

African-American Music and Muskets in Civil War New Orleans

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The multiple, frequently intertwined, strands of African-American music in New Orleans have consistently provided an accurate and complex aural image of communal responses to oppression. When the Civil War presented the possibility that slavery might at last be abolished, abolitionist action was catalyzed and reinforced by music. The sounds of that music were undeniably African in origin and style. Insistent percussive patterns, sophisticated melodic and harmonic structures interlocked with allusive lyrics to form as astute a commentary on life as had originally been found in Africa. It was an essential part of the collective memory of a people who treated music as a constantly adaptable cultural resource.

In most African countries, music was an integral part of daily and ceremonial life, particularly in the northwestern Senegambian region from whence many black New Orleanians had originated. Africans from Dahomey, the Congo, Guinea, and the Niger Valley as well as Senegambia sporadically augmented the handful of slaves in New Orleans in 1718. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue also supplied Louisiana with thousands of slaves. By 1763 Louisiana's African population outnumbered its European counterpart by 4,621 to 4,566. Louisiana's slave population continued to increase after the colony's sale to the United States in

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1803. By 1840 blacks in New Orleans numbered 23,448, but the city's servile population fell to 13,385 in 1860.¹

No other city in the United States had so many Africans living in or passing through its vicinity. This continuous stream of Africans meant that the cultural influences were constantly revitalized as well as steadily acculturated. George Washington Cable, a resident of antebellum New Orleans, maintained that Africans were still being sold in the Crescent City long after Congress had banned slave importations into Louisiana. Cable made relevant comments on the color and the culture of these fresh arrivals:

Iboes, so light-colored that one could not tell them from mulattoes but for their national tattooing; and the half-civilized and quick-witted but ferocious Arada, the original Voodoo worshiper. And how many more! For here come, also, men and women from all that great Congo coast,—Angola, Malimbe, Ambrice, etc.—small, good-natured, sprightly 'boys', and gay, garrulous 'gals', thick-lipped but not tattooed; chattering, chaffering, singing, and guffawing as they come: these are they for whom the dance and the place are named, the most numerous sort of negro in the colonies, the Congoes and Franc-Congoes, and though serpent worshipers, yet the gentlest and kindest natures that came from Africa.²

Recent research has demonstrated how powerfully Senegambians influenced the evolution of musical style and instrumentation in New Orleans. Bambaras, from the headwaters of the Niger River, were among the tribes mentioned most frequently in early eighteenth-century documents. This tall, slender, fine-featured people with light skins brought with them Voodoo, a strong propensity for *marronage*, and a rich, complex musical tradition. Modern studies have demonstrated how powerfully Senegambians influenced the evolution of musical style

¹Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1963), 10-11; Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer and Robert Tallant, eds., *Gumbo Ya-Ya* (Boston, 1945), 224-25; Jacqueline K. Voorhies, comp., *Some Late Eighteenth-Century Louisianians: Census Records, 1758-1796* (Lafayette, La., 1973); Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 326.

²George W. Cable, "The Dance in Place Congo," in Bernard Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States* (New York, 1969), 37.

and instrumentation in New Orleans, in part through the influence of voodoo. From its emergence in New Orleans, despite its fusion with Catholicism, voodoo was always a form of cultural and practical rebellion. Voodoo rituals and music were a source of independence and strength that encouraged rebellion, revenge, and escape. The strange chants and mesmeric percussion essential to any voodoo gathering, were as complicated as they were fascinating, as exemplified by Louis Gottschalk's compositions incorporating voodoo's hypnotic musical elements. Gottschalk's writings also depict dances like the calinda and the bamboula, which were commonly performed in New Orleans slave balls as well as at open air gatherings.³

The dances and music observed by Gottschalk were both characterized by distinctive percussive rhythms produced by African instruments. Drums were evidently common in and around New Orleans, popular misconceptions to the contrary notwithstanding. Reports of barrel drums, with ox-hide stretched over one end of the cylinder—abound, and congo drums are frequently mentioned or described.⁴ Improvised percussion instruments made with gourds, calabashes, and even animal jawbones were also utilized. When percussion was mated with a banjo, a truly African sound and mood was created. New Orleans historian Marcus Christian has traced the American banjo to "the African wambee, a banjo-like instrument of the Balonda tribe."⁵ As Dena Epstein points out, the "banjo, of course, entered the mainstream of American culture so successfully that its African origins were forgotten, and it was claimed as a native American product."⁶

³John K. Thornton, "On the trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas," *The Americas: A Quarterly, Review of Inter-American Cultural History*, 44 (January, 1988): 267-78; J.W. Buel, *The Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities* (San Francisco, 1883), 524-25.

⁴Alcée Fortier, "Customs and Superstitions in Louisiana," *Journal of American Folklore*, 1 (July, 1988): 136-37; Benjamin Henry Boneval Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans: Diary and Sketches, 1818-1820*, ed. Samuel Wilson, Jr. (New York, 1951): 49-51.

⁵Marcus Christian, "Musicians," Chapter added to typescript of Marcus Christian's manuscript for "A Black History of Louisiana" 1980. Marcus Christian Papers. Archives and Manuscript Division, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, Lakefront, New Orleans.

⁶Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, 1977), 345.

For African-Americans themselves, the retention of African musical traditions and instruments was symbolic of their ability to maintain a certain autonomy within the constraints of slavery. In his unpublished "Black History of Louisiana," Marcus Christian identifies African characteristics in the work songs that rang out from buildings and fields in and around New Orleans. He finds ample evidence that "the slaves brought with them their native music, and their masters, quick to sense the advantages to be gained[,] . . . encouraged this talent."⁷ Contemporary observers attest that blacks replicated their African instruments in New Orleans. Benjamin Latrobe, an architect active in New Orleans after the War of 1812, describes the dancing and singing he witnessed in Place Congo on February 21, 1819, as perpetuating "here those of Africa among its inhabitants." A singer used "some African language" and was backed by women stretching, bending and holding single notes. There was also a great deal of call and response. The singing was accompanied by two drums beaten with the edge of the hand and with the fingers which made "an incredible noise," and by a "most curious instrument . . . a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. On the top of the finger board was the rude figure of a man in a sitting posture, and two pegs behind him to which strings were fastened. The body was a calabash. It was played upon a very little old man, apparently 80 or 90 years old."⁸ The music kept pace with the varied rhythms of the dancers who moved in circles around a second small band using even more unusual instruments including a square drum and other African percussive instruments. Essentially African ring dances are mentioned as occurring regularly in New Orleans before and after the end of slavery. Le Page du Pratz and Charles Dudley Warner refer to the calinda in 1758 and 1875 respectively.⁹ The style and

⁷Marcus Christian, "Musicians," 2.

⁸Latrobe, *Impressions*, 50.

⁹Le Page de Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina*, trans. as new edition for T. Becket, London, 1774, 380, 387. Charles Dudley Warner, *Studies in the South and West, with Comments on Canada* (Hartford, Ct., 1904, c. 1889, Harper, New York), 75-82; Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 91-95.

intensity of these dances underscores the therapeutic functionality of African culture in the lives of black New Orleanians.

Black saloons dispensing African-American music and alcohol abounded in New Orleans in the antebellum years despite the apprehensions of the white community. According to one New Orleans journalist, "mobs and caucuses of our slaves nightly assemble at their orgies, to inflame the brains with copious libations, and preach rebellions against their white masters."¹⁰ A New Orleans newspaper editor was more explicit: "Should a servile outbreak ever occur in the City of New Orleans . . . we shall have to thank the keepers of those negro cabarets and club houses for it, within the precincts of whose damned halls, at the dead hour of midnight, heaven knows what plots are hatched against our peace."¹¹ As the foregoing quote suggests, these black bars were generally perceived as breeding grounds for abolitionist plots.

