

Introduction

Slave Spaces

Stories about places are makeshift things.

Michel de Certeau¹

Of all the places I've been in the world, New Orleans is the only place I've ever been where, if you listen, sidewalks will speak to you.

John T. Scott²

Charlotte's first Atlantic crossing did not require a passport. Her 1805 Middle Passage from Africa to New Orleans was legal. However, by her second transoceanic journey fifteen years later, the Atlantic currents had shifted. New Orleans, a colonial hamlet, had transformed into a booming American metropolis. Its population exploded from about 8,000 in 1803 to 27,000 in 1820, which made it the fifth largest city in the United States. International slave importation had been illegal since 1807, and Charlotte herself had changed: The prepubescent girl who left Africa had become the property of the prominent Forstall family and a mother in New Orleans. Like Charlotte, the Blancqs of New Orleans also descended from an Atlantic lineage, but unlike the enslaved woman these elite sojourners could visit their relatives in Bordeaux. In preparation for their 1820 journey, Pierre Blancq leased Charlotte, who would leave her daughter Corine behind in New

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 107.

² John T. Scott, *American Experience: New Orleans*, DVD, directed by Steven Ives (Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2007). Scott (1940–2007), a celebrated visual artist, was a black New Orleanian who, among other accolades, received the MacArthur Genius grant.

Orleans to nurse the three Blancq children. Since such border crossings jeopardized property claims and subjected importers to prosecution, the mayor issued a passport for Charlotte. That paper – the mayor, slave owner, and slave lessee all hoped – would ensure that Charlotte could travel to France and then re-enter New Orleans as she had left it – a slave.³

Charlotte's story and others like it suggest that daily experiences of slavery in New Orleans and its environs at the turn of the nineteenth century were international, interconnected, and itinerant – a sharp contrast to the contained, isolated, and stationary bondage long associated with the plantation south. Unlike in the northeastern states of the early republic, where emancipation schemes diminished slave populations, New Orleans became a major American metropolis as its slave population exploded. From 1803, the year of the Louisiana Purchase, until 1830, slaves made up one-third of the urban population. The city became a hub of slavery, diversity, and circulation at the same time that the proper management of people became a measure of civilization and modernity. How did Charlotte and her fellow slaves help to produce the cosmopolitan places of New Orleans, the polyglot port city at the intersection of US imperial expansion and the Atlantic market economy? How did elites seek to establish order among the slaves and rabble in a compact urban core? How was the place of slaves in the city and its terrestrial and maritime conduits informed by the transitions between mercantilism and liberalism, small-scale farming and agro-capitalism, Old World imperialism, and New World republicanism? In short, what do we make of a slave woman with a passport?

Slavery's Metropolis uses slave circulations through New Orleans between 1791 and 1825 to map the social and cultural history of enslaved men and women and the rapidly shifting city, nation, and world in which they lived. In contrast to the prevailing idea that black Atlantic journeys and intimate interracial assemblies were exceptional to or subversive of chattel slavery, this book argues that in New Orleans not only did such

³ I explore Charlotte's story in depth in Chapter 2. See footnotes there for full references.

On changes in jurisdiction and their implications for slave status, see Rebecca Scott, "Paper Thin: Freedom and Re-Enslavement in the Diaspora of the Haitian Revolution," *Law and History Review* 29, no. 4 (2011): 1061–1087; Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

journeys and assemblies exist despite that system of domination, but they were essential to it. A monolithic slaveocracy did not conspire to quarantine bondspersons; rather, slaveholders and local and imperial officials disputed over how to regulate and exploit slave mobility to build the city's infrastructure and industries. Bondspersons used this compulsory mobility to enact their own ideas about their proper place in a burgeoning slave society. So that diverse port situated at the intersection of Atlantic circularity and early American imperial expansion offers a rich vantage point for exploring the history of those multidirectional movements and the race-based containment strategies masters and leaders developed to regulate them. Though the master-slave relationship was a property-based arrangement, over time leaders and masters used law and custom to transform a black phenotype into a proxy for slave status. This book charts the uneven contests over the place of enslaved people in a port city to contribute fresh insights into the geographies of slavery and freedom for men and women, the history of racism, and the malleability of modern power.

This book uses everyday life across lines of empire, color, race, and status to offer a novel analysis of a transformational epoch in world history. In a little over three decades, the United States went from a collection of British colonies to a sovereign and imperialistic "nation among nations." The Haitian Revolution became a model for black freedom and an omen for the slaveholding Americas. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the nation's territory, accelerated the dispossession of indigenous nations, and hastened Anglo-American settlement in the continental interior. The transatlantic slave trade gave way to a domestic one that met the skyrocketing demand for slaves during the ascendance of King Cotton, strengthened US national sovereignty, and advanced the global industrial economy. The US victory over Britain in the War of 1812 and Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo ushered in a new era in the history of free trade, globalization, and colonialism. And this period stoked a white supremacist ideology that holds power even in the present. Slavery was central to each development, which put enslaved people in a position to advance, interrupt, shape, and talk back to such geopolitical shifts.

