A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth Century New Orleans

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A LUMINOUS BROTHERHOOD: AFRO-CREOLE SPIRITUALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ORLEANS

By

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To my spirit guides: Ross, Ruth, Dean, and Roberta
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the practice of Spiritualism among a group of Afro-creole men from 1858 until 1877 in New Orleans. It contends that Spiritualism was the process in which these Afro-creoles envisioned the proper social, political, and religious ordering of the material world. Communicating with the world of the wise spirits offered the Cercle Harmonique a forum for airing their political grievances and for imagining a more egalitarian world. Many of their messages focused on what the spirits called “the Idea,” a concept which meant humanitarian progress, equality, egalitarianism, brotherhood, and harmony. Championing the Idea, Spiritualism mediated the social and political changes experienced by Afro-creoles in the late antebellum and post-Civil War world. The messages the Cercle Harmonique received from the spirit world—and the spirits who sent them—mediated the changes to the New Orleans social, political, religious, and cultural climate.

From a close reading of their séance records and noting the spiritual network into which they placed themselves, this study maps the Afro-creoles’ social, political, racial, and religious goals. Concurrently, the project also illuminates how the Cercle Harmonique understood New Orleanian and American society and politics and the hierarchical Catholic institution to be limiting humanity’s progress. Tyrannical leaders, corrupt power, and white supremacy worked against the Idea. However, through their séances the Cercle Harmonique connected with an idealized society, and while that idealized society existed apart from the Spiritualists, their communication provided the Afro-creoles with republican ideology to combat politically destructive forces on earth.
INTRODUCTION

THE NEW ORLEANS CERCLE HARMONIQUE

“One effect of the law of association is known as harmony; and harmony is the soul and element of music. Music is a representation of divine Order; and Order is the Wisdom of the Deity. To establish harmony, therefore, in society, every man must be well instructed and properly situated, so that his movements may accord with the movements of the whole; and thus the movements of the human race will be in concert.” – Andrew Jackson Davis, The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind ¹

“The march of these events will bring Progress; the Fusion of the Races will happen little by little. The antagonistic elements will harmonize and Concord will triumph over disunity.” – Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais to the Cercle Harmonique, 6 October 1871²

“In the struggle of good against evil, you have in your world both antagonisms which continuously fight. My common sense and my heart directed me; I succumbed under the ball of a fanatical madman if there ever was!” – A Lincoln to the Cercle Harmonique, 27 December 1871³

Beloved and well-respected Afro-creole Spiritualist and medium Valmour⁴ died in February 1869. Three days after his death, his friend and fellow Spiritualist Henri Louis Rey⁵ received a message from Valmour’s spirit while working at the Louisiana House of Representatives. Like all spirit messages Rey received, he wrote it down. In the message, Valmour covered a range of topics, from personal matters to humanity’s progress. He called attention to his “unhappy family” and asked his friend to “pity” them and look after them. However, much of Valmour’s message emphasized not his immediate family but rather his world family. He congratulated Rey and other Spiritualist members of the Cercle Harmonique⁶ for “the beautiful work” they had achieved. As the “soldiers of Progression” they deserved crowns. Bravely they struggled to “discern the truth from error and falsehood” and now they championed the virtues of Spiritualism and equality. They had broken with “the infamous prejudices and ignorance” that blinded so many others. Valmour encouraged them to continue fighting “for the

² René Grandjean Collection (Mss 085), University of New Orleans Earl K. Long Library Special Collections; 85-34, 6 October 1871. Message signed “Lamenais.”
³ Grandjean collection, 85-35; 27 December 1871.
⁴ Valmour’s real name was John B. Aversin.
⁵ Spellings of Rey’s first name vary in the secondary literature, sometimes spelled Henry. I chose to use the spelling listed in his séance books when referring to him as a message’s medium.
⁶ The Cercle Harmonique is the name Rey and other Afro-creoles practicing Spiritualism together gave themselves.
good” and purifying themselves “by good deeds.” This would secure them a “reward” in the spiritual spheres even if they were not recognized for their righteousness on earth.⁷

Valmour and Rey were members of the *Cercle Harmonique*, a community of Afro-creole Spiritualists who practiced from 1858 to 1877.⁸ While other members came and went, Rey was a devoted Spiritualist for the whole duration of the *Cercle Harmonique*. Even when alone, he would transcribe the messages he received from the spirits. Rey was born a free man in New Orleans to parents from Saint Domingue, he was a “bright mulatto,”⁹ he was educated, and he volunteered in the army during the Civil War. Most others in the *Cercle Harmonique* were like Rey: educated, male, free, and from Catholic families. As a whole, the messages transcribed in Rey’s séance books frequently encouraged the Spiritualists to continue struggling for justice with patience and courage. The messages were almost always received and written in French, indicating that all in attendance at the séances came from Afro-creole backgrounds.¹⁰ Messages from Saint Vincent de Paul, New Orleans’s own Father Antonio de Sedella (or Père Antoine as he was locally called¹¹), Franz Anton Mesmer, and Emanuel Swedenborg abound in the séance books’ pages, along with messages from radical abolitionist John Brown, assassinated president Abraham Lincoln, and Rey’s deceased friend Union Captain André Cailloux. Other departed friends and family members of the circle frequented the table, as did anonymous friends and brothers, and figures from the French Revolution.

This study contends that Spiritualism was the process in which these Afro-creoles envisioned the proper social, political, and religious ordering of the material world. Communicating with the world of the wise spirits offered the *Cercle Harmonique* a forum for airing their political grievances and for imagining a more egalitarian world. Many of their messages focused on what the spirits called “the Idea,” a concept which meant humanitarian

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⁷ Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 February 1869.
⁸ Though the name *Cercle Harmonique* may not have been officially adopted until after the Civil War, Rey began practicing Spiritualism regularly with other Afro-creoles shortly after his conversion.
¹⁰ Occasionally a message is received in English, indicating that *Cercle Harmonique* members were likely bilingual. When this happens, it is almost always from an American spirit (John Brown or Daniel Webster). Though even spirits who sometimes communicate in English do not always communicate in English; for example, Brown’s messages come in both languages. Thus, choosing what language the message was transcribed in may have been the call of that meeting’s scribe. Regardless, messages in English are rare, limiting the circle to French speakers only—in other words, primarily creoles of color.
¹¹ The nickname of Father Antonio de Sedella, beloved Catholic priest of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who was particularly popular among Afro-creoles.
progress, equality, egalitarianism, brotherhood, and harmony. According to the spirits, the Idea was supposed to structure the world and ensure universal liberty. Championing the Idea, Spiritualism mediated the social and political changes experienced by Afro-creoles in the late antebellum period and post-Civil War world. The Spiritualism of the Cercle Harmonique elucidates how New Orleans Afro-creoles wanted the world to be. In particular, the proper ordering of post-war society, according to them, was reflected in the records from their séances. The messages they received from the spirit world—and the spirits who sent them—mediated the changes to the New Orleans social, political, religious, and cultural climate. In particular, during the post-Civil War and Reconstruction era, it was a hopeful time for black New Orleanians for it was their first clear entry into the political arena. It was also a dangerous time, easily seen by the violence of white terrorism. Thus it was an auspicious time for the leaders of a spiritual republic to guide the Cercle Harmonique.

From a close reading of their séance records and noting the spiritual network into which they placed themselves, this study maps the Afro-creoles’ social, political, racial, and religious goals. Concurrently, the project also illuminates how the Cercle Harmonique understood New Orleanian and American society and politics and the hierarchical Catholic institution to be limiting humanity’s progress. Tyrannical leaders, corrupt power, and white supremacy worked against the Idea. Through their séances the Cercle Harmonique connected with an idealized society, and while that idealized society existed apart from the Spiritualists, the messages from its members provided the Afro-creoles with a republican ideology to combat politically destructive forces on earth. This perfect world of the spirits manifested a deep collective identity that linked the members of the Cercle Harmonique to the spirits who spoke to them. Rather than individualized messages from the spirits of the dead (though that happened too), the Cercle Harmonique primarily received communiques that encouraged them to copy the idealized society of the spiritual world here in the material world. When describing antebellum Spiritualism, religious studies scholar John Modern contends that the practice owed much of its popularity to how a séance allowed participants to interact with people and social forces outside their immediate surroundings, or as Modern puts it, an “abstraction of the public.”12 For the Cercle Harmonique this mediation would conclude, hopefully, with a reconstitution of society. The spirits offered visions of proper laws, advised the correct way to organize government, and

modeled the perfectly functioning society. Since the spirit world conformed to the Idea, it was harmonious. Members of the *Cercle Harmonique* hoped the egalitarian republicanism that governed the spirit world could be replicated on earth. Then the material world could be harmonious too.

**The Category of African American Religions**

This discussion of the world of the *Cercle Harmonique* bridges three lively religious histories each with a rich historiography: African American religious history, history of American Spiritualism, and New Orleans history. In weaving these three strands of history together, this project seeks to expand the geographic, canonical, and racial boundaries of each. The example of the *Cercle Harmonique* aligns with the traditional focus on resistance and politics in the historiography of African American religions and yet does not easily subscribe to the subfield’s expectations. Mainline protestantism and evangelicalism dominates the historiography of African American religions, and while this may come as no surprise due to its denominational ascendancy, the protestant emphasis obscures as much as it illuminates in the historiography. Moreover, the primary figures in African American religious historiography have been male theologians and institutional leaders, and institutional church spaces have been the primary locales for investigating African American religions. The field has opened in recent years and this study adds to the expansion.  

In *The Burden of Black Religion* Curtis Evans identified how the assumed “innate religiosity” of African Americans shaped history and dictated previous historiography. Not only were African Americans seen as “naturally religious,” but they were viewed as religious in a way that privileged emotion and feeling as opposed to “‘rational’ faith of whites.” Scholars

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14 It is worth noting that Arthur Huff Fauset questioned the assumed religiosity of African Americans in 1944 in *Black Gods of the Metropolis*. He criticized the often accepted view that “there is something in the Negro amounting almost to an inner compulsion which drives him into religious channels” and stated that “the religiosity of the Negro often is taken for granted” (96–97). Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (1944; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
have expanded the historiography in recent years, by taking seriously the “burden of black religion” and identifying the “surprises, paradoxes, and ironies” in this historically contingent category.\textsuperscript{15} This project highlights one of these paradoxes—a religion typically associated with white, liberal protestants in the northeast but practiced by Afro-creoles. While the application of Spiritualism by New Orleanian Afro-creoles may appear surprising at first glance, what is not surprising is the result of this application: a religious mediation of politics, society, and culture.

Evans’s call recently was reiterated by Judith Weisenfeld, who encouraged scholars to look beyond the traditional persons, practices, and places of African American religious history and historiography and further open up the field. In a 2013 essay, Weisenfeld argued that conceptions of what is religious for African Americans largely has been steered by the numerical dominance of black protestantisms in American religious history which is why scholars looking for African American religions often focus on protestant churches. In response, Weisenfeld called for more work on “the histories of black figures who do not conform easily to the parameters of orthadox black protestantism and yet who brought spiritual sensibilities or critiques of religion to their work as public figures.”\textsuperscript{16} Weisenfeld’s suggestions indicate that the field has yet to fully break beyond the “burden of black religion,” the image of the “perpetual primitive” in African American religious historiography, and the “anti-African sentiment deeply embedded in black Christianity.”\textsuperscript{17}

Afro-creole Spiritualism and the local black Catholicism that influenced it are two of the “surprises” Evans prospects in African American religious history.\textsuperscript{18} This study thus joins other recent scholarly works in showing the diversity and dynamism of African American religions.


That diversity has been illustrated in various ways. Edward E. Curtis IV has argued that the practice and theology of the Nation of Islam was politically charged without losing claims to religious authenticity. Jacob Dorman’s recent work, *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* examined the history and significance of African American assertions of an ancient black Israelite genealogy. In *Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer*, Marie W. Dallam illustrated how the innovative leadership of Grace and the social-cultural context of the early twentieth century molded the House of Prayer. Sylvester Johnson demonstrated how religio-racial identities and theologies carved new ethnic spaces for African Americans to claim unique and global histories. Each of these works relies on solid historical-cultural research that demonstrates the dynamic beliefs and practices of their subjects, pays attention to the importance of context, and highlights the significance of politics and power.

This analysis of Afro-creole Spiritualism also takes seriously the significance of texts in African American religions. Texts created by communities of practitioners and believers provide scholars of African American religious history, and American religious history more broadly, useful artifacts for mapping the connections between religion, politics, and collective identity. Though the *Cercle Harmonique* did not write their community’s history or publish their theology, they still created rich religious texts—their séance records. Laurie Maffly-Kipp’s *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* examines the race histories of black protestants in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to see how the authors understood and responded to racism. According to Maffly-Kipp, their narratives “were designed to liberate them from the present time and place by connecting them with the past and future and with sites outside their own imperfect society.” The Afro-creole Spiritualists’ practice had such a result. They too wanted to move beyond their own imperfect material world but also to reform it to be more like the spiritual republic that advised them. The *Cercle Harmonique* considered their religious practice as engagement with a collective body of spirits who lived in harmony together as a community. The *Cercle Harmonique*’s communication with spirits of the French Revolution, with spirits extolling America’s republican promise, and with spirits critiquing

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slavery and the Confederacy allowed circle members to place themselves in the trajectory of humanity’s progress. Their practice furthered the Idea of republican egalitarianism, and the knowledge shared by the spirits guided them in their task.

**Religion, Power, and Politics**

No study of religion and race in the nineteenth century is complete without close attention to politics. Political personhood—meaning what politically and legally constituted a person—greatly changed over the course of the century. While free blacks possessed some political and legal rights, particularly under colonial New Orleans rule, the 1857 Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* declared that African Americans possessed no legal protection under the U.S. Constitution. American slavery provided the base to country’s racial hierarchy, and in various forms, religion both supported and criticized the nation-wide commitment to white over black. For many African Americans, religion provided spaces, language, and worldviews that fostered resistance and empowerment against white political hegemony. In many cases, Afro-Atlantic and African American religions drew from a combination of indigenous culture and Euro-American culture to contest the dominant culture. In the case of the *Cercle Harmonique*, these Afro-creoles used a tradition typically associated with white, liberal protesters in the northeast to criticize their own *ancien régime*—the white supremacist, slave-holding oligarchy.

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24. Additionally, Afro-creole Spiritualism exemplifies what Paul Christopher Johnson has called “an Atlantic genealogy of ‘spirit possession,’” for the spirits visiting the *Cercle Harmonique* were “unleashed by working in and through the history of slavery, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, rather than via its elision or supercession.” Johnson embeds the practice of Afro-Atlantic religion in the context of slavery and colonialism, rather than argue that religion transcends these forces. Afro-Atlantic religions are properly explored only when studied in context.
The racial hierarchy in New Orleans increasingly solidified on a white/black binary over the course of the nineteenth century. Within this social environment, the Afro-creole population was a fluid and complicated one that cannot be limited by any one characteristic but rather developed in a historically contingent matrix of political, cultural, social, and legal vectors.\(^{25}\) Historian Shirley Elizabeth Thompson defined New Orleans’s Afro-creoles as “an in-between people exiled from the comfortable confines of racial solidarity and national citizenship.” As such, she concluded that they served as “convenient prisms, refracting and reshaping competing ideas about race and belonging.”\(^{26}\) Ideas about race frequently changed in the nineteenth century which caused the social, legal, and racial identity of Afro-creoles to be in flux. Many free blacks and mulattos in New Orleans and the Caribbean aspired to be seen on the same level as whites, and though most free blacks did not seek the continuation of slavery, many wanted a place of privilege.\(^{27}\)

Political aspirations often find a forum for expression in religion. Nineteenth-century Spiritualism frequently intersected with both political and personal issues, and therefore, many works on Spiritualism focus on reform culture, mourning culture, or metaphysics.\(^{28}\) According to...

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\(^{27}\) The Afro-creole community is hard to define by any one marker, as the following example details. Years before he would die a war hero in the battle at Port Hudson and appear as a spirit at the Cercle Harmonique’s table, André Cailloux was born a slave in 1825 just south of the city on a plantation in Plaquemines Parish. His family likely came to New Orleans by way of the rebellion on Saint Domingue. At the behest of his owner Cailloux learned cigarmaking and was manumitted for his good behavior in 1846. Cailloux was an example of an Afro-creole who personified why it was no one characteristic that typified an Afro-creole. He was Catholic like most creoles and likely bilingual. He likely possessed no white ancestry for he was often described as having very dark skin. He was unable to marry while he and his later wife Felicie were slaves, and so it was after they signed their marriage contract in 1847 that they were able to have their son legitimized and declared “natural” before the law and thus baptized (though it is possible that Cailloux was not the boy’s biological father). He later purchased a slave, his mother whom he freed. The Cailloux family accumulated a modest estate with his cigarmaking skills, and so though born a slave, he later amassed a respectable living. Stephen J. Ochs, “A Patriot, a Priest and a Prelate: Black Catholic Activism in Civil War New Orleans,” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 12.1 (1994): 53–56; and Stephen J. Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

\(^{28}\) Many scholars of Spiritualism have focused on the theological elements of the tradition. Figures like Andrew Jackson Davis and Emma Hardinge Britten offer useful starting points for studies of American Spiritualism because...
historian Ann Braude, an “elusive connection” existed between religious and political radicalism particularly apparent in the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement. Many Spiritualists around the country supported abolition, women’s rights, and health reform. American Spiritualists’ interest in women’s rights has encouraged scholars to examine the gender dynamics of Spiritualism in terms of women’s agency and middle-class manhood. Molly McGarry’s *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* traces the interplay between American culture and Spiritualist practice and ideas. In McGarry’s work, Spiritualism is a politically potent religious culture that connects practitioners to their past, present, and future. McGarry’s work also examines the significance of race in Spiritualism, an analytical platform with much untapped potential.

The intersections of politics, race, and Spiritualism in American religious history are understudied. Historian John Patrick Deveney’s biography of Paschal Beverly Randolph is the only work specifically devoted to the significance and practice of Spiritualism among African Americans. Unlike Randolph, however, members of the *Cercle Harmonique* were not engaged in sex magic, free love, or occultism, but like Randolph the Afro-creole Spiritualists’ racial identity shaped their practice. In *Ghosts of Futures Past*, McGarry investigates how the “ambivalent affiliations” Anglo-American Spiritualists developed with the Native American

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32 Much like the race histories examined by Maffly-Kipp in *Setting Down the Sacred Past*.

spirits they channeled reflected their “romantic attachments to an ideal or imagined Indian.”

McGarry is attentive to how racial difference continued on in the spiritual world for Anglo-Spiritualists already in possession of racial privilege, but *Ghosts of Futures Past* stops short of offering non-white voices. This analysis builds on her work by examining how those without a white racial advantage envisioned the spiritual world. For example, the *Cercle Harmonique* understood death to be an event which released the spirit and left the raced body on earth.

**The Gulf South and the Atlantic World**

Nineteenth-century Spiritualism is not typically associated with religions of the African diaspora. Nor is the *Cercle Harmonique* diasporic in a conventional manner. Its members were not displaced in New Orleans and did not use their practice to express nostalgia for an African homeland. However, the *Cercle Harmonique*’s practice did attempt a kind of spatial transcendence—namely it closed the gap between the spiritual world and the material world. Though its members did not conceive of themselves as exiles from the spiritual world, they sought to interact with the spiritual world and replicate it in the material world. Their use of Spiritualism pulled from both the popularity of the Fox sisters and Andrew Jackson Davis but also from the desire to commune with a supernatural or spirit world, which resonated in Yoruba and Kongo traditions, Voudou, and Catholicism.

In New Orleans, processes of creolization occurred simultaneous to the city’s “Americanization.” Shirley Thompson described these as proceeding “in tandem fashion with both progressive and conservative implications for the expansion of freedom, equality, and basic

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34 The Spiritualists studied by McGarry also developed an understanding that Native Americans were their own spiritual predecessors.


37 This understanding of diasporic religion is informed by Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diasporic Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
Even as the city was “Americanized” and “Protestantized” as the nineteenth century unfolded, creolization continued in new ways. The confluence of Spiritualism, Catholicism, and the politically active culture of Afro-creoles in the late antebellum period was a new form of religious and political creolization.

To date, the transnational elements of American Spiritualism have not been fully considered. This project opens up this conversation by situating the Cercle Harmonique in a black Atlantic world. The reception of messages from spirits of the French Revolution and Atlantic world connect the story of Afro-creole Spiritualism to the black Atlantic. Through their remembrance of French revolutionary history and culture and through their spiritual-genealogical ties with French and Caribbean culture, the spirits advising the Cercle Harmonique extended American Spiritualism beyond national borders. This transatlantic aspect of Afro-creole Spiritualism emphasizes the importance of context, locale, and networks in the study of New Orleans religion rather than New Orleans exceptionalism. Earlier histories identified New Orleans, its culture, and its history as exceptional. For example, in the introduction to Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization editors Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon identified New Orleans as “a very peculiar city” and “a strange province in the American South.”

Rather than identify New Orleans as exceptional or as an outlier in American cultural history, this study builds on the conclusions of Paul Johnson and Charles Long in New Territories, New Perspectives: The Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase. Johnson pulled the Louisiana Purchase into the Caribbean world by foregrounding the movement of various actors in the purchase’s backstory and thus placed the region in a more dynamic narrative. In his telling of the Louisiana Purchase as a “Vodou Purchase,” Louisiana was not simply a frontier that was Americanized, but rather Johnson depicted the region as a “transcultured” space whose

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38 She also states that they possessed a “symbiotic relationship.” Thompson, Exiles at Home, 8.
39 Spiritualism as a whole has been examined as a transnational tradition, but the United States is typically absent from this historiographical thread. See 242, note 30 in Robert S. Cox, Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).
past shaped its “Americanization” process. Complementing Johnson’s telling of the Louisiana Purchase, Long reoriented the narrative of American religious history from the vantage point of New Orleans and classified New Orleans as an American city. Though it is seldom mentioned in stories of America’s founding, Long emphasized the variety of Native American, European, and African peoples who forged relationships and exchanged ideas in New Orleans history. He argued that New Orleans is a quintessential American city because it provides the best vantage point from which to script a more accurate and full narrative of American religious history.

Thus New Orleans should not be seen as an exceptional place or as the foil to other geographic regions of the nineteenth-century United States. Rather New Orleans was a location where Atlantic world culture, Caribbean world culture, and American culture came together. It is another “siting” for telling American religious history. While Afro-creole Spiritualism had a transatlantic element, it was also similar to the Spiritualism practiced further north. For example, what Bret Carroll termed “spiritual republicanism” was strong among the Cercle Harmonique. Additionally, the Afro-creoles did not take all their religious cues from France. Instead, messages recorded in Rey’s séance books identify American Spiritualism as superior to French Spiritism. However, absent in northern communities was the influence of the city’s Afro-creole Catholic culture. New Orleans provides historians with a rich history of black Catholicism, and as demonstrated in this project, Catholicism shaped the ideas and practice of the Cercle Harmonique.

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42 New Orleans specifically is the site “in which the issues of exchange, adjudications, reciprocities, tensions, powers, and realities work themselves out,” and the city’s religious significance “is defined by the manner in which the relationships create and enable persons and communities to become aware of powers of being that orient all of them in their specific worlds.” Charles H. Long. “New Orleans as an American City: Origins, Exchanges, Materialities, and Religion,” in New Territories, New Perspectives, 207.
Afro-creole Spiritualists in New Orleans

Until now, the Cercle Harmonique has not been thoroughly investigated. To date, sections in two published books and one master’s degree thesis complete the group’s primary historiography. One of these is historian Caryn Cossé Bell’s Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868 (1997) which examined the political radicalism, egalitarian ideals, and outspoken protest of Afro-creoles in New Orleans. Covering a wide range of cultural flows such as literature, Catholicism, and freemasonry, Bell focused one chapter on Spiritualism. However, because of her periodization and the book’s endpoint in 1868, the Cercle Harmonique received less than ten pages of attention. This project advances Bell’s insights by going further into Reconstruction and deeper into the ideas, goals, and frustrations of the Cercle Harmonique’s members and their spiritual guides. One of the other scholars to examine the Cercle Harmonique is Robert Cox in Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism (2003). Cox’s emphasis on the sympathetic highlighted Spiritualism’s interrelated ideas regarding human nature, time, the natural world, and the social world. Cox identified “the politics of race and ethnicity” as why Spiritualism “flourished” in New Orleans. I agree with Cox’s conclusion but situate the practice of the Cercle Harmonique more concretely within New Orleans’s social, racial, political, and religious context. New Orleans was a rich contact zone of racial politics, Catholicism, Afro-creole culture, and Spiritualism, making it a prime space for communication between the spiritual world and the material world.

The argument proposed here begins with a close reading of the group’s séance records as kept by Rey. After Rey’s death his friend and fellow Cercle Harmonique leader François “Petit” Dubuclet kept the records, and he later gave them to his son-in-law René Grandjean, a French émigré and Spiritualist himself. Their archive spans twenty years and thirty-five large register books, which amounts to over seven thousand handwritten pages. I spent extensive time with the

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46 For previous examinations of the Cercle Harmonique see, Caryn Cossé Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 215–221; Cox, Body and Soul, 171–188; and Daggett, “Henry Louis Rey.”

47 Cox, Body and Soul, 169.

48 This idea of contact zones and Spiritualism comes from John J. Kucich who defines Spiritualism broadly, as “regular contact with a spirit world,” and this understanding allows him to emphasize the polyculturalism of American Spiritualism as forged in various cultural “contact zones.” John J. Kucich, Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), xii.
Cercle Harmonique’s records and transcribed and translated from the original French over a thousand pages of spirit messages. I used a triangulated approach to situate their practice, focusing on the content of the spirit communiques, the identities of the spirits themselves, and the context in which the messages were received. Accordingly, I highlighted the spiritual genealogy in which they imagined themselves, the political and theological nature of the spirit messages, and their relationship to the wider world. As such, this project examines the rhetoric of spirit messages as African American religious texts but also considers the interplay between the messages’ contact, the messages’ content, and the messages’ context. For example, a message from late nineteenth-century French Republican martyr Victor Noir about the “the fratricidal struggle” taking place as nations slowly advanced towards the Idea—egalitarian republicanism—arrived in the wake the Paris Commune and during the fracture of the Louisiana Republican Party. This message was as much a commentary on the local political divide as it was about foreign affairs. Noir’s status as a republican martyr gave his message authority, as did the message’s timeliness. Spirit, message, and context together reveal the business of Afro-creole Spiritualism.

Methods of religious studies, history, and, to an extent, ethnography informed my approach to the group’s records. The ethnographic turn in American religion called attention to the lived, embodied, practiced, emotional, and ritualized elements of our subjects. This focus

49 I paid particular attention to significant dates, spirits, and recurring themes, but I was also careful to transcribe and translate a wide sampling of randomly selected messages to ensure a fair appraisal.
50 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 28 May 1871. Message from Victor Noir. See chapters 4 and 5 for more.
51 This project conceives of religion as a fluid and polyvalent concept. Taking cues from Jonathan Z. Smith, Russell McCutcheon, and others, religion is a second-order category that itself possesses a volatile past and lively genealogy. I study religion as a repertoire of beliefs, practices, and orientations people utilize to engage material and immaterial powers. This definition is influenced by Kathryn Lofton, “Religious History as Religious Studies,” Religion, 42.3 (2012): 384.
on the significance of everyday life has enriched the discipline. As a result “lived religion,” which once was regarded as a new trend, has largely become woven into the analytical approach of many in the field. The ethnographic turn has sharpened the field’s focus on the cultural constructedness of religion, particularly as it relates to power and practice. It also has highlighted how religion is contextually contingent and how religion possesses a dynamic relationship with other elements of culture, such as race, politics, gender, sexuality, and globalization. For example, in Richard J. Callahan, Jr.’s work on religion and the everyday lives of Kentucky coal miners, he conceived of everyday religion as “a kind of work, always in process as it is produced and reproduced in particular settings.” The Spiritualism of the Cercle Harmonique was also a kind of work, shaped by the changing political, racial, and social world of New Orleans.

While ethnography has brought much to the study of American religions, I employed it here with caution. In its most basic and straightforward way, hybridizing ethnography and history is complicated because participant observation and organically constructed conversation is impossible with deceased subjects. Though a historian cannot interview and directly interact with the authors of various archival documents, I can utilize practices and approaches from ethnography to treat the document as both history and part of a contextualized environment. I drew upon some of the approaches and perspectives of ethnography and applied them to historical documents in order to recreate a richer context that reflects the religious life of my subjects. For example, ethnography appreciates how our subjects and their materials, such as the texts they wrote, existed within a larger intersubjective network of relationships—in this case, a “social dialectic” that encompassed more than the Cercle Harmonique’s immediate environment.

Additionally, I am not interested in the authenticity of Spiritualism. In other words, whether or not the spirits actually communicated with the Cercle Harmonique is not my concern.

Rather this project focuses on the practice and ideas of Afro-creole Spiritualism in context. However, I do approach *Cercle Harmonique* meetings as meaningful religious experiences for those at the table. Some meetings cataloged over twenty pages of spirit messages, and this indicates a large time commitment. To dedicate such time and energy discloses the significance of Spiritualism to *Cercle Harmonique* members. For them, the supernatural intervened in the world, and the Afro-creole Spiritualists became part of a network including themselves, the spirits, and New Orleans. The received messages did not come *sui genesis*-ly to the *Cercle Harmonique* but rather from the spiritual genealogy in which the members imagined themselves.

“A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans” is organized in six chapters. Each chapter opens with a vignette about a message received by the *Cercle Harmonique*, with the exception of Chapter One, which begins with a newspaper story about Voudou highlighting the relationship of religion and race in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Chapter One builds the historical context of the project by positioning Afro-creole Spiritualism in a rich religious milieu and by describing Afro-creole people and culture in the colonial period and the nineteenth century. The racial, social, and theological elements of Afro-creole Catholicism and Voudou provide additional perspective for situating Afro-creole Spiritualism. Additionally, without romanticizing the city’s French and Spanish periods, the chapter illuminates various ways the Afro-creole population watched their earlier rights and privileges as free blacks disappear.

Chapter Two looks at Spiritualism in America broadly and, more specifically, Spiritualism in New Orleans. It introduces the *Cercle Harmonique* in terms of members, the details of their practices, and the spirits who communicated with them. The Afro-creole Spiritualists doctrinally held much in common with their northern brethren and their neighboring local, white, French creole and émigré mediums. The spirits visiting the *Cercle Harmonique* emphasized unity and harmony, and their communications denoted a level of personal

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connection between the community of spirits and the Spiritualists at the table. Rey’s own conversion to Spiritualism, the structure of the *Cercle Harmonique* meetings, and the spirits who appeared at their table unveil much about Spiritualism’s appeal to the Afro-creoles. According to the *Cercle Harmonique*, Spiritualism and the spirit world were egalitarian, unlike the institutional Catholicism frequently criticized by the spirits.

The next chapter focuses on the relationship between the group and Catholicism by investigating their religious genealogy and examining their ideas about religious authority. The members of the *Cercle Harmonique* pushed against Catholicism in order to carve out a space for their own religious identity. Yet at the same time, resonances of Catholicism echoed in the *Cercle Harmonique*’s practice in the form of advisement from Catholic spirits and reverberations of Catholic ideas. These Afro-creoles left the church pews, but Catholicism did not leave them. Though their practice included Catholic ideas and prominent Catholic spirits, they also received numerous anti-clerical messages which demonstrated the group’s perspective on religious despotism, tyranny, and exploitation. The spirits and members of the *Cercle Harmonique* regarded the revealed knowledge of Spiritualism as a more legitimate form of religious power than Catholicism and its assumed authority. Criticizing Catholicism illustrated the group’s ideas regarding materialism and simultaneously underlined Spiritualism’s egalitarianism.

The ideas of and major players in the French Revolution were present in the group’s practice, and thus Chapter Four situates the *Cercle Harmonique* in an Atlantic world where France, the Caribbean (primarily Haiti), and New Orleans are the main nodes. The French revolutionary motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” was reinvigorated by the *Cercle Harmonique* to convey the group’s political ideology and their understanding of the spiritual world. The way in which the *Cercle Harmonique* remembered the French Revolution and to a lesser extent the Haitian Revolution emphasize their dedication to particular revolutionary ideals and humanity’s progress. The presence of revolutionary spirits and ideas in the séance records express the circle’s opinions regarding justice, despotism, and republicanism. The Atlantic world’s revolutions continued in New Orleans through the *Cercle Harmonique* and their envisioned spiritual republic. Parallel to the French Revolution’s overturn of the ancien régime, the *Cercle Harmonique* was interested in the demise of another oligarchy—namely southern slave-holders and their white supremacist heirs.
The following chapter continues Chapter Four’s more political focus and examines the group in relationship to local and national politics, by highlighting the spirits’ criticism of slavery, the Confederacy, and political corruption. In contrast to this southern oligarchy and its white supremacy, the spirits endorsed republicanism and celebrated democratic ideas. Afro-creole Spiritualism’s emphasis on progress, republicanism, equality, and spiritual perfection resonated with the political aspirations of the Afro-creoles seated at the séance table. The spirits’ messages on slavery and the Civil War convinced the *Cercle Harmonique* that the country should regenerate itself with equality and liberty as its foundation. The Idea stood with the Union, with civil and legal rights, and with racial equality. In this chapter, an extended section narrates Afro-creole interest and involvement in post-war politics and how it intersected with the messages received by the *Cercle Harmonique*. Finally, the presence of various American celebrity spirits, most notably Abraham Lincoln and John Brown, solidify the circle’s imagined place in the progress of egalitarianism and liberty.

Chapter Six focuses on the *Cercle Harmonique*’s ideas regarding martyrdom, death, and the material body. To die for the cause of liberty or in the street violence of post-war New Orleans guaranteed one’s identity as a celebrated martyr. Spirits who were victims of slavery and tyranny frequently spoke of the simultaneous tragedy and glory of their deaths. While the previous two chapters each touched briefly on gender through issues of women’s rights and equality, this chapter explores martyrdom as a gendered act. The political martyrs who appeared at the *Cercle Harmonique*’s table died with a male boldness tempered with submission to the greater good. Death was not to be feared for it meant the escape of the spirit from the material—and raced—body. While the spirits knew their racial identity on earth, they did not claim a racial aspect in the spiritual world. Rather they were bright and enlightened, and no longer hampered by race, these spirits could properly advise the *Cercle Harmonique* how to perfect society on earth. Finally the Conclusion briefly remarks on the end of Rey’s practice and the continued trajectories of alternative black religious culture and Afro-creole political action. The study closes with a short postscript regarding the last dated message recorded in the *Cercle Harmonique*’s register books.
CHAPTER ONE

“WORKING IN THE MIDST OF CORRUPTION TO PRODUCE A BENEFICENT RESULT”: RELIGION AND AFRO-CREOLES IN NEW ORLEANS

“The Latin Negro differs radically from the Anglo-Saxon in aspiration and in method. One hopes, the other doubts. Thus we often perceive that one makes every effort to acquire merits, the other to gain advantages. One aspires to equality, the other to identity. One forgets he is a Negro in order to think that he is a man; the other will forget that he is a man in order to think that he is a Negro. These radical differences act on the feelings of both in direct harmony with those characteristics. One is a philosophical Negro, the other practical.” – Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, “A Few Words to Dr. Dubois: With Malice Towards None,” 1907

“The Black is on the rise!”– Spirit of Bernard de Marigny, New Orleans white creole, plantation owner, namesake of a creole neighborhood, and former Louisiana state senator to the Cercle Harmonique, 7 November 1871

On the twentieth of February 1875, The New-Orleans Times reported that a P. Dufour, who lived near the intersection of Royal and St. Philip streets, found a miniature coffin at his door at one o’clock in the morning. When a small coffin appeared at one’s doorstep, it was often a sign of Voudou, and according to this particular news story, this one was sent as an “emblem of death.” It was not Dufour who first discovered this miniature coffin. Rather a puzzled Sergeant Baverott of the Third Precinct police noticed a candle burning at the man’s front door. Due to the late hour, Baverott stopped at the house and “thinking some of the night hawks [burglars] were at work, the Sergt. grasped his revolver and stealthily approached the spot.” Baverott approached the doorstep and was horrified by what he saw—“a tiny coffin fringed around with black; the lid slightly pushed back, exhibited the image of a man made of some kind of red material.” Interpreting the “fetish charm” as a threat, he took the coffin to the police precinct to examine it. The man’s image in the coffin “was surrounded by a powder emitting a very pungent odor, which upon being inhaled by the curious officers, caused them to feel as if the hand of sleep was gently pressing down their eyelids.” While it was not clear who put the coffin there, it was clear that they meant harm.