Yet, music sung and played in churches could be equally subversive. Slaves were allowed to gather in large numbers only at church services where bondsmen sang spirituals alluding to freedom. Because such songs lifted slaves' morale, preachers were sometimes arrested as abolitionists, for, according to the editor of the New Orleans *Bee* these "psalm singing chaps are Abolitionists in disguise, and of the most dangerous kind."¹² Such beliefs were not entirely without foundation, for singers' insurrectionary fervor would have been aroused by such call and response spirituals as

Broders, don't you hear the horn?
Yes, Lord, I hear the horn;
The horn sounds in jubilee.

Or the more veiled allusions to combating harsh and evil masters in

¹⁰Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 158.

¹¹*New Orleans Daily Delta*, September 10, 1854; Jerah Johnson, "New Orleans's Congo Square: 'An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation,'" *Louisiana History*, 32 (1991): 124.

¹²*New Orleans Bee*, May 2, 1850.

Hip and thigh, we'll pull him down
Let us pull old Satan down.¹³

The African origins of the spirituals sung in New Orleans before and during the Civil War have been documented and analyzed by myriad modern musicologists as well as contemporary observers. The most popular spirituals have been identified as having rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic structures markedly similar to those found in songs sung by the Ashanti, or by residents of Dahomey or the Gold Coast. The complex characteristics of "polyphony and polyrhythm, antiphony, overlap, repetition of short phrases for the purpose of arousing ecstasy, call-and-response, part singing, recurrent incremental lines and the principle of incremental repetition, and often syncopation. All these characteristics have been carefully analyzed by dozens of musical writers and anthropologists."

Veiled references to rebellion and the adept use of words with double meaning also characterize African songs. Signifying and codification were techniques used naturally in African song that proved eminently functional in the face of American racism.¹⁴

In the half century leading to the Civil War, New Orleans produced Creole composers whose genius earned European as well as American admiration. New Orleans was the first American city to have its own opera company, and the city was full of European and colored Creole musicians, many of whom taught free black students.

The resulting cross-cultural borrowing was soon evident in the city's music. In the early nineteenth century several black orchestras played music combining European and African traditions. Using fiddles, flutes, pipes, drums, tambourines, clarinets, and triangles they played for dances and concerts, but

¹³Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 228, 220.

¹⁴"Portia Maultsby," "Africanisms Retained in the Spiritual Tradition"; Eileen Southern, "African Intentions in Afro-American Music," in D. Heartz and B. Wade, eds., *Report of the 12th Berkeley Congress*, 1977. American Musicological Society, Barenreiter Kassel, 1981, 53-98; Paul Oliver, *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues* (London, 1970), 10-101; John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (London, 1973), 3-15, 21-22, 145-91; John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idiom* (Chicago, 1979), 27-39; John Lovell Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Home: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out* (New York, 1972), 66, 42-43, 46.

when they played at dances, the musicians incorporated African rhythms that permeated and transformed the music's character. It seems appropriate that the American stage was integrated in 1837 by a black singer appearing at New Orleans' St. Charles Theater. In addition, during the antebellum period, white musicians customarily played with the Negro Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra.

On the whole, however, it was very difficult for black musicians to play with, or for, whites. Fine African-American musicians such as Parisian-trained Lucien Lambert, who wrote "Au Claire de La Lune" and other popular compositions, was so discouraged "by the color bar which stopped him at every turn in New Orleans" that he settled in Brazil.¹⁵ Edmund Dédé, another talented musician, also found New Orleans too restrictive. Dédé, the son of free black refugees from Saint-Domingue who went to New Orleans around 1809, trained under black and white teachers. An accomplished clarinet and piano player, Dédé's repertoire of European compositions was vast, though African influences are clearly evident in his music. He left New Orleans and lived in Bordeaux a year before the Civil War. Dédé's choice of destination was hardly surprising, for other leading musicians had already settled in France in order to escape "the growing sentiment against free blacks."

It is strangely ironic that the most truly original of all the antebellum New Orleans composers of color was enslaved. Basile J. Bares, the son of a Frenchman and a New Orleans slave woman, produced compositions with Africanized chromatically diminishing seventh chords and a strong rhythmic dynamic. He also eventually went to Paris.¹⁶

Black musicians who remained in Louisiana played classical, dance, and Creole folk songs that had positive French lyrics with compulsive rhythms as well as parade music that ranged from purely European to the decidedly Africanized tunes.¹⁷ The

¹⁵Eileen Souther, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York, 1971), 79-82, 141.

¹⁶Lester Sullivan, "Composers of Color of Nineteenth Century New Orleans: The History Behind the Music," *Black Music Research Journal*, 8 (1988): 54-66.

¹⁷Emilie Le Jeune, "Creole Folk Songs," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 2 (1919): 454-57.

sounds of Congo Square were never as distant or as alien as they seemed to outsiders. These sounds were to become richly blended during and after the Civil War.

An earlier war, however, made possible the parade element in this vital musical *mélange*. Free black musicians served in the War of 1812. It was the start of the New Orleans brass band tradition. Jordan B. Noble, a New Orleans Creole of Color who won a reputation as a superb drummer for the Seventh Regiment of Infantry, drummed the Americans into line at the Battle of New Orleans. New Orleans Creoles of Color collectively became famous for certain special war songs. "En Avant Grenadiers" was a Creole rallying song used in the Battle of New Orleans. As soon as the War of 1812 ended, black brass bands became commonplace. In the antebellum period, blacks sometimes played in brass bands to secure a musical education. In 1820, for instance, the New Orleans Independent Rifle Company advertised for "two young men of color" and offered to teach them to play and provide them with instruments, uniforms, and a monthly salary.¹⁸ Other young black men acquired a conventional musical education and played professionally in orchestras and in parades as members brass bands.

Regardless of their members' backgrounds, antebellum parade bands ritualized joy and sorrow. Weddings, feast days, and funerals provided ample opportunities for parade bands to play or sing topical songs. When festivities were not focused upon one event, bands often performed satirical songs about segregation in theaters and graveyards.¹⁹ Such songs strengthened the resolve and determination of African-Americans.

The inner strength of black Louisianians became increasingly important in the late antebellum period as tensions generated by abolitionism and sectional rivalries created a statewide backlash against free blacks and slaves. Slaves and free men of color lost jobs on the docks and the riverboats and in every area where black people were employed. Work songs that had accompanied daily tasks acquired a slower, more mournful tempo, and the words changed with circumstances. In the build up to the Civil War, reverberated adversely on free black people and slaves with almost equal intensity. Work songs and hollers sung in New Orleans were

¹⁸Southern, *Music*, 77, 139.

¹⁹New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, May 3, 1822.

characterized by the flattened thirds and sevenths, the elision, the call and response, and sometimes even the a-a-b structure that were to mark fully fledged blues in the period after the war. There were moments when folk songs would soothe discontent, but more often they expressed communal and individual anger.