Slavery's Metropolis contributes analytical and historical perspectives to three intertwined fields: African diaspora and black Atlantic studies, cultural studies of American empire, and Louisiana history. First, the book proposes a novel analytical framework, "confined cosmopolitanism," that extends recent scholarship on the geographies of slavery and freedom in the

United States and the black Atlantic. Ex-slave, abolitionist, and orator Frederick Douglass declared, “people in general will say they like colored men as well as any other, *but in their proper place!*”⁴ While Douglass likely referred to status, social and geographic positions are intertwined. Space is not a blank slate or an inert setting over which time acts. Rather, over time people produce places through lived experience even as those places shape people’s daily lives. As such, contests over place-making offer unique insight into historical processes.⁵ For example, auction blocks, whether the centerpiece of an elaborate pen or a slipshod arrangement of wood or stone no more massive than a milk crate, were a trader’s showroom and a buyer’s prospecting place. For those who mounted it, the auction block was a shattering space. Strangers gathered at that one physical place for a transaction that deepened their social and economic distance from one another.⁶

Slavery studies is heavily indebted to historian Stephanie Camp, whose groundbreaking *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday*

⁴ Frederick Douglass, “The Church and Prejudice” (speech given to the Plymouth County Anti-Slavery Society in Plymouth, County, Massachusetts on November 4, 1841), in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 3–4, 4, emphasis original.

⁵ As geographers and environmental historians have long insisted, people and places act on each other in contingent and competing ways. For example, New Orleans owes its existence as much to the rhythmic silt deposits carried by the Mississippi River as to the decision by early French urban planners to situate the city atop a “natural” levee. Geographers have long debated the relationship between space and place. For some, space is the “empty” terrain on which places are built. For others, place connotes the varied and distinctive landscapes associated with the pre-modern past while space refers to the homogenous or uniform landscapes of modernity and the future. In this book, I am interested in the ways that people “produced” places consistent with their competing visions of present and future society. I will generally use “space” to refer to conceptual or analytical schemas, whether those belonging to the historical actors or to me, and I will use “place” to refer to the concrete, material structures and sites that these actors produced and inhabited. On the shifting meanings of space and place in geography, see John A. Agnew, “Space and Place,” in *The Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, eds. John A. Agnew and David N. Livingstone (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 316–330. Important works on space and place in New Orleans history include Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Resistance in the Plantation South analyzes the ways that masters and slaves competed over physical space. Rural slave masters, Camp argues, sought to contain slave movement within a “geography of containment,” such as fields, housing quarters, and any other space subject to the master’s will. Through fences and slave patrols, pass systems and surveillance, they enacted power by containing their slaves. In response, enslaved men and women created a “rival geography” or the “alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planters’ ideals and demands.” The rival geography consisted of appropriated plantation space, and the areas to which truant and escaped slaves fled. These competing geographies, she argues, were one terrain in the ongoing struggles between masters and slaves that lasted through emancipation.⁷

While Camp focuses on rural plantations, her insights into the relationship between space and power apply to more capacious and dynamic geographies of slavery and resistance. Though most enslaved people lived, labored, and died on rural plantations, which were the primary sites of staple production, they were not the only contested space of Atlantic slavery. Rural plantations belonged to global geographies of capital and power that connected the African continental interior to the Atlantic, American plantations and mines to European capitals. Trade routes, wars, and displacement in the African interior supplied captives for the coastal trade. Elmina, Gorée, and other slave castles housed human cargo, sometimes for over a year until they passed through doors of no return. After kidnappers stole Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797) from his home he spent years as a captive in West Africa before he embarked upon the Middle Passage and later became a famed sailor and abolitionist. Millions lived and died on the salty Atlantic waters. Those who survived then mounted auction blocks to be scattered across the plantations, ships, mines, and households of the Americas. And after they arrived in port cities like New Orleans and their rural environs, bondspersons maintained “simultaneity” with the Atlantic World through heterogeneous assemblages and urban and rural migrations. Slaves were “citizens of the world.”⁸

⁷ Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6–7.

⁸ On the Middle Passage and the remaking of Atlantic communities, see Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*

Transnational lives demand transnational histories. The analytical framework “confined cosmopolitanism,” I argue, illuminates the global “geographies of containment” that masters hoped would bring land and sea, urban cores, and rural hinterlands into a single geography of Atlantic slavery, and the global “geographies of resistance” that enslaved men and women used to challenge it. It applies the conceptual frameworks pioneered by theorists of the black Atlantic to the populations often addressed by social historians of African diasporic slavery. This phrase “confined cosmopolitanism” may seem paradoxical, since everyday usage of “cosmopolitanism” calls to mind wealthy, educated, or otherwise privileged individuals, many of them male, who comfortably hop from place and place. I hope to subvert this assumption. In New Orleans, enslaved men and women had likely circulated through up to four regions – Africa, continental North America, the Caribbean, and Europe – and belonged, however unequally, to diverse communities of strangers.⁹ As recent scholarship shows, slaves manipulated space on and beyond plantations to build complex communities, escape, and revolt.¹⁰ But what about slave movement that was not the result of slaves’ attempts to find freedom, but instead the result of masters’ efforts to build their own wealth and power? Rather than mark plantations as containment spaces and everything beyond as latent freedom spaces,

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1992]).

