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## “Meet de Boys on the Battlefront”: Festive Parades and the Struggle to Reclaim Public Spaces in Post-Katrina New Orleans

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### ***Abstract***

New Orleans has been the parading capital of the United States for close to two centuries. Since Hurricane Katrina, parades have become more important than ever, as many residents have called festive organizations home to reclaim urban space and say “We are New Orleans” or “This is our city.” This article will consider how the place-making practices of Mardi Gras Indian tribes, social aid and pleasure clubs, and carnival krewes have all reflected and informed citizens’ responses to displacement after Katrina. Drawing on Abdou Maliq Simon’s conceptualization of people as infrastructure and a series of three case studies, it will refocus the discussion on the rebuilding of the Crescent City around its citizens, taking the embodied festive practices of New Orleanians as a lens through which to examine the politicization of public space in post-Katrina New Orleans.

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### ***Index terms***

**Keywords :** carnival, gentrification, Katrina, Mardi Gras Indians, New Orleans, parades, public spaces, right to the city, second lines

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**Full text**

## Introduction: Katrina and the Disruption of Public Space

<sup>1</sup> Katrina did not just kill hundreds of Louisiana residents when it made landfall in August 2005,<sup>1</sup> it also fundamentally altered the geography and demography of its largest metropolitan area. In the wake of the hurricane, about half of New Orleans homes – 108,371 dwellings – suffered flooding at least four feet deep.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of community members were displaced as a result, leaving entire neighbourhoods, such as the working-class Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East districts, empty.<sup>3</sup> The urban renewal schemes that were unveiled and implemented six months after the disaster to remedy “a housing crisis of historic proportions”<sup>4</sup> clearly accelerated the pace of gentrification: under the guise of reconstruction and disaster clean-up, the inner city got rid of its impoverished neighbourhoods and of its oldest healthcare providers, including Charity Hospital, which provided the only subsidized health and trauma care in the city. Public spaces were either privatized to maximize consumption or policed more actively.<sup>5</sup> Rather than striving to recreate the services that enabled residents to function in daily life (day-care facilities, public transportation, public schools, etc.), municipal authorities focused on tackling the city’s “culture of violence.” The need for safety became of greater concern than the effects of a long history of race and class oppression, deindustrialization, suburbanization, and neoliberal social and economic politics involving cuts in education, health care, and welfare.

<sup>2</sup> Drawing on a substantial (and growing) literature on public spaces and democratic rights,<sup>6</sup> New Orleans’s parading culture<sup>7</sup> and the city’s post-Katrina mood,<sup>8</sup> this article wishes to study how, outside the framework of party politics and representative democracy, socially, racially or politically marginalized New Orleanians have relied on local festive practices to reclaim the streets of New Orleans since August 2005.

<sup>3</sup> The first part of our analysis will introduce a three-pronged typology of parades in the Crescent City based on a historical overview of New Orleans’s parading culture. We will then proceed to consider how the place-making practices of carnival krewes, social aid and pleasure clubs, and Mardi Gras Indian tribes have all reflected and informed citizens’ responses to displacement after Katrina. Drawing on Abdou Maliq Simone’s conceptualization of people as infrastructure – which emphasizes “collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life”<sup>9</sup> and a series of three case studies, this section of the article will refocus the discussion on the rebuilding of New Orleans around its citizens, taking the embodied festive practices of New Orleanians as a lens through which to examine the politicization of public space in post-Katrina New Orleans. Finally, we will reflect on the relationship between parades and democracy and show how contemporary celebrants are expanding and redefining political discourse by eschewing formal rational dialogue aiming at consensus.

## 1. History and Typology of Parades in New Orleans

<sup>4</sup> To the extent that New Orleanians consider processional rituals to be an essential part of their lives and continually invent new excuses to take to the streets, New Orleans can

undoubtedly be called the parading capital of the United States.<sup>10</sup> The history of parading in New Orleans actually dates back to the 18th century and is rooted in African and Caribbean religious and festive practices<sup>11</sup> as well as European traditions, including the medieval tradition of the royal entry<sup>12</sup> and the informally organized public revelry of the Parisian carnival of the 1830s.<sup>13</sup>

5 In the 18th century, the focal points of the parading geography in New Orleans were the *Place d’Armes* (today’s Jackson Square) and Congo Square. The *Place d’Armes* (or *Plaza de Armas*, as it was called from 1762 to 1803) was laid out by Louis H. Pilié in 1721 as an open-air market, a site for the public execution of disobedient slaves, and a military parade ground. Congo Square, located just outside the ramparts of the original French settlement, was set aside for use by enslaved Africans and people of African descent as a market and social gathering place<sup>14</sup> Little documentation about Congo Square festive rituals has been preserved,<sup>15</sup> but it seems that Africans from disparate areas of West Africa all practiced their various drumming and dancing styles (calinda, bamboula, and congo) there, and spoke and sang in different tongues simultaneously. The tradition possibly began as early as the 1750s and ended in the 1880s.<sup>16</sup> In 1845, a municipal ordinance prohibited outdoor music and dancing without permission from the mayor. After Reconstruction, the New Orleans City Council renamed the square after the Confederate general P. G. T. Beauregard, and, like many other public places, it was reserved for white use and remained so until the 1960s.

6 In the 1880s, public street processions for religious holidays and fraternal organizations’ anniversaries, energized by the syncopated music of marching bands, extended the festive traditions cultivated in Congo Square to the entire city. Meanwhile, all-white, elite carnival organizations such as the Mistick Krewe of Comus, the Knights of Momus, the Krewe of Proteus, and Rex appropriated Creole Mardi Gras customs to stage a modern form of Mardi Gras spectacle parade meant to project cultural prestige as much as political power.<sup>17</sup> Under their influence, carnival became a major civic event and part of a municipal marketing strategy meant to attract out-of-town businessmen and, soon, international tourists.<sup>18</sup>

7 Today, despite the great diversity of its forms (St. Patrick’s Day parades, St. Joseph’s Day parades, Halloween parades, jazz funerals, commemorating processions such as the Maafa,<sup>19</sup> or the semi-organized foot parades of the Jefferson City Buzzards, Fountain’s Half-Fast Walking Club and the Joan or Arc Project),<sup>20</sup> public parading in New Orleans takes three main forms.