For African-American New Orleanians, the Civil War was essentially a fight for liberty. As armed conflict loomed ever closer, their songs took on a more insistent tone in their demands for freedom and equality. New Orleans slaves and free people of color were always better informed and more aware of emergent political attitudes and actions than those elsewhere in the Deep South. Whether they worked in a trade, in agriculture, or industry, New Orleans slaves became an unrecognized element in the complex communication system that coursed through the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the South. As rumors of secession circulated and as the concept of freedom was discussed, slave determination to seize this opportunity to seek their own liberty crystallized. Whether this end would be better served by supporting the South or the North was a question that vexed many minds: Most bondsmen decided to take whatever practical steps seemed most appropriate. To all "New Orleans slaves the Civil War was a time of breathtaking changes, boundless dreams, and painful disappointment."²⁰ When Private Henry Jones was sent to New Orleans and Baton Rouge from Massachusetts, he was surprised by the sorrow and solemnity of the songs sung by the slaves. He wrote of "the most plaintive chorus imaginable" and of songs of "mournful joy." "I can't describe it, but to my dying hour I shall remember it. It seemed like the incarnation of sadness."²¹ Other listeners, however, were impressed by the joy and endless hope that rang out of the songs of African-Americans during this period of dramatic change and seminal choices.

One of the most crucial choices facing black New Orleanians was whether to aid or sabotage the Confederate war effort. In hopeful anticipation that a free South might transfer that notion of freedom to their slaves, some slaves built fortifications, manned relevant industries, and generally sustained the

²⁰John Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago, 1973), 25.

²¹Henry T. Johns, *Life with the Forty-Ninth Massachusetts Volunteers* (Washington D.C., 1890, c. 1864), 140, 164-65.

Confederacy. Others, more skeptical, worked only under duress for their enslavers.

African-Americans who had been marginalized by the antebellum social and economic systems responded most promptly to the Confederate cause. Creoles of Color had a sense of communal anticipation at the start of the war. Creoles of mixed African, French, and Spanish ancestry collectively hoped to win full equality with white New Orleanians. Many Creoles of Color consequently volunteered to fight in the Southern army and were prepared to clothe and equip themselves at their own expense.

Led by Jordan Noble, the drummer boy of the 1815 battle of New Orleans, Creoles of Color announced in April 1861 that they were prepared to "take arms at a moment's notice and fight shoulder to shoulder with other citizens." According to the *New Orleans Delta* on April 23, 1861, "these men who distinguished themselves at the Battle of New Orleans are determined to give new evidence of their bravery."²² Within months two regiments of free "Native Guards" with a complement of 1,500 soldiers prepared to defend the city alongside white soldiers. They were formally accepted as part of the Louisiana militia, but these units never actually saw combat. Before the war, Noble had run an "excellent fife and drum band" which "was to be heard on every public occasion as no other music and no other band could compete with them." After the beginning of the war, he led the Native guards band and continued to play his much applauded versions of "Oh Susannah!" and "Take Your Time" at recreational occasions. Noble was equally effective at leading his military band in marital marching numbers. Another New Orleans Creole of Color stressed, "No matter where I fight I only wish to spend what I have, and fight as long as I can, if only my boy may stand in the street equal to a white boy when the war is over."²³ During the war, African-American soldiers on the side of the Confederacy certainly received some temporary respect and admiration. On November 23, 1861, a grand review of the Confederate troops stationed at New Orleans featured "one regiment" of "fourteen hundred free colored men." Commenting on another grand review the following February the

²²New Orleans *Delta*, April 23, 1861.

²³Christian, "Musicians," 9-11.

New Orleans *Daily Picayune* observed: "we must also pay a deserved compliment to the companies of free colored men, all very well drilled and comfortably uniformed. Most of these companies, quite unaided by the administration, have supplied themselves with arms without regard to cost or trouble."²⁴ On the same day one of the African-Americans "was presented with a flag, and every evidence of public approbation was manifested." African-American troops nevertheless "were soon dispensed with, although a few were retained for a brief period."²⁵ The only soldiers guarding Esplanade Street when New Orleans was invaded by Union Admiral David G. Farragut in April 1862 were among the few free people of color remaining in Confederate service.²⁶

Perceptions of free African-American enthusiasm for the Confederate cause became somewhat muted when it is realized that not all enlistments were entirely voluntary. Charles Gibbons, a New Orleans Creole of Color, was threatened with lynching by a city policeman if he did not enroll in the army.²⁷

During the first year of the war, while New Orleans was still the business center of the Confederacy, subversive acts by slaves more than doubled. Such acts included insurrection, arson, and murder; while running away became almost too common to quantify with accuracy. Escape now seemed more likely to be an effective route to real freedom. When captured, many slaves refused to tolerate physical punishment and generally made it clear that the war was an opportunity for an assertion of

²⁴New Orleans, *Daily Picayune*, February 9, 1862.

²⁵George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (New York, 1888), 84; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston, 1963), 40.

²⁶Gerald M. Capers, *Occupied City: New Orleans Under the Federals, 1862-1865* (Lexington, Ky., 1965), 25-53; J. Culter Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 148-51; J. Culter Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 236-43; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, April 25, 1862, April 30, 1862; C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1976), 103; Mary F. Berry, "Negro Troops in Blue and Gray: The Louisiana Native Guard, 1861-1863," *Louisiana History*, 8 (1967) 165-90; House Reports, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 16, p. 126; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York, 1966), 9; Blasingame, *Black New Orleans*, 34.

²⁷Mary F. Berry, "Negro Troops," 165-90; *House Reports*, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 16, p. 126; Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 9.

independence that was just a step on the road to freedom.²⁸ Some slaves even went on strike and demanded pay increases and better working conditions. Others used their masters' enlistment in Confederate forces as an opportunity for independent employment and a more autonomous life-style.

Slaves thus attempted to juggle their short-term needs with their long-term goal of equality. Bondsmen in New Orleans were adept at finding employment and buying and selling goods in a changing and often hostile atmosphere. Few slaves consequently chose to remain with masters who would feed and clothe them if freedom beckoned. "When presented with a genuine option for freedom, bondsmen overwhelmingly chose liberty, not loyalty to their masters," and "the myth of the satisfied Sambo was shattered by tens of thousands of slaves."²⁹ Encoded spirituals rang through the streets: "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel? Deliver Daniel deliver . . ."³⁰ Former slaves sang joyfully

We have no massa now, we free
Hallelujah
We have the Yankees, who set us free
Hallelujah

New Orleans rang with freedom songs like "May thousands go" or the following tune:

Slavery chain done broke at last!
Broke at last! Broke at last!
Slavery chain broke at last!
Gonna praise God till I die!

Way up in that valley,
Pray-in' on my knees,
Tell-in' God about my troubles,
And to help me if He please

²⁸Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 13.

²⁹John B. Boles, *Black Southerners, 1619-1869* (Lexington, 1983), 185.

³⁰Gale Jackson, "The Way We Do: A Preliminary Investigation of The African Roots of African American Performance," *Black American Literature Forum*, 25 (1991): 15-16.

The following lyrics are even more specific:

Hurrah, hurrah for freedom!
 It makes de head spin 'roun
 De nigga' in de saddle
 An' de white man on de ground!³¹

Slaves less optimistic about the outcome of the war were often employed in projects supporting the Confederate war effort. Louisiana used more slaves in support of military projects than in any other Deep South state.³²

According to a New Orleans merchant, "negroes were encouraged to run away, enlist, and bear arms." Yet most New Orleans slaves did not rush to embrace their apparent deliverers, and their hesitation was justified when in the early months of occupation "Union policy aimed to prop up slavery, not to aid its demise." Pressure from the slaves and run aways themselves forced Union officers to abandon their plan of maintaining slavery and ensuring the continuation of a stable work force.³³ Despite overt Northern condescension toward Louisiana's servile population, many slaves flocked to Union lines and into New Orleans in increasingly large numbers. According to Kate Stone, these runaways realized their freedom was at stake and "when told to run away from the soldiers, they go right to them and I cannot say I blame them."³⁴ Two years into the war, Mrs. W. A. Brice, an American Missionary Association school organizer and teacher who had run free black schools and who was denounced as an abolitionist in 1861, was convinced that New Orleans' slaves and free blacks were both fighting for liberty and equality. In a letter written to her

³¹Irwin Silber, ed., *Soldier Songs and Home-Front Ballads of the Civil War* (New York, 1964), 41; Bruce Jackson, ed., *The Negro and His Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (Austin, 1967), 71.