⁹ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Recent spatial histories of slavery and freedom include Vincent Brown, “Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760–1761: A Cartographic Narrative,” <http://revolt.axismaps.com>, accessed January 10, 2014; Thadious Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). On maritime marronage, see Jorge L. China, “Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, with Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago,” *Revista Brasileira do Caribe* 10, no. 19 (July–December 2009): 259–284; Linda M. Rupert, “Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean,” *Slavery & Abolition* 30, no. 3 (2009): 361–382.

I am instead interested in how, under particular conditions, the entire world could become slave space.¹¹

An Atlantic perspective on containment geographies contributes to the history of women and gender by disrupting the association between mobility and masculinity and by emphasizing the contingent aspects of slave women's circulations. Historians generally argue that male slaves were more likely to be "hired out," or leased, while, with few exceptions such as midwives and healers, female laborers occupied domestic and plantation spaces.¹² "Over the course of their lives," one historian writes, "bondwomen would leave their home plantations, with permission, extremely rarely."¹³ But in the port city of New Orleans, the geographies of slavery for men and women spanned the plantation south and the Atlantic World. Enslaved women also circulated as nurses, chain gang laborers, and peddlers, which allowed them to gain "geographic literacy" or knowledge of the physical and social terrains of the neighborhoods, regions, nations, and empires that converged in New Orleans.¹⁴ At the same time, such

¹¹ Pioneering works on the black Atlantic include Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Important works on slavery and the African diaspora include James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*. Several recent works investigate migrations and the practice of diaspora across slavery and freedom. They include Adam Rothman, *Beyond Freedom's Reach: A Kidnapping in the Twilight of Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014); and James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹² On midwives and ritual healers, see Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹³ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 28.

¹⁴ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 161; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, chapter 2. On geographic literacy, see Phillip Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 203–233.

circulations rendered them vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse in that notoriously violent port city.¹⁵

Beyond that, this focus on slavery in an Atlantic port city allows us to bring the conventions of land and sea into a single analytical frame. Scholars of the early modern Atlantic World are interested in the ways pirates, sailors, merchants, missionaries, and other such “citizens of the world” carved out unconventional lives and, at times, radical politics on the high seas. This association between the Atlantic World and freedom proves especially strong for the black “Atlantic Creoles,” a term historian Ira Berlin coined to describe the early generation who traveled freely in ways that would later become difficult. As one historian writes, these “Atlantic Creoles” were “extraordinarily mobile, both geographically and socially . . . These were not people who felt constrained by place or defined by slavery. Nor was race their primary identification; that imposition came later.” These daring individuals “repeatedly risked danger, found an opening, seized the moment, and freed themselves.” This relationship between Atlantic migration and freedom has proven a durable one, and many recent works show the ingenious lengths to which people of African descent traveled to escape bondage.¹⁶

Yet in its insistence that mobility was integral, not exceptional, to slave life and labor, *Slavery’s Metropolis* democratizes and deromanticizes cosmopolitanism and thereby decouples the strong association between mobility and freedom in Atlantic World studies. To be sure, transnational migration afforded some bondspersons an escape from or alternative to the hierarchies of slavery and nation. From the moment of their arrival in the Americas, people of African descent crossed national borders to join

¹⁵ On slave women peddlers in Charleston, see Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 178–183.

¹⁶ Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13. According to Ira Berlin, many Atlantic Creoles were predominately male African and African diasporic merchants, *gens de mer*, free blacks, and black landowners who enjoyed broad life possibilities before the lines between slave and free, black and white became more fixed in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Jane Landers extends Berlin’s Atlantic Creole framework to the Spanish Gulf Coast and circum-Mexican Gulf. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

indigenous communities and to form maroon nations. The continued resonance of the Underground Railroad and the North Star as powerful symbols of the African-American experience is a testament to the enduring association between migration and black freedom. But for the vast majority of Africans in the early modern black Atlantic, migration brought them closer to bondage. The stories of slaves in motion across, between, and within physical, social, and imperial borders remind us of the possibilities and, more often, limits of migration and other such spatial fixes to structural hierarchies in the Global South.¹⁷

In addition to its exploration of slavery's Atlantic geographies this book also investigates the contingent local and imperial efforts to create a rational race regime in a city legendary for disorder. Both Napoleon Bonaparte and Thomas Jefferson saw in Louisiana the solution to the challenges that confronted their respective imperial ambitions. After the Seven Years War (1756–1763), republican revolutions upended thirteen British Northern American colonies, France, and the French Caribbean. At the same time, the Age of Revolution was the age of African slave importation. According to some estimates, the enslaved population in Spanish Louisiana nearly quadrupled from 5,600 in 1766 to 20,673 in 1788.¹⁸ Napoleon Bonaparte envisioned for Louisiana a plantation economy to support his efforts to avenge France's defeat in the Seven Years