## 1.1. Mardi Gras Krewe Parades

8 Best known are probably the annual spectacle parades associated with Mardi Gras. Staged by predominantly white social organizations, or “Mardi Gras krewes,” these parades feature tractor-driven, thematically decorated floats interspersed with high-school marching bands. Each krewe perpetuates a narrative of aristocracy, with its honorees acting as kings, queens, princesses, dukes, maids, etc. Masked club members and their guests ride high above street level on the floats, throwing beads, doubloons, stuffed animals, or other tokens to the cheering crowds that line the streets of New Orleans. For a parade to be featured on the “official” Mardi Gras schedule, it must apply for a municipal permit. Traditionally, the New Orleans Municipal Code allowed for 34 parade permits to be issued to non-profit carnival organizations to parade during the two weeks prior to and on “Fat Tuesday.” Under new rules passed by the New Orleans City Council in 2014, that number has been brought down to 30 – though any organization granted a permit in the prior carnival season will be able to hold onto its permit if it meets the minimum

participation requirements.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. Second-Line Parades

9 Another popular form of procession is the semi-structured, quasi-weekly second line parades held by social aid and pleasure clubs (SAPCs).<sup>22</sup> Choreographed by predominantly black working-class clubs,<sup>23</sup> such parades are built around a narrative of “fictive nouveau riche”<sup>24</sup>: club members dress up in bright-coloured three-piece suits with matching hats, wear silk-embroidered sashes across their chests, birds other ornaments on their shoulders, and carry fans, walking canes, or umbrellas. Escorted by the police, club members dance along a pre-planned route – almost entirely through African-American neighbourhoods like Tremé, Central City, Carrollton – followed by a brass band of ten to twenty musicians and a “second line” of participants, including dancers, chanters, percussionists, and walking community members.

## 1.3. Mardi Gras Indian Tribe Parades

10 Related to the second line tradition are the Mardi Gras Indian tribe parades. Orchestrated by black or biracial (African/Native American) men, women, and children, they keep up a fiction of Indian royalty while strolling through the backstreets of the city on Mardi Gras day, St. Joseph’s night and “Super Sunday” (the Sunday nearest to Saint Joseph’s Day). A tribe generally includes a spy boy, a flag boy, a big chief, and a big queen,<sup>25</sup> each dressed in elaborate, hand-stitched “Indian suits” of beads and feathers. They are followed by percussionists and chanting choruses of neighbourhood and family supporters. While the holiday spectacle parades and the Sunday second line parades are officially authorized, Mardi Gras Indian processions are not. Tribes today maintain the historic practice of parading along unplanned routes *without* a city permit.

## 2. The Politics of Parading in New Orleans

11 Parading is not an isolated, one-time event in New Orleans. The activities involved in the production of parades extend to almost every aspect of daily life. The physical and sonic presence of parade participants must thus be interpreted as a way of inhabiting the time-space of the city, of transforming the *abstract space* (or bureaucratically shaped space) of the streets into a *lived space* (or concrete space) – to use Henri Lefebvre’s terminology.<sup>26</sup>

12 By the same token, parading has never been a purely festive practice in the Crescent city. The collective agency of the crowd, which LSU anthropologist Helen Regis primarily locates in the corporeal, the visual, and the spatial,<sup>27</sup> has repeatedly provided opportunities to claim social, economic, and political power and/or disrupt the racial ordering of urban public space. For the white business or professional elite of the city, late 19th-century parades were a way to project prestige as well as satirize the racial order deriving from Radical Reconstruction.<sup>28</sup> For the 20th-century black working class, occupying the streets of the Tremé neighbourhood with music was a way to fight invisibility and thus articulate a “right to the city.” Thomas Brothers thus writes that the pre-civil rights era second line parade, as a “public display of African American vernacular culture,” could be interpreted as a “symbolic act of resistance to Jim Crow.”<sup>29</sup>

13 Though discernible since the mid-19th century, the convergence of parades and urban politics has, we believe, become even clearer in New Orleans since Katrina. Regularly taking to the streets with messages such as “We are New Orleans” or “This is our city,” parade participants seem more intent today on showing that they are “owners” of public space and that the city is consubstantial with its residents’ cultural traditions.

14 Among dozens of examples gleaned from press cuttings, academic articles, and our own experience of carnival in New Orleans, we selected three cases we deem representative of the city’s parading culture and post-Katrina ethos: a controversial jazz funeral procession in honour of tuba player Kerwin James (2007), a surprisingly strife-free Mardi Gras Indian St. Joseph’s night procession (2012), and a chaotic Krewe of Eris Mardi Gras parade (2011). Our hope is that, taken together, these samples will provide insights into both black and white citizens’ responses to displacement after Katrina and will illuminate fundamental aspects of the politicization of public space in post-Katrina New Orleans.

### 3. Reclaiming Public Space in New Orleans since Katrina: Three Case Studies

#### 3.1. The 2007 Jazz Funeral Procession in Honour of Kerwin James

15 As Helen Regis has convincingly demonstrated since 1999, second lines are sources of empowerment for New Orleans’s black working-class population. “The majority of participants in the second-line tradition are not owners of homes, real estate, or large, public businesses. Yet through the transformative experience of the parade, they become owners of the streets,” she notably observed in 2001.<sup>30</sup> During the long hours of Sunday second lining, neighbourhoods are mobbed with participants singing, dancing, walking. Traffic is halted as paraders – a diverse cohort of marchers, dancers, and second liners often numbering from 1,000 to 5,000 people – come out of the door and funk up four or five miles of bad New Orleans road. Streets temporarily become vibrant public squares defined by subaltern groups who design their own use of them. “Shut that street down... I’m coming through here. That’s what it feel [sic] like,” a Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club member explains. “The tourists ... be trying to see what’s going on, they taking pictures, but we *own* the streets that day,” proclaims another.<sup>31</sup>

16 Despite the defiant, self-centred tenor of such declarations, those designs are inclusive and participatory. Dancing, as well as tuba-and-drum *call* and community *response*, break down the barriers between audience and performers. Unlike float riders in Mardi Gras, who glide along the parade route perched high above following onlookers, the celebrants of second line parades exist on the same plane as the observing crowd, only set apart physically by a rope.<sup>32</sup> The format of a moving stage as the structuring element reinforces the expectation of collective participation. Insofar as second liners fashion a distinctive, egalitarian public square, they illustrate Don Mitchell’s observation: “What makes a space *public* – a space in which the cry and demand for the right to the city can be seen and heard – is often not its preordained “publicness.” Rather, it is when, to fulfil a pressing need, some group or other *takes* space and through its actions *makes* it public.”<sup>33</sup>

17 In making a space public, second liners make a democratic move. For that reason,

the first parades sponsored by social aid and pleasure clubs that took place after Katrina (the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club paraded on November 26, 2005, and the Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club followed on December 18) were embraced as signs of the city's cultural and political recovery.

