

Black Girls Coming of Age: Sexuality and Segregation in New Orleans, 1930-1954

by

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*I dedicate this to my mother
and to those who lost their lives as a result of
Hurricane Katrina.*

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Abstract

This dissertation explores sexuality in the lives of African American girls living in New Orleans during the late Jim Crow period. I investigate interracial sexual violence, which many black girls experienced and most feared. I also explore sexual mores and how girls negotiated between the pressures to live up to standards of purity with simultaneous racist representations of black women and girls as sexually promiscuous. And finally, I explore experiences of intimacy and love in black girls' lives. I argue that black girls in segregated New Orleans faced a double bind—on one side was the reality of Jim Crow violence; on the other, middle-class African Americans' expectations of purity and respectability.

This project makes three main historiographical contributions. First, by centering the lives of black girls, my work uncovers the gendered violence of segregation. By considering a wide range of archival sources—including court documents, newspaper reports, police records, and delinquency home records—I make black female lives and suffering visible, and expose the links between segregation, sexuality and sexism. Second, the dissertation unearths the emotional violence of living in a legal and public culture that treated blacks as second class citizens. Such a project is crucial for uncovering not only the trauma of racial violence, but also for understanding the legacy of that violence today. Drawing on a close reading of social workers' reports, sociologists' interviews with children during the period, black girls' writing, photographs, and oral history interviews with women who grew up in New Orleans allows me to

approach the elusive inner worlds of black girls. Third, this dissertation broadens understandings of urban histories of race relations by connecting methods from social history, cultural geography and cultural history—in order to reformulate how we think about a Jim Crow city. I argue that black girls' notion of self was highly dependent on their place in the urban geography. Overall, I seek to understand how segregation disciplined black girls' bodies at the same time that black girls carved out spaces of intimacy and pleasure in the face of racialized constraints.

Introduction:

Black Girls, Gendered Violence and Jim Crow

Clarita Reed: It wasn't easy. You just got hardened to it.

You always expected an insult, regardless.

Interviewer: Daily?

Clarita Reed: Of course. Of course. If anyone tells you differently, they're lying. 'Cause it was...but basically that's what growing up in New Orleans was.

-Behind the Veil Oral History Project

New Orleans, Louisiana¹

Clarita Reed, born in 1922, grew up in segregated New Orleans. In a 1994 interview, she shared her experiences of coming of age during Jim Crow. First, Reed spoke specifically about what it meant to grow up a boy, as her brother did, in the confines of segregation. She explained, "The black male wasn't safe." Reed lived in "mortal fear" that one day her brother might be accused of raping a white woman or that he would be beat-up by a police officer. But what about Clarita Reed's own experience with segregation? What did it mean to grow up as a black girl during Jim Crow? When Reed explained black girls' experience with segregation, her language became vague. "And the black woman could be insulted any time," she said.² She mentioned the possibility of "insult" three times during the course of her interview. Not once did she give an example of an insult she received or clarify what types of insults were hurled at black women. Were these insults sexual or street harassment? Were they racial slurs?

¹ Clarita Reed, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 24, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

² Ibid.

Insults regarding one's looks? Perhaps all of the above? Instead of specificity, what does come across in Reed's interview is the ubiquity of *insults*. They provided the background noise to black women's and girls' daily Jim Crow life.

Other black women who grew up in Jim Crow New Orleans remembered being insulted as well. Ailene St. Julien, who was born in 1926, explained in an interview, "They treated you without dignity, you know, your dignity was always hurt."³ Dolores Aaron, born in 1924, remembered whites calling her and her sister, "monkeys." Aaron recalled the way her mother would turn the language of insult into "loving words" protecting her children by responding in a sweet sing-song voice: "Yes, these *are* my little monkeys!"⁴

We need to make an effort to better understand these "insults" if, as Clarita Reed suggested in her interview, that is "what growing up in New Orleans was." Although I cannot reconstruct the 'typical' type of insults black girls may have received on a daily basis, the following chapters do provide a framework for understanding what those insults may have looked like. Chapter one explores girls' experience walking down the segregated streets of New Orleans. Chapter two provides a discussion of interracial sexual violence, abuse and harassment, while chapter three's discussion of "niceness" offers an example of how one's dignity might be hurt and the constant state of anxiety around sex and reputation that these insults produced. My goal, though, with this work is to take the analysis a step farther. I want to not only reconstruct girls' experiences, such as being insulted by whites on the streets, I also want to understand the emotional

³ Aline St. Julien, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 1, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

⁴ Dolores Aaron, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 30, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

violence inflicted by such insults. In addition to experience, then, I am interested in emotions, inner lives and subjectivity—the process by which black girls came to understand themselves in the context of segregation. Therefore, the work begins by recovering black girls' experience of the violence of segregation, but then moves toward investigating the effects of that physical and emotional violence on their subjectivity.

I situate this work in the subfield of African American gender history and the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies. These two areas of study have established the groundwork for thinking about the "inner lives" of black women. In 1989, historian Darlene Clark Hine asked what non-economic motives drove black women to join the Great Migration, escape the confines of the South, and move to the Midwest, North, or West. She began by looking for the "hidden motivation" in black women's migratory patterns and theorized that the greatest factor was their desire to possess rights to their own bodies, fleeing from both interracial sexual violence and domestic abuse. That struggle for reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy, she argued, is difficult to recover because black women hid their inner struggles from racist, judgmental eyes, creating a "culture of dissemblance." By choosing the word dissemblance, Clark Hine emphasized "the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors."⁵

By posing her question, Clark Hine opened up a space for new work on black women's history; over the past decade, scholars have begun to fill the lacuna on the racial

⁵ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 912.

history of sexual violence.⁶ In addition to confronting issues of sexual violence, my work is also interested in black girls' "inner lives"—a phrase Clark Hine used in the title of her essay on dissemblance. By choosing the term, Clark Hine asked scholars of black women to think more closely about emotional and psychic worlds. I read the culture of dissemblance as an affective culture; it was the method by which black women dealt with their emotions and shielded themselves from further psychic harm. Dissemblance, Clark Hine argued, was a "self-imposed invisibility" that gave black women the "psychic space" for "mental and physical survival in a hostile world."⁷ Clark Hine's use of "inner lives," then, refers to both the emotional and mental world of black women.⁸

Historian Nell Painter's work, *Southern History across the Color Line* provides another model for exploring "inner lives." Painter reclaims more than just stories; she attempts to reconstruct the whole lives of the subjects she explores. In her discussion of

⁶ More work needs to be done on intra-racial sexual violence and domestic abuse, but for the past decade scholars have begun to probe the history of interracial sexual violence. For migration stories see Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2005), Ch. 1; For histories of sexual violence see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Danielle McGuire, "It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped": Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (2004): 906-931; Wendy Anne Warren, "The Cause of Her Grief: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March 2007): 1031-1049; Tammy D. Evans, *The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Catherine Clinton, "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence during Reconstruction," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 1992): 313-32; Lisa Cardyn, "Sexual Terror in the Reconstruction South," in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140-67; Lisa Cardyn, "Sexualized Racism/ Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South," *Michigan Law Review* 100 (February 2002): 675-867; Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Ch. 3; Mary Frances Berry, *The Pig Farmer's Daughter and Other Tales of American Justice: Episodes of Racism and Sexism in the Courts from 1865 to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), Ch. 7; On black reactions to interracial sexual violence and on intra-racial conflict see Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), esp. Ch. 3-5, 7-8.

⁷ Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," 915-920.

⁸ Clark Hine continues to address the question of survival and interiority in her work. See, for example, Darlene Clark Hine, "The Corporeal and Ocular Veil: Dr. Matilda A. Evans (1872-1935) and the Complexity of Southern History," *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 1 (February 2004): 3-34.

methodology she explains, "beyond even the most finely tuned categories lies something exceeding race, class and gender: individual subjectivity."⁹ Painter demonstrates a deep curiosity about individual lives. "The pursuit of individual subjectivity" forced her to turn to an interdisciplinary methodology influenced by psychology, psychoanalysis and social science.¹⁰

Painter and Clark Hine's work has provided me with the necessary theoretical grounding to persist in uncovering black girls' inner worlds, just as they have influenced my own methodological choices. To access black girl's inner lives, I have decided to employ the analytical concept of "subjectivity" as Nell Painter does. Although I do not invoke the term subjectivity at all points throughout the dissertation, this concept frames my study. For me, it is much more flexible than "identity." Subjectivity describes the process by which individuals' sense of self are constructed through sociological, familial and ideological relations. Feminist philosopher Jane Flax invokes the terms "psychic structures" to talk about subjectivity. She contends that subjectivity includes emotional, embodied experience on the one hand, and a discursive construction of self (that is raced and gendered) on the other.¹¹ My project then, is twofold: I attempt to reconstruct the ways in which black girls came to understand themselves given the exterior narratives of girlhood—racist discourses, discussions of respectability, disciplining of delinquent girls—but also to try to uncover their emotions and interior perspectives—what it felt like to be a girl in 1930s and 1940s New Orleans.

⁹ Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹ Jane Flax, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1993), 93-4, 98-100.

Subjectivities, though, are never stable or fixed. Flax conceives of subjectivity "as a verb as opposed to a noun" by describing it as "a process, as opposed to an identity or a stable thing."¹² This is because subjectivity is "multiply constructed" by many different experiences. Some of these experiences are linguistic, like being called a monkey on the street. Others are bodily, such as being sexually accosted while riding a street car. Some experiences are spatial, for instance knowing that one cannot play at a certain whites-only park. And others are cultural, such as entering a Catholic church on a Sunday morning. Still others are familial, like one's relationship to a mother who tries her hardest to turn insults into loving words. Therefore, one's subjectivity is not stable or fixed because there are a multitude of (sometimes) conflicting experiences, and one's world is always changing. Reconstructing black girls' subjectivity then can never be a completed project. But doing so, even in part, provides a glimpse into their inner worlds.

I have chosen to center this study on black girls as opposed to black women. Specifically, this study focuses on adolescent girls, which I broadly defined as girls and young women between the ages of nine to twenty. I believe this period is crucial to the formation of subjectivity. Black girls who grew up in Jim Crow came to understand themselves in a world segregated by color; later, they became women with notions of race, gender, place and justice informed by the childhood experiences delineated in these

¹² Flax's use of subjectivity is influenced by philosophical discourses, poststructuralism and feminist reinterpretations of psychoanalysis. See, for example, Megan Grant and Amanda Rubens, "Interview with Jane Flax," *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 24 (1997): 1-25; Flax, *Disputed Subjects*, 92-110; For other discussions of subjectivity or constructions of the subject see also, Kathleen Canning and Sonya Rose, "Gender, Citizenship and Subjectivity: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations," *Gender and History* 13, no. 3 (November 2001): 427-443; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2006); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15-49; Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Pamela Reynolds, *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, and Mamphela Ramphele (University of California Press, 2000); Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2006), Ch. 4.

pages. Not only were adolescent black girls learning about race, but sexuality was also introduced in their lives in specific ways that related to how they would come to understand their place in the world. In the segregated South, concepts of sexuality and race were closely tied together—therefore adolescent girlhood is a crucial moment to consider.

The categories of "girl", "childhood" and "adolescent" have their own complex histories. Feminist scholars interested in the burgeoning field of girls' studies (as well as childhood studies) have begun to trace out a genealogy of girlhood.¹³ At the turn of the century, ideas about "feminine adolescence" took shape through the work of G. Stanley Hall, Sigmund Freud, and a few years later by Havelock Ellis, Margret Mead and others.¹⁴ They hypothesized that adolescence was a period of transition and change. For young women, this was imagined as a phase between the stability of childhood and the eventuality of womanhood. The process of adolescence has been understood as bodily (going through puberty and becoming sexual subjects) psychological (mental development) and cultural (being part of a group of youth with a specific culture). By the 1920s and 1930s, the notion of "adolescence" as an important moment of human development was widely accepted not just in scientific literature, but also in popular understandings of childhood.¹⁵

¹³ See Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830--1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ These theories of adolescence were highly gendered. And the first attempts by historians to write the history of childhood and adolescence often centered on boyhood. DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in America*, 3; For histories that take "boyhood" as the norm of adolescence see, Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

¹⁵ Driscoll, *Girls*, esp. 2-11; DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in America*.

Adolescence then is a "coming of age"—a period of developing from child to adult.¹⁶ Because adolescence was understood as a transitional period, it was closely associated with notions of becoming a self-aware adult. Conceptualizing adolescence, then, became a particularly modern way of contemplating the development of the self.

By laying out this genealogy of adolescence, I want to point to the curious intersections between girlhood, race and subjectivity. According to experts and reformers at the time of my study, black girls' coming of age marked a period where they were *supposed to* learn how to become a full, gendered person and discover how to inhabit a particular identity. Following this logic, this project asks how girls came to understand themselves as black women. Studying girlhood allows me to turn to this crucial moment in the formation of subjectivity. How were girls taught to behave? How were black girls, in the Jim Crow order, expected to understand themselves, and how, in turn, did they comprehend themselves? The importance of such questions is reflected in gender theorist Judith Halberstam's discussion of girls' coming of age:

Female adolescence represents the crisis of coming of age as a girl in a male-dominated society. If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage (much celebrated in Western literature in the form of *bildungsroman*), and an ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remolded into compliant forms of femininity.¹⁷

For black girls coming of age in Jim Crow though, the "crisis" of growing up also happened in a white supremacist society. As such, "lessons in restraint, punishment and

¹⁶ By invoking the phrase "coming of age" in the title of this thesis, I intend to refer not only to turn-of-the-century theories of adolescent girls, such as anthropologist Margret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, first published in 1928, but specifically invokes civil rights activist Anne Moody's memoir *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, originally published in 1968. See Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001); Anne Moody, *Coming of age in Mississippi* (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 2004).

¹⁷ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.

repression" took place in specific racialized contexts. And "compliant" femininity also had particular meanings of what *black women* ought to be and do.¹⁸

An ever-increasing group of historians have made an effort to understand the experience of girls—and in particular adolescent girls. These historians explore how girls found pleasure in the working world, their relationships to their gendered bodies, girls' relationships with their mothers and fathers and the ways in which girls were disciplined by parents and authority figures.¹⁹ Yet historians have produced few project specific to the experience of growing up a black girl, despite an important group of black fiction and memoir writers who have focused on black girls' coming of age stories.²⁰

What did it mean for a teenaged black girl who had left school to work? Or for a black

¹⁸ This phrase refers to Stephanie Shaw's book by that name. Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁹ See, for example, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "Chlorotic Girls, 1870-1920: A Historical Perspective on Female Adolescence," *Child Development* 53, no. 6 (December 1982): 1468-1477; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Ruined' Girls: Changing Community Responses to Illegitimacy in Upstate New York, 1890-1920," *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 247-272; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1998); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "From Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth Century America," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 23-37; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1986), 53-76; Mary E Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple University Press, 1986); Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995). For an introduction on the history of childhood see, Paula Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), esp. Introduction; For the connection between G. Stanely Hall's work, race and boyhood see, Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 77-120; Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 95-127

²⁰ See Moody, *Coming of age in Mississippi*; Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 2002); Katherine Dunham, *A Touch of Innocence: A Memoir of Childhood* (Champaign: University Of Chicago Press, 1994); Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Plume Book, 1994).

girl who married young and had children? Should these young women still be considered adolescents or youth? In including these young women in my category of "girl," I look to black scholars of the period. Afro-American writers and scholars of the 1930s and 1940s noted the importance of adolescence in their own work.²¹ Although many of these scholars cited Hall and Freud, they most often employed the term "youth" as did black newspapers. The African American press was highly concerned with the "youth problem" of the 1930s and 1940s.²²

Through an investigation of segregation's influence on black girls' subjectivity, this dissertation contributes to historical understandings of Jim Crow life in three ways. First, by centering the lives of black girls, my work uncovers the gendered violence of segregation. Women's experience with the violence of Jim Crow has been made invisible both by the original culture of dissemblance that worked to shield black women's lives from judgment, but also by scholars' own preoccupation with the lynching of black men, police brutality toward black men, black male political culture, black (male) disenfranchisement and the economic terrorism associated with white supremacist violence.²³ These are all worthwhile and important projects. Nonetheless, the language

²¹ See, for example, the work of black scholars involved in the Negro Youth Study, Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt: Negro Youth In the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1941); Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1940); Ira DeA. Reid, *In a Minor Key: Negro Youth in Story and Fact* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1941).

²² See, for example, Janover Davis, "Youth," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 4, 1939, sec. Editorials and Opinions; Janover Davis, "Youth Versus Religion," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 4, 1939, sec. Editorials and Opinions; "Problems of Youth the Same," *The Louisiana Weekly*, May 20, 1939, sec. Editorials and Opinions; John Lee Nealy, "New Orleans Youth! Why Don't You Help Yourself?," *The Louisiana Weekly*, January 21, 1939, sec. Editorials and Opinions; "Youth, Crime, and Squalid Homes," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 6, 1937.

²³ Many accounts of segregated America stress violence towards men as a main feature of the Jim Crow order. For example, Ambassador Andrew Young reinforced this history when he spoke of Coretta Scott King's experience of racism just after her death. Young said that Scott King had an extraordinarily "bitter experience of racism and segregation" during her childhood in Alabama because she witnessed the burning

that has been constructed to understand Jim Crow life obscures the ways in which black girls and women suffered. The discursive focus on black male suffering was reflected in Clarita Reed's oral history interview when she attempted to explain the daily violence of Jim Crow when she said, "the black male wasn't safe" implicitly suggesting that black females were safe (or safer). Historian Jacqueline Dowd Hall has noted that "[M]ost studies of racial violence have paid little attention to the particular suffering of [black] women" and included her own early work in that group.²⁴ Along a similar line, Hazel Carby has argued that, "the institutionalized rape of black women has never been as powerful a symbol of black oppression as the spectacle of lynching."²⁵ By exploring gendered violence, I make black female lives and suffering visible, and expose the deep links between segregation, sexuality and sexism.

of her father's business. In Young's account, Coretta Scott King experienced racism primarily through the violence that happened to *her father*. My project looks at women of the same generation as Scott King, but uncovers the gendered violence they experienced. See "Remembrances: Andrew Young Remembers Coretta Scott King," All Things Considered (National Public Radio, January 31, 2006) For examples of histories of Jim Crow violence see, Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), Ch. 5; James H. Jones and Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, Revised Edition*, Revised. (New York: Free Press, 1993); James E Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005); Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*, Revised Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); David M. Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Robin D. G Kelley, *Hammer and hoe : Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998). One common tendency is to view violence against black women, when it is noted at all, from the perspective of black men. For example, one historian notes: "White men consciously used charges of rape as a weapon to reinforce the subordination of the black male..." Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 341-352.

²⁴See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape and Racial Violence," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow and Christine Stansell (NY: Monthly Press Review, 1983), 322; Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, Introduction.

²⁵ Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), 39.

Second, the chapters that follow unearth not only the physical violence of Jim Crow, but also the emotional violence of living in a legal and public culture that treated blacks as second class citizens—and more specifically the emotional violence of the particular gendered experience of Jim Crow faced by black women. Such a project is crucial not only for uncovering the trauma of racial violence—and thus the segregated South's true character—but also for understanding the legacy of that violence today. Furthermore, by investigating emotions, this dissertation takes seriously black girls' full personhood. As Nell Painter underscored in her essay, "Soul Murder and Slavery:" "The first step is to think about slaves as people with all the psychological characteristics of human beings, with childhoods and adult identities formed during youthful interaction with others."²⁶ My first step, then, has been to always treat black girls as full human beings—with a wide variety of emotions including both fear and pleasure. My attempt to look at emotional worlds has been aided by the recent turn to "affect studies" in cultural studies as well as by scholars of African American life who have interrogated the links between trauma and memory, particularly in the history of American slavery.²⁷

²⁶ Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line*, 20.

²⁷See, for example, Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line*; Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Éva Tettenborn, "Melancholia as Resistance in Contemporary African American Literature," *MELUS* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 101-121; Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 126-160; Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); J. Brooks Bouson, *Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Deborah M. Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Third, this dissertation broadens understandings of urban histories of race relations by connecting methods from social history, cultural geography and cultural history—in order to reformulate how we think about a Jim Crow city. Until recently, urban history paid less attention to the construction of and changing nature of urban centers in the South, instead focusing on Northeast, Midwest and Western cities. Southern cities often fall victim to the exceptionalism of the region itself: the South was continually defined in the historiography as agrarian, sometimes uncivilized, but most often as rooted in a racist plantation system of the past.²⁸ How might we think of urban centers in the South as cosmopolitan in their use of space—modern, but also "southern"? I approach this question by thinking closely about notions of "place" within the city. When defining New Orleans as southern, I point specifically to the legal culture of Jim Crow.

Choosing a southern urban center for this study, allows me to look closely at how legalized segregation worked, while also underscoring the ways in which a legal political culture of separation and inequality affected black subjectivity. The new urban histories of southern cities that focus on race tend to narrate a large period of time, charting the changing face of the southern cities during *desegregation*.²⁹ Instead, *Black Girls Coming*

²⁸ Sandra Frink, "Review Essay: Searching for the City in the Past: The Many Histories of New Orleans," *Journal of Urban History* 35 (2009): esp. 578; Raymond Mohl, "City and Region: The Missing Dimension in U.S. Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 25 (1999): 3-21; Kenneth Scherzer, "Southern Cities--How Exceptional?," *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000): 692-706; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History," *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (1998): 175-204; For two important exceptions to this see, Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Tera W Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); For a critique of the tendency to see southern spaces as antimodern see, Hale, *Making Whiteness*.

²⁹Urban history has uncovered the ways in which metropolitan and suburban geographies are sites of racialized poverty, violence, and discrimination, using sources that most often focus on issues surrounding housing, public policy and/or consumerism. These histories usually center on the spatial transformation and urban decline of postwar United States. For recent southern examples that focus on the conflicts over

of Age is a synchronic history that maps the dense cultural geography which provided the backdrop to black girls' lives. While scholars of Jim Crow have noted that segregation was not uniform, with different experiences for African Americans living in rural versus urban areas, my work more closely explores the context of public space in New Orleans in order to analyze the relationship between the specific urban geography of Jim Crow and black girls' lives under segregation. I argue that black girls' sense of self was highly contingent on their place in the city, including whether they lived in uptown or downtown New Orleans, which neighborhood, the racial make-up of the area, and whether or not they were on the margins of these spaces. Furthermore, as is evident from the context of the insult, as explained by Clarita Reed, girls who walked along the streets of New Orleans were reminded of their place in the city as subjects vulnerable to white and male violence.

To do this, I draw on historians of gender and sexuality who have employed methods from cultural history and poststructuralist theory to gain insight into networks of power in the gendered space of the city, often focusing on prostitution and the moment of the 'modernization' of the city at the turn of the century.³⁰ My approach to the city of

desegregation see, Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The New Suburban History* (University Of Chicago Press, 2006); Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁰ See, especially, Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (University Of Chicago Press, 1992); Judith Walkowitz, "Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London," *Representations* 62 (Spring 1998): 1-30; Marc Stein, *City Of Sisterly And Brotherly Loves: Lesbian And Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), esp. Part I; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994); Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University

New Orleans has been influenced by these gender historians, and thus, I work to bring a sustained analysis of the gendered *and* raced spaces of New Orleans.

I chose New Orleans as the site for this study because I am interested in the history of racial formations—the history of the ever-shifting meanings associated with "white" and "colored" (or black).³¹ I do not conceptualize race and racial meanings as immutable and given; instead, I see them as constructs created in a specific time and place. New Orleans provides an interesting case study. Because of the French-Spanish colonial context, New Orleans' racial structure differed from other Southern cities. During slavery and before the end of the Civil War, New Orleans had not only a large population of slaves, but also a large population of *gens de couleur*, or, free people of color. This population of black and multiracial free people of color built their own local communities and sustained many of the skilled trades of the city. Their numbers were buttressed by expatriates and travelers from Haiti, Cuba and other places from the Caribbean and Latin America.³²

Press, 1997); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002); Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*. Much of the rethinking of the city has been done by historians of prostitution who linked modernity, sex districts and the city. See, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (February 1999): 117-141.

³¹ For examples of and methodological discussion on shifting racial ideologies (as opposed to using racial categories as given and immutable) see, for example, Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100 (February 1995): 1-17; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-first Century* (Harvard University Press, 2002); Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Race and Ideology in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. Morgan J. Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-77; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, Gender & American culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Hale, *Making Whiteness*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*.

³² See Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Sybil Kein, ed., *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth*

Even though New Orleans was distinct from Anglo-southern cities, it was deeply and strongly implicated in the structures of slavery—not only in the French and Spanish speaking Americas but also in the English speaking parts of the United States. And after the incorporation of Louisiana into the United States and the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the early 1800s, New Orleans became an important location in the inter-state slave trade, housing slave dealers, pens, and the enslaved themselves who were waiting to find their new fate. This inter-state slave trade linked the city to the slave economy of the nation.³³

French and Spanish cultures, including French language and the Catholic religion, characterized New Orleans even after Louisiana officially became part of the United States in 1803. And ethnic clashes between French-Creole New Orleanians and (white) Anglo, newly-arrived Americans characterized the local politics before the Civil War. Therefore, once Louisiana became a part of the United States, Americanization was a slow and uneven process in New Orleans.³⁴

However, as Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon explain in *Creole New Orleans*, "If New Orleans was culturally, demographically, and economically part of the French and Spanish empires during its formative years, it was legally and institutionally part of the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth century."³⁵ The evolution of race relations and reconfiguration of what it meant to be "free," and thus, what it meant to be

Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008); Kimberly Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³³ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*.

³⁴ See Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*; Kein, *Creole*; Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*.

³⁵ Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 189.

"white" or "colored" took shape during these important periods. With emancipation and Reconstruction, the make-up of black New Orleans changed. Freed slaves from the countryside (both Creole freedpeople and Anglo freedpeople) moved to the city to explore their autonomy and find opportunity. Freedpeople and the established community of black and multiracial Creoles flourished politically, economically and culturally during the years of Reconstruction. These communities continued to develop their own unique cultures while collaborating politically over 'the racial question.' But the Redeemer constitution of 1879 marked a new era of white supremacy.

Disenfranchisement of black Louisianans was accomplished by 1898. Both white violence, including a massacre at Thibodaux (1887), and segregationist laws, such as the separate railway car acts (1890), elimination of interracial marriage (1894), separate street car act in New Orleans (1902), and the abolition of all distinctions in law between light-skinned blacks and darker-skinned blacks (1910), worked to create a strictly biracial order. At every step of the way, black New Orleanians fought the new regulations.³⁶ For example, Rodolphe Desdunes, a black Creole scholar and activist, wrote, "[I]berty is won by continued resistance to tyranny" in response to criticisms that the local black community was fighting "a battle which is forlorn" as their rights were being whittled away.³⁷

But by the early 20th-century, however, Louisiana looked very much like the rest of the American South. In many areas of the state, black sharecroppers worked in the

³⁶ Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*; Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, 2nd ed. (University of Georgia Press, 2008); Greta de Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*.

³⁷ Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cosse Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 260.

fields, attempting to provide a little bit for their families.³⁸ When black men, women, and teenagers left the fields in search of opportunity, their first stop was often segregated New Orleans. The "Old Regulars," the white supremacist Democratic Party political machine, insisted on black disenfranchisement in the city. And although residential segregation was much more irregular than in other southern cities, New Orleans had passed residential segregation ordinances in 1924. By 1930, the once flexible color line had hardened.³⁹

New Orleans, like all American cities, suffered from the Great Depression. During the prosperous years of the 1920s, New Orleans had spent much of its wealth on city improvements such as upgrading and updating Canal Street. The city enhancements (to white sections of town), left debt that city officials believed would be easily recovered until the economy crashed in 1929.⁴⁰ The drastic city cutbacks that followed hurt black citizens much more than whites. Beginning in 1930, the city essentially fired all black workers employed in municipal jobs by requiring that workers be "qualified voters."⁴¹ And further, there was an unsuccessful attempt to exclude all black workers from the wharves. Black mothers and fathers, then, had a difficult time finding employment to feed and raise their children. In the early Depression years, black New Orleanians made up one third of the city's population but one half of the unemployed and two thirds of relief recipients. The city set lower relief payments for black recipients, and by 1937 decided to restrict the number of blacks on the rolls by not accepting any new

³⁸ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 1-20; Lee Sartain, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 8.

⁴⁰ Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans And the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 71-103

⁴¹ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 42.

applications. One social worker believed this decision would cause, "the slow starvation of a large section of the population."⁴²

City spending on the black, segregated schools—already wildly unequal—was further slashed during the Depression, leaving black children with poorly funded schools and underpaid teachers. (In 1930, for example, New Orleans spent just 22% of the white level per child on schooling; by 1935, the city was spending only 17% of the white level.) Other black and community institution also suffered from reduced funding: the NAACP membership trickled to its lowest levels in the early 1930s (but recovered by 1935), the Commission on Interracial Cooperation barely survived, while black owned banks and business collapsed under financial strain.

Although the national and city economy recovered with the entrance of the United States in the Second World War, in late 1941, the economic affect on black New Orleanians was, initially, an even tighter squeeze than before. New Deal programs were canceled and job discrimination continued to keep black workers from gaining well-paying jobs. In 1942, black New Orleanians were thrown off relief rolls. Although the city's shipyards were at capacity and Louisiana oil wells fueled American planes, black New Orleanians still did not have access to these jobs and more and more black New Orleanians moved West (especially to California) and North. At the same time, black activists in New Orleans made some real gains. For over a decade, black leaders had argued for a second colored public high school, to be funded by the Rosenwald fund, because of overcrowding at McDonogh 35, the single black high school serving city youths. In 1942, the city compromised by opening a second high school, Booker T Washington High, that would specialize in industrial training. Yet, the city still resisted

⁴² Ibid.

teaching students the skills that might lead to higher paying jobs such as welding.⁴³

Racial tensions "simmered and sometimes exploded" in the face of wartime reorganization of the economy, meanings of freedom and democracy, and racial class system.⁴⁴

After the war, African Americans continued to press the case for equal rights in the United States, and thus, segregation slowly started to transform. To resist black gains, the city of New Orleans responded by making concessions to the *equality* part of "separate but equal"—but also fiercely protected the "separate" part of the equation. In 1947, for example, black teacher's pay was equalized with their white counterparts. From 1940 to 1955, Louisiana's per capita spending on black children skyrocketed from 16 dollars to 116 dollars. Most of this was done in order to resist integrating schools.⁴⁵ Still, white supremacist violence was a daily facet of life for black New Orleanians. There remained violence towards veterans, police brutality and insults towards black women on the streets.

The 1930s and 1940s were turbulent decades. Therefore, my narrative necessarily ends in the early 1950s, as black struggles for equal rights and integration in New Orleans came to the forefront of national and local news and politics.⁴⁶ By focusing on only two decades, I am able to tell the story of a particular generation of women—women who experienced Jim Crow at its height, whose childhoods (or births) were marked by the Great Depression, and whose adolescent or young adult years were transformed by World War II. I have purposely made the choice to center this narrative on segregation—and

⁴³ Ibid., 37, 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75

⁴⁵ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 23, 36-37; Sartain, *Invisible Activists*, 82-98.

⁴⁶ Kim Lacy Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 1994); Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*.

further, to refer to the era as "Jim Crow"—despite the fact that the 1930s-1940s is indeed part of a long civil rights and freedom struggle moment.⁴⁷ Despite political challenges and contestations, the Jim Crow urban racial order of New Orleans provided the backdrop against which black girls growing up in the 1930s and 1940s experienced the world, their families and their selves. This work, therefore, seeks to map out a segregated New Orleans, providing a dense topography of urban segregation. As Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore and Bryant Simon argue, "Jim Crow was at bottom a social relationship, a dance in which the wary partners matched their steps, bent and whirled in an unending series of deadly serious improvisations."⁴⁸ Although Jim Crow was a dynamic, ever changing system—or a "dance"—white supremacy was at its center. Yet, Dailey Gilmore and Simon argue that there was always a struggle in the relations of power, and a tight balancing act between whites and blacks. Jim Crow was therefore a dangerous dance for black girls—who always had to carefully figure out their place in the segregated order.

To analyze segregation's effect on black girls' subjectivity, and to recreate girls' inner lives, requires a wide source base. In search of fragments from girls' lives, I have scoured nearly every archive in New Orleans and visited others in California, Illinois and North Carolina. I have tried to think creatively about sources and approach. Each chapter uses a different set of sources, and a slightly different methodological approach to

⁴⁷ The southern civil rights movement—both in popular memory and in the historiography—is *the* paradigm for understanding black life in the 20th-century South, particularly in the postwar period. It is certainly the paradigm for understanding black life after the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56. The 1930s and 1940s often get lost in telling this story. Additionally, the lived experience of Jim Crow gets flattened as it is represented by riding in the back of the bus or drinking at colored water fountains. For a discussion of how the post/pre civil rights dynamic affects the ways in which racial violence is understood see Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story* (New York: Crown, 2004); For critiques on the focus on the South in civil rights historiography see for example, Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1-4; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10-11.

⁴⁸ Jane Elizabeth Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

understand one aspect of black girlhood in New Orleans. Still, I cannot reconstruct inner lives completely; there are pieces of the puzzle that will always be missing.

This dissertation draws on oral history in order to examine emotion, memory and subjectivities. What people remember, how they narrate their stories, and what they choose to conceal gives as clues into their interior emotions and their understanding of self. Yet, oral histories and memories are not straightforward representations of the past. Relating one's life experiences to an interviewer involves story telling; episodic memories are threaded together to create unified storylines. These memories only become cohesive and coherent when they are told in a narrative format. Oral histories, then, are full of narrative choices: the choice of setting and what type of plot and storyline the interviewee develops. Therefore, I pay close attention to the logic of oral history narratives. And at times, I point to the larger narrative or conversation between interviewer and interviewee, including the flow of the questions and answers, their relation to one another, or their divergence.

The memories revealed through oral history do not always give the "facts" of the past, but they can help us reconstruct inner lives. The stories women choose to tell highlight the subjective experience of growing up Jim Crow, detailing the everyday trauma of living as a second class citizen. To get at emotion and interior lives, I have looked not only at what people said, but also how they said it: what was disclosed, what remained unspoken, when was their silence or laughter? Historian Rhonda Williams argues that working with black women's oral histories necessitates reading the entire tone of the interview including silences and gestures; this helps unveil layers of meaning and affect. By doing so, Williams argues, "one can discern the structuring and working of

memory. One can hear and see the anger, the pity for stupidity, the resistant will, the lethargy, the insecurities, and the nostalgia. One can detect dialogues with multiple audiences, including the interviewer, which can be quite informative."⁴⁹ Attention to voice and silence—what is disclosed and what remains unspoken—is crucial to the tone of an interview or story; therefore, I have tried to point to silences when they change the meaning, weight or significance of an oral history narrative.⁵⁰

I have accessed several rich oral history archives. In the 1990s, a team of researchers traveled to several Southern locales (including New Orleans) to record the history of African Americans who lived through and grew up during Jim Crow. The purpose of the *Behind the Veil Oral History Project* was to reclaim a history that would not likely be found in traditional archives. I also make use of oral histories housed in local New Orleans archives. My study uses these interviews as an important avenue into understanding New Orleans during the 1930s and 1940s. My own knowledge of segregated New Orleans has benefited greatly from the countless formal and informal conversations I have had with women who grew up in New Orleans, as well as from attending local Louisiana Creole Research Association (LA Creole) conferences. In the following chapters, I make use of five oral histories that I conducted beginning in 2007.

In addition to oral histories, I use the records of judges, courts, community centers, delinquency homes, social workers, and sociologists. These people and agencies worked with children, observing their lives and sometimes recording the children's words and actions. These documents, of course, are mediated by the adults who chose to study

⁴⁹ Rhonda Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information: History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 63.

⁵⁰ Sherry Thomas, "Digging Beneath the Surface: Oral History Techniques," in *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002), 56.

or work with urban children, and are thus tinged with the observers' understanding of black childhood. But without such sources this project would be impossible.

Newspapers, particularly the local black publication, *The Louisiana Weekly*, also provide an important avenue for reconstructing black girls' worlds. The news stories they contain provide overarching narratives of race, girlhood and prescriptions for 'proper' behavior for children. These discourses are useful not only for what they reveal about New Orleans, Louisiana at a particular moment in time, but are also the same discourses black girls read when they picked up the paper, or heard when their parents discussed the daily news. These sources help us to recreate and capture something of their world.

Additionally, I use visual sources when available; maps and photographs add an important piece of the story of black girls' lives in 1930s and 1940s New Orleans.

There are three themes that run through this dissertation and connect the chapters with one another. The first is sexuality. Michel Foucault defined sexuality along three axes in his series, *The History of Sexuality*. The first axis is the production and proliferation of knowledge by experts that catalogued sexual behavior. The second is “systems of power that regulate its practice.” This axis, concerned with power networks includes resistance, discipline, punishment, and surveillance. The third axis is “the forms, within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality.”⁵¹ This final axis focuses on the subjectivities produced by catalogues of sexual behavior and systems of power that police behavior. Many historians have

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 4. See also, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

since noted that, “sexuality has increasingly become a core element of modern social identity, constitutive of being, consciousness and action.”⁵² At the same time, scholars of African American life have linked the formation of racial and gender categories to sexuality. Martha Hodes explains in the introduction to *Sex, Love, Race* that “the history of racial categories is often a history of sexuality as well, for it is partly as a result of the taboos against boundary crossing that such categories are invented.”⁵³ However, I argue that if we understand the color line only as a set of taboos, we cannot fully understand the dynamics of race in the Jim Crow order. By centering the lives of black adolescent girls, one sees crossings of the color line as both tabooed *and* permitted.

Therefore, to understand Afro-American girls’ subjectivity during the Jim Crow period, I investigate the part that sexuality had to play. To accomplish this, I consider interracial sexual violence—which many girls experienced and most feared. I explore sexual mores and how girls negotiated between the pressure by parents and religious leaders to live up to standards of purity and the simultaneous, racist representations of black women and girls as sexually promiscuous. And finally, I examine experiences of intimacy and love in girls’ lives. I work with a broad definition of sexuality, one that encompasses more than simply “sex.” I understand sexuality to be the various social and cultural restrictions related to sex that constrain people’s behavior, by literally disciplining their bodies, but that also allow for places of intimacy and pleasure. Thus, I am interested in sexuality as a window into wider networks of power that shaped black girls’ everyday lives and sense of self.

⁵² Kathy Lee Peiss and Christina Simmons, “Passion and Power: An Introduction,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss, Christina Simmons, and Robert A Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 4.

⁵³ Martha Elizabeth Hodes, *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 1.

The coupling of violence and emotional suffering represents the second theme that runs through this dissertation. I seek to define violence not only as physical (which Jim Crow violence often was) but also as emotional. Critical race theorist Patricia Williams defines "psychic violence" as the encroachment of an all-powerful other into the psyche and consciousness of the self. She argues, "What links child abuse, the mistreatment of women, and racism is the massive external intrusion into psyche that dominating powers impose to keep the self from ever fully seeing itself."⁵⁴ The chapters that follow attempt to bring to bear this notion of "psychic violence" onto the history of the segregated South.

The third theme that connects the narratives that follow is resistance. However, resistance does not enter this narrative in terms of New Orleans's heroines of the civil rights movement although this is an important part of New Orleans's history.⁵⁵ Instead, resistance enters my narrative at the point of survival. "The obliteration of self" that Patricia Williams describes as the aim of psychic violence, was never a fully accomplished project despite white supremacist goals. How did black girls survive a culture of trauma, and how did they carve out space for pleasure and self-expression? Answers to these questions point to the way in which I would like to think of resistance. I conceptualize resistance as the mundane—everyday acts of endurance. Despite the constraints and violence of segregation, African Americans continued to live their lives, spend time with families, build neighborhoods, fall in love, mend broken hearts, cry, and laugh—in essence, they lived full lives. This day-to-day survival is just as important and compelling as stories of political action.

⁵⁴ Patricia J Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 63.

⁵⁵ For a narrative of gender and civil rights politics in Louisiana see Sartain, *Invisible Activists*

Studies of agency and resistance in the 1970s and 1980s, argues Nan Enstad, "offered [readers] profound narrative pleasures: it allowed them to unmask power and challenge its limits, to transform their own individual consciousness and to identify their political ideas and efforts within a great tradition of resistance."⁵⁶ In short, it gave people, especially those in oppressed classes, heroes of the past. But at times, in our search for agency and resistance, we overlook the conflicting emotions and motivations of the historical actors that we study. In other words, we overlook grief and pain in order to talk about victory and bravery. And further, complicated historical debates get flattened into the question: did they or did they not resist? In keeping with the idea that girls were full humans, with a range of conflicting emotions, I would like to argue that agency and pain are not diametrically opposed. Subjectivity, after all, is multiple, so one can go from a state of sadness and terror, to a state of triumph and joy and back again all in one moment.⁵⁷

Chapter Overview:

The first chapter of my project functions as an introduction to the spatial ethic of Jim Crow and the city of New Orleans, exploring how black girls lived and moved through segregated streets. The chapter winds through the landscape of New Orleans, dwelling on three specific streets: Canal, Rampart and Tchoupitoulas Streets. These areas, I contend, taught black girls lessons about racial difference, and in turn, provided notions of self based on race and space. I begin by analyzing the role of Canal Street in dividing black and white New Orleans. Next, I explore Tchoupitoulas Street, where

⁵⁶ Nan Enstad, "On Grief and Complicity: Notes toward a Visionary Cultural History," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History*, ed. James Cook, Lawrence Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 325.

⁵⁷ Grant and Rubens, "Interview with Jane Flax."

working-class, Anglo-black and white children fought over space. I end the chapter with Rampart Street, where black New Orleanians' experiences reflected the intersecting categories of class, gender and race.

Chapter two explores incidents of interracial sexual violence as well as the contradictions black girls faced as they attempted to act respectably in the face of sexual violence. At the center of this chapter is the attempted rape of fourteen year old waitress Hattie McCray by a white police officer. McCray resisted his advances; the officer was so enraged that he shot and killed McCray. It has been difficult for scholars to excavate black women's experiences of rape because of the culture of dissemblance. Thus, to explore the history of sexual violence experienced by Afro-American girls, one must also look closely at silence. I contend that silences around the issue of sexual violence were multiple: we find silences in white discourses of interracial rape because black girls were never articulated as possible victims of assault, silences within the black community because of the culture of dissemblance, and silences that are then recreated in the archive.

The third chapter examines black adolescent girls' daily fears related to issues of sexuality and sexual violence through a close reading of Allison Davis, John Dollard and the Negro Youth Study's investigation of black youth in 1938 New Orleans. By analyzing the life narratives of two girls in the study, Edna Hill and Jeanne Manuel, this chapter investigates how the emotion of fear helps us better understand girls' own preoccupations with certain aspects of sexuality and their relationship to the segregated racial order. By this means, we learn that sexuality, and more specifically chastity, were at the core of girls' social identities as "nice girls". I argue that Jeanne Manuel and Edna

Hill's relationships to the category of niceness highlights tensions specific to New Orleans along the lines of skin color, ethnicity and class.

After discussing nice girls, the fourth chapter turns its attention to delinquent girls at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, a Catholic delinquency home for (black and white) girls run by an order of nuns dedicated to the rescue of "wayward" girls. Black girls convicted of crimes were often sent to the home because New Orleans did not have separate public facilities for Afro-American delinquents. Families also might send their daughters to the House of the Good Shepherd if they became pregnant or misbehaved, though this practice subsided by the late 1940s because of pressure from the local court system. I argue that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, along with municipal authority, stigmatized black girls' bodies by marking the youth in their care as "sexually delinquent." This chapter provides a glimpse into the world of girls who did not live up to middle-class standards of "niceness" and explore the various forces shaping their choices, their transgressions and their vulnerability to abuse and mistreatment.

The fifth chapter explores pleasure in black girls' lives. Because of the culture of dissemblance, and silence that continues to construct black women's sexuality, finding pleasure in black women's lives is crucial in reconstructing their inner worlds. To discuss pleasure, I use texts authored by adolescent black girls including, photographs, and literature. This chapter asks: where did girls find pleasure and intimacy? What did they have to say about their lives? I argue that girls created "make believe worlds" to forge moments of intimacy and pleasure away from the violence of Jim Crow. Central to these worlds were romantic fantasies, thus allowing safe and respectable experiences of intimacy and sexuality for "nice" black girls.

Finally, the epilogue of my dissertation makes connections between the Jim Crow violence of the 1930s and 1940s and the violence of Hurricane Katrina. I accomplish this by discussing what it meant for black women whose lives were bookended by the different, yet perhaps related governmental violences of legalized segregation and Hurricane Katrina. Elderly women who lived through or died in Hurricane Katrina due to the storm's attendant governmental neglect and racism also came of age during legalized Jim Crow in New Orleans and a white supremacy supported by the state. I turn to the story of one woman who grew up in New Orleans in the early 1930s and faced the story as an elderly New Orleanian. Her relationship to the state, her sense of belonging to New Orleans, and her subjectivity—along with other elderly New Orleanians affected by Hurricane Katrina—was irrevocably tied to these two epochs in New Orleans history.

A Note on Usage and Terminology

Throughout this work I use "black" to denote people of African descent in New Orleans. In New Orleans, the terms African-American and Afro-American are complicated by the fact that some people recognize their *ethnicity*, and even national heritage, to be something other than a U.S. based. Though I sometimes use the terms Afro-American, and African American, I most often use Black Creole and Anglo-Black. I capitalize my use of "black" only when employing it specifically as a racial/ethnic term in these two cases. Black Creole and Anglo-Black allow me to make a distinction between people of color in New Orleans who identified themselves as "Creole" (and thus of a multiracial, multinational and/or multiethnic origin) and those who were identified as Anglo (with a U.S.-based ethnicity and English-speaking heritage). Anglo-Black Americans, just like their Creole counterparts, could be of multiracial origin. Therefore I

want to emphasize that my use of "black" is intended not to invoke a "race" or skin color, but rather a *diasporic* notion of people who have at least some ancestors that were brought to the Americas from Africa.

Attempting to define what Creole means to and for New Orleanians is a difficult and controversial task, especially considering what "Creole" has meant to Creoles of Color during eras of tremendous change. There are deep disagreements among scholars and Creoles themselves. My definition, then, is driven by the period I study. During legalized segregation Black Creoles were defined by the state (on birth certificates) as "colored" and they attended segregated schools. My dissertation is concerned with *all* girls who were identified as "colored." Therefore, I am not including in this definition of Black Creole anyone "white" or those who lived as white.

I use "colored" (and much less frequently Negro) when it is historically appropriate, following the lead of my sources. The word "colored" emphasizes the Jim Crow racial order. This was the term hanging from drinking fountains, in street-cars and throughout the city. These signs often noted "for colored patrons only" or "for whites only." I believe it is significant that this was the word girls saw as they traversed the city—and eventually they came to recognize that the sign referred to them.

The disagreements over which words best describe racial categories in New Orleans illustrates the difficulty of pinning down "race" in New Orleans and in the United States more generally. This is because race is not a trans-historical given, but something that has been created over time. In other words, race has a history. Therefore, I have tried to talk about "race" in a way that does not reify racial categories, but instead, explains their construction.

Harl Douglass, an educator and scholar of children, wrote in 1940: "The American people have gone far to disinherit the Negro boy...Negro girls fare better than boys, but they too constitute an important group among those which go to give us the American youth problem."⁵⁸ The idea that the racism of the United States had "disinherited" boys, more so than girls, speaks to the invisibility of black girls' experience during the Jim Crow years. This work hopes to bridge our gap in knowledge, by grappling with the connections between racial segregation, sexism and sexuality.

⁵⁸ Harl Douglass, "The Education of Negro Youth for Modern America: A Critical Summary," *The Journal of Negro Education* 9, no. 3, The Negro Adolescent and his Education (July 1940): 534-546 On Douglass see, Whinery, Barbara, "Harl R. Douglass," in *The Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education*, ed. Anfara, Vincent A., Andrews, Gayle, and Mertens, Steven B. (Greenwich: Information Age Publishing, 2005), 180.

Chapter 1:

"Suppose They Don't Want Us Here?" Geography and Subjectivity in Jim Crow New Orleans

And as I would be going to Dryades Street with my father (who was probably doing a lot of the shopping for my mother because my mother was probably pregnant) I would spell out words. And one word that I kept seeing was spelled c-o-l-o-r-e-d. And I was trying to sound out the word and I was saying col-o-red. What is col-o-red? And he told me, "That's colored, and it means you." And, I was looking at the signs that were marked for my use that looked different from things that had "w-h-i-t-e". And I always wanted to know why these things didn't look as nice...so my father was trying to help me understand the kind of society in which I had to live. And he just told me that no matter what other labels placed on me, I determined what I was.¹

*-Florence Borders
Behind the Veil Oral History Project*

Florence Borders discovered that she was "colored" in the space of urban New Orleans. As she traveled across the city and practiced her reading skills, Borders came to understand the meaning of race. The letters—c-o-l-o-r-e-d—the sounds they made when strung together, and the quality of the things those letters marked, taught her complex lessons about her place in Jim Crow society.² Borders's father simultaneously helped give meaning to the word "colored" as he attempted to teach her to see herself as more than the narrow definition of colored that hung from the signs she sounded out.

¹ Florence Borders, interview by Kate Ellis and Michele Mitchell, June 20, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

² For a discussion of reading, racial signifiers and Jim Crow signs, see Elizabeth Abel, "Bathroom Doors and Drinking Fountains: Jim Crow's Racial Symbolic," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 435-481.

Borders's introduction to the terms "colored" and "white" happened through the geography of New Orleans. She encountered the signs away from her home and neighborhood. As her recollection illustrates, it was through the control of both public and private city space that girls learned what it meant to be "colored" in New Orleans and in America. Everywhere they turned, there were signs that marked them as colored, special stairs for them to enter the theater, public benches they could not sit on, and dressing rooms where they could not try on clothes.

The Jim Crow state effectively controlled space and employed spatial language—boundaries, borders, insides and outsides—to create a biracial order. The biracial order flattened New Orleans' diversity by dividing the city into "white" and "colored." The ideology that whites and blacks must always be completely separated dated only as far back as the end of Reconstruction.³ For white supremacists in the city, spatial separation ensured racial difference while spatial proximity became a metaphor for racial equality. A white New Orleanian, in 1892, declared: "We of the South who know the fallacy and danger of race equality, who are opposed to placing the negro on any terms of equality, who have insisted on a separation of the races in church, hotel, car, saloon, and theater...are heartily opposed to any arrangement encouraging this equality, which gives negroes false ideas and dangerous beliefs."⁴

Even figuratively, race relations between blacks and whites came to be understood spatially; as W.E.B. Du Bois elegantly framed it in 1903: "The problem of the

³ This ideology did not extend as far as black nannies and nursemaids who were incorporated into the space of the white home. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴ quoted in, Dale Somers, "Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900," *The Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 1 (February 1974): 41.

twentieth century is the problem of the color line."⁵ But the language of borders and lines did not maintain dominant geographies alone. So too did the tangible, three-dimensional of segregated space. White and black people moved about in a topography literally marked by color.⁶

By exploring geographies of New Orleans, this chapter emphasizes how black girls' sense of self developed within and around the confines of segregation. The goal of this chapter is twofold; first I want introduce the setting for this dissertation, the city of New Orleans, anchoring it within a southern culture of Jim Crow. Second, I explore how black girls' subjectivity developed in relation to space. Children and youth developed a mental map that helped them understand themselves and their racialized city. To explore the meanings of these mental maps, I wind through the urban space of New Orleans, introducing three streets, their respective neighborhoods, and the buildings along the roads. These areas, I argue, were important to the construction of black girlhood in the 1930s and 1940s. I begin by analyzing the role of Canal Street in dividing and defining New Orleanians. Next, I move uptown to Tchopitoulas Street, where children played as their parents worked at factories, on the railway, and on the river. There, I examine the role of conflict over space among white and black children. Finally, I turn to Rampart Street, the "back of town" known for its black clubs and barrooms. A discussion of the "back of town" allows me to grapple with the intersecting categories of gender, class and sexuality for black girls walking along that street.

⁵ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilon and Son, 1903), vii.

⁶See Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And The Cartographies Of Struggle*, 1st ed. (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiv. She says, "If we imagine that traditional geographies are upheld by their three-dimensionality, as well as a corresponding language of insides and outsides, borders and belongings, inclusions and exclusions, we can expose domination as a visible, spatial project that organizes, names and sees social differences (such as black femininity) and determines where social order happens."

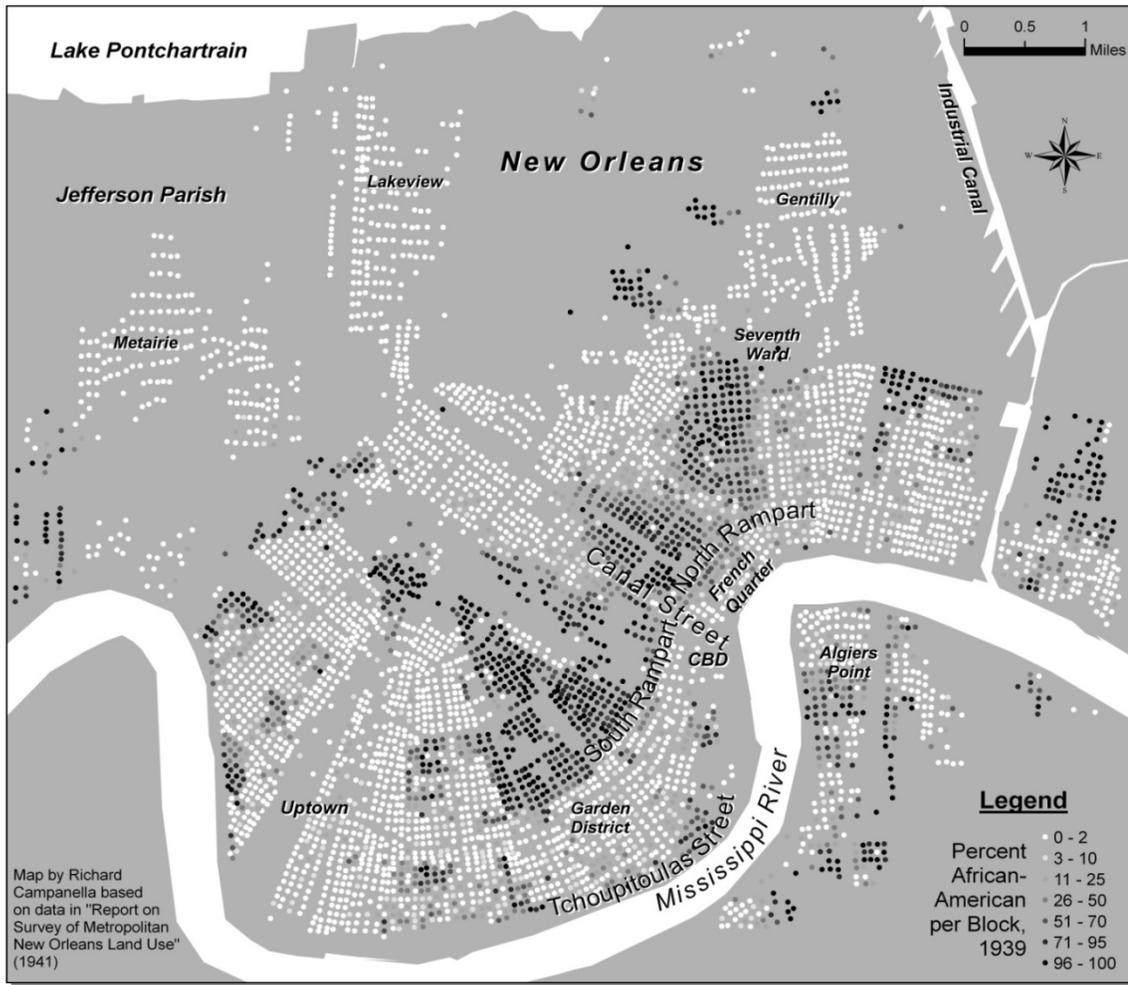


Figure 1.1
New Orleans Population Distribution, 1939
 (Map by Richard Campanella)

Geography of Jim Crow Streets

Before I turn to Canal, Tchoupitoulas, and Rampart Streets, I would like to further develop my use of the terms "geography" and "place" and their relationship to the process of racial learning in New Orleans. Scholars often think of identity as deeply informed by language. But, as geographers have pointed out, social interactions that happened across space spoke just as loudly as words. In the inaugural issue of the feminist geography

journal *Gender, Place and Culture*, Geraldine Pratt and Susan Hanson argued that lived geographies constructed gender difference (along with other categories of identity).⁷

Geography assists in my conceptualization of subjectivity because "contests over identity occur in and through the spatial relations of places."⁸ Cultural and feminist geographers, who have been influenced by critical theory and deploy interdisciplinary methods, have approached the question of geographical space by demonstrating "the complex entanglement between identity, power, and place" through close, contextual readings of buildings, landscapes and cultural sources such as literature, music and art.⁹ Mental maps, then, came to reflect not only the physical placement of buildings and streets, but also included songs, images, and feelings associated with different spaces of the city. At the same time, the maps had to include a spatial conception of white and male authority so that young women could avoid additional risk. Black youth had to understand the relationship between space and power.