¹⁷ Philosophers and intellectual historians have long debated the connections between cosmopolitan or universal moralities and particular interests. Even before philosopher Immanuel Kant elaborated on the concept in his influential 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*, the word “cosmopolitanism” has situated the universal realm as an antidote to the narrow prejudices and hierarchies of home. Cosmopolitanism as a moral project, however, is beyond my scope. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, trans. M. Campbell Smith (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Lim, 1903). Recent works that interrogate cosmopolitanisms in the black Atlantic include Emmanuel C. Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001), chapter 3; Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo, “‘Charged with Sympathy for Haiti’: Harnessing the Power of Blackness and Cosmopolitanism in the Wake of the Haitian Revolution,” in *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, ed. Doris Garraway (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 91–112; Pnina Webster, “Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (May 2006): 496–498; K. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006); Clifford Geertz, “What Is a Country If It Is Not a Nation?” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 4 (1997): 235–247. On deromanticizing black history, see Clarence Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 278, 284–285.

War and the Haitian Revolution. He planned to re-enslave the rebellious blacks in Saint-Domingue, return them to cash-cropping agriculture or deport them to Louisiana, and sustain the tiny Caribbean island with staples imported from Louisiana. When anticolonial and antislavery forces in Saint-Domingue defended their revolution, Napoleon sold Louisiana to his archenemy Great Britain's other Atlantic rival: Thomas Jefferson's United States.¹⁹

To Jefferson, New Orleans was central to US geopolitical interests. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1785, he rightly predicted the Mississippi River would become "one of the principal channels of future commerce for the country west of the Allegheny." It would convey goods from the continental interior out to European markets. In addition, Louisiana promised a peaceable solution to the divisive slavery question that threatened national unity from the start. Jefferson and others thought slavery would decline. By the 1770s, only South Carolina and Georgia had expanding plantation economies, and by 1804 seven of the original states had either abolished slavery outright or instituted gradual emancipation schemes. Jefferson hoped reproduction and geography would lead to a similar result in Louisiana. As Anglo-American settlers migrated west, he calculated, they would take the nation's slaves with them. The "diffusion" of the slave population over space and the presumed superior rates of white reproduction over time would lead to the gradual and, for masters in the Old South, profitable disappearance of blacks and, by extension, slavery in the early republic.²⁰

¹⁹ Laurent Dubois, "The Haitian Revolution and the Sale of Louisiana," *Southern Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2007): 18–41. On Saint-Domingue, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York: Penguin Books, 1999 [orig. published 1785]), 9. On slavery and Jefferson's vision for American empire in the era of the Louisiana Purchase, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 30–35; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Walter Johnson, "The Racial Origins of American Sovereignty," *Raritan* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 50–59; Roger G. Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). On whiteness in the early republic, see Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

As Jefferson predicted, strangers from all walks of life indeed converged on the hovels of New Orleans. “The low orders of every colour, white, yellow, and black, mix indiscriminately at these receptacles,” one observer wrote of the city’s tipping houses. “Such a motley crew, and incongruous scene!”²¹ At the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, the city’s population stood at 8,000, and though it trailed that of more established American cities – New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Charleston – New Orleans, many thought, was the place of the future. Its geographic location at the crossroads of the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean coupled with its political transfer from the Spanish and French to the notoriously enterprising Americans promised commercial success. “The city every day acquired new population,” one traveler wrote. “The population of the city,” he estimated, “must be about ten or twelve thousand souls.” Those souls included “Frenchmen most of all, but also Spaniards, Anglo-Americans, several Bohemian families, Negroes, and mulattoes, some free, but most of them slaves.” By 1810, not even a full decade after the Louisiana Purchase, the city’s population had more than doubled to over 17,000 people, which made it the seventh largest American city. Together, if unequally, these citizens of the world transformed a swampy colonial borderland into a crossroads of capital and empire, human streams and freedom dreams.²²

American inventor Eli Whitney’s cotton gin did turn Louisiana into a graveyard for individual black people, but it did not become a graveyard for slavery. Whitney’s invention, which mechanized the removal of seeds from short-staple cotton, transformed the political economy of the Deep South. As the Industrial Revolution transformed cloth production by increasing the capacity of textile mills in England and the northern United States, southern planters used technological innovations to optimize crop growth. The gin allowed for the more efficient production of short-staple cotton, which could be grown in a larger territory than its long-staple counterpart. Bellicose expansionism transformed Indian

²¹ Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon and John Davis, *Travels in Louisiana and the Floridas, in the Year, 1802, Giving a Correct Picture of Those Countries* (New York: I. Riley & Co., 1806), 53–54. On the radical politics of the “motley crew” across the Atlantic World, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

²² C. C. Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana, 1803–1805*, trans. and ed. Stuart O. Landry, Jr. (New Orleans, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 1966 [1807]), 36, 32; Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana-Lafayette Press, 2008), 26, 28.