18 On January 15, 2006, four and a half months after the storm, a coalition of 32 social and pleasure clubs came together to put on an "All-Star Second Line." Participants wore black T-shirts bearing the slogan "ReNew Orleans" on the front and their club's name on the back. The event drew 8,000 people from across the socioeconomic spectrum – including more middle-class blacks and whites than usual, partly because, as the first big post-Katrina second line, it was embraced by everyone seeking evidence that New Orleans's black cultural traditions and the city itself were back. It also drew large numbers of displaced New Orleanians. Thousands of them drove or flew in from Baton Rouge, Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta (and some from as far away as San Francisco, New York, and Portland) to participate in the parade, to check on their homes, neighbourhoods, friends, and family, and articulate publicly an intention, and perhaps a right, to return to the city. The second line's route made note of the destruction of African American neighbourhoods before and following the flooding and spoke to the hope of rebuilding those areas.<sup>34</sup>

19 Tragically, what was supposed to be an ode to renewal was marred by a shooting near the Zulu Club headquarters on Broad Street and Orleans Avenue that wounded three residents. New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) Superintendent Warren Riley used the incident as an excuse to bulk up the numbers of officers assigned to every second line and to raise parade permit fees from approximately \$1,250 per club (right before the hurricane) to \$4,445.<sup>35</sup> Considering this decision as an attempt to drive most clubs off the street, Prince of Wales president Joe Stern and New Orleans Bayou Steppers president Michele Longino formed a coalition of local parading groups that challenged the fee increase in court. The American Civil Liberties Unions (ACLU), which filed the lawsuit on its behalf, argued that the new fees threatened the very existence of the tradition by denying paraders the right to free expression under the First Amendment. The complaint also alleged that Fourteenth Amendment protections had been compromised because the police escort and bonding requirements imposed on the clubs were unreasonable and excessive. Attorneys for the police argued, on the other hand, that second lines were lightning rods for violence and that they were private events, distinct from public holiday parades protected under the city's Mardi Gras Code (chapter 34 of the Municipal Code), thus allowing the city to set fees at its discretion. Ultimately, the ACLU was successful, and in May 2007 the NOPD settled, agreeing to return the fee to its original level and give the paraders an hour on the street after the parade to socialize.<sup>36</sup> The judgment paved the way for weekly second lines to play their cathartic role in the renewal of black working-class neighbourhoods and of the city.<sup>37</sup>

20 On October 6, 2007, the streets of Tremé filled with sound again, this time for an impromptu jazz funeral in honour of the New Birth Brass Band tuba player Kerwin James, who had died of complications from a stroke several days earlier. As dozens of musicians played the hymn "I'll Fly Away," the police showed up and told the mourners to disperse. When the musicians continued playing, officers waded into the crowd, physically quieting the musicians. They ended up arresting drummer Derrick Tabb and his brother, trombonist Glen David Andrews, for disturbing the peace and parading without a permit. After negotiations between community organizations and the NOPD, the procession continued the following night under permit.<sup>38</sup>

21 Like the debate about fee increases, the Kerwin James funeral incident gave New Orleanians the opportunity to discuss issues of violence and gentrification as well as the city's dissimilar treatment of New Orleans's black and white cultural traditions. One

prominent concern was the right of community members to control public space. There was disagreement among Tremé residents as to whether the mourners should have agreed to parade with a permit the following night. Some argued that to do so actually meant giving up claims to both space and tradition. Others hinted that applying for a permit was a way to legitimize a cultural practice and, more practically, obtain welcome protection from delinquents who might disrupt the event. Commentators also puzzled over the NOPD’s general tendency to enforce or ignore official municipal regulations depending on the context. In response to a police statement according to which the celebrants had broken the law and the city tolerated no exceptions to the ordinance that prohibited playing music on the street after 8 p.m., some people pointed out that exceptions to city ordinances were made all the time for Mardi Gras parades and other touristy events in the French Quarter – the city’s “Creole Disneyland.”<sup>39</sup> Others noted that police intervention had come at the request of some of the newer residents of the gentrifying Tremé, interpreting the incident as proof that the latter’s “right to the city” was taking precedent over that of the long-time working- or lower- middle-class residents of the neighbourhood. The irony of seeing newcomers trying to regulate Tremé’s cultural life when they had precisely been drawn to the area by its rich cultural history was not missed, and led to renewed debate over the city’s future in the local and the national media.

### 3.2. The 2012 Mardi Gras Indian St. Joseph’s Night Procession

22 Our second case study, although still revolving around the question of parading without a permit, features different actors – Mardi Gras Indian tribes instead of social aid and pleasure clubs. Its outcome (appeasement, after decades of friction) also deviates from the course set by the Kerwin James incident.

23 Mardi Gras Indian rituals in New Orleans have always been associated with resistance since their appearance in the 1890s. Reid Mitchell thus maintains that masking Indian was a shared political meaning among African Americans to which whites did not have access, “a form of black protest that claimed ritual space in a Jim Crow New Orleans.”<sup>40</sup> Tribes, whose names tend to blend Native American and African influences with New Orleans geography (Creole Wild West, Wild Squatoolas, Wild Tchoupitoulas, Eighth Ward Hunters, Mandingo Warriors, Congo Nation, Guardians of the Flame, Yellow Pocahontas, Wild Treme and many others) would claim control of their neighbourhoods through masking, parading, and fighting. These tools were hardly the panoply of formal, representative democracy, and there was an exclusionary character to the tribes that the fighting exhibited. Still, masking and parading were expressions of self-governance in black neighbourhoods.

24 Over time, physical violence yielded to artistic rivalry.<sup>41</sup> Lisa Katzman’s 2007 film, *Tootie’s Last Suit*, documents the competition that Allison “Tootie” Montana, former big chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe, had with his son, Darryl, over who was the “prettiest” Indian.<sup>42</sup> Katzman conveys the seriousness of purpose involved in the Indians’ creations. Enormous amounts of skill, time and dedication go into making the complex feather-and-bead costumes that are donned on Mardi Gras and St. Joseph’s night – a sort of *mi-carême*, or Mid-Lenten break.

25 During the fall and winter leading up to Mardi Gras, members of the tribes practise their dancing and singing in African American sections of the city. Through these weekly rehearsals, children are nurtured in musical and dance traditions. Michael Smith observes that “certainly the most significant aspect of the Black Indian tradition are the tribal organizations and friendships, which continue all year long, and the ‘practices’ on Sunday

evenings [...] where the dancing, drumming, and communal traditions are continued.”<sup>43</sup> For the tribes and their neighbourhoods, all this activity contributes to community, fosters a distinctive public life for African Americans, and provides constructive responses to crime and violence in the city. In Katzman’s documentary, Darryl Montana alludes to troubles he used to have; it is clear that he has left them behind to embrace the life-affirming traditions of African American masking.<sup>44</sup> There is a clear recognition among Black Indians of how involvement in the tribes’ parades directs people’s attentions to constructive and culturally meaningful connections in New Orleans’s black neighborhoods.