To speak of mental maps is to invoke people's "geographical knowledge."

Geographers speak of a geographical knowledge or the way space is conceptualized and

⁷ Geraldine Pratt and Susan Hanson, "Geography and the Construction of Difference," *Gender, Place and Culture* 1: 5-29. See also, Mona Domosh and Karen Morin, "Travels with Feminist Historical Geography," *Gender, Place and Culture* 10, no. 3 (September 2003): 257-264; Liz Bondi and Damaris Rose, "Constructing Gender, Constructing The Urban: a Review of Anglo-American Feminist Urban Geography," *Gender, Place and Culture* 10, no. 3 (September 2003): 229-245.

⁸ Ruth Fincher and Jane M. Jacobs, *Cities of Difference* (Guilford Press, 1998), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2. See also Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (South End Press, 2007); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 15; David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (Routledge, 1995); Carole Boyce Davies and Monica Jardine, "Imperial Geographies and Caribbean Nationalism: At the Border between "A Dying Colonialism" and U.S. Hegemony," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 151-174; Melvin Dixon, *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* (University of Illinois Press, 1987); Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, "Unnatural discourse. 'Race' and gender in geography," *Gender, Place & Culture* 1, no. 2 (1994): 225; Richard Peet, *New Models in Geography: The Political-Economy Perspective*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1989); Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001); Kay Anderson et al., eds., *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002); Cindi Katz and Janice Monk, eds., *Full Circles: Geographies of Women Over the Life Course* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

understood by the humans populating it.¹⁰ People express their geographical knowledge in daily language, through memory, art, song and literature. Therefore, people living in Jim Crow cities conceptualized geography in multiple ways. Black girls' mental maps included the streets where they played and the homes where they sat on porches to gossip. Their relationship to and conceptualization of the city's landscape was different from that of black boys or white girls. It is important to recognize girls' own knowledge of the city because their identity was not just a result of dominant ideologies and "colored patrons" signs, but was also developed in relation to local black knowledge. For instance, as Florence Borders sounded out *col-o-red*, she discovered what that word meant not only from the prominent sign, but also from her father who instilled in her a pride about her racial heritage.

Black girls' interactions with and within certain spaces defined their place in the city and how they came to understand themselves. In Jim Crow New Orleans, and certainly in other segregated urban and rural spaces, the term "place" helps give insight into the way in which geography helped create racial and gender identities. In *Black Geographies*, Clyde Woods and Katherine McKittrick criticize work that essentializes blackness; work that focuses solely on the actual, physical placement of black bodies, rather than thinking through a black sense of place.¹¹ For them, "place" denotes the relationship between the spaces one inhabits and one's sense of self. Importantly, that sense of self shifted with the literal movement of black girls' bodies because even in the regimented society of Jim Crow, subjectivities were fluid. One moment a girl might have identified primarily as Creole, and the next she might have observed a "colored patrons

¹⁰ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiii.

¹¹ McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 6.

only" sign—a reminder of a racial identity that ultimately connected her with other "colored" people in the city whom she did not know. Black bodies were in motion, as were people's sense of self.

Herbert and Ruth Cappie, both teenagers in New Orleans during the 1930s and early 1940s, articulated the complex and ever shifting notion of place they dealt with coming of age during Jim Crow. Herbert Cappie noted, "The most difficult thing about segregation was in knowing one's place. In New Orleans, my place may have been over here, and in Alabama it was in another place over there. You had to know how to deport yourself in different places." Ruth Cappie added, for emphasis, "That's like in foreign countries."¹² Segregation and race-making in one Jim Crow city was not exactly the same in the next. As this interview demonstrated, place in legally segregated cities was extremely complex; one had to constantly learn and relearn the proper space for and department of "colored" citizens or they might be arrested and/or harassed by city workers, officers, sheriffs or white citizens more informally policing the streets.

Figuring out one's place was made more difficult by the fact that spaces and the meanings associated with it, though seemingly self-evident and stable, were never fixed.¹³ And as we have seen, "place" in segregation was always changing with context. Thus, part of one's job as a "colored" person was to constantly try to figure out one's 'proper' place and the attendant meanings of the spaces one inhabited. This had to be done carefully. Importantly, whites did not have to do as much work to understand the meaning of space. Tiptoeing and careful movement through unknown spaces was part of black subjectivity. As we will see, this meant that black girls were often unsure as they

¹² Herbert Cappie and Ruth Irene Cappie, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 29, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

¹³ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi.

navigated the complex spatial dynamics of white supremacy. Moreover, girls sometimes had limits on their self expression; often, they had to act with controlled restraint in public spaces instead of with abandon or visible pleasure.

Jennifer Ritterhouse, in *Growing up Jim Crow*, develops a theory of "racial etiquette" to explain the process of southern children's racial learning.¹⁴ She argues that children constructed identities based on social interactions scripted by proper racial etiquette. Therefore, Ritterhouse explores the social and interpersonal aspects of racial etiquette. The social moments of racial etiquette were evidenced in, for example, conventions of eating (separately) and in the titles blacks used to address whites, and in the (lack of) titles whites used to address blacks. These were the rules of social intercourse children learned early on, "by the age of three or four."¹⁵ And so, for Ritterhouse, children's racial identities formed through this very specific type of racial learning.

Of racial etiquette in the 1930s and 1940s specifically, Ritterhouse argues that a "well-established code of domination and deference inherited from slavery continued to script the public transcript of southern race relations even as the code itself evolved to fit the modern urban environment that, alongside more traditional agricultural arrangements, characterized the region by the mid twentieth-century."¹⁶ For me, what is particularly interesting about the "public transcript of race relations" (during segregation in the 1930s and 1940s) was, in fact, its very *public* nature and corresponding spatial dimensions. Not only were they social encounters, as Ritterhouse points out, they were also spatial

¹⁴ Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), esp. Introduction.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

encounters. Certainly, these transcripts must have differed significantly in urban versus rural areas. So, by thinking carefully about black girls' place in New Orleans, I would like to dislodge the urban "public transcript of southern race relations" from the "tradition of slavery" described by Ritterhouse. Instead, I argue that we need to pay attention to where these encounters happened and how racial meaning permeated the space of the modern city, because space itself was part of the "transcript of race relations." In fact, I contend that the racial code (and here I add gender and class) manifested itself not only in public transcripts, but increasingly, *on* the urban topography. Urban space influenced how girls saw themselves and others. By sketching out girls' mental maps of Canal, Tchoupitoulas and Rampart Streets, the dynamic between geography, racial learning and subjectivity becomes clearer.

Canal Street

In the pages of the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review*, tourist Willietta Johnson described charming, scenic New Orleans. She explained that the city was, "cut by Canal Street into two phases of life, two epochs of history, and two methods of thought." French and Spanish culture survived in the slice of the city below Canal Street, argued Johnson. Below Canal was full of old-world charm, foreign chatter and "beautiful women, convents, chapels, cemeteries and seminaries, all of which are tinged with an oriental charm." "The upper portion of the city," she wrote, housed the garden district and "the beautiful as well as the characteristic Southern home, planted in lovely lawns."

Johnson went on to describe the brilliance of Canal Street at the center of it all:

Again and again one wanders up and down Canal Street, the cosmopolitan drawing-room of the city, where brilliantly-dressed women, handsome men, idlers, peddlers, dudes and beggars seem to congregate, as if by mutual consent and attraction, to promenade aimlessly that shopping

thoroughfare; one feels, as never before, the strange influence of foreign life. The monotony of American streets is lost in the grotesqueness, picturesqueness, brilliant dressing and babble of tongues which surround you.¹⁷

Ms. Johnson visited New Orleans in 1893. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the case that eventually enshrined "separate but equal" was already winding its way through the court system. New Orleans railways had separate cars for different races, and the city was well on its way to Anglo-Americanization and eventually to solidifying legalized segregation. The ugly underbelly of the city was invisible to Ms. Johnson, or, more likely, not a part of the enthralling, exotic portrait she wished to create for her readers. Although her account was more flawlessly poetic than reality, one thing Ms. Johnson took note of was true—Canal Street demarcated the middle of the city, separating two ways of life. It was a street littered with fun seekers, tourists, and shoppers. But by the early twentieth century, the street also functioned as a dividing line between two other New Orleans: one white, the other black. Willietta Johnson surely would have experienced quite another Canal Street had she come to the city only a few decades later. Canal Street functioned as a race-making space in segregated New Orleans. It helped define two competing black communities while simultaneously made distinct white from black.

New Orleanians who grew up in the city reveal a particular geographical knowledge of the metropolis—their memories provide insight into the symbolic importance of the city's streets. Oral history interviewees constantly referenced Canal Street and represented it as a cultural crossroad. The bustling street was an important dividing line for blacks who lived and grew up in New Orleans. Interviewees used the street to orient themselves, while describing who they were and where they came from,

¹⁷ Willietta Johnson, "Southern City: Reflections," *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review*, July 1893.

because when interviewees spoke of New Orleans, they spoke of "uptown" and "downtown." Canal Street was the functional dividing line between these two opposing sections of the city and between two socially distinct black communities.¹⁸ In the early to mid twentieth-century, black children living on the uptown side of the city rarely played with (or even met) black children from the downtown side unless they were relatives, classmates at a private school or classmates in high school.

The division between black uptown children and black downtown children was constituted by a complex mixture of class, color, ethnicity and histories of migration patterns. Many of the black downtown families had lived in New Orleans for generations, their ancestors a blend of African, French, Spanish and Caribbean migrants. As such, a majority of the downtowners identified as Creole. Louise Bouise, who grew up in the downtown Treme neighborhood, described the difference between downtowners and uptowners as primarily *ethnic* difference:

[Canal Street] was the sort of diving line between the American blacks, as some people refer to them, and the Creole blacks. And more or less, the Creoles lived on this side of Canal Street which we call the downtown side; the American blacks lived on the uptown side, or the other side of Canal Street...¹⁹

Bouise contrasted the term "Creole blacks" with the phrase "American blacks," noting the difference between those identified as Creole, and those who were not. "American" in her usage stood-in for English-speaking, Protestant and Other. American blacks were not like the people she grew up around; instead, they lived on the "other" side of Canal Street. She mapped the difference between these two groups of New Orleanians onto the

¹⁸ Cardinal directions are not used in New Orleans, so when one uses "downtown" as a direction it literally means toward the North East. But "downtown" is also used to describe the section of the city North East of Canal Street.

¹⁹ Louise Bouise, interview by Kate Ellis, tape, June 20, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

streets, explaining the categories geographically by placing "American blacks" in uptown New Orleans.²⁰

In fact, black Creoles and Anglo-blacks lived on both sides of Canal Street. But, most blacks (and whites) who lived in uptown neighborhoods were (relatively) recent migrants to the city. Their families came from small towns throughout Louisiana and Mississippi looking for better education, work, a little bit more opportunity and a lot more excitement.²¹

Afro-Americans living in New Orleans often associated the downtown neighborhoods with black Creole culture; the Treme and the Seventh Ward were two historic Creole neighborhoods located downtown. The Treme was located just "downtown" of Canal Street, bounded between North Rampart and North Broad streets [figure 1.2]. Marie Boyer Brown grew up on St. Phillip Street "in the heart of the Treme." Mrs. Brown identified herself and her family as Creole. Notably, she described her mother as both "brown-skinned" and Creole.²² Marie Boyer Brown made explicit the distinction between skin color and ethnicity in her interview. By noting that her mother was darker in color, she wanted to explain that Creole, in New Orleans, did not designate skin color alone, despite local and national myths that either claimed black Creoles as nearly all white-looking, or defined "Creole" as a racial type. Instead, Mrs. Brown

²⁰ Her phrasing also revealed the politics of the moment of her interview (the 1990s). Rather than use the term "colored", she pored Creole and American with "black" although at the outset of her interview she explained that she grew up "colored" and that black, African American and colored do not have analogous meanings. When asked to further explain, she could not quite articulate the different "connotations" of these words, perhaps because the changing nature of the words reflects the changing nature of race over time. In her attempt she did call on history—on the black power movement as a significant moment in (re)defining the word "black."

²¹ Philomene Guillory Allen and Viola Guillory Dunbar, interview by Kate Ellis and Michele Mitchell, tape, July 4, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

²² Marie Boyer Brown, interview by LaKisha Simmons and Lolita Villavasso Cherrie, digital, March 2007, In possession of author.

characterized Creole as a culture (that included a shared set of values, language, and religion) and as an *ethnicity*. Mrs. Brown's relatives and friends, for example, spoke "Creole" and went to Catholic Church. The family's genealogy, according to Mrs. Brown, traced back to France, Africa and Haiti. Marjorie Pajaeud also grew up in the Treme and defined Creole outside of merely skin color by declaring, "Creole is a form of life, a form of culture."²³

²³ Marjorie Bellsina Pajaeud and Jessie Larence Moutan, interview by Felix Armfield, tape, June 23, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

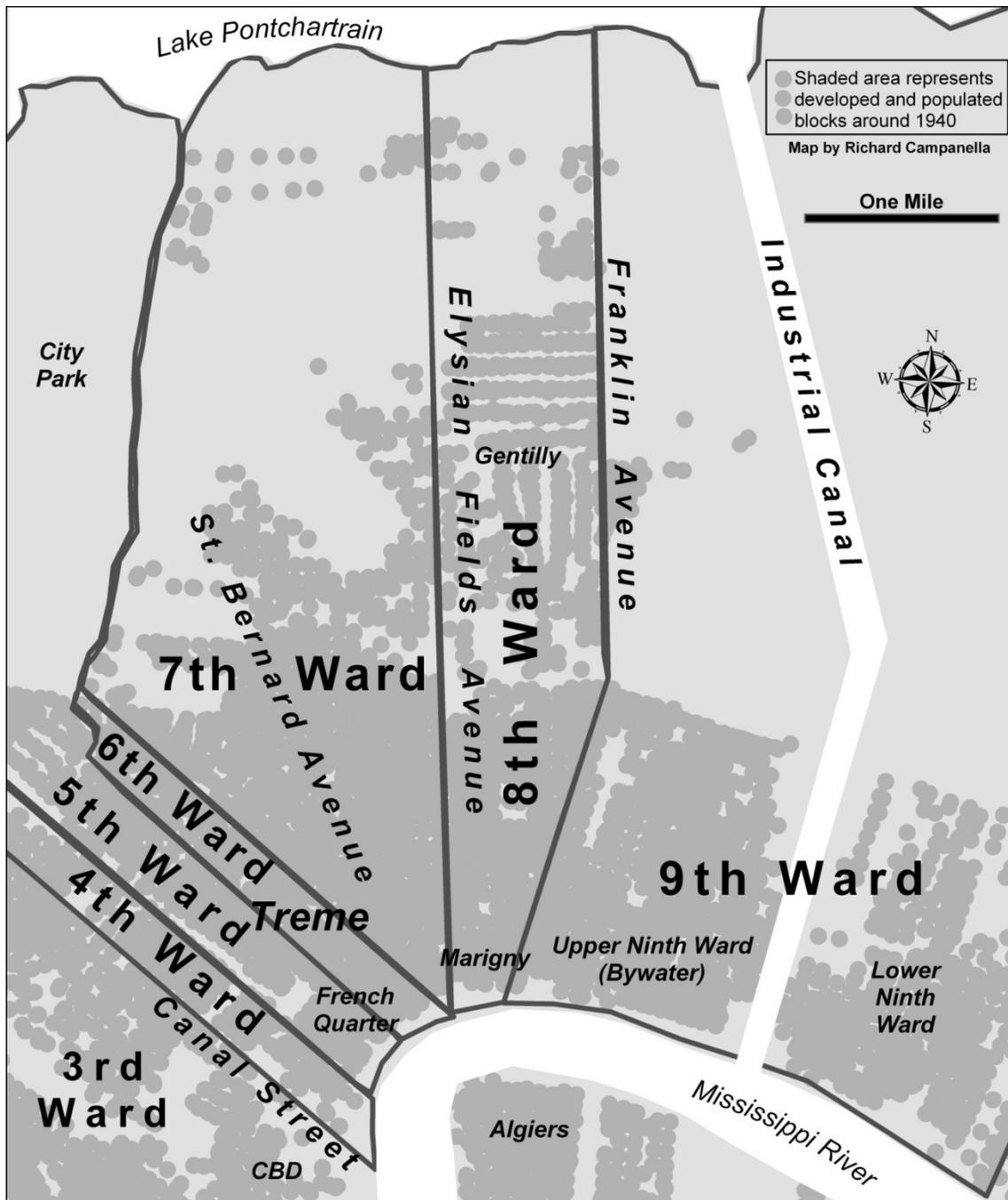


Figure 1.2
Map of Downtown New Orleans, 1940
 (Map by Richard Campanella)

Lily Braud grew up in uptown New Orleans, although her family identified as Creole. Her interview illustrates the local black geographical knowledge of New Orleans' neighborhoods and the way in which color and ethnicity combined to define who

belonged above and below Canal Street. Ms. Braud grew up in a comfortable Creole family and was able to attend Xavier Prep, the black Catholic high school. Yet, as a teenager Lily Braud went to all of the Anglo-black clubs and restaurants located in uptown New Orleans. Still, people continually tried to classify her in terms of neighborhood and skin color. "When I tried to go into some of the black places," she explained, "they didn't want me. Because they said they couldn't come into ours...But see, everybody, if you were light, they just assumed you were from the seventh ward." When she met resistance at the bars, Ms. Braud would announce: "I don't live in the seventh ward! I live in the thirteenth ward! And I'm going to go to this place."²⁴ By stating that she was not from the seventh ward (downtown) Lily Braud was identifying herself as a certain type of black New Orleanian. Despite her light skin, she wanted to identify with the black community uptown—the community she grew up in. By saying that she was not from the seventh ward, she was also rejecting the exclusiveness of the downtown Creole community and culture. Lily Braud's identity was certainly fluid; she went to private Catholic schools and made friends with many of the downtown black Creole girls, but continued to associate with black uptowners, and people from all backgrounds. Ms. Braud always thought of herself in the broadest of terms, and this was evidenced by her bridging of uptown/downtown cultures.

In spite of the cultural differences between uptown and downtown teenagers, many came together because the city had only one colored public high school, McDonogh #35 (an industrial high school, Booker T. Washington, opened in the early

²⁴ Lilly Braud and Lolita Villavasso Cherrie, interview by LaKisha Simmons, digital, March 2007, In possession of author.

1940s). In her interview, Florence Borders, a graduate from McDonogh #35, explained the cultural divisions within black society:

[G]enerally you were an uptowner or a downtowner, all across the board. And when we got to 35, we met people for the first time who were in our age group, and in our class, and from another section of the city. But there was always a consciousness of being an uptowner or a downtowner ... one of the girls who was in my class married a *'downtown boy.'*²⁵

Borders used vocal intonation to imply that a "downtown" boy was scary, different, and possibly even dangerous. She did so in a joking manner but her narrative pointed to the fact that perceptions of the difference between the two sides of the city were extreme enough to discourage inter-neighborhood dating. Millie McClellan Charles also spoke of 35 as a cultural meeting ground between two separate communities. She said, "I had never known the other high school kids that were below Canal Street until that happened, because I never traveled below Canal Street, except for with my grandmother who went to the French market every Saturday." When she got to 35, Charles "marveled at the fact that they had lifestyles that were different. They were predominantly Catholic; the Creole mentality was very strong there."²⁶ The notion of difference based on "lifestyles" and "mentalities" pointed to a distinct notion of a bifurcated New Orleans—from Charles' view, the kids from downtown literally thought and saw differently.

Canal Street, then, separated two black communities with distinct identities, and which side of the street one was from became short hand for the community with which one identified. The institutions associated with each community helped define social life and girls' experiences with the city. Downtowners had Catholic churches, parochial schools and social clubs such as the Autocrat club—known for its exclusivity.

²⁵ Borders, interview.

²⁶ Millie McClellan Charles, interview by Felix Armfield, tape, July 12, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

Uptowners congregated at Baptist and Methodist churches, Dillard University and clubs such as the Dew Drop Inn. Of course, as Lily Braud's interview makes clear, the distinctions between uptown and downtown were never totally clean and clear—there was always overlap, interweaving, and cooperation. But the divisions were stark enough to discourage inter-neighborhood dating and to sustain the stereotype that all (or most) black Creoles lived downtown. As a consequence of these distinctions, Canal Street became an important geographical marker in black girls' lives, defining whether they were an uptowner or a downtowner. Yet, no matter how distinct the black communities were from one another, white New Orleanians defined both uptown and downtown black girls as "colored." If girls went to public schools, the Jim Crow laws forced them to go to colored public schools. When brown-skinned girls walked the streets, whites identified them as Colored girls. In this, it did not matter from which neighborhood a black girl hailed.

Interviewees not only used Canal Street to locate themselves geographically; they also used Canal Street as a central metaphor for the exclusion of Jim Crow society. The road functioned as a more nebulous but also more symbolic dividing line between blacks of all kinds and whites. This dividing "line" was not actually a two-dimensional line, but a race-making spatial zone in which differences between black and white were created through rules imposed upon black visitors to Canal Street. Most of the stores located on Canal Street did not welcome black customers, there were not many places for black New Orleanians to relax or hang out, and, notably, there were no public Colored restrooms

provided on the street. Beverly Caitone explained, "at one time blacks were shunned off the main street, Canal Street."²⁷


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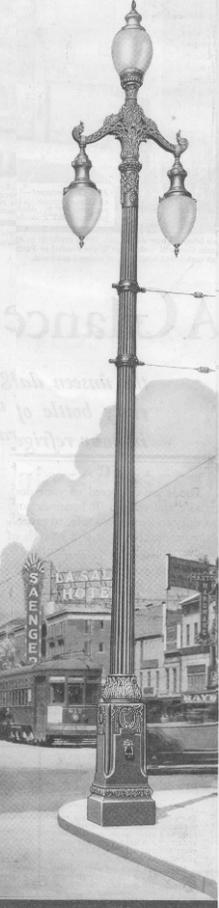
Union Metal Design No. 4601 with
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Canal Street, New Orleans, the White Way of the South. Union Metal Standards, installed by the New Orleans Public Service Co., supply the illumination. The success of New Orleans' great beautification program was due largely to the leadership of Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley, Commissioners William T. Hall, John Klorer, Paul B. Habans, City Engineer Bryson Vallas and the Canal Street and Association of Commerce Beautification Committees.

Figure 1.3
"Night Brings Light" *Saturday Evening Post*
 (Courtesy of Union Metal Corporation)

²⁷ Beverly Caitone, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 8, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

In 1930, Canal Street underwent a complete makeover. A lighting ad in the *Saturday Evening Post* boasted of the transformation of the shopping district. The ad's narrative description of Canal Street claimed that "Canal Street, New Orleans has long been known as the widest and one of the finest business streets in America."²⁸ And the *New York Times* reported on the new lights of the "white way."²⁹ The festival of the lighting of Canal Street commenced with Thomas Edison flipping a switch (from his home in Florida), to turn on the street lights, while local bands played, powerful white citizens spoke, and "thousands" cheered.³⁰ City officials and businessmen poured three and a half million dollars into the rebuilding and modernization of Canal Street.³¹

Yet, the modernization of the street worked to exclude blacks, and the "white way" became both a literal and figurative description of Canal Street. Despite the money poured into the boulevard, there ostensibly was not enough for Colored restrooms. The lack of bathrooms was noted by local businessmen who prepared a report and decided on "public comfort stations" that would "service the white people of New Orleans."³² Olga Merrick explained that "when you got ready to go to the bathroom you had to come home because there was no bathrooms down there."³³ To deal with this slight, black parents had to carefully plan their day out around bathroom breaks at home. The message, from

²⁸ "Union Metal Manufacturing Ornamental Lamp Standards," *Saturday Evening Post*, unknown. *H. George Friedman Personal Papers*.

²⁹ The paper and ad both played on words as "The Great Wide Way" (a Canal Street nickname), which became the "white way."

³⁰ "Sets New Orleans Aglow," *New York Times*, February 25, 1930.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Report on Public Comfort Stations," June 9, 1931, New Orleans Association of Commerce Minutes, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection and Special Collections, quoted in Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans And the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 134.

³³ Olga Merrick, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 2, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

white store owners, city officials and businessmen was clear: do not make yourself comfortable, for, you do not belong here, in the heart of the city.



Figure 1.4
National Eucharistic Congress, 1938
(Courtesy of H. George Friedman, Jr.)

The scene displayed in figure 1.4, visibly demonstrates the centrality of Canal Street to life in New Orleans.³⁴ In the photograph, Canal Street is decorated for the National Eucharistic Congress in 1938. It was the first time the conference was held in the U.S. South. The conference, at the behest of the Catholic Church, and in hopes that New Orleans race relations would remain calm, included black Catholics at all events. "Colored" sections were set up at masses, often in prominent areas. And a parade along the city streets even included a section for black Catholics (in the rear). This event, at once segregated and yet also "integrated," marked a special time for New Orleans and its

³⁴ *National Eucharistic Congress, 1938*, photo-postcard, 1938, Collection of H. George Friedman, Jr., <http://www.cs.uiuc.edu/homes/friedman/canal/Canal4.htm>.

Catholic citizens.³⁵ As the photograph depicts, the city prepared meticulously with months of planning. Canal Street became a center stage. On Canal, the participants at the conference enjoyed the tropical decorations (the palm trees are actually the street lights decorated to look like palm trees) while shopping and touring New Orleans. Decorative torches lined the street, announcing the convention. Although the conference included blacks officially, Canal Street remained a marker of whiteness—even in this time of "unity."

Canal Street was inundated with shoppers, visitors and New Orleanians enjoying the celebration. Fastened to the buildings were signs of modern consumption: hotel signs, department store names, and billboards. Visual stimulation, grand buildings, shopping and celebration were all part of the allure of Canal Street. Inclusion in this scene marked New Orleanians as both contemporary and cosmopolitan.

Powerful white men in the city not only excluded black youth from participating in the entertainment and consumption of Canal Street, but white boys also harassed black girls as they traversed its geography. In 1939, *The Louisiana Weekly*, the Afro-American newspaper, reported, "WHITE BOYS HIT SCHOOL GIRL: WAS ON HER WAY HOME WHEN HIT IN THE FACE." The story claimed that girls attending the newly built Colored YWCA, located on Canal Street, were repeatedly having problems with neighboring white boys. The paper argued that the attacks were motivated by resentment among white residents who did not want the Colored YWCA located on Canal Street.³⁶

³⁵ Justin D. Poche, "Religion, Race, and Rights in Catholic Louisiana, 1938-1970" (dissertation, Notre Dame, 2007), 14-22.

³⁶ "White Boys Hit Schoolgirl: Was on Her Way Home When Hit in the Face," *The Louisiana Weekly*, April 29, 1939.

The Colored YWCA's location toward the lakeside of Canal Street helps explain some of the hostility girls faced as they attempted to enter the building. The building was formerly used by a black teacher's training school, Straight College.³⁷ Behind the YWCA, but occupying the same property, sat Albert Wicker Junior High School, a Colored junior high. Although these were two important black institutions, whites populated the homes that bordered them. According to the 1930 census, not even one black family lived in the thirty two homes surrounding the property.³⁸ At one time there was an interracial boarding house near the college for both black and white educators—presumably for Straight College professors and students. After the college closed its doors, the boarding house was converted into apartments occupied by whites.

The square block surrounding the YWCA was extremely homogenous by New Orleans standards, where residential mixing was not necessarily uncommon. The whites that lived along the property of the Colored YWCA were working-class whites, engaged in labor at local factories, others working in white-collar jobs as clerks, and many working for the city as firemen, city officials, streetcar drivers and typists—jobs denied to black New Orleanians. There were several white police officers in the neighborhood: policeman Henry Norton's house was directly across the street from Wicker on Cleveland Avenue.³⁹ The presence of policemen did not provide safety for black girls walking along the street. The whites living on Canal Street and Cleveland Avenue did not want Colored buildings in their vicinity. Neighborhood white boys and girls owned the streets

³⁷ “Sanborn Map: New Orleans, La” (Sanborn Map Company, 1940), Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Williams Research Center, Historic New Orleans Collection.

³⁸ The 1940 census is not yet available to scholars for a street-by-street analysis. However, the racial make-up of the street was consistent between 1920 and 1930, leading me to believe this was also the case between 1930-1940.

³⁹Demographic information from, Nellie Gaillard, “The Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930” (Orleans Parish, Louisiana, New Orleans City, Ward 3, District 33, April 2, 1930), Department of Commerce--Bureau of the Census, Ancestry.com US Federal Census.

surrounding the YWCA and Wicker Junior High School. The *Louisiana Weekly* article made clear the way in which local white residents carefully policed Canal Street surrounding the YWCA and brought to the forefront the politics of space in New Orleans.

A short editorial lamenting segregation in New Orleans captured the antagonism of Canal Street. The editorial discussed Louis Armstrong's reign as the Zulu King during Mardi Gras of 1949. Writing about the racial politics of Mardi Gras and Canal Street, the author noted: "[W]e wonder if a New Orleans colored citizen dared raise his voice in even a whispered 'Whoopee!' on Canal Street. The United Press reported it thusly, 'Satchmo presided over the Negro Mardi Gras celebration 'back of town.' Along Canal Street and in the French Quarter the white people were making merry."⁴⁰

Because of the hostility experienced on Canal Street, it is a site full of memories of segregation. Canal Street is often featured in oral histories that describe life during Jim Crow. In these interviews, narratives of rejection are a common theme, and such stories were told by the interviewees for specific reasons. Narratives of rejection reveal moments of racial learning in the segregated South.⁴¹ These are moments when the teller of the story had been metaphorically (and sometimes literally) kicked out and marked as other through a very public process. During segregation, these moments of rejection were social, happening on the street or in front of other people. In the narratives, rejection is mapped onto the streets of New Orleans. Stories of rejection reveal learning about one's place in the racial order, a city's particular racial ideology, and one's place among one's peers.

⁴⁰ "Segregation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1949, National edition.

⁴¹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), 45.

In the 1940s, after having a baby and getting back into shape, Aline St. Julien proudly went to the department store, Maison Blanche, on Canal Street. Maison Blanche had a commanding presence on the skyline; the building stood tall, announcing the majesty of the shopping experience. Ms. St. Julien traveled to the department store to buy a bathing suit that might show off her hard-earned figure. The store 'politely' refused to let her try on the suit given that it was against store policy to allow "Colored" people to try on garments before they bought them. Confronted by Mrs. St. Julien's vocal protests, the store clerk sent her to see the assistant manager. For Mrs. St. Julien, this story about a bathing suit described her relationship to segregation and her complex relationship to the city she loved:

That was the first time I cried like a baby. I cried. The first time segregation made me cry. All those years you grew up knowing you were segregated...I knew everyday that I woke up in my life, that I wasn't as good as the little white girl living at that time in our neighborhood...when they wouldn't let me try on that bathing suit I cried. But I wasn't crying just for that bathing suit. I was crying for all those years, that I had suffered. And it had come to a head. You know how that woman whose clothes line broke and she went inside and shot herself? It wasn't that clothesline, it was all the things that had mounted through the years. And that's what happened to me. It just came down on me...but that one time I broke. I never cried after that.⁴²

This narrative of rejection suggests how emotions are crucial to reconstructing the history of segregation and Black subjectivity during Jim Crow. By using the metaphor of the woman who committed suicide, Mrs. St. Julien reveals how segregation's constant denial of her dignity slowly tore down her defenses, causing psychic injury. St. Julien attempted to describe the affects of everyday trauma by explaining that she was not crying over the bathing suit. Instead, the bathing suit added to the "small violences of the

⁴² Aline St. Julien, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 1, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

spirit" she encountered in her daily life.⁴³ This memory illustrates the psychic trauma of growing up Jim Crow.⁴⁴ The classical definition of trauma describes a person's psychic state after she or he experiences an event that is "outside the realm of the ordinary."⁴⁵ But the psychic harm of rejection describes "insidious trauma"—a trauma of the everyday. Everyday trauma assaulted a person's integrity. Rejection from Canal Street, all those things that mounted through the years, did violence "to the soul and spirit."⁴⁶

Like Mrs. Aline St. Julien, Lilly Braud chose to enter a Canal Street department store when she knew for a fact she was not welcome. Ms. Braud's story tells another side of the negotiation of space, and the experiences of rejection during Jim Crow. Her narrative exposes the complex negotiation of space by light skinned blacks in New Orleans. Lilly Braud was from a black Creole family and her light complexion allowed her to *passé blanc* (pass for white) when she so chose. Like the interviewees from the *Behind the Veil* project, Ms. Braud used Canal Street as her larger metaphor for troubles with segregation. She laughingly told about her experience as a teenager on Canal Street:

It wasn't until you started venturing outside or going downtown to Canal Street, and you tried to put a hat on your head [that incidents occurred]. I had a girlfriend... They were very dark skinned people, and I went all over with her, because she was kinda brave, you know. She was one of those girls uptown. She'd protect you! ...JoAnne and I were [shopping] and she went off somewhere else in this store, and I am trying on these hats and this lady is helping me. And all of a sudden I turn and I say [to JoAnne who was returning], "How do you like this one?" [The clerk] turned, she looked at JoAnne, she looked at me. Now this had been going on for a good ten minutes, all of a sudden she said, "Oh, I am sorry, you can't try

⁴³ Laura S. Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 109.

⁴⁴ For discussions of memory and trauma see, Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell and Ferguson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 299-306; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008)

⁴⁵ Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," 100-101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

on this hat." So then I put on every expensive hat they had on that table. I put this on my head, I threw it down. I guess [the clerk] said [to herself], "I'm gonna leave this crazy lady alone." I said, "Don't you tell me that I can't. I've been standing here for fifteen minutes."⁴⁷

Because of Lily Braud's skin tone she could get away with disobeying the signs that attempted to regulate black New Orleanians. However, her insistence on hanging out with whomever she wished (including dark skinned friends and brown skinned family members) meant that she would not pass into the white world unnoticed. Her refusal to cede ground to the store clerk was very likely made easier by her position in New Orleans as a light skinned, middle-class, Creole girl.

Even though Ms. Braud seemed relatively unaffected by the rejection she received from the store clerk, her life story revealed the difficulty of living in a segregated world. As Mrs. Braud began her story, she was laughing and acting out the parts. At the end though, she became somber. The truth was that she knew she would get in trouble if she stayed in New Orleans. The story, though funny, dramatic and defiant, was also serious. She ended her story by explaining: "And that's the rebel in me. I knew I would get in trouble. You just weren't supposed to talk to white people like that."⁴⁸ As soon as she finished high school, Ms. Braud decided to move to California because she believed she could not accept (or survive within) the constraints of New Orleans.

It is telling that Aline St. Julien, Lily Braud and her friend JoAnne showed up to Canal Street department stores in the first place, knowing as they surely did that they would not be allowed to try on clothes and hats. Their actions took a considerable amount of courage; they put themselves out in the public to be exposed by white store clerks as an unequal member of New Orleans society. By going to Maison Blanche, and

⁴⁷ Braud and Villavasso Cherrie, interview.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

insisting on trying things on, Aileen St. Julien and Lilly Braud pushed back on the dominant narrative that they did not belong in that particular space of the city. St. Julien and Braud made themselves visible to the store clerk who attempted to marginalize them.

Another oral history interviewee, Dolores Aaron, described her experiences with rejection by explaining the way in which segregation continued to have a hold on her, influencing her current behavior. Unlike the previous two interviews, Aaron explained why she refused to go to the stores on Canal Street:

I hated to go shopping. I hated to go shopping. I hated it. 'Cause you could look at something, you could like it, you couldn't put it on. And they had places where you could go try on clothes, and the sign up there would say, for white only. The signs told you could not try on a hat, and you could not try on any clothes. So I hated to go shopping, and that is why mama did most of our sewing for us. [Going shopping was] the worst thing in the world. And guess what, until today, I shop at two stores now... Its just a carry over that I have never gotten over... I buy [from] two black stores. Treasure Chest and Elegance, in Los Angeles...I shop twice a year, and my friend in Los Angeles sends me things and I either keep them or send them back. That is what that has done to me. Its just like if I couldn't buy it then, I don't want it.⁴⁹

The everyday trauma of segregation is evident in Dolores Aaron's description of Jim Crow shopping. In her interview Aaron repeated the word "hated" multiple times, she could not overemphasize how uncomfortable she felt shopping in New Orleans. The "for whites only" signs in Dolores Aaron's story represented the refutation of her personhood. Those signs attempted to tell her who she was by explicitly stating what she could not do; and Mrs. Aaron's repetition of the word "sign" exposed her insistence that these signs were meant to negate her right to that particular space (the dressing room for example), to the very articles of dress the store sold, and by extension to Canal Street itself. In the resolution of this narrative though, Mrs. Aaron forcefully asserted that she

⁴⁹ Dolores Aaron, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 30, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

would not even shop in those stores today. Her current (at the time of the interview) refusal became a viable political protest against the controlled space of past segregation.



Figure 1.5
Brill-Built Car, ca 1940
(Courtesy of H. George Friedman, Jr.)

At the same time, she presented her refusal to shop at those stores as part of the trauma of segregation. She said, "Its just a carry over that I have never gotten over" as if her

inability to shop regularly was something that had not been cured yet. She had not fully healed from her experiences of rejection.

It is notable that these stories of rejection centered on Maison Blanche, the shopping hub of New Orleans. The narratives highlight the gendered spaces of Canal Street, while underscoring the struggle the young black women and teenagers faced in self-presentation. The space of Canal Street denied these women the opportunity to engage in consumption, which was the main spectacle of the road. In so doing, the businessmen, city planners, and white saleswomen controlled who deserved the pleasure of shopping, an activity that defined one's class and gender.

The centrality of shopping as a Canal Street activity is apparent in a circa 1940s photograph [figure 1.5].⁵⁰ Standing in the middle of Canal Street is a young black woman. She is dressed up, in sling-back, white heels and a printed dress. Her hair is slicked back, with waves and rolls on the front of her stylish hairstyle. It is clear that she put effort into the way she looked for her trip to Canal Street. At the same time that this young woman presents a picture of modern fashion, representations of segregation haunt the photograph, just as they did Canal Street. The west line street car, which is in motion through the photograph, carried its passengers based on race; and, if she is about to board the train, she would have had to sit behind the "for colored patrons only" sign. The large, imposing presence of Maison Blanche sits in the background. In the photograph, the building beckons the viewer, just as it seems to do for the woman in the foreground; however, her vision is facing the opposite direction. Maison Blanche was a building that could not be ignored; it asked that people come in, shop and recognize its significance.

⁵⁰ *Brill-Built car 873*, Photograph, ca. 1940s, Collection of H. George Friedman, Jr., <http://www.cs.uiuc.edu/homes/friedman/canal/Canal4.htm>.

Its very presence taunted those who could not comfortably shop inside, while it signified a privilege for those who could.

New Orleanian Mary Johnson described the effect of rejection on black working class teenagers, who were not on Canal Street to shop.⁵¹ After graduating from eighth grade, Mary Johnson gave birth to her first child, a son, who brought with him the responsibilities of adulthood. Soon thereafter, Ms. Johnson began working as a domestic in white families' homes to support her child. Ms. Johnson's stories are perhaps more emblematic of the many unrecorded voices of working teenagers who did not leave written records about their experiences with segregation.

Ms. Johnson emphasized that every day she went to work she had to ride the street car all the way down "to the end of Canal Street":

Well, when I did start working...I went to work, from eight in the morning. I came home in about four in the evening. But when we came from work, a lot of time we didn't have anywhere to sit. Because the white people had taken up all the seats...so we had to stand up and crowd behind where the colored people was. A lot of times [the whites] didn't want you to even stand over them. It was on the streetcar, the Canal Street car. We had to stand up. But the streetcar driver, he didn't say anything about it. But we had a kinda hard time. We didn't have a too hard time getting to work, but we had a hard time coming back.⁵²

As Ms. Johnson tells her story, the anger in her voice is palatable. She especially emphasizes that the white riders did not want the black riders to stand over them. The listener of this story can all too well imagine all of the blacks crowded, standing in the back behind the "for colored patron's only" screen that demarcated the front of the streetcar from the rear of the streetcar. The white riders made clear their dislike of the

⁵¹Mary Johnson was one of a handful of *Behind the Veil* interviewees who did not graduate from high school. In fact, most interviewees not only graduated from high school, but also went to at least some college. This is true in the interviews I conducted as well.

⁵² Mary Johnson, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 27, 1994, *Behind the Veil*, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

black riders, snubbing them by suggesting that their bodies not be too close, their black arms not holding onto the moving street car above their pristine white heads.

Why did so many people map their coming of age stories onto Canal Street? First, Canal Street was the center of the city, and as we have seen, it represented the "center" of New Orleans, dividing the urban landscape into two sections that were important to members of the various black communities. Second, Canal Street was an iconic site (not unlike the French Quarter) and therefore it held a certain currency for New Orleanians and outsiders alike. By choosing such a symbolic place as the setting for their narrative of rejection, the interviewees were able to articulate the significance of the experience of rejection to interviewers who were not from the city. Third, the narratives that focus on Maison Blanche reveal the way in which gendered notions of "place" also existed on Canal Street, where shopping was an important part of the modern New Orleans landscape. And finally, Canal Street helped interviewees demonstrate the differences between "inside" their neighborhoods and "outside" in the world where they felt the most vulnerable to the affects of segregation. Canal Street represented life "outside" of the neighborhood, away from familiar streets and neighborhood play and fighting. To further explore life "inside" of one of the neighborhoods in New Orleans, I am now going to turn to Tchoupitoulas Street.

Tchoupitoulas Street

Founded in 1896, the original Kingsley House was a settlement home located in uptown New Orleans near the central business district. The settlement home worked with white working-class children and women, particularly Irish and German immigrants and

migrants to the city.⁵³ The Kingsley House created safe play spaces in order to socialize children because social workers believed proper play spaces were good for children's development.⁵⁴ They sponsored dances and play activities and established playgrounds for the white children of the neighborhood. In 1945, the directors of Kingsley House decided to open an "uptown riverfront extension project" for the children of textile workers at Lane Cotton Mill further uptown on Tchoupitoulas Street. Because there were so many children in the area with nowhere to play, they decided to make this a "biracial" project: white children would be primarily served, but black children would be allowed to play on special, separate days.⁵⁵

Tchoupitoulas Street (Chop-ə-too-ləs) ran along the Mississippi River, so, the story of Tchoupitoulas is, in part, the story of the river.⁵⁶ Textile factories, cotton mills, cigar factories, ice companies, lumber yards, asbestos and chemical storage facilities were located along the river-side of the street.⁵⁷ These industries were part of the activity of river commerce. Opposite this industrial corridor lived both white and black families with Anglo surnames; as one geographer has noted, the "noisy, smelly, objectionable riverside port facilities...attracted inexpensive housing and, ergo, an economically poorer

⁵³ All children's names from the Kingsley Project are pseudonyms. Carolyn Kolb, "Kingsley House, 1896-1996: A Brief History" (Kingsley House, ca 1997), www.kingsleyhouse.org.

⁵⁴ For discussions of "safe spaces" and childhood see, Marta Gutman and Ning De Conick-smith, eds., *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children* (Rutgers University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ According to one report there were 1700 white, school-aged children within a half mile radius of the new project, and there were 450 black children in the same area. Dorothy Spiker to Emeric Kurtagh, "Population Figures in Area of Textile Worker's Hall," January 28, 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections

⁵⁶ The etymology of the name Tchoupitoulas is not precisely known, but folklorists and linguists alike believe it is a derivation of Choctaw meaning "those who live by the stream." William Bright, "Native American Place Names in the Louisiana Purchase," *American Seppech* 78, no. 4 (2003): 353-362; Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, American Guide Series (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 541.

⁵⁷ "Sanborn Map: New Orleans, La."

class of people."⁵⁸ The white fathers tended to work at the factories, for the oil companies and, less frequently, for the city. The black fathers of the neighborhood worked as manual laborers at the factories, labored on the docks, wharfs and for commercial ships, while their wives, mothers and sisters worked as domestics for white families or cleaned and cooked for local companies. Though the area was 'interracial' in some sense, the uptown riverfront neighborhood along Tchoupitoulas was nevertheless divided by race [see map, figure 1.6].⁵⁹ The map of the riverfront extension project demonstrates the ways in which some 'integrated' neighborhoods still loosely followed rules of segregation. The numbers inside of the blocks represent the percentage of Afro-Americans living on the block. What is striking about this pattern of racial segregation is that black families lived in clusters surrounded by white families.

Anglo-black girls who lived in the uptown riverfront area, learned to map the city, and its relations of power, through their movement and play inside of their neighborhood. Black girls living along Tchoupitoulas navigated the streets, discovering where they were and were not wanted. The Kingsley Extension Project provides a window into black girls' constant conflict with neighborhood white children. Dispute and conciliation contributed to black girls' mental map of the city and their sense of self, as they constantly assessed the level of exclusion and safety in the places they occupied. In this way, black girls learned to impose meanings on the geography of New Orleans based on race, power and privilege.

⁵⁸ Richard Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm* (Lafayette: Center For Louisiana Studies, 2006), 305.

⁵⁹ "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930" (Orleans Parish, Louisiana, New Orleans City, Ward 12, District 213, April 2, 1930), Ancestry.com US Federal Census; "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930" (Orleans Parish, Louisiana, New Orleans City, Ward 12, District 206, April 16, 1930), Ancestry.com US Federal Census.

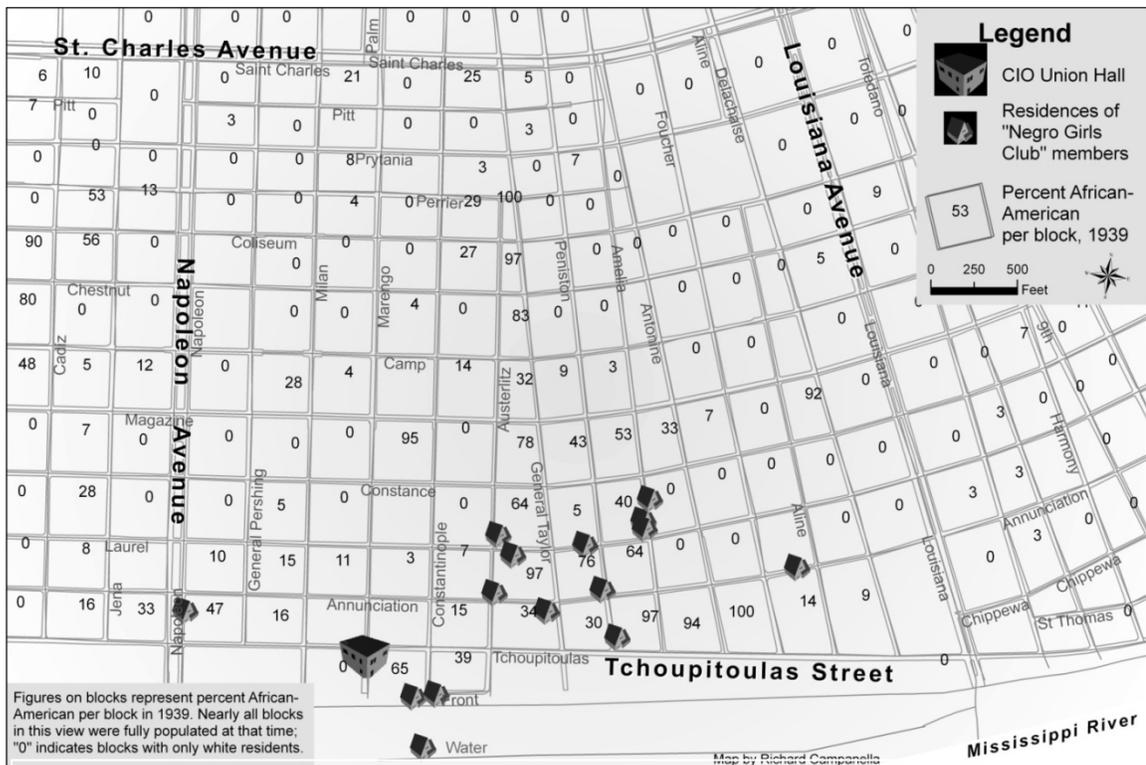


Figure 1.6
Riverfront Extension Project Neighborhood—Clustered Residential Segregation
 (Map by Richard Campanella)

To staff the extension project, the Kingsley House directors decided to hire a female social worker from outside of the New Orleans area because it would have been difficult to find a white local worker who was both qualified and willing to work with both groups of children. Constance Grigsby, originally from Des Moines Iowa, was the first leader of the River Front Extension Project of the Kingsley house.⁶⁰ The white social workers who worked at the Kingsley House Extension Project provide insight into the segregated space of uptown New Orleans. From their point of view we can see the conflict over the ownership of the streets between black and white children. This perspective is often missing from oral histories. Oral history interviewees tended to emphasize moments when white and black children played together peacefully and

⁶⁰ Constance Grigsby, “Grigsby Application,” 1945, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

coexisted on city streets. These memories usually come from early childhood before children started at segregated schools.⁶¹

Instead of unity, the social worker's viewpoints allow us to observe the violence that took place on the streets between black and white children. Because the social workers were not from New Orleans, they tended to report conflicts that were normal for the children of the neighborhood, but appeared extreme and tense to the leaders of the project. Their daily reports focused on the mundane and the extraordinary. Furthermore, as social workers, they were trained to see and address the problems children faced.

The Lane Cotton Mill CIO Union Hall housed the Kingsley House Extension Project, which first began by working exclusively with the white children of the neighborhood. When Constance Grigsby and local black leaders began discussing the possibility of Kingsley House altering its exclusionary practices, they discussed the possibility of working with the riverfront black children. The men emphasized the need for the program explaining that the black children had few places to play. But they worried about adding a black play day at the CIO hall because it would create "too much friction with the white folks and might lead to trouble." For these local black leaders, it was important that they not antagonize an already hostile white community. The fathers who attended the meeting described how their children had to walk to school on specific

⁶¹ The narrative of childhood unity is seen not only in my interviews with New Orleans residents, but also in the *Behind the Veil* interviews with New Orleanians. Also see, Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*. This narrative of childhood unity might also be a consequence of the type of people who volunteer for oral history interviews, or the class of the particular people interviewed. In New Orleans interviews, memories of neighborhood diversity and integration are often contrasted with the aggressive residential segregation associated with the white flight of the civil-rights and the increasing urban decline of the post-civil rights eras. Interviewees also use neighborhood diversity to explain how New Orleans was distinct from other southern cities. Jacqueline Sardie, interview by LaKisha Simmons, digital, November 18, 2008, In possession of author; Boyer Brown, interview; Braud and Villavasso Cherrie, interview.

streets so they would not be beaten up by the white children policing the neighborhood.⁶² These fathers already understood the geography of the neighborhood as divided by race even though black and white families lived on the same block.

Meanwhile, local white residents strongly discouraged the project from the start. Grigsby asked the neighbors if having black children share the union hall—yet use it on separate days "of course"—would be acceptable. She reported a local neighbor's response:

He did not come out and say that he thought it was impossible, but said that it would have been easier if we had started the two at the same time. At this point it would be taking away a day from the white children and might cause a good deal of friction. [He] emphasized the need to educate parents and children of the neighborhood to the idea of having such a program before starting it. [He] said he could see where the thing might hold all to dynamite if not very careful [sic].⁶³

The very threat of "dynamite" was a spatial threat. This man's words exposed the mix of both power and privilege the white residents felt over the geography of the riverfront. Thus, the conflict centered not on whether or not the black children had a place to play, but where that place would be. The white resident's use of "dynamite" as a metaphor suggested that if black children played in the union hall, there would be disorder and violence on the streets.

The Kingsley House never secured a separate play area for the black children, so they decided that the white and black children would have to share the same union hall on Tchoupitoulas [figure 1.6]. Black girls (ages 8-14) would play on Wednesdays after school, black boys on Saturday mornings and white children would play at all other times. The program was 'progressive' because not only did the white and black children

⁶² Constance Grigsby, "Program Report Kingsley House Extention Project," May 31, 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁶³ Ibid.

use the same building, they also used the same toys, and the same restrooms.⁶⁴ Yet, the notion of having play time scheduled based upon race exposed the curious logic of Jim Crow. Once the new "biracial" program was officially announced to the white community, some children said they would not be able to play in the union hall after the black kids had played inside.⁶⁵

As the program began, it was clear that the controversy would center on which group of kids owned the play space. On the first Wednesday (black girls' day), the white children stood by, closely watching the eight black girls who showed up to play with the toys. Constance Grigsby reported:

There were quite a few white children hanging around and watching [the colored girls] at their play which seemed to make the girls quite self conscious during most of their play. Some of the younger boys who were hanging around began making very cutting remarks like, 'Don't you break that you nigger,' and 'Dirty old things,' and I had to send them away quite briskly.⁶⁶

As the black girls attempted to play, the white children stood by, possessing the space and attempting to intimidate the black girls. The white children felt comfortable standing in the entrance of the union hall, occupying the street outside and the building. Not only did these white children assert their physical presence, they also occupied the union hall visually, a constant reminder of who had power. Even some of the white parents came by just to look in on the black girls and assess the situation.⁶⁷ The white boys' visual possession of the space made the girls noticeably distressed. Having whites visually

⁶⁴ "December 18th Report," December 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁶⁵ Constance Grigsby, "Riverfront Update, June 30-July 6," Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Constance Grigsby, "Kingsley House Project, July 15-20," July 20, 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

occupy the space reminded the black girls who belonged and marked the girls as visitors and interlopers.

As the program continued, more black children began showing up on their assigned days. On the third Wednesday of the new program, thirty black girls showed up for "the Negro Girls Club" and to play. The girls arrived before Grigsby. While the black girls played, a handful of white neighborhood children showed up, determined to disturb the black girls and unwilling to leave. When Grigsby finally arrived she found the white and black children ready to exchange blows.⁶⁸ The fight consisted of "nasty talk" on both sides. Grigsby, called the altercation the "most tense" moment since the Kingsley House Uptown Riverfront Project began.⁶⁹ That the black girls felt bold enough to fight illuminates either the intensity of the white children's words and actions, or just as likely, that the black girls routinely did not back down from the white children. These were all local, neighborhood children who lived around Tchoupitoulas Street. Certainly the white children knew the black girls and visa versa. The resolution of the conflict was only temporary—the white social worker showed up and told the white children to leave. However, to keep this from happening again she told the black girls not to show up early, reinforcing the idea that the play space belonged to white children by default.

Soon, the conflict over the union hall spilled into the surrounding streets. A few months later, a group of white boys taunted the girls with "aggravating remarks" during a Negro Girls Club meeting. The girls responded to these remarks by "talk[ing] back" to the boys. The social workers tried to move the girls away, but could not defuse the argument. Meanwhile, a white girl, May Rose, threw a rock over the fence toward the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

black girls. In response, the girls ran after her, calling her a "son of a bitch." An instructor reported: "They stopped at the corner... Those who had run outside came into the hall again. They were irritated by not apparently really disturbed. With a fair amount of encouragement... they got settled in chairs for the meeting."⁷⁰ Just as the girls readied themselves for their club meeting, May Rose and the two white boys came back calling names through the doors of the union hall. Throughout the conflict, Grigsby insisted that the black girls remained "calm" but "annoyed."⁷¹

The social workers' designation of the black girls' emotional state as "calm" reveals the ways in which girls learned how to deal with racial conflict during segregation. Most likely, the girls were able to remain calm despite their chaotic surroundings because they were used to the way the white neighborhood children treated them. Clearly, fending off insults from May Rose and her friends was a common occurrence. Even though the girls remained somewhat calm (they did, after all, chase May Rose down the street and call her names) they had to listen to the offensive words coming from their white peers. A student intern reported on the dynamic between insults by white children and the varied reactions from the black children: "the colored children cannot express their hostility but must take the insults of the white children to keep what little they have."⁷² Clearly, at times, the black children *were* able to yell back, release their frustration and defend themselves. Yet their responses had to be measured because their use of the play space was always in question. The "calm" yet "annoyed" description of the girls' emotional state speaks to the ways in which they might fight back, but

⁷⁰ "Narrative on Negro Girls' Club at Riverfront for October 1946," October 16, 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Evaluation of Summer Program at Kingsley House Extension," August 15, 1947, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

ultimately needed to return to a "calm" state. Clearly, the girls had learned to alternatively fend off and then ignore verbal insults from whites.