lands into American cotton plantations, trades in human flesh supplied cotton pickers, and methodical torture increased their productivity. By 1820, about 69,000 slaves lived in the state of Louisiana, and they labored until death in the Deep South's cotton fields. Two decades after the founding of the first republic, slavery was not a vanishing relic of a colonial past; it was ascendant. And New Orleans was poised to become its capital.²³

Slaves in motion became central to the New Orleans economy even as the proper management of people in space became a marker of modernity. The contests over the place of slaves in the port city reflected and heightened the tensions of republican state-building during an era of emergent agro-capitalism. As art historian Dell Upton argues, the American city was a physical place, political symbol, and commercial hub. As republican leaders reorganized cities, they hoped transformations in the built environment would transform wayward slum dwellers into good citizens and productive workers. The rise of the culture of capitalism hastened the stigmatization of poverty and idleness. Reformers laid roads and built buildings, criminalized vagrancy, and regulated gatherings. Asylums, prisons, hospitals, and other therapeutic institutions exemplified and enforced Enlightenment values – order, cleanliness, uniformity, and classification. And gridded streets, uniform street names, and other developments in infrastructure allowed information, commodities, and laborers to circulate.²⁴

Capitalism did not reshape the American landscape uniformly. In the North, the transition from mercantilism to a free market hastened the decline of slavery and the rise of a caste society. Northern industrialists erased slavery – and blacks – from memory and from the streets

²³ Historians debate whether Whitney invented the gin, but he patented it – and that technology transformed the Lower Mississippi River Valley. On empire, capitalism, and slavery in Louisiana and the Atlantic World, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Rothman, *Slave Country*.

²⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On capitalist space, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

through curbs on African-American citizenship rights, mob violence, colonization schemes, and disproportionate incarceration.²⁵ In the US South, by contrast, the emergent sugar and cotton economies depended on slave labor. Regional elites refused to eliminate black slaves, so the demands of racial slavery refracted their debates about urban space and the place of workers in it. The slave population increased even as the region attracted Anglo-American settlers and immigrants from the Caribbean and Europe. Those influxes compounded fears about the physical place of laborers, both slave and free, and their relationship to each other. To become a modern American capital, to go to the future, New Orleans had to put slaves in their places.²⁶

During the territorial period (1804–1812), the racialization and regulation of black people became key to Louisiana's preparation for inclusion in a modern, imperialistic nation-state. Urban space became a key site on which leaders sought to impose an ideological geography onto the diverse and fractured territory through hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. The modernizing imperial state used what theorist Michel Foucault calls "biopower," or strategies to classify and regulate bodies – their migrations, assemblages, domesticities, sexual relations, reproduction, punishment, and execution – to turn white supremacist ideologies into everyday practice. In this conception, chains, fences, and property lines did not necessarily delineate the geographies of containment, since masters and leaders needed slaves to be able to move. Instead, those in power did so through policy, legislation, social customs, and architecture. This transformation was neither linear nor harmonious. Generally, masters privileged profit, imperial officials valued social order, and small entrepreneurs favored regulated slave latitude. When those values came into conflict, as they often did, varying sectors of the propertied, powerful classes lobbied for their version of blackness in the city.²⁷

²⁵ James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006); Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Berquin-Duvallon and Davis, *Travels in Louisiana*, 53–54. On "terrorist assemblages," see Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and

Even as leaders and masters fought over the place of slaves in New Orleans, enslaved men and women had their own ideas about where to place themselves on the urban frontier. To be sure, chattel slavery was an institution sustained by violence. Bondspersons confronted asymmetrical power relations at every turn.²⁸ Nonetheless, enslaved persons appropriated the places assigned them toward their own ends, a point that broadens the received gendered geographies of slave resistance. Because New Orleans was an important port city, it offered a diffuse set of pathways for escape – and recapture. If the politics of place could oppress, slaves reasoned, movement could also become an avenue to freedom. The connectedness that made the city’s location so desirable to merchants and imperial officials – its land passageways, river outlets, and Atlantic access – gave runaways an array of escape options. The fugitives redefined themselves in local “geographies of resistance,” or fled to other parts of the Atlantic World. But truancy and escape carried costs. Even when they escaped the purview of one master or even one empire, they remained trapped on a trans-imperial terrain shaped by racism. They remained vulnerable to capture, kidnapping, rape, and even death. But many still set out toward freedom, and their individual journeys subverted the imperial cartographies of the Atlantic World.²⁹

This book’s third contribution rests in its examination of racism, sexism, classism, and sexual exploitation in enslaved daily life to challenge the persistent myth of New Orleans exceptionalism in history and memory. New Orleans presents a paradox: a capital of slavery was a capital of free blacks. Due to lenient manumission policies during the Spanish period and the influx of the Saint-Dominguan diaspora, New Orleans became home to one of the largest free black populations in the United States. Some formed political, cultural, and literary institutions, owned land and slaves (whether to “free” relatives or as masters in a more conventional sense), and fought in the nation’s wars. Influential and exciting recent scholarship on Louisiana and the black Atlantic focuses on those who secured freedom through migration and contestation. And

Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 829–865; John Fiske, “Surveilling the City: Whiteness, the Black Man and Democratic Totalitarianism,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 2 (May 1998): 67–88.