26 Some actually argue that “Mardigradian” parading constitutes a form of “democracy without (or rather despite) government,”<sup>45</sup> insofar as it displays a self-consciousness about using the streets in spectacular and inclusive ways to articulate African American traditions. This political self-consciousness is about resistance, resilience, shared energy, community spirit, and support for a participatory African American public space. As Ned Sublette states, “The Indians embody resistance. You can sum it up in four words: ‘We won’t bow down’.”<sup>46</sup>

27 Since Mardi Gras Indians tribes have always refused to ask for parade permits, they have long been confronted to threats of arrest or police harassment. Police-Indian relations reached a low point on March 19, 2005 when the NOPD raided a gathering of hundreds of Indians at A. L. Davis Park in Central City on St. Joseph’s Night, ordering them to remove their Indian suits or be arrested, as recounted in a 2005 *Gambit* article by Katy Reckdahl.<sup>47</sup> Indians, who take pride in policing themselves, sanctioning members who engage in or advocate violence, were naturally outraged. The incident resulted in a City Council hearing in June 2005 (two months before Katrina made landfall) that ended abruptly when Allison “Tootie” Montana collapsed at the podium from a fatal heart attack as he was discussing the police brutality that he had experienced during his fifty-two years of participating in the tradition. In the wake of the hurricane, police intimidation continued, with police officers regularly demonstrating antagonism toward gatherings of Indians and disrupting ritualistic meetings of prominent Big Chiefs in 2009, 2010, and 2011.<sup>48</sup>

28 In 2011, however, a Sound Ordinance Task Force put together by Councilwoman Kristin Gisleson Palmer proposed a revision to the edict limiting music on the streets that a member of the mayor’s staff described as “more enforceable for police, and more respectful to musicians.”<sup>49</sup> Then, at a City Hall meeting of the City Council’s Governmental Affairs Committee, chaired by Councilwoman Susan Guidry, police and Indians sorted through issues that had long divided them. At the meeting, attended by every NOPD district commander, Deputy Superintendent Kirk Bouyelas announced that the New Orleans Police Department would no longer arrest Indians or use sirens and lights to force them off the streets. Bouyelas said that the department would also require most officers patrolling Indian parades to be on foot rather than inside squad cars and that they would be taught at a district and academy level to have a “positive attitude” toward the centuries-old tradition. When police suggested that Indian tribes should get permits to parade the streets, Jerome Smith, founder of the Tambourine and Fan youth organization which teaches children about New Orleans culture, including the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, said “You cannot police a bird. The streets belong to the people.” Susan Guidry subsequently made it clear that that suggestion was no longer on the table. As a result of these extensive negotiations, the St. Joseph’s Night parade in 2012 was the first in years not to involve dust-ups between police and Mardi Gras Indians.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 1**



Posters bearing Jerome Smith's quote were put up in Uptown New Orleans in anticipation of St. Joseph's Night 2012. Image courtesy of Anthony Turducken DelRosario.

<sup>29</sup> Such a detente may of course be interpreted as yet another sign that Mardi Gras Indian traditions are becoming more mainstream, sanitised, and domesticated as they find new audiences.<sup>51</sup> The odds of that happening seem low, however. Interest in the Indian masks and suits may spread, but the culture itself cannot really be reproduced elsewhere, for it is entirely in and of New Orleans. Its heart lies not in the public performances, dramatic though they are, but in the traditions passed down in song and in the countless hours spent alone in a room conjuring history with a needle, some thread and thousands of sequins, feathers and beads.

### 3.3. The 2011 Krewe of Eris Parade

<sup>30</sup> Our last case study veers away from the field of black performance traditions and deals with a (mostly) white carnival group. Carnival krewes are often portrayed as bastions of privilege, whiteness and masculinity.<sup>52</sup> While many organizations do conform to this description, the world of Mardi Gras in New Orleans is far more complex than these sources let on. Traditional organizations (be they “old-line krewes” such as Comus, Proteus, Momus, and Rex, or “super-krewes” such as Bacchus, Endymion, and Orpheus) have always been challenged by alternative parades with differing definitions of revelry and conceptions of public space. In the 1910s, Zulu lampooned the wealthy “big shots” who paraded around on Mardi Gras in expensive and extravagant costumes. Its members’ uniform (blackface and grass skirts) was meant to ridicule the demeaning portrayal of their African American neighbours by poking fun at the minstrel stereotype. Zulu has since been incorporated into the licensed festivities, to the point that it closes the official parade schedule together with Rex. In 2000 the Krewe of Muses decided to challenge the male-dominated carnival by organizing an all-female parade, complete with girlie throws such as decorated shoes, lighted necklaces, purses. It is now one of the most popular parades of the carnival season. An up-to-date list of alternative parades would include such krewes as ‘Tit Rex (which parades with miniature floats to denounce the escalating costs of Mardi Gras), Krewe Delusion (the Big Easy’s newest satirical parade, from which

a dozen “innerkrewes” emanate), the science-fiction-themed Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus, as well as the Krewe of Eris.

31 Named after the Greek goddess of discord, Eris is a foot parade that both honours and transgresses New Orleans parading traditions. Its founders, Ms. Lateacha and Lord Willin, used to participate in New Orleans’s downtown-based, punk Krewe du Poux, until they decided to experiment with another aesthetic in 2005. Their original aim was to “give back” to the city where they wintered every year. “I wanted to contribute and give something back to New Orleans instead of just taking and absorbing culture,” Lateacha explained in a 2011 interview.<sup>53</sup> By choosing to incorporate a brass band (the Eris band), original tunes (the triumphant “Eris Anthem,” written by a musician called JR who teaches would-be band members to play in the weeks leading to the parade) and by selecting a different theme every year (“Planet Eris” in 2007, “The Swarm” in 2008, “Mutagenesis” in 2011, “Eris Dawns” in 2013), Lateacha and Lord Willin paid homage to indigenous festive traditions – what they call “the roots of Carnival” in New Orleans.<sup>54</sup> Eris, however, deliberately went against the grain by advocating an explicitly anti-authoritarian perspective. Inspired by James Gill’s book about the history of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, *Lords of Misrule*, its founders sought to bring something rowdier to the contemporary parades. “Even the first year, it was just an open call for creative chaos,” Lord Willin explains.<sup>55</sup> While other carnival organizations are prohibitively expensive to join in, or simply closed to new members, Eris is free, open, and the costumes and floats are all designed and made by participants. Furthermore, although all krewes are required by law to obtain a permit in order to march, Eris has consistently refused to even apply for one, preferring instead to express its freedom by marching without permission.

32 Katrina was a turning point for the krewe, as it was for so many of New Orleans’s residents. The krewe’s theme that year was “Nouveaux Limbeaux,” a phrase meant to “capture the mood of uncertainty that was pervading the city” after the levees broke.<sup>56</sup> The founders of Eris were not sure whether they should parade at all, but they did so to send a message of hope as well as to reclaim public space. “I like[d] the idea of having a beautiful parade,” says Victor Pizzaro, a 40-year-old member of the krewe who takes a dim view of the post-Katrina influx of do-gooders from New England and the Pacific Northwest. “And this was [also part of] a greater conversation about what’s happened with New Orleans since the storm. [...] Ultimately, it’s about empowerment, it’s about getting people to be able to create.”<sup>57</sup>

33 The 2006 parade took two hundred brightly costumed artists and activists from the 1892 site where Homer Plessy, a black shoemaker from the Tremé, had been removed from a “whites only” car on an East Louisiana Railroad train, to Bywater (part of the city’s Ninth Ward), with its shiny paraphernalia of gentrification (art galleries, cafés), in order to protest attacks on free space, the abrupt inflation of rent in poor neighborhoods, and the razing of hundreds of houses for a new upper-end hospital, all of which stemmed from “an effort to [...] homogenize the city’s culture.”<sup>58</sup>