The week following the hectic street chase, the Negro Girls Club hosted a Halloween party for their friends. A Kingsley House instructor "police[d] the streets" to keep the white boys and aggressive children away. Nevertheless, the white boys threw firecrackers into the union hall and shouted: "The Nigs ought not to be allowed to come [here]."⁷³ The insults coming from the white children were no longer simply verbal, but had turned physically violent. Despite the instructors' warnings, the white children wanted to mark the union hall as white only territory. The erupting firecrackers delivered on the earlier promise of "dynamite" from one of the white fathers. The social workers did not comment on the girls' reaction to the white boys' aggression. Yet the boys' behavior taught the Negro Girls Club members important lessons about violence, gender and power on the New Orleans streets: white boys and men were dangerous to their safety. The white boys' verbal threats and violence demonstrated the ways in which they had learned about race—for them, it was appropriate to harass a group of black women (or at the very least funny and playful). They did not think of the black girls as children, like themselves, who might be hurt or injured. Interestingly, the conflicts over space were not nearly as intense on the black boy's day. Sometimes, the boys even played football together.⁷⁴

Constance Grigsby, the first social worker hired by the extension project, had a difficult time adapting to the racial dynamics of the uptown riverfront neighborhood. She

⁷³ "Weekly Summary, Oct 28-31," October 31, 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁷⁴ "Daily Log, October 1-7," October 1946, Tulane Special Collections; "Riverfront Report, October 12," October 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections; "Riverfront Report, 11th-16th," November 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

found the black residents and their children respectful and "clean." At the same time, she worked every day with the white children. She claimed at the beginning of July 1946, that while there was "little community antagonism" from whites "[o]ccasionally when I am walking down the street a group of younger children who do not attend the program call 'nigger girl,' but this is the only indication I have had of such feeling (which of course does exist)."⁷⁵ The depth of the community antagonism remains unclear. However, that the name-calling came from *children* rather than adults is telling. The adults of the neighborhood, black and white, men and women, worked long hours. They had little time to themselves or to spend with their children, supervising their play.⁷⁶ If white adults felt hostile toward Grigsby, they simply kept their distance. Still, the archive discloses some of the tension between the white adults and the Kingsley Extension Project. Toward the end of July, the white chairman of the neighborhood advisory committee for the extension program quit in protest of the biracial program.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Grigsby worked to keep one of the neighborhood's white mothers loyal to the program. Grigsby said, "It is very important that she see it our way because she is very influential in this neighborhood."⁷⁸ Not long after Grigsby recorded the calls of "nigger girl" and her problems with the advisory committee, she quit.

By the beginning of 1947, the Kingsley House hired new social workers, Joy Coombs and Mrs. Kelley.⁷⁹ Coombs and Kelley were better prepared to deal with the white parents and spent much of their time negotiating the racial tensions in the

⁷⁵ Grigsby, "Riverfront Update, June 30-July 6."

⁷⁶ See for example, Kelley, "June 30-July 4, 1947," July 1947, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections

⁷⁷ Grigsby, "Kingsley House Project, July 15-20."

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Kelley's first name is not noted in the Kingsley House documents.

neighborhood. Rather than ignoring or downplaying white racism in the neighborhood, they used the ideology of racial segregation and separateness to open up a space for the black children to play.

Kelley's work with the white girls made clear the complex negotiation happening over space and place in the riverfront neighborhood. One Friday afternoon during the summer of 1947 (the second summer of the Extension Project), the white girls were "persistently" trying to come into the CIO union hall. The black girls had left the hall to go on a hike, and so the black boys were inside playing pool. Kelley recorded her conflict with the white girls:

The girls (white) insisted that they had to come in and play jacks on the big table...I repeated that they will not stand for any colored children coming in on the other days and that I could not in fairness let them in now. I also said that I knew their mothers were all critical of the program because it includes Negro children and that they would indeed be upset if they knew their daughters were actually playing in the same room with big Negro boys. The girls answered haughtily that their mothers "would never know a thing about it."⁸⁰

In order to get control of the union hall from the white girls (who continually tried to show up on the wrong days) and from the parents who disapproved of the program, Kelley used racist language to convince the white parents that their daughters needed to stay away. Explicit in this language was a use of sexually charged understanding of black manhood as dangerous ("big Negro boys") and the importance of protecting white daughters. In this way, white girls learned from their parents and the social workers, the power of racist language that worked to define black men and boys as inherently perilous. The white girls though, were not afraid of the boys. Perhaps, instead of frightening them, Kelley's admonitions (as well as their parents') demonstrated the power of racist

⁸⁰ Kelley, "June 30-July 4, 1947."

language. *Talking* about the dangers of black boys' sexuality could be used for the purpose of manipulation.

After the white girls refused to leave and played jacks despite Kelley's warnings, Kelley went to their mothers' homes and told them what had happened. At first the white mothers were unfriendly, according to Kelley, they "were suspicious...only [one] asked me to come in. The others all held the door open just a crack. I said frankly that I knew I wasn't popular with the girls and that I knew they were calling me a 'nigger lover' but that I wanted to explain the real situation." Kelley proved to the white mothers that she was neither a 'nigger lover' nor someone who supported an integrated play environment. She manipulated the discourse of racial segregation for her own, 'progressive' purposes in order to argue that the white children needed to give up the space of the CIO union hall for a couple of days a week. Kelley told the mothers she "was sure they would not want their daughters playing in such close quarters with the Negro boys. They were all horrified at the very idea and thanked me for coming to explain."⁸¹ In her reports Kelley, unlike Grigsby, made clear that the white mothers rejected interracial play, "closeness" between whites and blacks, and supported racist notions of blackness.⁸² At the same time, Kelley's language reified sexualized assumptions about blackness and whiteness—and superimposed that language onto the children's bodies. The very threat of "such close quarters" implied a sexualized atmosphere within the union hall building. At the core of her argument lay the assumption that segregation was meant to separate black boys from white girls.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

While the social workers spent a considerable amount of time negotiating with the white children about who controlled the space of the union hall, they were unable to forge an intimate relationship with the black girls. Unlike the black Catholic children who confessed to white priests, and depending on their school, might be taught by white nuns, black Protestant girls rarely had intimate relationships of any kind with whites in their neighborhood. Because public schools were segregated by race, black children going to public schools in New Orleans were taught by black teachers. The majority of black kids living near Tchoupitoulas rarely, if ever, confided in white adults. Additionally, the conflicts with white children over space marred many of the black children's activities, causing awkwardness between the social workers and the black children. Joy Coombs believed that the black girls had "criticisms of the program that they don't want to express for fear of being thought unappreciative, partly because the leader meets with them only once a week, and then in a large group....Most of the girls are reserved toward the leader and felt unsure of acceptance around the CIO hall and the white children."⁸³ Coombs believed that the black girls' "reserve" was due, in part, because of the conflict over space. The black children had to navigate space in such a way that they were never quite sure if they belonged at the union hall. For black girls, figuring out their place was further complicated by the fact that the white children were always trying to remind them that they did not belong, even as the white social workers tried to make the black girls comfortable. This double message reveals the intricate ways in which black girls had to think about space. These racial relationships were integrated into their mental map of spaces where they could feel comfortable and at ease.

⁸³ Joy Coombs, "Negro Girls Club Fall [1946] Report," February 1, 1947, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

Complex negotiations over space are evident in the black girls' trips outside of their Tchoupitoulas neighborhood as well. The Negro Girls Club took fieldtrips around the city, illustrating how black children came to impose meanings on their environment relating to race, power and privilege. One of the white social workers noted:

On the picnic and traveling to concerts [I am] often asked what places and equipment are okay for Negroes to use (the levee, swings in the park, residential sections). They need sound advice in this area. The older girls are quick to tell the younger ones if their behavior is not acceptable. Their admonition is in a moralistic generality; magic words "bad" and "nice" are their only explanation. The leader supposes that Negro children have to accept the behavior pattern expected of them younger than white children do and that standards of good public behavior are therefore a special need for them. The older ones probably have a particular interest in etiquette in general.⁸⁴

The Kingsley fieldtrips clearly demonstrate that although black children learned the rules of racial etiquette through interpersonal interactions with whites, they also learned the etiquette of space. Urban geography functioned as a teacher; it educated the younger children, telling them where they belonged and thus, who they were. The built environment, therefore, marked New Orleans' social priorities and power networks. Furthermore, the interactions between the older and younger girls, demonstrates that age and cognitive development shaped black New Orleanians encounters with and interpretations of space.⁸⁵

As they traversed the city streets outside of the Tchoupitoulas neighborhood, the younger girls took in information about new areas. Children are not born with the ability to map their environment, rather they learn about the spaces around them as they grow

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of childhood, race, and cognitive development of space see Rebecca Ginsburg, "The View from the Back Step: White Children Learn about Race in Johannesburg's Suburban Homes," in *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space and the Material Culture of Children*, ed. Marta Gutman and Ning De Coninck-Smith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 193

and experience space.⁸⁶ Children learn what is remote and what is near and then associate those distances with meanings. Black children in New Orleans might learn early on in life that a white school was located near them—maybe just a few streets away or in easy walking distance—whereas the "colored" school that they would eventually attend was much further away.⁸⁷

Each new trip around the city helped younger girls involved with the Kingsley Project compose a mental map of the geography of New Orleans based upon race. The girls asked openly, what was their proper place at the city parks and levees? The smaller girls looked to elder girls for reassurance and guidance because it was never quite clear to them where they could safely travel. On one trip to the levee, the black girls sat on a log in the shade with the social workers. A younger girl asked if "Colored people" were allowed in the space. The social worker reassured her: yes, Colored people were allowed. Another girl chimed in, "Suppose they don't want us here?"⁸⁸ The children's questions illuminate both the process of learning place in greater New Orleans and the restrictions they faced in the Tchoupitoulas riverfront neighborhood. For them, there was a difference between being "allowed" and being "wanted." A distinction they knew all too well from their play in the union hall, and most likely on other spaces along Tchoupitoulas. They were accustomed to conflicts over space at the riverfront, differently perhaps than children who grew up in the slightly more secure Treme neighborhood.

The Kingsley Riverfront Extension Project closed its doors in 1949, only two years after it began. Community antagonisms and vocal protests from whites in other

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁸⁷ Braud and Villavasso Cherrie, interview; Boyer Brown, interview; Borders, interview; Cappie and Cappie, interview.

⁸⁸ "Picnic on Levee Report," November 1946, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

parts of New Orleans killed the project. Social workers who observed the children, along with students from the local women's college, Newcomb College, believed they had failed to create a safe play space for black kids. Kelley deplored the situation, arguing that it was impossible to educate "children to more accepting attitudes in a neighborhood where prejudice is so rampant." Kelley further explained:

Apparently trying to run a bi-racial program in accordance with what the community will accept is only erecting even more barriers between the white and colored groups. The distinction between 'colored day' and 'white day...my leader' and 'your leader'...seems to be aggravating the rivalry between the two, instead of encouraging sharing of facilities and fair play. The colored children are becoming obviously more fearless about expressing their aggressions...which may be to some extent a healthy release for them, but which seems only to incite the white children to greater rejection, which, in turn, does nothing to help the Negroes.⁸⁹

A student from Newcomb College agreed that the program could not last; she believed that, "As long as the feeling between the two racial groups is as strong as it is in this neighborhood, a bi-racial program is a forced program." She, too, argued that prejudices were being "increased" by the Kingsley Project rather than abated.⁹⁰ Thus, the white social workers and volunteers viewed the violence in the neighborhood as being stoked by the program, even though the black and white fathers made it clear when the program began that dramatic tension already existed between the children. The social workers who witnessed the conflicts between white and black children may have been looking in on the normal play between the children in the Tchoupitoulas neighborhood.

The conflict on Tchoupitoulas Street clearly demonstrates the feelings of insecurity, resentment, anxiety and anger for the majority of working-class Anglo-black girls living, growing-up and playing in the area. We see how black girls learned to map

⁸⁹ Kelley, "Aug 4-8, Weekly Log," August 1947, Kingsley House Papers, Tulane Special Collections.

⁹⁰ "Evaluation of Summer Program at Kingsley House Extension."

their world according to race as they constantly assessed where they belonged. Each neighborhood in New Orleans had its own identity and thus, racially defined spaces. Tchoupitoulas Street's racial patterns revealed intense hostility in an area some might define as 'integrated.' Yet the Kingsley House Project shows the ways in which negotiation of place along the lines of race was incorporated into children's daily lives.

Rampart Street

Robert Tallant, who led the WPA Federal Writer's Project in New Orleans, was a white folklorist and amateur historian who blended fact with fantasy.⁹¹ Tallant and his team of writers, including Robert McKinney, conducted numerous interviews with Black New Orleanians for the WPA collection on Louisiana. Their vision of the social and cultural geography of New Orleans emerges from the interviews. For these white men, Rampart Street was the center of black New Orleans. They viewed Rampart as a street of sexuality, promiscuous women, and gambling men.

In their narratives, Rampart Street was an exotic world of black sexual excess.

The men described a twenty-two year old cook whom they were interviewing:

Mary was doing some fancy walking up South Rampart street...keeping time with the hubbub and beat of the noisy street... She was a spectacle to see, wearing green house slippers, a tight short black dress that had ruffles around her posterior and just above her waist; she also wore a red comb in her wild, knappy hair and pair of red stockings that had arrows above her ankles. Mary was bowing and giving her 'howdy' to greet her kind, slow-walking pimps who were whistling weird blues songs, and frustrated whores whose baffled eyes depict the life they lead.⁹²

⁹¹See, Federal Writers' Project, *New Orleans City Guide*, American guide series (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952); Robert Tallant, *The Romantic New Orleanians*, 1st ed. (New York: Dutton, 1950); Robert Tallant, *The Voodoo Queen; a Novel* (New York: Putnam, 1956); Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1946).

⁹² McKinney, "Mary Davis," December 23, 1938, Robert Tallant Papers, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

For these white men, the spectacle of the women on Rampart merged with the spectacle of the street itself. McKinney and Tallant interviewed Mary Davis in an inconspicuous bar, the Suzy Q, located on South Rampart and Thalia Streets. "This happy girl" fantasized McKinney, "was the center of attraction as she arrogantly walked into the lowly Suzy Q...a hole in the wall 'joint' where dope fiends, murderers and thieves rub elbows and other things with each other and thirty five cent whores whose grip on life was lost long ago." McKinney was so confident of his depiction of sex and excess, that in his portrayal of the Suzy Q he placed a literal price (35¢) on the bodies of the women who populated the bar. In this way, he became the detached but omnipotent observer. Tallant and McKinney's depiction of Rampart—the black commercial district in New Orleans—was overwhelmed by people described as permanent fixtures of the space: broken down prostitutes, pimps, and drug addicts populated equally broken down buildings. For them, this was all there was worth noting about the people on Rampart Street. Their depiction of Rampart Street left little space for the Rampart Street that black girls walked along.

Rampart and Dryades Streets helped close the gaps left by Canal Street's white-only consumption—Rampart was the "prime black street" instead of the "white way."⁹³ At the same time, Rampart Street was a definitional space which illuminated gendered and class distinctions among black New Orleanians. Who was allowed to walk the street undisturbed? Who would be able to sit in the bars? Which young women would be defined as virtuous and worthy of protection? Answers to these questions revealed how a black girl would be classified according to her class status.

⁹³ "Prime black street" from, Borders, interview.



Figure 1.7
Pelle, Arvin *View down South Rampart at Clio Street, 1941*
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)



Figure 1.8
Zoom of Girls on Rampart Street from *View down South Rampart at Clio Street*

Rampart Street ran both uptown and downtown of Canal Street. South Rampart was uptown of Canal Street, while North Rampart was downtown of Canal. As a black entertainment area, the street had restaurants, laundries, bars, a thriving night life and parties. Peter E. Dave, Jr. described the Rampart Street of the 1940s: "They also had Camp Leroy Johnson...[soldiers] would migrate on Rampart street because that's where all the prostitutes were and gambling joints was, for black people. Canal and Rampart

was a central location...we'd go down there, I'd go there down..."⁹⁴ The image of Rampart Street as a geography of leisure has been immortalized in popular Afro-American music such as Ida Cox's "Blues for Rampart Street" (1923) and in the jiving comedy "Saturday Night Fish Fry" (a number one hit in 1947). Ida Cox sang of Rampart Street in various recordings during the 1920s and 1930s, claiming it for black New Orleanians:

Rampart Street in New Orleans town,
Known to everyone for miles around.
Colored music and real jazz bands,
That's the best spot in all the land.⁹⁵

Whether or not children were allowed to enjoy "the best spot in all the land" with or without their parents depended on their gender and class status. Boys had much more



Figure 1.9

Cox, W.H. *View up Rampart Street from the 800 Block*
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

⁹⁴ Peter E. Dave Jr., interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 23, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

⁹⁵ Later recordings replace "Colored" with "Creole." For lyrics see, Ida Cox, *Blues For Rampart Street* (Prestige, 2006); Ida Cox, *Ida Cox Vol. 1 1923* (Document Records, 2005).

freedom to explore their city, and played on its streets frequently. Peter E. Dave, Jr. often went to Rampart Street, and in the 1940s, when he was about fifteen years old he even worked in a black dress shop located on Rampart. New Orleanian boys had "territorial rights" over streets in their neighborhoods and "throughout the city," boys might get beat up if they entered a rival gang's territory. At nighttime, Dave and his friends would play in the white playgrounds and run away if whites approached them.⁹⁶ This boldness in investigating the city and patrolling 'gang' controlled streets made boys more likely to go out and explore places like Rampart Street. Albert Samuel "Junior" Garner started playing the drums in New Orleans barrooms when he was only a preteen. He played at the Dew Drop Inn (located on LaSalle Street uptown, just a few blocks from South Rampart Street).⁹⁷ Garner remembered his nights at the Dew Drop in the mid 1940s: "I was going to elementary school and I was playing in the Dew Drop six nights a week. I couldn't get a drink cause I was in elementary school...I played for all of the shows, all of the shake-dancers, I was everybody's little brother."⁹⁸

But many black parents worried about their children wandering the streets. Clarita Reed grew up in an uptown middle-class family. Her father was a porter, earning enough money so that her mother could stay home. Clarita Reed's parents tried to protect her and her brother from the physical violence and psychological humiliation of segregation. Reed explained: "...the black male wasn't safe. And the black woman could get insulted at any time...And you just didn't have any recourse. So most of the times most people kept their daughters sheltered and tried to keep their sons in." That black

⁹⁶ Dave Jr., interview.

⁹⁷ S. Rampart Street uptown is now Danneel Street.

⁹⁸ Albert Samuel "Junior" Gardner Jr., interview by Kate Ellis, tape, August 12, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

girls could get "insulted" at any time, suggested that the streets were places where girls experienced sexual violence and street harassment. Reed was not allowed to go out, but her brother was able to bend the rules and explore the city. She recalled, "I never slept until my brother came home...My brother was always out, as young people are. And you just worried, until he came and knocked on my window to let him in, so my parents wouldn't know he came in that late."⁹⁹

Typically, girls did not have the freedom that Clarita Reed's brother had. And Reed herself noted that she would never cross her parents' rules. Florence Borders, who grew up only one block from South Rampart, also noted the gendered and classed dynamics of Rampart Street:

I imagine that Rampart Street would have a greater appeal to people who lived in a style that would not be attractive to middle-class blacks. My mother, for instance, did not go in barrooms. I don't think she called herself middle-class, but she did call herself a lady. And she would not have considered it appropriate for anyone who wished to be called a lady, to go into a barroom, no matter what kind of barroom it was.¹⁰⁰

Borders described her mother in terms of her respectability. Respectability represented an ideal for the proper behavior of the "aspiring-class" of black men and women—people who attempted to reach middle-class status, not necessarily through higher incomes and 'better' jobs, but through an adoption of a specific set of mores.¹⁰¹ This included a morality based on female purity, religiosity, and straight-living. Middle and aspiring-class Afro-Americans who were obsessed with morality often made girls and young

⁹⁹ Clarita Reed, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 24, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

¹⁰⁰ Borders, interview.

¹⁰¹ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xx; Mitchell argues that applying "standard class labels" is more difficult while looking at a group of Americans just out of slavery. She explains, "I use 'aspiring class' then, as a means of differentiating African American strivers from contemporaneous middle-class, white Americans and to acknowledge the quickening of class stratification within African American communities."

women *responsible* for their own integrity. Therefore, they would certainly not expect upright women to frequent the clubs on Rampart Street. At the same time though, Borders noted that Rampart represented much more than entertainment for the immoral and low-class. Rampart did "fill the void" created by segregation. Borders insisted that her mother did not think disdainfully of the people on Rampart. The street included, "what they call rooming houses, because the situation at the time was that the men who ran on the railroad had time to spend in New Orleans. [They] could not check into any of the major hotels. They had to have some place to live, and many of the women who rented these big houses on Rampart Street...to people who need a place to stay, just considered this a business... [the] segregated system did not provide for the comfort of people."¹⁰²

Millie McClellan Charles lived only a few blocks from Rampart Street. But like Clarita Reed and Florence Borders, her movement was restricted by her parents. For example, there was a black club was only a few buildings down from their house.

Charles recalled:

I'd sit down on my front porch and look in there and wish I could [go in]. And when I got to be an adult, and finally was on my own. And I went there and Frank saw me at the door and Frank said, "Millie you can't come in here, I don't want your daddy getting behind me." And we laughed about that...that was the night club. It was located on LaSalle Street between Washington and 6th...see the entertainment was centered around Rampart Street.¹⁰³

Millie McClellan Charles wanted to be a part of the entertainment scene but the entire neighborhood knew her father was an "almost militant," strict minister, and so they looked after her, making sure she never broke the rules. Charles would walk the streets

¹⁰² Borders, interview.

¹⁰³ Millie McClellan Charles, interview.

all around her neighborhood and nobody bothered her. "They would protect me against anybody doing anything to me...They knew you don't mess with Elder McClellan's daughter...There was something personal in the relationship." Not only were the clubs off-limits, but Charles was not allowed to dance. "My father didn't believe in dancing;" she admitted, "he didn't know I danced." Charles graduated from McDonogh 35 in 1939, but her father continued to have strict control over her movement around the city since she went to nearby Dillard University and because she was still only fifteen years old.

Mrs. Charles's father was not the only minister concerned with immorality on Rampart Street. In 1941, *The Chicago Defender's* national edition reported on a special meeting of New Orleans' ministers, one that Charles's father likely attended. The meeting addressed the black ministers' concerns over the sins of Rampart Street, namely the "juke joints" and gambling. The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, lead by Rev. W. T. Handy of Mount Zion Methodist, conducted the meeting. They discussed the spread of debauchery from corrupt adults to innocent youths. The resolution the alliance drafted argued that gambling "contributes greatly to juvenile delinquency and an evolutionary demoralization of human character." The ministers talked of their attempts at "moral uplift" within the city.¹⁰⁴ Ministers, it seemed, found their own place on Rampart Street. Elder McClellan for example, walked the neighborhood around Rampart Street and whenever he saw children gambling he talked to them, building a personal relationship with those he saw as tarnishing their reputation and their relationship with God.¹⁰⁵

The ministers were especially concerned with the girls who went to McDonogh 35 Colored High School, which was located on South Rampart:

¹⁰⁴ "New Orleans Ministers Condemn 'Juke' Boxes and Open Gambling," *The Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1941, National edition.

¹⁰⁵ Millie McClellan Charles, interview.

Discussion of gambling as it is practiced in New Orleans detailed several instances of its effect upon the youth of New Orleans. One of these dealt specifically with five gambling joints on South Rampart Street within a stone's throw of the First Precinct Police station, where young girls and boys from McDonough number 35 high school must pass daily. It was also stated that on many instances these young girls had been approached by men hanging around these joints, and in a few cases, had been lured into immoral relationships.¹⁰⁶

Rampart Street was indeed an area where girls experienced street harassment, or the moment when a man (or men) approach and accost a woman (or women) in public space. In such cases, according to Micaela di Leonardo, a man uses "looks, words, or gestures, the man asserts his right to intrude on the woman's attention, defining her as a sexual object and forcing her to interact with him."¹⁰⁷ Street harassment then, was a moment of encounter where girls realized their sexual and physical vulnerability. Often called "meddling" by New Orleanians, the street harassment that occurred in the social space of Rampart Street marked McDonough 35 students as women.

Nonetheless, the ministers who believed that McDonough 35's location put female students' personal morality in jeopardy were certainly overreacting to the supposed dangers of the street and, more importantly, underestimating the girls' own resolve. A unique spatial dynamic existed between 35 girls and Rampart—all of the students found comfort in McDonough 35 despite, or even because of, its location. Olga Merrick, who graduated from 35 in the early 1930s, noted:

The most striking thing, and to this day I have never forgotten, was the principal, Lucian B Alexis. M-35 was at the corner of Rampart and Girod. And Rampart Street was a kind of hangout for our people and Mr. Alexis had such a rapport with those people—everybody along the way protected us. All of us. And if anybody appeared like they were going to meddle

¹⁰⁶ "New Orleans Ministers Condemn 'Juke' Boxes and Open Gambling."

¹⁰⁷ Micaela di Leonardo, "Political Economy of Street Harassment," *Aegis*, no. Summer (1981): 51-2; quoted in Judith Walkowitz, "Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London," *Representations* 62 (Spring 1998): 2.

any of us, some man, some Colored man, always straightened them out and said, "That's a M-35 high school girl don't bother her." and Mr. Alexis was just able to rule that street from Canal and Rampart all the way to Gerard and Rampart. And nobody ever bothered us. And it was known to be a street where you could get meddled or whatever. And that was the most striking thing.¹⁰⁸

Because McDonogh 35 was located in a black geographical space, the local community could look out for the girls who went to school there. Unlike the YWCA (which was located on Canal Street), where girls were accosted by white boys on their way to the building, Rampart ironically gave girls a certain type of safety even though the school was located in a notorious gambling district.

However, the principal labored to control the street (he "ruled with an iron hand") and Merrick insisted that Rampart Street was known to girls and women as a site for street harassment.¹⁰⁹ In Jim Crow New Orleans, street harassment had a specific *spatial* and racial dynamic.¹¹⁰ For black girls who suffered "insults" as Clarita Reed explained, the experience fit into a knowledge of space and place that included a history of interracial sexual abuse and harassment. "Meddling," on the other hand, often (though not always) defined street harassment that was intra-racial in nature. Women who later articulated the "meddling" that happened on Rampart, noted it because they wanted to clarify that they were not hanging out on Rampart Street for its unseemly entertainment. Instead, their articulations of street harassment explained the distinction between McDonogh 35 girls, and other women and girls interacting on the street. This difference, in fact, often helped protect M-35 girls as they traversed the street, whereas other black

¹⁰⁸ Merrick, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ It is important to understand the function of street harassment in different places and times. Judith Walkowitz argues that street harassment has its own a history. See, Walkowitz, "Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London," 2.

girls would not be 'defended' by the black men on the street, instead they would be open to abuse. These men then, in their protection of McDonogh 35 students, defined which girls were worthy of protection based on class and educational attainments. Thus, the street harassment on Rampart constructed 'worthy' aspiring class girls.

For McDonogh 35 girls, the street was policed first by their principal, Lucian B. Alexis, and then by the men who lived or lingered on Rampart as well as by the ministers who attempted to rid the street of vice. Lucian Alexis' demeanor brooked no argument; not only were the men on the street afraid of him, so too were most of the students. One female student suggested that Mr. Alexis was "eccentric," while another implied that he was unfriendly.¹¹¹ He was "a principal of a school on Rampart Street, which by any standard was a rough street," she described, "So he was trying to protect us as much as he was trying to protect himself. So he was a hard person to get close to. He wasn't friendly; he had this military bearing that he maintained all his life."¹¹² Alexis's "military bearing" helped him establish and maintain authority over the students and the geography of Rampart. He was so successful in this that girls such as Olga Merrick placed him and his authority on their mental map of Rampart Street.

Because of Mr. Alexis's iron rule, parents found Rampart Street to be safer than some of the more multiracial zones of 'vice' whose location was only a few streets over from North Rampart. Storyville, the interracial prostitution zone (closed down during WWI), was located near North Rampart in the historic Treme neighborhood.¹¹³ Despite the fact that legalized prostitution was closed down by 1930, the area was still known as a

¹¹¹ Herbert Cappie and Ruth Irene Cappie, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 2, 1994, Behind the Veil.

¹¹² Borders, interview.

¹¹³ Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

"red light district." As a high school student in the late 1930s, Jesse Lawrence Moutan grew up in the Treme, and walked to 35. Mrs. Moutan claimed that the "red light district had not closed down then. We could not go through that area...to go to school. We had to walk all the way to Rampart Street, then go straight up Rampart Street. And if anybody saw you going through that district, and said that back to my mamma, 'Why were you coming through that way?' 'Cause you just weren't supposed to. That was off limits."¹¹⁴ That parents preferred Rampart Street to some of the seedier streets only a few blocks over reveals that there was a certain safety in passing through a black zone as opposed to streets where white men were known to loiter.

Girls' reputations were not only protected by the black men populating Rampart Street, but also by McDonogh 35's principal and teachers. Audrey Freddy May Carr graduated from M-35 in 1935. She remembered the crumbling building in relation to the neighborhood it was in; "Our principal would let the boys go out, not the girls. We didn't go out into the streets...you brought your lunch. You sat around the building's yard. There wasn't much of a yard."¹¹⁵ The school was built in 1882, and the building was surrounded by storefronts.

¹¹⁴ Bellsina Pajeaud and Larence Moutan, interview.

¹¹⁵ Audrey Freddy May Carr Robertson, interview by Kate Ellis, tape, June 24, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.



Figure 1.10
McDonogh 35 Colored High School, New Orleans, LA

McDonogh 35's placement and building spoke to the city's understanding of Colored education. One student who graduated in the late 1930s remembered, "The buildings were so old it was crumbling, it was gloomy and dark. And they had no yard, you used to have to go out and stand on the fence. Something about three feet or four feet wide...we had classrooms in the basement part. And they were dark...The schools were terrible really."¹¹⁶ The girls would "cram up" along the fences on Girod Street and gossip. Their restricted movement spoke to the ways in which space worked on Rampart Street for girls of McDonogh 35. Once they arrived at school, they could not go out on the streets as the boys could.

¹¹⁶ Cappie and Cappie, interview.



Figure 1.11
McDonogh 35 Class 10A, 1931
(Courtesy of Lolita Cherrie)

Black girls' movement along the entertainment district of Rampart Street illustrates the development of a gendered and classed sense of place. Furthermore, these girls' mapping of Rampart Street related directly to the working of class in New Orleans' black communities. Where a girl was headed as she walked along the road spoke directly to her class position. Especially in the 1930s, most black girls who could afford to attend high school rather than work to earn extra money for their families came from stable family backgrounds. They were able to attend school because someone in their family (their parents, siblings, or relatives) made enough money to keep them at home. Once schoolgirls got to Rampart Street, the black men working, playing and living on the road

made the girls' class distinctions even clearer by marking their bodies as unpolluted from vice and worthy of protection. The irony of course, was that these men were protecting the schoolgirls from the men themselves. Nonetheless, walking along Rampart magnified the distinctions between male and female students of McDonogh 35. The girls had to be protected from meddling, and policed by the school so they would not face danger or go out in search of pleasure.

Conclusion: Changes to Segregated Spaces

Black girls learned about their place in the city by walking along the segregated streets of New Orleans in the 1930s and 1940s. Girls' stories and recollections, along with images and maps of the city, help demonstrate how their sense of self developed in connection to the Jim Crow geography. When girls walked along Canal Street, they were clearly marked by white business owners and city officials as 'Colored' New Orleanians. Meanwhile, black geographical knowledge of the city used Canal Street to denote the difference between uptowners and downtowners. Working-class girls living along Tchoupitoulas learned about their place in the city through their violent conflicts with white children. They discovered early on to remain careful, wary and reserved while navigating the city streets. And aspiring-class girls who walked along Rampart Street to attend McDonogh 35 also learned a spatial lesson: they realized that their gender, sexuality and class marked their bodies as worthy of 'protection' from black men along the street. These various spatial lessons helped define black girls in the city as certain types of New Orleanians and as certain types of girls, as they developed a sense of place and self based on the intersections of their neighborhood, gender, class and color.

Many people today imagine the history of New Orleans as exceptional in regards to race relations. New Orleans is often remembered as a city with frequent color line crossings, interracial sex, quadroon balls, and racial amalgamation. But during the 1930s and 1940s, segregated, exclusionary and restrictive streets remained the norm in many parts of the city. The segregated streets of New Orleans restricted black girls' movement, and affected the way in which they saw their place in the city.

The shape and look of segregation in New Orleans began to slowly change in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Protest from Afro-Americans in the city forced conservative whites to rethink black children's and youths place in the geography of New Orleans. In July of 1948 the *Louisiana Weekly*, the local black newspaper, complained bitterly on the front page that "New Orleans Negroes were once again brought face to face with the reality that a 'voteless people are a hopeless people!' Democracy, Southern Style [sic], was just a twisted and warped ideological concept which meant in effect that only white people are supposed to enjoy the municipally operated recreational facilities." The article noted that on Fourth of July celebrations, black New Orleanians had to use the neutral space (median) on Claiborne Avenue because there were no other places to go. The article's title made a clear link between southern segregation, the war abroad, and the inequalities at home when it stated, "SWELTERING 'CITIZENS' STRANDED," suggesting that New Orleanian blacks were merely second class citizens in their home town.¹¹⁷

In response to the protests over the problem of recreation space for black New Orleanians, the city began to develop *segregated* spaces for black children and youth to

¹¹⁷ "Claiborne Ave Birth's Negro City Park: Sweltering 'Citizens' Stranded on 4th of July," *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 5, 1948; see also, "More about Recreation for Negroes," *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 12, 1948.

play. The New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) began in 1947, with the explicit purpose of replacing delinquency with healthy sport activity. Indeed, NORD's "Negro Division" changed the relationship between space, play and exclusion in the city. In 1952 the city boasted in its NORD program report that before NORD there was absolutely nothing for black children. Thus, they spoke of the city's "earnest and fruitful endeavor since 1947 to bring adequate facilities to the Negro population."¹¹⁸ In this way, New Orleans city officials believed that by creating more 'equal' separate spaces, they could starve off integration of white only spaces; they also envisioned themselves as a leader among southern states for recreation for children.¹¹⁹ Consequently, by the 1950s, black children gained the right to Negro NORD activities, and a Colored swimming and amusement area at Lake Pontchartrain (Lincoln Beach) opened in 1954, as well as a few new Colored playgrounds.

Recalling segregated Canal Street Professor Rapheal Cassimere noted: "You kind of knew as you grew up where you had to go. You had a mental map because if you were in the wrong place and you needed to use the restroom or needed a drink of water, you couldn't use it." As he grew older, Cassimere was one of many New Orleanians who forced Canal Street to fully integrate. Cassimere became the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Youth Council in New Orleans during the 1960s. When the youth council began boycotts and sit-ins, one of their first stops was Canal Street—the symbol of white exclusion and racists practices. "Integrating Canal Street was a broad-based endeavor. One thing that most people need to realize is that it was an effort made by a lot of people, young people, older people, blacks and

¹¹⁸ "NORD Program Report: "Negro Division"" (City of New Orleans, 1952), 74-75, Commissioner Lionel G. Ott Papers, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

¹¹⁹ "NORD Program Report: "Negro Division""; "America's Finest," *Life*, September 5, 1949.

whites, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants. And while there was a lot of sacrifice involved, there was also this feeling that something positive was happening."¹²⁰

For girls who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s, segregation and white supremacy held a firm hold on New Orleans; and thus, the cohort of girls who came of age in New Orleans during this period were forced to contend with a culture of exclusion and racist images of black girlhood.

¹²⁰ Peggy Scott Laborde and John Magill, *Canal Street: New Orleans' Great Wide Way* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006), 117.

Chapter 2:

"Defending her Honor": Interracial Sexual Violence, Silences and Respectability

As a teenager, Amelda Betz, a black New Orleanian, worked as a nanny for a white family with two small children: the Kanton family. However, her parents did not want her to work for the Kantons because, as Amelda Betz recalled in an oral history interview: "At that time my daddy and momma knew about Mr. Kanton's record."

¹ When the white interviewer asked what type of record, Betz replied, "Well, he used to love colored girls, you see... [His wife] didn't know, but all the Colored people knew." Although it was common knowledge in the South that white men abused young black girls, such information was whispered about, rumors spread quietly, or the abuse remained a public secret within local communities.² White supremacist racial and sexual ideologies required silence; a silence in regards to the continued crossing of the racial border by white men. As is clear from oral histories of women living during the Jim Crow era, sexual abuse of black girls by white men was common. But silence about this came from many directions. Amelda Betz attempted to articulate a common danger faced

¹ Amelda Betz, interview by Dorothy Schlessinger, November 26, 1984, Cabildo Oral History Project, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division. Family name is a pseudonym.

² See Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 198-199, 219-220; Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2005), 19-21, 24, 28; William Henry Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: New Press Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 8-15; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to Do* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 24-26; Susan Kahn writes about girls who were interviewed by the American Council of Education in the 1930s. These girls were silent about rape, but vocal about harassment from white men. Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 111.

by black girls during segregation. The history of that sexual violence though, has been lost under many layers of silence.³

On Monday, February 10, 1930, Matt Piacum, a white restaurateur called the police because his black, teenaged dishwasher, Hattie McCray, had been shot by Charles Guerand, a white patrolman. The police report recorded the facts of the crime: "Matt A. Piacum...notified the police, returning to the kitchen, Piacum asked Guerand why he shot Hattie McCray, Guerand stated that he was trying to have SEXUAL INTERCOURSE with her and that she ran at him with a knife, and he in turn shot her."⁴ Charles Guerand's actions were so scandalous and the newspaper stories following the crime so melodramatic, that for a moment, the silences in New Orleans' discourses of rape and race shattered. Yet as the story of Hattie McCray's refusal to have sex with Guerand, and his enormous rage, were told time and again, silences in the discourse of sexuality and race reappeared.

One of the above accounts is a memory, an oral history dwelling on the legacy and everyday realities of Jim Crow violence; the other is an official account, a narrative that attempts to establish the truth of a shocking crime and the motive for a murder. What are the silences between these two accounts of sexual violence and how are they

³ Few scholars have been able to explore the sexual abuse of black girls and women by white men. Only recently have scholars begun to tackle this topic. For new work focused on incidents of sexual violence against women of color see, Hannah Rosen, "'Not that sort of Women': Race, Gender, and Sexual Violence during the Memphis Riot of 1866," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. Martha Elizabeth Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 267-293; Danielle McGuire, "It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped': Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (2004): 906-931; For early, foundational attempts to theorize sexual violence against women of color by historians see, Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape and Racial Violence," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow and Christine Stansell (NY: Monthly Press Review, 1983), 328-349.

⁴ "Homicide Report: Charles Guerand," February 10, 1930, New Orleans Homicide Reports, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

linked together? In order to embed the Hattie McCray case within a larger context, this chapter looks at silences in the discourse of sexuality and violence during Jim Crow. Silence, as I seek to define it, performs discursive work and has a life of its own. Silence is absence; it is stories half-told and narratives ignored. Silence helps conceal what is inconvenient. Who can speak reveals systems of power, exposing who has authority over bodies. Recognizing those who cannot share their stories and cannot articulate their experiences reveals vulnerability. Consequently, each section of this chapter is concerned with some aspect of silence—whether silences broken or silences maintained.⁵ Each section removes a layer that helps unveil the cultural significance of the Hattie McCray case, the narratives that accompanied it, and the wider significance of interracial sexual violence during segregation.

In this chapter I explore discourses of sexuality, black girlhood and white manhood during the late Jim Crow era. After a brief discussion of the circulation of silence in dominant, white public culture (such as film and novels) and in politics, I will turn to oral histories that grapple with issues of silence and interracial sexual violence in public spaces. These two sections provide context and establish the overlapping and intertwining discourses of sexuality and race in the larger Jim Crow South. I will then turn to the heart of the chapter, Hattie McCray's death in segregated New Orleans. I argue that it was only because of Hattie McCray's murder that silences were broken regarding the sexual abuse of black girls by white men.

Sexual Violence in Black and White: Silences in the White Public Imagination

⁵ For a discussion of silence in African American historiography see Michele Mitchell, "Silences Broken, Silences Kept: Gender and Sexuality in African-American History," *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 433-444

It is well-known that white southerners considered interracial sex taboo. However, interracial sex most often referred to sexual contact between white women and black men. The threat of lynching hung in the air of the South for any black man in, or rumored to be in, even a consensual interracial relationship. Many people during the early twentieth century, and historians since, have discussed the terror associated with lynching.⁶ This section explores the role and circulation of silence in discourses of race and sexuality within the white public sphere during the early years of Jim Crow.

At the dawn of legalized segregation in the South, gendered definitions of white and black were deployed to create and maintain new codifications of race. Thomas Dixon's novel, *The Clansmen: A Historical Romance of the Klu Klux Klan* (1905), along with D.W. Griffith's film version of the book, *The Birth of a Nation* (1912), revealed the importance of gender and sexuality to the southern racial project.⁷ The movie and book attempted to document and justify the historic rise of the Klu Klux Klan. Their narratives centered on black men's supposed insatiable lust for white women and their corresponding inability for political citizenship. According to Thomas Dixon, the author of the story, black men were too inexperienced and too distracted by their sexuality to properly take part in the political process; in addition, white women were too naïve and weak to protect themselves or make coherent decisions. Both the novel and film depicted a respectable, young white woman endangered by an over-sexed black man drunk on his

⁶For histories of lynching that discuss the sexual and gendered dynamics of violence see, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*, Revised Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line : W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Martha Elizabeth Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

⁷ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 91-119.

own political power and lust.⁸ Dixon was fanatical about the impropriety and dangers of interracial sex, despite (or because of) the fact that his white father had a biracial child born out of wedlock.⁹

As Dixon, Griffith and others bemoaned white woman's sexual vulnerability, black women were meaningfully absent from public and cultural representations of race and rape. Their bodies became a reverse image to the white ideal of the respectable white woman as "[t]he association between darkness and eroticism cast white women *en masse* in the role of the 'ice goddess;' upon black women were projected the fears and fascinations of female sexuality."¹⁰ Not only were black women eroticized, but many white commentators denied black girlhood by sexualizing young bodies. For example, in 1895, a representative of Kentucky argued against age of consent laws on the grounds that black girls were always inviting sexual advances. He argued that it was impossible for white men to rape black women and declared, "We see at once what a terrible weapon for evil the elevating of the age of consent would be when placed in the hands of a lecherous, sensual negro woman, who for the sake of black mail or revenge would not hesitate to bring criminal action even though she had been a prostitute since her *eleventh year!*"¹¹ His rhetoric exposed both white desire for unrestricted access to black women, and the denial of a period of innocent girlhood for African Americans.¹²

⁸ Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (NuVision Publications, 2005); D.W. Griffith, *Birth Of A Nation*, DVD (Reel Enterprises, 2006).

⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, 113.

¹⁰ Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, 156.

¹¹ Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 33.

¹² This type of language, sexualizing Black girls, was not exclusive to white men only. William Hannibal Thomas, in *The American Negro*, suggested that incest was the result of poor Black women and girls degeneracy and immodesty within their own home. William Hannibal Thomas, *The American Negro* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 173-207; Also see Michele Mitchell, *Righteous*

The silence surrounding black girls and women as victims of sexual violence was one of many "peculiar silences" within the discourse of sexuality during the Jim Crow era. These silences reveal both the idiosyncrasies within the discourse of sexuality, and the power at stake in discussions of black and white sexualities. Importantly, "[l]ike speech, the meaning of silence depends on a power differential that exists in every rhetorical situation: who can speak, who must remain silent, who listens and what those listeners can do."¹³ The formation of sexuality at this time was never "subjected to dense discursive articulation"¹⁴ because it focused specifically on those (often fictional) aspects of sexuality that supported a racist social order. In other words, white men never fully articulated white male sexual desire as it would directly contradict the idea of civilized white men versus unqualified black men. Meanwhile, these public discourses of sexuality also silenced white female desire particularly that of the upper and middle classes. Therefore, a main element in the discursive formation of racialized sexuality at the time was "its strategic... deployment of a peculiar 'silence.'"¹⁵

These silences were "peculiar" in their obvious irregularity. Stories had to be half-told, rewritten and truths were hidden in order to keep the racialized definitions of sexuality intact. So, white men in the public sphere associated interracial sex with black men's trespasses against white womanhood. And, as white men and women routinely accused black men of raping white women or even looking at them in the 'wrong' way, whites with political power conveniently ignored the rape of black women and girls by

Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 83, 145-146.

¹³ Tammy D. Evans, *The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), xxii.

¹⁴ Abdul JanMohamed, "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of "Racialized Sexuality"," in *Discourses of Sexuality*, ed. Domna Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

white men. These peculiar silences regarding sexual violence were best explored by Ida B. Wells' investigative reporting. As early as 1892, Wells, in her famous *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases*, challenged the idea that white men were "protecting women and children by lynching." As Wells listed towns where lynchings had occurred for consensual black male- white female relationships, she pointed out that at the same time and place, a white man had raped a black girl, escaping serious punishment and community censure. Wells reported: "At the very moment these civilized whites were announcing their determination to 'protect their wives and daughters,' by murdering [a black man], a white man was in the same jail for raping eight-year-old Maggie Reese, an Afro-American girl...The outrage upon helpless childhood needed no avenging in this case; she was black."¹⁶ By exposing the silences in white discourses of rape and lynching, Wells attempted to show the illogic of white supremacy and its definitions of sexual violence. Simultaneously, Wells demonstrated the way in which silence worked to uphold the racial power dynamics of segregation.

The peculiar silences around the issue of sexual violence never went entirely unnoticed by white activists against violence either. A small group of southern black and white women worked together, attempting to end the horrors of the lynching; these women realized that lynching was predicated on the privileges of white manhood. In the 1930s, The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) attempted to use their position as white women to end the appalling social custom of lynching. They did so by purposely complicating the southern story of race and sex.¹⁷ The women "explore[d] the myths of black women's promiscuity and white women's

¹⁶ Ida Wells-Barnett, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases," in *On Lynchings* (Salem: Aver Company Publishing, 1987), 12.

¹⁷ Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*.

purity, and noted how this split image created a society that 'considers an assault by a white man as a moral lapse upon his part, better ignored and forgotten, while an assault by a Negro against a white woman is a hideous crime punishable with death by law or lynching."¹⁸ Nonetheless, for the majority of white southerners, the rape of black women and girls seemed impossible. The definitions of race and gender in the Jim Crow South were predicated on this very "fact."

Sexuality was extremely important to definitions of whiteness and blackness. Dominant white society talked openly only about certain aspects of sexuality that aligned with racist definitions of blackness. The issues that were clearly articulated were imagined and deployed simply to support white supremacy. That is, white men in the public sphere only acknowledged black male sexuality (read: lust), black female sexuality (read: promiscuity), and white female purity. Consequently, the fact of white men as perpetrators of sexual violence seemed an impossibility as it was silenced by whites. "Silence in the South," a scholar who grew up during segregation noted, "is like a shimmering mirage that hovers in the distance over a blacktop country road; it is always there, yet at the same time it is impervious to close inspection."¹⁹

Oral Histories and the Violence of the Ordinary: Breaking Peculiar Silences

Not only were there silences in white discourses of sexuality, there were also silences within Afro-American discussions of sex and sexuality. Black women did not feel comfortable talking about their inner lives or their struggle with sexual violence—especially not in the open where white ears could hear, but also often not even with each other. Many of these silences originated in black women's desire to survive the

¹⁸ Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape and Racial Violence," 339.

¹⁹ Evans, *The Silencing of Ruby McCollum*, 5.

humiliations of Jim Crow life. Rarely did black women openly discuss interracial sexual violence. For one, it was not safe to accuse white men of such a transgression, particularly powerful white men. Second, black women who were victims of sexual assault often wanted to keep the violence to themselves; being a victim of sexual violence could have been used against them by whites claiming they were sexually promiscuous.

Darlene Clark Hine has explored this type of silence arguing that a "culture of dissemblance" kept black women from speaking about rape in order to protect their dignity and shield them from disapprobation.²⁰ Connected to this "culture of dissemblance" was the very real need for all black Americans to focus on survival; talking aloud about the pains and horrors of segregation was not seen as a key to enduring the hardship of Jim Crow.²¹ Thus, keeping secrets became a mechanism of survival. Instead of dwelling on the horrors of life, Afro-American communities encouraged each other and particularly their children to think positively of the promises of the future. Teachers told children they were talented; schools emphasized self-respect and fortitude by teaching the great Afro-American poets (such as Paul Laurence Dunbar) and songs like "Lift Every Voice and Sing."²² Because of all the various types of silences and the emphasis on self-respect and the de-emphasis on the struggles of everyday life, finding

²⁰ Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance."

²¹ See for example the oral history interviews and collected family histories in, Graham Judd, *African American Lives*, DVD (PBS Paramount, 2006); *African American Lives 2*, DVD (Pbs Paramount, 2008) .

²² Dolores Aaron, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 30, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University; Florence Borders, interview by Kate Ellis and Michele Mitchell, June 20, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University; Herbert Cappie and Ruth Irene Cappie, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 29, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University; Aline St. Julien, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 1, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

records of sexual violence suffered by black women in the archive is extremely difficult for the historian.²³

The sexual violence perpetrated against African American girls can nonetheless be traced through both the many peculiar silences and the rare moments when these silences were interrupted. Oral histories that recount life in the Jim Crow South help to break through such silences. At some points, the interviewees only hint toward the history of sexual violence and harassment, purposefully leaving holes in their stories that help maintain privacy and shield inner lives. Other times, the interviewees boldly tell stories of sexual violence in order to bring to light a part of history that informed how they saw themselves and race in the segregated South. By using oral histories as a source for understanding interracial sexual abuse, I am able to explore how sexual violence—and the concealment around it—affected black women and children. The oral histories also allow me to demonstrate, if only anecdotally, the prevalence of interracial sexual abuse.

The secrecy surrounding the discourse of sexual violence was made clear in an interview conducted in New Orleans in the 1990s. Herbert Melven Cappie and his wife, Irene Ruth Cappie were both teenagers in New Orleans during the 1930s. They recalled events regarding sexual violence that took place in their neighborhood. Mr. Cappie began by explaining how dangerous it was for black boys and teenagers at the time. He said, "Growing up, too, was traumatic when I was in my late teens because during those years there would be cases of rape. And if a white girl were raped, all black boys had to

²³For further discussion on historical method and black women, rape, and silence see, Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance."

stay off the streets until the police had picked up one as a suspect."²⁴ After discussing incidents of false rape accusations, Mr. Cappie then turned to the problems young black girls and women faced when dealing with white men. Not surprisingly, as he began talking about the reverse side of interracial sexual violence (white men raping black women) his language became much more guarded. He said, "There were incidents in the black neighborhoods, the white men going with black women, yeah it happened frequently." At first it is difficult to discern if the interracial relationships he referred to were coerced or not. But then he gave an example:

Mr. Cappie: I should let my wife tell you about this one because she is more familiar with it than I am. This bus driver would stop his bus and he would go into this woman's house and he'd spend considerable time in there. It was obvious to everybody what was going on, 'till a bunch of the men in the neighborhood got together and they caught the man, and they beat the hell out of him. It was Wingy, it was another one of them I can't remember--

Mrs. Cappie: --Francis.

Mr. Cappie: Don't call his name! Don't do that. The man is dead now, let him rest in peace.²⁵

The peculiar secrets in this memory abound, but the dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Cappie in the interview is particularly revealing. Mr. Cappie, when explaining the white bus driver's actions, claimed that "it was obvious to everybody what was going on." However, what might have been obvious to their community at the time of the event is not so obvious in his retelling of the story. He never clarified the relationship between the white bus driver and the black woman. It was only through the resolution of the story, when the black men in the neighborhood banded together in order to prevent the bus driver from returning, that the possibly coercive nature of the bus driver's behavior

²⁴ Herbert Cappie and Ruth Irene Cappie, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 2, 1994, Behind the Veil.

²⁵ Ibid.

becomes clearer. To beat up a white man at this time was extremely dangerous for blacks, and they did so under the veil of anonymity. Mrs. Ruth Cappie's insertion of the name Francis, the man who defended his neighbor, bothered Mr. Cappie despite the fact that Francis was no longer alive.

The brief exchange between husband and wife reveal how silence in this story of possible abuse exists on several levels. First, the exact behavior of the bus driver and the neighborhood woman remains clouded in mystery. Second, not only did the victim of the assault go unnamed, but so too did the men who defended her. Indeed, the importance of this level of secrecy is confirmed by Mr. Cappie's reluctance to name the participants. And finally, it remained unclear as to why Mrs. Cappie would be "more familiar" with the story than her husband. Perhaps the woman was a friend or family member of hers. Or maybe, it was something the women in the community talked about at the time of the event. Either way, Mr. and Mrs. Cappie left conspicuous holes in the telling of this story, leaving the entire event open to multiple interpretations.

Wanda Dell Regan also insinuated that sexual abuse was a common problem in the city. But like the Cappies, she did so just barely by leaving large gaps in her retelling of life during segregation. Wanda Dell Regan moved to New Orleans in 1935, when she was twenty years old to escape the poverty of the country, exacerbated by the Great Depression.²⁶ As a young woman, she came to the city looking for job opportunities. She was certain that New Orleans would be a better place for her because in the country "you either did domestic work or you went into the fields. And I didn't intend to do

²⁶ Because I am discussing her request to turn the tape off, and the silence that ensued, I have decided to use a pseudonym for this *Behind the Veil* interview. The initials are consistent. See, Wanda Dell Regan, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 28, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

either." By moving to New Orleans she felt as though she would have a chance to find a more fulfilling and better paying job. The interviewer who was recording Wanda Regan's story asked her what New Orleans was like when she arrived. Regan recalled: "Terrible. You went into the sewing factory or restaurant. And I didn't like restaurants because I didn't like the customers thinking they could get familiar with you."²⁷ Just as she began explain the difficulties on the job ("customers getting familiar"), she stopped and told the interviewer to turn the tape off. Whether she finished her story by talking about the insults hurled at working black women by white men, or she discussed sexual harassment by white customers, we will never know. Wanda Regan's interview further demonstrates the ways in which silence was maintained by black women to shield their inner lives. Even as she explained why New Orleans was "terrible" at first, she did so in an impersonal manner. Rather than talking about her personal experience, she distanced her language—instead of using "me" she chose the word "you" saying, the customers felt they could get "familiar with you." Perhaps once the recorder was off she specified her story, but it is just as likely that she continued speaking in a vague manner. What is clear from her interview is that Wanda Dell Regan did not mind sharing part of herself with the young black interviewer, but she did not want to share her inner secrets with the oral history project as a whole, or record intimate stories on tape.²⁸

Not only did young working women have to cope with sexual abuse and harassment, so too did black children. The children who experienced sexual violence often kept the incidents to themselves. At the same time, the familiarity with white

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Her insistence to turn the tape off continued later in the interview when she was describing the herbs that people used to help fight depression. Ibid.

violence defined their childhoods. In some oral histories, the children of segregation spoke up, often breaking years of silence.

Stine George, an African American man born in 1931 in the rural South, recalled an event that happened when he was seven. One Sunday, in 1938 George, his five year-old brother and his nine year-old sister were on their way to see their cousins. A young white man whom the Stine children knew stopped them. The man took Stine's sister into a house and raped her. The young boys were left outside, wondering what would happen to their sister. Frightened, they ran into the woods for safety. Stine George was sixty-three at the time of his interview. As he began to narrate his memory, Mr. George said, "I shall never forget this, and this is something nobody ever knew because we don't tell it. I wouldn't tell it now because it's painful, it will be painful to even tell it, but with what you are doing, I'll tell it."²⁹ The trauma caused by his sister's rape left a scar on Stine George. And as he talked to the interviewer, he emphasized that this memory had been silenced within him. He attempted to stress to the interviewer that the story was (and is) never told, and by using the present tense, he emphasized how the silence traveled through the past straight into the present: "we don't tell it," he said. According to Mr. George, the reason for the silence was twofold; they did not have the power to accuse, even a white teen, of raping a black girl, and the story was simply too painful to recount.³⁰

It is especially significant that witnessing the rape of his sister was part of his childhood memories. As he told the story he continually emphasized their ages, "All of

²⁹ Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow*, 14.