58 Grandjean collection 85-44; 8 August 1872. Message from Lunel, “the devoted brother.”
59 Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, “A Few Words to Dr. Dubois: “With Malice Toward None,” March 1907; Tureaud Papers, Box 77, folder 38, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.
60 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 7 November 1871.
Why Dufour was targeted was also unclear. The news story reported that the coffin indicated “Voudouism,” and Voudou was often racialized in New Orleans, associated with blacks. The writer, like many news reporters in the city, held a negative view of Voudou, calling it “a relict [sic] of barbarism,” that involved “the strange combination of toe nails, claws, intestines, hair, and the like” and took advantage of “the ignorant negro.” While it was possible that a Voudouist sought to harm Dufour, *The New-Orleans Times* identified Dufour as “a carpet bagging official,” and suggested that perhaps this coffin was sent as “intimidation by the kklux.” If this was the case, then the city’s aggressive white supremacists used Voudou to threaten northern Republicans living in New Orleans. The reporter’s speculation was certainly plausible since politics and religion frequently intersected in New Orleans. Regardless of who left the coffin, any New Orleanian would know its message. Even a person with a small amount of knowledge regarding Voudou could identify this as a clear warning or a curse. The newspaper report on Voudou illuminates a key assumption about racial and religious identity present in late nineteenth-century New Orleans: black alternative religions were indicative of the continued belief in irrational “superstitions” and “heathenism” among black New Orleanians.

The categories of religion and race are pivotal to this study of Afro-creole Spiritualism in New Orleans because of the city’s racial stratification and religious diversity. The *Cercle Harmonique*’s practice developed amid a rich religious milieu and a volatile political atmosphere, and this chapter will discuss the rich historical and cultural context surrounding the creation and tenure of the *Cercle Harmonique*. The Afro-creole population that Henri Louis Rey, François “Petit” Dubuclet, and others of the *Cercle Harmonique* came from was a racial, ethnic, and cultural group that differed from whites and other blacks. It was no one characteristic that differentiated Afro-creoles from non-creole blacks but rather a complex network of multiple identity vectors. Much of the city’s Afro-creole population came from families who were freed during the colonial or antebellum era, were Catholic, were often mixed-race or of lighter skin color, were French-speaking or bilingual, were educated, and were often wealthier than their black non-creole neighbors. Before the Civil War, much of the Afro-creole population

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occupied a racial and social space somewhere between slave and white, but following emancipation, their special status as free black now described all blacks. In response to the city’s changing racial stratification, many Afro-creoles argued for full civil and legal rights for all races. Others drew attention to their community’s unique history and heritage.

In a short 1907 publication entitled *A Few Words to Dr. DuBois: “With Malice Toward None,”* creole of color and political figure Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes differentiated between the “Anglo-Saxon or American Negro” and the “Latin Negro.” What Desdunes noted was a philosophical and political difference between the two kinds of blacks in the South who had recently been legally forced together with the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson.*\(^6^4\) The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter clarifies the differences Desdunes saw. He associated identity politics with the “American Negro” and the “Latin Negro” with equality. Whether or not this was an accurate distinction to make, some Afro-creoles continued to maintain an ethnic and cultural boundary between themselves and non-creole blacks.\(^6^5\)

What follows describes the rich cultural context of colonial and nineteenth-century New Orleans in order to see how the *Cercle Harmonique’s* practice mediated the city’s social, religious, and political changes. This chapter offers a brief chronology of colonial and antebellum New Orleans with religion and race as key themes starting with the early city’s tripartite social and legal structure. This tripartite hierarchy was largely predicated on race where lighter skin often correlated with social power, wealth, and opportunity. However, as the

\(^{64}\) Desdunes, “A Few Words to Dr. DuBois.”

\(^{65}\) He followed this publication with the 1911 book project *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire (Our People and Our History).* Rodolphe L. Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* trans., Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (1911; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973). This project does not suggest a firm dividing line between Afro-creoles and non-creole blacks because identities and communities in New Orleans were too fluid for hard distinctions. Rather I reference this historiography to note the regional specifics of what scholars call Afro-creole identity.
nineteenth century progressed, the city increasingly reflected the black/white binary common in the American South. Religion was frequently a shaping force on the city’s racial dynamics. French Catholicism, with its theological emphasis on universalism and simultaneous complicity in slavery, was a significant part of Afro-creole culture and identity from early in New Orleans’s history. The Spiritualism practiced by the Afro-creoles who formed the *Cercle Harmonique* would mediate these political, religious, racial, cultural, and social changes and offer the group a language and forum for criticizing the society and politics surrounding them.

“The Latin influence among our people”: French and Spanish Colonial Rule

New Orleans was founded in 1718 in the vast French territory of Louisiana, and its first Catholic parish, St. Louis Church, was established soon after. During the early years of French rule, the city was particularly unstable—the result of forced deportations to Louisiana (thus bringing an often less than desirable population), the wide acceptance of racial mixing, and the frequency of slave runaways to the surrounding swamps. Since white women were scarce in the colony’s early years, sexual relationships between French men and African and Indian women were common, and these relationships led to a developing mixed-race population. Thus white control of the city was relatively uncertain during the early colonial period. Due to this instability of the white ruling class, New Orleans possessed the “most Africanized slave culture in the United States.” Most of the slaves brought to the city under French rule arrived between 1719 and 1731 and directly from Africa’s Senegambian region. To increase their value, slaves were often taught a trade. Some of the male slaves provided invaluable resources to the city, particularly during the Natchez Indian uprising. Africans and Afro-creoles in the Louisiana Territory joined the French militia against the Natchez Indians in 1729, and many of the male slaves who fought against the Natchez Indians were freed for their service.

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66 Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 15. In his history of the city’s Afro-creole population, Desdunes wrote at great length regarding the French influence on the Afro-creoles. René Grandjean (Petit Dubuclet’s son-in-law) and Desdunes were acquaintances and exchanged letters, including research notes, during Desdunes’s research.


68 Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire*.


population would prove their military worth to local officials again by helping quell the slave rebellion upriver from New Orleans along the German coast in 1811 and by serving in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.\textsuperscript{72}

Slavery was established early on in the colony, with the first slaves arriving shortly after the city’s founding. In addition to slaves in New Orleans, early settlers also introduced large numbers of African slaves to cultivate rice in the surrounding fertile low-lying river areas. The importation of African slaves led to Louisiana’s adoption of the \textit{Code Noir} in 1724, which both provided for and punished slaves. Owners were expected to give their slaves certain amounts of food and clothing, and if they failed to do so, their slaves could complain to the local government. Slaves were to have Sundays off work and slave owners were responsible for seeing to the baptism and religious education of their slaves in the Catholic Church. But the \textit{Code Noir} also plainly stated that slaves were to be regarded as property, not people, and that their duty was to their owner.\textsuperscript{73} Whites were allowed to stop free or enslaved blacks on the city streets and demand to see their emancipation papers or passes from their masters. The \textit{Code Noir} also regulated slave behavior and detailed the punishments for infractions. A frequent punishment was branding the slave’s body with the \textit{fleur de lys}. As described by one scholar, slave life under the \textit{Code Noir} “was similar to that of a prisoner.”\textsuperscript{74} The Spanish adopted and used the \textit{Code Noir} with little alteration. Spanish Governor Esteban Rodríguez Miro also outlawed assemblages of blacks at night or any other “large concourse of people.” Both protecting and punishing slaves, the \textit{Code Noir} reinforced the racial hierarchy, a necessity especially in the city’s earlier decades.

The manumission process was relaxed and common in Spanish New Orleans.\textsuperscript{75} This led to a thriving population of \textit{gens de couleur libres}, though this did not mean the city did not regulate their lives too. Free blacks were harshly punished for aiding slaves. For example, the \textit{Code Noir} prescribed three times the monetary fine for the concealment of a slave if the perpetrator was a free black than if s/he were white. If the free black was unable to pay the fine, the punishment was enslavement.\textsuperscript{76} One of the most famous laws passed on the \textit{gens de couleur

\textsuperscript{73} Article X of the Louisiana \textit{Code Noir}, 1724
\textsuperscript{76} Article XXXIV of the Louisiana \textit{Code Noir}, 1724.
**libres** was the requirement for mixed-race women to bind their hair with a handkerchief called a tignon and the ban of wearing plumes or jewelry in their hair.\(^{77}\) While a hair scarf may seem an innocuous rule, it reflected a more deep-seated racial anxiety. The free Afro-creole population possessed some social power and occupied a racially ambivalent space, thus requiring a more simple appearance drew clearer lines between the white and black classes.

Though slavery was part of city life from the beginning, so too was a kind of racial ambiguity. One reason for New Orleans’s unique population dynamics was the “assimilationist tendency” in French culture as opposed to the “segregationist” stratification common in English society.\(^{78}\) New Orleans’s early frontier existence was tenuous; few colonists were equipped with farming knowledge and bayou epidemics could be catastrophic. Close intermingling between Indians and French began early, partly due to the demand for food, which soon led to a growing mixed-blood generation. The city’s duration under Spanish rule did little to change the shared French culture throughout the city. These colonial intimacies\(^{79}\) and the *Code Noir* ensured a growing population of black Catholics, though black Catholicism in colonial Louisiana remains a topic in need of further investigation.\(^{80}\)

In addition to the *Code Noir*’s requirement to baptize all slaves, Catholicism was the only religion legally allowed in the Louisiana colony. Those who practiced any other religion would be punished as disobedient rebels.\(^{81}\) The colony’s Catholic population was supported by Jesuit and Capuchin priests and Ursuline nuns who preached and shared a universal message of Catholic salvation. The clergy also owned slaves. This Catholic universalism offered salvation to all regardless of gender, class, or race, and due to its spiritual egalitarianism, it was a welcoming and inviting message for slaves and free blacks in Louisiana. Rather than dividing people based on their skin color, the Catholic Church categorized Louisianans as saints or sinners before black

\(^{77}\) Governor Miró first required the headdress in 1785 and the restriction remained in place during American rule. Christian, “The Free Colored Class,” in “The Negro in Louisiana. The tignon would later be frequently associated with New Orleans creole women. For example, images of Marie Laveau almost always feature a tignon.


\(^{80}\) At the turn of the nineteenth century, southern Louisiana, southern Maryland, southern Missouri, and western Kentucky possessed the largest populations of black Catholics. Cyprian Davis, “Black Catholics in Nineteenth Century America,” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 5.1, (1986): 2. Florida also contained an Afro-Catholic culture; see Marotti, *The Cana Sanctuary*.

\(^{81}\) *Code Noir*, Article III.
or white. However, this equality before God’s eyes did not easily translate in practice, as
demonstrated in the clergy’s complicity in slavery and the racial reality of everyday life.

With its French colonial origins, New Orleans was a Catholic stronghold in early
American history, but clerics did not always find Louisiana to be an easy place to evangelize,
administer the sacraments, and oversee parishes. The frontier could be harsh, the laity could be
disinterested, and the institutional infrastructure took time to build.\footnote{Michael Pasquier, \textit{Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789–1870} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).} Though it was a Catholic
colony, some places were more loosely Catholic than others making it difficult to describe
colonial Catholicism. The Catholic practice and beliefs of slaves is even harder to determine.
After baptism, a slave’s religious education was typically the responsibility of his/her owner. The
slaves owned by the Jesuits, Capuchins, and Ursulines received consistent religious education,
but language barriers and overwork often impeded the continued Catholic education of other
slaves.\footnote{Alberts, “Origins of Black Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans,” 34–36.} Even though baptism of slaves was legally required, this did not ensure that it would
happen. Missionary priests in the Louisiana Territory often had trouble administering to all the
plantations, especially in the less populated or more remote areas. According to one Capuchin
superior’s observations in 1725, many who lived outside New Orleans would “ordinarily die
without sacraments and that even in the most populated places the instruction of the negro and
Indian slaves is entirely neglected since the masters think only of deriving profit from the work
of these poor wretches without being touched by concern for their salvation.”\footnote{Raphaël de Luxembourg to Jean Baptiste Raguet, New Orleans, 15 May 1725; quoted in Michael Pasquier, “Before Black Catholicism: Creolization and African Slavery in French Colonial Louisiana,” American Society of Church History Winter Meeting, January 2014, New Orleans, LA.}

A core element of New Orleans Catholicism was the Ursuline nuns. Twelve Ursulines
arrived to the frontier settlement of New Orleans in 1727, and though they specialized in female
education, the colonial government officially procured the Ursulines to care for sick soldiers and
orphans and to reform lewd women. However, the nuns also found ways to live out their
missionary zeal, educating the French girls in the colony, as well as slaves and nearby Indians.
This education included both catechism sessions and reading lessons rendering the Ursuline
mission a mixture of education and conversion. They supported and sponsored a women’s
confraternity shortly after their arrival and sought to both create and sustain a community of
Catholic women in the city that spanned class and racial categories, though social hierarchies did
remain intact within convent and school walls. Initially only white students were allowed to stay at the convent beyond immediate class hours, but following the relaxed manumission laws under Spanish rule, mixed-race day boarders were allowed starting in 1797 though kept separate from white students. Unlike other colonies in the Caribbean world, New Orleans’s main missionaries were women, and this helped attract female slaves. With the dual influence of the Ursulines and Afro-Atlantic culture, Catholicism increasingly became Africanized and feminized throughout the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Enslaved female Catholics joined in the evangelization process of their fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers. Additionally, female slaves and free blacks became frequent godparents, a role for which required displays of commitment and faith. This allowed them to maintain and create familial and social bonds.

While the spirit and rhetoric of universalism in the Catholic tradition made Catholicism an attractive religious orientation for slaves and free blacks, this universalism did not underpin all social interactions. The nuns and other religious orders such as the Jesuits owned slaves and were thus complicit in the stratification of the city’s racial and social hierarchy. In fact, upon Spanish ownership of Louisiana, the Catholic Church was the colony’s single largest slaveholder. While a theology of universalism was preached to their slaves, the reality of the power dynamic between them should not be overlooked. The Code Noir provided the base for the city’s racial stratification and religious flavor. Slaves could be severely punished for various

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86 Historians Emily J. Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould identify godparenting as a form of developing new fictive kinship networks and the creation of new “community and familial bonds.” Clark and Gould, “The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans.”
87 However this tension has yet to be fully addressed in the historiography. In her work on the Ursulines, historian Emily J. Clark argued that “by extending their catechizing mission to people of color,” the nuns “provided an institutional foundation for inclusivity in one of the key realms of colonial society and culture and laid an enduring foundation for a multiracial church” (187). Not only does this conclusion render the conversion of African slaves as “tidy,” “uncomplicated,” and thus overly simplified as Michael Pasquier has argued, it also negates the reality of slavery. Emily J. Clark, Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727–1834 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Pasquier, “Before Black Catholicism.” Clark also argues that the Ursulines “dangerously disturbed the racial order;” however since they owned slaves, they also socially and economically reinforced the region’s racial stratification. A critique similar to this is raised by Tracy Fessenden in her review of Clark’s book. Tracy Fessenden, “Review: Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727–1834 by Emily Clark,” Church History, 77.4 (2008): 1073–1078. Clark’s analysis of the Ursulines in terms of gender, though, is masterful.
88 For example, the Ursulines offered their free black plantation overseer a small farm in return for his service but refused to allow his heirs to inherit the farm after his death. See Jacobs et. al. v. Ursuline Nuns, in Martin’s Reports of the Cases Argued and Determined in the Superior Court of Territory of Orleans, and in the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans: Samuel M. Stewart, 1846), 328–331.
infractions which violently displayed the racial hierarchy, but they were also to be cared for both materially and spiritually. Catholicism remained a powerful institution and shaping cultural force in New Orleans, though it was hardly the only religion in colonial Louisiana.

“A Snake Story”: The African Diaspora and New Orleans Voudou

Catholicism may have dominated colonial New Orleans’s religious scene, but it was not alone. Historian Jon Sensbach has described New Orleans and the Mississippi River as the “conduits bringing African Atlantic religious cultures deep into the heart of the continent.” This movement allowed for the creolization of various religious cultures. Even before arriving to the new world, many slaves possessed knowledge of Christian beliefs and practices. Some converted and some incorporated various elements into their own traditions. Others brought Islam across the Atlantic. In discussions of the creolization of African religions and Christianity, scholars frequently mention Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voudou or Voodoo. Voudou drew upon influences from various West African traditions like that of the Yoruba and Kongo, Catholicism, Haitian Vodou, European folklore, and from the immediate surroundings of slavery in Louisiana. While it does not appear that members of the Cercle Harmonique practiced Voudou, Afro-creole Spiritualism, like Voudou, bridged the spiritual and material worlds. The Cercle Harmonique mediums channeled the spirits of the dead, and Voudou priests and priestesses too felt their bodies possessed by external forces.

90 The Daily Picayune, 13 August 1863.
94 The Haitian term Vodou and the New Orleans rendering of Voudou have an uncertain linguistic genealogy. The Dahomeyan term rodu refers to a supernaturally powerful snake, and considering the prevalence of a snake god in New Orleans practice, a likely influence on the tradition. Vodun is the typical name used to describe the religion of the Fon and Ewe people, also related to the Dahomeyan kingdom. I use the spelling Voudou to discuss the religion in the nineteenth century because most nineteenth-century sources use this particular spelling. The Haitian term Vodou and the nineteenth-century New Orleans Voudou have an uncertain linguistic genealogy. The Dahomeyan term rodu refers to a supernaturally powerful snake, and considering the prevalence of a snake god in New Orleans practice, a likely influence on New Orleans. Vodun is the typical name used to describe the religion of the Fon and Ewe people, also related to the Dahomeyan kingdom. Ina J. Fandrich, “Yoruba Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo,” Journal of Black Studies 37 (2007): 775–791. Also see Alasdair Pettinger, “From Vaudoux to Voodoo,” Forum of Modern Language Studies, XLI (2004): 415–425.
New Orleans Voudou is a complicated religion to quantify and qualify because the number of adherents and the defined details of doctrine are difficult to pinpoint. The arrival of refugees and their slaves from the island of Saint Domingue following the Haitian Revolution brought a sizable practicing population and a boost in African-influenced religion and culture. Historically and contemporarily, Voudou, or Voodoo, was and remains a misunderstood and misconstrued religion. Though some southern whites also believed in Voudou, it was a religion typically racialized as black and savage. Not only was the religion demonized and associated with dark power, dark magic, and dark desires, it was also associated with ignorant and “deluded darkeys.” Practitioners and critics alike recognized a different kind of power in Voudou—one outside the typical realm of religion. As such, it could be a powerful mediator for the oppressed, but for outsiders, it was an indication of heathenism and ignorance. Similar accusations were leveled at Spiritualism among nineteenth-century New Orleanians. In the nineteenth century, exposé style newspaper articles sought to expose the charlatanism of so-called mediums who fed on the city’s ignorant. Spiritualism and Voudou often received bad press from local New Orleans newspapers, depicting the practitioners of both religious traditions as duped and ignorant or as greedy charlatans. Spiritualists were deemed “guilty of so great a variety of crimes and indecencies,” and Voudou was identified as “fetish-worship” and nothing more than “negro superstition.”

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95 Many contemporary primary sources about New Orleans Voudou come from sensationalist newspaper reporting or biased white observations, leaving them suspect and requiring a particularly careful historical interpretation. Other sources come from the early to mid-twentieth century with the work of Zora Neale Hurston and other folklorists from the Works Progress Administration. Historians can also look to the Caribbean and back to Africa. Elements from other Afro-Caribbean and African religions resonate in New Orleans Voudou and can help piece out the significance of various practices and beliefs. These sources should not be simply projected onto New Orleans Voudou, but can still be used to read against and through the sensationalist accounts of Voudou. With some historical massage, together these source bases can allow religious historians understand and frame Voudou.

96 Gwendolyn Hall identified the “re-Africanization” of New Orleans earlier with in the Spanish period, though this is due to her work’s colonial focus. The influx of Haitian refugees was a second re-Africanization period.


98 See The Daily Picayune, 28 January 1853 and The Daily Picayune, 13 May 1866 for negative reporting on Spiritualism in general. The following newspaper articles meant to expose local Spiritualist mediums: “Spiritualism Exposed,” The Daily Picayune, 5 August 1873; “Ticket of Leave Spirits. Remarkable Demonstrations. Messengers from the Penitentiary Graveyards. A Séance with the Cracksmen,” The Daily Picayune, 12 July 1874; and “Spiritualism. Second Chapter in the Experience of a Times Reporter as a Medium,” The New Orleans Times, 8 March 1875. It is noteworthy that these latter stories ran in the papers during the heyday of exposés on Voudou.

99 The Daily True Delta, 13 March 1859; also see The Daily Picayune, 5 August 1873 for the exposure of Mr. Hercules Housah as a fraud. In spring 1875, The New-Orleans Times printed a series about one of their own
Africans and African culture were significant contributors to Louisiana from its early years. As early as 1727 the slave population overtook the free population in numbers. Nearly all the slaves brought to Louisiana during French rule arrived between 1726 and 1743, and two-thirds of these slaves came from the religiously diverse Senegambia region. The Diola, Bambara, Mande, Mandiga, and Wolof were the main ethnic and cultural groups to which the slaves belonged. Islam and Islamic practices had made inroads into the region long before the eighteenth century when the slaves were taken, and while certainly not all the slaves were Muslims, Islamic influences reverberated throughout many of the ethnic groups. One of the most common requests to a West African Marabout (Muslim holy man) was for a gri-gri charm—an amulet that derived its power from the confluence of “Koranic texts, letters, stars, and numbers.” Marabouts also led community prayers and possessed the ability to “charm” crocodiles. Though gri-gri amulets were Muslim in origin, many non-Muslim Africans also utilized their power.

In addition to the Senegambian, the Kongo and the Yoruba were the other most significant African cultural and religious traditions to influence both Haiti and New Orleans. The religion of the Yoruba extended over a sizable region of West Africa, centered near the Bight of Benin in present-day Nigeria. Yoruba religion and politics both drew heavily from orisha rituals, including offerings to the orishas, festivals in their honor, and the orisha’s possession of a practitioner’s body (spirit possession). The empowerment derived from orisha rituals could either

105 According to a British trader observing the region in 1623: “the gregories [sic] bee things of great esteeme amongst them, for the most part they are made of leather of serverall fashions, wonderous neatly, they are hollow, and within them is placed and sowed up close, certaine writings or spels which they receive from their Mary-buckes, whereof they conceive such a religious respect, that they do confindentely beleve no hurt can betide them whilst these Gregories are about them.” Richard Jobson, the trader, reports that a “Mary-bucke” (a term he uses to refer to African priests, likely the Marabout) was a privileged man of high regard. Richard Jobson, *The golden trade; or, A discovery of the river Gambra, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians* (1623; Devonshire: E.E. Speight & R. H. Walpole, 1904), 63. For the reference to charming crocodiles, see Jobson, *The golden trade*, 21.

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reporters who was identified as a medium by a group of Spiritualists. Since the reporter disagreed with the Spiritualists’ appraisal of his abilities, the group was identified as frauds.
100 The *Daily Picayune*, 24 June 1875; also see The *Daily Picayune*, 25 June 1875, in which the celebrations of St. John’s Eve are described as “a night in heathenness.”
101 The *Daily Picayune*, 5 October 1887; also see The *Daily Picayune*, 28 July 1850; The *Daily Picayune*, 31 July 1863; and The *Daily Picayune*, 23 May 1868.
support the political status quo or encourage protest.\textsuperscript{107} These orisha deities could be “hot,” meaning fiery and unpredictable, or “cool” like the even and steady flow of water. The orishas were typically each associated with a line of work—such as Ogun the divine blacksmith; Shango of war, lightening, and fire; or Oshun of fertility, beauty, and love.

The Kongo were another major population group the Atlantic slave trade brought into New Orleans. While the slaves arriving during French colonial rule were mainly Senegambian, Spanish rule saw the import of many Kongo slaves, and it is possible that some of the Kongo slaves brought to New Orleans were familiar with Catholicism. In 1491, King Nzinga of the Kongo converted to Catholicism after a decade of trade with the Portuguese. Starting in 1704 a Kongolese woman named Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita claimed to receive visions from Saint Anthony of Padua. While the saint possessed her body, Kimpa Vita began to make radical racial claims about Catholicism for which she was burnt at the stake. Her popularity and prophetic status are indicative not only of Catholic influence among the Kongo but also their ability to adapt Catholicism for their own religious, cultural, and social needs.\textsuperscript{108}

Along with these salt-water slaves, the arrival of refugees and their slaves from Saint Domingue shaped the development of Voudou in New Orleans. Haitian Vodou was no stranger to politics and played a significant role in the Haitian Revolution. Soon after the success of the revolt, a developing legend told of a Vodou ceremony that took place in mid-August 1791 just before the outbreak of the rebellion. In the Bois Caiman (Alligator Woods), a Vodou priest named Boukman, a slave coachman from a nearby plantation, organized and ran the ceremony, during which he and female priestesses sacrificed a black pig. Its blood sealed the oath of the fighters, and Boukman and the priestesses used the pig’s hair to make protective amulets. Whether or not the legend is true, the association of Vodou with the Haitian Revolution grew.\textsuperscript{109}


Haitian Vodou organized the spirits or lwas in families or nations, and similar deities could be found in each nation. The Dahomeyan town of Arada was the homeland of the popular Rada lwas, a “cool” nation of spirits heavily influenced by West African spirits or orishas. The fiery Petwo spirits were a nation of lwas born in the context of enslavement and indigenous to Haiti. The Rada nation was steady and reliable, while the Petro acted akin to “invisible loan sharks.” While the Petro were more powerful than other nations of lwas, seeking their help was risky and they demanded much in return for their invocation. While the origin of the name for the Rada nation is fairly straightforward, the Petro is less so. A mulatto sorcerer on the island born of Spanish and African heritage known as Don Pedro has been identified as the possible founder of the Petro nation. Others have connected the Petro lwas to Kongo origins. Another convincing explanation for at least the origin of the name of the Petro lwas comes from the indigenous population of the island of Saint Domingue, the Petro Indians.

Vodou in Haiti and Voudou in New Orleans were different traditions, but they were certainly related. Like in Haiti, Voudouists in New Orleans believed in a pantheon of spirits with both African and Catholic influence, albeit a smaller pantheon than in Haiti. Ogun, the Yoruba blacksmith orisha who was also associated with tools of war, could be found in both in Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voudou. Considering the violence of slavery, his presence in both is not surprising. The orisha of the crossroads, Eshu, also appears into the Vodou and Voudou cosmology. In Yorubaland, Eshu was the spirit of the crossroads in control of the gate between the living and the dead, the world of the visible and the invisible. Papa Legba, or simply Legba, is his new world counterpart and is also associated with Saint Peter. New Orleanian Voudouists

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110 For example an Oshun-like lwa can be found in most nations, and these lwa typically contain Erzulie somewhere in their name.
111 These two nations, the Rada and the Petro, dominate studies of Haitian Vodou and the practice of it. For the popularity of the Rada nation, see table of Haitian Lwa appendix in Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, eds, Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 139–141.
113 For example, the blood sacrifice of a four-legged animal is always necessary to begin a ritual for a Petro lwa.
114 Moreau de Saint-Méry wrote in 1797 that Don Pedro had been “taking advantage of the credulity of the blacks with superstitious practices, gave them the idea of a dance analogous to that of the vaudoux, but in which the movements were more sharp and sudden. To give the dance even more of an effect, the blacks mixed well-crushed gunpowder in the cheap rum they drank while dancing.” Moreau de Saint-Méry, quoted in Thompson, Flash of the Spirit, 179.
also appeared to have had a main deity, often called *Li Grand Zombi*, from the Kongo Bantu word *nzambi* meaning spirit or god.\footnote{Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 114–116; Fandrich, “Yoruba Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo,” 786; and Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*.} All these spirits could possess the bodies of Voudouists and connect the human to the supernatural.

The strong influence of religion and culture from the Senegambian region in New Orleans likely played a large role in some of the distinctions between Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voudou. The influx of refugees and their slaves from the island of Saint Domingue to New Orleans between 1795 and 1810 certainly strengthened the relationship between the two. Still, before and after the arrival of the Haitian refugees, the strongest element of African religion in New Orleans seemed to be that of the Senegambians, and most notably, their gri-gri charms. Eighteenth-century historian and ethnographer Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz traveled through Louisiana in the 1720s and 1730s and reported that the African slaves in Louisiana were “very superstitious and attached to their beliefs and to trinkets that they call gris-gris; and they must not be taken from them nor can one talk about them, otherwise they would think themselves lost if these things were taken from them.”\footnote{Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758), quoted in Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 184.}

In 1773 Voudou would first enter the New Orleans court by way of a criminal case involving four slaves (Bernardo, Cipion, Carlos, and Francisco) who were charged with poisoning Francisco Simars de Bellile (the owner of the latter three) and Augustin (his first slave overseer). According to the trial documents, Francisco (the plantation’s second slave overseer) was bitter towards Augustin and sought the assistance of Carlos for his revenge. Bellile’s suspicions were initially aroused when his dogs began to die in relatively quick succession—twenty of his twenty-one dogs in just eight months. Additionally, and even more damning, was the failing health of Augustin. In the documents from the trial, Carlos used the term “gri-gri” to describe the type of crocodile-based poison he was asked to make.\footnote{Though the witnesses refer to crocodiles in the trial, they were referring to alligators.} Not only did Carlos refer to the gri-gri, but it appears that he was not asked to explain what a gri-gri was. Instead, he described how he manipulated the gall and the heart of a crocodile to make poison. At the end of the trial, it was unclear what caused the dogs’ death or Augustin’s ill health. Bernardo blamed another slave for the dogs, and Augustin began to languish before the gri-gri plot began. The court even fed additional dogs the gri-gri’s supposed poison and monitored its effects, which
were none. As the trial wore on, more slaves who were aware of the gri-gri plot were arrested for conspiracy. Francisco Broutin (the defense’s attorney) concluded that Carlos may have been “loco” and was certainly an ignorant brute (“bruto y bosal”), and thus he did not understand why making the crocodile gri-gri was a crime. While awaiting the court’s decision, a handful of the defendants died in prison, and the case was likely dropped. However, the power of gri-gri charms and the fear derived from them—both the fear that could be inspired in slaves and also Euro-American concerns for how a gri-gri might embolden a slave rebellion—remained strong in the city. A decade after the 1773 trial, Spanish governor Bernardo de Galvez outlawed the importation of slaves from Martinique because they were “too much given to voodooism and made the lives of the citizens unsafe.”

Gri-gri bags in particular, and small power objects more broadly, remained key elements in New Orleans Voudou. The practice of spirit possession was also important both in Voudou and in Haitian Vodou. The early nineteenth-century dances at Congo Square were known for their drumming, chanting, dancing, and how those three practices together could bring a spirit into a dancer’s body. This religious alternative, with its material culture and its embodied styles, was frequently cast in an unfavorable light. Though not seen as social equals, black Catholics and Protestants were at least spiritually respected by their white neighbors. However, many whites demonized those who practiced religions outside the normative Christian umbrella.

During the mid-nineteenth century as the country moved closer to war and the city’s race relations grew increasingly tense, many New Orleanians associated Voudou with social mischief. The “Voudous” would continue to cause problems throughout the late antebellum period, and for this, they were frequently demonized. This demonization was often linked to racialization. Since most Voudouists were black, many whites saw it as evidence of the continuing and powerful presence of African heathenism. Particularly during Reconstruction newspaper accounts of Voudou emphasized the barbarous nature of the practice, and when white

120 Quoted in Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 76.
122 For example, in July of 1850, *The Daily Picayune* reported that “Adele Catherine, alias Victorie Pellebone, f.w.c., and a ‘voudou woman,’” was sent before the First District Court for trial for the charge of “insulting and abusing an officer in the discharge of his duty.” *The Daily Picayune*, 6 July 1850.
women attended meetings, periodicals reported this with lamenting disappointment. In late July of 1850, the police arrested a group of Voudouists practicing at a house on Conti Street. Part of the reason for the arrest was the presence of both free blacks and slaves at the Voudou meetings, which was illegal under the regulations regarding “unlawful assemblies” of enslaved and free blacks. Upon arrest, Betsy Toledano, one of the women at the house, did not deny the charge of Voudou. Rather, she attested before the court that “Voudouism was an African religion with its signs and symbols” and that she learned the secrets of Voudou from her African-born grandmother. Toledano and two slaves were arrested while others present at the meeting escaped. When investigating the house, the police found that one of the rooms appeared like “some sort of chapel,” with prints of saints and apostles on the walls and a “number of basins or large earthenware bowls” full of gravel, paving stones, and pebbles. Toledano explained that the stones and gravel protected the home from lightening. For her actions, Toledano was deemed a trouble-maker and fined for holding an “unlawful assembly.” To add further insult, *The Daily Picayune* followed up the next day with a brief story of “a woman of steady and quiet habits, obedient and industrious” who went mad after attending a few “secret” meetings of “Voudous.”

In the final decade leading up the Civil War, the local newspapers were particularly damning in their descriptions of Voudou and its practitioners. In 1851, police arrested eleven free women of color on Burgundy Street “while engaged in the rites of ‘Voudou.’” The local newspaper further reported that upon arrest only some of the women were dressed and all were “going through their foolish and mumbling ceremonies on the floor.” This story was hardly alone. A few years later in another newspaper story about a police raid of a mixed-race Voudou meeting, *The Daily Picayune* reported that the house’s occupants were found “celebrating the wild orgies of the voudou by dancing naked round a bubbling caldron.” They were arrested and jailed. This association of Voudou with sex was common in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Indeed, one 1857 newspaper article asked of its readers, “Who in New Orleans has not heard of the Voudou orgies?” The arrest of another sixteen women (race not specified), in late

124 She also claimed that a seashell necklace given to her by her grandmother bestowed upon her power over the rain, *The Daily Picayune*, 30 July 1850.
125 *The Daily Picayune*, 31 July 1850.
127 *The Daily Picayune*, 3 November 1854.
1857 kept the city’s attention on the immorality of Voudou. The public report on their arrest described how the women would “dance around … till perspiration flows freely and they become excited with a sort of religious frenzy” and then cast “spells and incantations … derived from an Ethiopian goddess.”