34 In the years leading to 2011, the parade’s embrace of decentralization became more patent. “[Originally, Lateacha and I] put in a lot of long hours bottom-lining Eris. [...] Then [...] we quit being in charge and Eris became a group decision-making process.”<sup>59</sup> A side effect of that structurelessness was the emergence of discord within the ranks. In 2010, following repeated conflict with the New Orleans Police Department, members debated whether they should occupy Jackson Square or continue following their usual route through the Marigny and French Quarter. Lateacha clearly favoured the second option:

[Jackson Square] is a very controlled space. Last year the cops were arrayed there waiting for us. New Orleans police hold grudges, and these days they figure out ahead of time when we’re happening. We used to have the

advantage that they were all at Bacchus, but now they're ready. Even if we 'liberated' Jackson Square, it would only be for five minutes. That doesn't seem worth what it would cost. I think Eris reclaims enough space through movement, and keeping moving is a big part of Eris. By focusing on taking a single space, you sacrifice continuing feelings of liberation for a single moment of liberation. There are times when that's worth it, but as someone who believes in the longevity of Eris, I don't think this is one of them.<sup>60</sup>

35 To some, it seemed as if the krewe was not quite living up to its revolutionary or insurrectionary, inspirational beginnings. “So Eris is the goddess of chaos,” one krewe member named Peter explained in 2012. “[T]o me it actually does mean a lot. You summon that and you're begging to overturn the social order. [...] You have to stand behind what you say. If you're saying, 'I want to see chaos,' you know? Sometimes that's people doing things you don't expect and that's going to end up in a little bit of a battle.”<sup>61</sup>

36 When Latachea expressed her desire to see the krewe be more active beyond just the yearly parade and compared the possibility of an expanded Eris to the way traditional social aid and pleasure clubs operate, helping build community spirit and sponsoring regular social or fundraising events, people like Peter decided to bring in more anarchistic-minded friends to the parade, which led to renewed conflict with the NOPD.

37 On the night of March 6th, 2011 (known as “Sunday Gras”), the parade was re-routed, avoiding Decatur Street in the French Quarter and Jackson Square. The year's theme, “Mutagenesis,” was meant as a satire of corporate contamination and state collusion as illustrated by the BP oil spill. The krewe's open-ended call for a “creative response” was answered by a joyous group of about 250 Erisians dressed as the fish, shorebirds, and other Gulf creatures whose ecosystems had been disturbed by the April 2010 environmental disaster (much like Katrina had disrupted theirs in 2005). The 2011 parade, however, also attracted participants who wished to not just dance wildly in the streets but to leap on top of cars, throw residential dustbins about, and paint phalluses on random objects. As the spectacle neared its end, Eris was met by members of the New Orleans Police Department's Fifth District. A skirmish ensued. As often in these circumstances, reports go from pure, unprovoked police brutality, to reckless vandalism from krewe members. It does seem, however, that revellers were tased, batoned, and pepper-sprayed, that brass instruments were crushed, and that phones and cameras documenting the raid were destroyed. In the end, twelve arrests were made.<sup>62</sup> A few days later, on Ash Wednesday, the NOPD shut down the ARC, a warehouse space that had for years been home to Plan B Community Bicycle Shop and the Iron Rail Library and Bookstore, for lack of permit. As it happens, the founder of Plan B was also a member of the Krewe of Eris. Clearly, this raid was more than mere revenge on the police's part. It was a way of making sure that the city's definition of public and private space would prevail over that of its more nonconformist residents.

38 Since the ill-fated 2011 parade, Eris has become even more clandestine, refusing interviews and corresponding with its members via text messages only. In 2012, it gathered at a secret address for 127 minutes before parading without a permit through the city's Ninth Ward while the city-sanctioned Mardi Gras went about raging uptown.<sup>63</sup> The parade was shut down quickly, and the future of the krewe is now uncertain, with some of its members advocating a return to leadership, the limitation of its ranks to a more carefully defined body, and the initiation of a courteous dialogue with the city of New Orleans on issues of reconstruction and gentrification,<sup>64</sup> and others recommending a continuation of the anarchic approach revolving around the illegal occupation of the city streets.<sup>65</sup> “My fear is that if there is a permit, the police will be with us the whole time and I personally don't like being around police,” one krewe member explained in 2012. “I don't like being around cops. I want to have a certain level of freedom. I'm not looking to fuck up someone's car or break someone's window, but I am looking to have that

experience, that existential experience of freedom that the police rob you of with their immediate presence.”<sup>66</sup>

39 To people like Peter, Eris is a political gesture meant to foreground an alternative to the prevailing vertical model, or “the pyramid,” which they argue curbs creativity and pits people against each other. They suggest that “anything from a farm to a factory to a parade to a movement” could be organized according to a “horizontal model” and that the results would be much better for the city of New Orleans and the world at large.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion: Democracy in the Crescent City’s Streets

40 The parades discussed in this paper have been central to the post-disaster recovery of the city, not only because of their ability to stimulate economic activity or to appeal to tourist interests, but because of the meaning they have for participants. Partakers in these rituals have created “mytho-poetic spaces rich with reinvented symbols of the past”<sup>68</sup> that have allowed them to negotiate their identities in the face of adversity. While outsiders may be struck by the resilience of the city and its culture, insiders emphasize the enduring power of ritualised collective effervescence. The perpetual calendar of parades<sup>69</sup> provides a stable reality within a complex, fragmented, and unpredictable world. Individual identities associated with such a culture extend into everyday life and sustain the meaning of the experience.

41 Writing about Johannesburg, Abdou Maliq Simone suggests that one way to think about an urban area after “the policies and economies that once moored it to the surrounding city have mostly worn away” is to consider people as “an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city.”<sup>70</sup> It is the residents of the city who find ways to reconnect, to build new ways of interacting with meaningful places in their lives – even if they have been dramatically transformed. These meaning-filled experiences help to explain how the impetus to parade can, even momentarily, upstage the work of rebuilding a city.

42 What these three case studies also make clear, however, is that parading in post-Katrina New Orleans cannot be reduced to a festive, communal practice. Debates and commentary about parading fees and parade safety provide a window onto disputes and conflicts involving the right to residency in the city, the ownership of its culture, and the use of public space.

43 Like other scholars before us, we see parades as “mobile public spheres,”<sup>71</sup> constituted in real time, but also as events that open up a broader, ongoing space for reflection on key issues pertaining to the future of urban areas. In that sense, parades are “battlefields of contention,”<sup>72</sup> displays of power through which parade participants make claims on contested spaces.