³²Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 10.

³³W. C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States, including a visit to New Orleans under the Domination of General Butler* (London, 1863), 31; Julia LeGrand (Julia Waitz), *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, New Orleans, 1862-1863*. Edited by Kate Mason Rowland and Mrs. Morris L. Croxall (Richmond, 1911); 81-82; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, February 14, 1862; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, January 16, April 25, 1862; Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 76, 2.

³⁴Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*. Edited by John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge, 1972, c. 1955), 128, 209; George H. Hepworth, *The Whip, Hoe and Sword: The Gulf Department in 1863* (Boston, 1864), 144-45.

father from New Orleans in July 1862 she said that there was "no nation of people that ever determined to be free but has succeeded in the end."³⁵

Cable stresses the lighthearted jubilation with which African-Americans in New Orleans greeted Farragut's victory in April 1862 in a song of remarkable length and mockery that includes the lines:

An-hé!
 Qui ça qui rivé
 C'est Ferraguitt et pi Botlair,
 Qui rivé

Other older songs, like the Creole slave musical witticism "Nèg Pas Capa Marche," were repeated and adapted as the war advanced. Similarly "Criole Candjo" with its flirtatious sexual innuendo was turned into a celebration with the lines

But Creole tek' sem road, and try
 All time, all time to meck free

The escape song "Dé Zab," using what Cable assumed were Congo phrasing but which was probably Senegambian dialect, was sung as a song of triumph, ending with the rousing

Rozah, rozah, rozah a-a mom-zah³⁶

Other songs by Creoles of Color were very different because of the group's determination to foil the efforts of Union troops. "Chaque Colonel" was a parody of a marching song belying free New Orleans' suspicion of the Union army and its motives.

Chaque coronel n'ont pas, n'ont pas (de) soldats (2)
 Each colonel has no, has no soldiers

Nous fais-ye galoper (3)
 We make them gallop (3)

³⁵Mrs. W. A. Brice to her father, July 24, 1862, American Missionary Association Archives, No. 45348, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans.

³⁶George W. Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," *The Century Magazine*, 31 (February, 1886): 816, 814, 816-18.

Jusqu' à la Rue Canal
Up to Canal Street

Nous pren' ferry, nous traversons à l'autre bord (2)
We take a ferry, we cross to the other side (2)

Nous fais - ye galoper (3)
We make them gallop (3)

Jusqu' à la Rue Canal
Up to Canal Street.³⁷

Such anti-Union sentiment did not deter the movement of many slaves to New Orleans, which accelerated the demise of slavery. Many former slaves went to "the St. Charles Hotel, penetrated to the quarters of staff-officers, and gave information which proved to be reliable. Great numbers soon flocked into the Custom-House, pervading the numberless apartments and passages of the extensive edifice, all asking to be allowed to serve them."³⁸ Alexander Pugh, a local plantation owner, noted "a perfect stampede of the negroes" to Union headquarters in New Orleans.³⁹ According to Chaplain Hepworth, when Union troops took control of New Orleans "blacks alone welcomed us with vociferous shouts and frantic gestures." This enthusiasm seemed more than justified when the Confiscation Act of July 17, 1862 freed all rebel-owned slaves.⁴⁰

Songs like

I free, I free!
I free as a frog
I free till I fool
Glory Alleluia!

resounded through the streets of New Orleans alongside such rousing choruses as

³⁷Nicholas R. Spitzer, *Zydeco: Louisiana Creole Music* (Somerset, Mass., 1976), 9.

³⁸Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 14; James Parton, *General Butler in New Orleans* (New York, 1862), 492.

³⁹Alexander Pugh Diary MS in Alexander F. Pugh Papers, Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴⁰Letters from Henry Miller to his sister, William W. King Papers, State Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

It's stomp down freedom today
Stomp it down!⁴¹

Now that freedom was within the slaves' grasp it had become "a song itself." The revolutionary impulse to transform life that had coursed through the spirituals seemed to have attained its primary goal with emancipation, for at last there could be "a great camp meeting in the Promised Land. In New Orleans the battle for freedom was literally fought and won 'Down by the riverside'"

We will end this war, brethren
Down by the river,
End this war,
Down by the riverside

Not all former bondsmen were content to let events run their course toward emancipation. Over 200 slaves organized themselves into a company and elected officers. They acquired guns and horses and planned a slave uprising centering on New Orleans. Their plans were disclosed by an uneasy slave, and the uprising was effectively put down. The ringleaders were hanged and lesser conspirators were whipped. There was serious talk of "servile war" when a large group of plantation slaves came pouring into New Orleans in 1862 "armed with clubs and cane knives." Contemporary observers noticed New Orleans' menacing atmosphere, created by blacks' insolence and refusal to work.⁴²

Inundated with slave runaways, Butler added an exclusion clause to the Confiscation Act permitting Union confiscation of rebel-owned slaves. This clause ordered the return of all slaves not employed by the military in order to ensure the continuation of agricultural operations. Slave fugitives nevertheless continued leaving area plantations and arriving at army bases in and near New Orleans.

⁴¹Quarles, *Negro*, 54; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 25.

⁴²Lovell, *Forge*, 116, 390-91, 312; Nancy Willard to Micajah Wilkinson, May 28, 1861. Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; L. C. Causey to R. J. Causey, November 19, 1863, Causey Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; William E. Messner, "Black Violence and White Response: Louisiana, 1862," *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (1975): 22-23; J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country. The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (Lexington, 1953), 22.

On August 12, 1862, Count Mejan, the French consul in New Orleans wrote to Lieutenant Godfrey Weitzel that "unmistakable signs have manifested themselves among the servile population of this city and surrounding country of their intentions to break the bonds which bind them to their masters and many persons apprehend an actual revolt."⁴³ Mejan's fears were not without foundation. Field hands on many of the plantations surrounding New Orleans attacked Confederate forces. Union officers occasionally encouraged such activities, and General George H. Hanks went as far as to commend a slave for killing a rebel major.⁴⁴

As slavery crumbled under the wartime pressures, African-Americans deepened the cracks and began to tear apart the institutional infrastructure. Not only did slaves run away to join together to coordinate their onslaught on ex-masters, they also rescued their wives and children.⁴⁵ Their freedom was celebrated in songs, and songs inspired their battle for freedom. The "Runaways Song" had been heard in New Orleans since Spanish colonial times, but it was reborn as a song of defiance during the Civil War. The historic core of the song was retained and with adapted verses could be heard on streets throughout the Crescent City in the early stages of the conflict:

O General Florido
Indeed fo' true dey can't catch me
Dey got one schooner out to sea
Indeed fo' true dey can't catch me.⁴⁶

In December 1862, Confederates sympathizers in New Orleans articulated their fears of slave revolts in and around New Orleans to General Butler and, later, to General Nathaniel P. Banks and requested Federal protection against slave violence. According to Julia Le Grand's journal, "It is rumoured that we are to have a negro insurrection in the New Year [New Year's

⁴³Parton, *Butler*, 464.

⁴⁴Peyton McCrary, *Abraham Lincoln and Reconstruction: The Louisiana Experiment* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), 145.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 145-47.

⁴⁶Maud Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (New York, 1974, c. 1936), 267.