²⁸ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁹ “Geographies of resistance” is taken from Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6–7.

the shifting classifications of free persons of color from a tripartite race regime in the colonial era to the binary regime instituted after the Louisiana Purchase became a barometer of race-making in colonial and early American Louisiana.³⁰

Yet such attention to free and freed blacks risks privileging freedom stories when slave labor became the engine of a global industrial economy and New Orleans a capital of the slave trade and slavery.³¹ New Orleans was (and remains) a unique city, but it was not an exception to the Atlantic plantation complex; it was fast becoming a hyperreal space of capitalism and slavery. From a comparative perspective, New Orleans was arguably suspended between the Caribbean and Latin America on the one hand and the US South on the other. Its colonial history of French and Spanish rule and the conventions that stemmed from it – including a sizable free black population – remained salient after the Louisiana Purchase. But the city underwent significant changes upon entry into the United States that shortened the distance between that port city and its neighbors on the Eastern Seaboard. A transnational African diasporic perspective allows us

³⁰ Works that highlight the experiences of free blacks include Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Scott and Hébrard, *Freedom Papers*; Shirley Elizabeth Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Virginia Meacham Gould, *Chained to the Rock of Adversity: To Be Free, Black and Female in the Old South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³¹ Important works that explore the history of enslaved Louisiana include Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, “‘Un Nègre nommé [sic] Lubin ne connaissant pas Sa Nation’: The Small World of Louisiana Slavery,” in *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World*, ed. Cécile Vidal (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, “Slave Migrations and Slave Control in Spanish and Early American New Orleans,” in *Empires of the Imagination: The Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, eds. Peter J. Kastor and François Weil (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 204; Rothman, *Slave Country*; Judith K. Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846–1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–31; Judith K. Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*.

to appreciate how New Orleans was a crossroads of the expanding US empire and the Atlantic World.³²

In no case is this approach more valuable than in understanding the practice of intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, class, and sexuality in everyday life. The persons introduced in this work belonged to diverse categories and classifications that had contextual meanings in the intimate and international spaces they inhabited, and the close attention to the contextual meanings of race in individual lives is one of this work's most critical contributions.³³ Rather than considering free blacks, people of so-called mixed race, or interracial sex as evidence of comparatively lenient race regime, this book instead examines the contingent lived experiences of racism across all levels of a complicated society.³⁴ Historian Doris Garraway makes this point about colonial Saint-Domingue, where one of the most brutal slave systems in the Americas gave rise to a politically active, economically independent, and largely mixed-race free black class. "Rather than viewing the coincidence of racially exclusionary law and

³² "Scholars' efforts to understand the black world beyond the boundaries of nation-states have profoundly affected the way we write the history of the modern world." Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (April 2000): 11–45, 13. See Cécile Vidal, ed., *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Julius S. Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986).

³³ Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, eds. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143–177; Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (1990): 95–118; Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *The AHR* 100 (February 1995): 1–20.

³⁴ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946); Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Nancy Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, *Introduction to Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

interracial libertinage as a contradiction,” she writes, “I consider these phenomena to be mutually constitutive of the system of white supremacy and racial domination that shaped French slave societies.” This insight is also instructive for New Orleans, where in the early nineteenth-century slaves and free blacks both contended with the hardening lines of white supremacy.³⁵

It is easy to romanticize nineteenth-century New Orleans as a foil for its twentieth-century version, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the US Supreme Court case, enshrined Jim Crow nationwide. The polyglot colonial capital seems an almost perfect antithesis of the fixed lines of twentieth-century Jim Crow segregation. But such a perspective fails to take into account the ways white supremacy and diversity can work in tandem with one another. Melting pot, gumbo, and jazz metaphors notwithstanding, chattel slavery allowed New Orleans to become a modern city. This book explores how that happened.³⁶

In his influential essay “Walking the City,” anthropologist Michel de Certeau calls for increased attention to “the stories and legends that haunt urban space like superfluous or additional inhabitants.”³⁷ For the stories of enslaved New Orleans, however, this effort is easier said than done. The first challenge is that local elites transformed the city’s inconvenient history into enchanted myths for tourists’ consumption. The commoditization of slave culture is as ubiquitous as slaves are invisible.³⁸ In New Orleans as in the nation, as Toni Morrison theorizes in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, “a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed,” and she explores the

³⁵ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 30.

³⁶ As recent works show, multinational communities also thrived at the heart of Jim Crow in New Orleans at the dawn of the twentieth century. See Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), chapters 1–2; Emily Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865–1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), chapter 2; Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Sante Fe, NM: Center for American Places in Association with the University of Virginia Press, 2003).

³⁷ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 106. See also Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, Introduction and chapter 1.