During the Civil War but before the Union took the city, a group of free black women, slave women, and a white woman were arrested for unlawful assembly. The women “were in a state of half nudity and were dancing as if their life depended on their agility.” They also had “a mystic circle on the floor,” a collection of “religious pictures,” burning candles, bottles full of liquor, and “a stocking filled with red peppers, canary seed, gravel, hair, etc.”

These reports continued throughout the nineteenth century, and black alternative religion was associated with Voudou, sexuality, immorality, and darkness.

The presence and power of Voudou in New Orleans both demonstrates the importance of black religious alternatives in the city but also the danger of non-normative religion for practitioners. Harnessing religious power outside the traditional institutions was an attractive and reasonable option for some of those lower on the racial hierarchy. Voudou and Spiritualism offered Afro-creoles connections to powerful spirits from a world outside the purview of white authority. Over the course of the nineteenth century Afro-creoles saw the racial stratification of the city solidify on a strict black/white binary, and these spirit worlds remained alternative sources of power.

“The City of New Orleans where flesh gains ground on spirit”: American Rule

As seen in Haitian Vodou’s affinity with Voudou, the Afro-Caribbean culture on the island of Saint Domingue found a home in New Orleans. An influx of French émigrés and creoles from the Caribbean and Napoleonic exiles from across the Atlantic reinforced New Orleans’s French culture. Approximately 10,000 refugees from Saint Domingue arrived in New Orleans in 1809 by way of Cuba, including a sizeable portion of free blacks. Before the Haitian Revolution, the island was the most successful of the French colonial empire and the richest of the Caribbean sugar-producing islands. Like New Orleans, the island’s society was

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128 Times-Picayune, 7 November 1857.
129 The Daily True Delta, 14 January 1862.
130 This quotation comes from an article published by the Afro-creoles of the Comite de Citoyens protesting the creation of St. Katherine’s, the city’s first black national parish. “Citizens’ Committee,” The Crusader, 14 February 1895; Charles B. Rousseve Papers, Box 2, Folder 14, Amistad Research Center.
split into three “castes,” whites, free people of color, and slaves, and the refugees arriving to New Orleans were split fairly equally among these social groups. On Saint Domingue before the Haitian Revolution, free blacks helped counterbalance the population distribution. Slaves outnumbered whites on the island, and in some respects the gens de couleur libres acted as a buffer. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, most of the gens de couleur libres and slaves possessed a skilled trade and “had a near monopoly of certain trades, including those of mechanic, carpenter, shoemaker, barber, and tailor.” A trade increased a slave’s value and extra labor helped slaves earn the money to purchase their freedom and their family members. Blacks and the mixed-race held many positions of skilled labor through the colonial period and into the nineteenth century.

This large free black population was the result of extramarital unions between white men and black women during the colonial period and the influx of refugee gens de couleur libres from Saint Domingue. Some slave owners arranged their wills to free their mistresses and provide for their mixed-race children. Plaçage, or the keeping of a free black mistress, though not common was not unheard of in colonial and antebellum New Orleans. Described by one scholar as “a ritualized system of prostitution,” plaçage offered free women of color access to furniture, nicer homes, and often a monetary allowance. Plaçage relationships could be temporary or life-long. During the nineteenth century increasing regulations on quadroon balls made it more difficult for plaçage relationships to develop and, more generally, rendered this space of free black and white creole interaction more complicated. One city ordinance in 1828

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136 A recent book by historian Emily J. Clark has argued that the plaçage system was uncommon and that accounts from antebellum visitors incorrectly described what the author saw. She further contends that “the plaçage complex” was employed by Dominguan refugees as opposed to women born in Louisiana and that the mythology of quadroon and octoroon women was largely propagated by white, Anglo men. Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
officially segregated the balls and forbade whites from attending mixed balls. Despite these difficulties, talk of interracial relationships involving prominent whites remained common long into the antebellum period. According to rumor even General Andrew Jackson fathered a slave child during his time in New Orleans, a young man who grew up to be an “intelligent yellow ‘boy’” and slave servant. Similar arrangements were often made on the island of Saint Domingue, though interracial marriages were legal there. The result in both places was a growing population of mixed-race children whose fathers often saw after their education and social status. Despite the freedoms exercised by the *gens de couleur libres*, the social line between them and whites was absolute.

Though the racial hierarchy was clear in theory, interracial relationships muddled it in reality. Some of the city’s mixed-race population could be mistaken for white, and the drama of racial passing played entered courtrooms. Calling someone black became a legal offense and neighbors sued each other over public impugnation of one’s background. The most visible case of this was what Rodolphe Desdunes called “the Toucoutou Affair.” In 1858 Anastasie Desarzant, nicknamed Toucoutou, sued her neighbors for $10,000 for publically identifying her as a woman of color. The racial accusations not only threatened Desarzant’s pride, but also her marriage to a local white man. Neighbors described Desarzant’s family as one embedded in New Orleans and Saint Domingue’s intimate, interracial history. In the end the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled against Desarzant and identified “the plaintiff’s real status” as “that of a person of color and that she has been endeavoring to usurp that of a white person.”

While some of the *gens de couleur libres* understood Desarzant’s desire to pass as white, others rebuffed her. Local barber, songwriter, and creole of color Joseph Beaumont wrote poems about Desarzant’s legal scheme. The most popular song mocked her for the social prestige she desired and lost in her failed attempt for whiteness. “Ah, Toucoutou, we know you,” the refrain sung, “You are a little

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141 Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 61–64.
Mooress. Who does not know you? No soap will make you white.”

The song could be heard around the city long into the twentieth century.

The large influx of white Americans from further north and Irish and German immigrants added to the city’s changing racial and ethnic hierarchy. Afro-creoles begin to lose their hold on skilled occupations and tension between groups began to rise. Unlike in other nineteenth-century cities where the influx of immigration led by the Irish shaped much of the city’s Catholic culture, New Orleans Catholicism remained firmly in the control of the primarily French creoles empowered by what historian Michael Doorley called “ethnic defensiveness.”

The first non-French archbishop for the New Orleans archdiocese was not elected until Archbishop Francis Janssens, a Dutch cleric, in 1888. It would not be until 1907 that most sacrament registers began to enter new records in English as opposed to French.

The continued French influence in the city was owed in part to the continued dominance of Catholicism. Historian Caryn Cossé Bell has argued that “a Catholic worldview informed the thinking of French-speaking Afro-Creole radicals.” Bell identified the influence of the Capuchin order, a branch of the Franciscan order known for simplicity in their sermons and lifestyle, as part of this worldview. After Louisiana was ceded to Spain in 1763, the French Capuchins left and were replaced by Spanish Capuchins in 1772; seventeen of the twenty-one Capuchins left Louisiana following the 1803 purchase. One of the Spanish Capuchins, Antonio de Sedella, affectionately known as Père Antoine by much of the laity, chose to stay and was stationed in New Orleans from the late eighteenth century until his death in 1829. One reason for Sedella’s popularity among the Afro-creole population was his disregard for civic and religious prohibitions that hampered Afro-creole spiritual growth. Though the illegitimate

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143 Desdunes, Our People and Our History, 64.
148 Bell, “French Religious,” 1; also see Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana.
children of interracial relationships were not to be baptized according to the *Code Noir*, Sedella administered the sacraments to both those engaged in those relationships and their children.\(^\text{150}\)

Though Sedella was to be relocated to Spain following the Louisiana Purchase and initially agreed to the move, he changed his mind, remained in New Orleans, and continued on as pastor at the St. Louis Cathedral. In the time leading up to his decision to stay, Father Patrick Walsh, the vicar general for Louisiana and the Floridas, declared himself the pastor of the parish. Their dual claim of the pastorate led to the Schism of 1805 with most of the laity and the parish’s *marguilliers* (lay trustees) siding with Sedella. Walsh withdrew to the Ursulines’ chapel and laid an interdict upon St. Louis Cathedral. Both sides appealed to Rome and to the nearby archdioceses in Havana and Baltimore.\(^\text{151}\) Even Walsh’s death in 1806 did not end the conflict, but with the support of the primarily creole laity Sedella was eventually affirmed as the cathedral’s pastor. Sedella’s European ties, particularly to the Spanish monarchy who paid his salary for several years even after the Louisiana Purchase, rendered him suspect to some. It was not until he swore an oath of loyalty to the United States in 1806 in front of Governor William C. C. Claiborne that Sedella was allowed to officially continue as pastor.\(^\text{152}\)

Sedella was not alone in finding the city’s transition from French and Spanish to American rule difficult or disruptive. Historian Joseph G. Tregle has argued that the “marriage of disparate cultures [Anglo-American and French creole] quickly foundered in a sea of troubles.”\(^\text{153}\) Many incoming Americans viewed the creole population as their foil in all respects, such as religious practice, sexual liaisons, racial purity, education, political competency, and class. Anglo-Americans believed these deficiencies in civilization and God’s—meaning *protestant*—law allowed for the city’s “depravity,” evident in the quadroon balls and plaçage. Additionally, commercial interests divided the city with the influx of American businessmen. From 1836 to 1852, New Orleans split into three separate municipalities. Each municipality had control over their own financial affairs but one citywide governmental maintained authority. The

\(^{150}\) Bell, “French Religious Culture,” 8–9.

\(^{151}\) For more, see the Antonio de Sedella collection, 1778–1816, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library Special Collection, Tulane University.


American section economically flourished which led many creoles to resent their new neighbors and lament the erosion of their superiority. Increased immigration after 1830 furthered the Americanization of the city, as new arrivals cared little for the city’s creole heritage.

After the Civil War, many white Louisianans began to romantically imagine and whitewash their pasts, “as if a celebration of an imagined idyllic prewar society could in some way ease the pain of an intolerable present.” For some creoles this consisted of a nostalgic over-emphasis of white creole importance throughout the antebellum period. In the wake of the Civil War, clarifying the boundary between black and white became more significant, making it impossible to accommodate “a pan-racial creolism.” The power of white supremacy even influenced white creoles to redefine creole identity. In summer 1873 the local French periodical Le Moniteur neatly and clearly stated the new identity binary in the city:

The moment has come for the sons of Louisiana to declare themselves. It is imperative that everyone choose to be either white or black. Two races are here: one superior, the other inferior ... their separation is ABSOLUTELY necessary. Let us separate then, from this day forward, into two well-defined groups: the white group and the black group. The position will then be clear: White Louisiana or Black Louisiana.

In the 1880s white creole historian and former president of the Louisiana Historical Society Charles Gayarré began a campaign to have creole designated a white only ethnic category. Contemporary, negative mythologizing about old creole French culture by authors like George Washington Cable in The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life had made the boundaries of creole identity a contentious issue. With their separation from blacks, white creoles regained some popular respectability for their heritage following Reconstruction.

While French versus American was a point of contention early on after the Louisiana Purchase, the city increasingly divided on racial lines as the nineteenth century progressed. And though the Catholic Church accepted all races into its pews and still promoted a universal theology, black Catholics continued to occupy a lower social rank than their white neighbors. Many Catholic bishops were complicit in American slavery and either classified it as a political

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154 Ibid, 169.
155 Ibid, 173.
156 Le Moniteur, 13 July 1873; Quoted in Dubois and Melançon, “Creole Is, Creole Ain’t,” 242.
157 For example, Gayarré’s popular and later printed 1885 lecture “The Creoles of History and the Creoles of Romance” defended the creole’s white racial purity and favorable contributions to New Orleans history.
158 Cable, a New Orleans native but of Anglo-American descent, wrote popular novels and short stories about New Orleans creoles that often depicted them as backwards, ignorant, illiterate, and dishonorable.
issue or wholly supported slavery in certain regions of the South.\footnote{Pasquier, \textit{Fathers on the Frontier}, 167–202.} On the national level, Catholic intellectual Orestes Brownson viewed blacks as an inferior race fated for eventual extinction.\footnote{Davis, “Black Catholics in Nineteenth Century America,” 9.} Because of sentiments like Brownson’s and the institution’s reticence on the issue of slavery, it comes as no surprise that it was not until 1854 that the United States saw its first mixed-race priest and not until 1886 that the country welcomed its first ordained African American.\footnote{James Augustine Healy, Sherwood Alexander, and Patrick Francis Healy, the three sons of slaveowner Michael Morris Healy were ordained in the 1854, 1858, and 1865. Augustine Tolton was born a slave in Missouri, admitted as a student at the seminary of the congregation of the Propaganda in Rome in 1880, and ordained in 1886. He would serve most of his pastorate in Chicago. Davis, “Black Catholics in Nineteenth Century America,” 11–12.} Black female religious orders formed earlier, first in Baltimore in 1831 with the Oblate Sisters of Providence followed by New Orleans’s own \textit{Sœurs de la Sainte Famille} (Sisters of the Holy Family) in 1842.\footnote{Thaddeus J. Posey, “Praying in the Shadows: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, a Look at Nineteenth-Century Black Catholic Spirituality,” \textit{U.S. Catholic Historian}, 12.1 (1994): 11–30; Morrow, \textit{Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time}; and Brett, \textit{The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family}.}

Free black women were a significant and sizable population in the city and even more so in the Catholic Church. When New Orleans changed national hands, the arrival of American-born slaves changed the city’s racial and religious dynamics, and the influx of non-Catholic black slaves and European Catholic immigrants lessened the influence of black women in the Church. Afro-creole women responded with increased lay participation and by 1842, ninety percent of slave and free black baptismal candidates were sponsored by women of African descent. Other historians have found that black creole women were more active practitioners of Catholicism than black creole men. Historians Emily J. Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould argued that the “key features of Afro-Catholicism” in the antebellum period were “the appropriation of Catholicism by the city's free black women, the women’s determination to extend the embrace of their church, and the white male clergy’s recognition of their role as partners in this mission.”\footnote{Clark and Gould, “The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans,” 410.} A recent study by Natasha L. McPherson highlighted Catholicism’s redemptive role for unmarried black mothers.\footnote{She makes a strong case for concubinage as a primary means female blacks made connections in the community. Thus, the possible shame of a baby out of wedlock could be combatted with the sacraments. Natasha L. McPherson, “‘There Was a Tradition Among the Women’: New Orleans’s Colored Creole Women and the Making of a Community in the Tremé and Seventh Ward, 1791–1930,” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2011), 122–126.} The intimacies of family kept creole women in the pews. Though many Catholic fathers were present in the lives of their children as well, the mothers were the primary “moral purveyors of the family” who “ensured their families attended...
mass and participated in the Church sacraments.”\textsuperscript{165} With the exception of Sister Louise in the initial years, the main members of the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} were men. Women periodically attended the séances, including Henri Rey’s wife Adèle, who appears to have believed in Spiritualism but still wanted her children to be raised as Catholics. Rey and his male \textit{Cercle Harmonique} brethren sought direct access to spiritual knowledge and spiritual betterment through the séance, while some Afro-creole women found it in the convent.

The \textit{Sœurs de la Sainte Famille (SSF)} was the second order of nuns for non-white women founded in the United States. Historians, including the order’s first historian Sister Mary Bernard Deggs, typically cite 1842 as the \textit{SSF}’s founding year and list Henriette Delille (primary founder and cousin of Adèle Crocker Rey’s father), Juliette Gaudin, and Josephine Charles as the foundresses.\textsuperscript{166} One of the primary goals of the order was the evangelization and religious education of slaves and free women of color. The \textit{SSF}, like other local Afro-creoles, used their access to property and funds to their advantage. The sisters also used their connections with free black philanthropists to gain donors. Delille’s family raised her for plaçage, a system her biological sister entered for a time, but Delille used her inheritance to purchase buildings for the order. Delille and other sisters of the order owned personal slaves and a benefactor “brought two or three slaves to work for us [the order].”\textsuperscript{167}

Before the Civil War, the \textit{SSF} took over the Ursulines’ task of religious education for the city’s slave and free black populations. Though the \textit{SSF} allowed women from across the black/white racial spectrum to join the order, only free-born women were admitted until the contentious decision to allow former slave Chloe Preval in 1867.\textsuperscript{168} The divide over Preval’s

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 100.

\textsuperscript{167} Deggs, \textit{No Cross, No Crown}, 10.

\textsuperscript{168} “The rule of the old first motherhouse state that we accept only those of free and well-known families,” Deggs, \textit{No Cross, No Crown}, 29. This rule ended with Preval’s entry, and their decision to segregate the education of free black children from the non-free indicate the sisters’ complicated place on the black/white, slave/free spectrum. The order’s second historian, Sister Mary Francis Borgia Hart identified the house split and the disagreement over Preval’s admittance “a momentous decision.” The majority of the sisters felt it was “too soon after the social
acceptance elucidates some of the sisters’ concerns regarding their status and reputation. While the sisters had often traversed the boundary between slave and free to provide religious education, to admit a former slave into the order would transgress the boundary in a new and more tangibly intimate manner. Also after the Civil War, the SSF encountered increasing racial harassment from other orders of sisters and the Catholic hierarchy. The order even had to fight for the right to wear the veil of Catholic sisterhood. In 1872, thirty years after their founding, Mother Superior Josephine Charles sent one of her young novices to the office of Archbishop Napoleon Perché dressed in a religious habit made by Charles herself. The sister was Sister Marie, who was of mixed racial ancestry and fair enough in skin tone to pass as white, particularly when veiled in her homemade habit. The archbishop did not immediately recognize her as one of the mixed-race sisters of the SSF and took her to be a member of an established white order. Once he realized her race, he admonished her for pride, telling her “Go take that off! Who do you think you are? You are proud, too proud. That dress is not for you. Go, take it off at once.” Had the young novice been white, her ownership of the habit would have been fine but her African descent tainted her. The Catholic institution was not always as welcoming to its black members as it was to white members. While the SSF sought recognition and spiritual assurance through the Catholic sisterhood, Rey and other members of the Cercle Harmonique looked to the spiritual world.

169 According to Deggs, The Sisters of St. Joseph, one of the city’s white orders of nuns, “persecuted” the SSF into the 1890s, doing “all that they could do to make us take off our habits” (41). This was likely because the habits the SSF wore looked similar to the Sisters of St. Joseph. Additionally, other orders of women religious feared being too closely associated with the non-white SSF. Another order who briefly became one of the SSF’s “many enemies” were the Little Sisters of the Poor (37). Rather than similar habits, this dispute was over similar names of charitable homes for the city’s poor.

170 Their first clerical supporter, Father Rousselon, was to bring them their habit from France in 1866, but he passed away during his trip. Their promised habit was then “lost,” and it would be another fifteen years before they were presented with a formal habit. They wanted a habit though. Deggs and her fellow sisters strongly held onto their veils once they finally received them, for as she explains, no one in the city “would think we were anything if we were not dressed in the holy habit.” Deggs, No Cross, No Crown, 42.

171 Sister Marie shared this story with the order’s second historian, Sister Mary Francis Borgia Hart. Hart, Violets in the King’s Garden, 21, emphasis original.

172 Almost a decade later, on March 19, 1881 the sisters would receive habits blessed by the church, an event Deggs describes as “very pleasing.” Deggs, No Cross, No Crown, 13.

173 Other black Catholic men tried to establish their own authority within the church. The American Catholic Tribune, the newspaper venture of Daniel Rudd, a black Catholic born a slave in Kentucky in 1854, begun in 1886 became a mouthpiece for black Catholics and their demands for equality in the United States. The popularity of the paper led to the Black Catholic Congress, which met five times in five years.
Despite the challenges faced by the SSF, Catholic churches in the city were integrated throughout most of the nineteenth century, providing what many historians identify as the one space of racial quasi-equality in the city.\(^{174}\) Antebellum visitors to New Orleans frequently commented on interracial Catholic worship. In 1833, British visitor Thomas Hamilton wrote: “Both Catholic and Protestant agree in the tenet that all men are equal in the sight of God, but the former gives practical exemplification of this creed. In a Catholic Church … the slave and master, kneel before the same altar in temporary oblivion of all worldly distinctions …”\(^{175}\) Five years later Harriet Martineau identified the Catholic Church as the one place “where all men meet together as brethren … Within the edifice there is no separation.”\(^{176}\) Writing later in life, Dr. Thomas L. Nichols, a social reformer from the North, noted that he had never before seen such a “mixture of conditions and colours” as he did at St. Louis Cathedral in 1845. “White children and black, with every shade between, knelt side by side” without “distinction of rank or colour.” He could imagine no better example of “perfect equality.”\(^{177}\)

However, interracial worship was not without complications nor did it remain in practice in all parishes. In the 1840s parishes in St. Martinville dominated by Acadians began to segregate seating in churches according to social status: whites sat in the front with free blacks behind them and slaves occupied the aisles.\(^{178}\) Communion was distributed in hierarchical order, first whites, then free blacks, and lastly slaves. While some white creoles sought to keep friendships with black creoles, others began ascribing to the new black/white dividing line as opposed to the older creole/American divide. In part, the desire for racially segregated seating among some of the trustees of various local Catholic parishes, including the famously interracial St. Louis Cathedral, led to the 1842 founding of St. Augustine Church in the Tremé neighborhood. The Rey family was a pewholder at St. Augustine Church and financed a stained-glass window.\(^{179}\) The property on which St. Augustine was built was owned by free blacks and free blacks raised most of the money for the building. Free blacks also rented nearly half of the


\(^{177}\) Thomas Low Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (1864; New York, 1937), 127–128.


church’s pews, and all the small side pews were reserved for slaves. Though worship was interracial, a racial hierarchy still existed and was reflected in church seating and the segregation of the sacraments.

The trustee system remained in practice in New Orleans for nearly the first half of the nineteenth century, about a decade longer than it did in the majority of the country. This style of parish organization offered lay participation in church affairs. The trustees, or marguilliers in Louisiana, had hiring and firing privileges over their pastor and a voice in the parish’s financial affairs. For much of the city’s French creole population, maintaining the power of the marguilliers offered assurance that the church would remain faithful to its creole population, as opposed to the new American population or incoming German and Irish immigrants. Louisiana trustees were not afraid to use their influence and treat their pastor as their employee. For example, a parish in St. Martinville could withhold their priests’ salaries. The power of the marguilliers caused tension with the hierarchy, particularly the bishop. In 1844 the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled in favor of the bishop over the marguilliers and consolidated the authority of the diocese in the bishop. With this decision, the laity’s voice in the church was not silenced but it was quieted. In the following years Bishop Antoine Blanc saw the establishment of more parishes with free blacks as founding members, including Annunciation in 1846. Henri Rey’s father Barthélemy Rey may have been one of these founders, as it was the location of his funeral six years later in 1852. During the Civil War, the instability of wartime New Orleans influenced its Catholic culture as well. Following war, the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866 decided against a uniform plan and let those bishops whose dioceses contained black Catholics determine the best way to care for their congregants. Until the turn of the twentieth century, New Orleans remained integrated due to a clerical shortage and due to habit. Though their parishes were integrated, the Church remained largely silent on segregation and issued no calls for racial equality. The local hierarchy left the issue of race to “the predominant southern

\[181\] While all in attendance took communion from the same ciborium, they often did so in segregated groups.
political and racial idioms” and said little other than expressing the need to continue including them.185

In addition to those who formed the Cercle Harmonique, other Afro-creoles left the Catholicism and joined protestant churches, though the majority of black protestants were non-creole blacks or current slaves.186 Following the Louisiana Purchase, protestantism made its official arrival to the city coming with black American and Anglo-American arrivées. With them also came black preachers, religious authorities some black New Orleanians found attractive. Though the African Methodist Episcopal church had been banned from the Deep South since Denmark Vesey’s 1822 revolt, a group of black Methodists started a separate AME church in 1842. In his first five years, the first minister was arrested five times for allowing slaves to worship at the congregation. In the late 1850s the city banned black churches or organizations not under the direct surveillance of whites.187 Many black Methodists then worshipped in white congregations until the ban was lifted after the Civil War. Some formed their own separate congregations but numerous Methodist churches in the city remained racially integrated until the turn of the twentieth century. While some black protestants in the South embraced the opportunity for racially separate churches and complete control over the religious sphere, many Methodists, along with Catholics, in New Orleans held onto their racially integrated congregations.188

Complicating the city’s religio-racial scene further, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Methodist missionaries from the American Missionary Association flooded into Louisiana following the Civil War, opened schools for African Americans, and hoped to attract converts.189 Despite protestantism’s attempts, many of the city’s creoles of color continued to identify with

185 Bennett, Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow, 146.
188 Bennett, Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans. Black, and to a lesser extent white members of the Methodist Episcopal Church resisted the racialization of the church and supported racial integration. They believed that racial integration on the level of religious identity would influence the larger society’s view of race and ultimately transcend racism. M. E. church conferences and larger institutional gatherings represent the most successful interracial efforts of the denomination. Local congregations decided for themselves how racially inclusive to be, and this would not be successful in the long run.
the Catholicism of their families. Mesmerism and Spiritualism both gained a foothold among the city’s French émigré population, especially in the 1840s and 1850s. Thus, Afro-creole Spiritualism expands the story of Afro-creoles’ religious experiences since it is one of the few well-documented cases of nineteenth-century Afro-creoles leaving Catholicism for another tradition.

Religious diversity was on the rise in New Orleans during the antebellum period. Americans from the north and immigrants from Europe brought their languages, businesses, and religious backgrounds. Amid the changes in religious make-up, the racial stratification further solidified. Afro-creoles occupied more fluid space in colonial New Orleans but increasing social and political restrictions during the antebellum period limited their mobility. City ordinances and politicians clearly did not curtail all freedoms and liberties, but it was clear that the white over black racial hierarchy was hardening.

“Between two worlds”: Educational Opportunities and Legal Restrictions

Part of what made Afro-creole life ambivalent in the nineteenth century was its place of simultaneous privilege and discrimination. Indicative of Afro-creoles’ mixed antebellum status was the concurrent growth of educational opportunities for them and legal restrictions against them. The Jesuits and Ursulines were some of the first in the colony to educate Africans and Afro-creoles in any way beyond Catholic instruction. Near the conclusion of the Spanish rule of the city, the Ursulines began to allow mixed-race girls to attend their school as day boarders. In the 1810s and 1820s Catholic organizations began to provide charity and religious education to slaves and free blacks. In 1823, with the help of local black Catholics, Sister Marthe Fortiér, a Hospitalier nun, opened a school for free black girls. It was at this school that the future SSF foundresses first met. While education for free blacks was allowed, teaching slaves to read and write was outlawed by the Louisiana Legislature in the 1830s. The rise of abolitionist sentiment in the U.S. worried southerners who relied upon slavery and the racial hierarchy of white over black, and in this environment slave education became a threat. A member of the Bible Society

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190 This could lead to tension with American born blacks, for their religion and cultural backgrounds divided them.
191 Bennett’s *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow* offers a similar contribution in his exploration of why blacks joined or rejoined the Methodist Episcopal Church following emancipation.
of New Orleans was arrested (though later acquitted) for asking a group of slaves if they could read and write and if they would like a copy of the Bible. Stories of slaves forging passes to leave the city and move northward were common through the antebellum period. However, slaves who already knew how to read and write continued to carry extra value.\textsuperscript{195}

The city’s Afro-creoles were often educated. Some were sent to schools in France, Spain, Haiti, or in the North. Many worked as private tutors for wealthy white families and some opened private schools in the downtown area of the city. Others were composers, poets, and dramatists. The publication of \textit{L’Album littéraire: Journal des jeunes gens, amateurs de littérature} (\textit{The Literary Album: A Journal of Young Men, Lovers of Literature}) by black creoles in 1843 and \textit{Les Cenelles}, an anthology of poetry by black creole men in 1845, demonstrates the rich literary tradition of the city’s Afro-creoles. In addition to \textit{L’Album littéraire} and \textit{Les Cenelles}, Afro-creoles also published news periodicals. \textit{L’Union} operated from 1862 to 1864 and was replaced by the \textit{Tribune} in 1864, a newspaper that would play a key role in the founding of the Republican Party in Louisiana. Many of those affiliated with \textit{L’Union} and the \textit{Tribune} also contributed to \textit{L’Album littéraire} and \textit{Les Cenelles}. The \textit{Tribune}’s publication of poems like “\textit{Le 13 Avril}” about the death of Abraham Lincoln and “\textit{Ode aux Martyrs}” about the victims of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot of 1866 reflected the continued tradition of Afro-creole political writing long after \textit{L’Album littéraire} and \textit{Les Cenelles}.\textsuperscript{196}

\textit{L’Album littéraire} was published for less than a year, but it was popular amongst Afro-creole readers during its short lifespan. Writer Armand Lanusse’s multi-issue tragic story about a young quadroon woman was indicative of the periodical’s critical tone towards the city’s racial status quo. The character became a mistress or placée only to be abandoned when her partner married a white woman. In despair the quadroon woman threw herself under his carriage’s wheels.\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Les Cenelles} also included stories and poems critical of the plaçage system. For these authors plaçage represented the immorality, inequality, and ignominy of the city’s racial dynamics. To provide for themselves and their families and in attempts to offer their offspring better lives these women entered relationships with no possibility of marriage and every possibility of heartbreak. For Lanusse and others, the placée was nothing more than a sexual

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Tribune}, 25 April 1865; \textit{Tribune}, 30 July 1867.
\textsuperscript{197} Christian, “Negro Periodicals, Literature, and Art in Louisiana,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.
object for her partner and then discarded. Lanusse’s spirit also visited the *Cercle Harmonique* after his death.\(^{198}\)

The way the male Afro-creole authors of *L’Album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles* portrayed placées was similar to white authors.\(^{199}\) In his novel 1856 novel *The Quadroon; or, A Lover’s Adventure in Louisiana*, Irish-American author Thomas Mayne Reid tells the story of an English gentleman, Edward Rutherford, who falls in love with a beautiful young quadroon woman, Aurore who is sold at a slave market and purchased by the story’s depraved antagonist. However, the story ends well for Rutherford, for as it turns out Aurore was freed by her previous owner, and so they embark upon a “tranquil” life after the novel’s end.\(^{200}\) Dion Boucicault drew inspiration from Reid’s *The Quadroon* for his successful 1859 play *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana*.\(^{201}\) A similar plotline emerges; Zoe, a beautiful octoroon, is vied over by a virtuous northern who loves her and a corrupt former plantation overseer who lusts over her body. At the end of the American version of Boucicault’s play, Zoe commits suicide, unable to cope with the divided racial and social world she inhabits.\(^{202}\) The critical content and quality of writing of *L’Album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles* were on par with white counterparts. This rich literary tradition would be reflected in the séance records of the *Cercle Harmonique* in the spirits they communed with and the political potency of their messages.

New Orleans Afro-creoles often used their education and what cultural capital they had to better their race. For example, writer, plaçage critic, and spiritual guide Armand Lanusse was

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\(^{198}\) Lanusse died in 1867 and his spirit later visited the *Cercle Harmonique* on a few occasions. For example, in December 1871, he delivered a message with a group of other spirits expressing hope that their families would convert to Spiritualism. “How happy we would be if we could see all our friends and family join you for the continuation of this work, so productive for those who care,” Grandjean collection, 85-35; 22 December 1871. Message signed Armand Lanusse, Lovell, and others.


\(^{200}\) Thomas Mayne Reid, *The Quadroon; or, A Lover’s Adventure in Louisiana*, Vol. III (George W. Hyde: London, 1856), 226. Though ending happily, Aurore and Edward’s relationship was complicated at the start. Before he and Aurore confess their love for one another, Edward fears society’s opinion of his attachment. Though Aurore is “beautiful,” she is “still a slave.” “How Louisiana would laugh – nay, scorn and persecute!,” he laments, “the very proposal to make her my wife would subject me to derision and abuse.” Even if she were free, because she possesses African blood, he fears society’s reaction. However, immediately after this lament, he realizes that his love for her is too strong to be suppressed by proper social mores and proceeds to tell Aurore how he feels.


\(^{202}\) This is similar to northern abolitionist and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Quadroon,” from his *Poems on Slavery*, which tells of a slave-owner unable to resist the temptation evoked by the quadroon slave’s female body. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Quadroon,” in *Poems on Slavery* (Cambridge: Metcalf, Keith, and Nichols, 1842).
educated in France at *L’Ecole Polytechnique à Paris* and worked on the board of the city’s first large-scale black school. *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents* opened in 1848 and is perhaps the best representation of the Afro-creole population’s dedication to education and culture. The money left behind by the widow Marie Couvent supported the work of *La Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* and its school, *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents*, which offered affordable or free education for local black children. In her will the widow Couvent, an ex-African slave herself, declared that her land and estate were to support a school for black orphans. Though she died in 1837 her land, money, and plan sat idle for years. Her wishes were delayed due to the city’s anxiety regarding black education at the time. With city ordinances prohibiting the creation of free schools for black children, estate executor Henry Fletcher could do little. It would take a large group of well-connected Afro-creole men to fulfill Couvent’s wishes.

In April 1847 Barthélemy Rey, François Lacroix, Nelson Fouché, Maximilien Bruslé, Adolphe Duhart, and Lanusse organized themselves into *La Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* and worked towards the proper execution of Couvent’s will. The school opened the following year, and they augmented the estate through donations. Black orphans were admitted free of charge and others were asked for a modest tuition. Students who could not afford textbooks were given supplies as well. Lessons in grammar and writing (for English or French), rhetoric, geography, history, music, algebra, geometry, and even hygiene were offered by the school. Barthélemy Rey, Henri Rey’s father, served on the school board until his death. Along with the wealthy Afro-creole philanthropists Aristride Mary and Thomy Lafon *Société* member Lacroix supplied additional funds, and the city’s most educated and respected Afro-creoles served as teachers and administrators, including *Société* members, Joanni Questy, and Paul Trévigne (the later editor of *L’Union* and the *Tribune*, who had previously operated his own small private school). Historians Joseph Logsdon and Donald DeVore identified the school as “the nursery for revolution in Louisiana.” Former board members from *La Société* were common spirit guides. Questy, Lanusse, Duhart, and Barthélemy Rey would all later appear to the *Cercle Harmonique*.

204 *Prospectus de L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents* (New Orleans: Mr. Desarzant, 1847); Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library Special Collection, Tulane University.
Because of their educational prowess and the rights they possessed, free blacks were far removed from slaves. They could own property and write wills, they paid taxes, they could enter legal contracts, and they could serve as witnesses in court for cases involving whites. Through owning slaves, businesses, and real estate property, free Afro-creoles amassed wealth in the city and surrounding areas. In 1867 a local paper reported that the free black population in and around the city had “always maintained the most friendly relation with the planters and citizens generally” and that they “were generally kind hearted and respectful, and many of them quite prosperous.”206 However, some New Orleanians wanted to curtail the wealth and status of the gens de couleur libres. For example, in 1833 the Citizens’ Bank of New Orleans restricted stockholders to white men alone. Indeed, for all the rights they held distancing themselves from slaves, they were hardly at the same level as whites. Most notably, they were denied the right to vote.207

As Louisiana grew more powerful and valuable to the United States, it also grew uneasy and nervous of its racial middle caste.208 The new Louisiana Black Code of 1806 officially prohibited free black men from other states to enter the territory, and later laws in the 1830s built upon this earlier one. In 1818 the state forbade free blacks from owning white “redemptioners” (white indentured servants). The rights of free blacks to temporarily “own” whites had become too uncomfortable for Louisiana whites. A slave-uprising scare in 1829 just forty miles from New Orleans influenced some of the laws passed in 1830, including one that limited the right of free blacks to work with slaves. In 1830 the Louisiana Legislature also passed a law which made it criminal to write or publish any document that could cause discontent among the black population, and the prescribed punishment for the offense was life imprisonment or death. Anti-slavery agitation was particularly worrisome to Louisiana whites and even some slave-holding Afro-creoles, and thus the laws passed in the early nineteenth century which curtailed free black rights served two purposes. Not only did they restrict the rights of the free black community and take away some of the privilege possessed by the Louisiana gens de couleur libres, another consequence of the laws was the affirmation of white supremacy.