³⁰Ibid.

us, under ten... Like I said, my sister was but nine or ten."³¹ His continual repeating of their ages suggests that Stine could not completely comprehend the sexual abuse as it happened; for they were all less than ten years old. It also suggests a trace of guilt—by reiterating his age and youth, he reminded himself and his listener of his helplessness.³²

Ferdie Walker, born in 1928 and growing up in the urban streets of Atlanta, was also haunted by the memory of sexual assault. In her interview for *Behind the Veil*, she said, "I'll tell you this one thing that really sticks in my mind, one really harassing kind of thing that I went through at the time. I was eleven years old, and I will never forget it."³³ Every week, Ferdie waited for the bus at her local stop, where two white police men would regularly drive by and expose themselves to her. As an adult re-telling this story, she attempted to emphasize the type of trauma that this form of sexual violence had on her. She said, "I had a morbid fear of policemen all my life and it has not completely gone away yet."³⁴ Ms. Walker's memories reveal the intense feeling of insecurity that many young girls experienced during Jim Crow. Ferdie Walker knew she was vulnerable and realized that she could not trust whites, something made painfully obvious by the fact that the police, who were supposed to protect children, would not protect her. At eleven years old, Ferdie Walker was forced to become aware that her body was seen as a sexual object. Her encounter with the policeman became a moment of embodiment, of "becoming a body in social space."³⁵

³¹ Ibid. George repeated "Like I said she was about nine at the time" twice, gave his age twice, his brother's once, and their collective age "all under ten" once in his short recounting of the event.

³² In another story, about his house burning down, this same insistence on his age, and why he did not go in for his siblings is present. That there is still guilt associated with these memories speaks to the trauma of his childhood. Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid., 8.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Kathleen Canning, "The Body as method?: Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History," *Gender and History* (November 1999): 505.

The encounter highlighted her status in society as a *black* girl and was part of the sexual socialization of girls in the segregated South. White violence was outside the bounds of the law. The abuse mapped her body as part of an unprotected minority: "That was really bad," she recalled, "and it was bad for *all black girls*, you know."³⁶ By asserting that *all* black girls suffered from sexual assault from white men, Mrs. Walker portrayed black girlhood as a community of girls who suffered racial and sexual violence. By doing so, she insisted that black girls who came of age during segregation had common experiences with white violence and thus a common identity.

In these accounts of sexual violence the children coped by trying to hide from whites, retreating to spaces where they could disappear. This hiding represents another form of silence within the experience of sexual violence. For, as children hid, they vanished from the space of segregation silencing their very existence and their experience. Stine George hid in the woods with his brother.³⁷ Ferdie Walker stepped back from the curb and withdrew from view while waiting for the bus. That both interviewees remembered hiding, signals the intensity of trying to disappear from the white gaze (and in Ferdie's case, the white male gaze intent on sexualizing her body). The act of vanishing was to protect one's self. As I explored in chapter one, black children knew that to survive in the Jim Crow world, they had to walk the streets carefully, hiding whenever necessary. In part, the effect of disappearing meant withdrawing from the streets and society, to silence one's physical self. Abdul JanMohamed, in his discussion of "racialized sexuality," appropriates Foucault's rule *the cycle of prohibition* to express the double bind of a raced (and I would add here

³⁶ Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow*, 9.

³⁷ In fact, Stine George told several stories where he would hide in the woods from whites, as his father instructed him to do. *Ibid.*, 13.

gendered) subject in the Jim Crow era: "renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification."³⁸ For children, the act of disappearance was important for their very survival.

Ferdie Walker admitted to the interviewer that she never told her mother what happened. Her experience with these police officers was kept within her—her own secret. She said, "If I had gone home, my mother would have made me stay."³⁹ She explained that the bus driver knew she would be at that particular stop, so he always stopped regardless of whether she was visible or not. Thus, by hiding and keeping secrets, she refused to cede the streets as white ground. At age eleven, she resisted by remaining on the city streets, even if that meant she had to vanish.

Fear is also a central theme in these remembrances. Ms. Walker described her life-long fear of policemen as "morbid." Stine George continuously talked about his fear: they were scared, they didn't know what was happening, they didn't know what to do, and they didn't know where to go. This type of sexual terrorism focused particularly on children; the fear it caused stayed with Stine George and Ferdie Walker their entire lives.⁴⁰ As scared and confused as Stine George and his brother were, their sister must have been not only physically hurt but also terrified. She was taken from her brothers, assaulted and then left to find her way back home alone. How might have Stine George's

³⁸ JanMohamed, "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of "Racialized Sexuality"," 101 Quoted from, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 84.

³⁹ Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow*, 9.

⁴⁰ For an essay on sexual violence as terrorism see Carole Sheffield, "Sexual Terrorism," in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*, ed. Michael Kimmel and Rebecca F. Plante (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 409-423.

sister and Ferdie Walker understood their experience? What was their framework for understanding white violence towards their bodies and their selves?

The Hattie McCray case offers a different avenue for understanding sexual violence. Unlike oral histories, the McCray case provides the wider cultural framework for grappling with the issue of sexual violence by bringing the state concretely into the narrative and by revealing a parallel discourse about sexual purity that existed in the black press. By reconstructing the discourse surrounding her attack and death, we see the various meanings associated with black girlhood. By analyzing the press's narratives of Hattie McCray's death and Charles Guerand's trial, we can begin to construct the sexual subjectivities that were available for black girls.

Hattie McCray and Charles Guerand: Murder as a Sexualized Crime

Hattie McCray, a black fourteen year old, worked as a waitress in the business district of New Orleans. On February 10, 1930, an off-duty, white police officer, Charles Guerand, attempted to rape McCray in the restaurant where she worked.⁴¹ According to one report, fearing for her safety, McCray fled to the kitchen. After announcing to all those around that he would "kill that God Damned Nigger wench," Guerand followed Hattie. In the kitchen, "an argument concerning the girl's chastity ensued." After the dispute, Charles Guerand proceeded to shoot and kill Hattie McCray.⁴²

After the crime, the police quickly arrested Guerand and, much to the surprise of New Orleanians, in April of 1930, he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death

⁴¹ "Homicide Report: Charles Guerand"; Matt Piacum, "Statement of Matt A Piacum," February 10, 1930, New Orleans Homicide Reports, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

⁴² "Girl Refuses Advances of White Beast," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 15, 1930.

by an all white, male jury.⁴³ The guilty verdict was reported as a triumph in both the black and white papers; it was the first time in New Orleans history that such a verdict had been given to a white man for killing a black girl. There was no denying that the case brought white men's sexual contact with black girls into the courtroom and the newspapers. Both because McCray was killed and because of the sensational nature of Guerand's crime, the silence regarding the sexual abuse of black girls by white men was made public. However, as we will see, the silence was broken only for a moment, as the white press and court system attempted to bring order back to the sexual discourses of race and place.

Why did Guerand think that Hattie McCray's body was available for him? The crime figured Hattie's body as an available sexual object; if she would not submit to his will, she would be killed. And though the newspapers had varying interpretations of the crime, two things were certainly clear: this was a sexualized murder, where denied access to McCray's body and sex were the motives for the crime. According to Guerand's statement to the police, he had been "fooling" with the "Negro girl" all morning.⁴⁴ Hattie's white boss stated that Guerand could not "make her" and so he killed her.⁴⁵ Guerand was infuriated because he assumed that this body would be available to him and he acted on his sexual fantasy through violence. The hubris displayed, particularly in announcing his intentions to those around him, suggests that he believed murder of a black girl a prerogative of his whiteness.

⁴³ The surnames of the jurors suggest some ethnic variation—including Spanish, but it is safe to say that all these men were at least considered white in the local New Orleans community.

⁴⁴ Charles Guerand, "Statement of Charles Guerand," February 10, 1930, New Orleans Homicide Reports, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

⁴⁵ "Homicide Report: Charles Guerand"; Guerand, "Statement of Charles Guerand"; Piacum, "Statement of Matt A Piacum."

Despite New Orleans' infamous reputation as a city with frequent color-line crossings and interracial sex, Louisiana, like other southern states, had become increasingly concerned with regulating the boundaries between white and black.⁴⁶ The process that solidified Jim Crow laws in New Orleans also ended some of the city's more renowned interracial contact.⁴⁷ In fact, interracial marriage was outlawed in 1894, and, *interracial* concubinage was declared illegal (at least on paper) in 1907.⁴⁸ And white New Orleanians interpreted, at least in part, *Plessy v. Ferguson* as an attempt to separate the races physically because of fears of interracial sexual contact. A white New Orleanian who supported segregation suggested as much saying, "A man would be horrified at the idea of his wife or daughter seated by the side of a burly negro in the parlor of a hotel or at a restaurant cannot see her occupying a crowded seat in a car next to a negro without the same feeling of disgust."⁴⁹ This man's hypothetical example of the "horror" of integration only worked because whiteness was represented by a genteel white *woman*, while blackness was represented by a "burly negro" *man*. White-black touching in this context was sexualized, yet the fear displayed by white men was directed toward sexual contact between black men and white women only. Thus, by 1930, what is

⁴⁶ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, 2nd ed. (University of Georgia Press, 2008), 5-20; Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 11-13 For a discussion of color line crossing see, Monique Guillory, "Under One Roof: The Sins and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," in *Race Consciousness: African American Studies for the New Century*, ed. Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey Tucker (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 67-92; Shirley. Thompson, "'Ah Toucoutou, ye conin vous': History and Memory in Creole New Orleans," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2001): 232-266.

⁴⁷ Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 174-185, 250-1, 253-4.

⁴⁸ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 10; Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 183.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Siobhan B Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 35; from "Editorial," *New Orleans Times Democrat*, July 9, 1890.

so striking about Guerand's conviction is that it brought white male and black female sexual contact out from the shadows.

Interpretations of Murder and Sexuality in the White Press

Neither New Orleans's history of interracial sex, nor their relatively recent prohibitions against it, prepared the white press for Guerand's shocking behavior. As the facts of the case and trial unfolded, the white press did not initially support Guerand. In their reportage they treaded carefully as to protect the reputation of whiteness. And although they condemned the murder, New Orleans' white newspapers downplayed Guerand's crossing of the color line, treating it as something best ignored or politely glossed over. They were therefore not concerned with the life or person of Hattie McCray and focused almost entirely on the white perpetrator. Clearly, the case was dangerous. Too much talk of Guerand's horrifying actions would bring attention to white men's culpability in interracial sex and interracial sexual abuse; and yet, it was impossible to deny the fact that the case brought white men's illicit contact with black girls into public view.

Therefore, the white press attempted to preserve a silence—that of interracial sexual desire on the part of Guerand. When they did note that there was interracial sexual desire on the part of Guerand, they also never failed to mention that Guerand was "threatened" physically by McCray at the time of the killing, thus implicitly suggesting self-defense rather than a sexual crime. They did this despite the fact that Guerand was nearly a foot taller and seventy pounds heavier than McCray.⁵⁰ For example, *The Times-Picayune's* first story on the murder, under the subtitle "THREATENED WITH KNIFE,"

⁵⁰ "Guerand Charity Hospital Record," State v. Guerand Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; "Coroner's Report," n.d., State v. Guerand, Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

noted, "Going into the rear of the place...the policeman made advances to the girl and an argument ensued. According to Assistant District Attorneys Culligan and Granzin, to whom Guerand made a verbal statement, the girl reached for a knife, threatening to kill him."⁵¹ Another paper alleged, "Guerand, according to the police report made an indecent proposal to the negro girl...She refused to accede to his wishes, the report said, and an argument ensued...the girl reached for a knife and threatened to kill him."⁵² Though the papers referred to the "indecent" overtures made by Guerand, they always figured the killing as one of self-defense rather than one of sexual desire and control.

There was little evidence that the 5'1, 115 pound McCray even had a knife at the time of her murder except for Guerand's own statement to the police. At the crime scene, the investigators found no weapon beside her body.⁵³ And further, by naming Guerand's sexual actions as "advances" or "indecent proposals," the white press suggested that he *asked* for sex rather than demanded it. Such a suggestion epitomized the idea that an adolescent black girl might *want* to have sex with a grown white man, casting black girls as smaller versions of black jezebels. Although *The Times-Picayune* continued to report on Guerand's court battles for the next five years, they mentioned Guerand's sexual intentions only once more at the time of his conviction.

The white press spoke so little of interracial sex and desire because Guerand's actions embodied the abject. His crime blurred essential definitions that helped order and classify Jim Crow society.⁵⁴ The abject is unacceptable, disgusting and frightening as it makes ordinary understandings of life confusing. In this case, Guerand's crime confused

⁵¹ "Negro Girl, 14, Slain in Cafe By Patrolman," *The Times-Picayune*, February 11, 1930.

⁵² "Girl's Slayer Faces Charge," *The New Orleans States*, February 11, 1930.

⁵³ "Homicide Report: Charles Guerand."

⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-8.

definitions fundamental to white supremacy because his actions, when fully articulated, disturbed classifications of white versus black manhood and white female purity versus black female immorality. Thus, the crime could not be told in its entirety; silences were necessary. Furthermore, that Guerand was a police officer was especially troubling. As a white man he was supposed to be a calm, controlled citizen. As a patrolman, Guerand was a member of the white working class, but in his job he represented the rationality of white rule in New Orleans. When narrated clearly, Charles Guerand's crime disturbed the definitions of white manhood, and in turn, white identity. The truth of the crime had the potential to collapse racial meanings, or to expose the fallacies upon which they were based.⁵⁵ By referring to the murder as an "argument" or figuring it as a fight (where she is equipped with a knife), the white press tried to deflect the issue of rape and sexual violence.

Furthermore, the white press's troubling narrative of the crime disavowed Hattie McCray's pain. The denial of Hattie's pain was a disowning of a psychic realm of interiority.⁵⁶ She was not granted a self that could be terrified, hurt or injured; so even as papers like *The New Orleans Times* reported on the event, they denied McCray full personhood. They marked her as nothing but a body, absent of any interior emotions. Further, by suggesting that she initiated the violence, the press ignored the more likely scenario that she felt fear. Instead, she was cast as a rebellious, possibly even dangerous working girl. Certainly, McCray, staring at a potential rapist who had the power to arrest her and/or injure her physically, must have been petrified. The writers in the white press denied Hattie McCray an interior self by ignoring the actual event that lead to the

⁵⁵ See, *Ibid.*, 2, 4.

⁵⁶ For a discussion on the disavowal of pain see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60.

killing—an attempted rape. And thus, the killing was not placed in its proper context. The white press ignored how her personhood/girlhood was denied at the moment Guerand assumed she was sexually available.

In April 1930, after the jury declared Guerand guilty, the *New Orleans States* mentioned again the reason for the crime, this time clearly calling Guerand's act "immoral." In so doing, the paper suggested that Guerand's interracial encounter prior to the killing was inappropriate and *not* community-sanctioned. They gave credit to McCray's white, male boss for protecting the young girl: "It was shown that the policeman had pursued the girl with immoral intentions and had been twice repulsed by her. On the evening of the murder he had repeated his attempt... had been prevented from attacking her by her employer and then deliberately shot her down."⁵⁷ If the paper was making allusions to interracial sex between white men and black women, they did so carefully. By insisting that McCray's boss, rather than her own resistance, protected her from assault, they suggested that although there was inappropriate behavior on the part of Guerand, white manhood *en masse* and its morality were not called into question.

Not only did *The States* praise the white boss, they also gave credit to the all-male, white jury declaring their decision "just." "This verdict of an unusually courageous jury" argued the paper, "ought to have a repressive effect on men like this policeman who believe that persons of color have no rights they are required to respect. It means that in this city the Negro can and does get justice and protection in our criminal courts."⁵⁸ The editors of the paper fully distanced themselves from Guerand's actions. In opposition to Guerand's errant manhood, the members of the jury were described as proper, civilized

⁵⁷ "The Guerand Verdict," *New Orleans States*, April 15, 1930.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

men ("courageous"). *The States* attempted to admonish and point to errant "men like this" who committed egregious crimes against Afro-Americans, and perhaps even (subtly) rebuked men who engaged in interracial sex. By closing the case, silence regarding the issue of sexual abuse was restored for the white community because, as the verdict seemed to demonstrate, "the Negro" got justice and white men were "courageous." However, the author of this article failed to see the contradictions in his or her argument. The paper claimed that Afro-Americans were given justice and protection in court, but it is clear that Afro-Americans were not safe on the streets of New Orleans. Guerand was a *police officer*, and thus himself a part of the criminal justice system. And although his actions were not sanctioned by the police department, black New Orleanians knew there were many other officers who used their power to harass Afro-American girls and boys.⁵⁹ Guerand's belief that he had power over Hattie suggested how elusive safety and protection was for Afro-Americans. Thus, though the white papers did not support Guerand they failed to make connections to the broader implications of sexual abuse towards black girls and to the problematic presence of white male desire for black bodies.

As the Jim Crow state attempted to legally separate black from white, sexual abuse and rape of black girls and women continued to collapse the racial boundaries. Just as ritualized lynchings were a "controlled inversion of the color line," rape and sexual

⁵⁹ Afro-American papers throughout the South, as well as national papers, frequently discussed abuse against Afro-Americans by police officers. In *The Louisiana Weekly* see, for example, "Accused of Speeding, Is 'Beat Up,'" *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 22, 1930; Arthur Schott, "Letter Sent White Press on Killings," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 29, 1930; "All White Jury Frees Policeman for Raping Negro Girl," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 2, 1946 Also see for example, "Two Colored Girls Assaulted by Texas Police," *The Union*, August 14, 1920, The white police officers raped the young girls and "after raping and outraging these two young girls these two 'peace officers' carried the girls back to their escorts." The officers threatened to "kill them" if they told anyone.

violence functioned similarly.⁶⁰ Before and during a spectacle lynching, white participants interacted closely with the black body on display: collecting body parts, prodding and touching. In the case of interracial rape, the collapse of the color line was "controlled" by the silence in the discourse of race and sexuality and the taboo topic of interracial sex between white men and black women. Furthermore, by ignoring, even denying, sexual abuse, whites could believe that definitions between white and black were distinct and orderly. Black women continued to be stereotyped as sexually promiscuous while white men were defined as upstanding citizens as a consequence of white silence surrounding the issue of sexual violence.

The white press did not recognize the sexual nature of the encounter between McCray and Guerand because to do so would point to the fact that black girls were not willingly sexual objects. The "controlled inversion of the color line"—interracial sex between white men and black girls—had the power to blur the color line if the "secret" was articulated clearly. Guerand's crime highlights the way in which even such permissible inversions of the color line might mushroom out of control. Though white perpetrators were scarcely reported, let alone found guilty, the eroticization of black women's bodies, and the possibility that the 'relationship' might be taken too far was always present. Or, as was with Guerand's case, the abuse could be taken to extremes and expose the lies on which the color line was founded.

Discourses of Girlhood and Sexuality in the Black Press

The black press strategically used Hattie McCray's tragic, untimely death to break the peculiar silence about sexuality and race in the Jim Crow South. The case

⁶⁰ On ritualized lynching as inversions of the color line, or blurring together of Black and white see, Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 228-232.

illustrated the fallacy of stereotypes of whiteness and blackness. By placing the case in the headlines, the press attempted to prove that white men (not black men) were capable of being sexual "beasts" and full of "lust." And at the same time, they challenged white definitions of black girlhood as sexually advanced and promiscuous. In so doing, they disproved the adage, "that not only was there no such thing as a chaste Negro woman—but that a Negro woman could not be assaulted, that it was never against her will."⁶¹ The black press seized the opportunity to define black girlhood as pure, good and virginal. Consequently, Hattie McCray's *respectability* became the most important element of her tragic story.



Figure 2.1
"Girl Refused Advances",
***The Louisiana Weekly*, 1930**

From the very first glance at black newspapers, African American readers never doubted the sexual nature of Hattie McCray's murder. The black press focused directly on the sexual aspect of the encounter and portrayed the murder itself as a sexual crime. *The Louisiana Weekly's* first article on the murder announced, "GIRL REFUSED ADVANCES OF WHITE BEAST" on the front page.⁶² They introduced the case to their

⁶¹ Jessie Daniel Ames (1931), quoted in Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, xxvii.

⁶² "Girl Refuses Advances of White Beast."

readers by calling Guerand a "lust crazed murderer" guilty of a "wanton killing."⁶³ The black press purposely and explicitly turned the dominant language of race and rape on its head. By employing the language of a sexually "crazed," lustful beast, *The Weekly* drew on a discourse most often deployed by the white press to describe black men.⁶⁴ By March, *The Chicago Defender* also ran an article on Hattie McCray's murder. Because of their distance from Guerand's transgression, and more importantly from the South, they were the extremely bold and straightforward in reporting the crime, claiming that the "policeman became attracted to her."⁶⁵ And, in April, the Afro-American newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, ran an article on McCray.⁶⁶

Afro-American and Afro-Creole newspapers had a long history in New Orleans. *The Louisiana Weekly* was founded in 1925 by a middle-class, black Creole family and was deeply concerned with the politics of respectability.⁶⁷ The paper promoted "proper" behavior for blacks by publishing articles that urged Afro-Americans to act tastefully and featured photographs of respectable, aspiring class women.⁶⁸ In the early twentieth-century the "politics of respectability" was an important component of African American community life.⁶⁹ The philosophy of respectability comprised of religious and moral

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of lynching scripts see, Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 199-240.

⁶⁵ "Indict Cop for Murder of New Orleans Girl," *The Chicago Defender*, March 8, 1930.

⁶⁶ "Gallows for Girl's Slayer," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 12, 1930, sec. A, 8.

⁶⁷ Violet Harrington Bryan, "Marcus Christian's Treatment of Les Gens de Couleur Libre," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 42-56; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 18-19, 72-73; Arnold R. Hirsch, "Simply a Matter of Black and White: The Transformation of Race and Politics in Twentieth-Century New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 266.

⁶⁸ For example, "Landry School Crowns Queen and King," *The Louisiana Weekly*, January 7, 1939, sec. Society: Of Interest to Women; Norman Holmes, "Cause of Doubt and Despondency and Their Dissolution: Weekly Sermon," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 22, 1930; Nannie Burroughs, "Why Negroes Have 'Most Nigh Ruint' Their Dispositions," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 1, 1930.

⁶⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185-229.

components. Its emphasis on self-respect and the rights of citizenship despite America's racist society, made "respectability" more than a moral code—it was political.

Women and men who aligned themselves with such a philosophy "contested racist discourses and rejected white America's depiction of black women as immoral, childlike, and unworthy of respect or protection."⁷⁰ But just as respectability symbolized a political stance, it was also a mode of self-presentation. For many middle class and aspiring Afro-Americans, respectability required "proper conduct" and appearance in order to remain clean, pure and ready for citizenship.⁷¹ Respectability was thus also intertwined with a class-based understanding of right conduct. At the turn of the century and into the 1920s, there was a concern among some middle-class Afro-Americans over the possibility that lower class and working black women were sexually degenerate, particularly those exposed to the dangers and seductions of the bustling, modern city.⁷² Respectability represented the ideal lifestyle and morals for the "aspiring class" of black men and women—people who attempted to reach a middle class lifestyle, not necessarily through higher incomes and 'better' jobs, but through an adoption of Victorian mores.⁷³ Middle and aspiring class Afro-Americans who were obsessed with "morality" made girls and young women *responsible* for their own respectability. They assumed lower-class

⁷⁰Ibid., 186.

⁷¹Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 85; On "respectability" see also Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁷²Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 738-755.

⁷³Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, xx; Mitchell argues that applying "standard class labels" is more difficult while looking at a group of Americans just out of slavery. She explains, "I use 'aspiring class' then, as a means of differentiating African American strivers from contemporaneous middle-class, white Americans and to acknowledge the quickening of class stratification within African American communities."

highlighting the respectability of McCray. The NAACP and the Federated Civic League of Louisiana raised funds from the black community to help the state prosecute Guerand. A resolution published in *The Weekly* by the Federated Civic League highlighted the sexual nature of the crime and Hattie McCray's purity, therefore revealing the politics of respectability at play in the local discourse:

Hattie McCray, a colored girl, of but 14 years has been ruthlessly murdered by a white police officer, not in the discharge of his duty, but in an effort to appease his bestial lust...whereas the said Hattie McCray did give her life in defense of her honor, therefore be it resolved that...⁷⁴

It is clear that honor required *defending*, that respectability was a girls' responsibility.

The language in the resolution and in the paper following the crime exposed the double bind presented in the discourse of rape in the local black press. Young girls faced a difficult choice: be "ruined" by white men or face possible death or imprisonment. Another case reported by *The Weekly* some years later carried a similar message. A black girl successfully fought off her white attacker only to be jailed in a Louisiana state penitentiary.⁷⁵

The NAACP, *The Louisiana Weekly*, and *The Chicago Defender's* public celebration of Hattie's virtue reminded readers that respectable womanhood and girlhood was the ideal image for "the race" as a whole. Pretty, innocent girlhood symbolized a dignity and morality absent from mainstream white discourses of Afro-Americans.⁷⁶ The NAACP magazine, *The Crisis* represented the wholesomeness of the race in their pages. Under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* presented a "eugenic family album, a

⁷⁴ "Civic Bodies Raising Funds," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 22, 1930.

⁷⁵ "Service Men Seek Freedom For Girl in LA State Pen," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 24, 1945.

⁷⁶ Daylanne English, "W.E. B. Du Bois's Family Crisis," *American Literature* 72, no. 2 (June 2000): 291-319.

visual and literary blueprint for the ideal, modern black individual."⁷⁷ Of course for young girls this meant that they were from the "better classes" and that they were moral and good.⁷⁸ In fact, throughout the 1930s and 40s, the majority of *The Crisis* covers were graced by a proper, beautiful young woman or cute girls.⁷⁹ In the 1930s, *The Crisis* also briefly tried to promote children's art and writing in the "Youth Pages" and *The Chicago Defender* had a special section for children, "The Children's Greats Weekly." Thus, children were an important part of the respectable, black family. They were the future, and represented the progress and promise of the race.

It was in this context that Hattie McCray became the poster child for virginal girlhood. The reverence for the purity of Hattie McCray was at its zenith when *The Louisiana Weekly* published the poem, "Defending Her Honor." The verse was printed a couple weeks after the murder and paid tribute to Hattie McCray's respectability:

Defending Her Honor
Protecting her name
She fell, bullet wounded
Thank God but not in Shame!

She fell warding off
A beastly attack
A sterling young woman,
Even though she was black.

Defending her honor,
Protecting her name,
She fought for her virtue
And died for the same.⁸⁰

That Hattie McCray died for her virtue was understandably important to those in the black community. The press recognized that crimes committed by white men against

⁷⁷Ibid., 300.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 311.

⁷⁹ Du Bois was editor of *The Crisis* until 1934. See covers of *The Crisis* 1930-1945.

⁸⁰ Ivy Lenoir, "Defending Her Honor," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 22, 1930.

black girls were fueled by the idea that their girls were licentious and not quite human. This kept black girls' and women's bodies available for white consumption while white southern women's bodies were carefully guarded.

However, the language displayed in this poem placed black womanhood and girlhood on a pedestal. The discourse of girls' bodies was saturated with expectations that were completely unreal for most girls and young women. Consequently, the poem led readers to believe that being abused was shameful and possibly sinful. It implied that Hattie McCray would have lost her virtue had Guerand succeeded in raping her. The responsibility placed on Hattie McCray to defend her honor was enormous. "Defending her Honor" ignored the daily trauma inflicted on black girls. What type of pain might this language cause for a reader who had been sexually abused by a white man who chose to live rather than fight?

At the same time, while "Defending Her Honor" created a double bind for black girls, it is important to note that the poem was written by a woman, Ivy Lenior. Thus, the expectations placed on girls' bodies, and the regulation of them did not come exclusively from men. At the same time that the poem policed girls' bodies, it performed other work as well. The poem was clearly sentimental in nature, and glorified the body that has not been abused. The verse was a praise song for the "virtuous" body. It was a narrative celebration of someone who was able to control her body; even as it glorified the death of Hattie McCray.

The emphasis on bodily purity continued at Charles Guerand's trial, where both blacks and whites testified to McCray's good character.⁸¹ The Louisiana papers and *The Defender* all noted the argument over Hattie McCray's "chastity," and though they did not

⁸¹ "Cop to Die for Girl Slaying," *The Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1930.

comment on it, the "argument" was cited as the reason for the killing. At the very core of the crime was that this white police officer did not believe Hattie could be a "pure" girl—he believed her body, her color, marked her as unchaste and unworthy of protection. Understandably then, central to the story in the black press, and to Guerand's trial and conviction, was that Hattie McCray was the perfect picture of virginal girlhood. *The Defender* reported frankly, "After the slaying the coroner examined her and found she was a virgin."⁸² The paper offered no commentary on this violation of McCray's body. In fact, *The Defender* themselves used this as evidence of McCray's purity. That the coroner may have testified to this in court is probable. However, this information is not on the official coroner's report in the case file.⁸³ I am left wondering whether Hattie McCray would have been happy that her virtue was defended by the state in such a personal way? There was little respect for her body, even after her death, and the only way the white justice system could suggest that she was not shameless and deserving of murder was if she was indeed a virgin. Purity was not written on her body, and her age was not sufficient evidence. It was not enough that she was killed in cold blood; the court had to medically prove that Hattie McCray was still an innocent girl.

In April of 1930, the Afro-American community and *The Louisiana Weekly* celebrated the death verdict by the white jurors. As late as 1945, the paper was still commenting on the "infamous" trial and crime of Charles Guerand, who was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Hattie McCray.⁸⁴ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also celebrated the verdict, calling it "a

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Coroner's Report."

⁸⁴ "Service Men Seek Freedom For Girl in LA State Pen."

'single victory' for the African American race."⁸⁵ *The Chicago Defender* wrote an extended article on the trial, in which they praised Hattie for her purity, and explained the case and witnesses in detail. The paper reported that, "The McCray child was murdered on February 10th, when she resisted what is said to have been an effort at rape by Guerand."⁸⁶ This was the only newspaper to describe Guerand's actions using the word rape. This may have been because the paper was so far from the event that they would not be threatened by local white citizens. The *Defender* ended the article by again representing Hattie McCray as a vision of pure girlhood saying she "was only fourteen years of age and had left school only two weeks previous to her murder in order to work in the restaurant and help her family." The *Defender*, in both articles on the case, reported that Hattie had only been working two weeks; by doing this they were able to explain her absence from school.⁸⁷ This was a clear attempt by the paper to represent Hattie as a member of the "aspiring," respectable class of Afro-Americans, depicting her as not only self-conscious about her chastity, but also hoping for a better education. It is unclear though, whether or not Hattie McCray would have identified herself as such.

Charles Guerand & White Manhood: The Color of Crime and Innocence

Verdict Violates Tradition

According to the traditions of the South, a white man's life may not be taken in return for the life of one of our group. It is an unwritten law which is generally upheld by the people and one which has caused white men to kill with impunity, so long as their victims were of the darker races.⁸⁸

-The Chicago Defender

⁸⁵For courtroom narrative see, Michele Grigsby Coffey, "The State of Louisiana v Guerand: A Case Study of Racial Violence, Justice, and Injustice in the Jim Crow South" (Masters Thesis, Baylor University, 2002), 39.

⁸⁶"Cop to Die for Girl Slaying."

⁸⁷"Cop to Die for Girl Slaying"; "Indict Cop for Murder of New Orleans Girl."

⁸⁸"Cop to Die for Girl Slaying" *The Chicago Defender*.

Although Guerand was found guilty of his crime and sentenced to death, his attorney, A.J. Hollander, continued to fight the verdict.⁸⁹ Following the death sentence, white newspapers began to refer to Guerand not as a murderer but as an "ex-cop" and if they mentioned Hattie McCray at all she was simply a "negro serving girl."⁹⁰ This language clearly exposed the power differential that existed between Guerand and McCray and revealed the ways in which that differential would inform how they would be remembered. After failed appeals, including at the level of the state supreme court, Guerand's attorney continued to submit motions declaring that his client was insane.⁹¹ Hollander grounded Guerand's insanity on three facts: a blow to the head several years prior to the crime, a family history of insanity and disease, and Guerand's own attempted suicide six years before the killing of Hattie McCray.⁹² By claiming insanity, Guerand was able to save his life and eventually regain his freedom. Guerand passed back and forth between sanity and insanity, diseased and goodness; ultimately returning squarely back into white manhood.

A.J. Hollander's attempt to prove his client's insanity by history of disease represented a definite blurring of racial boundaries. In the early twentieth-century, many white doctors, reformers and city planners defined disease in racial terms. Progressive Era whites worked tirelessly to define the black body as contaminated and degenerate. In 1908, for example, Rosa Lowe argued that Afro-Americans "are naturally prone to disease by heredity...and by reason of their prevalent mode of life...They are markedly

⁸⁹ For an excellent narrative of the courtroom drama see Coffey, "The State of Louisiana v Guerand: A Case Study of Racial Violence, Justice, and Injustice in the Jim Crow South." For white reaction see: "Policeman Seeking Lunacy Board Aid," *Times-Picayune*, April 22, 1930; "Begin Fight to Save Ex-Cop From Noose," *New Orleans States*.

⁹⁰ "Begin Fight to Save Ex-Cop From Noose."

⁹¹ "Motion H-1," State v. Guerand, Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

⁹² Ibid.

subject to certain special diseases, which may also be called racial."⁹³ At the turn of the century, there was vigorous debate in both the white and black community about the health of Afro-Americans. It was taken for granted by both groups that the Afro-American death rate exceeded the birth rate, leading to the possibility that the race would not survive "natural selection."⁹⁴

Guerand's defense attempted to prove that his genes were at fault for his insanity when he submitted records to the court: his first cousin suffered from mental illness and was an "imbecile" and his father died from complications of "cerebro spinal syphilis arthritis."⁹⁵ That he called upon genetics (and thus eugenics) to prove mental illness was highly ironic. For the previous ten years, syphilis was painted as an Afro-American disease. In 1928, one researcher, concerned with the healthfulness of Afro-Americans claimed that "syphilis" was "so common a scourge with the American Negro."⁹⁶ Another spoke of the "ravages of syphilis" on the black community and suggested that,

This disease is a tremendous factor in the high Negro death rate, not only for this venereal infection, but for the 'degenerative diseases' which it super-induces. In fact, syphilis and its sequelae account very largely for the great excess of the Negro death rate today over that for the whites. Among the latter, the general trend for syphilis has been downward during the last two decades. Among the colored, the picture is a very different one.⁹⁷

These experts worked hard to paint syphilis as a 'black' disease, whereas educated whites were no longer affected by it. Nevertheless, Guerand's attorney argued, "such disease is

⁹³ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 215.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 81-83.

⁹⁵ "Emile Guerand Death Certificate," New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; "Affidavit," State v. Guerand, Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

⁹⁶ S. J. Holmes, "Will the Negro Survive in the North?," *The Scientific Monthly* 27, no. 6 (December 1, 1928): 560.

⁹⁷ Louis I. Dublin, "The Health of the Negro," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (November 1928): 79.

hereditary, and counsel verily believes the brain of your petitioner has been affected."⁹⁸

This defense proved to be much more palatable than Guerand's initial defense, which centered on his alleged drunkenness. By claiming that his crime was induced by insanity, a madness associated with Afro-Americans and the lower classes, then the public as well as the judges could feel detached from the crime. The crime no longer was associated with the failures and prejudices of the Jim Crow South; instead it was a crime of faulty genetics perpetrated, not by an upstanding white officer, but by the lower social orders. The crime was placed in its correct context.

In April of 1930, the motion for a new trial on the basis of insanity was denied by Judge Henriques because "the code of criminal procedure makes it mandatory that when insanity is pleaded as a defense *it must be pleaded prior to the trial.*"⁹⁹ But despite his verdict, the judge appointed a "sanity commission" who would determine the defendant's "present" sanity. The three doctors concluded that Guerand was indeed insane, and he was placed in an asylum. Five years later, it was medically determined that Guerand had been insane at the time of the murder. On the advice of Guerand's doctors, the judge decided to grant him a new trial despite his previous decision regarding the defendant's motion. But in order to fairly stand a new trial, Guerand would have to be declared sane enough to stand before court.

Ironically, the very basis of his defense, insanity, would have to be vacated in order for Guerand to stand a new trial and take a plea. This did not prove to be too difficult. The judge heard the testimony of the doctors, who decided once again in Guerand's favor: he was now sane. The doctors "had Guerand under constant observation

⁹⁸ "Motion H-1."

⁹⁹ "Petition #3," April 28, 1930, State v. Guerand, Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division, emphasis mine.

from the time of his commitment, and they declared that he had recovered his reason, and was sane and responsible. Upon which declaration the Court granted the defendant a new trial."¹⁰⁰

That Guerand was so easily able to cross the boundaries of insanity and sanity speaks to his whiteness. Despite having been convicted of murder and despite the genetic evidence submitted that he was not mentally stable, the defense was able to prove that Guerand had passed back into the threshold of sanity. The court arguably wished to paint Guerand's crime as a non-white crime (or a crime that had no relation to race). The state was able to reinstate meaning where meaning had once collapsed. By defining the crime as one of insanity and disease, *The State of Louisiana* was able to distance itself from the more unmentionable issues of interracial sex and sexual violence. The court was able to silence the argument regarding Hattie McCray's chastity before the murder, to forget Guerand's words yelled in the restaurant: "that God Damned, Nigger Wench." And on August 27, 1935 the court registered: "On this day, the defendant, through his counsel, offered to the State a plea of guilty of manslaughter, which was acceptable to the District Attorney and so ordered recorded by the court."¹⁰¹ In so doing, the court once again silenced the issue of black girls as victims of interracial sexual violence. *The Louisiana Weekly* did not so easily forget the memory of Hattie McCray. After Guerand was given a new trial, they were the only paper to republish the facts of the case, to call on the "Negro child's" virtue and reprint Guerand's guilty words yelled in the restaurant.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "August 27, 1935," August 27, 1930, State v. Guerand, Docket C. Case No. 52554, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Slayer of Colored Girl Escapes Noose," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 6, 1937.

The NAACP realized the futility of the case when, "Charles Houston wrote that 'the authorities ha[d] decided that five years is enough for a white man to serve for killing a Negro girl.'"¹⁰³ After Guerand's guilty plea with the caveat of mental insanity, the judge concluded that his penalty should not be too harsh. The court recorded: "In passing sentence the court took into consideration the defendant's prior good reputation, his mental condition at the time of the killing, the fact that he had been in the Insane Asylum for almost six years and when returned from that institution had been incarcerated in the Parish Prison for fully eighteen months."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the court fully ignored the crime for which Guerand was initially indicted and sentenced, and in reference to why such a minor punishment might be passed, they referenced Guerand's color, "The defendant is a *white man*, aged 34 years, born February 11, 1903, and prior to the time of his trouble bore a *good reputation*."¹⁰⁵ It was important to fix the meaning of white manhood as good, since the crime itself was abject, threatening those very boundaries. The crime had the possibility to destroy the very meanings of white manhood. For whites, ignoring the horror of the actual crime, murder, and guilty words were crucial because, "the abject provokes fear and loathing because it exposes the border between self and other as constituted and fragile; and because it threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border."¹⁰⁶ Guerand was able to pass fully back, not only into a secure position of "sanity" but also into whiteness, where his color bore his innocence and inherent goodness. So instead of receiving the death sentence, Guerand served most of his time in

¹⁰³ Coffey, "The State of Louisiana v Guerand: A Case Study of Racial Violence, Justice, and Injustice in the Jim Crow South," 61.

¹⁰⁴ "August 27, 1935."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. My Emphasis. It should be noted that at this point a new judge was assigned Guerand's case because Judge Henriques passed away before Guerand's trial would be heard again.

¹⁰⁶ Iris Marion Young, "Abjection and Oppression: Dynamics of Unconscious Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arleen Dallery, Charles Scott, and Holley Roberts (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 208.

a state insane asylum, and was released as a free man in 1937, seven years after the crime. In an editorial, "JUSTICE MOCKED" *The Louisiana Weekly* decried the miscarriage of justice for Hattie McCray and the eventual fate of the "child-killer" Guerand.¹⁰⁷

The court's decision to free Guerand so soon proved that although the initial trial was regarded as a fair and "just" one by white and black New Orleanians alike, his crime could not fully be acknowledged within the framework of Jim Crow. Only a year after his release, Charles Guerand received a pardon. In the end, Guerand was not even "guilty by reason of insanity."¹⁰⁸ Hattie McCray was easily forgotten by the court, because the prospect of a white officer, with a prior good reputation, possibly dying for a black girls' murder was too much. Acknowledging his crime required acknowledging white abuse towards African American girls, and thus upset definitions of both black and white femininity. In the end, white manhood was protected, and white interracial crime in New Orleans continued to go unpunished: tradition was upheld.

Conclusion

Between the 1890s and 1930s, "racialized sexualities" had taken shape with specific meanings that regulated the boundaries between white and black, between manhood and womanhood. Black girls' bodies were marked as licentious and impure. Sexual abuse perpetrated by white men was silenced within the discourses of sexuality. White men argued that black girls (as well as women) were "lecherous" and thus never victims of sexual assault. Simultaneously, white women's bodies were marked as pure and virginal through careful regulation of their sexuality and their contact with black

¹⁰⁷ "Justice Mocked," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 1, 1937.

¹⁰⁸ Leon Lewis, "Slayer of Girl, 14, Wins Pardon After Escaping Electric Chair," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 25, 1938.

men. Yet these racial boundaries required a continued vigilant regulation. Most importantly, their maintenance required silence; it could not be articulated that black women were the victims of assault by white men.¹⁰⁹

By recognizing interracial sexual abuse in the case of Hattie McCray, *The Chicago Defender* and *The Louisiana Weekly* broke the silence, headlining a black girl who was a victim of interracial sexual violence. And thus, they challenged white assumptions about the black female body. The paper resoundingly declared that black girls could be, and were, virtuous. They also claimed a childhood for the girls of their race. The white press, unlike the black papers, chose to ignore the issue of interracial sex and white desire for black bodies.

Who was Hattie McCray? Hattie McCray's subjectivity and experience is impossible to recover. Her words and thoughts can only be gleaned from secondary sources, each with their own agenda. Was she a member of an aspiring class of African Americans attempting to reach above their current status? Did she dream of returning to school, or getting married? Had she internalized the discourses of respectability and responsibility? Certainly her encounters with Guerand embodied her as a black woman. In those moments she was clearly aware of her body: aware of the areas where Guerand attempted to grope and touch, areas to which he made crude references. Perhaps his behavior toward her was something with which she was familiar. Hattie McCray knew that Charles Guerand, a white police officer, believed she was a prostitute. He did not see her as a girl, as her family did, but as a sexually available woman: this much was clear to her. In this moment, her notion of self was in conflict with racist white

¹⁰⁹ Just as important, white women could not "openly" desire Black men.

constructions of black bodies. Her world view and his were irreconcilable; she refused to give in.

We may never know Hattie McCray, but her case gives us insight to other girls' experience. What was the framework for black victims of sexual violence to understand their experience? Here, Hattie's case provides an entry into the language used to describe abuse and to the silences in the discourses regarding the abuse of children. Even though the African American press insisted that Hattie McCray had been sexually propositioned by Guerand, the discourses surrounding Hattie McCray's death in the black papers reinforced the politics of respectability which required girls and young women to protect their bodies from contamination. The politics of respectability created a double bind for young women. While reading the accounts of Hattie McCray's trial, girls who had been abused may have felt proud or felt a sisterhood with this singular "star" of their group. But many may have also felt that they hadn't lived up to African American standards of respectability and may have felt ashamed. The story would have enforced the fear that so many of them felt.

The white press and papers, the racist court system, white men, and police officers all believed that a black girlhood was impossible. Black female bodies were sexualized to such an extent that *even girls* were seen as diabolical or immoral, or simply sexually available prostitutes. This was a consequence of the racist formation of an arbitrary color line, a color line that depended on gendered definitions of white femininity (pure) and black femininity (foul). Guerand was one of many who could not see how black girls were just that—girls. Guerand's rage was perhaps extreme, but he honestly believed Hattie McCray's body was available for his consumption. He seemed shocked, confused

and angered that she might argue that her body was not for sex or for sale. The abuse of black girls by white men was an expression of control and power and a tool in a project of terrorism. But the abuse was also a product of sexualizing black bodies to such an extent, that children were no longer seen as children.

Though not all black girls experienced sexual violence personally, they knew that white men often "loved colored girls,"¹¹⁰ and also many were made aware, as Ferdie Walker was, that their bodies would not be protected by the law. "It was bad for *all black girls*" in the sense that sexual terrorism was a real and constant threat.¹¹¹ It was bad for all black girls as they tried to negotiate between their own wants and desires, their own ideas of their body and image, those of "respectable" African Americans, and those of a racist white society. Discourses of their bodies and their sexuality were implicitly everywhere, but the silences abounded. Many girls were left to understand and interpret their experiences on their own.

¹¹⁰ Betz, interview.

¹¹¹ Quote from Ferdie Walker's interview in Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow*, 9.

Chapter 3:

The Gender of Fear: On Being a Nice Girl

In 1938 children living in New Orleans, Louisiana, were interviewed by a group of sociologists for *Children of Bondage*, a book exploring "personality development" among black children in the urban South. One middle-class teen, Jeanne Manuel,¹ admitted in her interview: "When I was about twelve years old and in grammar school, a little girl asked me if I wanted to see a book of some pictures. I told her yes. It was a picture of a man and a woman. One of em had clothes on...they were doing something awful."² Jeanne constantly described her fear of bodily exposure and of sex. She insisted that sex, even in marriage, was "awful." She said, "I don't like the action, I don't like the idea of not having no clothes on, and I don't see why your husband should look at you when you don't have no clothes on, and I don't like the idea of looking at him when he ain't got no clothes on, I think they should have a substitute for having babies."³ Jeanne Manuel's distress when it came to the subject of sex reveals the ways in which the message of "respectability" intertwined with her daily life and was a source of anxiety for her. In the text of *Children of Bondage* the study's authors, Allison Davis and John Dollard, cleverly suggested, "perhaps [her parents] have trained her too well."⁴

¹ All of the names from the Negro Youth Study are pseudonyms. When the children's interviews also appear in the published materials, the pseudonyms are consistent.

² Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, August 17, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1940), 153.

Davis and Dollard's work was initiated by the American Youth Commission (AYC), which in 1936 created a Negro Youth Study (NYS) to examine the influence of racial mores on the character and personality of black children, and to analyze the "abnormal position" of black youth in U.S. society.⁵ The study culminated in the publication of four manuscripts based on government sponsored research.⁶ Two of these books examined black youth in the South, one of which was Allison Davis and John Dollard's *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (1940) the other, *Growing up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (1941) by Charles S. Johnson. To write *Children of Bondage*, Davis and Dollard, along with their team of researchers, interviewed children attending New Orleans junior high and high schools during 1938. Two of the children's interviews provide extensive commentary on girls' sexuality, fear and inner lives.⁷

In this chapter, I examine these interviews in order to consider what Afro-American girls' articulations of fears about sexuality tell us about raced and gendered subjectivity in Jim Crow New Orleans. In doing so, I analyze two separate narratives of fears—the narratives that girls produced in their interviews and the narratives produced by the interpretation of those fears by the NYS scholars. I argue that to better understand the issue of "respectability" in black girls' lives, one must understand the emotion of fear and the role it played in policing girls' behaviors. I explore how some black girls came

⁵ American Youth Commission, "A Proposal for a Study of Negro Youth," October 1936, 1, 3, American Council on Education.

⁶ Other minor studies were also published, but the NYS led to "Four Principle Reports," Robert Sutherland, "Report of Progress on Negro Youth Study of the American Youth Commission," n.d., American Council on Education, Hoover Institute. The other two published manuscripts were, E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossways: Their Personality Development in the Middle States* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1944), and Ira DeA. Reid, *In a Minor Key: Negro Youth in Story and Fact* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1941).

⁷ There are only two surviving full-sets of interviews that I have located thus far—both with girls.

to define themselves as "nice," respectable girls, and what experiences put their self-definition in jeopardy.

The body of literature provided by the Negro Youth Study is exceedingly useful for the study of black girlhood. First, I present “expert” discourses that marked girls’ bodies and sexuality as a site of political importance. In the early 1930s and 40s, progressive academics and activists described “healthy,” modern behavior of black girls and contrasted it with improper, outdated, rural-influenced behavior. Charles S. Johnson explained the progress of Afro-Americans by contrasting modern mores with outdated (rural) behavior in this way: "The whole trend of rural Negro youth is towards stricter standards and a more stable family life....Sexual promiscuity is fairly common in the lower classes, although it is not regarded by youth with the complacency typical of older generations of rural Negroes."⁸ Hence, the questions sociologists decided to pursue illuminated their personal preoccupations (with promiscuity for example).

Second, the data these scholars collected—surveys and interviews with youth—offer extremely rare primary sources authored by Afro-American girls. The interviews conducted through the Negro Youth Study offers access to teenage girls' worlds in a unique way. In particular, two interviews from the New Orleans study were fully preserved in the archives. These reflect multiple interviews conducted over a nearly six month period with Jeanne Manuel and Ellen Hill by Claude Haydel, a Black Creole Dillard student employed by Davis and Dollard, and by Elizabeth Davis, Allison Davis's wife. By analyzing Ellen Hill and Jeanne Manuel's life stories in the wider context of the Negro Youth Study, and life in New Orleans during the late 1930s.

⁸ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt: Negro Youth In the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1941), 240.

These sources are, of course, imperfect; girls were restrained in what they could say and how they could voice their opinions. Additionally, though some of the interviews were transcribed verbatim during the conversations, others were reconstructed from the field researcher's notes just after the interviews took place. Historian Stephanie Shaw's work on the Work Progress Administration (WPA) interviews with former slaves offers suggestions for reading limited sources. Shaw found that in response to 1930s WPA oral history interviews, elderly "freedpeople's responses were routinely more sophisticated than what the questions, on the surface, seemed designed to elicit."⁹ It is crucial then, to read the NYS interviews for the complexity and concerns black girls brought to the conversation, even when the questions asked seem straight-forward or simple. During the Negro Youth Study, Davis, Dollard, and their researchers spent months with their interviewees and amassed pages of reports including, not only the interviews, but also the child's school reports and interviews with family members. In this mass of work they assembled information that seemed to answer their research questions—questions specific to personality development, right conduct and class; but they also collected the concerns and opinions that the interviewees wished to articulate.

Finding Emotions: Fear and Anxiety in the Life of Girls

Afro-American Professor Clarita Reed was born in New Orleans in 1922 and grew up during the height of segregation. In an oral history interview, Reed explained the affects of segregation by telling a story. In the 1990s, Dr. Reed and her student

⁹ Stephanie Shaw, "Using the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives to Study the Impact of the Great Depression," *The Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 3 (2003).

entered The Roosevelt Hotel located near the French Quarter just off of Canal Street.¹⁰

Dr. Reed walked toward the rear entrance, while her student headed for the main lobby door. The ensuing conversation between Reed and her student illustrates the necessity of reconstructing the emotional toll of coming of age during segregation:

He asked, 'Why are you going to walk all the way around instead of going through the Baronne Street entrance?' I said, 'I don't like going through there.' He said, 'It's a beautiful lobby... See? Isn't it beautiful?' I said, 'No.' That's why I don't like the old hotels because every time [I] walk through [I think], now that old dirty, homeless, old white man I just passed on the street could come in here and get a room. He's better than I am. And still is. Still is. And I was never welcomed in there. So now I don't want to be welcomed.¹¹

What Dr. Reed's interview makes clear is that emotions are crucial to reconstructing the history of segregation and black subjectivity during Jim Crow.¹² Later in the interview, Dr. Clarita Reed reflected, "I don't see how anyone, who grew up anywhere in the South,

¹⁰ The Roosevelt Hotel has changed names several times. During segregation, the hotel was The Roosevelt. Since then, it has been a Fairmont Hotel; however it never reopened after Hurricane Katrina. It has since been bought by the Waldorf Astoria and renamed The Roosevelt Hotel.

¹¹ Clarita Reed, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, June 24, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

¹² For examples of the interdisciplinary discussions of emotion (also affect, sensibility and sentiment) see Peter Stearns and Jan Lewis, *An Emotional History of the U.S.* (NYU Press, 1998); Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (NYU Press, 1994); Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, "The Work of the Heart: Emotion in the 1805-35 Diary of Sarah Connell Ayer," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 577-592; C.Z. Stearns, *Emotion and Social Change: Toward a New Psychohistory* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988); Adela Pinch, "Review: Emotion and History. A Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (January 1995): 100-109; Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Lauren Berlant, *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Patricia Clough, ed., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 821-45; Daniel Wickberg, "What is the History of Sensibilities?," *American Historical Review* 11, no. 2 (June 2007); Daniel Wickberg, "Homophobia: On the Cultural History of an Idea," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 42-57; Joanna Bourke, "Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History," *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 111-133; Neal Oxenhandler, "The Changing Concept of Literary Emotion: A Selective History," *New Literary History* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 105-121.

could not have a lot of anger."¹³ The anger and hurt expressed in her voice comes across clearly in the taped interview. However, if the anger and hurt that Clarita Reed and others felt quietly "mounted through the years"¹⁴ or can only be understood through brief oral history interview stories and vocal intonations, how can historians uncover the emotions of the past?

Historian Joanna Bourke argues that the language used to describe feelings are important because, "emotions have to be '*made visible*' if historians are to examine them."¹⁵ Therefore, I pay close attention to how the girls interviewed by the Negro Youth Study narrated their fears: What language did they use in their interviews? What did they say confidently versus what they told only haltingly? So, while the previous chapter told a story about the spaces of silence in the discourse of sexual abuse, this chapter analyzes fears that were clearly spoken. In working with this juxtaposition, I further expose the preoccupation with certain aspects of sexuality—like purity and respectability for example—among different segments of the black community (middle-class, academic and Creole).

The evidence of fear and anxiety reveals the everyday implications of sexual and racial politics in girls' lives. Bourke explains, "Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between self and other or one community and another. They align individuals with communities...fear is a form of 'emotional labour' that endows 'objects and others with meaning and power.'" ¹⁶ Bourke's quotation emphasizes the role emotions such as fear and anxiety play in constructing subjectivity. Black girls' fears demonstrate what

¹³ Reed, interview.

¹⁴ Aline St. Julien, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 1, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

¹⁵ Bourke, "Fear and anxiety."

¹⁶ Ibid.

was important in maintaining a girls' sense of self and what put that sense of self in jeopardy. In addition, feelings such as pain, fear and anxiety make abstract words like "power" more meaningful. Historians must attempt to address questions such as: Who has the power to make someone fearful? What produces anxiety? Answers to these questions expose the flow of power in our society. Yet more importantly, an appreciation of the intensity of the emotions themselves allows for a somatic understanding of the implications of power. Those crippled by fear—people constantly threatened, ignored or attacked by the state and/or their families—are often those who are outside the bounds of full citizenship. So, for the historian, emotions make tangible complex networks of power within communities.

Historian Barbara Rosenwein has suggested that historians of emotion analyze "systems of feeling" in "emotional communities" or, more precisely, the emotional ties in social communities.¹⁷ Black girls' emotional communities in the 1930s consisted of relationships with their parents, churches, teachers, schools and neighborhoods. They also had intimate relationships with boys and girls of their same age. Through an analysis of these relationships we see not only *who* played important roles in girls' lives, but also *how* girls felt about those around them. Additionally, the various communities of which girls were a part each had set values determining what was good/bad, right/wrong and helped define what was safe or dangerous and what and whom was to be feared. These social communities assuaged some of their fears (those associated with segregation, for example) while the community sometimes instigated other fears (those associated with sexuality and loss of respectability).

Sex and the 'Expert': The Negro Youth Study of Personalities

¹⁷ Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History."

To understand girls' articulations of fear in the Negro Youth Study interviews, we need to first examine the wider context of the NYS and AYC, and the prominent scholars who interpreted boys and girls' fears—among other issues—to help define the "distortions of child and youth personalities."¹⁸ Afro-American scholars Allison Davis and Charles Johnson, along with white scholars such as John Dollard, were part of an emerging group of interracial liberal intellectuals that had an enormous influence on not only the disciplines of psychology and sociology, but also on popular discourses of race, racial conflict and race-based caste systems in America.¹⁹ Additionally, their work was considered foundational in the interdisciplinary subfield of "personality development."