³⁸ On culture and tourism in New Orleans, see Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

“imaginative uses this fabricated presence served.” One thing that made people white was the ability to “play in” or enjoy imagined blackness.³⁹ In New Orleans, “voodoo,” which began as a subversive spiritual practice that empowered Africans to survive and challenge slavery and colonialism, now modifies the names of lattes, ghost tours, sports franchises, radio stations, and rock festivals. Yet such visibility can be as violent as erasure, as with Congo Square, one of the few sites in the United States where slaves could drum, dance, and trade on Sundays well into the antebellum period. At the risk of seeming flippant, only in New Orleans could the paradigmatic site of slavery be a party. Again, this tendency is a problem of framing: Bondspersons partied there, but those gatherings took place within the daily traumas of enslavement. What did enslaved people do, see, think, fear, and dream beyond Congo Square? And how might their shifting places in space and society be read as barometers of the sweeping changes of a revolutionary age?

If histories of individual slaves are difficult, then a history of slave transience might seem methodologically impossible. Laws and customs prohibited literacy among most New World slaves, and even the literate lacked the resources to preserve documents. Few archives hold their words. As historian Nell Irvin Painter asks in her biography of abolitionist and women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth, “What sources can generate a history of the kind of person Truth was – black, female, poor, nineteenth-century? Do people like Truth *have* a history?” As Painter concludes, “People like Truth do have a history, of course. But a Truth biographer, like the biographer of any poor person, any person of color, or a woman of any stratum, cannot stick to convention, for conventional sources mostly are lacking.” Such histories are possible, but they require a creative approach to the archives.⁴⁰

As Painter and others insist, bondspersons were real-time actors in their societies, and their histories should show as much. For important reasons, scholars have sought to identify the core elements that defined the status of enslavement across time and space, an approach that allows for comparisons across different periods and places. But when scholars across disciplines distill the experiences of millions into a single, transhistorical

³⁹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6. See also Clyde Taylor, *The Mask of Art: Breaking the Aesthetic Contract – Film and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 289–291, 289, emphasis original.

essence of slavery, we lose the texture of their daily lives in relation to one another and to their societies. We exclude them as subjects of and actors in history, which has the effect of inscribing otherness onto them.⁴¹ Similarly, though enslaved men and women in scholarly literature are often aggregated into categories, such as sex, nationality, or skill set, this work instead uses “mini-biographies” to situate them within their rapidly shifting milieus and lived to gain fresh insight into the macro-level processes that shaped their lives.⁴²

For historians, such accounts require documents, but archives are themselves products of the histories we use their contents to examine. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, “silences” in the archives are neither haphazard nor apolitical. Power shapes source creation, preservation, evaluation, and narration. Conversely, the presence of documents raises challenges, since their materiality amid so many archival voids raise the temptation to confer disproportionate significance on them. Some documents, as musicians James Brown and Bobby Byrd might say, are “talking loud and saying nothing.” But rather than focus on what the archives do not hold, I investigate the sources that remain. I engage in informed speculation, and I consider the multiple possibilities embedded in each scene. Together, these documents and perspectives allow for fresh insight into the history of slavery in New Orleans and the larger Atlantic World.⁴³

To construct this history, I relied on primary sources held in over a dozen archives and penned in English, French, and Spanish. Early New Orleans was home to an unusually literate population that read monolingual and bilingual newspapers published in French, Spanish, and English. I have read select Gulf Coast newspapers for editorials and letters to the editor to discern political contests between the master classes. More importantly, I have also relied on runaway slave

⁴¹ As Vincent Brown argues, some scholars expanded historical sociologist Orlando Patterson’s distilled concept of “social death,” or “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons,” into a transhistorical definition of slavery. As a consequence, everyday slave experiences go unexamined. Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *The AHR* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1231–1249. On the politics of coevality, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

⁴² Lara Putnam, “To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 615–630.

⁴³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), chapter 1.

advertisements and slave sale announcements for insight into the ways enslaved persons inhabited and shaped the interlocked spatial, commercial, and discursive worlds of early New Orleans. Even the briefest advertisements recount slaves' names, genders, nationalities, physical features, past migrations, and, for runaways, presumed destinations. The facticity of these individual advertisements matters, but of equal value is the collective understandings of slave trajectories that these ads established. These ads divulge what masters thought individual slaves had done, and in so doing they created knowledge about what slaves do.⁴⁴

To track the ways that states saw slaves in space and society, I have drawn on executive, judicial, legislative, and commercial sources. I have used Governor William C. C. Claiborne's published correspondence, the New York Historical Society's extensive New Orleans Collection, and Xavier University's Heartman Collection for the receipts and ledgers of state-building in an occupied territory. The state met the market in every act of sale, succession, and other such transaction, so notarial records offer invaluable insight into the biographies and valuations of enslaved people as well as the social and economic transactions that eased their sales. Finally, to explore British geographies of Louisiana in the context of the War of 1812, I have relied on documents from the colonial, admiralty, and treasury offices housed at the UK National Archives at Kew and at the Gloucestershire Records Office. These documents reveal the ways adversarial states regarded slaves in Louisiana in war and peace.