207 There is evidence that some free men of color in Rapides parish successfully casted ballots occasionally in the 1830s to 1850s when sought by nativists. Christian, “Taxation Without Representation…..,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.
Starting in 1830 it was a criminal offense for an inn or tavern keeper to house any black or mixed-race person who had entered the state illegally. Permission for free blacks to return to Louisiana, if the state was one’s former home, was also prohibited. This law was elaborated on again in 1842, and as a result the population of free blacks in the state decreased over the course of the 1840s. In 1850, the Louisiana Legislature passed an amendment that prohibited free blacks from organizing religious groups or secret associations like the Masons. *La Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* was left intact only because they had the support of the Catholic Church. In 1855, this prohibition was extended to include scientific, literary, and charitable societies. Those groups already established were allowed to remain, but no new groups were permitted to organize. In 1848 free blacks in Clairborne parish were forced to pay a bond of five hundred dollars to the state as a show of good faith and “good behaviour” if they wanted to remain in Louisiana. In 1859, the state legislature passed “An Act to Permit Free Persons of African Descent to Select Their Masters and Become Slaves for Life” which encouraged all free blacks to choose self-enslavement.

If they had the money and means, some of the city’s Afro-creoles left Louisiana in the wake of these laws to live in Mexico, Haiti, France, or elsewhere in Europe. Many Afro-creoles stayed in New Orleans, including the Rey family and the family of Henri’s future wife Adèle Crocker. The city’s slow transition from a tripartite social-racial structure to a biracial one could be felt in fits and starts throughout the nineteenth century. For Rey and other members of the *Cercle Harmonique* Spiritualism would provide the support to remain in New Orleans and the insight to improve their home. Despite the hope and optimism expressed by the spirits that the post-war world would be an egalitarian place, Rey’s séance records conclude alongside Republican Reconstruction. The chapters that follow examine this process in closer detail, starting with a brief overview of Spiritualism in the United States and the origins of the *Cercle Harmonique*.

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209 Acts Passed at the First Session of the Second Legislature of the State of Louisiana (New Orleans, 1848), 90.
211 The *Cercle Harmonique*’s séance records contain a few passing references to their “brothers in Tampico.”
CHAPTER TWO

“THERE WILL BE AN HOUR OF TRIUMPH FOR YOU”:
SPIRITUALISM IN THE U.S. AND SPIRITUALISM IN NEW ORLEANS

“Many excellent mediums were found among the colored population, one of whom, a French creole named Dr. Valmour, attained a high and deserved celebrity as a healing medium.” – Emma Hardinge Britten, Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years’ Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of the Spirits

“The advice of the wise is always beneficial for those who put forward his reason as his guide.” – Mesmer to the Cercle Harmonique, 19 November 1865

“Come to the table in order to become just, wise, and to elevate yourselves by your soul.” – A Brother to the Cercle Harmonique, 18 March 1873

In late 1859, Emma Hardinge Britten delivered a series of lectures on Spiritualism in New Orleans hosted at fraternal lodges. During one of these lectures at the Odd Fellows’ Hall she began to tire while performing Spiritualist demonstrations. At the same time, a local black creole blacksmith known as J.B. Valmour (John B. Aversin) was walking by the building when suddenly he was “seized” by a “spiritual influence” and entered the auditorium. Hardinge Britten immediately recognized a spiritual affinity with Valmour and exclaimed, “Let that Brother come up here to me, to give me strength to speak, he is full of electricity.” Valmour went on stage and sat there for the next two hours during which Hardinge Britten was able to continue her demonstrations and keep the audience “charmed.”

In her later writings, Hardinge Britten noted how “either the noble Creoles are determined to take Spiritualism by storm, or the spirits are determined to take them.” The “noble Creoles” she referenced were likely Valmour and his friends Henri Louis Rey and “Sister Louise.” Valmour, Rey, and Louise were part of a group later known as the Cercle Harmonique, a small but active group of Afro-creole Spiritualists in

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213 Emma Hardinge Britten, Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years’ Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of the Spirits (New York, 1870), 425
216 The Daily True Delta reported that “Miss Emma Hardinge” would begin delivering free lectures on Spiritualism in December. Daily True Delta, 27 November 1859.
217 Grandjean collection, 85-64; Grandjean notes.
218 Hardinge Britten, Modern American Spiritualism, 428–429.
mid- to late-nineteenth century New Orleans. Valmour and Louise left the circle before it entered its most active years, due to their early departures from the material world. Rey remained a leader for the circle’s entire tenure.

The *Cercle Harmonique* had much in common with other groups of Spiritualists in America and was quite different. As such, they are an important addition to the story of American Spiritualism and African-American religions. After a brief introduction to Spiritualism in the U.S., this chapter will examine the practice of Spiritualism among French émigrés led by Joseph Barthet in mid-nineteenth century New Orleans. Meeting with Barthet were a few Afro-creole men, such as Valmour, who would later develop their own circle, the *Cercle Harmonique*. This chapter’s second half focuses on the members of the group, the form of their meetings, the spirits who appeared at the séance table, and how the spirits described Spiritualism. The spirits advising the *Cercle Harmonique* from the spiritual world were a varied group, ranging from those familiar with circle members to political celebrities. Recurrent themes in the séance books include the problem of materialism, the nature of the spiritual world, republicanism, and the need for unity. Additionally close examination of the spirits’ messages indicate a personal element to the practice, where a community of spiritual advisors who formed a spiritual republic advised those on earth who wanted a similar style of republican governance. While the politics of the circle will be explored more in depth in later chapters, the deep collective identity and connection between the spiritual world and the *Cercle Harmonique* is investigated here.

**“The benign influence of a rational Spiritualism”: Spiritualism in America**

Spiritualism rose in popularity in New Orleans in the 1850s among French émigrés and creoles and then again in the late 1860s and 1870s with the *Cercle Harmonique*, but its origin in the U.S. dates earlier in the antebellum period. Jon Butler and others identify Spiritualism as a product of the “antebellum spiritual hothouse”—the widespread acceptance of an active supernatural presence. Many American Christians found Spiritualism more fulfilling and

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220 Though Catherine Albanese dates the origins of American Spiritualism before the Fox Sisters by looking at Native American religions.

convincing than their previous denominations because “they believed spiritualism represented the most perfect expression of Christianity yet revealed.” According to historian Bret Carroll, Spiritualism offered a cure to the country’s “spiritual malaise.”

Gaining great currency following the fame and success of the Rochester rappings and the Fox sisters, Spiritualism moved far beyond the New York “Burnt-over District.” Helping the tradition spread across the United States was its print culture. Journals like the Boston-based *Banner of Light* (begun in 1857), New York City’s *Spiritual Telegraph* (1852), and Chicago’s *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* (1865) connected a national network of Spiritualists and helped spread the news of Spiritualists lectures, books, and pamphlets to both believers and non-believers.

A large part of Spiritualism’s appeal came from its ability to straddle the material and spiritual worlds, the natural and the supernatural, the immediate world of humans and the world of the dead. Historians and scholars of religion include Spiritualism in the broad spectrum of Christianity, though with a unique focus on spirit activity and the possibility of (and desire for) communication with spirits in the invisible world beyond the material one. Spiritualism was also popular among Americans of all class backgrounds with “the popular ‘phenomenal’ form of spiritualism in the flamboyance of the spirit manifestations but, alongside this form, a more philosophical and ‘speculative’ version” among the upper classes. The authority the spirits could bestow was attractive to both those with social power and those desiring it. In New Orleans, concepts from Franz Anton Mesmer, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Andrew Jackson Davis—and these spiritual scholars themselves—manifested in the ideas and practices of the *Cercle Harmonique*.

While Spiritualism was a product of the antebellum spiritual hothouse, its roots reach back to European scholars who experimented with science, philosophy, and religion. In the eighteenth century, Swedish scientist and theologian Swedenborg wrote extensively about the nature of the world and the three heavens—the celestial, the spiritual, and the natural—as revealed to him in his visions and religious experiences. *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell* to an extent, but ultimately finds metaphysical religion (or the occult as Butler termed it) central to the story of American religious history, a idea she argued in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*.

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(1758) was one of his most influential works, and in it he described the afterlife as he saw it—full of spirits organized in ascending spheres according to their spiritual status. Swedenborg’s ideas regarding communication with the spirits and the organization of the spiritual cosmos, which included a detailed cosmology, became a core part of American Spiritualism.226 Catherine Albanese defined Swedenborg’s understanding of the cosmos as one in which “worlds merged into other worlds, and connecting them was a spirit influx from above, which permeated all that was below as its source and sustenance.”227 In his visions, he experienced the melding of the material and immaterial, the spiritual world and the physical world, and Earth and the cosmos. While Swedenborg communicated with “angelic presences of another order,”228 the Cercle Harmonique communicated with departed loved ones, former Spiritualists, political thinkers, and significant figures in Spiritualism’s history, including Swedenborg himself.

Another major foreign influence on American Spiritualism came from German physician Franz Anton Mesmer whose 1766 doctoral dissertation “On the Influence of the Planets” examined the power of planetary magnetic fields and what he called “animal gravity.” Animal gravity, Mesmer explained, was “the cause of universal gravitation and which is, very probably, the foundation of all corporeal properties.” He went on,

The harmony established between the astral plane and the human plane ought to be admired as much as the ineffable effect of UNIVERSAL GRAVITATION by which our bodies are harmonized, not in a uniform and monotonous manner, but as with a musical instrument furnished with several strings, the exact one resonates which is in unison with a given tone.229

His theory of animal magnetism suggested that invisible fluids coursing through the bodies of humans connected them with the larger world around them and that good health was a result of keeping those fluids in harmony. Through these fluids, spirits could affect the bodies of Mesmer’s patients, and additionally magnetizers—like Mesmer—could use the powers of their minds to harmonize the fluids in patients. Particularly in France, mesmerism was associated with liberal politics, free thinking, and those who wanted to transform society.230 In the United States,

227 Albanese, A Republic of Mind and Spirit, 141.
228 Cox, Body and Soul, 14.
229 Mesmer, as quoted in Albanese, A Republic of Mind and Spirit, 191.
mesmerism was, as Emma Hardinge Britten wrote, “wide-spread” and “largely practiced over every part of America.”

Andrew Jackson Davis, a predominant American Spiritualist in the late antebellum period, first engaged in the practice of magnetism before channeling spirits from the invisible world through his body. Albanese has identified Jackson as “the leading light of philosophical spiritualism, by all counts the spiritualist theologian if the movement had one.” His 1847 lectures The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind, which preceded the Fox sisters’ fame, solidified his position as one the country’s foremost Swedenborgians and Mesmerists. The volume rambles at times and reads like a stream of consciousness at other times because Davis delivered these lectures while in a magnetic (mesmeric) trance. His emphasis on the power of the mind, the mind’s abilities, and the “spiritual organization” of matter and bodies led him begin engaging in communication with the spirits. He developed what Carroll called a “spiritual republicanism” that “avoided the extremes of individualism and authoritarianism, by emphasizing spiritual freedom, democracy, and equality on the one hand and self-restraint, social obligation, and the rule of natural law, and moral order on the other.”

Albanese has suggested that his theology and understanding of Spiritualism was “the metaphorical encodement of a utopian vision for society.” He advocated the creation of a perfect society and the perfection of individuals on spiritual quests. For a perfect society, harmony would be key. Significant to this work, and all other writings by the Davis, was his “Harmonial Philosophy,” which explained how this world could be transformed (for the better) through the involvement of advanced spirit societies in other “spheres.” In these other spheres resided God and of other spirits. Spirits would progress through Davis’s three heavens and three hells towards God who was the “Great Positive Mind,” whose ‘breathings … flowed through the ten thousand avenues and forms of animated Nature, until it breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul.” While Swedenborg’s understanding of the spiritual cosmos was a static one in which one’s spirit was fixed to a particular sphere with no potential for upward mobility, Davis and most American Spiritualists believed that spirits would progress to higher

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231 Hardinge Britten, Modern American Spiritualism, 22.
233 Carroll, Spiritualism in Antebellum America, 37.
spheres once in the presence of the spirits. This is particularly where Davis and others’ understanding of a spiritual republic becomes clear. The spirit world was based on equality in the sense that it was a meritocracy, rather than aristocracy, where “while all souls were spiritually equal and shared the same final destiny, there was wide variation in abilities, qualities, and rates of advancement.”

According to another Spiritualist, Robert Hare, the spirit world was “the beau ideal of a republic” because “virtue and mind give respect’ and ‘ascendancy is founded on real merit.”

Emma Hardinge Britten called Davis the “John the Baptist” for American Spiritualism, though she also gave that accolade to the Shakers. Britten was a practitioner and fervent defender of Spiritualism, explaining it as “a religion, separate in all respects from any existing sect, because it bases its affirmations purely upon the demonstrations of fact, science, and natural law, and admits of no creed or denominational boundary.”

Her popular work, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years’ Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of the Spirits*, was an encyclopedic account of Spiritualism in the United States. In her own practice of Spiritualism, she frequently served as a medium for Native American spirits, including Black Hawk, King Philip, Osceola, famed orator Red Jacket (Sa-go-ye-wa-tha), and “other Indian ‘braves’ who functioned as ‘leaders of spirit bands at circles.’”

Her communications with Native American spirits was not unordinary for American Spiritualists. As Molly McGarry has argued, white, Anglo Spiritualists imagined Native American spirits as “powerful spiritual predecessors” who functioned as a “vital link between this world and the next.” As they vanished from the nineteenth-century American landscape, they reappeared ambivalently in the spiritual world.

Britten toured the American South, and it was during a tour when she met Valmour and Rey. This particular tour was not without tension; she was threatened with lynching during the

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236 Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 75.
237 Robert Hare lecture, “Lecture on Spiritualism: Delivered Before an Audience of Three Thousand, at the Tabernacle, in the City of New York, in November 1855 : Comprising an Account of the Manifestations which Induced the Author's Conversion to Spiritualism, and Confirmed His Hope of Immortality;” quoted in Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 75.
same lecture circuit while in Tennessee and South Carolina.\textsuperscript{242} On another trip to New Orleans, one of her friends reported meeting a powerful “negro” named Tom Jenkins who would channel the spirit of a Mississippi River boatman named Big Ben and make “magic.” Jenkins reportedly “became entranced, took off his shoes and stockings, rolled up his pantaloons to his knees, and entered the pine wood fire, literally standing in it as it blazed upon the hearth, long enough to repeat in a solemn and impressive manner the 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 24\textsuperscript{th}, and 25\textsuperscript{th} verses of the third chapter of Daniel.”\textsuperscript{243} In her writings she reported both her own experiences and those of others in the South. She later reprinted a \textit{Banner of Light} correspondent’s letter while in Memphis in mid-1864. The correspondent met a great number of free African Americans and determined them to be fit for Spiritualism, describing their character as “so intuitive, inspirational, religious, and altogether mediumistic.”\textsuperscript{244} She also reprinted another correspondent’s report from Macon, Georgia who had met a “colored girl, who was an excellent physical medium.”\textsuperscript{245} Spiritualism was certainly not absent in the South according to Hardinge Britten’s reporting, a fact reinforced by the 1890s establishment of the Southern Cassadega Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association in Florida.\textsuperscript{246}

In the wake of the Fox sisters’ popularity and notoriety, mediums, trance healers, mesmerists, and others who combined these three identities traveled the country giving lectures and sharing their practice with others. In particular, connecting with the spirit world and communicating with the dead—be them deceased loved ones or celebrity figures from history—brought the power of the supernatural in close proximity with everyday Americans. Though Margaret Fox later identified her work as a hoax, Spiritualism continued to spread, bolstered by its appeals to science.\textsuperscript{247} Many sought scientific evidence for the existence of the spirit world and its involvement in the material.\textsuperscript{248} Spirit photography fulfilled this demand for some.\textsuperscript{249}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{242} Bell, \textit{Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana}, 197.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Hardinge Britten, \textit{Modern American Spiritualism}, 205.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Ibid, 498.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Ibid, 205.
\item \textsuperscript{247} For Margaret Fox’s confession, see \textit{New York World}, 21 October 1888. Though she recanted this confession the following year, Nancy Rubin Stuart, \textit{The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox} (Orlando, Fl: Harcourt, 2005), 309.
\item \textsuperscript{248} Modern, \textit{Secularism in Antebellum America}, 223.
\end{footnotes}
Spiritualists also encouraged skeptics to try Spiritualism for themselves.\textsuperscript{250} One of Spiritualism’s more famous scientists, chemistry professor turned Spiritualist Robert Hare saw no distinction between the mind, matter, and spirit, concluding that the natural and the supernatural were not exclusive.\textsuperscript{251} His spiritoscopes directly allowed spirits to deliver their messages and remove the possibility of medium error or charlatanism. The success of mediums, the quality and quantity of the messages received, Hare’s spiritoscopes, and spirit photography all provided evidence for Spiritualism’s scientific modernity and reality.

Answers to immediate queries and issues could be found in Spiritualism. The spirits could suggest who to marry or how to invest their money and provide guidance for both everyday life and major decisions.\textsuperscript{252} The spirits were present in larger, more significant ways too. With their guidance, the spirits helped move along the progress of humanity by conversing and advising those on Earth. As Davis explained, “the intercourse between minds in this world and minds in the other, is just as possible as the oceanic commerce between Europe and America, or as the more common interchange of social sympathies, between man and man, in every-day life.”\textsuperscript{253} Indeed, “the ‘republican’ government envisioned by spiritualists… used neither rhetoric nor ‘coercion’ but openly ‘impressed’ moral order ‘upon their constituents.’”\textsuperscript{254} The progress that the spirits pointed towards was typically one of reform, including abolition, women’s rights, health reform, and labor reform.\textsuperscript{255} Key to the practice of séances, Spiritualist piety focused on “an enhanced understanding of one’s links with the spirit-world.”\textsuperscript{256} From these links, knowledge could be transmitted. Spiritualists could also, in a sense, observe the spirit world, take notes, and apply these observations to their world. From the spirits, Spiritualists gained “a code of governance that guaranteed freedom on earth” and premised independence

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{252} Tromp, “Spirited Sexuality,” 67.
\bibitem{253} Andrew Jackson Davis, \textit{The Present Age and Inner Life; Ancient and Modern Spirit Mysteries Classified and Explained} (1868; Boston: Colby & Rich, Banner Publishing House, 1886), 68. Also see Modern, \textit{Secularism in Antebellum America}, 222.
\bibitem{254} Modern, \textit{Secularism in Antebellum America}, 247.
\bibitem{255} Braude, \textit{Radical Spirits}; and Morita, “Unseen (and Underappreciated) Matters.”
\bibitem{256} Modern, \textit{Secularism in Antebellum America}, 17.
\end{thebibliography}
“upon one’s interconnectedness.” Spiritualism taught that humans were not alone. The spirits who guided them lived in harmonious societies built on fraternal brotherhood.

“Parlez-leur, ils vous répondront”: French Spiritualism in New Orleans

Metaphysical religious thought began gaining firmer ground in New Orleans in 1845, though mesmerism had been accepted by many in New Orleans—including priests—before. Throughout the 1840s, references to mesmerism meetings and lectures and negative expose pieces became common in the local newspapers. The Daily Picayune informed readers of the “awful” effects of mesmerism, as well as the “wonderful effects.” Newspapers advertised local lectures and reported on the medicinal and therapeutic value of the practice but also light-heartedly referred to the “wags” mesmerists had at the expense of others. In July 1843, the Daily Picayune adopted the language of animal magnetism to refer to the city’s current state and interest: “the city at the present time is in a perfect state of mesmerism.”

Joseph Barthet, a French émigré organized the city’s first metaphysical religion organization, the Société du Magnétisme de la Nouvelle-Orléans in April 1845. The Société organized lectures, public demonstrations, developed a library, and attracted a sizable number of French émigrés. One contemporary, local observer explained the appeal of Spiritualism to the city’s Catholic creole population in this way: “Spiritualism has made much more rapid progress among the creole and Catholic portions of our population than the Protestant; first, because most of them have more time for investigation than the rushing hurrying, money-making American, and secondly, the creed of the Catholic Church does not deny the possibility of spirit communication.”

Initially the Société met little opposition from the local Catholic Church. In fact, Father (Abbé) Malavergne was a member, and he and other priests would refer ill congregants to

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257 Ibid, 18.
258 This comes from the tagline of Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans: “Ils ne sont pas morts. Parlez-leur, ils vous répondront” (“They are not dead. Talk to them, they will answer”). Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Vol. 1, (New Orleans: G. Coppens & Co., 1857), quotation on title page. Issues of Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans were later published in yearly volumes for its short publication tenure.
259 The Daily Picayune, 31 March 1843, 5 November 1842.
260 The Daily Picayune, 4 April 1842, 23 February 1843.
261 The Daily Picayune 16 July 1843.
262 Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition, 198.
263 Quoted in Braude, Radical Spirits, 29–30.
mesmerists for help. However, the church’s official periodical Le Propagateur Catholique and its editor Abbé Napoleon Joseph Perché, began to criticize and denounce mesmerism and later Spiritualism. The paper, formed in November 1842, supported both Bishop Antoine Blanc and Catholic Romanization. For example, the paper criticized the St. Louis Cathedral marquilliers and their waning control of the cathedral. Le Propagateur Catholique and Perché sought to maintain proper hierarchical authority in the church, which meant adherence to proper doctrine and dogma and complete recognition of proper religious authorities. The leniency and fluidity of the days of Father Antonio de Sedella and Father Aloysius Leopold Moni—two earlier pastors of St. Louis Cathedral—were over. Sedella and Moni were beloved by the creole Catholics of all skin colors for their openness to freemasons and mesmerists and their support for the creole laity. Despite Catholicism’s long history in Louisiana, some members of the hierarchy, Perché and Blanc included, felt that religious ignorance and immoral indulgence were problems in the city, which Le Propagateur Catholique was to address and correct. In addition to mesmerism, adherents to Spiritualism became targets in Perché’s editorials.

Shortly after news of the Rochester rappings swept the country, Barthet became a believer in and practitioner of Spiritualism. In 1852, Barthet published a Spiritualism manual, the ABC des communications spirituelles, and when the periodical Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans debuted five years later, the communiques received by Barthet’s circle often dominated the pages. The tagline for Le Spiritualiste was “Ils ne sont pas morts. Parlez-leur, ils vous répondront.” “The doctrine of Christ has been disfigured,” the periodical contended, and Spiritualism concerned itself with “the restoring of its purity.” The Catholic Church, its dogma and its hierarchy in particular, received harsh criticism from the spirits that frequented the séance tables of New Orleans Spiritualists of all races. The periodical also printed responses to critics of Spiritualism, often citing the editorials of Perché in Le Propagateur Catholique. In response to their Catholic critics, Le Spiritualiste explained the differences between Spiritualism and

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266 Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition, 201–209.
267 “They are not dead. Talk to them, they will answer.”
268 Le Spiritualiste, 3.
269 One long article responding to Perché’s remarks includes mention of how the Spiritualists had tried to correct him. The article informs readers that the a letter was sent to Le Propagateur Catholique for the priest that responded to his claims regarding Spiritualism, and that Perché chose to continue to misspeak about Spiritualism.
Catholicism. The periodical’s editors argued that Catholicism told people to believe everything it asserted, even if it seemed contradictory and even though this religion did not reveal itself directly to them. Instead, they were to take all that Catholicism claimed on faith. However, Spiritualism said “see, think, question, study.” Unlike Catholicism, Barthet described Spiritualism as a more hands-on religion, in which believers personally engaged spirits and experienced communication with the spirit world.\(^\text{270}\) Though some New Orleanians embraced Spiritualism, others were more cynical and skeptical. Throughout the 1850s, advertisements ran in the local newspapers for lectures on Spiritualism, corresponding reporters sent articles about Spiritualist circles in the northeast, and expose style pieces were also published. In the local press both Spiritualists and their beliefs were often called “humbugs.”\(^\text{271}\)

Another French émigré Charles Testut also became a Spiritualist during the 1850s and published the results of some of his séances in a publication *Manifestations spirituelles*.\(^\text{272}\) Testut’s dedication to the ideals of the French Revolution, his abolitionist stance, and his belief in the brotherhood of man manifested in his séance records, his 1858 novel *Le Vieux Salomon: ou, Une Famille d’esclaves au XIX siècle* (*Old Solomon: or, A Slave Family in the Nineteenth Century*), and in his short-lived 1871 newspaper *L’Équité*. For example, his characters in *Le Vieux Salomon* belonged to a revolutionary secret society called *Les Frères de la Croyance Universelle* (The Brothers of the Universal Faith), a group that transcended racial and gender lines. Testut described the beliefs of the society as including “fraternity, charity, freedom, happiness, the present, the future, the greatness of man on earth and his pleasure in heaven; the equality possible in the social order.”\(^\text{273}\) This belief system possessed similarities with New Orleans Spiritualism in its emphases on fraternity, charity, and equality on earth and in heaven. The worldview of Testut’s characters and of Testut himself also resembled that of Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais, a French revolutionary priest who frequently visited the *Cercle Harmonique*.\(^\text{274}\) Testut’s novel, his 1871 newspaper, and possibly *Manifestations spirituelles* were read by black creoles.\(^\text{275}\) Barthet and others interested in Spiritualism and mesmerism were not only white creoles or French émigrés; rather the séances that Barthet headed were multi-


\(^{271}\) For example, *The Daily Picayune*, 24 November 1853.


racial and attracted some Afro-creoles. A few of these men would emerge as the leaders of the *Cercle Harmonique*.

**“Always follow your path”: Formation of the *Cercle Harmonique***

One New Orleanian medium Barthet held in high esteem was J. B. Valmour (John B. Aversin). Barthet compared him to Jesus and noted how Valmour’s home residence reminded him of the birthplace of “the great Nazarene.” Local blacksmith and respected healer Valmour, a man highly regarded for “the laying on of hands and in the transmission of spiritual messages,” was one of the most renowned black creoles interested in metaphysical religion and an early member of the *Cercle Harmonique*. Police disrupted a séance meeting at Valmour’s house in fall of 1858 under suspicion of practicing Voudouism. Spiritualism’s northern origins, support for abolition and equality, and calls for progressive liberal politics found allies and enemies in the South. In addition to threatening Britten’s southern tour, Spiritualist demonstrations were made illegal in Alabama with a five hundred dollar fine. The message of Spiritualism could threaten the status quo of the South, and thus, those invested in and wanting social and political changes found a religious orientation that interlaced with their goals. The world of spirits located a receptive audience in the free blacks in New Orleans who suffered increasingly restrictive laws and then met with violent resistance to suffrage and racial equality after the Civil War. For Afro-creoles, their social and political aspirations had found a spiritual medium.

The home of Valmour doubled as his blacksmith shop and séance meeting place. Locals would also come to see Valmour for his curative abilities. Grandjean recorded in his notes various cures of Valmour, Nelson Desbrosses, and others, and he reported some of their healing successes. For example, Valmour cured a bishop from Italy who had visited “prominent doctors” in Europe and the United States, but none could restore the bishop’s lost voice. Finally, during the bishop’s visit to New Orleans Valmour cured him with just “a few impositions of his

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278 Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 53. Valmour’s funeral announcement refers to him as “VALMOUR (medium).” *New Orleans Tribune*, 7 February 1869.
280 Ibid, 197.
281 Grandjean collection, 85-92. Grandjean notes include other stories of Valmour’s successful cures. Grandjean 85-36 notes include cures of others, including Lavigne.

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hands.” The most active mediums of the group were Valmour and Louise, and later Rey and friend and fellow medium François “Petit” Dubuclet. Not just the leaders, everyone at the table was important. The spirit of Lamennais informed the circle that one’s value at the table did not necessarily correlate with how vocal one was. Instead, even “the most humble at the table” produce and provide much for the good of the group.

In the group’s earlier years under the leadership of Valmour and Louise, Joanni Questy, Nelson Desbrosses, Adolphe Duhart, Paulin Durel, and Charles Veque also met for séances. Questy, Nesbrosses, and Duhart were well-respected local black creole scholars and poets, active in the publication of *L’Album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles*. *Les Cenelles* was a two-hundred plus page book of poems by seventeen Afro-creole male poets was regarded as a literary triumph by locals of all racial and social classes, and as such, these men were seen as leaders in Afro-creole culture. However, the vast majority of the séances records that have survived focus on the late 1860s and into the mid-1870s under a different core group, though Questy and Desbrosses would remain with Rey’s circle even after they joined Valmour in the spiritual world.

In addition to Rey, the other two primary mediums were Petit and Victor Lavigne. One spirit identified Rey, Petit, and Lavigne as the “blessed trio” who should “be happy” with their “Union.” Lavigne was a healer, medium, and cigar maker who owned a small cigar shop. Other members included Nelson Desbrosses, Emilien Planchard, Emile Luscy, Donatien Déruisé, Maitre Brion, Joseph Alexis, Romain, Jules Mallet, and Lucien Lavigne. Mondays and Fridays were the primary meeting days for the circle, and some members typically attended on a set day (either Monday or Friday). Typically seven members met for each meeting of the *Cercle Harmonique*. The size of the circle was not as important as the quality of spiritual work achieved at a meeting. According to the spirits, three solid mediums could “produce much more than the

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282 Grandjean collection, 85-47; Grandjean notes.
283 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 20 May 1872.
286 1872 and 1873 were the most active years, with 1871 and 1874 following as the next most active.
287 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 31 Jan 1872. Message from “Delauney (father).”
288 Grandjean collection, 85-34; Grandjean notes.
289 Grandjean collection, 85-36; Grandjean notes.
290 Grandjean collection, 85-57; Grandjean notes; and Daggett, “Henry Louis Rey” 48–49.
assembled masses with incoherent ideas.” The harmony of a circle was “due to the wisdom of those who come to join the search” rather than the size, social status, or race of its members. The strength of a circle came from the members’ “work,” not their backgrounds. Former leader Valmour instructed the group to “unite” and “not abandon anyone” of the “Cercle harmonique.” Unity and integrity trumped social rank.

*Cercle Harmonique* leader Rey was a well-educated, “bright mulatto” born into one of the Tremé’s most successful Afro-creole families on February 20, 1831. After his father’s death in 1852, Rey’s life drastically changed in material and spiritual ways. Just one hour after his father’s passing, Rey fleetingly saw the spirit of his father, but when he went to embrace him, the spirit disappeared. Though it would be a handful of years before Rey joined a Spiritualist circle, the experience remained with him. Other spirits also noted the significance of this event in Rey’s development as a Spiritualist “Apostle” and medium. An 1858 message from Rey’s father noted that his son recognized his father’s voice during that early Spiritualist experience but believed it to be an “effect of the imagination.” Rey was the son of Barthélemy and Rose Rey, free Afro-creole émigrés from Saint Domingue who left following the Haitian Revolution. The Rey family was an active and respected one in the city’s Afro-creole community. He grew up in a Catholic household, and his father served on the *Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence*, and he served as the school’s director for the year leading up to his death. In 1857, the same year Rey began to experiment with Spiritualism, he married Adèle Crocker, the daughter of Rose and Pierre Crocker. With his marriage to Adèle, Rey became part of a family with a wide range of religious relationships. Pierre Crocker’s cousin was Henriette Delille, the lead foundress of the Afro-creole *Sœurs de la Sainte Famille*. Additionally, Pierre

293 Grandjean collection, 85-60; 10 November 1875.
294 Pension records describe Rey in this manner, quoted in Daggett, “Henry Louis Rey,” 33.
295 Grandjean collection, 85-30; October 26, 1859. Barthélemy referenced this experience in some of his later messages. Grandjean collection, 85-35; 11 December 1871. “I communicated with my son, May 29, 1852, the day of my departure.”
297 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 29 November 1858.
298 The school was founded with money from the widow Couvent, and she and her husband would later visit Rey’s table. For example, late in April of 1872, Bernard Couvent brought the table a long message, encouraging the table to study the messages they receive and to hone their humility and charity. Grandjean collection, 85-40; 30 April 1872. For more on Rey’s connection to Catholicism, see chapter 3.

Rey became an active Spiritualist shortly following his formal introduction to it, though not immediately. Rey wrote that about three or four months after he heard of Spiritualism for the first time, he tried to levitate a table “out of curiosity” and succeeded. However, this was not yet enough to convince him. On April 19, 1857 Rey attended a séance and “laughed” at what he called “the madness of some people,” but after putting his hand on a chair at the séance table and proclaiming himself to be a medium—in a mocking fashion—he felt his hand shake violently. He identified the spirit in the room as Pierre Crocker, his deceased father-in-law, and asked him questions to confirm this.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-30; October 26, 1859. This particular entry in the register book is a long autobiographical essay detailing the Rey family’s interactions with Spiritualism.} Later that month, Rey attended a séance at the Tremé home of Afro-creole and accomplished medium “Sœur Louise.”\footnote{Bell, \textit{Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition}, 216. In some of his notes, René Grandjean describes Sœur Louise (her last name is not given) as having dark black skin. Grandjean collection, 85-92. Louise would later come to the table as a spirit.} During the séance, he was invited to try receiving messages. His hand began to scribble across the page, writing with a power foreign to Rey’s material body.\footnote{Some of Rey’s registers contain pages of what appears to be pencil scribbling.} He could hear the voices of spirits, and as he grew fatigued, his father instructed him to keep writing, telling him “you are not tired.” From this point onward, Rey would often see the manifestations of various spirits. For example, one afternoon he saw the spirits of a “pretty young lady” and a “big man” on his front porch. He was also a possible clairvoyant.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-45; Grandjean notes.} Rey’s wife Adèle converted to Spiritualism, but not immediately after Rey. Rey reports that Adèle frequently saw the spirit of her father following his death, an experience that often brought her to laughter or tears but not enough emotion to inspire a conversion. However, one night “at midnight we saw our room lit up like a thousand candles,” which prompted Rey to turn to his wife and ask “Do you believe in Spiritualism now?” Another time Rey asked a spirit “to hit” (but in a “positive way”) during the night, and he and his wife were woken up around midnight by the sound of a fist punching the back of their bed. Tests and experiments like this further convinced Rey and Adèle that Spiritualism was real.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 November 1859.}
Henri was not the only Rey who possessed the abilities of a medium. Rey recorded a long essay about his family’s interactions with Spiritualism in one of his earlier registers. His sister Alphontoine and his brother Octave could both access the spirits. Octave was a police chief for the Metropolitan Police in the 1870s and was attacked by the spirit of “some poor urchin thirsty for revenge” one day while patrolling in the Tremé neighborhood. In the coming years, many spirits would lament how Octave ignored and denied his abilities. Even Rey’s father Barthélemy saw the spirit of a grocer three days following his death, but how Rey came about this knowledge is not specified. At least one of Rey’s children, his daughter Lucia, attended at least one séance. The séance records report that she requested O.J. Dunn (African American politician who briefly served as Lieutenant Governor for Louisiana) to come to the table. Dunn was busy at the time—“immersed in reflections on his past life”—but the spirit of “Lucile la vieille” (Lucile the old) assured Lucia that Dunn would come some other time.