Day]. The Federal Provost-Marshal has given orders that the disarmed Confederates may now arm again and shoot down the turbulent negroes (like dogs). This after inciting them by every means to rise and slay their masters." Similar requests were met in April 1863. They were aggravated by local reports of slaves adapting a spiritual tune to fit the words "We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree."⁴⁷ Other slaves were actually bold enough and well-equipped enough to shoot at Confederate reconnaissance forces. Even more common were specific acts of "disloyalty" when slaves took over the property of absent masters with proprietorial conviction or gave away the hiding places of their fearful owners. In May 1863, Governor Thomas O. Moore warned that New Orleans slaves, and those in the surrounding areas, were filled with insubordination and a determination to occupy the promised land of freedom:

I heard a mighty talk about the promised land,
Down by the river,
The promised land I now behold, Down by the river,
The promised land all strung with gold, Down by the
riverside.

Some spirituals began to abandon the dual implications of immortality and mortal gain that had been their hallmark during enslavement. Now the lyrics could be unambivalent about temporal gains:

Slavery chains, Slavery chains
Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last
Free at last, free at last
Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last

The following lines are also representative.

We'll fight for liberty
When de Lord will call us home.

Others tunes among what W. E. B. Du Bois called "weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke" and "the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the

⁴⁷Le Grand, *Journal*, 58-59, 130.

seas" rejoiced at the ending of so many depredations and deprivations:

No more driver's lash for me
 No more driver's lash for me
 No more driver's lash for me
 Many thousand go

Relief was expressed in songs like "Babylon is Fallen," "Bobolishion's Comin," and "De Massa Run," or

Done wid massa's hollerin'
 Done wid massa's hollerin'
 Done wid massa's hollerin'
 Roll, Jordan, roll.

These are all spirituals that possess, as James Weldon Johnson noted, "a striking rhythmic quality, and show a marked similarity to African songs in form and intervallic structure." The lyrical sophistication was matched only by their "harmonic development."⁴⁸ Once the Union army had taken over New Orleans the melodic patterns of the spirituals became more powerfully positive and insistent and the demand for full freedom reverberated more loudly in the words as the need for "coded meanings" diminished.

Sidney Béchet's father recalled a swift mood change in New Orleans songs once emancipation was announced. The persistent demand for freedom had at last won through. According to Béchet

there was this big change: a different feeling had got started.

Go down Moses,
 Way down in Egypt land,

⁴⁸Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians*, 267; M. Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (Ithaca, 1953), 47-173; A. E. Perkins, "Spirituals from the Far South," *Journal of American Folklore*, 35: 223-49; William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard and Lucy M. Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York, 1929, c. 1867), passim; W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903), 250-64; Thomas W. Higginson, "Negro Spirituals," *Atlantic Monthly*, 19 (June, 1867): 685-94; William Eleazer Barton, "Old Plantation Hymns," *New England Magazine*, 19 (December, 1888): 669-78 and "Hymns of the Slave and the Freedman," *New England Magazine*, 20 (January, 1899): 706-13; James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamund Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York, 1925), 10-26.

Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go. . . .

It was years they'd been singing that. And suddenly there was a different way of singing it. You could feel a new way of happiness in the lines. All that waiting, all that time when that song was far-off music, suffering music; and all at once it was there, it had arrived. It was joy music now. It was Free Day . . . Emancipation.

And New Orleans just bust wide open. A real time was had. They heard the music, and the music told them about it. They heard that music from bands marching up and down the streets and they knew what music it was. . . . That music, it wasn't spirituals or blues or ragtime, but everything all at once, each one putting something over on the other. . . . Some of those people didn't even know what Emancipation was; they just know there was a hell of a parade going on, a whole lot of laughing and singing, a whole lot of music being happier than the music had ever been before.⁴⁹

New Orleans was the city where "Daddy" Thomas Rice had sung and danced "Jump Jim Crow" in the 1830s, almost certainly adapting it from a song by "Old Corn Meal," a New Orleans African-American performer whose repertoire was used by the early minstrel clown George Nichols. Corn Meal had been acknowledged in the local press as unusually talented and politically aware for a "Negro street peddler." His obituary in the conservative *New Orleans Bee* in 1842 had mourned the passing of "his double-toned voice—never again shall his corn meal melodies, now grumbled in a bass—now squeaked in a treble, vibrate on the ear. He was as public spirited a character as any we ever met with, and was as thoroughly known as a popular politician." His political acumen and performing power of expression had made it quite evident that he was using the stage to attack discrimination against all black people in New Orleans. It was in New Orleans during the war years that a song often attributed to a later period could be heard reinforcing black demands for an end to segregation as well as servitude:

No more Jim Crow. No more Jim Crow
No more Jim Crow over me

⁴⁹Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle* (London, 1960), 47-48.

And before I'll be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my lord and be free,

The "Contrabands' Jubilee," written in 1862, was sung enthusiastically by black New Orleans minstrels.

Oh praise an tanks!
De Lord he come
To set de people free

An massa tink it de day ob doom
An we ob jubilee
De Lord dat heap de Red Sea waves
He hus as strong as dem
He say de word
We las' night slaves
Today, de Lord's free-men

"63 is the Jubilee" is more typical of minstrel songs:

Oh darkeys had ye heard it,
hab ye heerd de joy-ful news
Uncle A-bram's gwine to free us
and he" send us where we chuse,

For de Jubilee is com-in
don't ye snift it in de air,
And sixty three is de Ju-bi-lee
for de darkeys eb-y-where

Dar'll be a big ske-dad-dle
now ole sixty three hab come,
And de darkeys noe will holler till
day make de country hum

Oh we tanks Ole Un-cle A-bram
Yes, we breees him day and night
And pray de Lord bress [sic] de Union folks
and de battle for de right.

We" shout, and drum on de onl ban-jo
'till we break it all to smash.

The following lyrics are also representative:

The Good Time com-ing is almost here! (2)
 It was long, long long on the way! (2)
 Now run and tell Elizah to hurry up Pomp
 And meet us at the gum tree in the swamp

Other songs published in New Orleans were fairly obviously intended to be sung by white minstrels in blackface. In "Nigger Will Be Nigger," black men are painted as cowardly:

I got down to New Orleans, ole Massa was forgotten
 As sojer man he cum along, an't sot me rollin cotton
 At night I axed him for de pay, he tole me take my lip in,
 He tuck me to de Calaboose, an' dar I cotch a whippin

Dey run me to de Steamboat, wid finger on de trigger
 You ought to see de scatteration den among de Niggas
 Dey dress me up in Sojer close—dey didn't fit me right
 Kase a Nigga will be a Nigga, you kin nebber make him
 white

Dey put me in de black brigade—de kernel he was drillin
 An' tod do "just American" ob blood dey'd soon be spillin
 De Rebels made a dashin raid, you ought to see us run
 An I'm satisfied de Nigg's would rather *run* than fight.

"The Happy Contraband" is about a slave who had been transported to New Orleans from Virginia and who is supposed to prefer slavery to freedom.

Then away with 'mancipation, give me back the old
 plantation,
 'Tis the best place in the world for the nigger
 That's the idea of the Happy Contraband.