As officials constructed empires, patriarchs and priests consolidated the domestic and spiritual spheres that were the building blocks of society. In family papers, housed at the Historic New Orleans Collection's Williams Research Center and at Tulane Special Collections, I read personal correspondence, acts of sale, invoices, receipts, diaries, wills, and other personal writings. In a single archival folder, correspondence that overflows with the sentimental language of paternalism and maternalism

⁴⁴ On runaway advertisements, see David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (April 1999): 243–272. On print culture in the Atlantic, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended edition (London; New York: Verso, 1991). On the hispanophone press in New Orleans, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

toward slaves sits atop a will in which masters affixed monetary values to those same slaves. Such sources capture like few others the bizarre banalities of chattel slavery. The Catholic Church also tracked the lines of family, class, and race in a society filled with people whose bodies subverted neat categories. Sacramental records offer accounts of births, marriages, and deaths, which I used to follow individual people and families, particularly those who immigrated to Louisiana from Saint-Domingue.

The rare sources that give a glimpse into the words and perspectives of enslaved persons themselves are the Holy Grail of slavery studies. I draw on Louisiana Works Progress oral interviews conducted in the 1930s and very early 1940s. Like all sources, these interviews present challenges. They were conducted nearly seven decades after emancipation during the Great Depression in the Jim Crow South. Predominately white interviewers used what today would be considered questionable survey design methods, such as leading questions, that compromised the level of transparency these elderly black informants offered. These and other limitations have prompted some scholars to set aside these testimonies. But trauma travels the generations. A discursive analysis of these interviews from the early twentieth century proves useful even if only to bear witness that the geographies of slavery seared the memories of survivors well into the twentieth century. Published slave narratives also communicate perceptions of slavery from the survivors who lived to tell.⁴⁵

This work is rooted in archival sources, but it also draws on other ways of knowing, including critical theory and literature. Novels rest alongside theorists of power, literary scholars, and historians of diverse times and spaces. The rewards of such intellectual promiscuity far outweigh the risks of casting aside the contributions of such diverse thinkers. Together, this rich literature allows me to improvise the inner lives of the men and women who traveled across the physical and social borders of early American society. This approach has proved especially fruitful in black women's history where, all too often, traditional sources that recount individual thoughts and experiences have been made to not exist.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *The Journal of Southern History* 41 (November 1975): 473–492.

⁴⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, "Three Southern Women and Freud," in *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 93–111.

The structure of this book mimics the incongruities of the society it examines. First, New Orleans was a polyglot society, so I do not standardize names into one language. Instead, I follow the sources to trace when, for example, the bondswoman named Maria Redas, before a Spanish notary, became Marie Rose when her French master reported her to local authorities after the Louisiana Purchase. Second, this book is not a linear, “change over time” story, nor does it follow one narrative arc. Some chapters are synchronic, while others trace changes over time. I focus as much on fleeting encounters as I do longitudinal sequences, so many of the people who appear on these pages step into focus and disappear just as quickly. There are methodological and conceptual reasons for this approach. Though I do so when possible, it is difficult to trace these actors beyond a single scene, and the juxtaposition of synchronic encounters is as illuminating as diachronic narratives. The approach adopted here revels in the messiness and contingencies of this diverse society. Finally, this work offers no essential truths about “the” slave experience. In fact, it does the opposite by presenting a pastiche at odds with itself. Some evidence charts race-making, others its unmaking. Rather than refining the typologies of slavery, this book presents biographies and kaleidoscopic snapshots that reveal the contingencies and complexities of slavery and modernity.

This book consists of five chapters, each of which explores a specific circuit or site of New Orleans slavery. It is bookended by two chapters that are transnational in scope, while the middle chapters explore the local, regional, national, and Atlantic circulations of enslaved people through New Orleans. Chapter 1 uses migrations from Saint-Domingue into Louisiana during the era of the Haitian Revolution to examine the resilience of racist hierarchies amid trans-imperial journeys in an era of republican revolution. Chapter 2 illuminates the sanctioned and illicit circulations of enslaved men and, significantly, women that connected the markets and communities of urban and rural Louisiana. This chapter gives particular attention to enslaved female peddlers because their labor complicates notions that enslaved women were rendered uniquely immobile during slavery. They were commodities and they transported commodities across the Deep South. Such circulations allowed them to maintain diverse and far-flung communities.

Play was serious business in early New Orleans. Chapter 3 analyzes the ways intimate yet public places such as brothels, taverns, boarding houses, sports, and Congo Square became microcosms of national and global contests over gender, race, sexuality, and class. Chapter 4

examines the shifting race and space practices inside the New Orleans jail and on its chain gangs. It shows how the nascent prison industrial complex in the slave south helped to create categories of race, status, gender, class, and sexuality as well as the multiracial politics that inmates used to challenge it. Finally, Chapter 5 charts the complicated imperial freedom that a handful of black sojourners from Louisiana realized in Trinidad after the War of 1812. It uses their journey from Louisiana to the British Caribbean to illuminate the competing imperial visions of black modernity – chattel slaves and somewhat free laborers – to meditate on the possibilities and limits of freedom in the Global South.