44 Parades do not intrinsically create “deep” or full emancipatory democracy because they are often disconnected from major centres of power. Instead of discursive forms found at marches with an explicitly political program (signs, banners, and speeches), parade participants in New Orleans “speak” through practices linked to black and white performance traditions. Second lines, Mardi Gras Indian processions, and carnival parades do not explicitly or directly speak to changing specific public policies, and so they are not part of formal governmental policy determination.<sup>73</sup>

45 Still, under conditions of substantial inequality and government disregard of the disempowered, parading is a public activity that recognizes lack of access to formal political power and improves the quality of life. In other words, parades constitute a form

of “democracy despite government.” They allow the disempowered and disenfranchised to claim a public place and to give voice to their cultural and political beliefs. Anarchist Mardi Gras parades like those organized by the Krewe of Eris function at least in part as populist reclamations of space rooted in New Orleanian cultural practices. Second lines and Mardi Gras Indian parades also provide opportunities for an egalitarian, open, and participatory discourse. They memorialize past events and foster hope for the future. Their brand of politics may not be immediately operational, but it can overtly speak to local, state, or federal government oppression.

46 Parades, therefore, challenge the character of public space and the terms of political discourse. They reject the privatisation and instrumentalisation of public space and call for its communal and expressive use. They seek to expand political discourse beyond formal rational dialogue aiming at consensus and to extend that discourse into civil society. They open spaces for alternative modes of expression, reminding us that “because civil society is heterogeneous, so too should be what counts as politically relevant dialogue or expression.”<sup>74</sup>

47 In the future, our research will look at how New Orleans’ local parading culture has influenced and benefited from the rise of global democratic performance. Political scientists, social movement theorists and cultural geographers have made us aware of forms of micro-political resistance that have challenged the corporatisation and securitisation of the city. An increasing tactical feature of such resistance has been the deployment of leisure practices to challenge the dominant norms and ideologies governing the use of urban space.<sup>75</sup> By comparing the festive reclaiming of the city with other forms of urban mobilization such as the 2011-2013 *Occupy NOLA* actions and the 2009 *Reclaim the Streets* “protestival” (protest + carnival) that marked the 10th anniversary of the WTO protests in Seattle and ended in six arrests by New Orleans police, we intend to show that the boundary between established festive organizations and newer grassroots urban social movements is slowly eroding in New Orleans (to wit the birth of the anarchist Guise of Fawkes Krewe in 2014) and that such erosion points to a more global merging of the carnivalesque with the political in urban settings. In the wake of Katrina New Orleans’s civic life may be transitioning from practices anchored in “genealogies of performance”<sup>76</sup> derived from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean to new forms of public intervention derived from an international, globalized culture of urban protest.

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## Notes

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The 2008 official death toll lists one fatality in Kentucky, two each in Alabama, Georgia, and Ohio, 14 in Florida, 238 in Mississippi, and 1,577 in Louisiana. It is estimated that some three-quarters of Louisiana’s Katrina-related deaths occurred in New Orleans, where about 70 percent of the victims were age 60 and older. See Peter Katel, “Rebuilding New Orleans: Should Flood-Prone Areas Be Redeveloped?” *CQ Researcher* 16.5 (2006): 97-120. <http://www.cqpress.com/product/Researcher-Rebuilding-New-Orleans.html>.

2 Bring New Orleans Back Commission, “Action Plan for New Orleans: The New American City.” Urban Planning Committee, 2006. <[www.bringneworleansback.org](http://www.bringneworleansback.org)>. The water did not recede until late September.

3 By 2010, the city’s population was still only 71 percent of what it was in 2000. By 2012 it was back up to 369,250 – 76 percent of what it was in 2000. See Melissa Schigoda, “Hurricane Katrina Impact,” *Greater New Orleans Community Data Center*, August 19, 2011 [http://www.hurstvillesecurity.com/images/page\\_uploads/Recovery%20-%20Hurricane%20Katrina%20Impact%20Fact%20Summary%20%28GNOCDC%29%20%28Aug%202011%29.pdf](http://www.hurstvillesecurity.com/images/page_uploads/Recovery%20-%20Hurricane%20Katrina%20Impact%20Fact%20Summary%20%28GNOCDC%29%20%28Aug%202011%29.pdf); Allison Plyer, “Facts for Features: Katrina Impact,” *Data Center Research*, 2014 <http://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/katrina/facts-for-impact/>.

4 Sheila Crowley, “Where Is Home? Housing for Low-Income People After the 2005 Hurricanes,” in Chester W. Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds, *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster*:

*Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 121.

5 See John Arena, *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); George Lipsitz, “Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship,” *Cultural Anthropology* 21.3 (2006): 451-468; Siri J. Colom, “The Politics of Visibility: Contentious Struggle over Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” Conference presentation, Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York City, 2013; [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p650211\\_index.html](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p650211_index.html); Paola Branciaroli, “Public Spaces in New Orleans Post Katrina. Plans and Projects as Instruments for Urban and Social Revitalization,” *Italian Journal of Planning Practice* 3.1 (2014): 93-109; Renia Ehrenfeucht, “Art, Public Spaces, and Private Property along the Streets of New Orleans,” *Urban Geography* 35.7 (2014): 965-979.

6 Marcel Hénaff and Tracy B. Strong, *Public Space and Democracy* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003); Mark Purcell, *Recapturing Democracy: Neoliberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2010); Lisa Keller, *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Nancy S. Love and Mark Mattern, *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013).

7 Samuel Kinser, *Carnival American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, “Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order,” *Social Forces* 75.2 (1996): 423-458; Reid Mitchell, *All On a Mardi Gras Day. Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Helen A. Regis, “Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (1999): 472-504; Marcia G. Gaudet and James C. McDonald, *Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Rachel Breunlin and Helen A. Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans,” *American Anthropologist* 108.4 (2006): 744-764; Cynthia Becker, “New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians: Mediating Racial Politics from the Backstreets to Main Street,” *African Arts* 46.2 (2013): 36-49.

8 Clyde A. Woods, “Do you Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans? Katrina, Trap Economics, and the Rebirth of the Blues,” *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 1005-1018; Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club, “Coming Out the Door for the Ninth Ward” (New Orleans, LA: Neighborhood Story Project, 2006); Matt Sakakeeny, “Resounding Silence in a Musical City,” *Space and Culture* 9 (2006): 41-44; Bruce Boyd, “‘They’re Tryin’ to Wash Us Away’: New Orleans Musicians Surviving Katrina,” *Journal of American History* 94.3 (2007): 812-819; Michael White, “New Orleans African American Musical Traditions: The Spirit and Soul of a City,” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke, eds., *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race and Public Policy Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 87-106; Chelsey Louise Kivland, “Hero, Eulogist, Trickster, and Critic: Ritual and Crisis in Post-Katrina Mardi Gras” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke, eds., *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race and Public Policy Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 107-128; Rachel Breunlin, Ronald W. Lewis, and Helen A. Regis, “The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis” (New Orleans, LA: UNO Press/Neighborhood Story Project, 2009); Joel Dinerstein, “Second Lining Post-Katrina: Learning Community from the Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club,” *American Quarterly* 61 (2009): 615-637; Eric Porter, “Jazz and Revival,” *American Quarterly* 61.3 (2009): 593-613; R. E. Barrios, “You Found Us Doing This, This Is Our Way: Criminalizing Second Lines, Super Sunday, and Habitus in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” *Identities* 17 (2010): 586-612; Catherine Michna, “Hearing the Hurricane Coming: Storytelling, Second-Line Knowledges, and the Struggle for Democracy in New Orleans” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 2011); Rachel Carrico, “On Thieves, Spiritless Bodies, and Creole Soul: Dancing through the Streets of New Orleans,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 57.1 (2013): 70-87; John O’Neal et al., “Performance and Cross-Racial Storytelling in Post-Katrina New Orleans: Interviews with John O’Neal, Carol Bebel, and Nicholas Slie,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 57.1 (2013): 48-69; Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker, *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2013); Romain Huret and Randy J. Sparks, *Hurricane Katrina in Transatlantic Perspective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

9 Abdou Maliq Simone, “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg,” *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004): 407.