There were times, of course, when African-American minstrels would sing these songs with such sarcasm and wit that their meaning would be totally subverted. Even "I Wish I was in Dixie," which was first published in New Orleans (by

Philip Werlein) had its words altered and its meaning turned around by genuinely black New Orleans minstrels.⁵⁰

There now seems little doubt that the blues were born as slavery ended and attempts were made to reconstruct the way in which black and white Southerners related to each other. A plethora of scholarly studies place embryonic blues in the period but few sum up the gestation more succinctly than musicologist Edna Edet:

For the first time, the Freedmen were able to sing out loud about their misery in secular song, without religious disguises. For the first time, they had the hope of a better life—a hope quickly extinguished. The dichotomy between their hopes and desires and their actual experiences was enough to give birth to the blues.⁵¹

Early forms of blues evolved in the Crescent City when plantation slaves poured into New Orleans to escape their masters and join the Union army. These fugitives brought with them their hollers and work songs, their shouts and spirituals and adapted them to their new circumstances and urban surroundings. Songs shifted and changed their patterns while emphasizing the flatted notes and topical content. The lyrics below are typical of the embryonic blues:

Don't you see the lightning flashing in the cane breaks,
 Don't you see the lightning flashing in the cane breaks,
 Looks like we gonna have a storm.
 Oh no, you're mistaken, its the Yankee soldiers
 Oh no, you're mistaken, its the Yankee soldiers
 Goin' to fight for Uncle Sam.

An "enlistment" song formed in a more traditional mode was equally popular:

⁵⁰Sheet Music of songs mainly published by A. E. Blackmar, 167 Canal Street, New Orleans and collected in the Sheet Music Folio Collection of the Chicago Historical Society; Sigmund Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music in America* (New York, 1948), 138-52; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, May 22, 1842; New Orleans *Bee*, May 23, 1842; Carl Wittke, *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage* (Durham, 1930), 17-18; Brander Mathews, "The Rise and Fall of Negro Minstrelsy," *Scribner's Magazine*, 57 (June, 1915): 755.

⁵¹Edna Edet, "One Hundred Years of Black Protest Music," *Black Scholar* (July/August, 1976): 42, 39; Wyatt T. Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, 1979), 58-60.

I've listed and I mean to fight
 Yes, my lord
 Till every foe is put to flight
 Yes, my lord.⁵²

Much of New Orleans' economic life centered around the Mississippi and river songs or chanteys were sung by black boatmen. One of the most popular songs in New Orleans was "Sally Brown" about a part-black, part-Native American "Creole lady" who married a "Negro soldier" during the Civil War. Other New Orleans chanteys and spirituals were defiantly anti-Confederate and pro-Union. Some ended with the words "Dis Union Forever." Stonewall Jackson was the focus of the improvised street chant "Stood Wall Jackson" popular during the war among Creoles in the city and sung for generations afterwards by rivermen.⁵³

All of these songs and their different styles could be heard in the barrel houses and saloons that sprang up in New Orleans in the wake of Admiral Farragut's victorious entry into the Crescent City in April 1862. These establishments and the larger concert saloons provided a new home for classically trained Creole musicians when many of the theaters and halls where they had previously played were closed for at least part of the war. They began to play music that was more appropriate for a saloon setting and developed new styles borrowing heavily from folk songs. Because most of these New Orleans musicians also played in the brass bands, the seeds for jazz were sown in the cultural turmoil engendered by the Civil War.

Musicians were prominent among those New Orleans free men of color and slaves who rushed to enlist with the Union army once General Butler decided in August 1862 that the shortage of Federal troops in the Department of the Gulf made it necessary to muster the free black militia, the Louisiana Native Guards, into the federal army.

Distinctions between slave and free were generally ignored

⁵²Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge, 1966), 226; Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians*, 266.

⁵³Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians*, 81-82, 267; William E. Barton, "Hymns of the Slave and the Freedman," in Katz, ed., *Social Implications*, 101.

by recruiters and slaves who enlisted alongside free men.⁵⁴ Butler subsequently ordered the formation of black regiments and named seventy-five men of African origin as captains or lieutenants.

African-American Francis E. Dumas, became a major. Dumas was a wealthy, well-educated slave owner, and Butler said that he was "a man who would be worth a quarter of a million dollars in reasonably good times. He speaks three languages besides his own, reckoning French and English as his own." Butler added with some generosity of spirit that "He has more capability as a Major than I had as a Major General, I am quite sure, if knowledge of affairs and everything that goes to make a man is any test."⁵⁵

Other black officers of note were P. B. S. Pinchback, who was later to become acting governor of Louisiana, James H. Ingraham, Louis Rey, James Lewis, William Barrett, C. C. Antoine, and André Cailloux. In the eyes of the New Orleans correspondent of the *New York Times*, these officers all had exceptional levels of "intelligence, education, and refinement" and even the privates were an unusually "decent, orderly, obedient and soldierly set." Many of the black officers virtually recruited their own men. Dumas filled a company with men off his own plantation who were ready "to fight to break the bonds of their fellowmen."⁵⁶ James Lewis had joined the Confederate Native Guards at the start of the war and then became a steward on a Confederate ship. He abandoned ship to become a colonel in the Union army and muster two companies of men. He would later become prominent in New Orleans politics and was the only African-American of that time to live on Canal Street.⁵⁷

The early volunteers whipped up moral with traditional New Orleanian military songs. The popular Creole song "En Avant

⁵⁴Donald Everett, "Ben Butler and the Louisiana Native Guard," *Journal of Southern History*, 24 (1958): 202-17; Berry, "Negro Troops," 165-90; Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1976), 3; Parton, *Butler*, 517.

⁵⁵Testimony of Major General Benjamin Butler, "The Negro," 2560-61, Record Group 94, National Archives.

⁵⁶Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 36; Vincent, *Black Legislators*, 7; Quarles, *Negro in the Civil War*, 214.

⁵⁷Handwritten note in unfiled box of Dunn Landry Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans.

Grenadiers" could be heard sung by the Native Guards and the Corps d'Afrique. This was the song that had been sung by Creole troops in the Battle of New Orleans and arguably had earlier origins in anti-slavery uprisings:

Forward march, grenadiers
 Those who get shot will get no ration
 Forward march, grenadiers
 Those who get kill'd, bad luck to them
 Tra la la la la la la la la la, etc.

Grenadiers, grenadiers
 You who are not afraid of danger
 Grenadiers, grenadiers
 Those who get killed, bad luck to them,
 Tra la la etc.⁵⁸

In a lighter vein they sang marches like "Free Market," which with typical New Orleanian musical complexity was also a waltz, or the multi-layered "New Orleans Song of the Times."

The forecast of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* that there would be no rush to join the Union army because "the vast majority of negroes are content with their situation" could hardly have been less accurate.⁵⁹ Slaves had made it increasingly clear by their actions, as well as in numerous songs, that they were determined to become more involved in this struggle for freedom. The minstrel song "Shoo Fly" was adapted for brass band use and military lyrics were added:

Shoo fly, don't bother me, don't bother me,
 Shoo fly, shoo fly, don't bother me, don't bother me,
 I belong to Battalion B—to Battalion B!⁶⁰

⁵⁸"An Avant Grenadie," *Creole Songs of the Deep South*. Selected and arranged by Henri Wehrmann (New Orleans, 1946), 19, Music Collection in Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans; Spaeth, *Popular*, 152-53.

⁵⁹New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, July 30, 1862.

⁶⁰Helen Mayhew, "New Orleans Black Musical Culture," M. Phil, unpublished dissertation (Exeter, 1986), 171, 35; John Niles, "Shout, loon, Shout!," *The Musical Quarterly*, 16 (1930), 523.

General Butler decided, in August 1862, to organize ex-slaves into an efficient fighting force. In the spring of 1863 Butler was replaced by General Banks who rapidly attempted to reverse Butler's decision to appoint African-American officers. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards (later called the 73rd, 74th, and 75th U.S. Colored Infantry) all had black captains and lieutenants, with Dumas as a major of the 2nd Louisiana Native Guards.