Rey’s first register book begins shortly after his first session at Louise’s house. Some of the messages he recorded were marked with the word “Seul,” indicating that Rey practiced Spiritualism alone some of the time early in his career as a medium. This first book spans four years (the longest amount of time for one book), as it was interrupted by Louisiana’s involvement in the Civil War (its entries stop in April 1860 and resume in May 1863 after Rey’s discharge). Rey himself served as a captain in the Louisiana Native Guards when they volunteered for the Confederacy, and he and others surrendered and offered to enlist in the Union Army when General Butler occupied the city. The involvement of free blacks in the Confederate volunteers puzzles some historians. Many blacks undoubtedly enlisted with the Confederacy fearing that otherwise they would be suspected as traitors. Others may have volunteered in order to defend their home city, and at least a few did so to maintain the economic and racial status quo in Louisiana. The black soldiers’ defensive explanation for joining the Confederate troops was

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306 In a message received on May 29, 1871, Barthélemy Rey expressed his joy of seeing both Henri and Octave at the séance table. Grandjean collection, 85-33.
307 Grandjean collection, 85-53; Grandjean notes.
308 In 1874, a Corporal Reading was “sorry” that “Capt. R your brother” (meaning Octave) was not tapping into his powers “as a medium between us and your world.” Grandjean collection, 85-56; 24 August 1874. Message recorded in English.
309 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 30 November 1871.
not fully developed and widely deployed until some were forced to give official statements regarding their volunteer enlistment in the Confederacy. The Native Guards, who saw no active combat while on the Confederate side, were ordered to leave the city as the Union approached. However, they disobeyed Confederate orders, remained in their city, and a committee of four, including Rey and his brother Octave, surrendered their weapons to the Union army. Rey would serve at the level of captain in the Native Guards when mustered for the Union, though he was discharged for medical reasons (disease) before the Battle of Port Hudson which claimed the life of his friend Captain André Cailloux.

In addition to being a medium for others’ words, Rey put his own to paper too. Just months after northern troops took the city, French-speaking black creoles in New Orleans launched *L'Union*, a newspaper dedicated to the interests of the black community. In its inaugural issue in 1862, a poem by Rey entitled “L'Ignorance” was printed. Ignorance, he wrote “suppresses Liberty” and all “apostles of truth”—including Jesus, Joan d’Arc, Christopher Columbus, and Swedenborg—were victimized for speaking the truth. Though the political, social, and religious worlds seemed to enthrone ignorance, truth would bring “Liberty, universal peace, Human happiness, fraternity!” The themes of liberty, progress, peace, and fraternity—so frequently seen in the séance register pages—were emblazoned in Rey’s mind. His Spiritualist orientation molded his understanding of history’s progress and the world’s latent victimization of truth. He also served in local politics. In 1868 Rey was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives, and he even received a message from Valmouir while at the chamber house in February of 1869. In the 1870s Rey served as New Orleans Third District Assessor and was appointed as a member of the Orleans Parish School Board.

François “Petit” Dubuclet was another leader of the *Cercle Harmonique*. Petit’s father Antoine Dubuclet served as Louisiana State Treasurer (on the Republican ticket) from 1868 until

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311 Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 118–119.
313 *L'Union*, 27 September 1862.
Antoine Dubuclet appointed his two sons, Petit and Auguste, as his assistants. Both Antoine and his first wife Claire Pollard Dubuclet (Petit and Auguste’s mother) were part of the gens de couleur libres. Both of his parents brought land and slaves to the marriage. In fact, with the profit from his sugar plantation, Antoine Dubuclet was one of Louisiana’s wealthiest free men of color during the antebellum era. His parents’ civil union in New Orleans in the 1830s was followed by a proper Catholic marriage in France. Claire died in 1852; later when she would manifest at the Cercle Harmonique’s séance table, she identified herself as Claire Pollard instead of her married name. Starting in 1865, the Dubuclet brothers would practice Spiritualism with their friend Rey, though, it seems only Petit would continue into the 1870s.

Though always there in spirit, Valmour’s material life ended before the Cercle Harmonique’s prime. The beloved medium remained close to his friends and fellow Spiritualists years after his death. Valmour died February 6, 1869 at four in the morning. On the eighth of the previous month, Rey and Petit received a message that Valmour identified as the announcement of his impending death. In it, the spirit of Nelson Desbrosses and others spoke highly of Valmour’s character and abilities as a medium and healer. The spirits told the circle, “dear and loving friend of suffering humanity, we are here waiting with the patience of those who have to share eternity! At your coming here, your friends will have a great procession.” On the day Valmour died, Saint Vincent de Paul visited the Cercle Harmonique to comfort them. He assured them that Valmour’s spirit was among them and had “conquered his place at the top of the luminous mountain of progress and the goodness of God.” Furthermore, God was “happy and content with the one who was called.” The members of the Cercle Harmonique left behind were instructed to not only follow Valmour’s example but also to care for his widow and children. Saint Vincent de Paul was not alone in his high regard for Valmour. When the spirit of Lamennais complimented Andrew Jackson Davis for being “learned and luminous,” he also noted that “[Charles H.] Foster, [Emma] Hardinge, and Valmour” were further “proof of our

318 Grandjean collection, 85-31; Grandjean notes.
320 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 6 February 1869.
existence that speaks to the mind and soul of all.”³²¹ Another spirit noted Davis for his “love and charity,” Valmour for his charity, and Sister Louise for her hard work.³²²

Valmour would frequently return to the séance table from the other side as a spirit. He reaffirmed his status as a healer, blessed by “Providence” with the ability “to throw the regenerative fluid.” Though outsiders accused him of “charlatanism,” he knew he was in the right and encouraged his devoted brothers to continue in the face of their critics.³²³ In a rare message recorded in English, Valmour seems to forgive Rey (calling him by name, “Henri”) for any of Rey’s offenses. This suggests that there may have been some amount of tension early on the circle between the two powerful mediums. However, as a spirit and now “more than a man,” Valmour did not worry about such things. Instead, he came to the table to express his love and respect for the Cercle Harmonique and their work.³²⁴ Though Valmour, like other spirits, instructed Afro-creole Spiritualists to not be attached to things and persons on the earth, he admitted that in the spiritual world that he missed Petit. Interestingly enough, in light of the message in which he forgave Rey for his past offenses, he did not mention missing Rey.³²⁵

One reason for the tension between Rey and Valmour was their disagreement on how public the séances should be, and in death Valmour seemed to have moved closer to Rey’s desire to restrict strangers. Though it was good that the circle accepted all to the table, Valmour’s spirit warned that they should not allow vagabonds with “disorderly manners” who might taint the circle’s harmony and effectiveness. “To be generous and great is lofty,” he admitted, “but, the animal that is infected by a contagious disease must be separated from the flock by the good shepherd …” In the end, the unity of the circle must be preserved, especially since the circle had many critics. A “systematic opposition” was “at work in order to hamper the ascending march of Truth!”³²⁶ Though Valmour and Rey disagreed on earth, when Rey received messages from Valmour, the spirit of his former mentor now agreed with him.

³²¹ Grandjean collection, 85-41; 7 May 1872.
³²³ Grandjean collection, 85-42; 22 June 1872.
³²⁴ His message also seemed to have a bit of urgency to it. The message concludes, “The hour has come, I want you to be true to God and to thy family. Remember tonight and be true to all.” Grandjean collection, 85-34; 27 November 1871.
³²⁵ Grandjean collection 85-31; 7 April 1869. Valmour shouts that he missed Petit in two short back-to-back messages.
³²⁶ Grandjean collection, 85-35; 19 December 1871. Message from Valmour signed “your brother and friend.”
In addition to being an emotional connection, the relationship between spirit and medium was a personal and sensory one.\textsuperscript{327} Because spiritual work was difficult, the spirits needed “energetic and dedicated souls.”\textsuperscript{328} According to Saint Vincent de Paul, the spirits sought “in perfect harmony … to control” the bodies of the mediums or use clairvoyance “to make them reach certain levels.”\textsuperscript{329} On another occasion, Paul described a medium as “the true agent,” “he who is in charge of activating the sacred fire of the Philosophy of love and charity,” and “the apostle giving voice to an evangelical and angelic gospel: the writings of the Law of Right and Equity, the divine teachings of the spiritual world, knowledge of the Infinite and the Beauties of eternal and spiritual life.” Indeed, being “the intermediary between Heaven and Earth” was no small task.\textsuperscript{330} According to Swedenborg, a medium was “an apostle who receives and gives the word of truth” and like a “physician who soothes but does not send the [bill] Collector”—someone good, truthful, generous, and selfless. Swedenborg’s affinity for metaphor continued, describing the medium as “the wire that transmits to Humanity the results of discoveries of Spiritual Science and principles derived from it.”\textsuperscript{331} A medium became more advanced the more selfless he acted.\textsuperscript{332} “Mediumistic powers” were “natural,” but “he who is advanced in this work by the state of his soul can enlighten you and cause the beneficent force of your faculties to increase.”\textsuperscript{333}

Spiritual work was not easy, and most spirits recognized this. As such, messages periodically arrived that celebrated the skills and character of the \textit{Cercle Harmonique’s} members. For example, the spirit identified as Alpha called Romain “quiet” and modest;” Mallet was a “young child in study but with a prepared mind;” Lavigne was an “Apostle;” and the “wisdom of Petit” was something to be admired.\textsuperscript{334} In another, Tillius was described as “a child

\textsuperscript{327} Once when the spirit of Voltaire used Rey as his medium for communication, Rey described the hand of Voltaire as “very energetic.” Grandjean collection, 85-42; Grandjean notes.
\textsuperscript{328} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 November 1871.
\textsuperscript{329} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 20 March 1867.
\textsuperscript{330} Grandjean collection, 85-32; 5 April 1870. Message from Sister Louise.
\textsuperscript{331} Furthermore, Swedenborg’s spirit explained that since the medium was between “your and Our World … he must be purified.” He is “the one who prepares the way of progress … leading to the Temple of Truth and Happiness.” Grandjean collection, 85-33; 17 May 1871.
\textsuperscript{332} Grandjean collection, 85-46; 20 October 1872. Message from Mesmer. Additionally, mediums who were “materialistic” or chose not to help others should be avoided. Grandjean collection, 85-59; 8 March 1875. Message from a spirit signed as “X.”
\textsuperscript{333} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 25 July 1872. Message from Abner.
\textsuperscript{334} Grandjean collection, 85-40; 28 April 1872.
who has received the light.” In another message, Mallet was recognized for receiving “Light,” Petit for possessing “confidence,” and Lavigne for providing “stability.” Mallet, Petit, and Rey all were “developing extraordinarily.” Lunel also described the work of the “dedicated” brothers Petit and Rey as “beautiful” and “beneficial,” which was exceptionally admirable considering that they were “working in the midst of corruption.” Petit was “a pillar of confidence and abnegation,” while Rey illuminated “the Route by his confidence, his dedication, his prodigious strength of humanitarian love, and his great dedication.” High praise like this coming from the spiritual spheres helped motivate the Cercle Harmonique even if much of the New Orleans society disagreed with their religion or politics.

An “instructive lesson, a solemn meditation, and exchange of thought”: Séance Meetings

The Cercle Harmonique’s séance meetings had multiple pleasant effects. After a meeting, one could feel the aftereffects of the achieved harmony “for three days.” The “happy influence” of that “harmony of souls” could make a soul feel “so full of grand emotions and ineffable joys.” The Cercle Harmonique typically met in the evenings, but sometimes the spirits arrived on their own time. For example, the spirit of John Jones manifested at 3:25 one afternoon, and though he noted that the time was “strange to me,” he rationalized it since “the truth shines everywhere” and at all times. After the group established their harmony, the spirits who manifested at meetings were the ones who initiated communication. Though Rey’s daughter had requested the spirit of O.J. Dunn to the table once, this was rare. In fact, a spirit named Sophia instructed the circle to “never call any Spirit” by name for “often he cannot come, and another then could take his name.” Therefore, the circle should always “weigh” each message “with your Reason” and make sure it is accurate and comes from a good spirit.

The Cercle Harmonique recorded the messages they received, and messages would be read and reflected on in later meetings. A key reason why the Spiritualists kept good records

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337 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 8 August 1872.
340 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 3 May 1872.
341 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 8 October 1872.
342 A medium, as a true apostle of Spiritualism, “must write what is dictated;” thus, the messages recorded in the séance books and read back at later meetings could be trusted. Grandjean collection, 85-40; 2 May 1872. Message
of their séances was because the spirits told them to do so. Simply put, the communications the Cercle Harmonique received were “for instruction.” Transcribing the spirits’ “thinking” helped illuminate the “Road” of humanity’s progress. The spirits encouraged the Cercle Harmonique to “keep all these writings and especially reread what we give you.” A circle could be strengthened by reading previous messages. Or, as put by another spirit, the pages should be “constantly reread” in order to “develop many Truths.” Similarly, Saint Vincent de Paul explained that the pages of the séance records were to be read at the beginning of each session “to prepare you.” The spirits also occasionally referenced earlier messages, signaling that the books’ communications were read again and again. Other mediums affiliated with the Cercle Harmonique also kept records of séances. Unfortunately Valmour’s books were misplaced and lost after his death, as were the books from Louise’s circle.

In addition to keeping their records, the spirits instructed the Afro-creole Spiritualists to arrive at meetings “with abnegation, charity, good will, and love of humanity at heart.” More precise regulations for the séances were put to paper on a later day. In spring of 1872, the Cercle Harmonique wrote some rules for their séances in one of Rey’s register books. They explained that the purpose of the séance meetings was “to accelerate the development of the faithful believers,” who, additionally, were “required to be punctual.” The séance was to begin with “the lecture of some spiritual communication” in order to prepare the group “for a good harmony,” and “in order to avoid any interruption, the door should be kept closed while the lecture lasts.”

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348 Grandjean collection, 85-37; 22 November 1875.
349 For example, Père Antoine reminded the Rey of his earlier messages at the circle of Louise. Grandjean collection, 85-63; 13 May 1877. Since Rey was likely practicing alone at this time, the years of messages he and others had compiled for years were consulted and regarded like a treasured friend.
When the lecturer concludes, everyone was to calmly take their “habitual” seats at the table, and no one was to be admitted to the séance once it began. The only allowed conversation at any point are those related “to Spirituality,” and “no conversation either political or otherwise … will be tolerated before or while the séance.” Despite having set these structuring rules, and their inclusion of punctuality, someone must have arrived late shortly thereafter. The first message to arrive after the setting of these rules came from Claire Pollard, who began her message stating,

> It is understood, my brothers, that the belated ones, arriving after their lecture, would take their places at the table with respect and in a deep meditation so as not to disturb the harmony already established among the present ones. A minute in one’s life seems a trifle but often is of consequence, carries its weight. Thus, come to the table of spirits as soon as it is possible for you to be there.

One can safely assume that the latecomer felt duly shamed; as Pollard’s spirit said on another occasion, “listen to your mother.” Arriving on time to the meetings was important in order to be present for the opening lecture. Lunel explained that reading at the “Table of Truth” could chase away “the worldly thoughts” and focus the group on higher ideals.

Like all people, not every meeting of the Cercle Harmonique was perfect. Even one unfocused member could “produce unfortunate influences.” In one of Rey’s séance books, a message from Lunel explained why the previous evening’s séance failed. Though there was more than one reason why the meeting was unsuccessful, the primary reason in this case was the “disposition of several brothers who had the idea to go somewhere else” but chose to attend the séance anyways “in fear of losing their rights and privileges to attend the meeting on Monday.” (Monday was the main meeting of the Cercle Harmonique, with Grandjean describing Friday as the meeting of the “ordinary circle.”) Distractions, apparently due to “material interests” in this case, could disrupt the harmony of the séance and render the meeting tedious, ineffective, and unfulfilling. In another message, “the Unknown” (an anonymous spirit), called out Planchard for not meeting his full spiritual potential. Opening the lines of communication between the spiritual world and the earthly world was not always easy. Thinking

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353 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 1 April 1872.
354 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 14 July 1872.
355 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 13 August 1872.
357 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 9 April 1872.
358 Grandjean collection, 85-57; Grandjean notes.
“holy and pure things” was what facilitated “moral and elevated manifestations” of the séance.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-60; 4 October 1875. Message from Jeanne Dastugue.} It was difficult, a spirit explained, for spirits to manifest to the circle if “the necessary currents” were not established between them. On an evening where the séance must not have been overly successful, the spirit of former politician Daniel Webster comforted the circle, telling them not to be “discouraged” and advised them forward.\footnote{The circle had recently welcomed a “child” to the table and since then had “very little success.” Webster’s advice was to first “procure, if possible, a well-developed medium; so that we may insinuate our ideas with more facility.” Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the circle should make sure that the child understood the purpose of Spiritualism and possessed a supportive family. If the child’s relatives, “especially of the father and mother,” held contrary beliefs, this could be the problem. However, the child’s presence at the table and hearing “this wholesome lecture” should help rectify the problem. Grandjean collection, 85-31; 23 January 1866.}

At one point in the circle’s tenure, likely in May 1871, the Cercle Harmonique recorded a “Spiritual Invocation” in their records that reads much like a common prayer. It opened by thanking their “Eternal and infinitely Good Father” for their place on the earth, followed by a statement of purpose: uniting their “hearts in search of Truth, to illuminate our souls with the Good, Love and Charity.” They asked “the spirits of Peace and Light” to guide them, put them “on the path of eternal progression,” and “drive away the darkness.” With the “strength to break with error, ignorance and superstition of all false doctrine,” the Cercle Harmonique sought the “Light” of the spirits’ “Wisdom” to “enlightens our minds, console our hearts” and “render a brilliant and solemn Path that leads to your holy and eternal abodes, to be received with honor and glory, for the purification and sanctification of our souls.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 November 1871.}

Though meetings typically were small, Saint Vincent de Paul suggested that the Cercle Harmonique was larger than they knew. Deceased circle members and other spirits in the spiritual world worked with them, as well as “many workers [on Earth] who do not have a brave enough soul to admit the Truth of their research.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-44; 23 August 1872. Message in English from Thomas Warrick who claims to have been born in New York, arrive in New Orleans in 1852, and die of yellow fever in 1857. Though he could not} More significantly, the spirits who came to the mediums expanded the size of the circle by an extremely large degree. The spirits ranged from family members, friends, local priests, Enlightenment thinkers, or even American celebrities such as U.S. Presidents or Pocahontas. Some spirits who manifested at the Cercle Harmonique’s table came primarily to identify themselves, perhaps express their disappointment that they could not communicate with their own families, or note the truth of Spiritualism.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-64.}
example, in death, even a self-described “rabid, fanatic Baptist” recognized the truth of Spiritualism.\textsuperscript{365} Others expressed regret for their earthly lives and the choices they had made.\textsuperscript{366} And many spirits communicated their political opinions.

Major figures in Spiritualism’s own history came to the Cercle Harmonique. Mesmer encouraged them to remain steadfast to Spiritualism even if they only achieved “mediocre success.” Progress would still be on the way and Mesmer and other spirits “will always be ready to assist in your development and the success of your noble enterprise.”\textsuperscript{367} Swedenborg too assured them that the spirits’ messages—which came “from Heaven”—“never fail” because they were the “intellectual seeds that will grow.”\textsuperscript{368} It was also common for spirits to sign off in the plural. Swedenborg concluded this particular message with “we will return,” suggesting that though one spirit might deliver the communique, a large contingent of spirits stood behind the message.\textsuperscript{369} The ideas of figures like Swedenborg and Mesmer were also present among Rey’s table. Mesmer himself encouraged medium-healers to not be discouraged if all of their cures by “fluids” were unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{370} A spirit simply identified as “Curious” described how both material bodies and the spirits could make use of “electro-magnetic fluid.”\textsuperscript{371} Swedenborg noted the effectiveness of magnetism, and another message explained how “magnetism” was “evidence of the superiority of the mind.”\textsuperscript{372} Even the spirit of Confucius recognized the power of fluids.\textsuperscript{373}
Deceased family members of circle attendees frequented *Cercle Harmonique* meetings. In American Spiritualism, the spirits of deceased family members typically signified part of a family’s mourning process and, more broadly, Victorian America’s “obsessive interest in death.”\(^{374}\) The “burden” of mourning could be more easily born by communicating with the dead and receiving assurance from loved ones that they were happy in the spiritual world.\(^{375}\) This does not seem to be the impetus behind messages from *Cercle Harmonique* deceased family members. Messages often came years after a father’s, mother’s, sister’s, etc. death, and while the spirit may reference their own satisfaction in the spiritual world, their messages more often contained an endorsement for Spiritualism than comfort for grieving loved ones. Claire Pollard frequently manifested, particularly if her son “P. Dubuclet” (Petit) was the medium, and she primarily delivered messages of encouragement. One December day her son’s hand wrote “be patient, gentle, and kind. Redouble your courage.” She often assured her son and his fellow Spiritualists that she and other spirits were “around you” as “your Invisible protectors!”\(^{376}\) Rey’s father Barthélemy often came with messages for his son and his circle. Another spirit reported that Barthélemy cried with “the immense joy of a victorious father” because he watched his “victorious child in the struggle.”\(^{378}\) After the death of friend Agalice Black, Barthélemy assured the circle that her sprit was “happy” now. She had fulfilled her mission as “wife and mother especially,” and now due to the “nobility of her sentiments,” her “soul was able to rise to us.”\(^{379}\) Another member’s father validated the circle’s practice, telling the Spiritualists “today I am in the spiritual world” and now “I see the Truth.”\(^{380}\)

*Cercle Harmonique* member Victor Lavigne’s sister, Henriette Lavigne, apologized on Christmas 1865 for not visiting sooner but explained that she had been unable to manifest to the *Cercle Harmonique* due to the “crowds” of more advanced spirits that frequently surrounded the table.\(^{381}\) The spirit of Joseph Rey, Henri’s grandfather, had progressed much in the years since 1857 by following “the circle of Louise and Valmouir” and hearing the messages of the

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\(^{376}\) Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 December 1865.

\(^{377}\) Grandjean collection, 85-48; 9 December 1872.

\(^{378}\) Grandjean collection, 85-38; 15 January 1872. Message from “your devoted brother, Lunel (who watches.”

\(^{379}\) Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 June 1870.


\(^{381}\) Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 December 1865. She also delivered a more general messages of encouragement and advice, see Grandjean collection 85-48; 7 December 1872 and 12 December 1872.
“Invisibles who visited.” Adèle Crocker Rey’s mother and father also appeared at the séance table. In one message her father described his apparent suicide, explaining that he “succumbed to a weakness that made me take my life.” He was “afraid to face the world” and now awaited “the hour of deliverance.” It is possible that this message was also an apology for the plaçage relationship that he kept with Marie Laveau’s daughter Marie Heloïse Euchariste Glapion. Adèle’s mother Rose regretted that she was not able to see her children practice Spiritualism during her time on Earth. Emilien Planchard’s brother Charles came to the table with some regularity, often with a message of encouragement. Charles also reported that because he watched his brother’s work, he too was “progressing” in the spiritual world. Emile Luscy’s father encouraged his son to continue practicing Spiritualism and keeping his place at the Cercle Harmonique’s circle for it gave him “Truth.”

During a séance with Joséphine Dubuclet (Petit’s younger half-sister) present, her deceased husband, Antoine Décuir, appeared despite having not believed in Spiritualism during his life. He came to encourage Joséphine to continue progressing. In another message, Décuir apologized to Joséphine for his faults as a husband and father. During the first séance that Petit assisted on, his sister Rosalie Dubuclet manifested herself through a medium who had fallen asleep at the séance table. Upon waking, the medium had no memory of the communication. Georges Bally Dubuclet, another Dubuclet family member, also visited the Cercle Harmonique. He was raised in France and upon arrival to Louisiana was disgusted with slavery and left for Tampico, Mexico. Petit’s deceased younger sister Claire Dubuclet also manifested to the Afro-

382 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 17 June 1871. Also see Grandjean collection, 85-38; 2 February 1872.
383 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 November 1871 for message from Pierre. See 85-35; 13 December 1871 for a message from Rose Crocker immediately followed by one from Pierre.
384 A message from a spirit identified as “A. Glapion” was recorded on 25 July 1872. Crocker and Glapion had a daughter named Adelai Aldina who died in 1871. Grandjean collection, 85-43. For Glapion/Crocker genealogy, see Carolyn Morrow Long, A New Orleans Voudou Priestess, 183.
386 For example, on 12 Feb 1872, Charles described “courage and patience” as “magic words.” Grandjean collection, 85-36. Also see Grandjean collection, 85-38; 5 January 1872.
387 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 3 February 1872.
388 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 10 May 1872.
389 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 3 February 1867.
390 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 4 March 1867.
391 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 20 May 1866. Details on the medium found in Grandjean notes accompanying the message. For another message from Rosalie Dubuclet, see Grandjean collection, 85-51; 18 July 1873.
392 Grandjean collection, 85-31; Grandjean notes. It is unclear how this Dubuclet is related to Petit. He was likely a cousin or uncle.
creole circle. But it would be Claire Pollard, Petit’s mother, who along with Barthélemy Rey were the most frequent deceased family members who visited the table.

Major figures of French Revolutionary thought also delivered messages, including Montesquieu, Maximilien de Robespierre, and Lamennais. François Rabelais also appeared occasionally. Saint Vincent de Paul visited the table frequently, as well as the spirits of other Catholics. Other famous figures who visited the circle’s table include Confucius, Lorenzo Dow, Montezuma, and Pocahontas. A spirit identified as Cagliostro, likely a reference to Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, the alias of Italian occultist Giuseppe Balsamo, delivered a brief message in September of 1877 to Rey instructing him to continue meeting and uniting with his brothers. Some spirits, like [John Wilkes] “Booth” and Robert E. Lee, came to apologize for their past offenses, particularly those related to slavery, violence, and politics. Some of Rey’s fellow soldiers from the Louisiana Native Guards, most notably André Cailloux and John Crowder also appeared to the Cercle Harmonique. Cailloux in particular cared for the Cercle Harmonique in a “brotherly” fashion after death, though he avoided Spiritualism in life. Victims and “martyrs” also frequently manifested to the Afro-creole Spiritualists, particularly Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, and the victims of the local 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot.

Former local Spiritualists visited the Cercle Harmonique, including Cercle Harmonique member Jules Mallet, who died in 1875. Beloved local Afro-creole writer Nelson Debrosses also communicated with the Cercle Harmonique from beyond the grave, encouraging his former circle mates to continue their struggle and prepare for the spiritual spheres he now inhabited. In one message Joseph Barthet, the former leader of the French émigré Spiritualist group, lamented how little most circles persist and succeed in their spiritual work. Joanni Questy

393 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 February 1869.
395 For Dow, see Grandjean collection, 85-52; 9 November 1873. Dow’s message arrived in English and attested that he was in the “light.” For Montezuma, see Grandjean collection 85-35; 18 December 1871 (2 messages). For Pocahontas, see Grandjean collection, 85-35; 27 December 1871. Spirits named Pacoha, Poloah, and Piloho followed Pocahontas.
396 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 14 September 1877.
397 Grandjean collection, 85-58; 13 December 1874.
399 Grandjean collection, 85-47; 7 November 1872.
400 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 27 Aug 1872. Grandjean collection, 85-63; 18 October 1877. A message from a spirit identified as E. Marc recorded a few days later is noted as being a member of Barthet’s circle. Grandjean collection, 85-63; 23 October 1877. Grandjean notes. On another occasion, a spirit simply identified as “Barthet” accompanied two other spirits in a brief message of encouragement. Grandjean collection, 85-31; 8 December 1865.
would communicate with the *Cercle Harmonique* from beyond the grave and help deliver the messages of spirits not yet able to communicate on their own.\(^{401}\) He encouraged the Spiritualists to “come to the Table of Truth” and never leave it.\(^{402}\) Though Questy might have been respected and admired, he did not claim perfection in the spiritual world. He regretted that he “hesitated” and “sat there lazily” during his earthly life. He complimented Rey and others for their efforts and predicted that they would “reach the perfectible Regions” and “walk in triumph.”\(^{403}\)

As a spirit, Louise, the medium who first advised Rey, received a “grand and magnificent” reward for her spiritual work on earth. “Thousands of spirits” had been waiting for her to join them in “in the world of happiness and unspeakable joy.” Though she encouraged the circle to look forward to the spiritual world where she now was, she did not forget the challenges of the material life. “I see you, my poor brothers and sisters, in your world of miseries and disappointments,” she acknowledged. Indeed, “the heart grieves, working for Future which is not yours” and feeling the “fatigue of material life.” Though life may seem bitter, the *Cercle Harmonique* should have “courage and patience” for “there will be happiness for you.”\(^{404}\) She also promised them that their hard work would be rewarded in the spiritual world and that “the spirit of Louise” would always be there to guide them.\(^{405}\)

It is possible that the *Cercle Harmonique* believed that they also could communicate with the spirits of the living. A spirit named Adolphe Duhart, who described himself as intelligent, lamented that he, like other “poor devils,” believed he received “absolution” but had been going to Mass and confession out of “fear of mortal sin.”\(^{406}\) Adolphe Duhart was the name of a local dramatist and instructor at the *Ecole des Orphelins*, the school operated by the *Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence*.\(^{407}\) Additionally, he was a medium who practiced Spiritualism with Valmouir and Rey in their earlier years and held séances at his home in the late 1850s.\(^{408}\) Born a free man of color in New Orleans in the late 1830s, he was educated in France. Under the pseudonym Lélia he published poetry in *La Tribune de la*...

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\(^{402}\) Grandjean collection, 85-41; 15 May 1872.

\(^{403}\) Grandjean collection, 85-43; 15 July 1872.

\(^{404}\) Grandjean collection, 85-33; 9 June 1871.

\(^{405}\) Grandjean collection, 85-51; 14 June 1873. Grandjean collection, 85-36; 1 April 1872.

\(^{406}\) Grandjean collection, 85-38; 6 February 1872.


Nouvelle Orléans in the 1860s, and his play Lélia ou la victime du préjugé was performed at the Théâtre Orléans in June 1866. Given that Duhart traveled in similar social circles as members of the Cercle Harmonique, taught at the Ecole des Orphelins, and was a medium, it is not a far leap to conclude that the poet and dramatist was believed to be the spirit behind the message.

Other New Orleans locals beyond family members also delivered messages to the Cercle Harmonique, often to affirm the truth of Spiritualism. Local district court judge Charles Leaumont, who also seemed to have been a Spiritualist himself, also appears a few times in the Cercle Harmonique’s records. Paul Bertus, who briefly served New Orleans as mayor in 1838 and again in 1843, was a fairly frequent visitor to the table to speak of the dangers of materialism and the glories of Spiritualism. Additionally, Rey’s former employer Eugene Hacker, at whose Tremé hardware store Rey worked as a young man, also appeared. A spirit identified as “Charles Laveau” encouraged forgiveness in February 1872. Charles Laveau was the name of famed Marie Laveau’s French creole father, but being a common last name could be a reference to another Laveau. However, considering the rise in popularity of Voudou in the 1870s, particularly its coverage in the local press, it is quite possible that it is a reference to the priestess’s father.

During the circle’s tenure under Valmour’s leadership, séances were often public with strangers and newcomers at every meeting. These visitors typically asked for proof of

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410 A spirit identified as Frank Attman manifested in December of 1873 and assured the circle that “it is really me!” after noting how the circle seemed to be “surprise[d]” by his appearance. Grandjean collection, 85-52; 4 December 1873. Other spirits identified who they were and wanted to deliver a short message. The spirit of Paul Mateo, a “good boy” known in “Bayou Lafourche” informed the circle that he was “calm and happy.” Grandjean collection, 85-54; 8 April 1874. The same day as his death in Baton Rouge, the spirit of Henry Shephard reported his happiness in the spiritual world. Grandjean collection, 85-58; 23 November 1874.

411 According to Grandjean’s notes next to a message from Leaumont received on 12 April 1872, Leaumont must have owned copies of Andrew Jackson Davis’s works because he saw copies with “Charles Leaumont” written on the inside cover. Grandjean collection, 85-36.

412 Grandjean collection, 85-37; 10 Feb 1873.

413 A few months following Hacker’s suicide in 1871, a deceased family member of his (a Dr. Hacker) explained to Rey and others that Hacker mourned for the family he left struggling behind. Grandjean collection, 85-35; 12 December 1871. Grandjean collection, 85-63; Grandjean notes. Three years later in 1874, Hacker still lamented the sorrows of the “grieving family” he left behind but happily reported that he had progressed in spiritual knowledge in the years since his death. Grandjean collection, 85-58; 28 October 1874.

414 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.

Spiritualism or for messages from their deceased family. Rey disproved of this decision and argued that it often inhibited the circle’s progress. Following Valmours death, strangers were rare at the séance table though some family or friends would periodically attend. One periodic visitor sitting at the Cercle Harmonique’s table was the wife of deceased Louisiana Lieutenant Governor O.J. Dunn. For example, on June 3, 1874, Dunn appeared at the table at the request of his wife. Dunn expressed his happiness and gratitude to the circle for the “impression” the circle would leave on his wife Fanny and her subsequent “development.” A local by the last name of Ehrmann also attended séances from time to time in 1874, and when he attended, his daughter Pauline would manifest. Another local by the last name of Scharff also occasionally attended meetings of the Cercle Harmonique for a brief time.

Communication between the spiritual world and Spiritualists on earth like the Cercle Harmonique was equated with the “Gospels” for they were both “noble, beautiful, and comforting.” Fostering this communication was “the fraternal chain that connects Earth to Heaven, Heaven to Earth” which consisted of “Valmour, Rey, Petit, Joanni, Louis, Tillius, Lavinge, [and] Sœur François Degruy.” The spirits described the work of the Afro-creole Spiritualists highly. Valmours described the Cercle Harmonique as “the light that shines within.” An anonymous spirit stated that a “brother” must show “progress” in order to become a member of the Cercle Harmonique or any other Spiritualist circle. The spirit believed that progress and hard work were necessary for members of the Cercle Harmonique because

416 Grandjean collection, 85-31; Grandjean notes.
417 Grandjean collection, 85-55.
418 Grandjean collection, 85-58; 25 November 1874. Not surprising considering that Dunn was African American in background rather than Afro-creole, his messages arrived in English.
420 At times, the note “séance with Scharff” is scribbled in French by a message. Scharff’s attendance must have been short-lived; references to his attendance and messages from his sister only appear in February and March of 1874. His sister Marie Louise Scharff encouraged the Cercle Harmonique to keep her brother at the table for it benefited him greatly. She assured the circle that if they could convince her brother to attend meetings, she would provide the proof of Spiritualism. Grandjean collection, 85-53; 8 February 1874. Also see Grandjean collection, 85-53; 10 February 1874. In this message “your sister Marie Louise” promised her brother, who was in attendance, that she would help him develop. Also see, Grandjean collection, 85-54; 22 March 1874.
422 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 16 August 1874.
abnegation and struggle were requirements for Spiritualists. A truly harmonic séance would only occur if “each member” shined.  

423 Volney (Constantin François de Chassebœuf, the Comte de Volney, whose presence at the Cercle Harmonique will be discussed in chapter 4) described “the harmonic circle” as “the study” done by a group “desiring communion together to help each other in research.”

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“Always be vigilant about the state of your heart”: Spiritualism According to the Spirits

The “dear children of progress,” as Saint Vincent de Paul called the Cercle Harmonique once, should “always be vigilant about the state of your heart, you have to work to purify [your heart] day after day, to be worthy of the One who created you.” Thus, he warned them not to “drag” their spirits “through the mud.”

425 The following four chapters will examine more closely the views expressed by the spirits and the Afro-creole Spiritualists regarding Catholicism, politics, society, violence, and death. This chapter concludes with a brief look at the beliefs and ideas of Spiritualism as described by the spirits at Rey’s table, with a focus on materialism, unity, and the importance of spiritual work.