10 For the sake of convenience, we will henceforth adopt Diane Grams’s definition of parading as “a processional activity sponsored by a nongovernmental social or cultural organization, taking

place on city streets, and involving costumed performers and live music from marching bands, brass bands, or percussionists with chanting choruses.” Diane M. Grams, “Freedom and Cultural Consciousness: Black Working-Class Parades in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 35.5 (2013): 502.

11 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 1990; Cherice Harrison-Nelson, “Guardians of the Flame: Upholding Community Traditions and Teaching with Art in New Orleans,” *In Motion Magazine* (1996); Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 1996; Henry Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (New York: Flammarion, 1997); James Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1997); Regis, “Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals”; Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History*, 1st edition (Metairie, LA: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2001); Gaudet and McDonald, *Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and Zydeco*.

12 Rosary O’Neill, *New Orleans Carnival Krewes: The History, Spirit and Secrets of Mardi Gras* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 34-42.

13 Kinser, *Carnival American Style*.

14 Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2011). New Orleans was not the only city that had a place for slaves to freely gather. There was a place in Philadelphia, for example, where slaves met during the colonial period. That space, also called Congo Square, is now called Washington Square.

15 Early references to Congo Square almost all come from notes taken by city outsiders, especially American European travellers such as Christian Schultz (1808), Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1819), and James Creecy (1834). Locals did not seem to find it worthy of documentation, except in arrest records. Indeed, some of the best evidence of African creative practices in New Orleans comes from the laws that were intended to control or prohibit them. See Jerah Johnson, “New Orleans’s Congo Square: An Urban Setting for Early Afro American Culture Formation,” *Louisiana History* 33.2 (1993): 117-57; Joseph Roach, “Carnival and the Law in New Orleans,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 37.3 (1993): 42-75; Evans, *Congo Square*.

16 Gary A. Donaldson, “A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862,” *Journal of Negro History* 69.2 (1984): 63-72.

17 Kinser, *Carnival American Style*; Roach, *Cities of the Dead*; Gill, *Lords of Misrule*; O’Neill, *New Orleans Carnival Krewes*.

18 Kevin F. Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Paul Spindt and Toni Weiss, “The Economic Impact of Mardi Gras Season on the New Orleans Economy and the Net Fiscal Benefit of Staging Mardi Gras for the City of New Orleans” (New Orleans, LA: Carnival Krewe Civic Fund, 2009). <http://www.rexorganization.com/Downloads/2009/MardiGrasStudy.pdf>.

19 From a Kiswahili word meaning “great tragedy,” the Maafa (pronounced “mah-AH-fa”) is a procession held every July since 2000 in memory of the transatlantic slave trade. It begins at Congo Square and ends at the Algiers ferry landing.

20 The City of New Orleans’s current parade permit application form even includes “foot races/marathons/walkathons” in its list of parades. City of New Orleans One Stop Permits and Licenses, “Special Event Permit Guide and Applications,” *NOLA.gov*, 2015. <http://www.nola.gov/getattachment/Cultural-Economy/Special-Event-Guide.pdf/>.

21 New Orleans City Council, “Regular Meeting News Summary,” *NOLACityCouncil.com*, 24 April 2014. <http://www.nolacitycouncil.com/news/meetingsummary.asp?id={A94D6270-0F39-4B23-B5B1-FAAD83071990}>.

22 Since Katrina the annual second line schedule has grown to include about 45 clubs, parading on 39 Sundays between the last Sunday in August and Fathers Day in mid-June. Weekends that do not have a second line parade include: Sundays that fall in the heat of summer (end of June through August), two weeks before Mardi Gras, and the last weekend in April and first in May when the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival takes place. During Mardi Gras many SAPC members mask Indian; during Jazz Fest, many clubs and tribes are paid to parade through the festival grounds. See Joel Dinerstein, “Rollin’ Wid It. 39 Sundays: Second-Line Season,” in Solnit and Snedeker, eds., *New Orleans: Unfathomable City*, 107-115.

23 Social aid and pleasure clubs were originally established to provide economic assistance and proper burials for those without means. Recreational activities soon complemented the mutual aid functions of the fraternal groups.

24 Grams, “Freedom and Cultural Consciousness,” 502.

25 Mardi Gras Indian culture used to be an exclusively male preserve – “a warrior culture” – but it appears to be slowly changing. Cherice Harrison-Nelson has been masking as the Big Queen of the Guardians of the Flame since 1996. See Harrison-Nelson, “Guardians of the Flame”. While many groups start their parades from bars or taverns, her gang, which includes several other women and a

number of children, got permission in 2011 to leave from St Augustine's, a beautiful Catholic church in Tremé built by free black people in the early 19th century.

26 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991). Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith.

27 Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals"; Helen A. Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," *American Ethnologist* 28.4 (2001): 752-777.

28 The 1877 carnival, for example, celebrated the violent end of Reconstruction in Louisiana and the re-establishment of white rule. The Krewe of Momus took as its theme, "Hades – A Dream of Momus" and offered a virulent caricature of local, state, and national Reconstruction leaders, including President Ulysses S. Grant, who was portrayed as Beelzebub, and General William Tecumseh Sherman, who was mocked as Baal. Other prominent Republicans who came under fire included James G. Blaine and Frederick Douglass. The final float showed the entire ship of state going up in flames. The satire was so outrageous that some Louisiana Republicans suggested that the organizers should be arrested. If the message were not clear enough, Comus's parade, which closed the season, celebrated the superiority of "The Aryan Race." See Gill, *Lords of Misrule*, 125-128.

29 Thomas D. Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 22.

30 Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," 756.

31 Quoted in Joel Dinerstein, "39 Sundays," 111.

32 Carried by four celebrants (two in front and two in back) to keep the dancing second line off the moving stage, this is the only structuring device that controls the movement of the crows.

33 Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 32.

34 Katy Reckdahl, "The Price of Parading," *Offbeat Magazine*, 1 November 2006. <http://www.offbeat.com/articles/the-price-of-parading/>.

35 That number was later reduced to \$2,220, until another shooting brought it back up to \$3,760 in March 2006.

36 Lewis Watts and Eric Porter, *New Orleans Suite: Music and Culture in Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 42-43.