In 1935, the American Youth Commission (AYC) of the American Council of Education began a study of the problems of America's youth. During the Great Depression, scholars, politicians and reformers alike were concerned that both black *and* white youth were becoming disenchanted with American mores and democracy; they worried that excessive idle time might ruin the country's children. The AYC studied the "characteristics" of youth, investigated the negative and positive influences on their character, and analyzed the goals of education in relation to the social, political and economic problems of the depression years.²⁰ In 1936, the AYC decided to sponsor studies on America's black youth through the Negro Youth Study. Two of the NYS publications that focused on the South, *Children of Bondage* and *Growing up in the Black Belt*, were at the forefront of what came to be known as personality development research. For the scholars of the NYS, "personality" referred to an "individual's traits,

¹⁸ W. M. Brewer, "Review: [untitled]," *The Journal of Negro History* 26, no. 1 (January 1941): 113-115.

¹⁹ Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 40-61.

²⁰ American Youth Commission, "Activities of the American Youth Commission," October 12, 1936, 1, American Council on Education, Hoover Institute.

habits, and attitudes which determine his social role."²¹ They investigated both "healthy" and "unhealthy" social and psychological development. Allison Davis, John Dollard, Charles Johnson, and the other researches involved in the studies were aware of their position at the forefront of this new research. White members of the AYC board and outside reviewers voiced discomfort over the new approach used in the Negro Youth Studies prior to their publication. Despite these somewhat hostile responses, Allison Davis remained positive and sure of his research. In his opinion the reviewers were "far more favorable than I had expected, in view of the new method of personality study used, and in view of the emotional reactions which are built up and maintained in our society with regard to recognition of class and caste structures," Davis noted.²²

Allison Davis was born in Washington, D.C. in 1902. Although he came of age during segregation and in a Jim Crow city, Davis had access to an excellent education. His family read Shakespeare together at night, along with other celebrated Anglo-American authors, and he attended Dunbar High School, the most prestigious colored public high school in the country.²³ His father worked in a secure job for the government and his family lifestyle could easily be defined as part of the elite black class in Washington, D.C. During the time in which Davis grew up, the city was famous for its large number of elite, college educated, successful African Americans. After graduating from high school, Davis left D.C. to attend Williams College, becoming the valedictorian of his class, despite being forced to live in off-campus housing because he was black. In

²¹ Robert Sutherland, "Revision of Prospects Worked out at the Chicago Meeting of Negro Youth Study," n.d., American Council on Education, Hoover Institute.

²² Allison Davis, "Comments on Criticisms of Davis-Dollard Typoscript Transmitted by Dr. Sutherland," December 1939, American Council on Education, Hoover Institute.

²³ Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 34; "Black Heritage Award for an African-American Educator," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 23.

1925 he earned his first master's degree in English from Harvard University. Afterward, he taught English Literature at Hampton Institute, an industrial school for minorities in Hampton, Virginia.²⁴ Of his time in Virginia Davis said, "teaching in the standard manner made no sense to these poor and poorly schooled rural blacks. I decided that I didn't know anything to teach them since our backgrounds were so different, yet I wanted to do something to affect such students."²⁵

Next, Davis returned to Harvard to begin studying Anthropology. As a graduate student, Davis would study at Yale, The London School of Economics, as well as conduct interviews and research (along with his wife Elizabeth Davis) in Natchez, Mississippi for a book on racial caste: *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*. Once that research was completed, Davis moved on to teach at Dillard University in New Orleans. He lived, worked and researched in New Orleans for nearly five years. It was while he was there that he and his wife conducted interviews and collected data with New Orleans children and their families for the NYS.

Elizabeth Stubbs Davis first interviewed female participants for her husband in Mississippi. Elizabeth Davis' interviewing was an important part of the research for *Children of Bondage*.²⁶ Not only did she interview and spend nearly six months with Edna Hill, one of the two girls whose interviews are the main focus of this chapter, but she also conducted a few interviews with Jeanne Manuel, the other student featured in my study. In the introduction to the *Children of Bondage* Davis recognized his wife's skill as a researcher and interviewer, "To my wife," he said, "I am indebted not only for gathering

²⁴ Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," 34.

²⁵ "Allison Davis, 1902-1983," *University of Chicago Centennial Catalogues*, http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/centcat/fac/facch25_01.html.

²⁶ "Guide to the Allison Davis Papers, 1932-1984: Biographical Note," Davis, Allison Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

life histories, but also for her constant aid in the analysis of the Negro class modes of behavior, a work she began with me in 1933 in the social anthropological study of [Natchez, Mississippi]."²⁷

In 1940, Allison Davis accepted a professorship at the University of Chicago and in 1947 Davis became the first tenured Afro-American on the faculty.²⁸ The University of Chicago became known as a powerhouse for sociological studies, especially for studies in the emerging field of "urban sociology" and also for their research on black communities. Lloyd Warner (Davis' thesis advisor), Earnest Burgess, and Robert Park were a few of the most famous scholars associated with The Chicago School. E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson, along with Allison Davis, were the most prominent Afro-American scholars who employed the methods of the Chicago School.²⁹

The goal of racial uplift was one of the main tenets of the Chicago School. Uplift ideology focused on the vast class and cultural difference among Afro-Americans, something Davis had noticed very early on in his life and career because of his upbringing in the elite world of D.C. Proponents of the ideology argued that lower-class blacks needed to assimilate their value structure to that of a seemingly more sophisticated, middle-class society because, "elite blacks believed they were replacing the racist notion of fixed biological racial differences with an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation, measured primarily by the status of the family and civilization."³⁰ This

²⁷ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, xi.

²⁸ "Allison Davis, 1902-1983"; Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," 34.

²⁹ Marlon Bryan Ross, *Manning the Race : Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*, Sexual cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 166-7; Fred B. Lindstrom, Ronald A. Hardert, and Kimball Young, "Kimball Young on the Chicago School: Later Contacts," *Sociological Perspectives* 31, no. 3 (July 1988): 298.

³⁰ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.

view then, favored upper, elite and middle-class blacks' lifestyles and morals over those of the lower class.

Allison Davis' interdisciplinary method was influenced by this diverse and rich educational history, his elite background, and his mentor, Lloyd Warner. In his work, Davis melded sociological and economic data, with in-depth, qualitative interviewing and psychoanalysis. For Allison Davis, young children's sexuality and sexual training was of extreme importance to his psychoanalytic *and* class-based approach. This meant that Davis's line of questioning in interviews focused on the sexual lives of not only adolescents, but also on their infantile sexual history: masturbation as a child, suckling (on their mother's breast, their thumbs and on pacifiers), toilet training and the physical punishments they received for their inability to learn societal norms.³¹ For a variety of reasons, many contemporaneous readers did not approve of the psychoanalytic aspects of *Children of Bondage*. One child-development psychologist argued that Freudianism "failed to improve the product. The data supplied by Davis and Dollard do not provide any critical tests of psychoanalytic or behaviorist hypotheses, nor are these hypotheses well-enough substantiated to provide a dependable interpretation of life history data.

White psychologist John Dollard was born in Wisconsin in 1900 and described his ancestors as "Famine Irish."³² Like Davis, Dollard was also influenced by the Chicago School of research—he received his Ph.D. in sociology from Chicago in 1931. In 1932, he began researching at Yale University Institute of Human Relations.³³ He also studied psychoanalysis at the Berlin Sociological Institute. Dollard's method of

³¹ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 7, 10, 263.

³² Christopher Waldrep, ed., *Lynching in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 13.

³³ "Guide to John Dollard Research Papers," John Dollard Research Files for Fear and Courage under Battle Conditions, The Tamiment Library & Robert F Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

researching racial problems in the United States came directly from this psychological approach and are clear in his articles such as, "Culture, Society, Impulse and Socialization" (1939).³⁴

In 1935 John Dollard researched racial relations in the South, spending five months in Indianola, Mississippi for his now classic book *Class and Caste in a Southern Town* (1937).³⁵ Dollard later recalled in a 1970s interview that he got the idea for the research and its emphasis on racially formed castes from Lloyd Warner, Allison Davis and Burleigh Gardener (the co-authors of *Deep South*). At this time, all of these scholars were working together, visiting one another at their research sites, and exchanging theoretical concepts. Dollard noted the deep connections between *Deep South* and *Class and Caste*:

I was certainly influenced by their work. What I brought to my study that they didn't have was a strong basis in Freudian analysis. Without the Freudian analysis, the study was structured without content. To get a complete sense of the southerner, I had to show him loving and hating, laughing and breathing. In this way, Freud is unparalleled in describing human life.... Theirs should be read for the caste analysis and mine should be read for the intimations of emotional structures of feeling and hatred.³⁶

Dollard's theories of class and caste were formed by his use of the Freudian concepts of drive (natural instincts toward free sexual relations and uncontrolled aggression) and civilization (the restrictions placed on people by the modern social order). According to Dollard, what made southern, lower-class Afro-Americans notable was that they were segregated out of society, thus placing them outside of the bounds of modern civilization.

³⁴ John Dollard, "Culture, Society, Impulse, and Socialization," *The American Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 1 (July 1939): 50-63.

³⁵ Interview reprinted in, William R. Ferris and John Dollard, "John Dollard: Caste and Class Revisited," *Southern Cultures* 10, no. 2 (2004): 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

According to this theory, Afro-Americans were not socialized by mainstream society to be full, proper citizens.

Dollard believed, therefore, that southern blacks were free to follow their natural instincts. These 'natural' instincts were toward freer (promiscuous) sexuality. Even in the 1970s he explained his theories in a manner that exposed a troubling notion of race and sexuality:

It is saddening to think that when all those Negroes are properly socialized, as will occur very rapidly, they are probably going to have a lot less fun. They will be under the powerful example of the culture as a whole to change and approximate themselves to the white middle-class norm of society. Middle-class life is really limiting and restrictive, with its concern for time, cleanliness, and morality. There is no philosophical device by which I could ever see how one would compare the relative sexual and aggressive freedom that lower-class Negroes used to have and still have with the satisfaction of mastery, social position, and prestige that the middle- and upper-class whites have. All we know is that if people get a chance, they will approximate themselves to the middle-class white model.³⁷

Dollard believed that Afro-Americans following their natural drives were sexually promiscuous. He would never expect working-class blacks to be concerned with cleanliness, moral questions or sexual respectability *unless* they had some sort of contact with middle-class whites or middle-class blacks (who he saw as trying to imitate the social norms of middle class whites).

The racist implications of Dollard's theory are perhaps self-evident. It follows that all lower-class black girls were believed to be promiscuous; Dollard would be incredibly surprised to find a lower-class black girl who did not want to experiment sexually or one who resisted the sexual advances of white men. Reviewers of NYS publication noticed this focus on sexual mores. One reviewer of *Children of Bondage*

³⁷ Ibid., 17.

favorably noted, "The authors skillfully dissect raw data in which the reader may find full explanation of the degraded mores which caste has produced and defiantly maintains."³⁸

To Dollard's credit though, he did believe that lower-class whites had lower sexual standards than middle class whites, and these standards he believed, approached (though were not identical to) the freedom lower class blacks experienced.³⁹

In 1939, just before *Children of Bondage* was released, John Dollard published *Frustration and Aggression*. Again, developing a combined theory of drives and racial caste systems; this book became a foundational text in personality development research. He argued that "aggression is always a consequence of frustration."⁴⁰ Like most personality development research, understandings of psychological categories, such as frustration, were highly gendered. As is clear from the interviews with girls for the Negro Youth Study, scholars' frameworks for understanding male aggression and masculinity never fit neatly in understanding girls' experiences.

Despite its controversial use of psychoanalysis, Davis and Dollard's *Children of Bondage* was reviewed positively by a wide variety of scholars. Allison Davis explained that "[our] book is a study of personality, and is presented in a manner so as to reach a large public. The whole organization of the book, as well as the style, has been planned from the first page to make the book lucid and perspicuous for this audience."⁴¹ By structuring each chapter around the particular life-narrative of one child, Davis and Dollard's writing style exposed a "harsh realism" that necessarily spoke of their

³⁸ Brewer, "Review," 114.

³⁹ Ferris and Dollard, "John Dollard," 17.

⁴⁰ Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 44.

⁴¹ Davis, "Comments on Criticisms," 1.

objectivity and education.⁴² One scholar noted *Children of Bondage's* style when reviewing E. Franklin Frazier against Davis and Dollard's NYS studies. The way the book read, he argued, made the reader feel as if he stepped into the actual world of the child. "If one wanted to run the risk of oversimplification, he might say that *Negro Youth at the Crossways* [by Frazier] represents a more intellectual experience of the problem while *Children of Bondage* yields more of a direct aesthetic, emphatic experience," the reviewer observed.⁴³ Davis and Dollard unceasingly presented what they saw as the "realities" of youths' lives.

By delving into the intricacies of the sex lives of individual children, Davis and Dollard believed they portrayed an otherworldly life of the 'lower class' street and the inside world of the social controls and the restrained sexual fantasies of the upwardly mobile. This could only be done with what literary critic Marlon Ross describes as the "cool perspective."⁴⁴ Davis and Dollard had to present sex talk in the disinterested voice of the expert. Even then though, their methods might be questioned by readers. On reading a draft of the manuscript, Mordecai Johnson, president of the historically black college, Howard University, worried that, "In two or three places the authors have made record of sexual passes or 'impertinences' of students in relation to the investigators." He believed that the manuscript would be "improved if these references were deleted and the investigators were kept in the position of detached observation."⁴⁵ Extraordinarily, Mordecai Johnson thought that by merely deleting evidence of sex-talk and flirtations, pure objectivity could, indeed would, be restored. His objections to the discussions of

⁴² Ross, *Manning the Race*, 147.

⁴³ Leonard S. Cottrell, "Review: [untitled]," *The American Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (July 1941): 111-115.

⁴⁴ Ross, *Manning the Race*, 147.

⁴⁵ Mordecai Johnson to Reeves, December 12, 1939, American Council on Education, Hoover Institute.

sexuality reveal the ways in which sex talk could make readers feel uncomfortable and also question the overall objective value of the research. Davis and Dollard attempted to guard against such readings by preceding the lurid life histories with a more theoretical, 'objective' chapter, "The Mystery of Personality," by using rat subjects rather than human sexuality to discuss Freudian concepts of goal response, elemental drives, punishment and repression.⁴⁶

Charles S. Johnson is perhaps the most well known of the NYS scholars in the discipline of African American Studies. Because *Growing up in the Black Belt* focused on rural life in the segregated South, I do not spend as much time with his research in this chapter as I do with Davis and Dollard. However, the connections and convergences, between their understanding of class, sexuality and respectability are significant. Charles Surgeon Johnson was born in rural, southwestern (and segregated) Virginia in 1893. As a Baptist minister, his father was an upstanding member of the black community. Johnson attended a historically black college, Virginia Union for his undergraduate degree, and later received his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago in 1917. From 1923-1928, Johnson helped usher in a new era of African American writing and philosophy (known as the Harlem Renaissance) as the founder and editor of *Opportunity*, an Urban League magazine.⁴⁷ In 1927 Johnson became a professor at Fisk University, a black college in Tennessee; and in 1946 he became the school's first black president.⁴⁸

Johnson, even more so than Davis and Dollard, was concerned with African American movement from the rural South, to the modern city. He viewed changes in

⁴⁶ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 3-20.

⁴⁷ Patrick J. Gilpin, "Charles S. Johnson and The Southern Educational Reporting Service," *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 3 (July 1978): 198.

⁴⁸Biographical Information for Johnson comes from, Matthew William Dunne, "Next Steps: Charles S. Johnson and Southern Liberalism," *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 1-4.

black migration as fundamental to Afro-American progress, and believed there was a need for new moral and intellectual training to lead African Americans out of their slavery past into a new modern era. For instance, in an essay on the black family Johnson described this transition as one of "cultural evolution" and explained that, "what seems most important in this change is not so much the population increase [in cities], but the profound cultural shocks involved in this drastic change of ways of life."⁴⁹ The outdated family model of the rural blacks (left over from slavery) could not compete in the new cultural world of the city, Johnson believed. Just as Davis and Dollard's personality development research studied "healthy" psyches (necessary for a healthy society), Johnson's urban sociology looked towards racial betterment and was ultimately concerned with the health of the Afro-American race as a whole. Both personality development researchers and urban sociologists such as Johnson juxtaposed "healthy" and thus morally correct behavior with behavior which they defined as "unhealthy" and thus morally depraved; this problematic dichotomy was a common tendency of their work. Charles Johnson fell into this trap with his use of statistics to define "normal." In Johnson's work, "the norm silently slips from indicating a practice engaged by a [white] numerical majority...to mean that which is 'proper' morally and socially."⁵⁰ Though Johnson did not use psychoanalysis in his work, he did find respectable sexuality to be an important barometer for "healthy" and modern behaviors. Additionally, all three scholars were concerned with various processes of acculturation to white, middle-class standards—which necessarily included sexual standards.

⁴⁹ Charles S. Johnson, "The Present Status and Trends of the Negro Family," *Social Forces* 16, no. 2 (December 1937): 249.

⁵⁰ Ross, *Manning the Race*, 171.

As is clear from the educational histories and philosophies of Davis, Dollard, and to a lesser extent Charles Johnson, the psyche, childhood training and the social were indelibly linked for scholars of the personality. These links were made clear by Davis and Dollard's view of the important role of mothers in raising a child. They claimed that "family training is closely related to [a child's] personality; in fact, it *is* her personality." They went on to argue that learned traits and dispositions became "marked" on children and then determined how the child would interact with the world around her or him as they grew older.⁵¹ The early socialization of a child determined her place in the world, her character, her ability to assimilate to new situations and her capacity to become a full, participating citizen. Motherhood was also central to the scholars' notions of failed, improper masculinity. For Dollard and other personality development researchers, "events in childhood had a role in determining the kinds of citizens white and black men could be."⁵² The importance of proper citizenship for young men and boys was certainly clear in the efforts of the American Youth Commission.

During an AYC conference, one contributor made the relationship between childhood training, manhood and citizenship clear when he said, "I would add to that that fact that when the youngster reaches the age of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, he is ready to take over the responsibility of an adult. When he is ready to become an adult, he finds little place...to enable him to be a man, to be a citizen."⁵³ For girls though, the ultimate goal was not necessarily "proper citizenship" as it was developing into a nurturer of society. Childhood training determined girls' relationship with the opposite sex;

⁵¹ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 59, Emphasis mine.

⁵² Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 46.

⁵³ American Youth Commission, "Discussion Notes: American Youth Commission Conference" (New York, July 1936), 28, American Council on Education, Hoover Institute.

researchers believed girls' relationship with boys was the defining struggle of their lives. The assumption was, of course, that healthy children became heterosexual partners and had only a few children that they could properly care for. And thus, sexuality was a central avenue for exploration when attempting to reconstruct a child's proper or improper social development.

"The Struggle for Respectability" and the Importance of Being a Nice Girl

When Allison Davis and John Dollard explained differences between Afro-Americans in New Orleans based on class, they reported a "chasm" between classes, one that could be explained by behavior. The difference, they argued, "lies between the stimuli and goals of the 'respectable,' status-bound lower-middle class and those of the recalcitrant, impulsive, physically aggressive lower class."⁵⁴ Here, they defined "respectable" as exactly what they believed those in the lower class were not: sexually pure, controlled in bodily desires, and having suitable manners. The NYS scholars and the students interviewed, stressed the importance of being considered a "nice" girl. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the meaning of "nice" and to explore its significance in New Orleans girls' lives. In this section I will explore "respectable" and "nice" behavior in relation to class status in New Orleans. In doing so, we will be better able to understand fears associated with losing the designation of "nice girl."

Charles Johnson argued, similar to Davis and Dollard, that respectable behavior corresponded with class status. In a *Growing up in the Black Belt* sub-heading titled, "A Struggle to Maintain Respectability," Johnson outlined the problems facing Afro-American girls.⁵⁵ As suggested by the sub-heading, when Johnson approached the

⁵⁴ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 265.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt*, esp. chap. "The Social World of Youth".

subject of girls' bodies and sexuality he made the assumption that girls must individually choose virtue rather than vice (they struggled against the outside pressures). In an interview with Mildred Reed for example, Mildred noted that, "It is bad for a girl to smoke or drink. Boys can do it sometimes if they do not carry it too far. People do not think much about girls who hang around street corners and go to the cafes. It's all right to be around boys and go with them if they have *nice* people and they do not take a girl to rough places, but there aren't many nice boys now. Most of them do not respect girls."⁵⁶ Her language revealed the way in which the politics of respectability was highly gendered. Mildred's community expected girls to remain respectable, and she pointedly expressed the expectation that girls be responsible for their purity by not drinking, smoking or going out. Interestingly, Mildred ended her answer to the interviewer's question on the topic of boys. She suggested that girls' niceness was not threatened by moral depravity alone, but rather by outside dangers: girls were not "respected" by boys. Mildred was perhaps implying that girls' *bodies* were not respected by boys or that there was *sexual* pressure put on girls that made her feel threatened and uncomfortable. Clearly she attempted to articulate the ways in which girls' "purity" might not be totally in their control. At the same time, Mildred's personal definition of "nice" related not only to sexuality, but more explicitly to drinking, smoking and dancing.

The girls' voices from The Negro Youth Study illustrate the consequences of the project of uplift and racial betterment and make evident the ways in which the politics of respectability was internalized by girls who heard its message. For these girls, the message of respectability carried with it great responsibility and created the fear that they may not live up to the standards of morality being set for them. In the 1930s, at the very

⁵⁶ Ibid., 87 Emphasis mine.

center of "respectability" was the moral imperative to be a "nice" girl. Parents, teachers, pastors and priests policed the behavior of teenaged girls to make sure they remained "nice." Nice was a polite euphemism for sexually and morally wholesome. The protection of girls' sexuality was of utmost importance to elite, intellectual and aspiring class Afro-Americans during the early twentieth century.⁵⁷ One National Association of Colored Women (NACW) clubwoman, Ursula Wade, suggested in 1904, that there were thousands of blacks who had "advanced to high planes" but that there were millions who "needed lifting from 'degradation and ignorance.'"⁵⁸ Afro-Americans who worried about the health of the race intertwined the politics of respectability with the politics of sexuality. As one historian notes, reformers "frequently promoted 'respectable reproductive sexuality within the safe confines of marriage' as a viable means of uplifting the masses and working toward black progress."⁵⁹

Children of all class backgrounds did indeed hear the messages the reformers sent to them. The girls interviewed by Johnson, Davis and Dollard spoke clearly about the set of moral standards by which they lived. The politics of respectability infiltrated their lives—though at varying levels. Ellen Hill was a fourteen year old living in poverty in

⁵⁷ For important works on the subject of black women's sexuality and respectability during the early twentieth century see, Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 738-755; Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989); Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989).

⁵⁸ Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 78.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 85.

New Orleans at the time of her interviews. Her father had left the family because of his addiction to alcohol. Ellen, her mother, and her six siblings lived in a one-room (studio) apartment—the only restroom available was shared by all the tenants in the building.⁶⁰ The room was in a downtown New Orleans housing project just on the border of the seventh ward, so Ellen Hill lived marginally in the Treme neighborhood but was not truly a part of the community. Because her mother worked long hours during the day, Ellen learned her code of ethics from her grandmother, her church and from extensive reading of books and newspapers. Because of this, the discourse of proper conduct permeated her world. This was clear when Allison Davis' wife, Elizabeth Davis, gave Ellen a copy of Arna Bontemps' *The Sad Faced Boy* as a gift. Ellen excitedly opened the book, but then stopped and said, "I read in *Manners of the Moment* that you shouldn't pick up a book and read it when you're visiting. Is that right?"⁶¹

In *Children of Bondage*, Davis and Dollard defined nice in a strictly classed way. For them, nice corresponded with a morality that assimilated to white middle-class standards of self-control and cleanliness.⁶² But, "aspiring class" works much better with nice's more varied definition because girls who aspired toward upward mobility, even if only within black society, tended to behave more carefully—keeping themselves clean, watching the ways in which they displayed their body, and fretting over sexual contact or

⁶⁰ Homes in the study were measured by the number of rooms in total in the house.

⁶¹ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, June 15, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, June 15, 1938.

⁶² Davis and Dollard defined class in a complicated matter. They identified six social classes in black New Orleans society: (in order from lowest to highest) lower-lower, upper-lower, lower-middle, middle-middle, upper-middle, and upper class. According to Davis and Dollard, "The sociologist identifies [the classes] and describes the forms of behavior which their members have in common. It is the community itself, however, not the sociologists, which classifies the inhabitants into social levels...The people of any community ask only one question to determine an individual's class position, namely, 'Whom does he associate with?'" See, Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 13, 256-262.

play with boys.⁶³ But even some girls who were not reaching for a higher social position attempted to attain certain standards of niceness. For them, being "nice" meant that they did not go running around with boys, usually they were still in school, and that they held to high moral standards—along with refraining from sex, fights, alcohol, and hanging around with boys alone. Consequently, nice girls could come from any neighborhood or class background in New Orleans, if they followed these simple rules.

Certainly, girls from lower class backgrounds had a much more difficult time adhering to the moral standard of niceness. Girls who stayed home unsupervised because their mothers worked had to be careful with whom they hung around after school. In addition, older girls whose families were experiencing financial difficulties (like Hattie McCray's family, for example) often had to quit school and work in order to help the family survive. Ellen Hill's oldest sister was in this situation; she wanted to continue her education but was forced to quit high school when the family got into financial difficulty.⁶⁴ Ellen's mother was clear about the way in which class and respectability interacted in her girls' lives. She said her three eldest daughters' friends were "nice children with nice houses."⁶⁵ Niceness in this context referred to not only proper behavior, but also high standards of cleanliness and the properness of the home (as her girls tried to take a bath at least once a day despite their decrepit surroundings).

⁶³ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, xx. Mitchell argues that applying "standard class labels" is more difficult while looking at a group of Americans just out of slavery. She explains, "I use 'aspiring class' then, as a means of differentiating African American strivers from contemporaneous middle-class, white Americans and to acknowledge the quickening of class stratification within African American communities."

⁶⁴ Mrs. Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, May 30, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Davis and Dollard used another teen's life history, fifteen year old Mary Hopkins, as emblematic of lower-class life. Mary Hopkins's family was on governmental relief, and of their class status Davis and Dollard declared,

The family is secure also in having ready and unhindered access to the basic goals: food, shelter, clothes, sex and aggressive responses can all be made; these goal responses in turn reinforce the Hopkins' lower-class folkways. There is no bothersome goal of high status to lure them into anxious days and wakeful nights. Mary shares in this confident atmosphere.⁶⁶

Even still, the language of respectability pervaded the way she saw the world, though she was not of an aspiring class; this fact seemed to dismay the scholars. First, Davis and Dollard classified Mary's friends by their respectability: "Three of Mary's seven girl friends are called 'real nice' meaning that they do not permit sexual approaches from boy friends and that they approach middle-class standards. One girl is known to have intercourse with her boy friend and she is teased about it but not rejected in any other way."⁶⁷

Davis and Dollard used "nice" to suggest that three of the friends were of an aspiring class. But like those friends, Mary did not engage in sexual activity. Davis and Dollard defined Mary's insistence on not having sex as "puzzling" for someone of her class level, even though her mother had clearly instructed her not to let sex ruin her life, nor to let boys in the house while she was alone. Mary explained, "I don't never let them inside the house unless someone is home. Even if you don't do nothin', people talk about you, and my mother says to keep 'em out."⁶⁸ Davis and Dollard speculated that Mary did not become sexually active because she was "not a good looking girl" and did not have

⁶⁶ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

the ability to tease boys or any physical traits that might "lure" them to her.⁶⁹ Instead of seeing Mary Hopkins' refusal of sex as a result of her looks as Davis and Dollard explicitly do, it is much more likely that she had made a conscious choice to forego sexual relations. And, in fact, she said she had been propositioned by boys before.⁷⁰ She felt she was from a "nice" family regardless of the fact that her mother worked as a domestic and her family did not have much money. Mary Hopkins attempted to live up to standards of niceness and, for her, this choice had nothing to do with her class position or social ambition. Hopkins' very claim on "niceness" complicates the more narrow assumptions by Davis and Dollard.

The "dilemma of the lower-class girl with regard to sex," suggested Davis and Dollard, "is that there is no one to police her a good part of time."⁷¹ "Policing" was understood by them as strictly parental supervision. Davis and Dollard did not understand that girls' behavior was not merely constrained by the watchful eyes of parents. The discourse of moral purity came from newspapers, school, parents and church. Girls who took these lessons seriously often policed their own behavior. This is seen not only in Mary Hopkins' resistance to having boys in her home while she was alone, but also by Ellen Hill's reaction to her church.

Ellen Hill's Baptist church laid out behavioral standards for the congregants: dancing and card-playing were clearly sins—sins that Hill admitted enjoying.⁷² Ellen explained to the interviewer, Elizabeth Davis, that though she was baptized she did not take communion. When Davis asked why, Ellen responded thoughtfully, "I don't feel

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, July 6, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

worthy. I am good enough, I guess, [but] I don't think it's right." Ellen felt that if she wasn't going to live strictly by church standards, then she could not stand before god and the church as a sinner. She said that her friends all took communion without thinking seriously about it. "They don't think nothing about it," she said, "they just goes on up—cause they're members—but I don't think you should do like that."⁷³

That Ellen used the language of worthiness here is significant. "Worthiness" was the language by which Ellen expressed her anxieties. Her decision not to remain chaste—by dancing against the wishes of her church—caused her to question her self-worth. Although she said "I'm good enough," her internal conflict was made clear by her addition, "I guess." It was not just that Ellen was sinning by playing cards or that dancing that made her feel unworthy; she also felt that maybe card-playing, at her age, was not wrong. She suggested that when she was twenty five she might be ready for communion, saying, "So by the time I'm twenty five I will have had enough of 'em and then I can give them up and take communion. But I don't think they're sins now, so it's not right to take communion."⁷⁴ For Ellen, the definitions of right and wrong were nuanced. But clearly, worthiness was a complicated matter. To be worthy before God meant being in line with church teachings. Though she justified dancing and card-playing for herself, at her current age, she did not question the authority of the church. Ellen's thoughtfulness and articulations conveyed her worries. Mary Hopkins, like Ellen Hill, also held back when it came to her participation in church. Mary Hopkins's family

⁷³ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, April 11, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

⁷⁴ Hill, interview, July, 6, 1938.

was Baptist as well, but she liked to dance and so she would not officially join the church.⁷⁵

Gossip and community "talk" helped police girls' bodies and behaviors. Girls themselves spread sometimes vicious rumors about one another. During Ellen Hill's interview she pointed out a fellow classmate to her interviewer, "You saw that girl in white that spoke to me this morning? There is a scandal about her. She's always hanging 'round beer parlors and night clubs and she's got lots of money too. She's supposed to be going with a white man!"⁷⁶ By saying the girl had "lots of money," and was seen with a white man, Ellen insinuated that she was a prostitute, or at least exchanging sex for money. Ellen talked intimately with Elizabeth Davis revealing both the way rumor spread and the closeness that developed between interviewer and interviewee. That "the girl in white" was involved in a "scandal" suggested that the entire community knew of and defined her behavior as disgraceful. What is even more interesting about the mysterious girl in white was the fact that the community talk had (seemingly) not stopped her behavior.

Ellen's mention of the girl in white's time at beer gardens fit in with the 'respectable' communities concern that bear gardens and dance halls were the mark of the sinful. Allison Davis, John Dollard and Charles Johnson were particularly interested in girls who frequented forbidden spots—such as beer parlors or dance halls. Their curiosity about the extra-curricular activities of black youth certainly was not singular and was connected to their uplift mission. Having youth congregate in dance halls was seen as a major threat to respectability. Dance halls were associated with immoral

⁷⁵ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 52.

⁷⁶ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, May 12, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

behavior and improper sexual activity.⁷⁷ By the 1930s and 1940s, their concern was not focused on working class Afro-Americans as a whole, but that *adolescents* in particular were exposed to moral degradation at a young age, spreading racial decadence. In 1939, the *Louisiana Weekly* explored the problems of youth, "For many months we have lamented the fact that beer parlors and so-called entertainment establishments cater so largely to minors, and have urged civic and religious organizations to protest to proprietors and city authorities."⁷⁸ And as late as 1954, the concern that Afro-American youth were spending too much time at dance halls was studied by sociologist Robert M. Frumkin. Frumkin attempted to assuage the anxieties of parents who thought that their girls were involved in licentious behavior.⁷⁹ The gossip concerning the girl in white mirrored the "respectable" communities concern over beer parlors' association with improper sexuality.

Jeanne Manuel, a light-skinned Creole informant, like Ellen Hill, discussed the politics of gossip in her interview. Manuel also grew up in downtown New Orleans, but in a much nicer home in an aspiring class family. When discussing her clique of friends she said, "Our bunch has a paper now called *Gossip Times*...that's just a little paper we write. Every time we know something about somebody we put it in the paper and things like that." All the *girls* in her clique read and helped write the paper. The boys were not

⁷⁷ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 168, In fact whites were also concerned with what their girls were up to in their spare time. One letter to the editor in a Louisiana paper suggested that youth were drawn into vice by dancing and drinking at beer gardens. This letter was signed by an "anxious parent." See "Expressing the Public Mind: Letters to the Editor," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, August 4, 1936, sec. Letters to the Editor, For an earlier discussion of white fears of dance halls see also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple University Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ "Problems of Youth the Same," *The Louisiana Weekly*, May 20, 1939, sec. Editorials.

⁷⁹ Robert M Frumkin, "Expected Versus Actual Socail Behavoior of Negro Adolescent Girls," *The Journal of Negro Education* (1954): 197-200.

allowed to read the paper because they did not take it seriously (they would rip it up) and because often, they were the subject of the columns. The girls would "just sit and read it and laugh."⁸⁰ The girls of Jeanne's group circulated stories of not only outside girls and boys, but also those of their group as well. Thus, their "Gossip Times" policed their own behavior more than those of others. By making fun of the offenders of 'niceness' they clearly defined appropriate behavior for themselves. Additionally, if any girl stepped outside of the bounds of respectable behavior they knew they would be the subject of ridicule—possibly in their own *Gossip Times*.

The Gender of Fear

The girls interviewed for the Negro Youth Study attempted to express their fears, many of them associated specifically with sex and sexuality. Because the NYS's anthropologists and sociologists' held gendered notions of what constituted rational fear, their attitude is best understood not in the text of the interviews, but in their own interpretations of the girls' and boys' personalities. For adolescent boys, the NYS scholars clearly understood some of the factors that caused high anxiety: lynching, police brutality, and violent encounters with whites. In *Growing up in the Black Belt*, for instance, Charles Johnson dedicated a subheading of a chapter called "Relations with Whites" to the subject of lynching. In so doing, he pointed directly to the adverse psychological affect of white violence saying that lynchings "left a vivid imprint on the minds of youth" and gave the example of one young man who experienced "deep scars of horror, fear, and dismay."⁸¹ In the same chapter though, Johnson failed to mention experiences of interracial sexual violence, or the ways in which girls might fear white

⁸⁰ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, July 14, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

⁸¹ Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt*, 316.

men for different reasons than boys. This omission says a lot about what constituted "rational," understandable, or observable fears in the eyes of the researchers. In *Children of Bondage*, Davis and Dollard reported on the "bitter experiences" one teenager, Chester, experienced. As a young child a white man placed a gun to his back and threatened to shoot him for shouting out a Joe Louis' victory against a white boxer. Davis and Dollard explained, "Such a fear experience would leave any boy more intimidated for future dealings with white people."⁸² So even as the scholars listened carefully for boys' expressions and narratives of fear and anxiety, Allison Davis, John Dollard and Charles Johnson did not clearly hear the girls' articulations—some of the girls' anxieties the experts labeled as irrational while others remained silences that would never fully be expressed.

"Frightened Amazon," the first personality study in *Children of Bondage*, narrates the life story of Julia Wilson and is intended to explore the harsh underworld of a lower class girl. Julia Wilson's personality was defined by Davis and Dollard as dominated by both violent rage and irrational fears. Unfortunately, Julia's interviews are not contained in Alison Davis's or John Dollard's personal papers so the dynamic between Julia and her interviewer is lost. So too are the more complex words and ideas she may have tried to express.

Julia Wilson was a sixteen year old high school student, living in New Orleans when she was interviewed for *Children of Bondage*. Julia was living with her mother and father even though she was recently married (she disliked her husband).⁸³ Children like Julia Wilson, who were deemed violent by the sociologists, were thought to be "[d]riven

⁸² Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 122.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

by strange and unpredictable animosities and by equally mysterious and uncontrollable fears, these individuals are the children of wrath and self-love," argued Davis and Dollard.⁸⁴ They said, "We know...that Julia is subject to chronic irrational fears."⁸⁵ By labeling her fear as "chronic" Davis and Dollard suggested that her fear was a symptom of a disease. In fact, her "uncontrollable" fear was a sign of her thwarted, unhealthy personality.⁸⁶ But her fear of sexual violence rings quite loud, even as Davis and Dollard marked it as "irrational."⁸⁷

Julia's greatest anxiety was the fear of bodily exposure. She was terribly frightened to go to the doctor for fear that he might see her naked, and presumably (though not explicit in Davis and Dollard's text) that he would have to touch her. Instead of going to the doctor when she mistakenly thought she was pregnant, she chose to marry young. Julia admitted, "I was scared. And I didn't want to go to a doctor, I told [my boyfriend], 'cause I didn't like to let [the doctor] look at me. So I married him. When I found that I wasn't going to have a baby, I got mad at him, and I ain't like him no more."⁸⁸ The authors of *Children of Bondage* found Julia's fear of bodily exposure to be "unexpected" particularly because they thought she was promiscuous and interested in relationships with men.

But if sexual violence is highlighted in Julia's story, her fears appear rational and coherent. According to Davis and Dollard, Julia often dreamed of being assaulted by men. And her record had "strange accounts" of men trying to attack her.⁸⁹ When Davis

⁸⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶"uncontrollable" quoted from, Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26-27, 38, 40.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27, 40.

and Dollard wrote that the accounts of assault were "strange" it is unclear if they suggested that these "tales" were merely fictitious stories. Whether they believed the stories to be false or not, Davis and Dollard did not attempt to explain the source; however, they were certain that Julia demonstrated a "definite fear of penetration."⁹⁰ They quickly defined her dreams and fears of sexual attack as a "puzzling" aspect of Julia's otherwise violent and seemingly controlling personality.⁹¹

The dreams that Julia experienced are not as puzzling if one reads them in the wider context of the Jim Crow South and with the other NYS interviews. Both Ellen Hill and Jeanne Manuel also experienced similar dreams. Jeanne dreamed of the danger of a neighborhood man "meddling" her sister. "Meddling" was the word most girls used to describe the inappropriate, unwanted, sexualized behavior of men toward women. Jeanne told her interviewer,

I dreamed [my sister] and I were riding on a train and you were working on the train...I was sitting with [my sister] sewing, then there was an old man who I see all the time and he came up and he meddled [my sister]. I called you and you put him out. I was just screaming when he meddled [her].⁹²

Ellen had a similar dream as Jeanne's. Ellen Hill dreamt that she was being chased by an old man who intended to molest her, which was a scenario that she found rather frightening. She explained, "I didn't want him to know I knew he was following me and I just kept walking faster and faster and faster and so did he and I kept trying to wake myself up...he was an old man with whiskers."⁹³ That Davis and Dollard did not find Jeanne and Ellen's dreams "puzzling" is noteworthy. They assumed that because Jeanne

⁹⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁹¹ Ibid., 27, They say, "There are even more puzzling aspects of Julia's behavior than her fear of accidents, sickness and sexual attack...[she] displays behavior which is often childlike, almost infantile."

⁹² Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, August 2, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

⁹³ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, June 7, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

and Ellen were attempting to live life as nice, respectable girls, that the fear of sexual intercourse, at least, was not unusual. But if the dreams of these three girls are read as a fear of sexual violence, they all appear to be completely rational given the culture of violence in which they all lived.⁹⁴

The only explanation Davis and Dollard could give for Julia's behavior was that she had "a grudge against life itself" because she was born into lower society without a chance for advancement. She was "rejected" from the world, which led to frustration; she responded with "aggression."⁹⁵ By explaining her personality through her violence, Davis and Dollard exposed the limits of the frustration/aggression theories. Their analysis cannot take into account sexual violence as a reason for Julia's fears. They also found that her "deep animosity toward people stem[med] from the hostile demands and the abrupt, traumatic training which she received from her mother and oldest sister."⁹⁶ In other words, Davis and Dollard claimed that the early instruction (feeding, toilet and pacifier training) the women of the family gave to Julia caused her to be overly aggressive and frightened when it came to sexuality. What is missing from Davis and Dollard's presentation of Julia's story is the relationship she had with the men around her as she was growing up. Davis and Dollard briefly mentioned that Julia's father was a bootlegger, whose clients who would give Julia drinks when she was as young as ten.⁹⁷ In addition, Julia's family rented one of their rooms to male lodgers.⁹⁸ Because the records no longer exist, it is unclear if the interviewer ever followed up on these questions. Was Julia sexually abused by any of the many men in her life: the lodgers, her

⁹⁴ See Chapter Two for further discussion of sexual violence, "Defending Her Honor."

⁹⁵ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 41.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

father's customers or one of her doctors? What is known is that Julia did attempt to articulate her fear of sexual violence to the interviewers. But the fear that was reflected in "Frighten Amazon" reads not only as "irrational" but also as imagined.

In *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, Charles Johnson, like Davis and Dollard, did not analyze the possibility of girls being victims of or afraid of sexual violence, either interracial or intraracial. One youth interviewed, Sadie Rudolph, was concerned with her respectability and she constantly attended church as a result. Johnson commented, "The worst sin she thinks, is having a baby before marriage. Then 'I'd miss heaven and go to hell, and I'm working to go to heaven.' The next worst sins in the order named are drinking, killing and stealing."⁹⁹ This fear of hell came from a youth who was herself born to a single mother.¹⁰⁰ Her fear of being tainted sexually was expressed when asked about her feelings towards whites. She said, "[w]hites are all right in their place and ought not to bother colored folks. I am scared of whites when they don't stay in their place. They like colored women."¹⁰¹ Despite the fact that this young woman was expressing a deep-seated fear of white sexual violence, Johnson and his team of researchers asked questions directed toward an uplift mission, and thus focused their questions regarding consensual premarital sex.¹⁰² The emphasis on premarital sexual activity resulted in another silence regarding black girls and the racial border. Not only were their complaints legally silenced, and silenced within white discourse on interracial sex, but their experiences of unwanted sexual contact were often ignored in the discourse of experts.

⁹⁹ Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt*, 8-10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰² Perhaps these glaring silences in Johnson's work were strategic, for if he were to take to seriously sexual terrorism, he may not have been as highly regarded as an "expert."

Johnson, Davis and Dollard were interested in helping usher in modernity for Afro-Americans. At the same time, their gendered analysis of youth's experiences clearly missed some of the most important aspects of growing up a girl under racial segregation. Namely, they neglected the sexual subjectivity of Jim Crow. By focusing on "healthy" proper morals, they missed the cruel realities of girls' sexual lives. A pressure was put on girls by the politics of respectability—some of which the scholars understood—but they mis-stepped when they interpreted respectability as merely and fundamentally about class control and "proper" behavior. Because of their limited view, these scholars failed to see how girls' fears and anxieties were interlaced with their notions of respectability. Moreover, Johnson, Davis and Dollard overlooked the girls' fears and anxieties despite the fact that the interviewees attempted to articulate them to their interviewers.

Respectable Children and Promiscuous Mothers

Many "respectable" people in the black community believed proper parenting by mothers instilled "nice" behavior in girls.¹⁰³ And so, a daughter's behavior was seen as a reflection of her mother's and vice versa. If a mother's respectability was in question, girls feared that their reputation might also be ruined. Many of the psycho-sociological scholars such as Charles Johnson and John Dollard explored maternal failures in producing masculine citizens for America.¹⁰⁴ This generation of scholars suggested that "because all too many black women did not mother successfully, they failed to raise sons equipped to resist racial prejudice."¹⁰⁵ As Ellen Hill's interview demonstrated, mothers were indeed blamed for their children's success and a mother's ignorance was a horrible

¹⁰³ See Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, chap. "Racism as Un-American: Psychology, Masculinity and Maternal Failure in the 1940s" and Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*.

¹⁰⁴ Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, chap. "Racism as Un-American".

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

thing for a child, boy or girl. "And one little colored boy, his mamma is ignorant and doesn't know nothing," explained Ellen, "he's always calling somebody nigger and using bad words. Look like anybody would teach him better, huh?"¹⁰⁶

Because she was so concerned with niceness, Ellen Hill's mother's behavior was a source of extreme anxiety for Ellen during her seventh grade year. I use "anxiety" to mean an overwhelming feeling of fear and/or worry that preoccupies one's thoughts. At times, Ellen's anxiety went farther than occupying her thoughts, it was also written on her body. When Elizabeth Davis first met Ellen she observed that Ellen "seemed quite nervous" and underweight.¹⁰⁷ And when Ellen went to the doctor they noted that her hands and fingers shook.¹⁰⁸

Ellen's worry over her mother's behavior dominated her daily life. During the school year, Ellen's grades plummeted and she went from one of the top students, to one of the worst students in her school. Her grades dropped so low that she was in danger of failing and not being promoted to the next grade. At first, interviewer Elizabeth Davis did not understand Ellen's poor school performance. Later, Davis found that Ellen's mother was pregnant despite the absence of a man in the home and this coincided with Ellen's mysterious behavior at school.¹⁰⁹

At first, Ellen hid her mothers' pregnancy and concealed just how many children were in her family. Ellen began opening up only months after the initial interview. Ellen said that she had been worrying about the pregnancy "plenty." Even after her mother

¹⁰⁶ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, May 2, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

¹⁰⁷ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, March 28, 1938, Allison Davis Papers.

¹⁰⁸ "Clinic Administration Record," May 20, 1939, University of Chicago Special Collections.

¹⁰⁹ See Hill, interview, July 6, 1938; Mrs. Greene, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, May 17, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

began showing, Ellen and her sisters "didn't know she was going to have a baby. Me and Velma used to talk about it most every day and we'd say she looked like she was going to have a baby. Amie would say, 'no, she didn't believe she was.' So we'd just go on talking about it."¹¹⁰ Not knowing if their mother was pregnant caused serious concern for the girls, because they knew the family could not afford another child.

More importantly, their family's reputation was on the line. Despite their constant worry, none of the sisters ever asked their mother if she was pregnant. "None of us had nerve to do that," Ellen explained. That the girls were too afraid to ask their mother about her pregnancy spoke to their fear of an "illegitimate" birth. In their curiosity they did not want to accuse their mother of impropriety. When Elizabeth Davis asked if the father of the baby was someone other than the eldest children's father, Ellen vigorously defended her mother. She said, "Oh no! 'Cause me and Velma counted up...my daddy left in September and she begun to look funny about February so that would be all right."¹¹¹ Even in defending her mother, Ellen exposed the reason for her and her sisters' anxieties. They were indeed worried that their mothers' pregnancy was the result of sex outside of marriage. The girls spent the months before the birth anxiously "counting up." Additionally, Ellen's defense also exposed the moral discourse of right and wrong. Ellen noted that after counting the months, the sisters determined that the pregnancy was "all right."

Ellen's grandmother, Mrs. Greene, was surprised to learn that Ellen tried to hide her mother's pregnancy. But Mrs. Greene quickly interpreted her granddaughters' discomfort: "Children really are funny, now ain't they? But you know--there's no telling

¹¹⁰ Hill, interview, July 6, 1938.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

what [the girls are] thinking. I guess [Ellen's] ashamed...Seven children [her mom's] got now, and with the father away; I guess [the girls] thought it ain't right, but she was that way when [their dad] left her."¹¹² Mrs. Greene articulated the girls' main fear—that the pregnancy "wasn't right." In doing so, she used a word that both her granddaughter and daughter would repeat throughout the interviews: ashamed.

Mrs. Hill, like her own mother, also used the language of shame to articulate her daughter's fear. Moreover, Mrs. Hill felt partially responsible for her girls' anxieties. Ellen's mother knew that because she worked, her daughters could easily get in trouble—particularly trouble with boys. She implied that it was miraculous that none of them had become pregnant, that "something doesn't happen to them." Mrs. Hill was especially saddened because she could not provide a respectable home for her daughters. She told Elizabeth Davis that, "they ain't bad girls, none of 'em. And with me working all the time and the father being drunk, it's a wonder something doesn't happen to them, I'm telling you. But they always say where they're going, and they don't have no bad friends...they oughtn't have to be shamed of their house and their father."¹¹³ Because of the poor behavior of their father, Mrs. Hill was solely responsible for the girls' behavior. She had to work to care for them. And though the drunkenness of the father certainly caused some dishonor to the family's standing—the girls were much more concerned with their mothers' behavior than their fathers'. Once the father left the house, so too did the shame Ellen felt about his alcoholism. He was no longer a reflection of her character.

Ellen's articulation of shame was consistently centered on her family life. The embarrassment that Ellen felt over the lack of a proper home—not to mention the

¹¹² Mrs. Greene, interview, May 17, 1938.

¹¹³ Mrs. Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, October 13, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

possibility of having a promiscuous mother—mortified her. She did not want the light skinned, proper, professor's wife, Elizabeth Davis to see her home, find out about the number of children there, or even talk to her mother. Ellen worried that her mother's social position would keep Davis from viewing her as a nice girl and she was visibly distressed after she found out that Davis had visited her home. It was only after Elizabeth Davis found out about the mother's new baby that Ellen was honest about these embarrassments. In fact, Ellen had even lied in her first interview about her mother's job. She said her mother was a "nurse" and not a domestic worker for a white family.¹¹⁴

The way in which this embarrassment worked is clear in a conversation between Ellen and Elizabeth Davis. Early in the series of interviews, before Ellen started to discuss her mother's pregnancy both honestly and openly, Davis asked Ellen if she was ashamed of being black or of being dark skinned. But Ellen consistently defined her humiliation around her family situation and not her color. When Davis inquired about what Ellen thought of her looks, Ellen responded:

Ellen: "No, I ain't proud of them but I'm not shamed."

Elizabeth Davis: "Of your color?"

Ellen: "It's all right, too. Only where we live I'm shamed and when my father was drunk."¹¹⁵

In this conversation, Davis attempted to begin a discussion specifically about race and skin color. But Ellen refused to discuss her anxieties regarding race. Instead she voluntarily brought the conversation back to a discussion of respectability.

Ellen rarely articulated anxiety over race or color and she seldom mentioned Jim Crow. Those particular anxieties were incredibly difficult for children to express in words

¹¹⁴ Hill, interview, March 28, 1938.

¹¹⁵ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, May 18, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

and perhaps it was difficult for them to even pinpoint their direct fears associated with race and color. More often, these fears are expressed in oral histories or memoirs, as adults narrate their past, and make sense of their coming of age.¹¹⁶ Instead, Ellen insisted, "I wouldn't want to be nothing but Colored." And she unfailingly expressed the sentiment, "I don't want to look white either."¹¹⁷ For Ellen, 'Colored' did not primarily signify second-class citizenship. 'Colored' did not automatically denote promiscuity or vulgarity. Instead, in Ellen's conversations with Elizabeth Davis, racial subjectivity got played out in terms of respectability. None of the stereotypes defining Afro-Americans as second-class citizens applied *if* you were the type of colored person who was educated, clean, and lived a proper, nice life. In some of the first interviews Ellen articulated these feelings fairly clearly. She proclaimed to Davis, "I want to be famous and a credit to my race."¹¹⁸ Ellen said this even as she was struggling to pass her classes in school.

For Ellen then, and probably for many girls coming up during Jim Crow, articulating fears relating to racial violence was incredibly difficult. Through the course of the interviews Ellen was never able to talk about racial violence explicitly. However, there was one notable exception: toward the end of the interview process when Elizabeth Davis and Ellen Hill were close friends, Davis asked Ellen if she had read about the recent lynchings in the black newspaper. Ellen's response exposed her feelings about the complexity of the relationship between white and black in the segregated South:

Colored people ought to start not taking so much. All the good colored people ought to get together and get some guns. Don't let them low class ones know 'cause they'll tell the white folks and then when they get ready to lynch somebody, they ought to start shooting. That's what they ought to

¹¹⁶ Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 108-142.

¹¹⁷ Hill, interview, March 28, 1938.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*.

do. Get up in trees and just shoot every white person you can. They ought to practice shooting so that they could get at least half dozen whites and then if you die, it won't make no difference. Six for one, that's good. That's worth dying for.¹¹⁹

Ellen Hill's response to the local lynching suggests that racial violence indeed affected her psyche. Even as she said she would never want to be anything but Colored, she noted that it would not "make no difference" to die, if one was to die shooting whites. Such a statement by a young teenager reveals the psychic cost of living with racial violence in the Jim Crow South. Further, the violent reaction she had to the newspaper story also exposes her anger toward her social station.

But even as Ellen Hill discussed the possibility of fighting back, she still described black New Orleanians in terms of class. In her estimation, only "good colored people" would make worthy fighters. On the other hand, "low class" colored people would be untrustworthy and unaware of their political stake in self-defense. As Ellen Hill thought about the possibility of a better, safer future, she saw a "good" or "nice" class of black Americans invested in the progress of the race. Even in her hypothetical, Ellen wanted to be classed with the "good" colored people. She couched her fantasy in such a way that allowed her to further distance her self from ignorant "low class" black New Orleanians.

When Elizabeth Davis asked Ellen if she wanted to move to the North, away from the constraints and violence of the South, Ellen responded, "That is alright with me, but I want to go to Tuskegee first. That's Booker T. Washington's school. And then I'll go to the other places. New Orleans ain't a good place for colored; we ain't got nothing here.

¹¹⁹ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, August 4, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

That's why I want to go away. You jus' can't get to be nothing."¹²⁰ Ellen continually mentioned her desire to go to Tuskegee and be like Booker T. Washington. Ellen's concerns about her Jim Crow life in New Orleans motivated her insistence that she wanted to go to Tuskegee. In this way, we see the mundane affects of the psychic violence of segregation.

Her feelings show that it was not segregation specifically that she blamed for her problems, but the inability to reach her dream of a respectable life. Ellen wanted to go to college, become a credit to her race, yet she believed this could not be done in New Orleans. She insisted, "we ain't got nothing here," despite the fact that in 1938 there were two black colleges within the city limits. Because Ellen did not come from a family already deemed respectable, or maybe even because she lived as an outsider on the outskirts of the more stable black Creole downtown neighborhood, Ellen could not see how she could achieve respectability in New Orleans. Ellen said at one point: "There's plenty of [promiscuous] girls like that at Hoffman, but most of the children at Wicker are Creoles and downtown, and I think they're nicer and refined and cleaner too. These uptown people aren't Creoles and they don't care how they dress or look, and come to school anyway."¹²¹ Respectability, as Ellen articulated, in the city and neighborhood in which she lived, was so closely aligned with categories Ellen did not fit into: Creole, light in color, well-off financially (at least enough so that the mother would not have to work, particularly as a domestic).

Ellen's goal of being a Tuskegee graduate and a "credit to her race" revealed her profound concern with niceness. At the very core of Ellen's identity sat purity and

¹²⁰ Hill, interview, March 28, 1938.

¹²¹ Hill, interview, May 2, 1938.

respectability. Her anxiety, fear and worry steamed from the fact that her reputation was all she had to reach these goals. For Ellen, the horror of Jim Crow was not just the daily slights that Afro-Americans faced. It was that and more: the inability to live a life of niceness and success devastated her hopes for a future in New Orleans and her sense of self.

"Awful" Sex

Jeanne Manuel's articulations of "awful" sex exposed the crises of the adolescent moment; a moment of development when she was forced to think about, confront and consider engaging in sexual intercourse. Jeanne was truly afraid of engaging in sex play and confused about what sexual intercourse entailed. In *Children of Bondage* Davis and Dollard correctly concluded, "Some of her sex fears are expressed in the record, but undoubtedly many are not. She looks on the sex act as one with no possibility of pleasure for her, but rather as submission to a kind of assault."¹²²

Jeanne's parents taught her much about her place in New Orleans' segregated society; they taught her of a Creole heritage which included her obligation to her "group" and her obligation to be a nice, respectable girl. A twenty-one year old Dillard University student named Claude Haydel interviewed her.¹²³ Like Jeanne, Haydel was also from a downtown, Creole, New Orleans family; he was the ultimate insider. At the beginning of his report, Haydel noted that Jeanne "cooperated without any hesitancy. She too felt free to talk to me about color, passing for white... because we were both

¹²² Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 152.