Many of the messages centered on humanitarian progress, equality, egalitarianism, brotherhood, and harmony. Freedom was humanity’s natural state. Additionally, the spirits were particularly concerned about humanity’s proclivity for materialism. Materialism was a term they used to describe greed for possessions and power or for an overwhelming focus on the temporary material world. Materialism “enveloped” people “in darkness.”

426 Materialism was the “vile” source of “antagonism” and angling for “supremacy” in society. It created “selfishness, pride, and vanity.”

427 Materialism was not only associated with greed for material possession but also with greed for power. The spirit of J. Olivier lamented how materialism often led people “astray from the path of the Just.”

428 Materialism was also the reason why many denied Spiritualism.

429 In contrast, Spiritualism was “the theory of love because it rejects materialism completely.”

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423 Grandjean collection 85-32; 3 September 1874. Message signed X.
424 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 25 August 1872.
426 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 3 September 1873. Message from “A brother.”
428 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 19 March 1873. The spirits also, at times, enjoyed shaming or chastising those on earth. C. Boudreau criticized “you who commend, extol vice, and even make a parade of it, taking pride in doing so, and who think yourselves to be ‘worthy men’ by what your materialism teaches you.” Indeed, “you extol vice and make a show of your prostitution” only further display “your infamous corruption.” Grandjean collection, 85-51; 20 March 1873.
Contrary to materialism, abnegation was a desirable trait for Spiritualists. The spirit of Valmoul described it as “necessary” for Spiritualists because material interests not only distracted people but could disrupt a séance. On another occasion, Valmoul identified abnegation as a “prerequisite” for spiritual “progress.” Indeed, abnegation was “the distinctive mark of the advancement of a true spiritualist!” A spirit’s “triumph” in the spiritual world, such as Valmoul’s, was “due to his abnegation.” Though a “humble blacksmith,” he now fulfilled “the grand role of Spiritualist Apostle” because of his admirable “love and charity.” Spiritualists proved their abnegation through their spiritual labor. Père Antoine warned the group to fight and “master your passions,” or else the “strength of materialism” would keep them weak.

Though materialism and money could promise happiness, they made people miserable. “The happiness” people sought “so vainly” during their earthly existence would be found in the spiritual world “overflowing each soul with brilliant rays.” The “bitter fruit” of materialism unfortunately kept some captive to greed. A clear effect of materialism’s greed was gambling, which slowly destroyed one’s soul. “Unhappy” were those who spent their time in the “infamous gambling dens.” “Gambling and debauchery” were two “infamous vices.” Additionally, gambling and prostitution were two corruptions that reinforced each other. A man who frequented the “gambling dens” subjected himself to a “degrading torture.”

429 A spirit identifying himself as “a brother” encouraged the circle to “call your brothers and sisters” to the table but warned that many would not listen due to “Fear, Indifference, and Materialism.” Grandjean collection, 85-52; 7 December 1873.
430 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 30 December 1871. Message from Lunel, “a devoted brother.”
431 A materialistic medium (and thus, not a desirable medium) might “dictate what they wished for” rather than what the spirits actually dictated. Grandjean collection, 85-41; 29 May 1872.
432 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 10 April 1872.
433 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 14 February 1873. Message from “a brother.”
434 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 12 March 1873. Message from “a brother.”
436 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 9 February 1872. Also see Grandjean 85-37; 18 July 1873 for a message from Alfred Brard instructing the Cercle Harmonique to “Fight against your Passions.”
served material playthings, likely drinking or gambling.\textsuperscript{443} The spirits of some former card players remained riveted to those gambling dens they frequented during their earthly lives, which slowed their spiritual progress.\textsuperscript{444}

Materialism fostered vices like gambling and encouraged people to focus on material things. And the “vanities of this world” were “ephemeral.”\textsuperscript{445} Saint Vincent de Paul warned that no “worldly goods” could be found in the spiritual world.\textsuperscript{446} One should “despise the Goods of the Earth,” and instead “work with Courage” to receive “the bread of the soul.”\textsuperscript{447} Barthélemy lectured those who wanted “earthly riches.” They would not be able to carry their material fortune, or anything for that matter, into the spiritual world with them. Everything material would be left behind on the earth.\textsuperscript{448} Looking back on his life, one spirit asked, “Here! what would I do with these material goods?” He wished he had understood the temporary nature of material things during his time on earth, but the “vile combination” of fear and greed kept him captive to things.\textsuperscript{449} Overcoming materialism propelled a spirit along in his/her spiritual progression.\textsuperscript{450} Materialism and greed weighed down a spirit, and so people should “fight” against their “passions.”\textsuperscript{451} A soul could “sink in an abyss of darkness more and more gloomy,” or if that soul was “elevated by right-doing, it will ascend in light, illumining its peaceful route ad infinitum!”\textsuperscript{452} Happiness came from allowing “one’s soul should be elevated constantly and enlightened by solemn Truth.”\textsuperscript{453} “With happiness, receive our instructions,” a brother told the Cercle Harmonique; “enlighten yourselves and labor to elevate your souls, oh! my dear children!”\textsuperscript{454} Rather than the material, the Afro-creoles should focus on the spiritual.

Though Spiritualism seemed like a new religious orientation and practice for many Americans, the spirits claimed otherwise. A spirit assured the circle that “spiritual work has

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\textsuperscript{443} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 4 March 1869. Message from “A spirit.”
\textsuperscript{444} Grandjean collection, 85-50; 8 March 1873. Message from a brother.
\textsuperscript{445} Grandjean collection; 85-36; 5 February 1872. Message from Vincent de Paul.
\textsuperscript{446} Grandjean collection, 85-32; 15 October 1870.
\textsuperscript{447} Grandjean collection, 85-47; 4 December 1872. Message from Emile Rabouin.
\textsuperscript{448} Grandjean collection, 85-45; 15 September 1872. Message from L. Bmy Rey.
\textsuperscript{449} Grandjean collection, 85-52; 26 November 1873. Message from M. Morano, Grandjean notes that this was Manuel Morano.
\textsuperscript{450} Controlling one’s “passions” in the struggle against “evil” was a key part of emerging “triumphant” in the “fight” against materialism. Grandjean collection, 85-59; 2 March 1875. Message from “X.”
\textsuperscript{452} Grandjean collection, 85-52; 17 November 1873. Message from St. Vincent de Paul.
\textsuperscript{453} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 20 March 1873. Message from “a brother ex-priest.”
\textsuperscript{454} Grandjean collection, 85-52; 1 December 1873. Message from “a brother.”
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existed for centuries." Since Spiritualism has been known for all history, according to another, the “moral gospel of Jesus” was akin to Spiritualism. Valmou...ndowed Humanity with Spiritualism.” In other words, Spiritualism was a gift from Jesus. Spiritualism was also described as another expression of proper politics. The spirit of W. R. Meadows, who died in the 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot, described the spirits in the spiritual world as “the invisible army of true Republicanism.” As such, the spirits encouraged the circle to include others in their hopes for humanity’s salvation and progress. Cercle Harmonique members should be “wise and true” brothers and “give light, light to any one, friend to you or enemy; in darkness, do not leave anybody.” Spiritualism was for all and for the progress of all.

Upon entering the spiritual world, spirits would recognize the error of their ways, and many regretted their denial of Spiritualism on earth. One spirit recognized that he would “have been ten thousand times happier” had he been a Spiritualist. Defending the validity of Spiritualism was common among the spirits of those who were not Spiritualists while alive. Rey’s father Barthélemy acknowledged that many called Spiritualism “crazy,” and in response put forth the question: is “the crazy one [the one] who does good and prepares himself for our world by the purification of his soul” or “the one who lives of impurities, of egotism, and of prostitution?” Additionally, spirits had the opportunity to study those on earth and watch them “under the pressure of their passions, of Error … going from weaknesses to weaknesses, from cowardice to cowardice, defiling themselves constantly.” Observing the faults and misdoings of others—and easily recognizing them as such after joining the spiritual world—was a kind of Spiritualism classroom for spirits in which they would begin to recognize their own past

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455 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 30 November 1871
456 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 1 January 1872. Message from “a devoted brother.”
457 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 26 September 1874.
458 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 1 December 1871.
460 Lunel, “the devoted brother,” stated that in uniting together, loving one another, and working in peace they would “be elevated splendidly.” Grandjean collection, 85-51; 19 March 1873.
462 Grandjean collection, 85-45; 15 September 1872. Another spirit warned the deniers of Spiritualism that they would become “anxious to prove what you used to deny with so much obstinacy.” Grandjean collection, 85-71; 19 March 1873. Message from J. Olivier.
offenses.\textsuperscript{463} Not just observing people’s faults, watching their spiritual triumphs also proved educational to new spirits. Many silent spirits remained undetected by the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} and observed the circle’s practice unsure if they were allowed to influence the Afro-creoles.\textsuperscript{464} Spirits could progress to higher spiritual spheres as their spirits further understood the Truth, i.e. Spiritualism. However, those spirits who focused too much energy lamenting their past offenses “hampered” their “progress.”\textsuperscript{465}

Sometimes the spirits expressed their approval of the circle’s work. A group of “your friends” congratulated and thanked the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} for their hard work and assured them that if they continued to work hard, they would come out “victorious in the struggle.”\textsuperscript{466} Work was important to the spirits. According to Lunel, “the devoted brother,”

This hard work is the spiritual result of what you have found consoling, and what we have planned and prepared for you. Always be willing to work for the good, and your soul to reap the sublime conception and Revelation. Here, near us, you will understand by your wonderful huge arena in which you have been called to walk by your persistence in spiritual work.\textsuperscript{467}

Indeed, some amount of comfort could be found at the séance table, despite present political and social circumstances: comfort in knowing that the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} was right, comfort in knowing that the spirits were working with them, and comfort in knowing that a “sublime” future awaiting them in heaven. A spirit simply identified as “Friend” validated the circle’s progress, telling them “by your good acts, you have grown spiritually; by Truth you have been consoled; you understand God and his works better; you participate in the holy joys of the elected ones; with them, you rejoice yourselves!”\textsuperscript{468}

Spiritualism’s great value came from the significance and importance of spiritual work. For example, Confucius explained that the spiritual work done by the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} during their earthly lives awarded them more stars “shining in your bright sky.”\textsuperscript{469} Indeed, the “immense advantages” of Spiritualist gatherings came from spiritual labor. The spirits offered “happiness and peace” as the reward of successful spiritual work and elevated thinking.\textsuperscript{470} The spirits spoke

\begin{itemize}
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-52; 1 December 1873. Message from “a brother.”
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-37; 12 November 1875. Message from “a friend.”
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-51; 15 March 1873. Message from Lamenais.
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869. Message signed “your friends.”
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-40; 1 May 1872.
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-60; 17 October 1875.
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-35; 13 December 1871.
  \item Grandjean collection, 85-50; 22 February 1873. Message from Alfred Delavigne.
\end{itemize}
often of light. “The light of the Spirit” produced by one’s spiritual work helped keep “antagonistic” spirits away from the séances. Superior spirits, “full of wisdom,” invited Spiritualists to “the exchange of a frank and honest” conversation. With the help of the spirits, the Cercle Harmonique’s work would ascend “the luminous mountain of Progress and Truth.” Additionally, the presence of a good spirit surrounded the Cercle Harmonique “with his protective fluid like a luminous circle.” This helped ensure quality spiritual work would be achieved.

Solid spiritual work was the measure of a good Spiritualist, not the amount of time spent in practice. A spirit taught that one’s worth as a Spiritualist came from “not the number of years passed at a table,” rather it came from whether or not one’s soul was “purified and sanctified.” A spirit simply identified as “a brother” argued that there was “a great difference between the one who comes to sit at a table to listen only to the word of the Spirit and the one who struggles persistently against Evil.” Indeed, listening to the spirits was not enough. Proper action was necessary. The courage to recognize one’s mistakes was highly regarded by the spirits as the mark of a quality Spiritualist. The spirit of J.J. Rousseau lamented that many lacked “the courage to admit their weaknesses and mistakes” and explained that “this is why many suffer” because they lack the “moral courage to confess weakness.” Those who avoided “the teachings of true Light” were cowards and should be “ashamed.” Bravery was determined not by fighting by through the ability to “conquer” one’s “passions and be true to all men.”

The spirits frequently emphasized harmony and unity. The spiritual republic effectively governed the spirit world because of the spirits’ harmony, and if those on earth could replicate the spirits’ unity, a true republic could be possible in the material world too. In order to achieve harmony, the spirits advised a focus on charity. To describe humanity’s “high destiny,” Saint Vincent de Paul explained that: “Charity is the Pillar. Universal love is Law. The Search for Truth is one of its joys.” Valmour described the “soldiers” of “progression” as those carrying three “flags”—the flags of “peace and love and especially Charity.” This was indicative of

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471 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 2 March 1873. Message from J. Lespinasse.
472 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 30 October 1873. Message from “a brother.”
473 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 8 March 1875. Message from a spirit signed as “X.”
474 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 3 December 1873.
475 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 9 November 1871.
476 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 27 November 1871.
477 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 5 June 1871.
478 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 March 1870.
many of the spirits’ messages, for charity was key to the work of fighting materialism. On another occasion Saint Vincent de Paul explained that charity was supposed to be “the basis of all religions.” Thus, the Spiritualists were to make charity their “sacred duty” and thus “contribute to the happiness of your brothers teaching them moral Truth.” Harmony, universal love, truth, progress, charity, and equality were frequent topics for the spirits. For humanity to reach its goal, Jesus taught, “Charity” would need to be the guide along with “Justice.” Père Ambroise explained that the spiritual world was organized “by the most perfect harmony.” The spirits worked together to help elevate each other and progress to higher “spheres,” and this should be replicated on earth. The spirit described “your world” as “the glimpse of God’s Creation,” while “ours” is “the compliment of his work.”

The spiritual world was a higher, more perfect, more godly place than the earthly world. Thus, those on earth should try to emulate the world of the spirits—an idea clearly expressed in the spirits’ views on politics through their focus on equality. To enter higher spheres in the spiritual world, spirits needed to be purified. A “vulgar spirit” was weighed down and moved about “with difficulty,” while purified spirits existed more freely and enjoyed a “luminous appearance.” In this sense, a spirit reaped what s/he sowed according to “his progression and advancement.” Any “spirit who is unhappy here [spiritual world]” owed “it solely to what condition in which he has placed his mind and soul.” A true Spiritualist appeared “magnificent and beautiful by the soul” and will “shine like us [the spirit guides],” but “when passions and cowardice have soiled” one’s soul, he appeared “surrounded by darkness, in spite of the light which shines by us!” Those who spent their lives struggling for “Good” would be welcomed in the spiritual world “by our joyous cheers, because he has atoned for his shameful past in liberating himself from Materialism and in spreading Light.”

The spirits never said their work would be easy. Lunel encouraged them to “not be discouraged” for they “will be rewarded” for their “work” and “diligence.” In another message, Lunel told the circle, “those who want to know the Truth must look for it, unite

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479 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 December 1869.
480 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 28 May 1871. Message from “Jésus” (Jesus).
481 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 April 1869.
482 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 4 May 1872. Message from Absalon.
483 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 9 June 1874. Message from “a luminous brother.”
484 Grandjean collection, 85-60; 7 June 1875. Message from “a luminous brother.”
486 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 21 December 1871.
themselves and work in harmony in order to develop it.” Indeed, work was a key element of Lunel’s message—the necessity of it, the need to continue it, and the group effort it would require of the circle.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-51; 19 March 1873. Message from Lunel, “the devoted brother.”} Claire Pollard also encouraged hard work—“firm and resolute.” But the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} would not be alone. Pollard assured them that “Valmour, Vincent de Paule, and millions of happy spirits are watching over you.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-40; 1 April 1872.} Confucius also assured the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} that they were not alone. Rather, he and other spirits “take care of you and will always be ready to constantly speak to you.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-41; 13 May 1872.} Jesus too came to the table to speak of courage and preparation for the future. He came to the table “with delight,” for he approved of the Spiritualists’ courage and hard work. “March! Fear not! … Do not tremble!” he encouraged them. Their work at the séance table prepared them for any troubles that may lie ahead.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-32.}

Spiritualism would shepherd them in their future endeavors, but the spirits did not want to constrain the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}. A person’s freewill allowed Spiritualists to accept the spirits as their guides on their own accord. One should come to Spiritualism on his own free-will, but should then “place yourself at the disposal of the Spirit.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-42; 22 June 1872. Message from “Lamenais.”} However, the spirits never wanted to force anyone; they criticized Catholicism for that offense. Instead they wanted people to listen to them and accept the spiritual teachings on their own accord. Another dominant criticism of Catholicism centered on the “religious oligarchy” of priests and the “religious despotism” of the pope. The spirits frequently depicted the leaders of Catholicism as materialistic and power-hungry. In contrast to Spiritualism’s focus on free will and egalitarianism, the spirits saw coercion and exploitation in Catholicism. Though, as the next chapter explores, these criticisms of Catholicism were interwoven with ideas and spirits from the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}’s Catholic past and became a key part of how the Afro-creoles imagined their own religious identity.
CHAPTER THREE

“ALL OF YOU, AT THIS TABLE, WHO HAVE BEEN RAISED UP AS ROMAN CATHOLICS”: SPIRITUALISM AND CATHOLICISM IN NEW ORLEANS

“They [Catholic priests] believed that they themselves were the designed apostles of this great faith; and they taught their followers to consider them as the instruments to perpetuate apostolic power, prophetic wisdom, and heavenly teaching. Hence they claimed the power to cure diseased persons, and to be authorized to make believers, if not by preaching, yet by the sword, the stake, the rack, or in a more honorable way, their sacred inquisitions!” – Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind* 493

“No temples are required by spiritualists; God and the spirits are everywhere! Also, no priests.” – De Sévigné to the *Cercle Harmonique*, 24 February 1871 494

“Think maturely and discard your mistakes that Catholicism provided you.” – Léonine to the *Cercle Harmonique*, 26 December 1865 495

Even though *Cercle Harmonique* medium and leader Henri Louis Rey’s writings indicate that his wife Adèle also believed in Spiritualism and that at least his daughter Lucia was not a stranger to Spiritualism, an October 1872 message from a spirit named “Lamenais” (likely Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais) suggests that Adèle wanted their children to be raised as Catholics. Lamennais reassured Rey, reminding him that he had heard his child “laugh and force his mother to laugh at the absurdities” that she (Adèle) wanted “to stuff in his head” to “make him a Roman Catholic.” Not to worry Lamennais told Rey, reason would shine through and the child would recognize the “absurdities of a Roman catechism before him.” 497 In spite of this disagreement with Adèle, Rey tried his best to keep Catholicism out of his home. In January 1873, Rey turned away a Jesuit priest who knocked on his door, and the spirits praised him for it. “Oh! be satisfied, brother Rey, of having today, met face to face one of them who presented to you the little prayer written on a piece of paper—a disguised way to beg.” He continued, “Be

492 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 18 December 1872.
494 Grandjean collection, 85-32, 24 February 1871.
495 Grandjean collection, 85-31, 26 December 1865.
496 Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais was an early nineteenth century French priest who left the church with the 1834 publication “*Paroles d’un croyant*” (“Words of a Believer”), an essay that described kings and priests as being against the will of the people. The significance of the spirit “Lamenais” will be taken up in the next chapter.
happy of your moral courage for having avowed frankly to him your belief and that you are opposed to such oppressions on the masses.” The spirit, Ambroise (a former Capuchin priest himself), also noted the haste with which the priest left “as soon as he understood that there was nothing to reap from you.” It was better that the Jesuit left, for contact with a Jesuit was “unhealthy.” Ambroise would not be the only spirit to criticize the Jesuit order in particular, and priests in general, as exploitative manipulators who took advantage of the vulnerable. Though the wealthy seemed to be the priests’ primary targets, they would prey upon anyone in order to satiate their greed for material riches. However, this disapproval is not to say that the Afro-creoles of the Cercle Harmonique left their Catholic pasts.

Rey and fellow members looked outside the Church’s sacraments and (living) clergy for support, but communicating with deceased priests and saints kept the Spiritualists connected to their larger community’s Catholic past while still departing from the institutional Church. Though Catholic priests were targets of criticism among the spirits, spirits of former Catholics also engaged the circle and led them along their spiritual progression. Afro-creole Spiritualism was a religion grounded in the religious history of New Orleans. Thus, both resonances of Afro-creole Catholicism and anti-Catholic sentiments manifested in the Cercle Harmonique, highlighting the New Orleans Catholic heritage of circle members and their understanding of religious authority. The Cercle Harmonique’s relationship with Catholicism helped shape their view on the role of religious institutions in society, a view depicted in the spirits’ criticisms of the Catholic Church and its priests.

The resonances of Catholicism that echoed in the Afro-creole Spiritualist circle are not surprising, given the members’ own religious upbringings within the larger context of the New Orleans religious milieu. The strong Catholic culture of New Orleans described in Chapter One was not left behind when Rey and others sat at the séance table. Unlike many of the nineteenth-century Spiritualists other historians have investigated, the Cercle Harmonique did not come from white, liberal, Protestant communities in the northeast. These were Afro-creoles who came

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498 This particular spirit Père Ambroise, occasionally signed his messages with the description “ex-Capuchin” following his name. The spirit was possibly that of Ambroise de Reims, a French Capuchin from the early seventeenth century. Keith P. Luria, Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2005), 70–71. Or the spirit was maybe Ambroise of Preuilly, a French Capuchin who served as a missionary in India in the mid-seventeenth century. Ona Yasuyuki, “The French Travellers and the Mughal Empire in the 17th Century,” in Cultural and Economic Relations Between East and West: Sea Routes, ed. Prince Takahito Mikasa (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1988), 85–86.

from families with strong Catholic heritages. One spirit plainly acknowledged the circle’s Catholic past in December of 1872. He complimented the circle identifying how “The path you have followed, all of you, at this table, who have been raised up as Roman Catholics” demonstrated the “good result” that comes from “years” of spiritual work. The *Cercle Harmonique* identified “what is necessary for the illumination of the path” for “those who have never known Spiritualism with its illuminations and glories!” Though historian Bret Carroll has identified similarities between the Catholic priestly authority and a “Catholic cosmos” of spirits, the Catholic influences upon American Spiritualists remains largely unstudied.501

The members of the *Cercle Harmonique* did not hybridize their Catholic past and Spiritualist present, nor did they straightforward convert from one to the other.502 Rather, the religious activities and beliefs of Spiritualist Afro-creoles were more akin to what scholar of Native American religions Kenneth Morrison called “religious change,” and more recently what Linford Fisher termed “religious engagement” or “affiliation.”503 Morrison argued that conversion is not an accurate term to describe the experiences of native Christians because conversion “stipulates a particular and singular outcome to religious encounter” and presupposes conversion as progress.504 He describes this as “religious change,” meaning a more open and

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502 Religious and cultural hybridity are often discussed in terms of the cross-fertilization that happened in cultural encounters. One group appropriated elements, be them beliefs or practices, from the other, and this process often occurred in both directions. Hybridity could upset and trouble power relations; for example, in cases of colonization, hybridity could be dangerous for the colonizer because it eroded some of the boundaries between colonizer and the colonized. Neither a pure culture nor a pure religion exist; not only are both overly simple scholarly concepts, but both are also contingent upon the interactions and actions of humans. The idea of Catholic resonances in this chapter also builds off this rejection of pure culture but not in the same manner as hybridity. For theoretical work rejecting the idea of pure culture, see Malory Nye, *Religion: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 44–46. Bruce Lincoln, “Culture” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Russell McCutcheon and Willi Braun (New York: Continuum, 2006), 409–422. For an understanding of hybridity and colonization see *The Location of Culture* by Homi K. Bhabha, in which he introduces the notion of the interstitial space or interstitial passage: a location “between fixed identifications (that) opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.” Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Rutledge Classics, 2004), 5.
504 Rather, Morrison highlights the distinctiveness of Algonkian thinking in relation to French Catholic: he does this by first explaining *manitou* and how it interacted with the world, in order to see how the Algonkians approached and came to integrate Catholicism into their worldview. Though the Algonkians did come to accept elements of Catholicism, they did so on their own “terms of the categories of person, power and gift.” Morrison argued that the Indians “came to reexperience and thereby revitalize the basic religious truths of their traditional life.” Kenneth
dialectic process that allows for the dynamism of religion in colonial encounters. Religious change does not require a specific outcome. Also, with no predetermined outcome, religious change focuses our attention on the importance of the cultural, political, and social context shaping conversion. Thus the Spiritualism practiced by Afro-creoles in New Orleans could be and was different from the Spiritualism of Anglo-Americans in the northeastern U.S. These resonances of Catholicism and the anti-Catholicism in the Afro-creoles’ practice of Spiritualism were the result of their own religious change and of their New Orleans context.

Identifying resonances of Catholicism, either in the form of Catholic ideas or Catholic spirits, illuminates how the Cercle Harmonique’s engagement with Spiritualism fit with the members’ own religious pasts and contemporary New Orleans context. A key way the Afro-creole Spiritualists carved out their religious identity was by pushing off from others, mainly Catholics. Calling attention to the differences between Catholicism and Spiritualism illuminated the boundary between the two and the preeminence of Spiritualism. According to the séance records of the Cercle Harmonique, Spiritualist enlightenment was a much superior form of religious intelligence in comparison with Catholic dogma. The revealed knowledge of Spiritualism was a more legitimate realm of authority than Catholicism and its imposed domination. The Cercle Harmonique argued that a cleric claimed his authority based on the power invested in him from a human hierarchy and institution on earth. Spiritualists gained insight from spirits and it was this spiritual wisdom that endowed them with power. Even as they pushed off Catholicism to shape their own religious and social identity, they used Catholicism to do so. Catholic language, ideas, and spirits remained with them even after leaving parish pews.

In the Afro-creole circle’s spirit messages, various Catholic ideas about the afterlife and former Catholic priests themselves appeared. This chapter first examines the presence of deceased local Catholics at the Cercle Harmonique’s séance table. This included friends and former pastors. Then the chapter focuses on one of the group’s most frequent spiritual advisors, Saint Vincent de Paul. The spirit’s emphasis on charity is not surprising, considering the reputation of the saint and Catholic benevolent societies named after him. Next, the chapter examines the continuation of Catholic ideas and terminology in the spirit messages, further indicating the influence of Catholicism on the members of the Cercle Harmonique and their

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spiritual practice. However, these resonances of Catholicism were mixed with anti-Catholicism. The final two sections of this chapter explore the spirits’ anti-Catholicism and focus more specifically on the group’s anti-clericalism and views on religious authority. Spirit messages described Catholic priests as exploitative authoritarians who took advantage of the unfortunate. Priests—at least according to how the spirits described them—were no better than slave owners or white “redeeming” Democrats: all fed on underserved power and all represented the kind of politics the circle denounced.

“We do not neglect those who suffer down here”: Former Catholic Locals

Members of the Cercle Harmonique did not leave their Catholic pasts. The priests of their parents and of their own childhood continued to look after them. The identities of the spirits who came to the Cercle Harmonique sometimes disclosed more than the content of the spirit messages about the group and their practice, indicating who the Cercle Harmonique wanted to support them and whom they wanted in their spiritual genealogy. In addition to French revolutionary thinkers and leaders like Robespierre, metaphysical theologians like Swedenborg, and republican American martyrs like John Brown, Afro-creole Spiritualists included certain Catholic voices in their spiritual network.

An occasional spirit at the table was Père Antoine, or Father Antonio de Sedella, the parish priest for St. Louis Cathedral until his death in 1829. The Spanish Capuchin priest came to the city originally in 1781, and while he was in the middle of more than one controversy during his long tenure in New Orleans, he was largely beloved by the laity. He welcomed open members of masonic fraternities into the parish, he testified on the legal behalf of slaves and free blacks, and he had the support of the parish’s marguilliers. When the Louisiana Territory was transferred from Spanish ecclesiastical authority to the American archdiocese in Baltimore, the lay trustees stood by Sedella, despite the appointment of a new “American” pastor for the parish, which subsequently caused the Schism of 1805. Sedella would remain pastor until his death and was often viewed as a champion of the people. According to historian Caryn Cossé Bell, Sedella’s support of the city’s black population, both his involvement in local court cases testifying for the city’s free blacks and slaves and his frequent godparenting of nonwhite...
children, endeared him to black New Orleanians. It was the tenure of Sedella especially, and his successor Father Aloysius Leopold Moni too, that constituted what other historians identify as the golden era of Catholic universalism in New Orleans. While the spirit of Catholic universalism should and can only be interpreted in the context of a very present slave system, it does point to some of Catholicism’s and Sedella and Moni’s appeal to blacks. Mixed-race congregations, godparents across the racial divide, and celebrating a Catholic Church who loved all her parishioners equally—at least in theory—appealed to free and enslaved black creoles. Spiritualism delivered the universalism that Catholicism promised.

Sedella’s spirit messages were signed either Père Antoine, a local nickname of endearment, or simply Antoine. A number of his messages contained encouragement for the circle or explanations of truth. For example, Sedella promised that those who sought the truth would find it and that “we [the spirits] are with those who are with us.” In the Rey’s early years as a Spiritualist, Père Antoine was one of the most frequent spirits to visit. On Christmas of 1858, Sedella, first announcing himself as “a brother for Jesus,” told the circle to “greet the dawn of a beautiful day” with “kindness” and to “sanctify” each day with “brotherhood.” Pére Antoine described a benevolent Creator of “magnificent works” whose “infinite wisdom” created the world and its laws. In contrast, the God of non-Spiritualists was an “unjust and cruel” God, the result of human materialism projected onto a deity. Only Spiritualists had a proper and correct understanding of a wise, loving, and republican God.

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507 Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 70–73. Stephen Ochs also references the revered status of Sedella among the city’s black population due to his “pastoral attention to them” and his “zealous ministry among the slaves and free people of color.” Ochs, A Black Patriot and a White Priest, 24 and 50.


510 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 10 February 1872.

511 Grandjean collection, 85-30. 25 December 1858.

512 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 19 November 1858.

513 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 25 November 1858.
Many of the spirits communicated messages that criticized materialism, and Sedella was no different. He encouraged them to keep their souls “pure of defilement.” Additionally, “the good deeds of your material existence prove that you have been charitable.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-46; 1 November 1872.} In another message, he told the medium that no one should complain about his or her “unfortunate” status, nor should anyone desire wealth. Greed would only beget more greed, as “the king is on his throne, surrounded by the prestige and glory of human vanities, wants more than the beggar.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-30; 12 December 1858.} Indeed, like most spirits, Sedella admonished those who were too attached to the material world. “Material wealth,” he taught, was only a mirage. He taught the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} that their “moral enfranchisement” came from “the energy of your soul” and their rejection of materialism. In this particular message, he also chastised Napoleon Bonaparte, who for all his ambition and power could only carry “the remembrances of his crimes” into the spirit world.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-38; 9 February 1872.} Ambition and materialism would only bring a person to greed and corruption. It was better to focus on the soul and spiritual progression.

Sedella also encouraged the circle not to fear the physical death of the body, a message that was common throughout the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}’s years. Many of the spirits described death as a release from the “material envelope” of the body which allowed the soul to enter the world of the spirits. For example, he informed the circle to not cry or despair over the death of a child, for the child in question was pure of heart and thus enjoying his new spiritual abode.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 March 1869.} After that particular message was complete, Pére Antoine returned immediately after to exclaim that his “heart” was “happy” when spirits of good men were reunited in the spiritual world to work together for the progress of brotherhood and “the welfare of humanity and its perfection.” “Receive, my brothers,” he concluded this second message, “our blessings and happy events of your brethren who have the good fortune to be separated from matter.”\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, physical death did not separate those who loved one another. Sedella assured Rey and others that “we do not neglect those who suffer down here.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-30; 12 December 1858.} In his death, Sedella had recognized where truth resided—Spiritualism rather than Catholicism—and came to the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} to share this knowledge and guide them to truth.
Père Antoine’s spirit must have recognized that, as a former priest, messages that spoke negatively of Catholicism could puzzle listeners. He told the *Cercle Harmonique* to “not be surprised” by the spirits’ “repeated blows against the colossal power that obstructs the progress of humanity.” With their “erroneous dogmas,” the Catholic power of Rome “falsifies the truth, and in the name of divine justice, exterminates men and bloodies their clothes.” Sedella recognized his own “crimes” and admitted he had “worked to consolidate this power.” During his time on earth, he “ignored my mission” and “helped establish greater ignorance to ensure [Catholicism’s] domination.” But, in the spiritual world, he confessed his sins and dedicated himself to a new mission: to reveal the truth and support Spiritualists everywhere. With his help, and the help of other spirits too, “Satan will be recognized under the hypocritical mask” and “Rome will be regenerated.” On another occasion he reminded the *Cercle Harmonique* that he often came to the “circle of Louise” to “undermine prejudice and tradition” and show the ugliness of “Religious Domination”—a mission he continued as a spirit.

Father Aloysius Leopold Moni was Sedella’s successor and pastor of St. Louis Cathedral from Sedella’s death until his own in August 1842. He had less of a tumultuous time as pastor than Sedella and was also beloved by the local laity, in part because he continued Sedella’s fight to maintain the power of the lay marquilliers. Moni too was a spirit who visited the *Cercle Harmonique* and he did so frequently. He spoke of the eternal struggle between good and evil and how people were responsible for their actions in this world and the next because of free will. Though Moni encouraged the Spiritualists to make their own decisions, he also instructed them to “drive from your soul anything that might corrupt and stain.” Instead, the group was told, “charity must be your guide.” Moni and Sedella also delivered messages with political edges. Sedella encouraged them to try to understand the political perspective of others. In another communique he taught that Spiritualism’s tenets did not allow “any antagonistic thoughts about anyone.” Moni was pleased to see the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment but was even happier to reside in an environment where amendments were not necessary to ensure justice and fair governance.

520 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 6 January 1872.
521 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 9 June 1874.
523 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 18 March 1870.
524 Grandjean collection, 85-58; 7 November 1874.
525 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 6 February 1870.
Despite being a former priest, Moni endorsed Spiritualism as the best religion, stating “Spiritualism produces beautiful and noble sentiments; it inspires justice and charity for all.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 March 1871.} In the decades since his death Moni discovered that religious truth was found outside the walls of his former institution. In another message Moni likened the power of the religious oligarchy of priests to “the despotic pressure of cockroaches” keeping “three-quarters of humanity groaning under a monstrous clerical yoke.” But hope existed for those still on earth since “the truth must shine in all its splendor” and truth would fight “the clerical yoke.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 October 1869. Moni was not the only spirit to compare priests to cockroaches. Grandjean collection, 85-35; 18 December 1871.} Instead of praising clerics, Moni extolled the virtues and abilities of the circle’s former medium Valmour.\footnote{Valmour’s funeral announcement refers to him as “VALMOUR (medium)” and announces his death on February 6th. \textit{New Orleans Tribune}, 7 February 1869.} “Afraid of nothing,” Valmour was “triumphant” in the spiritual world. Moni continued to celebrate the life and talents of Valmour, instructing the circle to “continue to fight injustice, error, and superstition, and you’ll have the satisfaction of the heart; and as Valmour, you will leave without fear and without reproach” and reach the invisible world.\footnote{Grandjean collection; 85-31; 7 February 1869.} Moni was not the only spirit who glorified the triumph of Valmour, but his identity as a former priest made his positive appraisal of Valmour particularly noteworthy. Rather than admire and praise Catholics, this priest picked a local black creole medium.