Local Confederate opposition to the existence of African-American officers within the Union forces was vociferous and active. One lieutenant was seized and executed by white citizens who proclaimed that he was "nothing but a d-d Nigger officer any how."⁶¹ Men like Captain André Cailloux aroused resentment among white Northern officers, few of whom could match his intellectual or military abilities. Educated in Paris, Cailloux was a wealthy free New Orleanian who was proud of his very black skin and equally proud of the company containing ex-slaves that he trained to be first class soldiers.⁶² Cailloux met hostility in and out of his unit, the 1st Louisiana Native Guards, as did a free black second lieutenant who was one of the youngest officers in the Federal army. Appointed at only sixteen John Crowder asked his mother "If *Abraham Lincoln* knew that a colored lad of my age could command a company, what would he say!" His age became the source of irritation when he repeatedly showed up older white officers with his mastery drill and diplomacy as well as his superior leadership and efficiency. His success was attacked even more bitterly when it was realized that he had come from a relatively deprived background.⁶³

Neither execution nor execrable treatment were unusual as far as such officers were concerned. One white Union officer

⁶¹Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990), 8-9, 215; Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 104-5, 30.

⁶²William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (Boston, 1867; reprint ed. New York, 1968), 168-69; Williams, *Negro Troops*, 218-19; *New York Times*, June 13, and August 8, 1863.

⁶³Deposition of Martha Ann Stars, October 28, 1872. Deposition of Tev. John M. Brown, April 9, 1875, Affidavit of Jane Ellison, August 24, 1874, Affidavit of Martha Ann Stars, March 23, 1877, Pension file of John H. Crowder, Record Group 15, National Archives.

announced in February 1863 that he would not tolerate black officers of "the nigger regiment," and under Banks most officers of African-American origin were removed. Only the 1st Louisiana Native Guards, which was composed largely of Creoles and other long-time free New Orleanians, were permitted to retain their original officers.⁶⁴ Yet no state provided more black soldiers for the Union cause. Twenty-four thousand African-American Louisianians had fought for the Union by the end of the conflict.⁶⁵ They had also shown extraordinary bravery in the most adverse situations.

It was never strategically feasible for the Union forces to take the Confederate stronghold at Port Hudson, but the efforts of the Black Louisiana regiments came close to achieving the impossible. Indeed, their heroism was commented on not only by Generals Banks and Ullman, but also by the Confederate commanding officer. Banks said that during the attack "No troops could be more determined or more daring."⁶⁶

Black troops from New Orleans first tested their mettle in battle at Port Hudson on May 27, 1863. The only approach to the fortress was defended by Confederates well armed with both rifles and cannons. The fortification was attacked seven times with two black regiments leading most of those attacks.⁶⁷ Their drummers helped maintain the extraordinary level of bravery. In 1863 William Wells Brown praised the troops and their African-American commander,

It was the first time that Captain Howard exhibited his splendid powers as a commander. The negroes never hesitated, never flinched, but gallantly did their duty. The

⁶⁴Cornish, *Sable Arm*, 142-43.

⁶⁵James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War* (New York, 1965), 142-43; John Blassingame, "The Selection of Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1863-1865," *Negro History Bulletin*, 30 (January, 1967), 8-11; Louis Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedmen: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865* (Westport, 1973), 107.

⁶⁶Banks to Hallack, May 8, 1863, *Officials Records*, XXVI, Pt. i, 43-45. General Henry McCulloch, CSA Report, June 8, 1863, *Official Records*, XXIV, Pt. ii, 467.

⁶⁷Philip Shaw Paludan, "A People's Contest": *The Union and the Civil War, 1861-1865* (New York, 1988), 210.

intrepid Howard never said to his men 'Go,' but always 'Follow me.' At last when many of their men were killed, and the severe dire of the enemy's artillery seemed to mow down everything before it, these brave men were compelled to fall back from the pits which they had so triumphantly taken.

At night fall General Banks paid the negro officers a high compliment, shaking the hand of Captain Howard and congratulating him on his return, and telling his aids that the man was worthy of a more elevated place. Great amount of prejudice was conquered that day by the intrepid Howard and his companions.⁶⁸

The fall of Port Hudson was marked by heavy black casualties: 67 were killed, 171 wounded, and 26 missing. A few years later a Union colonel recalled the "Extraordinary bravery of all the African-American troops at Port Hudson." The colors, he said, were carried proudly through the conflict by

Captain André Cailloux of Company E, First Regiment of Native Guards, won for himself a proud place among the military heroes of the Negro race for all time. He was pure Negro blood, but his features showed the result of generations of freedom and culture among his ancestry. He was a man of fine presence, a leader by instinct and education. He was possessed of ample means and yet was not alienated from his race by any interest. He loved to boast of genuine blackness, and his race pride made him an acceptable, successful and formidable leader. It was the magnetic thrill of his patriotic utterances that rallied a company for the services of his country the previous year. Upon all occasions he had displayed talents as a commander and gave promise of rare courage when the trying hour should come.

Cailloux refused to leave the battlefield at Port Hudson even though his arm was shattered. He kept urging on his men in English and French. "When within about fifty yards at the fort, a shell smote him to his death," he died as he lived facing his foe. A song celebrated his fall

'Still forward and charge for the guns', said Cailloux,
And his shattered sword-arm was the guide they knew.

⁶⁸William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius and his Achievements* (Boston, 1863), 308-10.

But a fire rakes the flanks and a fire rakes the van;
He is down with the ranks that go down as one man.⁶⁹

The *New York Times* said "Cailloux . . . died the death of a hero." In his honor, the American flag remained at half mast for 30 days in New Orleans.

Cailloux's fortitude and sheer style was considered typical of New Orleans black soldiers at all their encounters with rebel troops during the war. At the Battle of Milliken's Bend, Captain Matthew Miller commander of Company I, North Louisiana Regiment, was astonished by the sheer determination and nobility of his troops; nothing in the way of injury deterred them from returning to the fray and he stressed "that I never saw a braver company of men in my life." Over and over again the eyewitness accounts mention black soldiers' commitment to fighting for freedom and their "unimpeachable valor." Although recently liberated from the house of bondage, they knew the value of liberty, and those who fell into conflict with their old enemy did not grudge the price they paid in yielding up their lives."⁷⁰ At Milliken's Bend, black troops successfully defended a Union stronghold, less than two weeks after their numbers had been decimated at Port Hudson. In this encounter, however, the ex-slaves of the Corps d'Afrique played a more prominent part, and their enthusiasm for attacking ex-masters was acknowledged as one of the factors responsible for their success.⁷¹

Despite these demonstrations of skill and bravery at Port Hudson and Milliken's Bend in May and June of 1863 as well as a congressional commendation, few of the New Orleans-based black troops saw much further action. Reorganization meant that the three Louisiana Native Guards regiments originally raised by Butler, the five regiment brigade raised by General Ullman, and the twenty-six regiments of the Corps d'Afrique recruited by General Lorenzo Thomas were broken up

⁶⁹Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "People of Color in Louisiana," Part II, *The Journal of Negro History* (1917), 70.

⁷⁰Williams, *Negro Troops*, 218-28.

⁷¹Paludan, *People's Contest*, 211; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 121-36.

and absorbed into the United States Colored Infantry in early summer, 1864.⁷²

The encoded message of "Mighty Day" took on an element made of sarcasm even though it had become a tribute to emancipation:

Yes, the book of Revolution's
to be bro't forth on the day
And every leaf unfolded,
the book of seven seals

O wasn't that a mighty day
O wasn't that a mighty day (3 times)

Other numbers were sung specifically to encourage the Louisiana troops in battle and were accompanied by the heavy beat of army drums. In "I'm Goin' to Sing" clear sentiments of valor rang out:

We want no cowards in our band,
Who will their colors fly;
We can for valiant hearted men
Who're not afraid to die.⁷³

Members of the disbanded military bands reorganized themselves as New Orleanian brass bands which played martial numbers like the "Salutation March" and the "Gettysburg March." Those men whose collaboration in battle had induced a sense of pride in their units, felt almost as demoralized by the decision to disband most of their regiments as they had been by the removal of black officers. This disorientation was sufficiently evident to those in positions of higher command that the restructuring orders were rescinded

⁷²Edwin Stanton to Lorenzo Thomas, March 25, 1863, Records of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives; Roland McConell, "Louisiana's Black Military History, 1729-1865," *Louisiana's Black Heritage* edited by Robert S. Macdonald, John R. Kemp and Edward F. Haas, Louisiana State Museum (New Orleans, 1979), 61.