¹²³ Age calculated from, Claude Haydel, "New Orleans, Louisiana," in *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930), <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1930usfedcen&recid=37552947>.

Creoles."¹²⁴ Haydel knew the other girls and families in Jeanne's downtown, eighth-ward neighborhood. In fact, one interview illustrated their interrelated histories when Haydel asked Jeanne about a girl in her class. Jeanne said, "You ought to know, you are friendly with her" and "she is going with your cousin."¹²⁵ As Jeanne and Claude Haydel discussed her experiences with sex play and fears of sexual intercourse, the way in which she viewed her own place in New Orleans society became clear.

Jeanne was anxious about sexual intercourse because she had the strong feeling that sex, in all its forms, was morally wrong. Jeanne defined herself as a deeply spiritual person, and thus, Catholicism and morality were closely tied together. Jeanne's sisters teased her about her religious devotion. But Jeanne proudly stated to Haydel, "My sisters are not as religious as me. I am the most religious one out of the children."¹²⁶ Jeanne defined church as a place of reflection, prayer and hushed devotion. "I like the silence in church. You can pray in silence," she said. Haydel pressed Jeanne by suggesting that she was strict Catholic who did not quite understand why she loved church. But Jeanne was insistent; she knew exactly why she loved church, "I told you, I like church because of the silence in church. I like to be around where it's quiet sometimes. I don't like to be where there is always noise." Jeanne's prayers, in the silence of church, were for things she wanted, for the dead who could not pray for themselves and "to make sacrifice to God." Jeanne also regularly attended church so that she could have the courage to "live right."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Claude Haydel, "Jeanne Manuel Abstract," 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹²⁵ Manuel, interview, August 2, 1938.

¹²⁶ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, June 20, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Despite her devotion as a Catholic, Jeanne was also a staunch critic of the sexual politics of the church. It was clear that she had thought deeply about questions of religion, sexuality and morality. When Claude Haydel asked her opinion of the priests in her parish, Jeanne responded thoughtfully,

I don't think priests should like the ladies. After twelve years in the seminary they should have decided whether they were willing to give up the ladies or not. Maybe some of 'em wait until they get old to like the ladies, huh? I know one girl they said the priest liked, and she liked him, but she went away. Another girl the people said liked a priest but she said she was going to be a nun. She is in the convent now. Some of those priests don't do nothing but run around. Some stay out until eleven o'clock at night. Some stay out later since they be around the dances the church give... There should be some changes made. For instance the priest shouldn't be allowed to go out much. They should stay in like the nuns unless they got some place in particular to go. They shouldn't drink so much and fool around [with] ladies and they shouldn't be allowed to live so kingly.¹²⁸

Jeanne was certain in her opposition to priests "liking the ladies." She felt it was their duty to live a life of strict devotion, excluding not only sex, but also alcohol, dancing and worldly things. Her critique of the priests' role in her culture hinged on an analysis of the sexual and gender politics of the church. She saw diverging standards for nuns and priests. She also believed that the priests often were guilty of what she was supposed to refrain from: staying out late and being involved in sexual relationships.

Jeanne's moral code was built on her understanding of right and wrong which was informed by Creole culture. Both of these institutions enforced a particular type of politics of respectability. More than anything, "Creole" signified an ethnic identity in Louisiana. Black Creoles in New Orleans were a tight-knit group of friends, families, and extended kin networks, segregated from white society by Jim Crow laws that defined them clearly as "colored" and also segregated from Anglo-Blacks living in New Orleans

¹²⁸ Ibid.

by culture, history, class and sometimes biases. They placed a high premium on their cultural experiences as a multiracial and multiethnic people, on Catholicism, and their connection to French culture.¹²⁹ Jeanne explained her racial and ethnic identity to Haydel, "There should be three classes of people, white, Creoles, and Colored. It wouldn't matter if they had some dark ones in the Creole group as long as they were nice, but I wouldn't care to go around with them."¹³⁰ This comment exposes the way in which Jeanne understood Creoleness mainly by class and comportment. For Jeanne, "niceness," even more so than skin color, defined her Creole racial/ethnic identity. But her notion of Creoleness also illustrates the complex interrelation of class, color and ethnicity in New Orleans.

Jeanne's identity as a Creole girl also gave her a certain appreciation of her value in her community. According to Jeanne, she did not wish to be white, nor did she look up to or respect whites for their social position. When Jeanne was asked if she liked whites she responded, "No they've got too many conveniences. They've got pools to swim in, parks to play in, nice theaters. They've got everything, and anyhow they don't like us so why should I like them?"¹³¹ And when Jeanne referred to the whites living in her neighborhood she told Elizabeth Davis, "There's plenty ole cheap pecks around."¹³² For Jeanne, class and respectability were important components of identity—more so than race. To emphasize respectability meant that although one might be defined as "Colored" by white society, one's family and community was worth more than that. For

¹²⁹ Bliss Broyard, *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life--A Story of Race and Family Secrets*, Reprint. (Back Bay Books, 2008), 297-99.

¹³⁰ Manuel, interview, June 20, 1938.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Jeanne Manuel, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, June 16, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Jeanne then, low-class whites were no better than her. In fact, they were much worse. One of the reasons they were worse was their inability to live nice, clean lives.

In addition to the influence of her ethnic identity, Jeanne was also persuaded by her friends and popular culture. From these sources (church, Creole culture, popular culture, friends and family) Jeanne built a complex moral code that was completely logical and consistent to her. When Claude Haydel asked if she saw anything immoral about sexual intercourse, Jeanne responded, "I don't see anything in it, in the first place, and I do think it's wrong. People will talk about you if it ever got around. They will say you are indecent and a whole lot of stuff. The girl will be talked about."¹³³ Jeanne clearly articulated community sanctions against nice girls having sexual intercourse. But she also truly believed sex was immoral. When asked about sex after marriage she further clarified her position regarding the morality of sex. Jeanne pointedly questioned the contradictions in the discourse of sexual intercourse, "That's what I don't like about it. It's so wonderful after you are married but it is looked upon as so wrong if you do it before you are married. It should be the same in both cases."¹³⁴ To relieve this contradiction, Jeanne stuck to her belief that sex was "awful" in all situations and under every circumstance.

Because of Jeanne's closeness to her interviewer, Claude Haydel, she felt free to ask him questions about sex that had previously preoccupied her. Her questions reveal an underlying anxiety that sex itself was something frightening. During one interview Jeanne asked, "Do you know what 'paw' means?" When Haydel did not quite understand the question, Jeanne went on to clarify what had perplexed her:

¹³³ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, June 7, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Jeanne: Well, I was reading in a magazine that a movie star said she couldn't stand her husband "pawing her."
Haydel: Did that have an effect on you?
Jeanne: Sure, if she couldn't stand it after marriage she must have thought it was awful, and so I thought it was awful too.¹³⁵

Jeanne's knowledge of sex was heavily influenced by popular culture. Her question reveals that she did not understand the meaning of "pawing" but the context in which she read it lead her to believe that it was "awful" and she may have thought that the "pawing" act of sex was violent. Her question further exposed that Jeanne's fear of sex came from different angles—popular culture, church, home—but also proved that sex was something she had thought a lot about.

Unlike Ellen Hill, who refused to date boys because she despised them, Jeanne had boyfriends; so although Jeanne disliked sex play, she was obligated to put up with boys.¹³⁶ Her clique was composed of both girls and boys who dated one another. It was assumed that pretty Creole girls would grow up and marry a Creole boy from her same downtown neighborhood as the downtown Creole society placed a high premium on marrying the right boy from the same community. Marriage might not come right away, if a girl was destined for college at Xavier University, but it was expected nonetheless.¹³⁷ Accordingly, boy-girl relationships were exceedingly important in Jeanne's social world. She explained to Haydel her relationship with her boyfriends: "I used to let them sit close to me and kiss them now and then, but they always wanted to and I didn't; so it was best

¹³⁵ Manuel, interview, August 17, 1938.

¹³⁶ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, August 1, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

¹³⁷ Wendy Gaudin, "Autocrats and All Saints: Migration, Memory, and Modern Creole Identities" (dissertation, New York University, 2005); Natasha McPherson, "Creole Women of Color and the Making of a Community in 19th-Century New Orleans" (dissertation, Emory University, forthcoming); Darrlyn A. Smith, *The New Orleans 7th Ward: Nostalgia Dictionary, 1938-1965*, Second revised. (Seattle: Jada Inc, 2004); Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Tragic Courship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore, A History of Love and Violence Among the African American Elite* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

that they leave me alone. I don't believe in that very much and surely not all the time like they wanted to."¹³⁸ That Jeanne did not believe in kissing "very much" illustrated her moral uncertainty concerning sex play; kissing was something she struggled with. At the same time, it is clear that she did not want to be as physical as the boys did. Jeanne repeated twice the fact that the boys were much more interested in kissing than she: "they always wanted to" and "all the time," which made clear the boys' intentions. When Haydel asked if she ever went further with her boyfriend she was adamant, "You mean if I ever gave him too many liberties?...No I didn't."¹³⁹

Clyde Haydel's relationship with Jeanne Manuel bordered on inappropriate; at least for a girl like Jeanne, intimate sex talk was extremely provocative, particularly with a college-aged man. She was open with him, but he was prodding her about her sexual fantasies. As she clearly expressed her discomfort with sex and sexuality, it was also clear that the discomfort extended to her relationship with Haydel. The incendiary nature of the relationship was evident when Jeanne discussed with Haydel a dream she had about him: "One evening you were holding me in your arms and asking me for too many liberties and I told you no. Then you kissed me and I disappeared." The dream came to Jeanne after Haydel and Jeanne had discussed getting undressed in front of one's husband. Jeanne believed she had the dream because she had been preoccupied by their conversation when she got home that night. Jeanne found herself in a profound moral

¹³⁸ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, May 18, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹³⁹ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, June 27, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

quandary. She confessed, "I thought about how awful it was and maybe we shouldn't have talked about that."¹⁴⁰

In an interview a few days after Jeanne revealed her dream to Haydel, they revisited the subject. Jeanne admitted that their conversation about sex "was too deep."¹⁴¹ But in that same interview, Haydel continued to push her regarding her view of sex. Haydel suggested that sex was pleasurable in marriage—that two people in love did it willingly. When Haydel had suggested there was enjoyment in sex, Jeanne exclaimed, "Pleasure! Out of something as awful as that? I thought people did that just to have children. Well I guess I'd just have to divorce my husband [if he wanted to have sex]...if he loves me he wouldn't want to do me that."¹⁴²

At the same time that the sexual nature of the conversation with Haydel truly troubled Jeanne, they maintained a unique relationship throughout the interviews. As a downtown Creole, Haydel knew the other girls and families in the neighborhood. Even as he teased Jeanne, he did not ask leading questions; usually, he asked the question in the opposite of what he was sure she would say. For instance, knowing her family background as very light (nearly white looking) Creoles, and being from a similar family background himself, Haydel knew that Jeanne would not want to date a dark-skinned boy. But he asked Jeanne, "Probably you like a sort of dark boy [to date]?" Jeanne responded passionately, "Who? No indeed! I don't like no dark boys. They are all right, but I don't like 'em for myself."¹⁴³ Ultimately, her comfort with Haydel is expressed by

¹⁴⁰ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, August 15, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹⁴¹ Manuel, interview, August 17, 1938.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Jeanne Manuel, interview by Claude Haydel, transcript, May 24, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

her willingness to discuss boys and sex with him despite his teasing and prodding, her sex dreams, and despite the seemingly provocative nature of the topics they discussed.

In *Children of Bondage*, Davis and Dollard concluded that Jeanne's sexuality was repressed because of the social controls of her class status, claiming that she had been trained "too well." They argued,

Jeanne is strongly suppressing her womanly feelings, but they are there none the less, otherwise she would not be afraid of them. It is surely no accident that her dreams show a marked preoccupation with sexual themes, and seem to illustrate quite clearly the punishments for sexual actions. Granted that Jeanne's parents want her to be a virtuous girl, they probably do not want her to shun marriage and parenthood altogether.¹⁴⁴

In their analysis, her fear of sexuality was concrete and comprehensible given her social "caste." Unlike other girls in the study (such as Julia Wilson) whose fear of sexually seemed both bizarre and mysterious to the researchers, Jeanne Manuel's fears appeared to derive strictly from childhood training—the training of her parents, church and class. In their view, her intense dreams stemmed from her frustrated and repressed sexual impulses.

But Jeanne Manuel's fears tell a much more complicated story; her anxiety concerning sex revealed her social development as a teenage girl in the Jim Crow era, while also exposing the way in which girls' subjectivity changed over time. Jeanne's subjectivity was built on ethical grounds. She came to understand herself, and self worth, through her adherence to a moral code that included religiosity, purity, niceness, and a Creole heritage. For Jeanne, these things were all intertwined. Once Jeanne was old enough to have to confront sex and sex play, she found that the components of her identity were wavering. Her fear of sex revealed how unstable certain aspects of her

¹⁴⁴Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*, 153.

subjectivity were at the moment of adolescence. It also showed how, at a moment of crisis, such as experiencing sexual violence, Jeanne's view of her self might be completely altered. It is also impossible to know just how Jeanne's subjectivity shifted once she reached the next phase in her life as a sexually active teenager or adult. However, it is clear that as a teenage girl living in New Orleans, sexual purity was a crucial component to her subjectivity as a black, Creole girl.

Conclusion: Nice Girls in New Orleans

What do Jeanne Manuel and Ellen Hill's fears and anxieties tell us about the confluence of segregation, sexuality and respectability in the late 1930s? First, it is notable that the language of "respectability" permeated different segments of the black community to such an extent that proper conduct was on the minds of young girls who policed their own behavior. "The politics of respectability" was not just a discourse coming from reformers, writers and the black elite. Teenage girls also spoke their own language of respectability, a language that was specific to their daily lives.

Second, sexuality—and chastity—were at the core of both girls' identities. For Ellen, preserving the "nice" girl image was a challenge. She constantly worried that soon, she wouldn't be 'nice' enough for high (or middle or educated) class society. Jeanne Manuel's nice girl image was a reflection of a cultural/ethnic identity as a Creole girl, just as it was a self-fashioned religious and moral subjectivity. Through the interviews, we see that during segregation, the identity of respectable, nice girls was one of the few things black girls could hold onto. It was something that made both Jeanne and Ellen feel special and proud.

To what extent are these conclusions about girls' fears and anxieties singular to a couple of girls who were interviewed in 1938? Is there anything we can learn from these stories about the cultural dynamics of New Orleans and, even possibly, the wider segregated South? Jeanne's and Ellen's stories highlight some of the tensions specific to divisions in New Orleans society along the lines of skin color, ethnic background and class. Jeanne's insistence that there should be at least three classes of people—Colored, Creole and white—was intertwined with a politics of both color and niceness. She said, "It wouldn't matter if they had some dark ones in the Creole group as long as they were nice."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, niceness in Jeanne's definition of Creole trumped color. The existence of a black Creole culture that stressed niceness, and to some extent separateness, meant that the language of respectability circulating in New Orleans was one that also worked to delineate one ethnic community from another. This is seen in Ellen Hill's interview when she echoed a discourse of respectability based on ethnic notions of niceness: "the children at Wicker are Creoles and downtown, and I think they're nicer and refined and cleaner too."¹⁴⁶ Certainly, this association between Creoleness and niceness is specific to the French/Spanish then Anglo post-colonial context existent in New Orleans.¹⁴⁷

Still, there are aspects of Ellen Hill and Jeanne Manuel's story that have connections to the wider history of the American South and to African American life in this period more generally when it came to the issue of sexuality and respectability. For Afro-American girls living in the Jim Crow South, Ellen Hill and Jeanne Manuel's stories

¹⁴⁵ Manuel, interview, June 20, 1938.

¹⁴⁶ Hill, interview, May 2, 1938.

¹⁴⁷ That is to say, the way in which niceness defines ethnic differences within the black community seems specific to the New Orleans context. However, we may find that within the black community in other spaces—particularly urban spaces—respectability might work to delineate differences between other groups of African Americans as well. And, in fact, we have already seen this at work with respectability in regards to class.

remind us that girls' sexual subjectivity was a complex construction made from knowing and living segregation, but also of their interactions, play and response to the discourses of respectability that circulated throughout the black community. As I previously noted, purity and niceness remained one of the few positive identities for black girls. This is an extremely important point to remember, and clarifies even further the double bind within which Hattie McCray found herself in when she confronted Charles Guerand.

Chapter 4:

"Relationships Unbecoming of a Girl Her Age": Stigmatized and Refashioned Girls at the Convent of the Good Shepherd

Behind the high brick walls, shut away from the bustle and pulsating life of the city stands the old established House of the Good Shepherd, a holy retreat for many world worn girls and women who find there with the good sisters quiet for their souls, work for their hands and consolation for their bruised spirits.

-Mrs. Joseph E Freund, New Orleans 1937¹

The bulky brick building of the House of the Good Shepherd sat in downtown New Orleans on the corner of Bienville and N. Broad. A concrete wall, cracked from age and adorned with iron work, separated the property from its neighbors. At the entrance the name "Good Shepherd" announced the building to the surrounding community, visitors and passersby. At the heart of the convent stood the chapel; all visitors were funneled through its doors. Inside, white nuns worked to rehabilitate the "world worn girls" of New Orleans—both black and white. The building was an imposing site of church, municipal and parental authority in downtown New Orleans. The convent's centrality in the black community and the visibility of the building ensured that all girls noticed its presence.

Many black women who grew up in New Orleans in the first half of the twentieth-century remember clearly the House of the Good Shepherd, although the actual building was knocked down decades ago. Some recall that their parents used to regularly threaten

¹ "Interpreters Give Intimate View of Chest Agencies," *The Times-Picayune*, August 29, 1937.

to send them there.² This threat was so ubiquitous that it was featured in Darrlyn Smith's *New Orleans 7th Ward Nostalgia Dictionary*. Under the entry "House of Good Shepherd" Smith wrote, "institution for wayward girls located on Bienville and Broad. Parents threatened to enroll girls who misbehaved."³ While some women remember the threat of being sent to the House of the Good Shepherd, others distinctly recall the coercive force suggested by the physical structure. Uptowner Lily Braud remembered seeing girls peer out the windows. From her vantage point, the girls looked trapped inside as if they were in a jail. Braud believed that if she behaved badly enough, she too would be locked inside the brick building that held sorrow filled faces.⁴

The enclosed structure of the building, along with the nuns and girls cloistered inside, created a grim aura. Although many women remember the House of the Good Shepherd, very few remember the sisters or *why* girls were actually sent there; the convent, though familiar, remains a mystery. Most women, thinking back, suspected that the girls were either in trouble with their parents or pregnant or both. The mystery of the House of the Good Shepherd was not singular to black New Orleans; white New Orleanians also recall the House of the Good Shepherd. Furthermore, postwar homes for delinquent girls and maternity homes throughout the country were, as one historian has noted, "gothic attic[s] obscured from the community by the closed curtains of gentility and high spiked fences."⁵ The physical structure, its geography, the mystery and threat of the House of the Good Shepherd worked to discipline the girls of New Orleans. Its very

² Eugenia Addams, interview by LaKisha Simmons, digital, March 2007, In possession of author.

³ Darrlyn A. Smith, *The New Orleans 7th Ward: Nostalgia Dictionary, 1938-1965*, Second revised. (Seattle: Jada Inc, 1996), 46.

⁴ Conversation with Lily Braud, LaKisha Simmons, November 16, 2008.

⁵ Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2000), 104.

existence signified and confirmed a dividing line between the social categories of "nice" and "bad" girls.

To reconstruct the world of the House of the Good Shepherd, I have gathered a variety of sources detailing the secretive institution: photographs, census data, reports on the methods of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, court documents, newspaper articles and monographs on the subject of female delinquency. These sources come from different years, even different decades, each divulging only a tiny portion of the whole story. Nonetheless, from these sources the world of the House of the Good Shepherd emerges, as it provides a striking contrast to that inhabited by "nice" girls.

This chapter considers the experiences of African American girls that led them to be confined at the House of the Good Shepherd and stigmatized as "bad girls." Girls identified as delinquent by municipal and church authorities certainly resisted those disciplining powers. I do not, though, have access to documents that would tell that particular story; instead, I lay out the ways in which "retraining" delinquent girls became religious work to clear them of sexual sins. Although the House of the Good Shepherd was a space where black girls' bodies were both disciplined and policed, I nonetheless suggest that the convent functioned, at times, as a safe space away from sexual abuse.

The chapter begins by briefly tracing the roots of the Good Shepherd, and then reconstructs what the girls may have experienced on entering, staying at and then leaving the convent. The stories of three specific young women, Ramona, Danielle and Sarah, who were sent to the House of the Good Shepherd by the local court system, reveal the convent's function as a disciplinary apparatus of the Jim Crow state. From two of these stories in particular, a fuller picture emerges of the constraints faced by girls, such as

neglect and domestic abuse, that led them to transgress norms for respectability and to pursue paths of pleasure. Once these young women entered the convent, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd sought to turn them into Catholic subjects by regulating pleasure and simultaneously regulating racial and cultural norms.

Tracing the Roots of the Good Shepherd

Examining the world of the House of the Good Shepherd proves rewarding even though the records of the convent often obscure as much as they reveal.⁶ At first glance, the mysterious building seems without context—separate from the city that surrounded it. Yet its development closely mirrored the period in which it was founded. Established in New Orleans in the 1850s during a period of female moral reform, the convent embraced change only reluctantly.⁷ Furthermore, the House of the Good Shepherd's story is deeply tied to the racial politics of the South, as well as the particularities of New Orleans. It was one of very few biracial reform homes in the South and the only biracial Convent of the Good Shepherd in the South.⁸ The facility was biracial, rather than integrated, because within its walls wards were segregated by race.

⁶ The story of the home provides a significant revision to the historiography of female moral reform, female delinquency and the history of wayward (or fallen) young women. Understanding the historiography in relation to the House of the Good Shepherd highlights the importance of the struggles between the church and the professionalization of city officials.

⁷ Typically, feminist scholars concerned with delinquent (or wayward) young women have focused on the historical shifts between four distinct periods in American history: moral reform movements of the mid to late nineteenth-century, the Progressive Era and its aftermath, the era of the Great Depression, and Post-World War II. For discussions of these periodizations see, Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1986); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*; Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸ See Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 68-70; Tennessee had biracial state reform homes, but the House of the Good Shepherd in Memphis was white-only. See, Jennifer Trost, *Gateway to Justice: The Juvenile Court and Progressive Child Welfare in a Southern City* (University of Georgia Press, 2005), 35, 136-137. In 1940 three House of the

The Order of the Good Shepherd traces back to a seventeenth-century community of cloistered nuns in Angers, France, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge. Reorganized in 1835 they became the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; some of these Sisters were silent and cloistered—praying for fallen women—while others worked to redeem wayward girls. Soon, Houses of the Good Shepherd were established throughout the United States. The order opened a convent in New Orleans in 1859, just prior to the start of the Civil War.

The first three vows of any order are poverty, chastity and obedience; after these, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd pledged "to labor for the salvation of souls."⁹ They toiled for girls' spirits by vowing to reform those who had fallen into sin. In 1866, Mother Superior Mary of St. Terese begged the New Orleans' community for donations to the cause of the Good Shepherd. She promised future success based on their past accomplishments of "rescuing fallen women from the mire of sin and awakening her soul once more to a consciousness of virtue of God and of heavenly hope."¹⁰ In the same year, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd moved their walled convent to the corner of Bienville and Broad, in downtown New Orleans. They would remain in that location for

Good Shepherd's locations served both black and white girls, yet the New Orleans location was the only one in the segregated South (the other two were in Oarhage, Ohio and Peekskill, New York). Three other Houses of the Good Shepherd were colored only (Baltimore, Maryland, Louisville, Kentucky and Germantown, Pennsylvania). See, John Thomas Gillard, *Colored Catholics in the United States: an Investigation of Catholic Activity in Behalf of the Negroes in the United States and Survey of the Present Condition of the Colored Missions* (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1941), 227; Also, Carrie, a "colored girl" was sent to the New York House of the Good Shepherd "but returned to the Court on account of her color." See William I. Thomas, "The Unadjusted Girl: With Cases and Standpoint for Behavior Analysis," *Criminal Science Monographs*, no. 4 (1923): 108; "Sisters of the Good Shepherd," <http://www.goodshepherdsisters.org/beginnings.htm>

⁹ "The Good Shepherd," *Catholic Louisiana*, 1909; Roger Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans, Louisiana," ca 1924, Roger Baudier Historical Collection, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

¹⁰ Sister Mary, of St. Terese, "At the Raffle, for the Benefit of the Convent of Good Shepherd," *The New Orleans Times*, January 21, 1866.

nearly a century.¹¹ The convent was supported financially by public funds from the city chest of New Orleans, the Associated Catholic Charities of Orleans Parish (ACC), and by charitable contributions.¹²

The Sisters in New Orleans, unlike other locations in the United States, took in girls and young women from all class levels, religions, races and ethnicities, but they were especially indispensable to the black community.¹³ Like other southern cities, New Orleans did not have a publicly funded delinquency home designated for black girls even up into the 1950s.¹⁴ In most Southern cities, therefore, black girls picked up by the authorities were often sent to jail with adult criminals. In New Orleans, however, girls might also be sent to the House of the Good Shepherd, or other smaller orphanages and asylums that accepted black children. Each year the Sisters of the Good Shepherd took in about 180 girls.¹⁵ About fifty black girls and a slightly higher number of white girls occupied the convent at any time. Sister Mary Raymond explained to the Archbishop in 1950: "At present we have sixty four-white girls which is more than we have had for quite some time, and the number of our colored sheep remains about fifty."¹⁶

The Convent of the Good Shepherd further expanded its reach during the Progressive era (roughly the 1890s-1920s). Progressive moral reform movements such as

¹¹ Thomy Lafon, a Black Creole businessman and philanthropist left twenty thousand dollars to the institution after his death in 1893. The money was used to construct an additional brick building for the convent. "Lafon Home," *The Daily States*, November 10, 1896.

¹² "Archdiocese of New Orleans- Institutions Annual Report," 1942, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

¹³ See Trost, *Gateway to Justice*, 35, 136-137; Thomas, "The Unadjusted Girl," 108.

¹⁴ "Will Aid in Care of Delinquents," *Times-Picayune*, 1949; "School for Delinquents Crowded, Busy," *Item*, May 6, 1951, Susan Cahn explores Afro-American struggles to obtain delinquency homes for black girls in the South; see Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 68-97.

¹⁵ For numbers, see *The Official Catholic Directory: Anno Domini 1930* (New York: Kenedy and Sons, Publishers, 1931) through *The Official Catholic Directory: Anno Domini 1954* (New York: Kenedy and Sons, Publishers, 1955).

¹⁶ Sister Mary of St. Raymond to Most Reverend Jos. F. Rummel, December 21, 1950, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) sought governmental regulation of morality.¹⁷ White Progressive activists expressed deep concern for working-class white girls and young women who inhabited the dangerous modern city.¹⁸ These white purity activists launched a national campaign to raise age of consent laws to align with new notions of childhood, adolescence, and virginal innocence.¹⁹ In Louisiana, the age of consent rose from twelve years in 1885 to eighteen by 1920.²⁰ Simultaneously, among middle and aspiring class black activists, there existed a similar "moral panic" over poorer black female migrants coming into large, dangerous cities from rural areas.²¹ White and black activists both believed fallen women were victims of a combination of vicious men, poor moral education, and substandard living conditions in the dangerous, modern city.

Due to new statutes regulating vice and raising the age of carnal knowledge of a minor, the House of the Good Shepherd began receiving more girls from the city—girls who had been through the newly powerful local court system. Previously, black and white girls had been placed in the convent mainly by their parents or guardians. But during the early twentieth-century, girls were sent to the convent by the courts for recuperation, reeducation, redemption and possibly even protection. In the late 1920s, the Associated Catholic Charities of Orleans Parish (ACC) was established. Their office oversaw the children and youth sent to the House of the Good Shepherd and other

¹⁷ During the Progressive Era, New Orleans established the most notorious vice district in 1897: Storyville. Storyville was closed during WWI. Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 106-107

¹⁸ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 170, 179.

¹⁹ Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 14, 36-37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14, 36.

²¹ Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 738-755.

Catholic charitable organizations.²² Although understaffed (in the 1940s they had only one social worker), this move represented the professionalization impulse of charities during the Progressive era. However, the House of the Good Shepherd remained an outlier—though the ACC brought access to a social worker, the convent continued to be run by religious women without specific training in the field of social work, psychology or health. And unlike many other Progressive reform homes, the House of the Good Shepherd continued to rely on religious moral training as the primary mode of rehabilitation.

By the 1930s, therefore, the Convent of the Good Shepherd operated with a complex notion of sin and piety influenced by definitions of immorality from different decades. This fact makes tracing the Good Shepherd's methods all the more complicated. On the one hand, the growing professionalization of the Progressive era penetrated the walls of the convent through the city courts, the children's bureau, and the ACC. But on the other hand, descriptions written about life behind the walls from 1909, and during the 1910s and 1920s, and 1940s tell overlapping and similar stories that reveal the sisters' unyielding commitment to older ideals of industry, confession and penance, despite the fact that the city on the other side of the wall and similar charity organizations were undergoing secularization and professionalization. This is not to say the Sisters' methods did not change over time.

Beginning around 1939, the Sisters at the convent struggled with a newly appointed judge to the juvenile court: Anna Veters Levy. The arguments and politicking that ensued centered on who would have ultimate authority over the girls' bodies—the

²² Mildred Lyons Reese, "A Study of the Social and Economic Factors in Twenty Selected Cases of Neglected and Delinquent Children under Care of the Associated Catholic Charities, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1948-1949" (Atlanta University, 1950).

state or the Sisters. Judge Levy objected to what she saw as the convent's antiquated methods of dealing with juvenile delinquents. Furthermore, the basis of her concern stemmed from an important philosophical debate over the role of professionalization and religion in reforming girls. Her job, Levy contended in a meeting with the Sisters, required that she "remove children from such institution when the care and discipline of children committed to such institution is found to be unsatisfactory."²³

The House of the Good Shepherd operated on a program of authoritarian domesticity—inherited from an earlier period of female moral reform.²⁴ The girls were, at least in part, inmates at the convent. In addition to the school day and periods of industrial training, wards had a strict work schedule where they worked as laundresses. In essence, the Sisters became the parental authority of the wards and they wielded this power to make sure the girls behaved. The Sisters' believed their power came from above, from God through the auspices of the Catholic Church. Once Judge Levy stepped in, however, the Sisters influence was challenged. Levy's authorial hand became mightier than that of the Sisters. Levy saw the role of the Convent of the Good Shepherd as simply an auxiliary of state authority—and nothing more.²⁵ She protested the fact that parents might actually send their children to the convent without governmental approval. She told the Sisters, "Girls should not be accepted in institutions unless placed there by the juvenile courts of this state...in no event should a girl be accepted directly from her

²³ "Memorandum of Conference Held at the Convent of the Good Shepherd," July 18, 1941, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

²⁴ On female moral authority and "authoritarian domesticity" see, Ryan, *Women in Public*, 101-102.

²⁵ On "maternal justice" and female judges in the Progressive Era see, Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 128-156; Trost, *Gateway to Justice*.

parents, relations, guardians...unless placement is approved by a juvenile court."²⁶ In her court, municipal authority trumped that of the church and the Sisters' domestic sphere.

The Sisters complained to the bishop about Judge Levy's attempts at belittling their authority over the girls. The Sisters believed that Levy talked "disparagingly" about them, their religious program and their medical services in open court and in conferences with parents.²⁷ When a sixteen year old (white) girl told the judge she wished to stay at the convent rather than go to the all-white state institution in Alexandria because Sister Madeleine had told her she would not be able to practice Catholicism at Alexandria, Judge Levy became upset with the Sister. Allegedly, Judge Levy told the girl: "You can tell Sister Madeleine for me that she is guilty of Contempt of Court and I'll certainly tell her myself when this hearing is over."²⁸

Levy's education (bachelors, masters, and law degrees from local segregated universities) as well as her professional standing, gave her the authority to 'objectively' critique the Sisters' work. In juvenile justice, "there is no punishment to be weighed and no need for show of power or authority in dealing with children," Levy argued in a book she published about her years in the juvenile court.²⁹ Levy suggest that the convent hire professionals, such as lay teachers, social workers and especially nurses, did not want the wards to work at the laundry center, she objected to the wall enclosing the structure, the mixture of girls of different ages, and she demanded a clearer attention to the girls' education.³⁰ The Sisters resisted the changes Levy proposed, partially because they did

²⁶ "Memorandum of Conference Held at the Convent of the Good Shepherd."

²⁷ Sister Bernard to Most Reverend Jos. F. Rummel, April 15, 1943, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

²⁸ Jos. Jacobi, "Summary of Cases and Action taken by Judge Levy in Juvenile Court, April 1942," June 25, 1942, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

²⁹ Anna Judge Veters Levy, *Other People's Children* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 278.

³⁰ "Memorandum of Conference Held at the Convent of the Good Shepherd."

not have the money to radically reform the space of the convent or hire the professionals Levy wanted working with the girls. But by the mid-1950s, the Sisters began readjusting the ways in which they approached redemption. And, in 1955 they began raising funds for a new building that would take into account new methods for dealing with delinquent girls. Nonetheless, the shifts in method do not fit neatly (or at all) within the trajectory of reform schools and maternity homes familiar to the historiography.³¹

On Entering: Stigmatized Bodies Come to the Convent

"Blues, narcotics and sex are virtually running away with New Orleans youth" reported *The Louisiana Weekly* in 1951.³² In a special, two-week, front-page report, the newspaper followed two recently hired Afro-American juvenile officers who worked with the city's black juvenile delinquents. The officers explained that while parents were away, youth went to "sordid places" and made contact with "questionable characters." The first article centered on girls' sexuality, which was believed to be particularly problematic. The officers claimed: "Girls, especially, who have been the victims of carnal knowledge are invariably from broken homes whose fathers and mothers are carrying on illicit relationships with companions before the children... In many cases such girls have practically no relationship with boys of their own age levels and want none."³³ These girls, if picked up by police officers, would be arrested, sent to the House of the Good Shepherd and labeled "sexually delinquent."

³¹ For example see, Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*; Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*. However, the shifts that Odem and Solinger sketch out do not fit nicely onto the story of the House of the Good Shepherd. Some of the trends that Odem observes in California, and Solinger sees with maternity homes, are nonetheless true with New Orleans as well.

³² "Youngsters in Drovers are Straying from 'Straight and Narrow' Path, Officers Find," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 17, 1951.

³³ *Ibid.*

During the decades that the House of the Good Shepherd served New Orleans, the girls sent there were identified by the stigmatized categories of "fallen," "wayward," or "delinquent."³⁴ Each of these terms relied on associated meanings of upright, normal, nice. Both "fallen" and "wayward" directly evoked movement from a pure state to an impure one. Delinquent girlhood only made sense in opposition to proper girlhood; stigma always works in relation to a set of ideological norms.³⁵ As I explored in the previous chapter, a language of niceness was used to express proper girlhood by middle and aspiring class Afro-Americans. Nice girls wore their cleanliness: well-cared for clothes, a clean body and well-kept hair. These were all physical markers of proper girlhood. Furthermore, sexual purity denoted nice behavior: a nice girl's body was not only clean, but also innocent. Not surprisingly then, definitions of waywardness and delinquency centered on the impurity of the body. As the 1951 *Louisiana Weekly* article implied, "delinquent" girls hung out in distasteful, dirty places and were sexually impure.

Delinquency was defined as a major social problem in the United States during the Depression, World War II and Postwar years. The problem of youth was studied by reporters, sociologists, psychologists, religious and lay reformers, judges, juvenile courts and police. Notions of delinquency overlapped with fears that boys and girls were developing improper or dangerous masculinity and femininity. In the 1930s and 1940s, delinquent black girls were defined as unclean. Their bodies, tattered clothing, and the

³⁴ "Fallen" was the popular term in the nineteenth-century. But as early as the 1890s the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were beginning to use the term "wayward." "Wayward" was often used in the local paper through the 1930s—but was sometimes used even in the 1940s. "Delinquent" was most common in the 1940s and 50s. John J. Delaney, "Catholic Reformatory Agencies," 1897, National Conference on Social Welfare Proceedings Papers, University of Michigan Digital Library Text Collection; "Interpreters Give Intimate View of Chest Agencies"; "Juvenile Delinquency and Inadequate Recreational Facilities," *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 2, 1947.

³⁵ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), 16-17. To be a stigmatized individual means to have "an attribute that is deeply discrediting." See, *Ibid.*, 19.

poverty surrounding them became stigma signs—markers of their abnormality and failure to live up to standards of proper girlhood.³⁶ Of course, access to the clothing, proper washing facilities and a well-kept home environment (which were basic requirements for 'niceness') were class-specific. Girls who lived in poorer families were much more likely to be blamed for delinquency. Journalists, researchers and reformers declared that filthy living spaces created unclean bodies which, in turn, led to immorality. A 1937 article in *The Louisiana Weekly* clearly linked filth with juvenile crime in an article, "Youth, Crime, and Squalid Homes." The author addressed children living in "sub-standard homes" and "squalor," arguing that the poverty located primarily in the slums of the city created immoral youth that might eventually rot the whole "super-structure of society." The only cure for this type of delinquency was work to ensure "proper environment."³⁷ The link between poverty and delinquency was especially emphasized in the case of Afro-American juvenile crime and immorality.³⁸ Delinquency, then, was defined in black communities as specifically an urban (slum) problem.³⁹ According to commentators, this problem existed in all cities throughout the United States.

Consequently, lower-class urban girls were thought to be in more danger of sexual immorality than their middle-classed counterparts. Allison Davis's research echoed this popular notion of criminality when he explained "aberrant youth" by invoking the classed notion of respectability versus delinquency: "When one observes the aberrant sexual, educational, and 'legal' behavior of a large portion of Negro

³⁶ Ibid., 58-64.

³⁷ "Youth, Crime, and Squalid Homes," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 6, 1937.

³⁸ For a sensationalized novel (written by a white, male writer) that explored the supposed links between slums, aberrant sexuality, delinquency and race see I.S. Young, *Jadie Greenway: A Novel* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947).

³⁹ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt: Negro Youth In the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1941), 186-187.

adolescents... the first thing one learns is that there are major differences of behavior within the Negro group, according to economic levels."⁴⁰ The connections between poverty, lack of supervision, filthy environments and immoral bodies all coalesced in the medical and sociological literature on diseased black bodies. Diseased Afro-Americans were already stigmatized—assumed by doctors, reformers and researchers to have failed to live up to a proper mode of living, thus deserving of their fate in sickness. For example, the Urban League's southern director, Nelson Jackson, explained that the spread of venereal diseases among southern African Americans was due, not to prostitution, but to promiscuity. This promiscuity was easily blamed on unsupervised black girls:

[I]t is the teen-age girl who furnishes much of the [sexual] activity. These girls quite often live in communities which do not offer sufficient group work and recreation facilities or other normal outlets for expression. Their recreational outlets frequently take the form of nightly visits to taverns and 'juke-joints' where men in uniform congregate. From there they are taken by soldiers to cheap hotels and rooming houses by taxi cab drivers or wander off to dark places where illicit sexual activity occurs.⁴¹

These promiscuous, diseased girls were defined in opposition to girls who engaged in "normal" behavior. The black girls engaged in "illicit" sex were assumed to have venereal disease, and to have failed in having fun like a normal girl. An intriguing slip occurs in his narrative: Jackson seems to blame all black girls, rather than just aberrant girls. He argues that "the teen-age girl" is responsible for sexual activity.

The association between unclean homes, unclean bodies and immorality may at first seem an odd one. Yet the coupling of moral health and cleanliness had a long standing in American life. During the 1880s-1920s, eugenics—inspired by eugenics—

⁴⁰ Allison Davis, "The Socialization of the American Negro Child and Adolescent," *The Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 3 (July 1939): 266-7.

⁴¹ Nelson Jackson, "Community Organization Activities among Negroes for Venereal Disease Control," *Social Forces* 23, no. 1 (October 1944): 66.

argued that clean home spaces promoted physical and moral health for children.⁴²

Furthermore, the physical body is a boundary, the only thing separating the outside (a filthy home for example) from the interior of an individual (one's moral core, such as her soul). The bodily boundary is always fragile. The outside and inside are connected through pores, mouths and sex organs: dirt, dust and disease from the outside can make their way inside. In 1944, an article in the Afro-American newspaper, *The New York Amsterdam News*, explored the ways in which the filth of the "ghettoes" of New York infiltrated the bodies of children living there:

[T]he average Harlem home...is filthy, insanitary and unfit for the normal life of youth. Water-soaked and foul-smelling apartments, basements, infested by bugs, roaches and other vermin...are the homes in which too many Negro children must spend long hours or parade through the streets and expose themselves to other kinds of unhealthy conditions... [T]here, five occupy a single room in which they cook, wash, eat, dance, drink hard liquor and engage in debauchery before the very eyes of their children.⁴³

This discussion of delinquency exposed the fragile boundary between inside and outside. In the "filth," residents ingested food and drink that had laid around in insanitary conditions, they washed their bodies (normally a good thing) not with cleanliness but with the dirt that surrounded them, they danced, resulting in heated bodies and sweat inside the home and had sex.

The "filth" written on poor girls' bodies identified them as members of an urban lower-class and as social outcasts. Uncleanliness became a stigma symbol for reformers—a mark of debasement, leading the juvenile courts, officers and judges or

⁴² See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 141-172.

⁴³ "Indifference Aids Delinquency Rate," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 8, 1944.

nuns to see young women as immoral and incapable of caring for themselves.⁴⁴ Written on poor girls' bodies then, was the unseemly femininity and immorality that was a sexualized product, "bred" in the "slums" of urban America.⁴⁵

Through their methods of reformation, the House of the Good Shepherd offered delinquent girls the opportunity for a moral reeducation, a refashioning of self through the secluded space of the convent. In 1942 the head of the Associated Catholic Charities (ACC) explained: "[The] program is predicated on the belief that religion is a prime factor in sound social case work treatment and is the strongest force we have in rehabilitating morally weak and delinquent girls."⁴⁶ The girls in the Sisters' care were already socially stigmatized—they were believed to be "morally weak" and incapable of making sound choices for themselves. But, what exactly, were the sins for which girls of the Good Shepherd were guilty? Between 1930-1954, girls came to the Sisters for a wide array of sins. Parents might send their children to the Sisters if they misbehaved or were "ungovernable."⁴⁷ The juvenile courts sent girls who were caught stealing, drinking or disturbing the peace.⁴⁸ In 1942, the executive director of the Associated Catholic Charities wrote to the bishop and included a review of cases that went before New Orleans's juvenile courts. Most of these summaries do not mention the girls' race, but they do provide clues into how Good Shepherd girls came to be confined at the convent,

⁴⁴ Goffman, *Stigma*, 58-64.

⁴⁵ For example, W.A. Mason, "Community Organization Activities among Negroes for Venereal Disease Control: Discussion," *Social Forces* 23, no. 1 (October 1944): 71

⁴⁶ H. Jos. Jacobi to Most Reverend Jos. F. Rummel, June 25, 1942, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁴⁷ "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund," ca 1955, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁴⁸ For example, a fifteen year old found at an interracial party was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd. For more on the party see Chapter 5: "Broken Hearts and Make Believe." See also, "Arrest, Fine, 64 at Mixed Youth Party in New Orleans," *Chicago Defender*, February 19, 1949. For example of other petty crimes see, "Camp St. Yields Child B-Drinker," *Item*, October 29, 1949.

while revealing the ways in which disease was used by the Sisters and the court to mark girls as sexually delinquent.⁴⁹ Although they came for a variety of reasons, over half of the girls who arrived at the House of the Good Shepherd were accused of improper sexual activity. Even more were marked as sexually promiscuous once they entered.⁵⁰

In the available documents, improper sexuality was usually recorded in relation to "carnal knowledge" charges brought up on the girls' adult male abusers or partners. But girls were also accused of being entertainers in "night club of ill repute," married to or living with men whom parents disapproved, or, simply, "in need of medical attention" which the girl and parents ignored.⁵¹ The comments in the House of the Good Shepherd case files referring to the girls' medical state illustrates the ways in which the ACC and the Sisters believed that measuring disease likewise measured immorality. Sin was written on the body. In one record the Sisters noted: "the judge was inclined to allow girl to go home before medical information was brought out."⁵² In other words, the Sisters wanted to use the "medical information" in court as a reason for further detaining the young woman at the convent. In these cases, the Sisters knew (with physical, somatic proof) that the House of the Good Shepherd girls were guilty of immoral activity and this medical proof seemed reason enough for them to keep a girl interned inside the convent. Accordingly, the transgression of premarital sex was written on the body of the wards.

⁴⁹ I can deduce the youth's race if they were later sent to a segregated institution.

⁵⁰ This estimate is calculated based on a small sample of cases seen in juvenile court in April of 1942 and July 1940- July 1941. See Jacobi, "Summary of Cases and Action taken by Judge Levy in Juvenile Court, April 1942"; Jos. Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Nix," June 25, 1942, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans; Jos. Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave," June 25, 1942, House of the Good Shepherd Papers, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁵¹ See, for example, Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave."

⁵² Ibid.

The sin of improper sexuality was a crime of action; the sinful act was then caught in the body through a wicked disease.

After a girl was admitted to the House of the Good Shepherd, she was given a medical exam by the convent nurse.⁵³ The records constantly referred to girls' medical status: a "four plus Wassermann report," "remained in the Convent of the Good Shepherd because of need of medical treatment," or "girl in need of medical treatment which parents ignore."⁵⁴ A Wasserman test determined whether or not a ward was afflicted with syphilis.⁵⁵ This test was commonly used on prostitutes, delinquent girls, and black men despite the fact that it was notoriously unreliable. A frequently cited 1919 survey of 100 (white) Louisville prostitutes, for example, gave each subject the Wassermann test and noted that every single one had venereal disease.⁵⁶ The fact that prostitution and delinquency were conflated at this time is not surprising. According to the criminal courts, reformers and doctors, syphilis and gonorrhea were two venereal diseases that denoted immorality and criminality in women.⁵⁷

Black women and teens, though, were already always defined as promiscuous, and were thus less likely to be blamed for prostitution—their regular sexuality was dangerous enough.⁵⁸ Their bodies, just like those of black men, were viewed by the

⁵³ Although the available records do not *specify* if this exam was a pelvic exam, it must be assumed that it was—as the medical reports recorded girls' venereal diseases. Presumably the convent nurse would also make a judgment regarding the girls' chastity while looking for STDs. This was indeed the case in California at the reform homes studied by Mary Odem. See, Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 116.

⁵⁴ Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Nix"; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave."

⁵⁵ Frank E. Leslie, "The Delinquent," *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 37, no. 22 (June 2, 1922): 1300-01.

⁵⁶ L. O. Weldon, "Psychiatric Studies of Delinquents: Part II. A Study of Physical and Mental Conditions of 100 Delinquent White Women in Louisville, Ky.," *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 35, no. 22 (May 28, 1920): 1247-1269.

⁵⁷ V. V. Anderson, "The Immoral Woman as Seen in Court: A Preliminary Report," *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 8, no. 6 (March 1918): 907.

⁵⁸ Jackson, "Community Organization Activities among Negroes for Venereal Disease Control."

medical establishment as sexually immoral and diseased.⁵⁹ The eugenics movement, which lasted into the 1930s, and the Tuskegee experiment (1932-1972) medically defined Afro-Americans in particular, but also lower-class whites, as licentious and contaminated. Such definitions were so popular that an educated white respondent in a 1930s survey argued against interracial marriage on the grounds that "We [whites] would have more venereal disease because the Negro is full of it."⁶⁰ Even among progressive white and black scholars and researchers there remained a close association between lower class black women and sexual promiscuity.

The following narratives recount how three different black girls became wards of the Good Shepherd. The first two stories reveal the ways in which sexual delinquency was often used to discredit girls sent to the convent. The third is a story of politics, policing and Jim Crow control. Each story, in different ways, illuminates the links between sexuality, delinquency and class in Jim Crow society.

*Ramona: Stigmatized Sexuality*⁶¹

Disease as proof of guilt and sin resonated throughout the limited case files for the House of the Good Shepherd. One ACC record contained in a social work master's thesis recorded the story of two teenaged black girls living in New Orleans. The short narrative of the girls' troubles makes the nexus of disease, class, race and guilt all the more clear:

Mable, age thirteen, lived with her fourteen year old sibling, Ramona. Their parents were divorced and the father resided in Memphis, Tennessee. He had remarried, but sent a check each month to his first

⁵⁹ Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (Doubleday, 2007), 157-215.

⁶⁰ Murray Spitzer, "What of the Negro Future?," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 5, no. 5 (January 1930): 282.

⁶¹ All girls names associated with House of Good Shepherd are pseudonyms.

wife for the support of the children. [Their mother] had left the children in the home alone, but she came to pay rent and would visit them every two or three weeks.

These adolescent girls lived in a one room apartment behind a house. It was upstairs and there were six families living in this rear house which had one community toilet...The room was furnished with only bare necessities and always appeared to be untidy. There was only one bed. Cooking, eating, sleeping, bathing and other activities were carried on in this one room.

Mable and Ramona had a poor relationship. Ramona was aggressive and bossy. She forced Mable to do all household chores. Mable sometimes refused and Ramona beat her. The mother was aware of Ramona's hostile, antagonistic attitude and openly abused her when she visited the home... Neighbors often told [the mother] about Ramona's boyfriend and of her sexual behavior in the community yard.

...Both girls were attending school irregularly. The teacher... was unable to get the cooperation she needed from the home. She referred them to court because of poor school attendance, neglect and delinquency. She knew their environment was conducive to delinquency. A medical examination revealed that Ramona was sexually delinquent.⁶²

Ramona was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd, while Mable was sent to Saint John Bercham's Home for Neglected girls. In this narrative, the girls' troubles began with lack of parental supervision, and were blamed on their "environment": the small, poor housing led to uncleanness, which led to immorality.

That a medical examination proved Ramona to be "sexually delinquent" is telling. First, like the other Good Shepherd girls, Ramona's sin was medically proven, presumably by either a broken hymen or a sexually transmitted disease. Second, her punishment for such delinquency was to be sent to the convent. But third, her "crime" was a sexual relationship with what the case file and the neighbors called a "boyfriend." The record did not mention widespread promiscuity or even prostitution. And though her

⁶² Names and father's location changed. Reese, "A Study of the Social and Economic Factors in Twenty Selected Cases of Neglected and Delinquent Children under Care of the Associated Catholic Charities," 35-36.

violence toward her sister remained an integral part of the story, the file charged her with nothing more than truancy and sexually immorality.

Ramona failed to live up to standards of proper femininity and normal girlhood (according to the file she would not clean, was aggressive, and was sexually promiscuous). By being sent to the House of the Good Shepherd she was marked as a discredited individual—one who could not care for herself. She was stigmatized by both her poverty and her sexuality.

The family's story though, seems much more complicated than even the case file can record. That the mother did not live with her children, but provided them with food, rent and clearly attempted to check up on their behavior suggests that she worked away from home, possibly living with and caring for a white family. Thus what gets defined in the Associated Catholic Charities case record as "neglect" and "sexual delinquency" could have also been narrated as a story about the inherent inequalities of racialized domestic work.

Danielle: Race and Jim Crow Crime

Danielle Jackson, an Anglo-Black sixteen year old, lived in uptown New Orleans with her eight siblings, mother and father. In June of 1946, Danielle Jackson ran away from home. She ran from a father who would beat her, tied her to a bed and threatened to kill her.⁶³ After Danielle ran away from home, her father, Arnold Jackson, searched for her. He carefully watched the home of 26 year old Ione Washington who lived only a mile and half away from his house. Jackson believed his daughter was hiding out at Washington's home because her son, who served in the military, and his daughter were

⁶³ "What's Become of Arnold Jackson and Trial for Attempted Murder?," *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 5, 1947.

friends.⁶⁴ After watching the home from afar and without a sighting of his daughter, Jackson began questioning the women inside: Ione Washington and her 19 year old sister Lillian Washington. The sisters claimed they did not know where Danielle had gone. Infuriated, Jackson shot and killed Ione Washington and critically injured her sister Lillian.⁶⁵ After three days on the run, Jackson surrendered himself to the police. With plenty of witnesses and evidence, the assistant district attorney Guy Johnson believed not only would Jackson be found guilty, but that the city could also seek the death penalty.⁶⁶

According to *The Louisiana Weekly's* account, the trial was sensationalized. The police located the state's star witness, Danielle Jackson, just before the trial. *The Weekly* wrote, "Miss Jackson, a pretty 16 year old, testified on the stand that she loved her father although she admitted that he had threatened to kill her."⁶⁷ In addition to Danielle Jackson's appearance in court, the judge also ordered the all-white jury to the scene of the crime in the uptown neighborhood.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable evidence, Arnold Jackson was found not guilty. *The Weekly* noted the injustice of this a year later: "A year ago the name of Arnold Jackson was on the lips of every Negro in New Orleans and most fair minded whites of the city."⁶⁸ After Jackson's acquittal, he was released from jail. Once Jackson was released, his daughter, Danielle Jackson was picked up by authorities on "relationships unbecoming to a girl of her age with the opposite sex."⁶⁹ She was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd.

⁶⁴ "Daughter Still Missing, Police Continue Search," *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 6, 1946.

⁶⁵ "What's Become of Arnold Jackson and Trial for Attempted Murder?"

⁶⁶ "Daughter Still Missing, Police Continue Search."

⁶⁷ "What's Become of Arnold Jackson and Trial for Attempted Murder?"

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

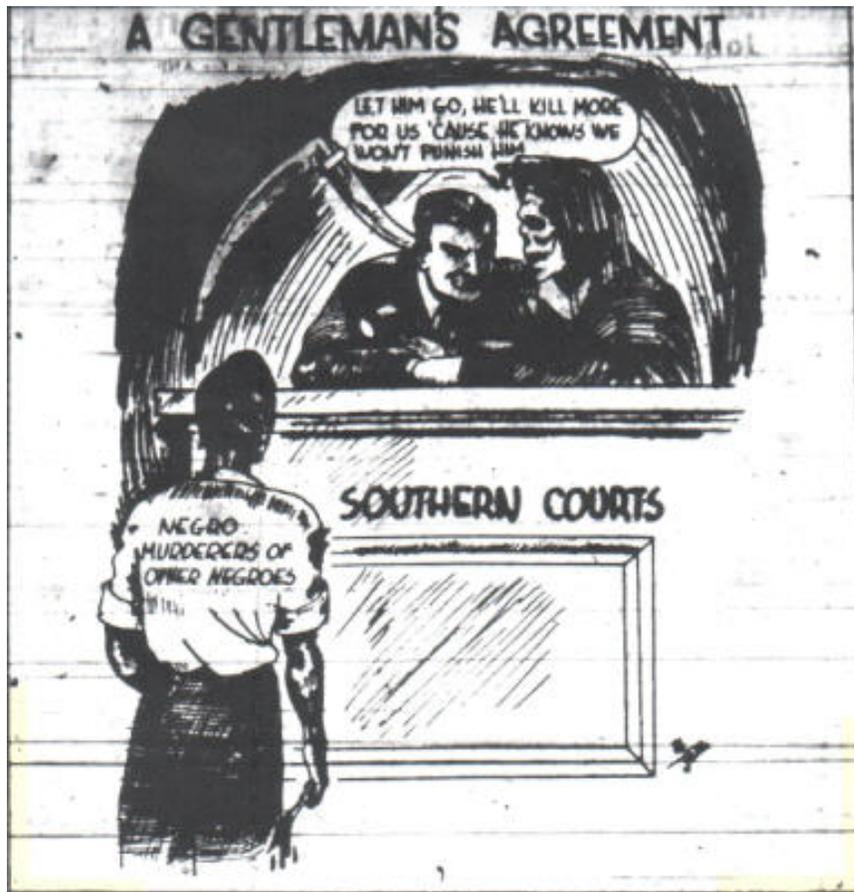


Figure 4.1
"A Gentleman's Agreement," *The Louisiana Weekly*, 1947

Arnold Jackson's story highlights the ways in which the white justice system did not protect the lives of black women and girls from abusive fathers and husbands. Jackson, who clearly beat his children, and murdered a woman in cold bold, was released from jail. The black community in New Orleans complained that they did not receive proper protection from the police or from the courts. Intra-racial crime plagued the black community just as interracial crime did. In January of 1947, *The Louisiana Weekly* published a cartoon, "A Gentleman's Agreement" illustrating this problem with the justice system [figure 4.1]. Begging for mercy from the white court was a black man who had killed other black citizens. The cartoon featured the Grim Reaper whispering, "Let him go, he'll kill more for us 'cause he knows we won't punish him" to a white male judge

representing the "Southern Courts." The cartoon represented white supremacy's hold on the state governing system. Black lives were rendered unimportant by white jurors and courts.