Moni also told the circle to “not be astonished at the Spirit speaking incessantly and relentlessly of your soul” because the soul’s purification and sanctification would lead to the soul’s “elevation and glory.” The Catholic sacraments did not cleanse a soul from defilement. Rather, spiritual progression, work done at the séance table, and supporting the spirit of brotherhood prepared a soul for “elevation.” Moni assured them that the spirits and the Creator desired to see all of them “cleansed from defilement, enlightened and with the soul of the true believer.”\footnote{Grandjean collection; 85-47; 7 November 1872.} And a believer in truth would be a Spiritualist, not a Catholic. The spirits of the two beloved former priests, Moni and Sedella—priests supportive of the black and white creole Catholic laity—recognized this and shared their wisdom with the Spiritualist circles. Indeed, who better to endorse Spiritualism over Catholicism than former clerics? However, the presence of formerly Catholic spirits visiting and guiding the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} still connected the circle to their Catholic heritage and past. The pastors’ support of the masons and \textit{marguilliers} would have
resonated with the liberal and revolutionary affiliations of the circle members. Communicating with Sedella and Moni allowed the *Cercle Harmonique* to express their approval for those priests’ pro-laity and pro-creole actions without contradicting the spirits’ anti-clerical communiques. Beloved pastors remained so even after their death and despite the circle’s critiques of Catholicism.

Not just former local pastors, family members also spoke about Catholicism. In a message from early in Rey’s involvement with Spiritualism, his father Barthélemy lamented how the Rey family had believed “the absurdities of the Roman Church.” Petit’s mother Claire Pollard also regretted how her adherence to Catholicism blinded her. When she arrived to the spiritual world, she realized that she was in “a different paradise” than the one taught by Catholicism, and once she stopped “believing in the fairy tales that had adorned my imagination,” she appreciated how she was in the best place conceivable. She hoped her sons would allow her to teach them “the way to happiness and peace,” meaning Spiritualism. Petit’s younger sister Claire was sent to France for her education as a child and possibly joined, at least for a time, a convent. In one of her messages she cried for “the poor child who isolates him/herself within the walls of a cloister.” She wept for her own past and the “orgies that had soiled me, the mire that had reached my virginal dress … I believed a Devil, what Error!” Near the end of the message she chastises those “Religious” who think only of their own souls and forget their family and “the most sacred duties.” In regretting the Catholicism of their past, both trusted family members and former local priests supported the *Cercle Harmonique*’s choice to practice Spiritualism.

Both Bernard Couvent and the widow Marie Couvent also came to the Afro-creoles’ table. The Couvents were beloved in the Afro-creole community, and the money left behind by the widow Marie Couvent supported the work of the *Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* and its *Ecole Des Orphelins Indigents*, which offered affordable (or free) education for local black children. As a spirit, Bernard taught that if a person “nobly

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532 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 29 November 1858.
533 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 February 1869.
535 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 5 December 1871.
fulfilled his mission,” he was welcomed into the spiritual world. He also expressed his pleasure at the work done at the séance table. Bernard, like many others who were Catholic in life, regretted their previous religious orientation in death. Calling Catholicism “such nonsense,” “foolish belief,” and “errors which I accepted as infallible dogmas,” he was happy to now be enlightened. Marie Couvent congratulated the Cercle Harmonique for their persistence, for the work they did was for both “your soul” and “the good of all.” Though a devoted Catholic during her earthly life, Marie's spirit attested that Spiritualism provided the best route for “Good and Progress.” Communicating with Bernard and Marie Couvent kept the Cercle Harmonique connected to the work of the Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence without having to remain attached to Catholic theology or the hierarchy.

“Courage, therefore, my children, with the support that we are always eager to give you” The spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul (or St. Vincent de Paule or V. de Paule as he often signed off) was a frequent spiritual advisor of the Cercle Harmonique. Lamennais even referred to de Paul as “the top Apostle” in one of his messages. The inclusion of this saint along with Sedella and Moni strengthened the Cercle Harmonique’s spiritual bond with their Catholic pasts. They communicated with Mesmer and Swedenborg too (as did many other Spiritualists around the country), but their frequent interaction with Catholic-turned Spiritualist spirits set them apart from other séance groups. The saint’s own biography included slavery; for about two years Paul was a slave in Tunis. Later in life, he founded a missionary society and dedicated himself to the service of the poor. His popularity rose after his canonization in the early eighteenth century and again in the 1830s with the founding of the Society of Saint Vincent

536 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 21 June 1872.
537 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 15 April 1872.
538 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 1 January 1872.
539 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 30 April 1872. Bernard echoed this focus on the good for all in Grandjean collection, 85-51; 18 July 1873.
541 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 1 December 1865. Message from Saint Vincent de Paul.
542 Though he was not a popular spirit among the earlier French émigré Joseph Barthet’s circle in the early 1850s. Many of that circle’s messages were published in a local periodical called Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans. These can be found bound together in Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Vol. 1, (New Orleans: G. Coppens & Co., 1857).
543 Grandjean collection, 85-45; 8 September 1872. Message from “Lamennais.”
544 During the majority of this time he was the property of an African chemist who was searching for “the philosopher's stone.” Writing of Vincent de Paul quoted in Henry Bedford, The Life of Saint Vincent de Paul (London: Burns and Oates, 1883), 10. Also see, Frederic Walker, “Saint Vincent de Paul and the Alchemist,” Journal of Chemical Education, 13.8 (1936): 358.
de Paul in Paris. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society (as it was called in New Orleans) was organized in the Crescent City in the early 1850s, and in the late 1850s and early 1860s, announcements for local masses in honor of the saint’s feast day were printed in the local newspapers.\footnote{References to a local chapter of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul begin to appear in the local New Orleans newspapers in 1853. The current society’s website lists 1852 as their founding year. “Feast of St. Vincent de Paul,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, 18 July 1857; “St. Vincent de Paul,” \textit{The Daily Picayune}, 18 July 1860.}

More significantly, interest in Saint Vincent de Paul increased in the 1860s among the city’s black and mixed-race population. \textit{L’Union}, the city’s first black newspaper, published a biographical piece on the saint “\textit{Le Pasteur de Peuple}” (“The Pastor of the People”) in series over the course of multiple months in 1862 and 1863.\footnote{There were fourteen publication dates, and on each day the segment on de Paul ranged from one newspaper page to a quarter of a page.} This came from a popular French author Clémence Robert, and it emphasized Paul’s dedication to Catholic reform, an “intense mystical piety,” “Catholic charity and Christian universalism.”\footnote{Bell, “French Religious Culture in Afro-Creole New Orleans,” 2.} Robert’s work and the ongoing segment in \textit{L’Union} championed the saint and focused on his tireless work for poor and vulnerable populations. “\textit{Le Pasteur de Peuple}” lauded Paul for his “fierce piety” and called him “the eldest son of charity.”\footnote{\textit{L’Union}, 9 April 1863; \textit{L’Union}, 15 January 1863.} Indeed, “the Vincentian ideal of a new-model Catholic leader animated by selfless service in humanitarian works carried particular force” in mid nineteenth-century New Orleans. “And for some,” according to historian Caryn Cossé Bell, the saint’s “mystical piety, fraternal charity, and egalitarian spirituality proved an irresistible model.”\footnote{Bell, “French Religious Culture in Afro-Creole New Orleans,” 3, 5.} The saint’s general association with charity and compassion, combined with his life experience with slavery and his desire to evangelize, made him an attractive patron saint for \textit{Cercle Harmonique}.

Many of Paul’s communications focused on the conflict between good and evil, the struggle between egalitarianism and greed, and, through Spiritualism, the triumph of humanity over materialism. Like Sedella, Paul too instructed the circle against the dangers of materialism. Indeed, greed greatly damaged one’s soul. “You are a spirit in a material body,” but in the spiritual world, you will “be relative to the state of your soul.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-52; 17 November 1873.} In other words, one’s status in the material world—wealth, race, or class—did nothing to guarantee a spirit’s state in the spiritual world. Materialism was only one type of greed Paul referenced. He also denounced the
desire for domination and instead endorsed equality. He must have realized that all the struggles
for egalitarianism and equality he encouraged were not easy, for he also spoke frequently of
courage. Courage would be necessary for progress. The Spiritualists would need to “fight with
courage against evil and prevent its spread, for it is the scourge which has slowed the
Progression.” 551 Indeed, the success of the Cercle Harmonique depended on their perseverence
in the face of adversity. In December of 1865, he reassured them: “Courage, therefore, my
children, with the support that we are always eager to give you, no doubt you will succeed.” 552
The following week, Paul told the Cercle Harmonique “courage, my dear children, you have
gained your freedom with blood.” 553 This message came months following the surrender of the
Confederate Army and the day following the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. It is
unclear whether this was with the blood of black soldiers, the blood of slaves, or the blood of
Union supporters in general, but the freedom alluded to is clear. This message came right on the
heels of a communication from “your brother and friend, Abraham Lincoln.” Although the
members of the Cercle Harmonique had been freed for some time long before the war, the
freedom of the message likely meant either freedom from slavery and/or from the Confederacy.

The Afro-creole Spiritualists would need courage during the long road of post-war
Reconstruction, and the spirits’ support helped impart the necessary courage. “We take care of
all your ups and downs,” Paul told them; “we will defend you … as we are for just cause—
Liberty.” 554 He was not the only spirit who frequently spoke of courage. Mesmer, Lincoln, local
friend Captain André Cailloux, and Claire Pollard also often urged the circle forward with talk of
courage, particularly in their final lines. 555 Despite how tumultuous, disappointing, and difficult
post-war New Orleans could be, Paul encouraged the circle to persevere. In early 1872, he
assured them that they would later “discover that you have gained through our help and you will
be happy, Courage and Patience, my brothers …” 556 The Spiritualist group led by French émigré
Joseph Barthet in the mid-1850s received some spirit messages that referred to courage as well,
specifically the courage to recognize one’s mistakes or the courage to make decisions in an

551 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 15 October 1871.
552 Grandjean collection, 85-31. 1 December 1865.
553 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 December 1865.
554 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 December 1865.
555 For example, a message from Mesmer received November 20th, 1865 concludes with “Courage, my brothers,
once more courage, we will always be ready to assist in your development and success of your noble company.”
556 Grandjean collection, 85-36; early 1872.
honest and thorough manner. One spirit reported that the happiest person was one with “courage in adversity.” In the messages from Barthet’s mixed but primarily white creole circle, courage was an admirable trait. This was true for Rey’s Cercle Harmonique as well, but the spirits who visited his table also spoke of courage as a necessity. In particular, Paul encouraged them to maintain their courage and use it to face prejudice. Not simply a respectable quality, for Afro-creole Spiritualists in the tumultuous and volatile years of the 1860s and 1870s, courage was essential.

Paul also advised against revenge and rather instructed them to not let “any hatred accumulate against you through your own fault; do not sow in the soul of your brothers and sisters a sad thought.” In the world to come, their enemies would be forced to deal with their injustices. Instead, “with courage,” the Afro-creoles should “labor … for good.” Though “spiritual progress” might be “slow” at times, he would be there to guide them. He assured them that their triumph would come one day. In the meantime they should give no credit to malicious persons for “they will all one day bow down before you to ask for help with their pain.” After a short break, the séance book reports, the same medium received another message from Paul. He encouraged them to “enlarge” their circle “but not with the wicked and criticizers. Forgive them but do not accept them.” The presence of corrupt persons would wreck the harmony of the circle and obstruct the communications. Rather, the circle should only include those who fight for justice and equality and fight against corruption and materialism.

Courage was not the only virtue Paul encouraged among the circle. He spoke much about charity too. Providence watched over everyone with love, he told them, and so it was good to possess “charitable hearts.” Just “as Jesus said ‘Forgive them, father, for they know not what they do,’” humanity too should be forgiving—a trait best cultivated by charity. The saint explained that “charity must reside in your heart, because it is that which saves [a human] Being.” Patience was also a necessary Cercle Harmonique virtue, along with courage and

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557 Le Spiritualiste, 136 (this was not a spirit message but rather an editorial on Spiritualism); Message from Husson, printed in Le Spiritualiste, 193.
558 Message from L. Bourdaloue, printed in Le Spiritualiste, 222–23.
559 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 27 October 1873.
560 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 1 December 1865.
561 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 1 December 1865. Another message from the same day but received through a different medium.
562 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 1 December 1865.
563 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 15 October 1871.
charity. He concluded another message by instructing the table to be “full of charity and devotion to the work that will accomplish the redemption of many souls.” He stated that “abnegation, love and charity” were three necessary traits for the “spiritualist heart” because one should be “more than a mere believer.” Right action, too, was necessary. The Cercle Harmonique members should not just learn the lessons of Spiritualism but also “endeavor to practice them.” To cultivate within their souls “love and charity” through their actions would help elevate their souls. If one’s soul was instead “under the unfortunate pressure of Evil” it would “sink in an abyss of darkness” and become “more and more gloomy.” However, if one elevated himself “by right-doing,” his soul “would ascend in light.” In three consecutive messages received in June of 1871, Paul continued to encourage all these good traits and good works. In the spiritual world, “the peace of a man’s heart” comes from knowing that he did his duty while on earth and left with a clear conscience. Therefore, “keep your soul healthy from defilement.”

When desiring a specific answer or message, the circle occasionally posed questions to the spirits, including Paul. When asked if the circle should use the terms “good spirits” and “bad spirits,” this particular good spirit answered by describing what makes a bad spirit. Bad spirits were those “who are still full of the prejudices of your world, who are not yet stripped of all their old errors, and who fall constantly in the bewilderments of their false ideas carried from your world.” In short, bad spirits were those who still refused to acknowledge the “universal fraternity.” This meant the circle’s enemies on earth similar to their spiritual ones. To ensure that one would be a “good spirit,” a Spiritualist should strive for spiritual progress and purification. The saint taught the circle that “each man possesses in himself a piece of this heavenly emanation, which allows a spirit to leave the material and join us in order to receive our salutary lessons.” While on earth, one should “obtain much for your soul.” Then, upon entering the spiritual world, the “vivid light” of one’s soul would “prove how much you have struggled for Right and Truth!” Paul wanted the spirits to join him “with glory and honor” after having “labored to dispel” themselves of hatred.

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564 Grandjean collection 85-32.
565 Grandjean collection, 85-53; 8 March 1874.
566 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 17 November 1873.
567 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 5 June 1871.
568 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 14 December 1868.
569 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 May 1871.
570 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 27 October 1873.
Though a Catholic saint, Paul did not extoll the virtues of other Catholics. In fact, much like Moni, a person he often complimented was former *Cercle Harmonique* member and medium Valmour. “Valmour has been elevated magnificently,” he assured the circle. The “love and charity” of his “splendid” soul ensured him a happy existence in the spiritual world. The saint was not short on praise for the medium. Valmour was also “noble and sublime;” his soul possessed a “brilliant light;” and he was a revealer of “eternal illuminations.” Others should emulate Valmour, particularly those who felt called to be mediums. Not only did he celebrate Valmour, he also praised Spiritualism. Indeed, Spiritualism was the religion that properly understood and propagated Jesus’s message. He explained that “understanding Spiritualism is imitating Jesus” and that to “recognize that Spiritualism is walking towards God.”

The saint also spoke of the triumph of humanity and the triumph of “the Idea.” Both of these meant the forward spiritual progress of humanity—a spiritual progress built on egalitarianism. “Enlightened philosophies” would extinguish “social prejudices.” Even in the spiritual realm, he was hard at this work “to purge the numerous errors that impede its [humanity’s] progress towards the Good.” A saint’s work was never done. Spiritualist brothers needed to do their part too, and those brothers were described as “a great phalanx” and “sentinels of civilization.” With Spiritualists working on earth and spirits like Paul in the spiritual realm, “generous ideas and truth can only triumph in the struggle.” Therefore, there should be “no doubt” in “the triumphant march of good over evil.” Though he was certain of eventual triumph in some messages, he still needed both those on earth and the spirits above to do their part.

Paul and all the spirits taught that the egalitarian triumph of humanity would need republican ideals. In all his wisdom, he knew that the oligarchy of old white southern power would eventually complete its fall from social power. A communication received in April of 1869 began, “The noisy clamors caused by the expiring oligarchy under the terrible blows given

571 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 12 February 1873.
572 “How many healing mediums for not having sought to know the truth have remained in complete ignorance of their faculties,” the saint asked. This was why they should listen to Jesus’s words “seek and you shall find.” Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 September 1871.
573 Grandjean collection 85-34; 24 September 1871.
574 In another message on November 19, 1871, St. Vincent de Paul stated that the work of him and other spirits already in the spiritual realm was “more difficult than you think.”
575 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 5 May 1871.
576 “We need energetic and dedicated souls,” but “we will prepare the road.” Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 November 1871; and 85-52; 17 October 1873, respectively.
by the invincible chief (Grant) with his sword, must, little by little, cease.” Everywhere, the saint praised, “the chains of slavery are falling under the voice of Reason and Logic.” Though he also referred to “moral slavery” from time to time, in this case Paul meant the physical enslavement of Africans and their diasporic descendants. He chastised Spain and Portugal who still “bore the burning stigma of the Slave Trade” and described these two countries in particular as “branded with the seal of infamy for having the last, preserved human slavery.” Later in the same message he would refer to moral slavery and told the circle “to extinguish moral Slavery, under any form it presents itself, in order to liberate Humanity of all chains.” If Spiritualists (both in this circle and others) could end moral slavery, then they would “spread the greatest quantity of happiness possible among Earth’s children, in destroying all power tending to control thought, action, and conscience.” Both the slavery of the slave trade and moral enslavement to materialism and greed came from the same inspiration: domination. But the “diverse social revolutions which take place among you and your neighbors” were symbolic of the “march of Progress.” The U.S. had a significant role in this progress, for here “you owe refuge to the oppressed of the Earth, without distinction of races, religions, nationalities.” He instructed them to “invite everyone to come and partake with you of the benefits of the rights of the press, of thought, and religious liberty.”

Paul’s instructions to “extinguish moral slavery,” his chastisements of white domination, and his support for humanity’s triumph are significant parts of the circle’s understanding of politics and society, and receiving these messages from a saint rendered a degree of authority to the *Cercle Harmonique*. While the Afro-creole Spiritualists and their guides criticized Catholicism and the hierarchy, they had Saint Vincent de Paul on their side. This Catholic saint was still their saint.

“Once the penance is accomplished, each spirit enjoys happiness”: Catholic Terminology and Ideas

Though former priests and others criticized certain elements of Catholic dogma, they also used terminology from Catholicism and Catholic-seeming ideas in their messages. However, this occasional use of Catholic-sounding terminology did not mean an acceptance of Catholic ideas. According to Edmond Capdeville, the “most stubborn” spirits to accept the truth of

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577 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 5 April 1869.
579 An Edmond Capdeville fought in the eighth regiment of the Louisiana militia during the War of 1812. Index to Louisiana Soldiers During the War of 1812, http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/state/military/war1812/index.txt.
Spiritualism were former Roman Catholics. After a lifetime in the Church, their own free will had been so “subjected to the ecclesiastical iron hand” that they had lost their ability “to reason,” and, he continued, “we do not want the blind acceptance of anything.” Rather than an expression of assent, spirits who used Catholic terminology typically did so in order to better explain themselves to those still stuck in the material world. Spirits who told the circle that they were in hell, such as Napoleon, did so in order “to make you know their position” because they knew that the use of hell “would carry the best explanation to your understanding.” Likewise the “brother” continued, “there have been spirits who have employed the word ‘Paradise’ to make you comprehend how happy they were!” According to Saint Vincent de Paul, those often called “angels” were really spirit guides. Capdeville echoed this idea and equated the notion of a “guardian angel” to the guiding spirits. “Some of our brothers here have felt obligated to use the word,” he explained in order to use a term recognizable to those still on earth. Catholic terminology was used only to render their messages more intelligible.

The language of Communion was also adopted by some of the spirits. Jesus referred to *Cercle Harmonique* meetings as the “bread of the soul” or “Communion.” The act of communicating with the spirits was “a holy duty” that contributed to the “gospel of peace, love, and charity.” The spirit of Volney referred to the “Word of the spirit” as “the daily bread of the soul.” Saint Vincent de Paul instructed them to “work to earn the daily bread that must relieve your body,” and while Paul did not define what that daily bread was, it clearly came from spiritual work rather than the Catholic Mass. The Afro-creole Spiritualists needed “spiritual food,” gained from working for charity and justice. One obtained “his daily spiritual bread” from work at the séance table. The frequent spirit guide Lunel compared the “metamorphosis”

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580 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 18 December 1872.
581 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 26 November 1873. Message from “a brother.”
582 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 1 October 1870.
583 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 18 December 1872.
584 The spirit of an “ex-priest” encouraged the circle “to pray.” Prayer helped call the spirits to a Spiritualist circle. The spirit also explained, “reinforced” the soul and “uplifts the Soul.” However, the spirit did not describe how a Spiritualist was to pray; surely it would not be through the use of a rosary or any other Catholic devotional device, for this would include the use of material “pomp” (more on Catholic pomp below). But, since the spirit signed off as “a brother, ex-priest,” it does seem to be a continued use of certain Christian terms. Grandjean collection 85-51; 20 March 1873.
585 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 21 December 1871.
586 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 23 February 1872.
587 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 30 March 1872.
588 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 30 April 1872. Message from “A devoted brother, Romain.”
of a soul under spiritual guidance to “Holy Communion,” for both were thought to purify and sanctify.589

Rather than absolving sin and becoming reconciled with God through Catholic sacraments, Moni informed the circle that the rewards of the invisible world were afforded to those with “pure hearts.” Though, for some, “penance” of a sort would be necessary. “Terrible punishment” awaited “for the vain glorious one who believed himself privileged, and did not understand that his clothing of flesh was merely a gross and perishable envelope, a food, or a prey for myriads of insects more disgusting the ones than the others.”590 Though “terrible punishment,” may make it seem as though Moni was referring to a kind of hell, most American Spiritualists did not believe in hell.591 Moni described a state of “darkness” awaiting those who unjustly oppressed others. Their spirits roam “about like shadows” in response to their cruel actions on earth. The spirits spoke of a time period after the physical world that seemed similar to purgatory called Retribution. According to Moni, it would be after “penance is accomplished” that each spirit enjoyed “happiness.” The period of Retribution was necessary for spirits because “each fault bears its own penalty.”592

The use of the term “penance” in conjunction with the waiting period of Retribution parallels the temporary punishment in and purification from Catholic purgatory. Retribution kept one’s spirit accountable for his or her actions in the material world, much like how purgatory allowed Catholics to purify themselves of their sins instead of directly going to hell. Upon entering the spiritual world, spirits underwent Retribution, during which they would be spiritually cleansed of their past injustices, biases, and superstitions. Recognizing their spiritual neglect during their earthly lives, realizing their own prejudices, and seeing their sinful ways, spirits would regulate their own atoning period. Observing themselves in the “mirror of Truth,” the spirits of the dead would recognize their offenses; find themselves “hideous;” and “be horrified” of their “ideas,” their “past,” and their “false appreciations.”593 Unlike any kind of Christian hell, the individual spirit, as opposed to anyone else, regulated his or her own Retribution period. “Everyone here,” the spirit of former New Orleans mayor Paul Bertus

589 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 13 Aug 1872.
590 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 21 October 1871.
592 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 21 October 1871.
593 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 1 December 1873. Message from “Andre, a brother.”
explained, “will be his own judge.” Retribution allowed spirits to learn the lessons they missed in life and punish themselves accordingly. A spirit identified as André warned the table that Retribution would show them, “by its mirror of Truth, what you are! Oh! then, you will behold yourselves hideous, and you will be horrified of what you are by your ideas, your past, your false appreciations.” Following Retribution a spirit underwent Purification. The spirit worked “for the glory and beauty of the soul,” all the while remembering “his struggles and his imperfections.” This included education from other spirits or from observing various circles. “Perfectibility” could only be reached after a spirit experienced Sanctification, when the soul became “radiant and enlightened” and recognized that he was “worthy” and belonged in the high spiritual spheres.

A person was better prepared for Retribution by keeping the soul “pure of defilement” on Earth and committing “good deeds.” Additionally, Retribution readied a soul for entrance into the high spiritual spheres. The truly “penitent” was burdened with “paying his debt.” While a spirit might weep for the past during Retribution, he would rise “educated and blessed” traveling to “splendid regions” with a “sublime soul.” During this time, the spirit viewed himself “reflected by the mirror of Truth with his weaknesses, his cowardice. The flesh is no more there to obstruct his reason.” Some spirits would be “unhappy and stubborn for a long time” in the spiritual world “owing to the action of Evil having its force upon them.” Ill-prepared for the spiritual world, these spirits would experience quite a jolt.

Not all would make the transition in the spirit world smoothly. While it seems most spirits willingly underwent Retribution, a few were “antagonistic” towards it and towards “those who seek for Good.” These spirits, not understanding the truth and oftentimes thinking themselves “condemned for eternity,” were unfortunately still “inclined to vengeance.” This was a main reason why circle members needed to be careful to avoid communication with those

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594 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 4 September 1874.
595 For many, Retribution takes place in abodes prepared for a lesson for development.” Grandjean collection, 85-32; 6 October 1872. Message from A. Rousseau. “Others [spirits] are there, bound to places where they have defiled their souls; they are there for an atonement; there is also retribution which calls them there for a lesson!” Grandjean collection; 85-52; 1 December 1873. Message from “a brother.”
596 Grandjean collection; 85-52; 1 December 1873.
597 Grandjean collection, 85-45; 6 Sept 1872. Numerous back to back messages from Edmond Capdevielle, the devoted brother.
598 Grandjean collection, 85-46; 1 November 1872. Message from Père Antoine.
601 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 27 November 1873. Message from “a brother.”
spirits. A spirit named Robert warned them that certain spirits, those “unhappy,” “stubborn,” and “gloomy” brothers, were “opposed to Humanity’s progress.” These spirits were “lurking” and “anxious to break the luminous circle.” However, these bitter and malcontent spirits must have been rare, for in the spiritual world, no one was really “safe from the punishment of his wrongs” because all experienced “the shame of seeing that everyone can read” in one’s thoughts any “committed wrong.” The spirit of Emile Bertrand taught them that nothing could save someone from “the judgment you will pass yourself on all your actions.”

The afterworld according to Spiritualism pushed against the theology of Catholicism in other ways too. While Retribution could be compared to purgatory, the concept of hell was thrown out completely. Though terror of hellfire had been a common theological talking point for Catholic evangelizers of Native Americans, such as the Jesuits during the earlier colonial era, it became a less frequent sermon focus in the nineteenth century. This does not mean that theological discussions of the horrors of hell and the possibility of purgatory dropped from Catholic communities, but it did lessen. Not just in American Catholicism, the earlier Catholic focus on hellfire weakened during the nineteenth century in France too. As the spirits came to the Cercle Harmonique to discuss the happiness of good spirits in the invisible world, sermons on the joys of heaven and the love of God replaced the earlier fearsome sermons in the U.S. and France. These positive messages of encouragement and progress and the constructive self-cleansing of Retribution were at odds with Catholicism’s exploitative fear of hell. Pére Ambroise informed Barthet’s circle in April of 1857 that Church’s notion of hell was absurd, for God was merciful and did not want to torture his children. Rather hell was a construct of the Catholic

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602 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 8 March 1873. Message from “a brother.”
603 These spirits “refused to listen” to the good spirits remained “apart.” Grandjean collection, 85-51; 22 March 1873. Message from “Robert, a delegate.”
Church meant to “inspire terror” and “subject” the laity.\textsuperscript{607} The spirits who visited the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} had a similar perspective. Moni castigated the Catholic Church for its teachings on the afterlife, including hell. Catholic priests tried “to scare” the laity with the threatening image of an “eternal fire!” In contrast, Spiritualism taught “eternal happiness!” He used this difference of afterlife theology to compare Catholicism with Spiritualism: “One seeks to frighten mankind in order to dominate, the other to comfort him by showing the Truth to be everyone’s judge.”\textsuperscript{608}

The spirit of Lamennais agreed with criticisms of hell and affirmed that eternal punishment was neither rational nor just. Thus a noble God could not condone it.\textsuperscript{609} Voltaire too pitied those “poor beings who spend their lives in this terrible hell of the fear of an imaginary hell.”\textsuperscript{610} Another spirit described hell as a “horrible invention” of the “black robes in order to dominate.”\textsuperscript{611} Moni described many former priests—whom he called “so-called Minister of God” and “Minister of Lucifer”—aimlessly wandering in the spirit world, seeking answers in their former churches “where they used to harass the […] conscience with false precepts” like hell.\textsuperscript{612} A “devoted brother” chimed in, “the idea of a hell preached in the material world has caused nearly all those unfortunates to believe in the eternity of their punishments.”\textsuperscript{613} In contrast to “the eternity of suffering preached by some bigots,” Spiritualism believed the immortal spirit moved towards “perfectibility in its eternal progress.”\textsuperscript{614} This could be a criticism of Catholicism or more orthodox Christianity in general, but considering how priests are typically identified as those who intimidate with threats of hell, the spirit was likely referencing Catholicism.

Ambroise was disappointed that the “religious oligarchy” manipulated people and squelched free thought. Those in monasteries, safely guarded from “prying eyes” with their “high walls,” offered indulgences for those who hoped to escape “imaginary hell.”\textsuperscript{615} Though he and other spirits taught that hell as the Church described it did not exist, Ambroise also seemed to use the ideas of Catholicism even in his rebuke of Catholicism. He stated that “the Lord will have mercy” on the innocent but “ravening wolves” would “be punished like me. May you see  

\textsuperscript{607} Published message in, \textit{Le Spiritualiste de la Nouvelle-Orléans}, 88–91. It is unclear if this is St. Ambrose, the church father of fourth century. The same spirit frequents the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}.  
\textsuperscript{608} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 2 June 1871.  
\textsuperscript{609} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 6 July 1871. Message from “Lamenais.”  
\textsuperscript{610} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 16 December 1871. Message from Voltaire.  
\textsuperscript{611} Grandjean collection, 85-43; 2 August 1872.  
\textsuperscript{612} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 21 October 1871.  
\textsuperscript{613} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 17 March 1873.  
\textsuperscript{614} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 16 February 1869. Message from “one.”  
\textsuperscript{615} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 2 January 1872.
your error!” This is another case of how the ideas of Catholicism, in this case the Judgment by
God, could be echoed in the messages of the Cercle Harmonique, though in the process, this
message reproached and warned priests like him.616 This ambivalence towards Catholic theology
points to a continued connection between the Cercle Harmonique and Catholicism. The Afro-
creole Spiritualists maintained various connections to their Catholics pasts. But, the Catholic
Church clearly did not teach the right understanding of the afterlife or the nature of the spiritual
world, or even a full understanding of sin. Reconciliation and confession did not save one’s spirit
after passing from the material world, and according to former clergy, the deadly sins preached
by the Catholic Church were not the most egregious. Rather, it was cruelty towards others,
prejudice, and impeding spiritual progress that harmed one’s spirit. Salvation came from proper
knowledge and understanding of the spiritual world and spiritual progress.

“They blessed the Confederate flags”: Anti-Catholicism among the Cercle Harmonique617

Barthélemy Rey, Henri’s father, was an active Catholic when alive, and like many other
members of the Cercle Harmonique, Rey was raised in a very Catholic home. His parents,
Barthélemy and Rose Rey, were first-generation, free, black émigrés from Saint Domingue
following the Haitian Revolution. The Rey family was an active and respected one in the city’s
Afro-creole community.618 Rey and his siblings grew up in a Catholic household, and his father
was part of the Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence and served
as director for the school for the year leading up to his death.619 When Barthélemy Rey died, his
funeral at Annunciation Church was lavish, included board members and instructors of the
Catholic Institute, and it was quite expensive. Though a devoted Catholic in life, Barthélemy
would prove a harsh critic in death. His spirit shared with Rey that he was suspicious of Father
Morisot, the family’s priest at Annunciation Church, and watched in horror as the priest and the
family were “haggling” over money for the funeral arrangements and the priest asked the family
for “your whole fortune.” Barthélemy lamented how “the next day [after the funeral], there
wasn’t a penny to feed the large family” because “you [Rose] gave him [Morisot] everything.”

616 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 10 October 1871.
617 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 11 June 1871.
618 Desdunes, Our People and Our History, 109–122.
619 The school was founded with money from the widow Couvent, whose husband would later visit Rey’s table. For
example, late in April of 1872, Bernard Couvent brought the table a long message, encouraging the table to study
the messages they receive and to hone their humility and charity. Grandjean collection, 85-40; 30 April 1872.
From the combination of witnessing this display of “avarice” and greed and of now living among the harmonious spirits of the invisible world, Barthélemy finally learned spiritual truth. “I realized that their [priests’] dogmas did not exist,” he told his son, for “a just God could not want unfortunate orphans to be robbed of everything.”

Though resonances of Catholic ideas like purgatory echoed in the circle’s messages and former priests appeared in the séance record books, the spirit communiques also demonstrated anti-Catholic sentiments from a variety of spirits. In an essay-style message on the importance of religious freedom, Swedenborg explained that Catholicism was easy for the spirits to attack because it was “the religion with the least harmony.” The institution of Catholicism and its priestly representatives were frequent targets for spiritual critique. This was not a trait singular to New Orleanian Spiritualists. Disapproval of the Catholic priesthood and the perceived undemocratic nature of the institutional church were common among Spiritualist across the country. But some of the spirits’ criticisms were based in New Orleans creole Catholicism and the actions of the archdiocese, particularly its support of the Confederacy. According to the spirits at the Cercle Harmonique’s table, both the Catholic Church and priests sought domination and power and were corrupted by greed and materialism. Catholics and dioceses across the South supported the Confederacy and the racial status quo of the region, and the local archdiocese’s backing for the Confederacy certainly did not help keep the city’s Afro-creoles in its pews.

Early on during the war, New Orleans Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin stated that, “our country … has become involved in a bloody war,” though “justice is on our side … let us fervently beseech the Lord that he may be pleased to shield them [Confederate soldiers] with his

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620 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 November 1858.
621 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 July 1858.
623 The New Orleans order of nonwhite nuns, *Sœurs de Sainte Famille* (Sisters of the Holy Family), though organized in the early 1840s, were not allowed to make public vows until 1852 and were denied official habits until 1872. For a longer history of the Catholic Church’s support of slavery and the racial status quo of the South, see Michael Pasquier, “‘Though Their Skin Remains Brown, I Hope Their Souls Will Soon Be White’: Slavery, French Missionaries, and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the American South, 1789–1865,” *Church History*, 77.2 (2008): 339–370; and chapter 5 “Slavery, Civil War, and Southern Catholicism,” in Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*. For a more national look at the Catholic Church’s support of slavery and Democratic politics, see Frank L. Klement, “Catholics as Copperheads during the Civil War,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 80.1 (1994): 36–57.
624 A spirit identifying himself as “Odin” visited the group in July of 1874 and encouraged the circle to prepare for a world “of love and charity.” Grandjean collection, 85-56; 7 July 1874. Message from “Odin.” Though the spirit does not apologize, as other former Catholic clerics often did, there is a good chance that the spirit is that of New Orleans Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin (February 25, 1800–May 25, 1870; Archbishop February 15, 1861–May 25, 1870).
powerful arm, protect our rights, and to preserve our liberties untouched.” Even during the Union occupation of New Orleans, the archdiocese continued to support officially the Confederacy. Blessing ceremonies for Confederate flags, Confederate troops, and the Confederate cause would persist through the war’s end and afterwards. The religion of the Lost Cause as historian Charles Reagan Wilson described it was present, though in a more muted fashion in New Orleans. In the years following the Civil War and into Reconstruction, former Catholic Confederate soldiers remained bonded over the common experience of war and wore their Confederate uniforms proudly during funerals processions. Archbishop Napoleon Perché ordered all parishes to celebrate the official end of Reconstruction by singing a Te Deum in “thanksgiving to God for the pacification of Louisiana which, reinstated in its legitimate rights and governed by a man of its own choice, will henceforth see all its children, without distinction, united in a spirit and one sentiment.”