37 The debate on parade fees has nevertheless left its marks: the present day fee of \$1,985 has forced some clubs to pool their resources and stage a single parade involving several clubs, each having their own division and their own brass band.

38 Matt Sakakeeny, "Under the Bridge: An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans," *Ethnomusicology* 54:1 (2010): 16.

39 Jonathan Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006): 159.

40 Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day*, 116.

41 Historian Samuel Kinser explains that Indian masking gradually "substitute[d] aesthetic for fighting prowess." Kinser, *Carnival American Style*, 160.

42 Lisa Katzman, *Tootie's Last Suit* (New York: Lisa Katzman Productions, 2007).

43 Michael P. Smith, *Spirit World : Pattern in the Expressive Folk Culture of Afro-American New Orleans* (New Orleans, LA : New Orleans Urban Folklife Society, 1984), 85.

44 Katzman, *Tootie's Last Suit*.

45 Peter G. Stillman and Adelaide H. Villmoare, "Democracy Despite Government: African American Parading and Democratic Theory," in Love and Mattern, *Doing Democracy*, 485-99.

46 Neil Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2008), 294. "We won't bow down/On that dirty ground" is a couplet that is at the centre of the most famous Mardi Gras Indian chant, "Indian Red."

47 Katy Reckdahl, "St. Joseph's Night Gone Blue," *Gambit*, 29 March 29 2005. <http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/st-josephs-night-gone-blue/Content?oid=1244049>.

48 On March 19, 2010, for instance, a squad car with its siren blasting disrupted nearly twenty Indians fanned out along St. Bernard Avenue during a ritualistic meeting of two prominent leaders, Big Chief Victor Harris from Spirit of FiYiYi and Second Chief David Montana from the Yellow Pocahontas. See Katy Reckdahl, "New Orleans Police Handling of Mardi Gras Indian Events Draws Praise/Criticism," *Times-Picayune*, 20 March 2010. <[http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2010/03/new\\_orleans\\_police\\_handling\\_of.html](http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2010/03/new_orleans_police_handling_of.html)>. On Mardi Gras Day 2011, police broke up a meeting of the Red Hawk Hunters and 9th Ward Hunters. See Watts and Porter, *New Orleans Suite*, 52.

49 Larry Blumenfeld, "Beyond Jazzfest, Ruffled Feathers in New Orleans," *Village Voice*, 22 June

2011. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2011-06-22/music/beyond-jazzfest-ruffled-feathers/2/>.

50 Katy Reckdahl, "Crackdown a Decade Ago Touched Off Powder Keg," *The New Orleans Advocate*, 19 March 2015. <http://www.theneworleansadvocate.com/news/11880449-123/decade-after-st-josephs-day>.

51 Pointing to Indian performances at mainstream events such as Jazz Fest or to museums displaying used Indian outfits (the custom used to be to burn them after St Joseph's night), critics are quick to point out that what used to be an underground art form is becoming "an ethnic commodity that symbolizes black New Orleans." Becker, "New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians," 49.

52 Jennifer Atkins, "Setting the Stage: Dance and Gender in old-Line New Orleans Carnival Balls, 1870-1920," Ph.D. dissertation (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 2008); Diane M. Grams, "Community parading and Symbolic Expression in Post-Katrina New Orleans" in Horace R. Hall, Cynthia Cole Robinson, and Amor Kohli, *Uprooting Urban America: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Race, Class & Gentrification* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 287-300; O'Neill, *New Orleans Carnival Krewes*.

53 Quoted in Jules Bentley, "Interview with the Krewe of Eris Founders," *The Raging Pelican 2* (2011). <http://ragingpelican.com/interview-krewe-of-eris-founders/>. Very few interviews of this founding couple exist, as Eris – like many anarchist organizations in New Orleans – cultivates secrecy.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Adam Chandler, "What the Occupy Movement Can Learn From a New Orleans Subculture," *The Atlantic*, 24 April 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/04/what-the-occupy-movement-can-learn-from-a-new-orleans-subculture/256281/>.

62 Eight of the cases were eventually resolved – including four with plea deals and one with dropped charges – while the Orleans Parish district attorney's office moved three others to municipal court. One arrestee, William Watkins III, was given a jail term of 45 days. Two failed to appear for court hearings. See John Simerman, "Krewe of Eris Prosecutions in Scuffle with Police Produce Mixed Results," *Times-Picayune*, 28 September 2011. [http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2011/09/krewe\\_of\\_eris\\_prosecutions\\_in.html](http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2011/09/krewe_of_eris_prosecutions_in.html). We were unable to find out what happened to Damien Weaver, who was charged separately from the other eleven because he faced the only felony counts in the group – battery of a police officer with injury and attempt to assist an escape.

63 Chandler, "What the Occupy Movement Can Learn From a New Orleans Subculture."

64 These authority-minded members half-jokingly refer to themselves as "Eris Alpha."

65 In 2012, most of the latter joined a splinter group called "The Krewe of Witches" that set a boisterous course through the streets of New Orleans one night before the Eris parade.

66 Quoted in Chandler, "What the Occupy Movement Can Learn From a New Orleans Subculture."

67 Ibid.

68 Grams, "Freedom and Cultural Consciousness," 509.

69 According to Diane Grams, the total number of parades has grown from near thirty in the parade season following Katrina's landfall (September 2005-mid-June 2006) to about 150 in 2011. Ibid, 526.

70 Simone, "People as Infrastructure," 411, 408.

71 Watts and Porter, *New Orleans Suite*, 33.

72 Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans*, 200.

73 There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. On August 31, 2009, for example, a coalition of social aid and pleasure clubs organized a parade to protest the destruction of Charity Hospital (which provided two-thirds of the care for the uninsured in NOLA until 2005) in the face of plans for a new medical centre that would require demolition of parts of Mid-City New Orleans rebuilt since the storm.

74 Stillman and Villmoare, "Democracy Despite Government," 328.

75 Paul Gilchrist and Neil Ravenscroft, "Space Hijacking and the Anarcho-Politics of Leisure," *Leisure Studies* 32.1 (2013): 49-68.

76 Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 25.

### List of illustrations

|   |                |  |
|---|----------------|--|
|  | <b>Title</b>   | Figure 1   |
|   | <b>Caption</b> | Posters bearing Jerome Smith’s quote were put up in Uptown New Orleans in anticipation of St. Joseph’s Night 2012. Image courtesy of Anthony Turducken DelRosario. |
|   | <b>URL</b>     | <a href="http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/docannexe/image/11328/img-1.jpg">http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/docannexe/image/11328/img-1.jpg</a>            |
|   | <b>File</b>    | image/jpeg, 2.9M   |

### References

*Electronic reference*

Aurélie Godet, « “Meet de Boys on the Battlefield”: Festive Parades and the Struggle to Reclaim Public Spaces in Post-Katrina New Orleans », *European journal of American studies* [Online], 10-3 | 2015, document 1.9, Online since 31 December 2015, connection on 20 June 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/11328> ; DOI : 10.4000/ejas.11328

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