The inefficiency of the Jim Crow justice system comes to light when we ask, as *The Weekly* did in 1947: "What's become of Arnold Jackson and Trial for Attempted Murder?" Not only was he released by 1947, as *The Louisiana Weekly* reported, he also continued to wreak havoc on his family. Tragically, nearly five years later to the day of Ione Washington's death, Arnold Jackson killed again. In June of 1951, his wife left him. Angered, Jackson hacked her head and arms with a meat cleaver, killing her instantly. Additionally, he set the house where she was staying afire. The fire not only seriously burned three young children in the home, but also (accidentally) led to Arnold Jackson's own death. At the hospital he admitted to the killing and also implicated himself in a murder of a previous girlfriend.⁷⁰

But what became of Danielle Jackson? Her life after her father's acquittal is not recorded in the newspaper accounts. However, we do know that she was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd shortly after his release. Her fate was not accidental—the convent's high walls not only kept "wayward" girls inside, it also worked to keep abusive men like Arnold Jackson out. Indeed, Danielle Jackson's stay at the convent opens the question of how such a place could become a refuge for girls like Danielle Jackson who had run away from home looking for safety. The convent's seclusion, high walls and all-female space made it perhaps the safest space for girls who had been abused by the men in their lives, especially given that the Jim Crow court system would not protect black

⁷⁰ "Man Kills Wife, Tries to Cremate Four Children," *The New Orleans States*, June 5, 1951; "Confesses on Death Bed," *The Louisiana Weekly*, June 9, 1957.

girls. Still, we cannot know definitively if Danielle Jackson was sent to the convent solely because she needed protection from her father.

A stay at the House of the Good Shepherd, no matter what the reason, would be deeply discrediting to Danielle's reputation. Furthermore, the newspaper reported that she had "relationships unbecoming of a girl her age." Readers of the paper could easily identify Danielle Jackson as a sexually delinquent young woman with a deranged father.⁷¹

Sarah: Youth, Punishment, and Interracial Mixing

In February of 1949, 64 people were arrested in an "interracial" Young Progressives Party co-organized by college students from Dillard, Newcomb and Tulane. The organizers included young, white college students Arlene Stich, Alice LeSassier and Gwendolyn Midlo.⁷² The party was held at the house of Stich and LeSassier. Their neighbor provocatively suggested that "such goings on" happened every night.⁷³ Although many were college students, the people arrested ranged in age from 15 to 33. Those over 18 years old were sent to jail, found guilty of "disturbing the peace" and fined five dollars or five days in jail. Meanwhile, the only juvenile picked up at the party was a fifteen year old black teenager (whom I call Sarah, although she went unnamed in the public reports of the "crime"). Sarah was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd.

Many of the white students involved in the party were from well-established New Orleans families, while the black students were from "the above average [part of town]

⁷¹ Although I have chosen to use a pseudonym, the local press published Jackson's full name.

⁷² "Raided Inter-Racial Party Leads to \$5 Fines for 64," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, February 8, 1949; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall to Jari Honora, "Re: Creole Research," January 31, 2009, in possession of author.

⁷³ Robert S. Browne, "62 to Appeal 'Interracial Party' Verdict: Judge Metes Out \$5 Fine or 5 Days in 'Midnight-to-Dawn' Court Trial," *The Louisiana Weekly*, February 12, 1949.

for Negroes."⁷⁴ The local white newspapers quoted "observers" of the party who suggested the students in attendance were "definitely pink and bordering on the red side."⁷⁵ The students supported Henry Wallace of the progressive party, so in addition to the interracial "mixing", the papers attempted to paint those there as communists and out-of-towners to discredit their attempts at challenging segregation.

The insinuation by the police, of course, was that more than just 'partying' was going on at the interracial gathering. According to *The Louisiana Weekly*, at night court the police officer testified that he did not want the judge to ask probing questions because, "he did not wish to embarrass anyone by having to state exactly what they were doing."⁷⁶ The police officer thus suggested that the students were engaged in interracial sexual activities. After further questioning he could not recall any one person who was not "dancing, talking or merely walking through the house." To further discredit those in attendance, the officer consistently referred to the black young women and men as "niggers."⁷⁷

By sending Sarah to the House of the Good Shepherd, the police were sending a message. A girl could be sent to the convent for any type of crime—but of course sexual misconduct was often assumed. And *if* the Sisters followed procedure, Sarah would have been given an invasive "medical exam" on entrance to find out if she was "sexually delinquent." Because the police insinuated to the court that the partygoers were engaging in immoral and embarrassing activities, it is logical to assume that they told this to the Sisters as well. Yet, we cannot know how the Sisters balanced their calling to work with

⁷⁴ "64 Fined \$5 in Disturbance Trial," *New Orleans States*, February 7, 1949, sec. Part Two.

⁷⁵ "Raided Inter-Racial Party Leads to \$5 Fines for 64."

⁷⁶ Browne, "62 to Appeal 'Interracial Party' Verdict: Judge Metes Out \$5 Fine or 5 Days in 'Midnight-to-Dawn' Court Trial."

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

wayward girls, with the pressures put on them by local police to help control behavior disruptive to the Jim Crow order.⁷⁸ Whether or not the Sisters fully cooperated, the police's decision to send Sarah to the House of the Good Shepherd demonstrates that municipal authority used the convent to control girls and uphold segregation. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall could not remember the youth that was sent from the party to the convent, but she recalled: "All [young] girls were terrified by threats that they would be sent there."⁷⁹

Sarah, unlike Ramona or Danielle, was most likely from a middle-class family. Her attendance at a party organized by college students heavily interested in politics (and attended by middle-class Afro-Americans) suggests that she was in the middle/aspiring-class of Afro-Americans that looked upon education as a means to bettering one's position in society and as a way to help strengthen the race as a whole. The House of the Good Shepherd, then, took in girls from all classes, even if they more routinely worked with girls from the working-class.

On Staying: Disciplining Religious Subjects inside the Convent

Once a girl entered their walls, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd worked to rehabilitate her. Theirs was the job of refashioning errant subjects. The Sisters tried to turn stigmatized girls into pious, solemn women who could become housewives, mothers and nurturers. The House of the Good Shepherd used institutional and municipal authority in fashioning selves. Moral weakness, the stigma sign of entering girls, was deemed a problem of the inner self—the soul. Therefore, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd attempted to teach what we might call a Christian—or more specifically,

⁷⁸ And although the records are not clear on this point, it appears that the Sisters detained black girls for short periods of time for the juvenile court. If there were enough rooms, it is likely that they were housed separately from other wards. See, "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund."

⁷⁹ Midlo Hall to Honora, "Re: Creole Research."

Catholic— subjectivity.⁸⁰ The Sisters controlled the wards by rewriting their past, remaking their bodies, encouraging confession, and providing penance. Ideally, this remade Christian subject canceled out the evils of juvenile delinquency. It is impossible to know if the Sisters "successfully" turned the wards into Catholic subjects or how (and to what extent) girls resisted the changes in self sought by the nuns. However, investigating the Sisters' methods provides a picture of how the House of the Good Shepherd contained and monitored the sexualities and bodies of the wards in their care.

Girls of all religions were committed to the convent, either by parents or the courts; they entered with their own religious histories and knowledge-set, or even lack thereof. By 1940, nearly one third of the black population in New Orleans was Catholic.⁸¹ The black Catholic girls placed in the House of the Good Shepherd, either by their parents or the courts, had more familiarity than black Protestant girls with Catholic doctrine and rituals, but also with white Catholic authority figures.

Black Catholic girls were acquainted with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They knew, perhaps, what it meant to be a subject of religious authority and had a familiarity with the religious discourses of sin and sexuality. Girls who were educated in Catholic schools, for example, were taught by nuns; both white and black nuns taught black children in New Orleans depending on the school. In her memoir, *A Light Will Rise in Darkness: Growing up Black and Catholic in New Orleans*, Jo Anne Tardy wrote about life as a black Catholic girl in the 1940s. She remembered cleaning the nunnery for

⁸⁰ Here, I am working with Julia Kristeva's notion of a religious subject. Kristeva, when sketching out a religious subjectivity variously calls it a "Christian consciousness," "Christic subjectivity" and "evangelical attitude." See, Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982), 113, 118.

⁸¹ Gillard, *Colored Catholics*, 20, 140; Elizabeth Fussell, "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans," *Journal of American History* 94 (December 2007): 846-855.

the Sisters of the Holy Family, a black order of nuns. Inside hung a series of photographs including pictures of the Holy Family founder Henriette Delille, Pope Pius XII, and "the ubiquitous image of the current Archbishop of New Orleans, Joseph Francis Rummel."⁸² The images and importance of white churchly father figures reinforced for black Catholic girls a church hierarchy, while simultaneously teaching a lesson about race.⁸³ All whites were not to be feared—some looked over you, although with a judging eye, and as a confessor, others held your deepest secrets. After all, black Catholic girls had regular interactions with the white priests in their parish.⁸⁴

Jo Anne Tardy fondly remembered Father Walsh, the priest who had taught her catechism and heard her confessions. The moral training she received from him reached farther than the church building. While Tardy was in junior high school, the priest stopped Jo Anne and her friend while they were crossing the street, headed for a group of older kids. Father Walsh said to them, "Don't go over there, Jo Anne...Don't associate with trash. Stay over here. They don't care anything about their immortal souls!"⁸⁵ Jo Anne then realized the older teens were taking turns making out. Fr. Walsh's presence in Jo Anne Tardy's coming of age story signaled the interrelatedness of Catholic doctrine, white father figures, and lessons about sexuality for the girls who grew up in the city. At that moment, Fr. Walsh taught Tardy a lesson about improper sexuality, sin and one's soul—a lesson she never forgot.

⁸² Jo Anne Tardy, *A Light Will Rise in Darkness: Growing Up Black and Catholic in New Orleans* (ACTA Publications, 2006), 65.

⁸³ On the other hand, the mother figures, such as Mother Delille, who is now a Saint, and the Virgin Mother Mary reinforced lessons specific to chastity and right conduct.

⁸⁴The Orleans Parish did not have any black priests until the 1950s. Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, 2nd ed. (University of Georgia Press, 2008), 7.

⁸⁵ Tardy, *A Light Will Rise in Darkness*, 87-88.

Thus, black Catholic girls knew, perhaps better than their Protestant counterparts, what to expect from the religious training offered by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. At the same time, though, New Orleans was indeed a Catholic city. Black girls of all religions knew enough to fear the House of the Good Shepherd. And black Protestants engaged in some Catholic rituals and celebrated Catholic holidays. Millie McClellan Charles explained, "Our lives were dominated by the Catholic religion even though we were Protestant."⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the New Orleans black community was divided along the lines of religion: some black New Orleanians even claim that black Catholic girls were less likely to befriend black Protestant girls.⁸⁷ Yet, once inside the House of the Good Shepherd, Protestant and Catholic girls found themselves living, learning, working and worshipping together.

To affect a Catholic subjectivity, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's first step was to throw away the ward's past and then renew them—just as nuns did when entering the convent. This helped the girls forge new identities inside the walls of the home. The Sisters advised the delinquent girl to "keep the story of her former life secret, telling it only to the mother in charge who [would] guide, direct and console her[.]"⁸⁸ The original purpose of this secrecy was to protect the identity of the wayward girl, so that the outside world might never know she had been a ward of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd—itsself a stigma and mark of sin.⁸⁹ But refusing to allow the past to enter the walls of the

⁸⁶ Millie McClellan Charles, interview by Felix Armfield, tape, July 12, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University; see also, Florence Borders, interview by Kate Ellis and Michele Mitchell, June 20, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

⁸⁷ Millie McClellan Charles, interview; Borders, interview.

⁸⁸ "The Good Shepherd."

⁸⁹ This model of secrecy and silence harkens back to turn of the century female moral reform movements—and held up in the House of the Good Shepherd from that time into the 1950s. See, "Interpreters Give Intimate View of Chest Agencies"; "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund." As Joan Jacobs Brumberg has noted, the Florence Crittenton maternity home also renamed the girls in their care. Dr. Kate

convent also created a space of rebirth; girls could become whomever they chose. The girls' identities were also "thoroughly protected" by their new religious name—"such as 'Catherine' or 'Mary'" thereby protecting the family name and the ward's future. No one inside of the convent, except the Mother Superior and the Sister charged with the girl's care, would know the young woman's birth name.⁹⁰

The process of hiding a ward's past and renaming her worked to do much more than protect a former identity, family name, or a girl's future. In fact, it was the former identity of a girl that needed to be reworked. In the process of renaming, a girl received the opportunity to construct and enact a completely new self. The chance to start anew was rendered by this new name.⁹¹

Not only were girls given new names, but all of the wards of the Good Shepherd were called "children" by the sisters, regardless of religion or age (the girls ranged in age from 8 to 18, though the majority were in their teens).⁹² The wards clearly became children of God; they were now hailed as religious subjects. At the same time, the Sisters became the parental authority. Notably, the ideal child's body, particularly in the Bible,

Waller Barrett wrote, "We try to impress upon our girls the fact that they must not discuss their fall with anyone; that if someone should ask them anything in regard to their past life they should say with quiet dignity: 'I have had a great deal of trouble in my life and it only brings up painful memories to discuss the subject.'" See Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Ruined' Girls: Changing Community Responses to Illegitimacy in Upstate New York, 1890-1920," *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 251.

⁹⁰ Roger Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd," ca 1916, Roger Baudier Historical Collection, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁹¹ The Convent of the Good Shepherd was not the only delinquency home, particularly in post-World War II America that worked to reconstruct identities. The methods of maternity homes and delinquency homes across the nation used a postwar notion of "fluidity of personal identity" to give worthy girls a chance to obtain a new life—through the adoption of middle class mores. Rickie Solinger argues that white girls in particular were given the opportunity to reconstruct themselves. The maternity home played on the notion of a postwar fluid identity that connected the shifting of identity with the new attainability of middle class life (for whites). I would argue that there were certainly spaces where this was true of black girls as well—particularly in Catholic Louisiana where the black community had long been divided by class (and ethnicity). Besides the House of the Good Shepherd, an important space of self-refashioning according to notions of class, were the black schools—both Catholic and public. See Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*, 105.

⁹² Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans, Louisiana."

was represented as free from sin.⁹³ By setting up a new system of identification through new names, a hidden past, no family, and the status of 'child', the girls were radically introduced to their new environment. Nearly everything in the atmosphere worked to set up an entirely new "system of meaning, hence a wholly different speaking subject."⁹⁴

Despite this new Christian subject, one element of the girls' former selves was preserved within the walls of the convent. An article in the *Catholic Louisiana* noted: "For wise reasons the Convent is divided into sections according to the different classes of those who live therein."⁹⁵ Though the sisters had little extra space, the convent was divided strictly—not by class as the *Catholic Louisiana* neatly phrased it—but by race on the one hand and level of sin on the other.⁹⁶ White girls did not live with black girls. To what extent there was any racial mixing is unclear. For good reason perhaps, the sisters did not specify it in their records. The Catholic clergy, though often deeply prejudiced, never followed the rules of white supremacy clearly or absolutely. Even Adam Fairclough, who does not hesitate to bring the Catholic Church to task for stifling aspects of the black freedom movement in Louisiana, has argued that, "Catholicism itself, for all its conformity to the practices of white supremacy, softened, albeit slightly, the harder

⁹³ For example, Mary Niall Mitchell argues that "the perceived purity, innocence, and vulnerability of young white children made them powerful disciplinary agents of reform[.]" Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (New York University Press, 2008), 68. For the root of the idea that children were pure and innocent see, for example, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005); Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Indiana Univ Pr, 1982).

⁹⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 113.

⁹⁵ "The Good Shepherd."

⁹⁶ "Memorandum of Conference Held at the Convent of the Good Shepherd."

edges of racism."⁹⁷ Louisiana Catholics, for example, opposed the Klu Klux Klan and the interracial Catholic Committee of the South pushed for antiracist policies.⁹⁸

Sociologist and Protestant reverend Edward Coogan's 1954 study of the House of the Good Shepherd underscored the importance of religious pedagogy in remaking sinful girls anew. In preparing his study, he wrote to the juvenile courts across the country that dealt specifically with the House of the Good Shepherd. He asked if the homes' efforts were "helpful at all." Judge John Wingrave from the New Orleans juvenile court replied: "in ninety-five percent of these cases the Sisters are able to work wonders with these girls, because of religious training and the general spiritual atmosphere."⁹⁹ The House of the Good Shepherd's moral pedagogy created the "spiritual atmosphere" and relied on several factors: a notion of the body that placed sin in the flesh, spatial isolation that would help keep the girls from returning to sin, confession, and feminine notions of hard work. These aspects of the "spiritual atmosphere" attempted to refashion girls into Catholic subjects.

Because the Sisters knew, upon entrance, if girls were "sexually delinquent"—or more precisely, "sexually active" since the two were conflated according to Catholic doctrine—they worked to rid the wards of the sins of the flesh.¹⁰⁰ Sisters of the Good Shepherd tried to help the girls repress sinful actions and desires and become bodies without sin. To do this, the Sisters created a safe and sacred space: the imposing walls of the convent separated the corrupt from the pious. But it was not just a matter of keeping

⁹⁷ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, 136. See also R. Bentley Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947-1956* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

⁹⁹ Reverend John Edward Coogan, "Religion a Preventive of Delinquency," *Federal Probation* 18, no. 4 (1954): 32-33.

¹⁰⁰ See Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave"; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Nix."

sin outside—the sisters need to keep that which might tempt the girls into sinful action away.

For that reason, the "spiritual atmosphere" of the House of the Good Shepherd began with the physical space of the convent. By barricading girls off from the world, the sisters hoped to keep temptation out. The interior was simply adorned—as were the girls themselves.¹⁰¹ The space of the inside was purified from excess of the world: there were no extra books, magazines, newspapers or movies that might distract a ward's attention from purity. Sister Mary Bernard explained: "[W]e do not allow [the wards] to read anything of loose moral or crime, but all current news and any other article of interest is always cut out and put on their bulletin board. With regard to magazines, besides many fine Catholic magazines they have *American Girl*, *Southern Agriculture*, *Current Science*, *Modern Mechanix*, *Popular Science*, and others, but *Life* and other sensational books are forbidden."¹⁰² The Sisters controlled the discourses that entered the walls of the convent. A serious and pious subjectivity was thus encouraged through limited reading materials. Furthermore, an innocent girlhood was reenacted by limiting knowledge of the outside world, crime, "sensation" and a denial of sensual (and pleasurable) reading materials. The bulletin board told them what they needed to know of the world—presumably this excluded stories of racial violence (as it excluded crime as a rule), war, poverty and probably anything of the world of which girls like Ramona or Danielle were familiar. This defamiliarization provided a context within which to

¹⁰¹ *Convent of the Good Shepherd, Sewing Room*, Photograph, 1955, Charles L. Franck and Franck-Bertacci Collection, Historic New Orleans Collection; *Covenant of the Good Shepherd Dance Class*, Photograph, 1955, Charles L. Franck and Franck-Bertacci Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection; *Convent of the Good Shepherd, Dormitory*, Photograph, 1955, Charles L. Franck and Franck-Bertacci Collection, Historic New Orleans Collection.

¹⁰² Bernard to Rummel, April 15, 1943.

"reeducate" girls by freeing them from the sins of their past and refocusing any of their present desires.

The spatial seclusion protected girls' moral safety from the sexualized public space of the vicious city and violent world.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the quiet seclusion inside the walls represented simple godliness. The purpose of spatial seclusion from sinful people, things and spaces sought to reform a delinquent girls' thinking process. An exterior purity reflected a girls' new interior purity. Furthermore, she could refocus her desire onto her work, learning, and most importantly, on God.

Before girls could refashion a new self they had to account for their sinful self. Despite being told to hide their past from their peers, the convent provided girls with the opportunity to confess their sins either to the Sister in charge of them, a counselor, or to a priest.¹⁰⁴ Some girls may have taken this act of confession seriously, while others may have refused to speak or fabricated narratives of their past "misdeeds." Honest, silent or fictionalized confessions will never be found in the archive. Nonetheless, the Sisters treated the act of confession seriously, as an important moment in the ward's refashioning. In preparation for confessing their "misdeeds" of the past, girls of the Good Shepherd were told: "'Look into your hearts, but with cheerful eyes.' Even a misspent past has its uses."¹⁰⁵ The Sisters compelled the girls to speak—to say something. Especially when confessing to a priest, such a speech act brought the most intimate

¹⁰³ See, for example, Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002), 81-82.

¹⁰⁴ "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund."

¹⁰⁵ Coogan, "Religion a Preventive of Delinquency," 30-1.

matters of a girl's past into the hands and judgment of another. Such an act (even when falsified or refused) laid to bare something of a ward's interior self.¹⁰⁶

Confessing sins of the flesh was especially important for affecting a Catholic subjectivity.¹⁰⁷ Black Creole Aline St. Julien grew up in a New Orleans household steeped in Catholic culture. Thinking back to the ritual of confession, she recalled the emphasis on impurity in the confessional as a girl:

I was so scrupulous, so not only was I going to confession telling my sins, which I thought were sins, they weren't even sins. Everything was a sin in those days, girl. I was confessing things like stealing a piece of meat out of my mama's red beans... And oh lord, if you did a little sin of impurity! If I'd say: "We'd be looking at each other's breasts" or... "I was in the bathroom pasting a lemon peel on my little nipples." I'd have to go tell [the priest] everything. It had gotten to a point where I think I was a little too scrupulous.¹⁰⁸

The practice of confession, even for a "nice girl" like St. Julien, depended on speaking of sin. And the very act of confession created a "scrupulous" way of interpreting one's actions and one's self. Confession controlled not only St. Julien's actions, but more, the way she came to understand herself in relation to sin and sexuality. She conceived of "impurity" explicitly in relation to her thoughts, actions and her own body. Girls at the House of the Good Shepherd were similarly expected to confess their pasts, bringing their misdeeds into language. If they became "thoroughly reformed" subjects they would be Catholic subjects. This was the goal of the House of the Good Shepherd. A Catholic subject (like St. Julien) confessed "freely"; she felt compelled to speak of her sexuality to a priest. So, for a black girl coming into the House of the Good Shepherd, the act of

¹⁰⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 129.

¹⁰⁷ According to his oral history interviews with people who grew up in New Orleans, Fr. Bentley Anderson found: "A young man or woman was expected to remain sexually pure until marriage, and any sexual activity outside of marriage was considered a serious matter for confession." See Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic*, 8

¹⁰⁸ Aline St. Julien, interview by Michele Mitchell, tape, July 1, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University.

confession asked her to speak of herself as sinner, reinterpreting her life as a religious subject even while segregation had taught her to see herself as a "colored" New Orleanian. How a black Good Shepherd girl actually understood herself and desires within these two poles is lost to history.

No matter what their past had been, girls of the Good Shepherd were advised by the Sisters and priests to continue to do their "best." Once they had confessed the ways of their sin, they were to "treat the past as dead."¹⁰⁹ In this way, the Sisters, the priest, and God were to be directors of a girl's changed self, reinforcing the hierarchal authority of the delinquency home. The death of the past after confession made way for a new religious subjectivity.

Because so many girls who were sent to the House of the Good Shepherd by the courts grew up around "immorality," the sisters believed they needed to teach and reform the girls' internal sense of decency and propriety. They believed girls need to be "re-educated" in family life because they did not fully understand the value and virtue of domestic industry.¹¹⁰ Thus, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd turned to lessons in proper feminine industry as a cure to the sins of the flesh. In this atmosphere, black girls who became "reformed" had to sublimate bodily desires through hard work and simplicity. A clean and proper domestic space renewed and cleansed the spirit and the Sisters used their authority over the girls to exhibit a work ethic that relied on focus, hard work and feminine duty.

Therefore, wards of the Good Shepherd of all colors were expected to work hard. Wards of compulsory schooling age received educational instruction for four hours a

¹⁰⁹ Coogan, "Religion a Preventive of Delinquency," 31.

¹¹⁰ "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund."

day.¹¹¹ Additionally the girls were taught how to properly be a woman. They learned how to cook, sew and nurse as part of their "vocational" training.¹¹² The Sisters of the Good Shepherd believed that a reformed girl would go on to be a mother and nurturer—passing on what she learned at the convent to her own children, or perhaps in black girls' cases, the white children they cared for. In 1937, the convent allowed an "intimate view" of life inside the convent to a writer for the *The Times-Picayune*. The ACC let the female author interview one (presumably white) ward. The sentimental article extolled the "kindness and devotion of the sisters who take such a bruised reed, mend its soul and body and prepare it as best they can to meet the new stresses of life when again the girl issues forth and takes her place in society."¹¹³ This comment highlights the connection between the soul and the physical body just as did the Sisters' methods. At the same time, the author noticed the importance of training a girl for her eventual "place" outside of the convent.

To be in their proper "place" in society, young women had to be "useful." Ideally, girls' stay at the convent would turn them into valuable women—women who could cook, clean, and take care of a home. If the Sisters could mould wayward girls' bodies into useful bodies, then they could claim the successes of their reformation project. The House of the Good Shepherd wanted to prove their worth and exhibit "useful" bodies to New Orleanians. For example, in the 1920s, an author for the *Catholic Louisiana* made such a claim about the convent's value:

Since the opening in 1859, over 20,000 have been received and sheltered in the Fold. Of those who have returned to their homes, thousands have

¹¹¹ Sister Mary of St. Raymond to Rummel, December 21, 1950.

¹¹² *Convent of the Good Shepherd, Kitchen*, Photograph, 1955, Charles L. Franck and Franck-Bertacci Collection, Historic New Orleans Collection.

¹¹³ "Interpreters Give Intimate View of Chest Agencies."

become *useful*, honored members of society. There are homes in every section of the country where mothers are teaching their little ones lessons they learned while under the care of the Good Shepherd. Everything possible is done to improve this condition so that they will be better equipped to make their living after leaving the Convent. Plain and fancy sewing, shirt and umbrella making and laundry work: each girl spends a part of the day in one of these departments besides the household duties which are assigned for their instruction.¹¹⁴

The Sisters, then, had a deep commitment to teaching proper femininity.¹¹⁵ To be "useful" to society meant being able to keep a home, teach a child, and work in fields appropriate for working-class women. Of course, there were different standards of "use" for black and white girls in the Jim Crow South. Most jobs were not open to black women in New Orleans. Black women could work as domestics in homes or companies, as laundresses, seamstress, or in restaurants. If a black woman was Creole with light skin, she might also work as a seamstress in the garment industry, at another factory, or behind the counter at a shop—*if* she appeared white. The designation of "useful" also worked against what both white and black girls were before they came to the convent: wayward, and thus, worthless. At their entrance to the House of the Good Shepherd they were the antithesis of "nice girls."

¹¹⁴ Emphasis mine, Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans, Louisiana." ca. 1924.

¹¹⁵ See also Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*, 127.



Figure 4.2
Convent of the Good Shepherd Dance Class, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

A series of photographs taken in the 1950s demonstrates the ways in which the Sisters of the Good Shepherd worked to present "useful," serious, pious girls to the New Orleans community. In 1955, the convent decided they needed a new building to better care for the girls, to update their methods, and to respond to the concerns addressed by a local juvenile court's judges. To help raise donations, articles were published about the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in local newspapers and they printed their own materials explaining their work. As part of this broad advertising campaign to help increase funds, the House of the Good Shepherd allowed a handful of girls, both black and white, to be photographed inside of the convent. The photographs proved the civic good done by the

house. This small collection of photographs, then, shows the girls in their supposed daily life and promises to offer a glimpse into the inner world of the convent.



Figure 4.3
Convent of the Good Shepherd Sewing Room, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

The photographs present a challenge as source material. As narratives, the photographs work to demonstrate the "truth" of the interior of the House of the Good Shepherd. But the images also obscure as much as they reveal because photographs are coercive. Images perform effective ideological work: social categories such as race, class, gender and sexuality appear natural and the photograph becomes evidence for the

stability of these categories.¹¹⁶ As the image is put forth as evidence, "the institutions of production, circulation, and reception of photographs effectively discourage inquiry into how things got to be the way they appear."¹¹⁷ With very little background information on the scenes shown in the photographs, or the girls who sat for them, how, then, should we approach the photographs of the House of the Good Shepherd?

For one, the photographs were not natural; they are staged. By examining the ways in which they were staged, we can more clearly articulate the type of "good" the Convent of the Good Shepherd wished to perform and present to New Orleans society. They showed their audience (viewers of the photographs) the reformation undergone by the girls in their care. These small groupings of photographs nonetheless constitute an archive. As Shawn Michelle Smith explains of photographic archives:

An archive circumscribes and delimits the meaning of the photographs that comprise it, investing images with import calculated to confirm a particular discourse. Even as it purports simply to supply evidence, or to document historical occurrences, the archive maps the cultural terrain it claims to describe. In other words, the archive constructs the knowledge it would seem only to register or make evident.¹¹⁸

The House of the Good Shepherd images worked to construct local knowledge about the inside of the convent; presenting the good work the Sisters performed for the New Orleans community. They tell the story that the Sisters wanted to be told about the nature of work, gender, race, and sexuality inside the walls of the convent.

The photographs of the convent appeared in a pamphlet produced by the Associated Catholic Charities to raise funds for the new building. Next to a series of four

¹¹⁶ Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney, *Photography/Politics: Two* (Comedia Publishing Group, 1987), 2.

¹¹⁷ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000), 5.

¹¹⁸ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line : W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 7.

photographs, the House of the Good Shepherd pamphlet included large letters floating on the page:

Awaits new Hope...
for those in need of guidance, re-education and training
for self-supporting
self-respecting
family and community living¹¹⁹

The four images on the page included white girls in a chemistry class (with a Sister in a habit instructing them), white girls sewing or ironing a garment, (with what looks to be an instructor overseeing their progress), three white girls cooking, and three black girls in the sick room (with a white nurse). Save for the chemistry class, the photos are all domestic images: they emphasize both the "family" atmosphere and the "community living" within the convent. And just like the quotation that accompanies them, the images stress that the convent is a space of instruction—a learning environment where girls are "re-educated." Therefore, the images neatly pair domesticity with education.

¹¹⁹ "House of the Good Shepherd Building Fund."



Figure 4.4
Convent of the Good Shepherd Infirmary, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

The photographs made use of viewers' entrenched systems of meaning and knowledge. By drawing on viewers' notions of proper gender roles, all of the photographs depicted the wards in the act of doing something. The girls were performing legible feminine tasks that were deemed appropriate for teenage girls, such as comforting and cleaning, but not, for example, bearing children (as some of the girls had done). Just as they rely on these dominant systems of meaning, the photographs simultaneously create their own meaning. Drawing on notions of gender and domesticity, they defined for New Orleans citizens who might donate to the convent, what life was like inside the walls.

The girls in figure 4.4, for example, appear to be learning how to care for a sick loved one. With the dark background, and light on the starkly white sickbed, the girl being cared for appears to be undergoing some sort of religious transformation. The girls photographed played the role of nurturer (rather than being nurtured or punished which is why they ended up in the convent in the first place). It is clear though, that this is only a learning environment. Nobody was really sick and nobody was really nurturing. Each person in the photograph had a pleasant look on her face. The instructor is smiling broadly and the 'infirm' agreeably allowed a photograph to be taken of her. Clearly this type of training would be useful in a family setting or working as a caregiver for a white family. Any viewer from the outside could see its usefulness and might decide that the interior of the convent worked to create industrious black girls.

Although they are playing at nurse, it is unclear if this photograph was actually taken in the infirmary. Could this be the black girls' dormitory? A series of dresses are barely visible in the periphery of the photograph—perhaps the wardrobe for the black wards. If this is the infirmary, it is large in size and number of beds. Perhaps this is where all sick girls stayed, black or white.



Figure 4.5
Convent of the Good Shepherd Dormitory, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

In contrast to the room that is the setting for the nursing photograph—there is another that clearly shows a dormitory room. This photograph is meant to give an inside peak at the living quarters for the wards of the Good Shepherd. Smiling white girls lined up to have their image shot. They all wore matching, white dresses, with simple curled hair styles, all looking at the camera. The beds were neatly made and the room was plain, although it had drapes with flowers. In comparison to the infirmary, the scene comes across as much more intimate and warm. Although the beds and the bed frames were identical to the infirmary beds, the comforters in the dormitory were decorated with patterns and flowers. The intimacy of the photo charms the viewer into believing that this feminine, indeed girlish, space is where delinquent children are sent to live. The

room was not presented as a space in which young women were unwillingly confined or imprisoned.

The photograph tells the viewers that the girls of the House of the Good Shepherd are happily domesticated. They sit, feminine and proper—with legs crossed and folded in their conservative and unadorned dresses. Although the girls lay across beds, the scene is not sexual. The simple mode of dress and hair inside the bare room purifies the space. That the Sisters are able to reform such wayward girls into proper young women speaks to their success. These girls are not a sexual threat to the social order; they are happily plain and properly feminine. Yet this is also the only photograph where the girls are not doing anything—are not in the act of learning or working. There is no parallel photograph of black girls sitting happily, presenting their femininity or at leisure in their beds, perhaps because a "useful" black woman would not be at leisure.

The plain adornment and identical hairstyles are common elements throughout the photographic archive. Both suggest that once inside the convent, the girls' individuality was forsaken for a communal identity. The girls' new clothing redefined who they were, replacing the old self and wardrobe. But instead of wearing white dresses as the white wards are, the black girls appear in the photographs in dark colored dresses. The color difference clearly marked the girls' racial difference for the viewer. The difference in dresses suggests that black wards were, at least symbolically if not actually, treated differently from the white wards. And, in a photograph showing the black wards in class, the girls sat with their hair pulled back in indistinguishable braids [figure 4.6].



Figure 4.6
Convent of Good Shepherd Classroom, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

The building fund pamphlet explained that girls received the benefits of a "thorough educational program."¹²⁰ In an earlier set of promotional materials, the convent explained that: "The Girls of school age attend school four hours daily. This is compulsory. Classes also are held for girls over school age who are defective or whose early education as neglected, and who may wish to avail themselves of this opportunity."¹²¹ The photograph of black girls in class is meant to demonstrate the education they receive. Yet again, the photograph was staged. A close-up of the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd." ca. 1916.

photograph reveals that the girls' books were all open to different pages, and the student writing on the board wrote nothing at all.

"The secret of the success of the Sisters in their efforts to reform those under their care" argued a 1909 description of the House of the Good Shepherd, "is industry. From the superior to the smallest child there is no one idle; the sisters set the example and in the kitchen, laundry, sewing and class rooms are always in attendance watching over and directing every employment." The photographs from the 1955 archive reinforced the notion that industry, particularly feminine industry, was the cornerstone of the Sisters rehabilitative work. In fact, the tasks performed in the photograph seem not to matter much in and of themselves, instead it is the fact that the girls are at work that is important. In all the photographs (except the white girl's dormitory) the girls are at work, in action, are doing something. A photograph of black girls in sewing class demonstrates the notion of industry the archive attempts to propagate [figure 4.3]. Every single girl in the frame is busy; none look up at the camera. Here, the photograph attempts to show them learning how to sew. One girl measures the other—perhaps for another prim brown dress. By setting the photograph in a seeming "learning" environment (just as a similar photograph with white girls does), the archive obscures the fact that the girls work each day in the convent's laundry that helped to raise money and paid for upkeep of the facilities. The "industry," described in 1909, remained literal—girls continued to work hard as laborers for the convent at the start of the 1950s as well. Their work helped provide their food and shelter. This type of work was not for the sake of education, but for the sake of diligence and penance.



Figure 4.7
Convent of the Good Shepherd Kitchen, 1955
(Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

As an archive, the photographs seem to create a world of playacting. It is clear that the Sisters believed that their wards would eventually be released from the convent and use these skills in the world outside the walls. At the same time though, the convent presented itself as a place of performance, with performance itself as the goal, a thing of healing power. If we think of the work girls did not only as education, as the Sisters attempt to present in the 1955 pamphlet, but also as penance, as they suggested in earlier material, then the compulsive need for "industry" and "work" is a religious necessity. For

penance, it did not matter what type of work the girls learned; the emphasis was on physical labor, not the final product of that labor.

The complex relationship between work as penance and work as education is highlighted in the kitchen photograph. The girls appeared to be practicing proper kitchen techniques for baking and setting the perfect table for a family meal. Such a session represented an educational lesson in middle-class femininity. A lesson the girls appeared happy to learn—with their large smiles. However, a close-up of the photograph reveals that there was nothing inside any of the bowls, the oven, or on the table. In fact, there was not any food or edible product (such as flour) out at all. Just like the shot of the girls in the classroom, the photograph was staged. If the girls were working merely for penance, the emphasis would not be on aesthetic, such as on the proper look of the table; instead it would be on the labor put into cooking the meal.

In creating an intimate knowledge of life behind the convent walls, the images worked to give the citizens of New Orleans—possible donors to their cause—an ideal world of the life of a ward of the Good Shepherd. The images of reformation were not violent, coercive, or even policed—beyond the presence of a benevolent (usually lay) instructor. The images displayed no resistance from the wards. Girls were not shown as imprisoned inside or kept against their own will or that of their parents and family members. According to the photographs everything came easy and neat for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

On Leaving?: Stigmatized Girls Come Clean

Girls' stay at the convent could last anywhere from a few days (the time between an arrest and a court appearance) to a year to "indefinitely."¹²² But what happened once girls were able to leave the walls of the convent of the Good Shepherd? Because the Sisters kept girls' histories and names secret, it is nearly impossible to trace the movements of former wards of Good Shepherd once they were released.¹²³ However, the existence of another group of young women at the House of the Good Shepherd tells one small part of the "on leaving" story—a group of girls who, on leaving, chose to stay instead.

The young women who stayed—the Magdalenes—lived a life separate from the wards sent by the courts (or their families). The Sisters explained this when detailing the layout of the four buildings: "one building was used for the Sisters, one of the Magdalenes, one for the colored girls and the fourth for the white girls and women."¹²⁴ The women who stayed were named after Mary Magdalene, who, according to biblical texts, was a follower of Jesus. She later became a symbol of fallen womanhood, prostitution and repentance; the church reinterpreted her as a sinned woman who followed Jesus because of her former life in prostitution. The Magdalenes at the convent looked toward the mythic figure of Mary Magdalene as fallen woman who atoned for her sins: "For them too, the example of St. Mary Magdalene, the sinful woman raised to sainthood because 'she has loved much,' has its personal lesson. The Good Shepherd girl has only to imitate the Magdalene in her love and devotion to Christ, then all will be

¹²² Jacobi, "Summary of Cases and Action taken by Judge Levy in Juvenile Court, April 1942"; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Nix"; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave."

¹²³ Interestingly, the census data that asks for the names of "inmates" at the convent only record a handful of names, and most of these girls are recorded as having come from other cities. Clearly, the Sisters did not like to disclose the names of the New Orleans wards even to the census takers.

¹²⁴ "Memorandum of Conference Held at the Convent of the Good Shepherd."

eternally well with her."¹²⁵ Clearly, the naming of the Magdalenes as such marked them as sinners kneeling humbly before God.

The documents do not record the race of the Magdalenes, therefore, we cannot know if any black girls were included as members of the community of St. Mary Magdalene. It is possible that the Sisters purposely did not record the names of any black girls who stayed on at the institution. They were secretive with all records and histories of their charges and this naturally extended to the Magdalenes. Furthermore, keeping black girls as Magdalenes would have been directly disobeying Jim Crow ideology; therefore, not recording race may have shielded the Sisters from approbation.¹²⁶ Yet no matter how much civil rights work New Orleans priests and nuns performed, all Catholic orders in the southern United States were segregated by race in the 1930s-early 1950s.¹²⁷ The Sisters of the Good Shepherd relied heavily on city funding and charitable donations to run the convent and any interracial mixing would have put that seriously in jeopardy. Nevertheless, it is more likely that the Magdalenes were all (or nearly all) white. Black women were never (knowingly) accepted as nuns into the Good Shepherd order. So instead of becoming Magdalenes, black girls who had been "thoroughly reformed" may have been sent to live with an African American order of nuns, such as the Sisters of the Holy Family, a Black order located in New Orleans.

Still, the existence of Magdalenes at the convent helps to untangle the sister's contradictory notion of redemption, on one hand, from their philosophy of sin forever tainting the body, on the other. Furthermore the existence of the Magdalenes illustrates

¹²⁵ Coogan, "Religion a Preventive of Delinquency," 31.

¹²⁶ Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic*; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*.

¹²⁷ Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic*.

the way that stigma was at work in the convent, but also proves that although girls certainly resisted the control over their sexuality and bodies, others did indeed become Catholic subjects.¹²⁸ Some girls—the Magdalenes at the very least—felt enough shame over their past stigmatized self to wish for reformation. Others may have stayed not because of shame, but because they found comfort and solace in Catholicism and the all-female world of the convent. Whether girls remained because of shame, because they needed the protection or because of a religious conversion, their presence gives us further insight into all of the wards' worlds.

To begin, a former ward of the Good Shepherd became a Magdalene only after "some years of prayer and penance."¹²⁹ A devotion to penance continued to describe their life once they entered the community of St. Mary Magdalene: "For them too, the example of St. Mary Magdalene, the sinful woman raised to sainthood because 'she has loved much,' has its personal lesson. The Good Shepherd girl has only to imitate the Magdalene in her love and devotion to Christ, then all will be eternally well with her."¹³⁰ *The Catholic Louisiana* described the "strict" life of the Magdalene as including solitude, penance and labor. The girls obeyed "the rule of the third order of Mount Carmel; a very strict silence is enjoined, so that they are called by the sisters of the Good Shepherd 'solitaries.'"¹³¹ Their silence worked as both penance and as a mode of presentation—purity in the face of previous sin. Silence helped the girls affect an art of the body.

¹²⁸One example of resistance includes two black girls, thirteen and fifteen years of age, who "threatened to burn the place down." The girls were sent to Parish Prison because of these threats. "Girls Are Jailed in Arson Threat," *Times-Picayune*, November 9, 1955.

¹²⁹Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans, Louisiana." ca. 1924.

¹³⁰Coogan, "Religion a Preventive of Delinquency," 31.

¹³¹"The Good Shepherd." The 1909 description of the Magdalenes from *Catholic Louisiana* is certainly reflective of a Victorian notion of female immorality. The article claims that the young women's lives were "fraught with more pathos than the saddest works of fiction; in most cases being more sinned against than sinning." Yet still, Magdalenes wore brown.

Along with silence, their industry continually worked to erase the action of sin in the past.¹³² Work too, was bodily action: a way to provide self-punishment but also to keep the hands busy. In this way, over and over, the Magdalenes repented for past actions. Their penance, confession, hard work, faith, and even silence, had to be indefinitely maintained in order to preserve their Catholic subjectivity. And in this way, Magdalenes were, according to the Sisters, in "the spirit of reparation" able to "obtain true peace for their souls."¹³³ The work they did to maintain silence and the physical labor sublimated the desires of the impure soul.

Even while the young women who stayed on at the convent were refashioned subjects, made anew by their continuous project of penance, they would never fully be made clean of their sins. This was made abundantly clear by the "inflexible rule" of the order:

[N]one of these Magdalenes are ever permitted to enter the order of the Good Shepherd. The Magdalenes wear a brown habit, and though always allied to the Convent of the Good Shepherd, their life of penance is never a stepping stone to the white-robed sisterhood. It is an inflexible rule of the order that no Magdalene, however devout she may become, shall ever be admitted as a Sister of the Good Shepherd. Only those young women are eligible for the order whose characters and whose families are of blameless reputation.¹³⁴

The brown habit of the Magdalene marked her as forever sinner. Brown became a stigma symbol, calling attention to the girls' past failures. So even as the Sisters worked to give their wards new identities, the order's entrenched notion of sin kept the Magdalenes apart from wholesomeness. Sin permanently tainted the girls—a "wayward" girl could never find a complete path back to goodness because she was not of "blameless reputation."

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Baudier, "Convent of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans, Louisiana." ca. 1924.

¹³⁴ "The Good Shepherd."

The past was always present. The Magdalenes who became such devout Catholics, still carried the debt of their past for which they were to be blamed. Although this description of the Magdalene's eternal state as a pennant was written in 1909, the policy did not change until 1950.¹³⁵

It is clear that the ACC, the Sisters, the bishop, and those working on the Magdalenes behalf believed the young women had been thoroughly reformed into Catholic subjects, the Magdalenes may have also been searching not only for religious forgiveness, but for a life of safety and security. Like Danielle, whose violent father beat her, many of the girls held within the walls of the convent had lived in poverty and experienced sexual or physical abuse at the hands of family members or friends. The walls surrounding the all-female world of the convent provided a safe space for these young women. The sisters often noted if the wards came from an "immoral" or even dangerous environment.¹³⁶ Brenda, a white ward, for example, lived in "deplorable" conditions. Her mother left her father and eight siblings in a single-roomed apartment. Brenda blamed her mother for leaving and for (unnamed) "sordid" experiences. Because of these experiences "she was very definitely in need of the protection...which the Convent could give her."¹³⁷ A black ward, Viola, was placed in the convent after being picked up by the police for stealing; her case was connected to a "carnal knowledge" charge against two men with whom she was arrested.¹³⁸ A sixteen year-old "begged" the judge to commit her to the convent for at least one year. Not only did she have a venereal

¹³⁵ Sister Mary of St. Raymond to Rummel, December 21, 1950.

¹³⁶ Jacobi to Rummel, June 25, 1942; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Nix"; Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave."

¹³⁷ Jacobi to Rummel, June 25, 1942.

¹³⁸ Jacobi, "Cases Heard in Juvenile Court from July 1, 1940- July 1, 1941: Judge Wingrave."

disease, but her case included a carnal knowledge charge against an older man who lived in her home.¹³⁹ For those girls who wanted to build a new relationship with God, their path to religion came through a history filled first with violence and then the safety found in an-all female environment. It is clear that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd saw themselves as these girls' protectors. However, it is not clear to what extent the Sisters blamed the girls themselves for their experience with sexual abuse.

The Magdalenes' story is compelling because no matter how hard they worked, they could never fully reach "normal status." The Magdalenes rigorously and seriously attempted to correct their stigma—the reason for having been socially marginalized.¹⁴⁰ They worked, through silence, penance and industry, to cleanse their soul and body to erase the past. Despite all this, they never were fully erased of the stigma of premarital or "delinquent" sex. In other words, the Magdalene was always a stigmatized person. Yet their story also demonstrates the extremes that some girls went to in order to become anew.

Conclusion

Girls who grew up in New Orleans knew about the House of the Good Shepherd. Many were afraid that if they acted badly enough, or were caught in inappropriate relationships, that they could be sent there—stuck behind the walls. The convent played an important role in New Orleans. Without the Sisters' help, the city would not have had a detention facility for black female juveniles arrested by the police—whether their arrests were for petty crime, "relationships unbecoming" of girls their ages, or disturbing

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Goffman, *Stigma*, 19-20.

the rules of Jim Crow. For all of these situations, the House of the Good Shepherd provided a facility for the offenders to be properly disciplined.

Although the records of the House of the Good Shepherd are limited in what they reveal, they do help us reconstruct the ways in which race, stigma and sexuality intersected in Jim Crow New Orleans. "Sexually delinquent" girls at the convent were accused of not only having acted immorally, but also of having both diseased and criminal bodies. By linking girls' sexuality to criminality, the convent and city turned "guilty" girls into stigmatized bodies that wore their sin.

Black girls who encountered the juvenile court system or the House of the Good Shepherd had to contend with these narratives of sin and delinquency. Therefore, investigating the convent's systems of meaning provides *one* backdrop against which black 'delinquent' girls created their self image. Even if they did not come to see themselves as sinners, or as bodies stigmatized by disease, they no doubt understood that the police, judges, Sisters and convent nurses saw them in this way. Some, like the Magdalenes, may have been ashamed of their past, while others may have attempted to create alternative understandings of self that did not align with the Sisters'. Either way, delinquent girls had to contend with the narratives of girlhood set forth by the House of the Good Shepherd.

Black girls who did not live up to middle-class standards of "niceness" and proper behavior might find themselves in the convent. There, they would be expected to reform their behavior, or, at the very least, work to help keep the convent running. For these girls, the Sisters were another disciplinary force in their lives—the convent, in association with the police and court system, attempted to control their behavior and decide what

they could and could not do. Meanwhile, some of the girls who entered the convent would find solace behind the walls—as they sought an escape from instability or the abusers in their lives.

Chapter 5:
Make Believe Land:
Conceptualizing Pleasure in Black Girls' Lives



Figure 5.1
Make Believe Land
(Courtesy of Amistad Research Center)

This photograph was taken at the Colored branch of the New Orleans's Young Women's Christian Association on Canal Street sometime in the 1950s.¹ From the other

¹ *Make Believe Land*, Photograph, ca 1950s , Fannie C. Williams Papers, Amistad Research Center.

side of the camera lens, the teenagers of the Colored Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) smile. If we can assign emotions to the bodily characteristics of the girls, we might say that they look not only happy, but also excited and proud. As discussed in chapter one, the Canal Street YWCA's location was controversial. As young women and girls walked to the facility in an area surrounded by white homes, they faced possible physical violence or insults from local whites. *The Louisiana Weekly* recorded the violence: white boys who resented the YWCA's presence threw rocks at passing girls.² Despite the hostility and segregation outside the doors, the interior of the YWCA presents us with an entirely different picture; it provides us with a glimpse into the inner world of the girls who entered.

In 1931, the New Orleans branch of the YMCA began discussing the possibility of opening a Colored branch for black girls in the city. They were concerned that black girls—particularly black Protestant girls—had insufficient space to safely develop into young women.³ In a 1948 annual meeting, the YWCA reported that they had 750 girls signed up for the Y-Teens program and 400 young women signed up in the young adults program. The directors of the programs placed a "special emphasis...on helping people have a good time during their leisure hours."⁴ The need for "a good time," particularly a safe and respectable good time, seemed especially important for the black teenagers of New Orleans. Fun and relaxation could not easily be found outside the doors of the

² "White Boys Hit Schoolgirl: Was on Her Way Home When Hit in the Face," *The Louisiana Weekly*, April 29, 1939.

³ They noted that 40% of black New Orleanians were Catholic and that "religious animosity keeps the groups separate." "1931 YWCA Report: History," 1931, YWCA Papers, Tulane Special Collections

⁴ "Annual Meeting Young Women's Christian Association," May 11, 1948, Fannie C. Williams Papers, Amistad Research Center.

YWCA or down the road in the segregated shopping and entertainment district of Canal Street. How then, did girls find pleasure despite the confines of segregation?

As the girls lined up for the photograph in "Make Believe Land," they give us clues to the function of the Colored YWCA. The teenagers did not just pose for the camera; they also created a whole world. Even though there is a prearranged symmetry to their positioning, they do not appear stiff because they seem to stand "in character." Their costumes, inspired by fairy tales, were only a piece of a larger performance. The princess in the front sat regally with her legs carefully folded, so that she could present the ruffles in her dress to the camera. The cross-dressed prince in the back (with mustache and all) stood straight-up, arms down to the side, perhaps trying to enact a masculine stance. Fittingly, the prince is also the only person in the photograph not displaying an open smile: is it the smirk of power that she wears? The camera, it seems, caught the girls *in the act* of make believing. Such make believing supplied pleasure. And the Colored YWCA provided the materials, stage and backdrop for make believe—it was the land of fantasies.

"Make Believe Land" stands apart from the other chapters of this dissertation. What follows is a methodological discussion that works to bring us toward a history of pleasure in black girls' lives. I argue that although finding pleasure in the archives is a difficult, sometimes seemingly impossible project, it is one that is worth attempting nonetheless. Without making an effort to recover pleasure, black girls' lives are narrated only by the trauma of Jim Crow. To consider black girls as full human beings, we need to understand their pleasures just as much as their pains—even if, for some, pleasure was fleeting. I end the chapter by exploring two types of black girls' pleasure cultures that

centered on themes of fantasy and make believe. By considering the types of sources I was able to uncover, I hope to suggest means of analyzing sexual pleasure in black women's and girls lives.

Thinking about Pleasure: Definitions and Dangers

The word pleasure is expansive and difficult to pin down in a single definition. I want to begin by thinking of pleasure in its broadest sense—as joy and satisfaction. Yet, the word pleasure also has a strong bodily connotation and is connected to physical sensations such as arousal and titillation. I want to argue, however, that to think of sexual pleasure in black girls' lives *does not* necessitate thinking exclusively of the body.⁵ In fact, such an approach can be limiting. Indeed, imaginary worlds are, in large part, worlds created by the mind that bring into existence desires, wishes and dreams that may relate to the body—some that even, perhaps, originated in the body. These two worlds—that of the body and the mind—are connected. Pleasure, therefore, can be understood as existing on multiple levels; sexual pleasure, in the sense that I wish to define it for black adolescent girls in this chapter, included three main elements.

The first component to my use of sexual pleasure is eroticism. Here I use the word erotic in the widest possible sense, as black feminist theorist Audre Lorde suggested.⁶ For Lorde, the erotic was expressed in the delight of sharing passions with others and the fearless "capacity for joy" in one's life despite, or rather in the face of,

⁵ And here, it is important to note once more that I use a broad definition of sexuality one that encompasses more than simply "sex." I understand sexuality to be the various social and cultural constraints related to sex that inhibits people's behavior, by literally disciplining their bodies, but that also allow for places of intimacy and pleasure. Thus, I am interested in sexuality as a window into wider networks of power that shaped black girls' lives and sense of self. See, from this dissertation, "Introduction: Girls, Gendered Violence and Jim Crow."

⁶ Lorde's definition of erotic is at some points troubling in its essentialism—she defined pleasure as a particularly female space and form of power. But this is a product of the era in which the essay was written, and I believe her discussion of the erotic has incredible use for conceptualizing pleasure today. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 2007), 53-60.

oppression.⁷ The erotic contained significant power; it opposed that which caused "resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial." Lorde envisioned this type of erotic power in all women's lives—regardless of their sexual orientation. To explain the erotic in everyday life Lorde wrote: "There is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love."⁸ Audre Lorde's linking of different types of pleasure (sexual pleasure with the pleasure of writing) allows us to think about the ways in which pleasure may have been expressed in black girls' lives.

What was important for Lorde was the transformative and political power of the erotic. Systems of racism and sexism limited women's access to the erotic in their lives; Lorde wanted to reclaim moments that were self-affirming and positive. For the girls I study, pleasure was always political. Finding and making space for the erotic in their lives was often difficult given the double bind in which they lived. Their pleasurable actions were limited by the constraints of Jim Crow society and, sometimes, by the disciplinary forces of respectable Afro-Americans who wanted them to remain "nice girls." Moments of the erotic in their lives, then, were moments where they could express joy and explore a more affirming sense of self on their own terms, whether through writing "a good poem" or experiencing romantic relationships.

The second component to my definition of pleasure is intimacy, experienced as love, connection and closeness to others. Adolescent girls often forged intimate relationships with boys of their age, but also with their closest girl friends. Not all of these relationships involved physical intimacy or sex—a girl might date a boy but refuse

⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁸ Ibid., 58.

to kiss him, for example. And some of these intimate relationships may have included a physical intimacy that we do not necessarily think of as "sexual": best girlfriends might have held hands, kissed cheeks, locked arms or offered hugs of support.⁹ These relationships are united under the category "intimacy" by the closeness and deeply loving connection between the youths. My goal then is not to turn all youthful relationships into sex-relationships but to expand our understanding of "sexuality" to include various forms of intimacy.

Romanticism is the final component to my use of pleasure. Black and white adolescent girls of the generation I study lived in a world where romance was deemed particularly important.¹⁰ The emphasis on romance was true for a wide range of young women—including working-class girls. As Kathy Peiss has discovered for working women during early twentieth-century New York: "The work culture of women encouraged an ideology of romance that resonated with explicit heterosexual pleasures and perils at the same time that it affirmed the value of leisure."¹¹ But romance, for many black and working-class girls, was often idealized rather than realized—the romanticized idea of the 'perfect' mate, influenced by popular culture, held tremendous sway even

⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Although Smith-Rosenberg analyzes a particular historical moment, where homosocial worlds of men and women made female friendships particularly common, her use of "intimacy" to define these friendships is especially important. She discusses deeply loving friendships as well as the "emotional ties" between women friends. Interestingly, we know very little about intimacy between girls who are friends—even as we know how important these friendships are to girls coming of age. This is true even of girls' friendships in the twentieth-century. Smith-Rosenberg's work on female friendships is one important starting place for theorizing intimate friendship among girls.