⁷³Barton, "Hymns of the Slave and Freedmen," in Katz, ed., *Social Implications*, 99-101.

and the regiments remustered in their original form with different names. Yet the tasks they were assigned were menial, and their pay was lower than that of white soldiers. Black soldiers from New Orleans spent most of the last months of the war repairing levees, building dams, mending roads and fortifications.⁷⁴ Only the military bands gave them a role with real dignity and purpose.

African-American soldiers helped to usher in the brass band movement into New Orleans. Throughout the war, black musicians formed and joined brass bands that were more numerous and more inventive than in other American cities. Bands such as the St. Bernard Band and Kelly's Band were splendid in their musical expertise and diversity. They captured the spirit of funerals and dances with equal precision. They provided musical accompaniment to every important occasion in life in this most vibrant city. The Excelsior Brass Band began in the sixties and endured to make a stirring and varied contribution to the New Orleans Cotton States Exposition of 1884-1885. The Excelsior Brass Band and most of the other Civil War era New Orleans brass bands were as comfortable with syncopation and improvisation as they were with the more conventionally structured marches. These bands were well-established in New Orleans during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and did not emerge in the 1890s, as has often been suggested. James Monroe Trotter's, analysis of New Orleans music, included brass bands.⁷⁵ Just before the Civil War, the instruments used by brass bands had become more sophisticated and adaptable. In 1840 Adolphe Sax had invented the saxophone and from then on piston valve instruments of conical bore were included in most brass band ensembles. During the war itself the need for economy of movement helped to refine the instrument and the clumsy backward pointing saxhorn was replaced by the forward aimed soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones. Helicons and tubas were also included. During the Civil War, New Orleans was exposed to both Southern and Northern military brass bands. Quartered in

⁷⁴John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 209-312; Charles B. Roussève, *The Negro in Louisiana: Aspects of His History and Literature* (New Orleans, 1937), 103-47.

⁷⁵James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (New York, 1881), 50-338.

the city at different times in the war, such bands held parades and gave concerts that whipped up enthusiasm for their rival causes. Every public ritual or ceremony was usually accompanied by a brass band. Instruments proliferated and became more available in the city's Creole of Color and poorer black areas. By the end of the Civil War "a brass-band tradition was firmly rooted in the black community."⁷⁶ Along with that tradition went one of the quintessential hallmarks of New Orleans music—the second line. Just as alternative rhythms were set up by those who followed the mourners and the official band at a funeral, so musical youths followed the army bands and established harmoniously discordant second line rhythms of their own.

Those roots went deepest into the culture of those free Creoles who had grown up playing classical instruments, either professionally or as a hobby, and adapting them to the needs of emergent local brass bands. These were the men who played in marching bands and who volunteered for the Native Guards. By 1863, freedmen bands and minstrel shows combined a brass-band element with a humorous and musically eloquent commentary on the war. Smallwood's Great Contraband Minstrels and Brass Band had formed in New Orleans during Union occupation and by the end of the war had become a Louisiana template for other bands. Like other aspects of New Orleans music "self aware comedy and dignity" combined in such bands to evoke deep political and emotional feelings with words that were as masked and multi-layered as the second lining music:

Verse 1

A Freedman sat on a pile of bricks,
 As the rain was pattering down,
 His shoes were worn and his coat was torn,
 And his hat was without a crown,
 He viewed the clouds and he viewed himself
 And he shook the wet from his head,
 And a teat dimm'd his eye as he saw go by,
 A boy with a loaf of bread,
 And he raised his voice in a doleful tone

⁷⁶William J. Schafer, with assistance from Richard B. Allen, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 9-12.

That sounded like a gong,
 While the rain came down on his happy crown
 And he sang to himself this song.

Verse 6

I dreamt last night ole masso come,
 And took us home with he,
 To de log ca-bin dat we left
 When just dey sot us free,
 And dar I built de light'ood fire,
 And Di-nah cook de yam,
 Dey say dat dreams are sometimes true!
 I wonder if dis am
 But den I'se flung away de hoe,
 To hab a ju-ber-lee,
 De rain may come, de wind may blow
 But bress de Lord I'se free
 But bress de Lord I'se free!⁷⁷

Such music intensified the martial spirit of black troops in fighting for their own freedom. To those black New Orleanians who had never been enslaved, the battle was for social equality. New Orleans' black newspapers, *L'Union* and *The Tribune*, stressed the need to "equalize" the circumstances of all "the oppressed, whether black, yellow or white."⁷⁸ If enlistment in either Confederate or Union forces could help realize that goal, black New Orleanians were prepared to fight to the death. As one wealthy Creole of Color explained to Union officers he was entertaining, he was willing to put everything he had, including his life, behind the side that would treat his children as equals.⁷⁹

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⁷⁷"The Freedmans Song," Published by A.E. Blackmar, 167 Canal Street, New Orleans, 1866, Sheet Music Folio Collection, Chicago Historical Society Collection.

⁷⁸"The Enslavers and the Enslaved," *L'Union*, September 26, 1863, 36:1; *Tribune*, December 6, 1964; Patrick Leavens, "*L'Union* and the New Orleans *Tribune* during Reconstruction," unpublished M.A. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1972, p. 39; Philip M. Mabe, "Racial Ideology in the New Orleans' Press, 1862-1877," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, South Western University, 1977, pp. 58-65.

⁷⁹Williams, *Negro Troops*, 84.

During the Civil War, black men around New Orleans garnered an enviable reputation as soldiers and as musicians playing martial music for black and white regiments. According to historian Christopher Small, black musicians in "large numbers, out of all proportion to the total number of black troops, served as musicians in the Union Army."⁸⁰ They sang patriotic words, they sang songs of freedom, but most of all they expressed aspirations that went beyond words. They collectively echoed the sounds that came out of a church in Carrollton, just outside New Orleans that provided the background to a spontaneous wartime prayer for freedom that the preacher ended with the plea

'gib us free!' when the whole audience swayed back and forward in their seats, and uttered in perfect harmony a sound that was caused by prolonging the letter 'm' with the lips closed. One or two began this wild, mournful chorus; and in an instant all joined in, and the sound swelled upwards and downwards like waves of the sea.⁸¹

African music was not only retained in New Orleans, it was creatively reconstructed and adapted to communicate fresh societal understanding and newly appropriate conceptions of human behavior. Sidney Béchet's father told his son that during the Civil War

there was always music around New Orleans in those days. All those people who had been slaves, they needed the music more than ever now; it was like they were trying to find out in the music what they were supposed to do with this freedom: playing the music and listening to it—waiting for it to express what they needed to learn, once they had learned it wasn't just white people the music had to reach to, nor even to their own people, but straight out to life and to what a man does with his life when it is finally his.⁸²

⁸⁰Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (New York and London, 1987), 261.

⁸¹George H. Hepworth, *The Whip, Hoe and Sword; or the Gulf Department in '63* (Boston, 1864), 163-65; Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 290-91.

⁸²Bechet, *Gentle*, 50.