¹⁰ See Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 211-240; Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1979), 260-291; Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 129-169.

¹¹ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple University Press, 1986), 51

though most girls never found their ideal mate. Yet, the very notion of romance was a pleasurable fantasy for many adolescent girls and young women.

Often, when feminist scholars have discussed sexual pleasure in women's lives, they have had to distinguish it from sexual danger. In the 1980s, feminist debates over sexuality were polarized between two camps: those who understood sexuality as primarily dangerous for all women and those who saw pleasurable sexuality as a domain of radical liberation.¹² Mariana Valverde explained that those who saw sexuality as dangerous defined "sexuality as uniformly oppressive, a picture of relentless male violence[.]"¹³ In black women and girls' lives the stark dichotomy between pleasure/danger is artificial. A long history of sexual vulnerability and exploitation makes ignoring sexual danger impossible and the project of identifying and naming pleasure even more important, especially in regards to black girls and women's subjectivities. Quotidian sexual harassment, such as that described in Ferdie Walker's oral history interview, proved to be "bad for all black girls"; and more, sexual danger could well mean death, as it did for Hattie McCray.¹⁴ Defining the meanings of sexual pleasure in such a context becomes both a theoretical and political project; therefore, finding and naming moments of pleasure is crucial for theorists of black women's lives. Furthermore, investigating pleasure is made doubly difficult in the case of black women whose sexuality has been defined by a silence.

¹² For discussions of and texts that constitute this debate see Mariana Valverde, "Beyond Gender Dangers and Private Pleasures: Theory and Ethics in the Sex Debates," *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 237-254; B. Ruby Rich, "Review," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 525-561; Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1983); Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)

¹³ Valverde, "Beyond Gender Dangers and Private Pleasures," 242.

¹⁴ See Chapter 2, "'Defending Her Honor': Interracial Sexual Violence, Silence and Respectability." William Henry Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: New Press Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 9

A Problem of Silence, Problem of Sources

"Black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting their verb" declared feminist theorist Hortense Spillers. In 1984 when Spillers set out to locate non-fictional texts about black women's sexuality (written "by themselves and for themselves") she failed to uncover the texts she was hoping to find. Instead of a record of black women's pleasure, she found an over-determined silence.¹⁵

The ideological systems that defined black women's sexuality, silencing expressions of pleasure, had two principal components.¹⁶ First, the silence stemmed from the over-articulation of black women's sexuality by racist ideologies. Black women, and even girls, were defined as promiscuous, as other, and as always an object of someone else's pleasure.¹⁷ If not promiscuous jezebels, then adult black women, and sometimes even working teenagers, were defined as asexual mammies by racist ideologies; the mammy figure was always at someone else's command, with no desire of her own. Second, the silence surrounding black women's sexuality was caused by a self-imposed culture of dissemblance.¹⁸ The silence was a reaction to the racist discourses that made black women objects of others' pleasure. Dissemblance afforded black women privacy—a way to shield their hurt and trauma. The culture of dissemblance was an affective culture because it provided a way to order one's emotional life in public. At the same

¹⁵ Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 74.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this over-determined silence see Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality. (More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory)," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2+3 (Summer/Fall 1994): 126-46.

¹⁷ We see this dynamic at work in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, "Defending Her Honor: Interracial Sexual Violence and Black Girlhood"

¹⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989).

time however, the culture of dissemblance was a culture of silence. And, for black women, hiding pleasurable sexuality might have been just as important as concealing traumatic sexual experiences. Sexual pleasure or sexual experimentation might cause one to lose the status of a respectable, "nice" girl or women.¹⁹

In "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," Evelynn Hammonds argues that black feminist theorists have consistently described black women's sexuality only by this very silence. She contends that black women's sexuality "has been shaped by silence, erasure, and invisibility in dominant discourses."²⁰ The silence suggests that black women have historically been without voice and without pleasure of their own. In *Black Girls' Coming of Age* I have attempted to point to places where black girls' voices and concerns are articulated. Through a reading of space in chapter one, I made girls' bodies visible—not simply as objects of desire but as intentionally moving subjects navigating the city space of New Orleans. In chapter three, I looked at fears articulated by girls themselves. But still, none of the previous chapters made girls' pleasure the central analytic. Indeed, girls' own pleasures have been hidden behind the regimented and disciplining features of the Jim Crow order.

The various silences that *seem to* constitute and consume black women's sexuality are reflected in the archive. Newspaper articles, 'expert' discourses on black sexuality, court documents, reform home records and even oral histories are filled with silence. Part of the problem of sources relates to the problem of authorship. Hortense Spillers argued that black women's sexuality was rarely depicted by the "subject herself."²¹ By interrogating authorship, we ask the question who can speak about sexuality and who

¹⁹ For a discussion of "nice girls" see Chapter 3 of this dissertation, "The Gender of Fear."

²⁰ Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black Female Sexuality."

²¹ Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," 74.

cannot. Spillers reflects: "The discourses of sexuality seems another way, in its present practices, that the world divides decisively between the haves/have-nots, those who may speak and those who may not those who, by choice or accident of birth, benefit from a dominant mode and those who do not."²² But what does it mean to be the author of a text of sexuality, of pleasure? To begin, authorship implies voice. To leave a trace of that voice—a text—also exposes power, or at least an absence of constraints. The ability to speak, to imagine, to desire freely without fear of punishment or censure marks both privilege and autonomy. The white, heterosexual men who left accounts of the racialized sexuality of the segregated South (in the form of political debates about black and white women's sexuality, their political campaigns to terrorize the black community with lynching, newspaper reports, 'interviews' with prostitutes) all speak to the authority of white men in the Jim Crow order. Traditional archives reconstruct the vision of those in power.²³

We must, therefore, turn to unconventional archives and fresh ways of looking at traditional archives in order to look beyond the silences and uncover a world of pleasure for black girls. Rethinking what constitutes archives in New Orleans is made difficult due to Hurricane Katrina's devastation of buildings, people's homes, material culture, and personal archives.²⁴ Still, a reconsideration of source material is necessary. Evelyn

²² Ibid., 79.

²³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), esp. Chapter 1 Finding texts on white women's pleasure is also difficult, although white women had greater access to publishing and presses.

²⁴ As I began this project, I wanted to build an extensive archive of photographs, diaries, letters and personal documents. This was Joan Jacobs Brumberg's archival approach in *The Body Project*. Brumberg, rather than turning to traditional archives, sought out the personal documents of women stored in chests, attics and forgotten in storage facilities—some even recovered from the trash. But shortly after I contemplated this approach, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. The photographs, diaries, letters and personal documents of thousands of women were one of the many things lost to the storm. Therefore, the archive available for "finding" pleasure is limited. Still, this is a project I am committed to because

Hammonds suggests that we need a method that pushes past silence, to "contest rather than reproduce the ideological system that has up to now defined the terrain of black women's sexuality."²⁵ There are places we can look and methodology we can use to conceptualize black girls' pleasure. To construct such a method I have turned to recent scholarship on queer theory and affect.

In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* Ann Cvetkovich argues that "[l]esbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love and activism—all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive."²⁶ Such a statement is true for other minority histories as well—and as we have seen, particularly for black women whose intimacy, sexuality and love have long been silenced. So what might a "radical archive of emotion" look like? Cvetkovich uses a wide range of sources, some more traditional than others. She looks at film, essays and poetry; but her sources also include cultural spaces and performances such as women's music festivals. Her work asks us to reconsider the meaning of space and fellowship. She turns to these sources by looking specifically at communities and their *public* emotions. As I have demonstrated, space in Jim Crow New Orleans was particularly important in the maintenance of the racial order. During segregation, black girls had to carefully figure out places in the city where they were allowed and welcome. Understanding spatial regulations and restrictions has allowed me to explore the fear and trauma of Jim Crow. But, if space was an important regulatory feature of Jim Crow New Orleans, then finding

without it black girls remain constituted by moments of trauma. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1998).

²⁵ Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black Female Sexuality."

²⁶ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 241.

spaces of freedom (even if they were small spaces) were equally important for black girls. Places where black girls did not need to consider others' views of them, worry about their safety, or whether they belonged most likely provided a sense of self-satisfaction in and of itself. What did places for fun and fellowship look like?

Exploring places of fun and fellowship through the lens of Cvetkovich's work can help us address the problem of sources. *An Archive of Feelings* explores "cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions" suggesting that emotions do indeed exist in the public world.²⁷ By disrupting the dichotomy between one's inner (emotional) world and the public world, Cvetkovich insightfully argues that our emotional lives saturate our public lives. Therefore, she goes looking for "trauma cultures."²⁸ Following this method, I have decided to look specifically for "pleasure cultures" that intersected with black girls' lives. Pleasure cultures formed in and around joy. They are found in public spaces where a community of black girls could enjoy them. The pleasure was in existence at the moment of production, in the practices of production, and also in moments of sharing and reception.

Pleasure cultures existed in black girls' worlds to varying degrees depending on class, ethnicity and location in the city. Certainly, black girls who went to school had more time and resources to devote to public culture and leisure. And school itself functioned as a particularly important site for developing pleasure cultures. Many black women who came of age during the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s—particularly those who graduated from high school—looked fondly on their school teachers, friends and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, black girls who worked and/or raised

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., Introduction esp. 9-11 .

children had little time to and for themselves. Nonetheless, it is a radical suggestion that pleasure cultures could (and did) exist in Jim Crow New Orleans—or in the segregated South that millions of African American citizens wanted to (and did) escape from.²⁹

So what did these pleasure cultures look like and where can scholars find them? Evelyn Hammonds suggests that scholars should begin by thinking of black women's pleasures as polymorphous. She argues that black women's pleasure might not look like that of white women's, it might have a different "geometry" because of the different circumstances of black women's lives and the intersection of racist and sexist ideologies that repressed and silenced black women.³⁰ Ann Cvetkovich argues that "emotional experience[s]" makes a strange archive because they "resist the coherence of narrative" and tends toward the "fragmentary and ostensibly arbitrary." This is because emotions are fragmentary even in their expression.³¹ I would like to take these two scholars as a starting point—beginning with fragmentary expression of fantasy, and thinking of sexual pleasure as polymorphous. Black girls' emotional worlds and peer groups included both boys and girls. Therefore, this chapter considers friendships between girls as an intimate and important space.

In grappling with pleasure cultures in black girls' lives, I have chosen to focus on elements of fantasy and make believe—the same make believe that seemed to delight the girls of the Canal Street branch of the YWCA. The first pleasure culture I focus on is that of a widely popular writing culture among black teenage girls. The sources for this section are fragmentary. Some of my evidence comes from New Orleans: oral histories,

²⁹ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

³⁰ Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black Female Sexuality."

³¹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 242.

yearbooks and the material culture of scrapbooks and autograph books. But to discuss the ways in which fantasy and make believe works in black girls' writing culture I am also forced to look outside of the bounds of New Orleans as a way to suggest what might be possible for future research. The second pleasure culture I want to explore is that of make believe and fantasy worlds created and shared by groups of black youth at the Canal Street branch of the YWCA.

Fantasy and Make Believe: Pleasure Cultures in Black Girls' Lives

Fantasy, Broken Hearts and Black Girls' Writing Culture:

In the 1930s and 1940s, black school girls spent a good amount of time writing and reading. This writing culture emphasized pleasure and fantasy. Romance stories read by girls during their free time and poetry by black writers (such as Paul Laurence Dunbar) that girls recited in school all functioned to create a literary counterpublic.³² By sharing and discussing these narratives with one another and even by writing their own stories, black girls constructed and imagined romantic subjectivities in opposition to their daily encounters with Jim Crow and to restrictive notions of what black women should be and do. These writings also disrupted the silence on black female pleasure. Although black girls' writings share some common features with black women's writings, youth's work diverges from themes of coupling in adult's work because girls' views of romance were built from make-believe and the hope of youth rather than on the disappointments

³²Michael Warner defines "public" as "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation." A counterpublic lacks the power of the dominant world view of a "public". Meanwhile Joanna Brooks argues that "a black counterpublic emerges through black-founded, black-governed institutional venues that permit black collectives to establish a more secure, self-possessed, self-determined presence in a generally hostile and dangerous public sphere dominated by white property owners." For discussions of the meaning of "counterpublic" see, Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49-90; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 122-23; Joanna Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (January 2005).

that often come with adulthood.³³ The writing culture that emphasized romance, love and sexual pleasure extended to autograph books, where girls wrote down witty sayings and poems (some original others reproduced) and participated in a public culture of romance.

The romance/pulp fiction magazine *True Confessions* circulated as one of the most important pleasure texts in black (and white) girls' leisure worlds of the 1930s and 1940s. *True Confessions* was first published in 1922 in order to compete with the most popular pulp magazine: *True Stories*. By the 1930s *True Confessions* was the second-most popular of the pulp "confession" styled magazines and by the late 1930s sold over a million copies. Ostensibly, these magazines printed "true" stories written by "real" readers. The contests to submit writing into the magazines invited black girls to think about the construction of romantic stories, lives and literature—even if they never sent in a story of their own.³⁴

Marie Boyer Brown, a graduate from McDonogh 35 in the early 1930s, explained the importance of *True Confessions* in an oral history. The tone, voice, and narrative interruptions during the interview help unveil multiple layers of meaning associated with *True Confessions* for black girls growing up during Jim Crow.³⁵ Boyer Brown first

³³ Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), esp. Chapter 5.

³⁴ Regina Kunzel's study of calls for help to the Children's Bureau from readers of *True Confessions* provides an important look at young girls' and women's reading culture and sexuality. For information on *True Confessions* and pulp magazines see, Regina Kunzel, "Pulp Fictions and Problem Girls: Reading and Rewriting Single Pregnancy in the Postwar United States," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (December 1995): 1465-1487; Ann Fabian, "Making a Commodity of Truth: Speculations on the Career of Bernarr Macfadden," *American Literary History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 51-76; George H. McClellan, "Review: [untitled]," *Educational Research Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (February 1, 1939): 57-58; Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Rowena Wyant, "Magazines in 90 Cities-Who Reads What?," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (October 1937): 29-41; Margaret Kessler Walraven, "Magazines in the High-School Library," *The English Journal* 24, no. 2 (February 1935): 134-136; Bernard Berelson and Patricia J. Salter, "Majority and Minority Americans: An Analysis of Magazine Fiction," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1946): 168-190.

³⁵ On tone and voice in oral history see Rhonda Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information: History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 41-63

introduced the pulp magazine when trying to describe the contours of "girl talk" between her and her best friend Ida. The circular conversation that ensued illustrates the ways in which sexuality, intimate friendships and girls' reading and writing cultures intermingled to create a pleasure culture. "Oh, we would talk about everything," she explained, "I used to read *True Stories* [and] *True Confessions*. My mama didn't like me to read that."³⁶

As if further clarifying what girl talk was and was not, and in relation to what *True Confessions* represented and did not represent, Boyer Brown introduced a new thread to the story: "I didn't like nude pictures. Those girls would sometimes get hold of these pictures; I think the boys had them. But I never did like to look at nothing like that."³⁷ As Marie Boyer Brown attempted to explain "girl talk," she moved back and forth between the fun things girls talked about—including *True Confessions*—and romantic, erotic and sexual relationships between boys and girls. In one sense, *True Confessions* functioned for Mrs. Brown as a metaphor for the types of things best girlfriends might discuss. "Girl talk" included intimate discussions about sexuality, romance and love. That Marie Boyer Brown associated *True Confessions* (and girl talk) with "nude pictures" (which she did not look at) speaks directly to the link between such magazines and the sexual content of the stories. Although the stories of premarital pregnancy, romance, mistaken identities, and dangerous relationships might seem passé to a modern reader, the stories contained in the pages of the magazine were much more risqué by the standards of readers in the first half of the twentieth-century.

To further clarify *True Confessions* to her interviewer, Boyer Brown compared them to soap operas:

³⁶ Marie Boyer Brown, interview by LaKisha Simmons and Lolita Villavasso Cherrie, digital, March 2007, In possession of author.

³⁷ Ibid.

And I was thinking too, about how foolish they were. That story [that I had on the T.V.] when you came [to interview me] and I turned it off?...I look at that too. Some of those girls make the wrong decision....[*True Confessions*] was like that. And I used to buy them. Mama would fuss. They were fifteen cents. And I would buy them; papa would give me money.³⁸

In Mrs. Brown's rendition of *True Confessions*, the stories were just as silly and over-the-top as modern-day soap operas. But just as she liked *True Confessions* back then, Mrs. Brown enjoys her soap operas today. From a 21st-century perspective, perhaps, she realizes that "some of those girls make the wrong decision," all in the service of an entertaining story-line.³⁹

Yet, while *True Confessions* was an entertaining read, the magazine also performed important cultural work. The "wrong decisions" made by the main characters were not so clear to the teenaged girls who anxiously read the stories for crucial information on love and sex. As Boyer Brown explained, the magazine helped her learn about relationships between boys and girls and provided information on sex and love that her mother did not give her. To explain why she enjoyed *True Confessions*, for example, Boyer Brown responded, "Well, my mama didn't talk with me. See that's another thing. No, my mama wouldn't talk with me. She didn't want to talk about things like that. I had other ladies that used to talk with me."⁴⁰ As Mrs. Brown explained, her mother "didn't want to talk about things like that;" and, at the same time, her mother did not appreciate her reading the lurid stories found in *True Confessions*. But for only fifteen cents, Mrs. Boyer Brown found a whole world of information on romance, love and sexuality—information she later shared and discussed with her friend Ida.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Indeed, *True Confessions* served that same role in many black girls' lives. Nearly every girl—even those in the aspiring and respectable classes—heard of or saw an issue of the magazine. In an ethnographic and "sociological study" of black beauticians and their customers, a 1950 sociology student noted the most popular reading materials in the black beauty shops she visited for her study. The most popular of all was *True Confessions* and *Love Story* followed by *Ebony*.⁴¹ Marian Wright Edelman, a daughter of a South Carolina Baptist minister, remembered that when she was about thirteen (in 1952) she tried to "trick" her father "by slipping a forbidden *True Confessions* magazine into the *Life* magazine [she] pretended to read." When her father found out what she was reading he "asked [her] to read it aloud and comment on its value!"⁴² By confessing this true story, Wright Edelman wished to teach children a life lesson on the value of reading proper materials. Significantly, her memory also points to the ubiquity of *True Confessions*. Even in Wright Edelman's religious household, she managed to sneak in a copy of the magazine and found it compelling enough to try to read where she might very likely get caught.

Not only did girls read these passionate love stories, but they also participated in a writing culture that emphasized romance. Marie Boyer Brown, who nourished a love of writing just as she loved reading, saved some of her love poems (written in the 1930s) in a scrapbook.⁴³ In one of these poems she declared: "Why I love and love to be in return/ To have love, to hold/ and keep and to yearn." Love and romance seemed central in

⁴¹ Mary Willie Johnson, "The Beauty Shop and the Beautician in an Urban Negro Community" (Thesis, Atlanta University, 1950), 12.

⁴² Marian Wright Edelman, *The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours* (Boston: Harper Paperbacks, 1993), 61.

⁴³ Marie Boyer Brown lived on the second floor of the Sisters of the Holy Family nursing home when Hurricane Katrina hit. Although she lost her home (the center closed as a result of the storm) and many of her friends passed away due to the storm, Marie Boyer Brown's scrapbook survived. We read parts of the scrapbook during our interview. Boyer Brown, interview.

many teen girls' writings. Marie Boyer Brown did not date many boys as a teenager; nonetheless, she wrote love stories that emphasized the fantasy of love rather than its reality. In one poem she spoke directly to the boy "of my dreams":

My heart speaks out to one alone
It will not be cast aside
Like a rolling stone.
Though ages will pass with the coming years
My heart should never
Cause my eyes to dimmer with tears.
Why waste love on lovesick fools
When love itself has many tools.
To the serious boy my heart sends love beams
The one and only one of my dreams.
Caution, oh heart, to the romantic call
Of thee strings that are tugging at thy wall.
Open your heart let love in
Begging and pleading again and again
Oh heart will thou let love plead in vain?
Answer, oh answer, without causing thee pain.⁴⁴

For Marie Boyer Brown, pleasure was not just found in imagining a "serious boy" with whom she could share her heart, pleasure was also found in the construction of the poem itself: she loved to write. Therefore, writing and sharing the love poem was pleasure in and of itself. Decades later, when discussing her writing, Marie Boyer Brown boasted: "I used to come up with them fast!"⁴⁵ Just as Audre Lourde explained the self-affirming and erotic act of "writing a good poem," Marie Boyer Brown's oral history emphasizes the pleasure she found, and continues to find, in her writing. Saving poems from the 1930s in a scrapbook, and continuing to look back on these poems today, illustrates just how important this writing was (and is) to Boyer Brown and her sense of self.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Writings saved from the 1930s reveal the centrality of the romantic ideal to black teenaged girls' notions of pleasure. The Normal School of Valena C. Jones in New Orleans published their own magazine full of student writings.⁴⁶ One 1938 short story in the collection echoed the tone of a "confessions" piece while also demonstrating what the "ideal" romance might look like. "When Fate Takes a Turn," by Inez Jolivette, told the story of a young man, Rhoderic, and a young lady, Joycelyn, who had a romantic spark the instant they met at a high school senior prom. Yet the idealization of love expressed by the short story is distinct from the experience of love. As Eleanor Alexander explores in her study of Paul Laurence and Alice Dunbar: "Paul fell in love with his idealized mate, not Alice; for to fall in love at first sight—as did Paul with a photograph of Alice—is to love a concept of perfection."⁴⁷ "When Fate Takes a Turn" is structured around the idea of romantic love as a concept of perfection.

The short story clearly described the portrait of an ideal young man—perhaps the fantasy that Inez Jolivette had cultivated over months of imagining what the perfect mate would be like. Rhoderic was manly but polite, strong yet respectable. Inez Jolivette described Rhoderic's high school years in terms of his athleticism and determination:

Rhoderic loved football and all his spare time was spent in practicing with the 'fellers'...[his mom] would become angry when he would rush home from school, eat his dinner, and then be off again to come back begrimed with dirt. She tried scolding him many times, but would stop when he would tell her that a 'feller' had to practice if he wanted to amount to anything on the football team. A few months later, however, he was made captain of the high school football team.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The Normal School was a Colored public school that gave certificates in education to black teachers. It took two years to complete the program in the 1930s. The school also functioned as an elementary school where the normal school students would receive part of their training.

⁴⁷ Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Tragic Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore, A History of Love and Violence Among the African American Elite* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 74.

⁴⁸ Inez Jolivette, "When Fate Takes a Turn," *The Moving Finger*, 1938. Fanny C. Williams Papers, Amistad Research Center.

He was clearly a leader at his high school, and therefore, sure to be a success in life despite the constraints of Jim Crow (which never fully enters the narrative). Rhoderic, above all else, was intelligent. He went north to an integrated school—U Pitt—and after a possibly derailing encounter with a wild roommate, became a successful doctor who performed the types of surgeries no one in the medical community thought possible. This was, possibly, the type of man Inez Jolivette wished to meet herself. She had chosen to become a school teacher, and may have wanted to date an educated man who had made a career and name for himself.

As for the portrait of an ideal lady, Inez depicted Joycelyn as modest, willing to be Rhoderic's helpmate but with goals of her own. "When Fate Takes a Turn" introduces Joycelyn to the reader in comparison to another girl—the one Rhoderic had chosen as his prom date:

Rhoderic felt towards Joycelyn as he had never felt before towards any girl. Moreover, between her and Lorraine there was quite a contrast. Lorraine was selfish, flirtatious, haughty and spoiled; while Joycelyn was well-bred, ambitious, demure and above all had a pleasing personality...[W]hen the dance was over they seemed to have known each other for a long time.⁴⁹

Right away, the scene is set with competition between two young women for Rhoderic's attention. Joycelyn wins this completion by being the "nice girl" who is ladylike. Yet part of this 'nice' description includes a surprise: ambition. When writing the character of Joycelyn, Inez Jolivette created a young woman whom she, too, could become. On a path to her own respectable career, Inez Jolivette created a character who was not simply a respectable woman; she was also an intellectual with concrete goals for her future. The intimacy and romance in the story is clear from this early scene featuring Joycelyn's

⁴⁹ Ibid.

ladylike behavior. The intimacy began on the dance floor. The characters were touching and looking at one another in the eyes, feeling as though they had "known each other for a long time."

Yet, Jolivette's story was full of the failures and half-starts of any confession story. The two lovebirds parted ways almost as soon as they had met, and only accidentally became reacquainted years later when Joycelyn applied for a job as nurse in Rhoderic's medical practice. After working together as nurse/doctor, they "grew more and more fond of each other, and likewise grew to become lovers. They made a perfect pair, for it seemed as if they were made to be together having so much in common."⁵⁰ Inez Jolivette's work expresses what it meant to have the intimacy of lovers. The main characters worked together as intellectual partners, they grew together and finally became emotional and physical partners.

Black girls' love poems and intimacy narratives also often featured heartbreak poems. These poems displayed the flip side of romantic love: rejection, breaking up, or, commonly, moving away. Heartbreak poems are one way to assess the pleasure culture of black girls' writing because although they focus on the distress of losing love, they nonetheless delight in the intimate relationship the couple once had. Some of these poems, just like the love poems, were likely based on fantasy rather than experience with the dramatic breakups or rejections the writings depict. Yet black girls in the South often did deal with losing loved ones to migration—best friends, family members, and lovers moved North and West, leaving behind intimacies and memories.

Lillian Voorhees, a teacher from Talladega College, an historically black college located in Alabama, collected the writings of her students. Many of these poems and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

short stories displayed extreme skill and nuance. A large number of them represented a similar genre of romantic writing that I found in New Orleans. As such, this larger collection enables a more inclusive examination of the pleasure culture of writing in black girls' lives. One 1930s heartbreak poem from this collection helps us explore the longing for intimacy expressed in girls' writing. Helen Hagin unveiled a lost love to her reader in the poem "Explanation":

I asked her for a kiss
Her lips were sealed,
Her touch was cold,
She saw me not, nor heard my plea.
No, friend, she was not dead—
She was in love,--
But not with me.⁵¹

As the tale begins, Helen expertly allows her reader to guess at her meaning by writing as if the narrator's lover has died. But soon the reader finds that the narrator has just been rejected and ignored. "Explanation" is intriguing precisely because of its mystery—it is open to multiple interpretations. The gender of the narrator is never clear, though we know the object of the narrator's love is a "her." It is possible that the two characters in the poem were both girls, maybe even best friends. The kiss and intimacy between one of them is romantic, while the other only feels a friendship because she is in romantic love with someone else. The suggestion is that the "her" is now emotionally dead, although presumably she was alive at one time—always at her friend's side. If this is the case, then the title of the poem becomes at once an allusion toward the ending of the poem, and an "explanation" for the soured relationship between the two girls. Alternately, maybe Helen decided to write from a male perspective, imagining a female character being chased by multiple lovers.

⁵¹ Helen Hagin, "Explanation," 1935, Lillian Welch Voorhees Papers, Amistad Research Center.

Whichever was the case, the intimacy and longing in this poem is tangible. The narrative's complexity is built through an "erotic imagination" of what the relationship could have been.⁵² Helen Hagin works with intimacy by figuring the romantic yearning almost through a tactile description. Using words that emphasized physical contact, "touch," "kiss," and "sealed" all call to mind states of contact. Although the narrator is rebuffed, physical intimacy never seems far away. And, in fact, the narrator does indeed feel her loved one, only to find that she is "cold." Because Helen Hagin addresses her reader directly as "friend" the longing for intimacy feels near and is almost transferred to the reader herself. The heartbreak described is indeed chilling. Helen Hagin's work speaks directly to the erotic in girls' writing culture. She develops a relationship between two people based on desire. Even though the love expressed is not reciprocal, her poetry reveals the ways in which black youth wrote and fantasized about pleasure.

Another heartbreak poem in the collection portrays the type of sadness caused by migration and movement. Beulah Jones wrote about missing a lover in the poem "Absence":

I thought if long miles were between the towns where you and I
Performed our tasks and kept our dreams,
Perhaps as days went by,
I would forget the little things
That made you dear—too dear,
And I should find happiness
Again, if you weren't near.
But I have come to love you more
Of that I am sure.
They are so wrong who would have me think
Absence is a cure.⁵³

⁵² duCille, *The Coupling Convention*, 86-87.

⁵³ Beulah Jones, "Absence," 1939, Lillian Welch Voorhees Papers, Amistad Research Center.

"Absence" displays how youths' writing often simultaneously emphasized both the pleasure and pain of losing one's lover. The term "too dear" is the most intimate piece of the poem. It may allude to a relationship that had overstepped the boundaries of niceness, and subtly expressed the physical pleasures that made her lover so special. The pleasure and intimacy in this poem is expressed in "little things" that go unnamed.

Romantic love and fantasy are echoed in a wide variety of black girls' writing. These writings together constitute a pleasure culture. Part of the pleasure in this writing culture was the joy of writing itself. In this setting, girls wrote for fun, for friends, and to express the love (and fantasies) in their life. Not only did black girls write such poems, so too did boys write to them. Although much less numerous in the archive, boys' romantic writing often took the same form as girls'. Not surprisingly, perhaps, much of boys' romantic writings were written directly to a specific (real rather than imagined) girl. In an autograph book once owned by Onelia Sayas Cherrie (a classmate of Marie Boyer Brown at McDonogh 35 in New Orleans) numerous little poems and sayings hint at the pleasures of *imagined* romance, love or intimacy. These "autographs" reveal the ways in which writing became a pleasure culture.⁵⁴ First, the signer had to think of something clever and cute to say, and then others delighted in what he or she had written as the autograph book was passed from classmate to classmate. One young boy wrote to Onelia Sayas:

I had a heart which
Once was mine
And now it's gone from me to you
So treat it well, as I have done,
For I have none and
You have two
(The author)

⁵⁴ Jacqueline Sardie, interview by LaKisha Simmons, digital, November 18, 2008, In possession of author.

-Wilbur⁵⁵

Sharing, discussing, writing and circulating love stories were sources of pleasure in black schoolgirls' lives. This writing culture was one of a particular class: school was a space in which black girls had the opportunity and time to write and share with friends.⁵⁶ Additionally, schoolgirls were aware of and learned about important black writers and intellectuals. In essence, they created a discursive culture around romance and pleasure. Their entrance into this writing culture was most likely influenced by popular culture, such as their reading of *True Confessions* as well as their teachers' insistence that they, too, could be writers like Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson or Langston Hughes. Until we collect more black girls' writing, we will not know quite how far the romantic culture of pleasure writing extended.

Make Believe at the Colored YWCA, New Orleans, LA

I want to return to the photograph taken at the YWCA's "Make Believe Land" in order to suggest that make believe and fantasy are productive ways to envision black girls' performance of pleasure. Instead of a discursive culture, the YWCA lets us into a world where black girls performed their ideas of pleasure and fantasy—often on a dance floor. The "Make Believe Land" photograph is a compelling symbol because of its location on Canal Street in the midst of segregation. At the same time, Make Believe Land appears to be a place of pure pleasure and fantasy. When I stare at the photograph, analyzing it, looking for the "little things" I find myself smiling at the faces who stare back at me.

⁵⁵ Wilbur, "I had a heart," ca1931, Onelia Sayas Cherrie Autograph Book, Cherrie Family Papers.

⁵⁶ This writing culture may have extended to working class girls as well, although finding writings authored by working class girls is difficult.

The Colored YWCA on Canal Street functioned as a central gathering place for black girls and young women in New Orleans—particularly Protestant girls. Ellen Hill, who was so concerned with niceness, was one of many girls who enjoyed the world created by the YWCA.⁵⁷ In 1938 she joined the Girl Reserves Club that met at the Y. The interviewer who talked with teenaged Ellen Hill reported that she "seemed very happy" to be part of the club, and spoke excitedly of the club's plan for fixing up a special room, where they would hold a Halloween party.⁵⁸ The Colored YWCA functioned as a cultural space where girls like Ellen Hill were free to construct their own worlds. By joining the YWCA, Ellen found herself connected to a group of black girls and young women who worked together to build and maintain the shared spaces of the YWCA. The official purpose of all YWCAs was to: "Build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians."⁵⁹ Yet the notion of "social living" and "fellowship" were extremely important in the southern Colored branches of the organization. As historians of African American life have observed, black institutions such as the YWCA provided a space for political discussion and a rich civic life for African Americans, despite the confines of segregation.⁶⁰ Yet the YWCA provided much more than just a space for political discourse—it also offered a space for pleasure and

⁵⁷ For more on Ellen Hill see, Chapter 4: "The Gender of Fear."

⁵⁸ Ellen Hill, interview by Elizabeth Davis, transcript, October 14, 1938, Allison Davis Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections.

⁵⁹ Campbell C. Johnson, "Negro Youth and the Educational Program of the Y.M.C.A.," *The Journal of Negro Education* 9, no. 3 (July 1940): 393.

⁶⁰ Joseph Heathcott, "Black Archipelago: Politics and Civic Life in the Jim Crow City," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 705-737; Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

leisure. This pleasure space provided girls the room necessary to construct alternate subjectivities around enjoyment, intimacy and fantasy.

Girls' experiences inside the Canal Street Branch of the Colored YWCA and at the Girl Reserves Club are difficult to trace. The space of the YWCA, though public, was also insular. It included only African American citizens of New Orleans, and unless there were special parties or club meetings, the YWCA included only girls and women. The images produced at the YWCA, the dances, games, clubs, and news stories about the Y reported in *The Louisiana Weekly* made imagined worlds real for just a moment.

Understanding the pleasure culture of the Colored YWCA is much easier when we work with juxtaposition. To fully appreciate the happiness a girl like Ellen felt when entering the world of the YWCA makes more sense after sketching out the realities of Jim Crow New Orleans. As explored in the other chapters of this dissertation, much of the public space and culture of New Orleans was organized around a dominant world view. It reinforced and recreated dominant ideologies of race, gender and sexuality.⁶¹ When girls opened social studies text books, they told the story of "The White Man's Burden," the images inside of local newspapers (both black and white) and at the movies, raced definitions of 'beauty,' and racist memorabilia (of mummies, for example) was displayed in the windows of New Orleans' tourist shops.⁶² But the worlds created by the YWCA, and in similar spaces *inside* of the black community, created a different, often positive

⁶¹For a discussion of ideology and the public sphere see, Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), esp. Introduction: The Intimate Public Sphere.

⁶² Florence Borders, interview by Kate Ellis and Michele Mitchell, June 20, 1994, Behind the Veil, John Hope Franklin Collection, Duke University; Lynnell Thomas, "Kissing Ass and Other Performative Acts of Resistance: Austin, Fanon, and New Orleans Tourism," *Performance Research* 12, no. 3 (September 2007): 137.

and hopeful, conversation providing a social space within which black girls could circulate. This space was often organized around pleasure (rather than trauma).



Figure 5.2
Les Jeunes Filles Club, 1954
(Courtesy of Amistad Research Center)

The Colored YWCA was made into a place of pleasure precisely because the organizers focused on leisure activities. The building became a space for dancing and parties sponsored and organized by the various clubs. There was pleasure (as Ellen Hill expressed) in the planning process of the parties: producing the costumes, the decorations, inviting girlfriends and boyfriends. Group work—coming together and creating together—provided the bases for the YWCA's approach to working with girls and young women. The YWCA's leaders believed that by working together in clubs or

planning social events, young women learned that "social adjustment and growth of the individual are all closely related."⁶³ Further, at the parties, girls learned the value of "good taste" and "general refinement."⁶⁴ When the girls chose who to invite to their parties, they were drawing ties of intimacy to boys and girls their age, while at the same time marking difference between those invited and those left out. For the girls involved, the YWCA created a sense of belonging.

Les Jeunes Filles Club (The Young Ladies Club) participated in and helped create the make believe world of the Colored YWCA. In the archive at Amistad Research Center (an archive devoted to black history) Les Jeunes Filles has a series of photographs dedicated to their activities. Some of these are photographs in various outfits and costumes. Along side of these posed costumed photographs are pictures of the young women at the YWCA being taught to sew. It is possible, therefore, that the outfits they displayed in the posed photographs were made by the club members themselves.

The shards of evidence left behind by Les Filles Jeunes Club shows evidence of a fantasy world. The outfits they wore (and possibly made) were role playing costumes. Les Filles Jeunes Club turned themselves into genies and cowboys. What made the clothes fantastical was the fact that they were, in a sense, useless. Because the clothing was most often made for themed parties with a focus on make believe, the costumes had little use outside of this fantasy world.⁶⁵ The girls' goal was not to learn how to sew to mend their own clothing (although they most likely acquired the skills to do so) nor were they making work or school clothes. These were not clothes for the "real world" outside

⁶³ Dorothy I. Height, "The Adult Education Program of the YWCA Among Negroes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1945): 391.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁶⁵ The posed photographs might appear along side another photograph depicting a "Ranch Party" for example.

of the doors of the Colored YWCA. They were purely pleasure clothes—with no other purpose. In this, the YWCA created a place of pleasure where girls escaped their daily world and instead "made believe."



Figure 5.3
King and Queen at YWCA
(Courtesy of Amistad Research Center)

Figure 5.3, a photograph taken in 1959, characterizes a later period of the Colored YWCA. The fantasy in the picture is clear—a couple has been named queen/king, and rule the night. Depicted in the photograph is the full blown world of make believe culture inside the YWCA. The fantasy world was created by decorations: large, painted masks, oversized fans, and ribbons flanked the walls while perfectly spaced plants appear to have bordered the dance floor. The image created is striking for its symmetry. The couples who surrounded the "court" of the king and queen are almost nearly symmetrical

(except for the fact that the boy-girl pattern is inverted on one side). The heterosexual couples on the sides descend in height; the ballerinas, *en pointe*, strike their pose perfectly in tune with one another.

Every single detail in the photograph is perfect—but in considering this coincidence of perfection I almost wonder if the scene is posed. Inexplicably, nobody at the dance looked at the photographer. Not one person looked down from the rafters at the camera; not one boy or girl's gaze was misplaced. It is clear then, that this is a make believe world with every detail worked to perfect precision by the girls involved. If, indeed, the scene is posed then the girls who created the party worked incredibly hard to create a "make believe" world that appeared completely real in the photo. Did the girls hope that the photograph would be published in the society section of *The Louisiana Weekly*? The pleasure of the dance is meant to be seen, shared and admired.

The dance (depicted by the posed precision of the photograph—which is not a substitute for the real dance) was saturated with safe, heterosexual coupling. Everyone—at least on the dance floor—is coupled boy-girl. The pleasure environment of the YWCA was molded specifically for respectable leisure. According to the New Orleans branch, the space was for "Negro girls and women...a community investment in healthy, happy, efficient womanhood."⁶⁶ This photograph reflects the YWCA's commitment to "the *right kind* of social relaxation," the type of relaxation that would teach girls to be pretty partners to the men in their lives.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Lee Sartain, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 63.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Also notable about this particular photograph, the dance, and more precisely the image created, is its mode of cold war intimacy.⁶⁸ Partially, this scene could have been played out anywhere in America. The photograph endorsed Cold War consumption—this scene is decidedly middle class. The photograph was built on excess and extravagance: this image was clearly not part of the 1930s YWCA. And lining the rafters are service men (in fact, here, there are more service men than girls, as if the scene was created not only for the photographer but also for them). In the photograph, pleasure is represented in coupling, hand holding. There is also a pleasure in extravagance and consumption. The girls wear beautiful dresses—some even strapless. But what makes this scene particular rather than ubiquitous is the world that existed outside the walls of the YWCA. Just down the street from the dance, at the shopping/ entertainment district of Canal Street, there existed a world of segregation. On Canal Street stood Lowes Movie Theater; Lowes's extremely long series of steps leading to the colored entrance served a physical reminder of Jim Crow. With each step youth knew they were entering the colored only section. This, along with the unfriendly world of Canal Street department stores, reminded black youth of their second-class citizenship.

The make believe world offered by the YWCA images show an alternate world to the segregated streets outside. The performance culture that emphasized dancing, costumes, and sets created a make believe land where fantasies could be realized. That this detailed, incredible world was made from construction paper, cloth, and the perfect photograph shows the care and time the club girls put into their lives at the YWCA. The

⁶⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

creation of such a world was part of the pleasure itself. At the same time, girls sought to have a good time at dances where they could take part in the act of make believing.

Conclusion: To Talk of Pleasure in a Culture of Trauma

The histories of pleasure that I have told are only bits and pieces of a larger history of intimacy, love, and joy in black girls' lives—a small piece of the puzzle to reconstructing girls' inner lives. In the end, I have not been able to recreate as much of that puzzle as I would have liked. But I hope the discussion will help point toward future areas of study and possible methodologies for thinking about pleasure in black girls' lives.

In some crucial ways, my discussions of black girls' pleasure culture builds on Robin Kelley's *Race Rebels*, a "history from way, way below" that seeks to explore the politics of the everyday.⁶⁹ In the chapter "We are Not What We Seem: The Politics and Pleasures of Community" Robin Kelley argues that historians of African American life need to "strip away the various masks African Americans wear in their daily struggles to negotiate relationships or contest power in public spaces, and search for ways to gain entry into the private world hidden beyond the public gaze."⁷⁰ His assertion suggests that behind the cultures of dissemblance, silence, and feigned smiles, African Americans cultivated cultures of pleasure with one another. Analyzing all-black spaces such as the YWCA partially answers Kelley's call. In fact, Kelley, like historians Tera Hunter, Stephanie Camp and Earl Lewis, attempts to explore life behind the masks by looking for

⁶⁹ Robin D. G Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 1-13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

spaces of black cultural life—dances, parks, even church.⁷¹ These scholars of African American life discuss the political ramifications of pleasure in black lives—by invoking the analytical terms resistance or infrapolitics. From their work we learn that pleasure cultures can be found in a myriad of public spaces. This chapter adds to the discussion of pleasure and politics, by grappling with the ways in which pleasure cultures helped individuals forge intimacies between one another.⁷² There is much to learn from friendships between girls and groups of women. These relationships helped women survive the traumas of Jim Crow and provided an alternate space to construct subjectivities. Further, through a detailed account of pleasure cultures in African American lives, we may also be able to reconstruct a history of love and relationships in black communities.

Productive dialogue might also be gained by grappling with the distinctions between talking about "pleasure" versus studying "desire." What would it mean for historians of African American history to center black female desire? What sources would allow us to grapple with black women as subjects of desire? Such a discussion would necessarily have to take into account the multiplicities of sexual desire, while also detailing if and how compulsory heterosexuality worked among the middle and aspiring class of Afro-Americans.⁷³

⁷¹ Tera W Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*; Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 3 (August 2002): 533-572.

⁷² Literary scholars Ann duCille and Eleanor Alexander seek to do this in their important scholarship on black writers. They are able to use the work of black writers—and thus have more sources to work from than a typical social historian. However, their discussions are crucial in helping to contextualize the love-culture in black communities. See, duCille, *The Coupling Convention*; Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow*.

⁷³ Mattie Udora Richardson, "No More Secrets, No More Lies: African American History and Compulsory Heterosexuality," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 63-76.

Many questions remain in investigating black women's and girls' sexual pleasure. This chapter is meant to only begin a dialogue about how scholars of the past might think about sources and methods to find entry into the "private world" described by Robin Kelley. Though finding traces of this private world is difficult, it is a crucial part of the story of black girls' lives during Jim Crow. The intimate and romantic relationships cultivated by girls give us a sense of their hopes and dreams. At the same time, these pleasure cultures provided an alternative identity for girls who participated. In the make believe world of the YWCA, or as the heroine of a love story, girls were no longer "colored," second-class citizens being insulted on the streets. Instead they were the heroes of their own lives—able to fantasize and play. What does it mean to talk of pleasure in a culture of trauma like that of Jim Crow? Understanding pleasures help us appreciate the places of play and freedom black girls were able to carve out for themselves despite the regimented features of Jim Crow society—even if many of these spaces were small, fragmentary or fleeting.

Epilogue:

Jim Crow Girls, Hurricane Katrina Women



Figure 6.1
Onelia Sayas and friend, ca. 1930
(Courtesy of Lolita Cherrie)

Onelia Sayas Cherrie was a fourteen-year-old high school student at a New Orleans Colored public high school when fourteen-year-old Hattie McCray was killed by Charles Guerand in 1930. The girls were the same age, living in the same city, both defined as "colored" in a racialized society. In some crucial ways they were worlds apart:

while one went to high school, the other worked. Yet they both lived under constraints faced by all black girls in Jim Crow New Orleans. Onelia Sayas Cherrie would have certainly heard about and probably even discussed with her friends and family Hattie McCray's death and later Charles Guerand's trial. Onelia Cherrie grew up in a predominantly Creole, downtown neighborhood. She saw herself as a devout Catholic, and, most likely, as a very nice girl.¹ Her nice girl status was buttressed by her intense faith, class background, downtown neighborhood, Creole ethnicity, ability to finish high school in the heart of the Great Depression, and her own commitment to middle-class values.

While Hattie McCray's death highlighted the silences in the discourse of race and gender in segregated New Orleans, Mrs. Onelia Cherrie's death, seventy five years later, brings up different, but related sets of questions regarding silence and accountability in twenty-first-century New Orleans. After the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Cherrie sat at the Convention Center with her son and thousands of other New Orleanians waiting for help from their government.² Cherrie's home withstood the storm, but the damage to the city left her and her son, Eddie Cherrie, without electricity or running water. Mayor Ray Nagin advised all remaining New Orleanians to try to make their way to the Superdome or Convention Center for further support and transportation. "Once there, we were forgotten," wrote Eddie Cherrie a month later.³ Mrs. Cherrie was one of many elderly black New Orleanians at the convention center. After three days of dehydration, she fell and hit her head; only then was she evacuated by helicopter to

¹ Marie Boyer Brown, interview by LaKisha Simmons and Lolita Villavasso Cherrie, digital, March 2007, In possession of author

² Eddie Cherrie, conversation with author, November 17, 2008; Lolita Cherrie, conversation with author, October 22, 2008.

³ Eddie Cherrie to Vicki Smith, November 8, 2005, Cherrie Family Papers.

Armstrong International Airport, where medical help and a flight outside of the city waited. At the airport, she was separated from her son by medical personnel promising to care for her. She was conscious and they had her information.

What happened next, no one knows for sure. Her son waited for her to come out of the triage area, but workers told him they could not locate her and that she may have been evacuated by FEMA to a shelter or hospital. Initially she was one of the many missing citizens after Hurricane Katrina; but Mrs. Cherrie never made it out of the airport alive. Her family learned of her death just before Thanksgiving, nearly two months after the breach of the levees.

The bodies of numerous victims of Hurricane Katrina remained unidentified during the weeks that followed the storm; while families frantically searched for their missing relatives. Eddie Cherrie, with the help of his wife Lolita, continued looking for his mother hoping to find her alive. In late September, Eddie Cherrie took a DNA test that might help identify his mother in a Department of Homeland Security morgue in St. Gabriel, Louisiana.⁴ The DNA test might have been able to link Cherrie with his mother and perhaps, provide some small bit of closure. Weeks later, Cherrie and his family found out (by watching Anderson Cooper) that the DNA had not been tested or processed because of a fight over who would pay for it, FEMA or the overwhelmed state of Louisiana.⁵ This lengthy dispute over dollars left families in an emotional limbo, wondering if their loved ones were alive, while the heavily guarded FEMA morgue

⁴ "FEMA: DMORT Operations End in Louisiana," March 3, 2006, <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=23979> (accessed November 3, 2008).

⁵ Lolita Cherrie, conversation with author, November 17, 2008.

prevented other families from picking up bodies that they knew were there.⁶ The federal government refused to care for those suffering from the physical, economic and psychological effects of Katrina. The government, while arguing about the cost of DNA tests, managed to fully distance themselves from human suffering. That they could be ignored so easily demonstrated that black citizens were not fully recognized in the fabric of the United States.⁷

Most people killed as a result of Hurricane Katrina were black or elderly and often both.⁸ The story of Onelia Sayas Cherrie's death is a powerful indictment of the government's culpability in the tragedy following Hurricane Katrina. Mrs. Cherrie's home withstood the onslaught of wind and flood waters. She did not die as a result of the storm itself; instead, she was one of many New Orleanians waiting for help at the Convention Center for hours, for days. Onelia Sayas Cherrie's story highlights the question of accountability. Her story is one of hundreds. People all over America were angry as they helplessly watched their fellow citizens crying for aid. As Clyde Woods puts it, "The picture of twenty thousand slowly dying African Americans chanting 'we want help' outside of New Orleans's Convention Center was a blues moment."⁹ This blues moment shattered existing silences in the U.S.'s discourses of race, citizenship and belonging.

⁶ Nicholas Riccardi and David Zucchino, "Families Lose Loved Ones Again--in a Bureaucratic Mire," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 2005.

⁷Of course, not all New Orleanians affected by the storm were black. But Afro-Americans were disproportionately affected. Additionally, the government responded as if the New Orleans victims were both black and poor. See Henry Jenkins, "'People from that Part of the World': The Politics of Dislocation," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (August 2006): 469-486; "Houston, We May Have A Problem," Marketplace (National Public Radio, September 5, 2005).

⁸ Howard Berkes, "Study: Many Katrina Victims Were Elderly, Black," podcast (National Public Radio, October 24, 2005).

⁹ Clyde Adrian. Woods, "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?: Katrina, Trap Economics, and the Rebirth of the Blues," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2005): 1005.

For Americans sitting at home watching from televisions, the pictures of thousands of terrified citizens embodied the abject, the unbelievable. The abject creates fear because it exposes the vulnerability of the human subject by destroying boundaries between self and other.¹⁰ The abject explodes fundamental definitions that help us make sense of the world. Those days after the storm seemed "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable."¹¹ Meaning collapsed. The presence of stranded and starving human beings shattered definitions of American citizenship and "developed world" status. A *Chicago Tribune* bureau chief wrote at the time: "The images I saw in New Orleans, I'm ashamed to say, were far more like those from what we imagine to be a Third World nation... Maybe the situation seemed even worse because we never expected to see scenes like that in America."¹² The disturbing coupling of New Orleans with the "Third World" after the storm revealed new uncertainty about what it meant to be an American.¹³ Of course, strategic silences held (and hold) together definitions of American citizenship, of what it means to be part of the "First World"—silences relating to realities of U.S. life: extremes of poverty and wealth, racial histories of inequality, and even governmental incompetence. Significant silences in the discourses of race in the United States erase black Americans' experiences. Every once in a while, cultural moments threaten to explode these silences, and bring to the forefront questions of justice that usually lurk in the shadows.

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982), 2-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹² Lisa Anderson, "Third World Memories and New Orleans," *Chicago Tribune*, September 11, 2005.

¹³ It also turned black bodies into "others" while implicitly devaluing the struggles of people in developing countries. Lynne Duke, "Block That Metaphor," *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2005.

Elderly women who lived through or died in Hurricane Katrina due to the storm's attendant governmental neglect and racism also came of age during legalized Jim Crow in New Orleans and a white supremacy supported by the state. Therefore, these women's relationship to the state, their sense of belonging to New Orleans, and their subjectivities are irrevocably tied to these two epochs in New Orleans history. As George Lipsitz reminds us, there has been a "perpetual struggle for dignity and self-identity waged by working class blacks in New Orleans[.]"¹⁴ The stories collected throughout this dissertation reveal that, for women, this "struggle for dignity" was a struggle against gendered forms of violence as well. Although some believed that America had "gone far to disinherit the Negro boy" while girls "fare far better," truth was that black girls faced struggles of their own.¹⁵

As we begin to grapple with Katrina as an historical moment, we must also remember that the people who lived through and died in the storm have individual life histories.¹⁶ Onelia Sayas Cherrie was tied not only to the trauma of Hurricane Katrina, but also to the trauma of segregation. These histories, seemingly far apart in time, are intimately interwoven by the people who lived through them. By considering Katrina in the epilogue of a dissertation focused on segregation in New Orleans, I answer Nell Painter's call for us to consider our "interrelatedness" not only across the color line, but also across time.¹⁷ An analysis of such interconnection reveals two crucial moments in

¹⁴ George Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (August 2006): 460.

¹⁵ Harl Douglass, "The Education of Negro Youth for Modern America: A Critical Summary," *The Journal of Negro Education* 9, no. 3, *The Negro Adolescent and his Education* (July 1940): 534-546.

¹⁶ My thinking has been influenced by, Nan Enstad, "On Grief and Complicity: Notes toward a Visionary Cultural History," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History*, ed. James Cook, Lawrence Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 39.

generational memory. Even as civil rights and black power movements transformed the racial structure of New Orleans, a generation of black citizens experienced the state's denial of their subjectivity and material and psychic pain during different stages of their lives. The women most vulnerable to the hurricane and its aftermath came of age during Jim Crow. Furthermore, the contemporary struggle for state accountability in post-Katrina New Orleans is informed by a much longer struggle for citizenship rights in New Orleans.

For black women of the generation who grew up Jim Crow and lived through Hurricane Katrina, their lives have been defined, in part, by traumatic experiences. For many of them, being an American citizen has been full of contradiction. They have had to contend with multiple assaults on their dignity: daily insults from whites on the streets, pressure from family to remain "nice," expectations about who they *should be* as black Americans, and the varying costs of being forgotten by the state. Their inner worlds have also been full of pleasures—of pleasant memories of neighborhoods, of good friends and supportive families, and those who were fortunate enough to attend school recall their educations with pride and happiness. But their stories must be told when reconstructing a history of Jim Crow, just as their stories must be included in any analysis of their generation.

"No greater gesture of mockery was ever recorded," *The Louisiana Weekly* declared in "Justice Mocked," an editorial in 1937 regarding Charles Guerd. *The Louisiana Weekly* pointed to a long tradition in which whites were not held accountable

for the death of black citizens.¹⁸ Who, if anyone, will be held accountable for the deaths following Hurricane Katrina? Will the systems of oppression that created the tragic aftermath of the storm ever be addressed by the government? Or, will tradition be upheld? Hurricane Katrina presents one type of ending to the story of the generation I follow throughout this dissertation. There has been persistent patterns of segregation, state neglect, and denial of psychic interiority for women who came of age during Jim Crow.

This dissertation has been a story about a generation of women who lived through a tumultuous time in New Orleans. By using sexuality as an analytical tool, I have grappled with the ways in which segregation and intra-racial tensions affected girls' notions of self. Black girls of this generation came to see themselves as subjects of certain types of sexuality—just as Onelia Cherrie did when she chose to be a devout Catholic, collecting prayer cards and saving them for the rest of her life.¹⁹ For many black girls, especially those who had to work, vulnerability to sexual violence and sexual harassment was one of the most intense ways that the Jim Crow state disciplined and defined "all black girls."²⁰ Middle-class girls often encountered insults or sexual harassment as well, when walking to school, or traversing the city streets outside of their neighborhoods. But this dissertation also shows that black girls in various circumstances could understand themselves as "nice girls," or, in a respectable manner, they could even become "romantic partners." On the other hand, black girls who transgressed standards of niceness might have been forced to identify as "sexually delinquent."

¹⁸ "Justice Mocked," *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 1, 1937.

¹⁹ Lolita Cherrie, conversation with author, October 22, 2008.

²⁰ William Henry Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow : African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: New Press Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 9

These various categories offered black girls ways to construct notions of self through, around and in the various constraints they faced as subjects of a segregated racial order. Fully examining these categories has allowed for a glimpse into black girls' elusive inner lives. After all, the emotional experience of growing up a second-class citizen in a segregated city contributed to how girls came to understand themselves and their place in New Orleans.

Onelia Sayas Cherrie was born during segregation and died as a result of Katrina. What did she see and think as she looked around at the horrific scene at the Convention Center? What framework did she have to comprehend her experience? Did she think of her past, of growing up in Jim Crow? In 1931 when Onelia Sayas Cherrie transferred from the public colored high school, McDonogh 35, to the local black Catholic high school, Xavier University Preparatory, a classmate wrote goodbye to her in an autograph book:

Dear Nellie:

Tis the sad, sad fate of a
Schoolgirl's heart
To meet, be friends
and then to part.
Always remember me as a friend.²¹

²¹ Mildred , "Tis the Sad, Sad Fate," June 1931, Onelia Sayas Cherrie Autograph Book, Cherrie Family Papers.

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