The Church’s support for Confederacy was so ubiquitous in New Orleans that a pro-Union, abolitionist priest was unique and scandalous for the archdiocese. French-born Father Paschal Maistre was not always a priest with the best reputation (he was twice accused of sexual impropriety), and he moved frequently around the Midwest during his initial years in the United States. When he was transferred to the New Orleans diocese, he came with a warning: his former bishop warned New Orleans Archbishop Antoine Blanc that Maistre “behaved well” but suffered from “the mania to make money.” But it would be his open and unapologetic support for the Union and abolition that marked him as a local renegade. However this made him a popular religious leader for the city’s black populations because he was a priest who spoke for racial equality despite his institutional leaders’ reproach. Maistre’s radical behavior included serving

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626 L’Union, “Religion Accommodating Politics,” 6 December 1862.
629 Napoleon Joseph Perché, Pastoral Letter prescribing prayers in thanksgiving for the happy issue of our political troubles, 6 May 1877, quoted in Pasquier, “Catholic Southerners, Catholic Soldiers,” 44.
630 Bishop James Oliver Van de Veld to Archbishop Antoine Blanc, 6 November 1855, and 23 October 1855; Archdiocese of New Orleans Collection in Archives of the University of Notre Dame; quoted in Ochs, A Black Patriot and a White Priest, 99.
631 For example, though diocesan regulations ordered the segregation of parish sacrament registers for whites, slaves, and free persons of color, Maistre began to integrate the St. Rose of Lima registers in January of 1863. When Archbishop Jean-Marie Odin ordered Maistre to return to “normal” practice, Maistre ignored his request.
black Union troops camped near his parish at Camp Strong who were denied an official chaplain. In April 1863 he offered a high mass in thanksgiving for the Emancipation Proclamation, and his sermon celebrated freedom. He identified the Emancipation Proclamation as the hard first step in the triumph of righteousness. Pro-Confederate New Orleanians began to threaten Maistre, including another priest, who according to the L’Union staff (though they hope they misheard), alluded to lynching him by his stole. For his support of the Union and abolition, the archbishop revoked Maistre’s clerical faculties and in May of 1863 shut down Maistre’s parish under penalty of excommunication until further notice. Yet Maistre and a group of parishioners continued to celebrate at the parish while building a new, and completely schismatic, parish nearby. Still displaying their criticism of the Confederacy and the region’s complicity in slavery, the renegade priest officiated a funerary service in honor of radical abolitionist John Brown on the anniversary of his death in December of 1867 at the rouge parish. Maistre’s story illuminates the pervasive acceptance and support of the Confederacy held by the local Catholic Church and hierarchy. While many black Catholics remained in their parish’s pews, it is not surprising that some left the Church for the spiritual republicanism of Spiritualism.

The spirits saw the Church’s support for the Confederacy as part of the institution’s thirst for power and proclivity for material success. Indeed, spirits came to the table to criticize the Church for its support of the Confederacy, and this included a former priest who had endorsed segregation. In 1871, former local New Orleans priest Father Gabriel Chalon came to regret how the institutional church thought it needed “so much,” including information. Echoing other priests, Chalon noted that he sought the secrets of the laity and their money. “Confess!” he had shouted, “We’re curious.” Not just information, the Church wanted money too. Though “the Negro” was forced to the back of the church, his “greenbacks” (money) were seen as “white”

633 L’Union, 4 April 1863.
634 L’Union, “Religion Accommodating Politics,” 6 December 1862.
635 During the Holy Name of Jesus’s first year (1864), Maistre would claim 150 baptisms—all black—nearly tripling his stats from his final year at St. Rose. When the archdiocese reopened St. Rose under new pastoral care in early 1864, the parish’s more powerful white creole families had their children baptized there. According to Archbishop Odin, Maistre had offended many of the white creole families of St. Rose’s with his support of emancipation, and the families who stopped attending the parish would only return after Maistre left it. Baudier, Centennial: St. Rose of Lima Parish, 25–26.
636 New Orleans Tribune, 1 December 11867. The Tribune was the city’s Afro-creole newspaper that began the week after L’Union closed during the summer of 1864. Similar stories and perspectives were reflected in both papers.
and welcome. He and other priests would “bless” any and all “greenbacks.” Not only money, he and others “blessed the Confederate flags.” During his time in New Orleans, Chalon oversaw mass at St. Mary’s Church, and in 1863 he began segregating the pews. Whites sat in the front of the parish, blacks in the rear, and the mixed-race occupied the middle pews. Coming to the Cercle Harmonique indicated that in death Chalon must have recognized his errors, or that at least the medium felt he should. The spirit of Lamennais also reproached the Church for their support of the Confederate cause:

My children, we did see them, during the last war, preaching the sanctity of the horrible institution of slavery; we did see them, blessing banners of the battalions which were forging new and stronger chains for their brothers, black as well as white; we did see them, flattering the vanity of those who relegated to the last pews in their temples their poor brothers, their children; we did see them, girding the sword, marching to battles, praying God for the extermination of the children of Progression, and for the enslavement of poor forlorn creatures, who were feeding them and their children, by the sweat of their brow, with their manual labor; we did see them—these unworthy disciples of Jesus—lie with effrontery to his beautiful principles.

In addition to the enslavement of Africans and African descendants, Lamennais seemed to criticize the general social power of upper-class whites.

Many spirits who were Catholic clerics in life expressed harsh judgment upon Catholicism in their messages. Amongst the former priests who expressed shame for their past errors was none other than Father Morisot—the priest in Barthélemy’s message guilty of swindling the Rey family out of their money following Barthélemy’s death. Morisot admitted that his “black dress … hid” his “weaknesses,” but he felt “ashamed” now and “bowed my head before my infamy.” His past experiences as a priest made him even more aware of “the dangers of the power of these mercenaries [priests], who, like me, are ravening the purity of those who are entrusted to them.” The people would be better off without priests. Ambroise likened revolutions that brought “Freedom of conscience” to ones that freed the people from “any clerical yoke.” This spirit, Ambroise, frequented the table of the Cercle Harmonique and would occasionally identify himself as an “ex-Capuchin,” thus joining Moni, Morisot, and

637 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 11 June 1871.
638 L’Union, 5 May 1863.
639 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 March 1869.
640 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872.
641 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 9 January 1870.
Sedella as former priests who came to the group. Thus, his disapproval of Catholicism could be trusted. He knew well “that cohort of demons, because I was one of their leaders.” Equating freedom from Catholicism with escaping from hell, he admitted that he “paralyzed the progress of humanity.” Additionally, like many others, he pointed out how all of Catholicism’s material wealth was at the expense of the laity: church bells, the organ, incense, and candles. And this greed was regrettable since “the rings of the Bishops, [if] sold and distributed to the poor of the earth, could relieve much misery.” Ambroise also delivered his criticism with attitude. They, meaning Catholic powers, “build splendid residences and Theatres … sorry, churches, at your expense.” The spirit of Renaissance French writer and monk François Rabelais also apologized for his former status as a Catholic cleric. Though he was an “abbot,” he now “confesses to you [the Cercle Harmonique].” Wearing the vestments of a priest did not make one special since “the clothes do not make the man.” Rather, everyone was responsible for their actions regardless of status.

Rabelais provided a glossary of sorts that offered explanations of Catholic and Spiritualist ideas, and the message largely targeted the exploitative nature of Catholicism. He described baptism as the imposition of beliefs on someone “who does not think or understand anything yet,” confession was “a demon laughing at the naïveté” of others, a choir boy was a child “learning to be a hypocrite,” a church was “the religious theatre,” purgatory was a place that depended on “the rise or fall of indulgences,” and the devil was “the bogeyman for devotees.” The priest received a particularly vitriolic depiction as “the enemy” and an “intruder who wants to be your master.” While a shepherd shears his sheep “to the skin,” a priest “shears his sheep to the bone.” In another message Rabelais compared priests to “ravenous wolves,” demanding money even from “beggars.” The “black Robes” still on earth would identify spirits like Rabelais as “demons,” but it was they who were the agents of “deception.” He, in contrast, was happy to be free from Catholicism’s “insolent dogmas” that “commanded obedience” and to be free from “intolerance.”

642 Grandjean collection 85-39; 18 February 1872, for message where he signs off as “Père Ambroise, ex-Capucin.”
643 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 10 October 1871.
645 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 March 1869.
646 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 17 December 1871.
The spirits identified the various theological ideas taught by the Catholic Church as backwards, misleading, and just plain wrong. The idea that “a kneeling posture” while “muttering prayers” could “obtain forgiveness” was preposterous to the spiritual republic. To be deserving of the spiritual world and its glory, one should actively “struggle against Evil” in order to “vanquish it,” not rely on asking for forgiveness later. Simply praying could not right someone’s past wrongdoings. Instead one needed to possess “the moral courage” to do the right thing simply because it was right and not out of fear. Additionally, the “mysteries” preached by Catholic clerics were intellectual “barriers” for the poor believer. Voltaire called the act of hiding behind an exploitative religion “pathetic, really!” But those who held power and demanded “religious subservience” were being “weakened” by the “march of humanity’s enlightenment.”

The “pomp and apparatus” of the Catholic tradition also brought criticism. Shortly after a grand ceremony honoring Archbishop Napoleon Perché, a spirit came to the table to lament the ceremony. Perché had just returned from a seven month stay in Rome, and his return was heralded by a great procession through the city, followed by a service at the cathedral. The whole ceremony was, according to the spirit of Pierre Méllo, a “great demonstration for a man who represents error, lies, and hypocrisy.” Méllo asked: “More than twenty thousand people attended to see what?” He then answered his own question: “to receive a blessing” from a man “who only thinks of wealth at the expense of the poor and orphans.” Perché gained some local notoriety for being a harsh critic of Spiritualism and Mesmerism, for denying the black Sœurs de la Sainte-Famille (Sisters of the Holy Family) an official habit, and for his general condemnation of liberal and revolutionary thought. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the spirits would be critical of him. Méllo’s criticism of Perché’s celebration and its splendor was not uncommon. The spirit of Armand Desdunes explained that anyone who condemned Catholics for their pageantry, would need to be equally critical of themselves. The practice of the Cercle Harmonique was good due to “the simplicity of your table.” This is not surprising, since the spirits often admonished those who were focused on material goods or the material body. The materiality of the Catholic mass distracted worshippers from what truth did reside in Catholic

651 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
653 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 22 May 1871.
teachings. In contrast, the simpler practice of Spiritualism kept the focus of practitioners on their practice. Their simplicity ensured that their “work” had “harmony.”

According to Voltaire, a true Spiritualist was nothing like “those great pompoms for a God,” and that the *Cercle Harmonique* should keep from the table those who claim to be Spiritualists but who have “lowered themselves to the level of those extinguishers of thought, who have organs, songs, and theatrical auxiliaries and apparel.” Those men will soon “want to institute churchly ceremonies” and turn Spiritualism into a prescripted affair that overshadows its point—interaction with wise spirits. Robespierre understood the Church to be opposed to the idea of the Republic. Whereas “Galileo saw himself thrown into prison,” Robespierre contended that republics “produced great men, who have been able to unfold their theories and put them into practice, without any fear from the revengeful hostility of the church.” Catholic authorities not only subdued intellectual progress, they also quelled the progress of humanity. His comparison continued, “Republic—it is the People marching towards Progress; the Monarchy—it is the Church, the Power striving to hoodwink the People, to gag, to lead it, to retard its march, denying it light.”

The Afro-creole Spiritualists fought Catholicism outside their séance records as well. Some stories about Rey and others in New Orleans were recorded by Grandjean from conversations with Petit (his father-in-law) and glued into one of the register books. One recounts a popular, local, French healer named Madame Charles Thomas who maintained a good relationship with the city’s metaphysicals and Catholics. When a priest approached her and suggested they work together to provide physical and spiritual guidance to locals for a price, she rebuked him stating that since she received the help of the spirits for free, her services would be free as well. Only a selfish person would use spiritual power for personal and material benefit. On another occasion a priest from Bayou Lafourche named Thibodeaux approached Rey with a similar plan—padding their “pockets.” Rey turned him down. Another local priest, a Father Subilo at St. Augustine parish, one day asked a local spiritual healer named Madame Jourdain why she no longer attended church. When she responded that she had given up Catholicism for Spiritualism, the priest admitted that he agreed with her. When she pressed why he continued to “teach error,” he explained that “the world is not prepared to accept” Spiritualism. By keeping

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654 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
655 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 26 October 1871.
656 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 24 February 1869.
quiet about the truth (Spiritualism), she retorted that “the world would never be prepared.” A final story recounts when the priest in Iberville, Father Dupuis, chided Petit for not attending confession. Petit’s responded that he would confess his wrongdoings only to those who cared about him, like his mother or father, and not “a stranger indifferent to what happens to me.”

The spirits periodically admired other critics of Catholicism, such as Calvin and Luther, for their willingness to speak out. Joining their ranks were the former priests who now criticized the institution of the Church, including two former popes. The spirit of Clement XIV repeatedly likened priests to “vampires” since they “sucked” power from everyone—men, women, children, kings, and beggars. On another occasion, a spirit identified as Boniface, lamented how “Fraternity and Charity” suffered due to humanity’s “imperious Selfishness.” According to the spirit, most religions were “born of interest” rather than “the Truth,” and favored the material over real salvation. He further explained that this selfishness contributed “to the loss of the Church of Rome, who, forgetting the Great Humanitarian and Fraternal Principles of Jesus,” instead focused on strengthening its own “power” and “domination.” Rather than seeking Truth, the Catholic Church desired power and control over all. In order to achieve this domination, Boniface described Jesuits as “the smaller soldiers with black robes in humble village [who] work to accomplish these wishes!” This reference to Jesuit priests characterized them as workers in the Church of Rome’s plan to dominate the world. Additionally, it is indicative of the spirits’ dislike of Jesuits, who they described as greedy men who exploited and stole money from rich and poor alike. Even if the poor had little money to give, the Jesuits wanted it all and would not shy from taking advantage of every, to use Boniface’s phrase, “humble village.” Thus, the hierarchal institution of the Catholic Church and the spirit of republicanism were at odds, in large part due to assumed authority of priests.

“Shun the Priest!”: Anti-Clericalism and Religious Authority

The disillusion with the Catholic hierarchy, as first expressed in Barthélemy Rey’s disapproval of Father Morisot, continued throughout the circle’s tenure. Even Jesus recognized

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659 Grandjean collection, 85-41; 7 May 1872. Message from Clement XIV.
660 Grandjean collection; 85-33; 13 June 1871.
661 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 23 December 1872.
“the infamous role of the Black Robe among his flock.” Into their final days, the séance records reported denunciations of the “religious oligarchy”—meaning the “monstrous power” of black-robed Catholic priests. Spiritualists could avoid the “religious subservience” demanded by priests. Instead of giving power to clerics, Spiritualists held religious knowledge and truth in their own hands and in their table’s records. The “freethinkers” at the table should “delight” in their knowledge and superiority over Catholic priests and their followers. “Triumph” and “progress” came from Spiritualism, not a hierarchical religious system. The “Religious Oligarchy” had ordered many to “Close your Eyes!” in order to keep them from seeing the truth. Another spirit likened the power of clerics to “the devouring wolf that watches and subsists on its victim’s blood.” This “clerical power,” the spirit taught, combated the enlightening of nations and the path of liberty, for “tyrants are anointed by it [clerical power], because they are its minions and associates, in order to deceive the People.” Rabelais also warned Spiritualists about the corruption of priests, both their lust for money and secrets. Rabelais warned that the priest “wants to be your master and that of your wife and children, who would like to know all the family secrets.” Money or secrets, priests wanted to exploit the laity for both.

In addition to their materialism, priests were criticized for their assumed and undeserved authority and how they used it to exploit the masses. “The evil caused by the religious oligarchy will be known to you here,” a spirit assured the circle. Without the obstruction of the physical body Cercle Harmonique members would be able to survey the earth and see for themselves “the perversity and the terrible immoral calamity which prevail inside of the so-called holy places.” This moment would confirm all the spirits’ warnings about the Jesuits, for they too will “shudder to behold the lugubrious history of the priest’s heart” and see the horror of “the unfortunate who has submitted to the black robed priest’s manacles.” The priest used his authority over the laity to exploit their vulnerabilities. Thus, in the spirit world there are “no priests,” for each spirit was a child of God “who has in his bosom a spark which will illumine his thought, will expand his intelligence, will elevate his soul toward Him, will teach to himself the eternal principles of

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662 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 10 December 1871.
663 Grandjean collection, 85-62; 24 February 1876. Message from “a friend.”
664 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 20 December 1872.
666 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 11 March 1869.
667 Grandjean collection, 85-62; 24 February 1876. Message signed a “Friend!”
justice for all.”

The Spiritualists had a different understanding of the origin of religious authority and believed their understanding was a more just and fair one.

The Jesuits in particular were a frequent target of the spirits. Saint Vincent de Paul discussed the Jesuits in a message that associates the Jesuits with slavery. “Their command is an extreme one,” he argued, “and has marched from century to century, dominating the masses.” He called Jesuit priests “those cruel enemies of all liberties, who are posing as dictators of conscience.” He further described them as those “who, hypocritically come with their flattering voice demonstrating a false humility.” There was a time “when the simple sight of their robes caused one to tremble and shudder; today they see with hate and anger their robes causing laughter.” Though Paul never clearly said who was the “they” in the message, it was the Jesuits. At first glance, with its references to abolishment, particularly with the exclamation “the chains of slavery have been broken,” this message seems to be discussing the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Furthermore, arriving in 1869, the message’s allusion to robes that could cause fear seems a reference to the Ku Klux Klan. However, as he continued, it becomes that the “they” are Jesuits propagating moral slavery to Catholic dogma. In the statement where Paul identified the “they,” it also appears that Paul believed that the Jesuits’ power is diminishing; “the times are gone when Kings were trembling before them, when a papal bull was making a man, a reprobate; an object of refuse, or scorns.”

Another spirit likened the “black robed men” to “mercenaries.” Desiring power and money, mercenary seemed an apt comparison.

In a long message from an unknown spirit, the Jesuits were the subject of a particularly harsh message. Though lacking a clear reference to the Jesuit order, the spirit lamented how “this fatal black army … fetters humanity.” The spirit attacked the idea of indulgences because they favored the wealthy. The “gates” of purgatory were “heavy for the small purses, but light for the full and round ones.” In other words, money could save a person from the priests’ “dreadful theories of an eternal hell.” The strong censure of priests and money continued as the unknown spirit noted how the quality of a mass, be it “pompous or shabby” depended upon “the number of coins thrown into the big pocket of your robe.” Even worse, the priests taught “error” and “superstition.” Then to really highlight the corruption of priests, the spirit began a long comparison of the behavior and dogma of priests with Jesus:

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668 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 24 February 1871. Message from De Seveigne.
669 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 5 April 1869.
Your divine master used to preach Charity and was generous to the poor; you, you despoil them!
Your temples overflow with riches!
Jesus surrounded himself with the unfortunates of society; you, you associate with royalty; your pope wants to dictate to the whole world.
Jesus died between two robbers!
Jesus carried his cross; you, you gild and worship it!
Jesus used to comfort the afflicted; you, you dishearten them by your cruel theories!

“It is as difficult for a rich man to reach Heaven, as it is for a camel to pass through the eyes of a needle” has said Jesus.
The gates of Purgatory are wide open for money at the sound of the cacophony of your choristers!
You imprisoned Galileo; science would be put under a cover if you could!
You bless the flats of despots; Jesus blessed the people!
Jesus died for humanity; you, you live off it in torturing it!
Girded with a crown of olives, Jesus rode on a donkey; you, you preach war; in your palaces you collect the tithe. The pope receives seated on his throne and presents his big toe to be kissed!
Jesus charged twelve apostles with the mission to propagate his doctrine by speech to spread truth; you, to maintain yourselves you need the assistance of foreign soldiers, of bayonets, of cannons!  

In the eyes of this spirit, who preferred to sign as “L’inconnu” (the unknown), black-robed priests corrupted the message of Jesus and contradicted his behavior in every way. These were men hardly worthy of being spiritual leaders and mentors. Rather, they should be avoided.

No matter how successful a Jesuit may be in his earthly life, his life in the spiritual world would definitely not be pleasant. This chapter opened with Rey’s rejection of a Jesuit priest at his door seeking monetary donations, an action that brought cheering from the spirit Ambroise. Acquaintance with these “black robed men” should be avoided. They tried to trick men and women into following their incorrect theology and then swindle them of their money. “Oh! pity them,” Ambroise told the circle, “for, here, they will moan, will have to pass years at work, in order to redeem the evil they will have done by their lies, said to hide their aim of speculation.”

One of their main sins in the material world was their love of materialism, clearly seen in their greed for money. The Spiritualist’s soul was much better for it was “freed from Matter and from Materialism, purified and sanctified, perfectible, but also full of Love and Charity.”

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671 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 13 July 1870.
672 Grandjean collection, 85-49; 25 January 1873.
One of the spirits’ main issues with priests was their undeserved authority. “Religious power,” Ambroise believed was “the most odious system.” It was also “a myth” since love and Spiritualism were everywhere. With Spiritualism everywhere, there was “no need for Temples or ministers.” Religious authority was made even worse when it was paired with a political system for it allowed men as greedy as “vampires” seek “exclusive control.” Spiritualism, or “true belief” would abolish “Religious Despotism,” just as “perfect government” would destroy “Political Despotism.” In addition to former priests, deceased lay people recognized that Catholic clerics had mistreated them in life. The spirit of Dr. Blanchard regretted that he “got into trouble” during his time on earth because “black robes had very much dominated me and filled me with errors.” He regretted that he gave “credence to such nonsense” and allowed himself to be “governed as a child, without reason.” Another spirit lamented how s/he lived his/her life “under the rule of the black robes” and “suffered” as ignorance kept him/her “in the darkness.” “Unfortunate” was the one who lived “under the domination of the Priest.”

Desire for power was not the only deplorable trait of Catholic clerics. When referencing priests, spirits always censured them for their materialism and their greed. “The priest in Louisiana as everywhere else,” the spirit of Orfila disdained, “always lives luxuriously and amidst abundance.” A spirit named Eugene Sue noted how “the masses suffer,” were “clad in rags,” and ate “stale bread, while the strolling players of the religious theatres [priests], who hawk about and retail God throughout the world, under the form of indulgences, etc, are overflowing with gold.” Again, it was the perceived materialism of the priests that the spirits attacked in particular. These priests who were “clad with sumptuous garments, stroll about with a gilded Christ studded with precious stones! Bow low, coward people, and worship the golden calf.” The Spiritualists should be comforted because they would one day be vindicated when the spirits of the priests entered the spiritual realm and faced Jesus, “the worthy and great philosopher.” At this, former priests would recognize their own past sins. Jesus observed the “error” and “infamy of those who call themselves apostles,” and he wept “over this great social plague which shall be heralded one day, however! And the vermin who caused it, shall also

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673 Grandjean collection, 85-39; 6 March 1872.
674 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 28 November 1871. Another spirit, Pierre Dante, also referred to Catholic theology as “nonsense preached for centuries” that had unfortunately been accepted by many. Grandjean collection, 85-35; 20 December 1871.
676 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 23 December 1872.
The spirit who delivered this message was also indicative of the *Cercle Harmonique*’s critical view of Catholicism and priests. The spirit Eugene Sue was likely early nineteenth-century French novelist Joseph Marie Eugène Sue, known for his anti-Catholic novels.678

To discuss materialism, a comparison of a priest with a doctor was an instructive exercise for one spirit. “Both know that society considers them as superior beings to be respected,” the spirit stated, “especially the priest.” Furthermore, they each have a “profitable trade, especially that of the priest.” Both also “live at the expense of those who listen to them,” “will acknowledge Truth in their heart, but will deny it publically,” and suffer from weakness due to materialism. However, for this spirit, one was clearly less necessary and more “dangerous,” and that was the priest. While both the priest and the physician were materialistic, the priest was also a coward. People needed doctors for their health, but priests only poisoned minds. The spirit ended the message with exclamations: “Shun the Priest! Flee from him! But study with the physician, and study him personally also.”679 There was nothing to be gained from an association with a priest, only possible corruption. Rather, there was some benefit from a doctor. One could possibly learn about medicine and health from a physician. Additionally, since the doctor was seen as less threatening, he would also be a good example of how not to live for comparative analysis. To “study him personally” likely meant to survey his habits, to scrutinize them, and see the materialist error of his ways. Through critical observation, one could better identify the proper way to live.

In addition to lay men and women who were Catholic during their material lives, the spirits of former priests also had critical remarks for the clergy, including former New Orleanian priests like Chalon. On another occasion, a spirit chose to introduce himself as “a brother, ex-priest,” perhaps to distinguish between his earthly life and new life in the spiritual world.680 Moni explained that he and others attacked “the gentlemen with the robes” because though priests “teach a pure morality … their actions are contrary to the moral they teach.” And those corrupt actions discounted any of the “beautiful morality” of their teachings. In contrast, Moni’s

677 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 10 June 1871.
679 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 23 December 1872.
680 Grandjean collection 85-51; 20 March 1873.
spirit believed that a Spiritualist’s “first principle” was “charity,” both in word and deed. Not only were priests criticized by the circle for their corruption, the pope was too. Haitian Revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture defined despotism for the Cercle Harmonique as “a heavy chain that weighs the soul” that prevents a moral and reflective man to reach Truth. He then identified two despots—the king and the pope. In fact, the pope was worse for he was both a political and religious despot. Louverture described “religious despotism” as something that will “torture Consciousness.” In true revolutionary style, he concluded the message with “Meure la Tyrannie. Vive la Liberté.”

Louverture was hardly the only one who reprimanded the pope. Another spirit particularly critical the Catholic Church’s leader was Voltaire. On one occasion Voltaire delivered a particularly condemning message regarding the pope, a greedy man seated on “his tottering throne.” Using “soldiers” and the threat of “the gallows,” the pope, Voltaire charged, sought to “represent himself as God.” He and other priests took advantage of confession—“the infamous raid of the conscience”—to learn “family secrets” not to help the laity but to demonstrate their own religious power. To get the support of a priest one had to pay upfront and in full. Voltaire pointed to the “high” price of indulgences and the offer of a votive mass (in exchange for money) for special attention from a cleric. “Oh Pope,” he lamented “you are far from being a son of God, you are the son of Error, you are the enemy of Progression.”

The spirit of French monk and scholar Rabelais agreed, and using similar language Rabelais contended that the collapse of “the throne of the Pope” would relieve humanity.

This was not the only time Voltaire criticized the pope, and the 1870s were an auspicious time to do so. During the 1870s, many American Catholics were looking towards Rome uneasy about the “Roman Question,” defined by historian Peter D’Agostino as “the abnormal status of the pope as a prisoner of Liberal Italy without a territorial sovereignty to guarantee his spiritual autonomy.” With the dissolution of the Papal States on September 20, 1870 the pope began to live in an internal exile within the Vatican, though many Catholics around the world were committed to their Holy Father and expressed their solidarity with him. Many American Catholics were apprehensive about liberalism, seeing it as a threat to their religion and, as such,

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681 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 November 1858.
682 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 March 1871.
683 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869.
684 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
categorized the creation of a unified Italian Republic as “an evil and monstrous injustice.”\textsuperscript{685} In contrast, the Afro-creole Spiritualists saw this downgrade of the pope’s temporal sovereignty as a positive move that stripped an unworthy man of undeserved political power.

In June of 1871, just months after the end of the Papal States, Voltaire responded to a spirit message from “a believer” regarding the pope. The believer spoke in favor of the pope, stating that he was “God on Earth,” “the master of intelligence,” and a “representative of God on earth.” Thus, “everything must belong to him.” “His army in black robes is sacred and must be respected.” Not surprisingly, Voltaire offered a “response” to this message that the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} recorded immediately under it. Across the world people “felt his [the pope’s] yoke.” Furthermore, the pope created “hatred and pain” beyond the “Inquisition” and the “Crusades.” Everyday people from all corners of the earth “were impoverished and lived under his sweat and toil.” His wretched army of priests caroused about “plundering society,” “lying brazenly,” and “hiding their saturnalia of the Night.” Indeed, Voltaire concluded, if Lucifer existed he would be “at home” and “with many companions.”\textsuperscript{686} Voltaire was happy to see the end of the Papal States and the pope’s territorial sovereignty, though he may have gotten a bit ahead of himself likening it to the “fall of the Papacy.” He stated that “as a huge roar” their voices (those of the Spiritualists and the spirits) “proclaim the fall of the Papacy which held humanity for a longtime in a cruel and merciless yoke.” Catholicism was like a “bogeyman” keeping people leashed to the pope. But finally, this “giant” (the Papacy) was falling and Voltaire shouted “Hosanna!” for “humanity will be liberated from an error and Despotism.”\textsuperscript{687} Similarly, Ambroise called Rome, with its “rampant corruption,” a “modern Sodom.”\textsuperscript{688} In a joint message from Montesquieu and Ambroise, they hoped for the release of humanity from “the bloody sword of kings and princes, and the infamous and shameless hypocrite successors of Peter!”\textsuperscript{689} A spirit identified as Jacques Dellile (likely French poet and scholar Jacques Delille) also lambasted the pope for enslaving “thousands” under his “hypocrite yoke.”\textsuperscript{690}

The spirits of French thinkers were not alone in their opinion on the pope. Beloved, local, black soldier John H. Crowder, a young second lieutenant who died during the Battle of Port

\textsuperscript{686} Grandjean collection, 85-33; 11 June 1871.
\textsuperscript{687} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 23 September 1871.
\textsuperscript{688} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 2 January 1872.
\textsuperscript{689} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 17 December 1871.
\textsuperscript{690} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 26 January 1872.
Hudson, frequently came to the séance table often to discuss his happiness for dying for freedom. Criticizing Catholicism was an occasional spiritual hobby as well. On June 16, 1871 he hoped to see “Men of Progress” be “more careful and not go and give a certain moral support to the Ceremonies that are to take place tomorrow in favor of the Pope.” Crowder identified this as the Roman Catholic Church’s “last struggle to retain a power in their hands.” And Crowder was not afraid to express his frustration with the Church. Humanity should not be “controlled by a set of impudent impostors trying to command as masters of your intellectual powers which they want to limit in order to be masters of you mind.” Crowder hated watching his old friends succumb to the exploitative power of the See in Rome and the pope, and so he was happy to watch the power of Rome “dying” and humanity set “free” of the Catholic oligarchy. The “Ceremonies” in question were likely Pope Pius IX’s silver jubilee anniversary, an event made more significant due to his lack of political/temporal power. In June the New Orleans press printed short news dispatches regarding masses and other ceremonies in his honor from across the globe. Around the same time as Crowder’s negative message, the circle received other critical communiques regarding Catholic clerics. Voltaire likened a priest to “a vampire in chase,” likely a reference to the perceived greed of priests. An anonymous spirit echoed this the following day, noting “the corruption of the clergy,” how clerics enslave the people, and were able to manipulate using the horrors of the Inquisition.

An important difference between the religious authority of a priest and of a Spiritualist medium was the origin of that authority. Whereas a priest’s authority came from the institution of the Church, a medium’s authority came from the spirits and his/her own individual abilities. For Catholicism, religious authority came from ecclesiastical institutions and human hierarchies. In contrast, Spiritualism’s religious authority was found in the spirits and the mediums who could access them. Rightful Spiritualists became mediums by their own “free will,” a term spirits


692 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 16 June 1871. Message recorded in English, which considering Crowder’s background, is not surprising.

693 The Daily Picayune, 11 June 1871, 16 June 1871, 17 June 1871, 20 June 1871.

694 He also referred to priests as “hypocrites” and “the secrets” to the religion’s strength. Grandjean collection, 85-33; 18 June 1871.

used to compare the behavior and beliefs of Spiritualists and their Catholic neighbors. In contrast to the greed, corruption, and immorality that the spirits identified with Jesuits and other priests, the spirits encouraged Spiritualists, in particular mediums, to emulate Valmour. “He has set, for healing mediums,” a brother told the circle, “the example to be followed as he who gave his cares to the sick at his material prejudice; but, he has received his reward.” Thus, mediums should “imitate his abnegation.” A medium’s heart was troubled only when he was surrounded by the materialism of others, while Catholic priests seemed nearly synonymous with materialism in the spirits’ messages. The Catholic sacraments administered by priests did not lead one to heaven either. Rather, the spirits guided people through their teachings “in order to open for you from the Earth a road to the Happy Land of good Spirits.”

Unlike the priest, a true and successful medium could not be a corrupt person. When determining who would be a medium “the state of the soul counts for much.” Furthermore, the medium was required to cultivate further their talents through practice and purification of the spirit. But, Spiritualists should be aware, the same spirit warned, that there were mediums “scattered here and there” who do not care about good spiritual work. These mediums were more like priests and should be avoided. “A luminous brother” told the circle that the “sublime societies” of spirits in the invisible world were helping advance humanity towards “perfectibility,” and this was why they “control you as a medium.” In response, the medium would receive “a glimpse, a very feeble glimpse of what there is beyond your world.” The spirits brought energy to a medium in addition to power. “Imagination wears out,” the spirit Ambroise explained to the circle, “but the medium who writes under our dictation” would not tire because “the sublime beauties of the spiritual belief has no barriers!” The power of a medium also came from his/her desire to develop soul and spirit. The spirit of Valmour informed the circle that less active mediums received fewer communiqués “by their own fault; because

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697 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 12 March 1873.  
698 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 17 March 1873.  
700 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 15 March 1875.  
701 “Mediumistic faculties are possessed with their relative value. Development extends and renders them more profitable and more assured.” Grandjean collection, 85-68; 25 July 1872. Message from Abner.  
702 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 8 March 1875.  
703 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 9 June 1874.  
704 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 10 December 1871.
they have not met their duties as they ought to; and also, because they have sought material interest, and consequently, to impose and dictate what they wished for.” A medium could also replace the priest’s role of confessor for the dead. The spirit of Napoleon was very grateful for the medium who received and transcribed his messages, and Napoleon “was somewhat relieved in imploring compassion, and exposing my regrets of my past conduct.”

Spiritualism was not the only religion in New Orleans that identified the source of religious authority outside of an official institution. In Voudou, religious authority came from the power of spirits and deities and from one’s ability to tap into those powers. Rather than originate in a church, power in Voudou came from the same place as séance communiques—an invisible world of spirits. The spirits endowed true religious power onto a Voudouist from the spirits themselves—not another human on earth. In addition to the spirits, the power of a Voudouist came from personal knowledge and from the power of who trained the practitioner. The power of famed “Voudou Queen” Marie Laveau was said to have been given by the deities and from being the protégé of another powerful priestess. Zora Neale Hurston found apprenticeships common in early twentieth-century Voodoo, and many of those who taught Hurston their “works” in the 1920s claimed to be a blood relative, apprentice, or both of Laveau. While apprenticeship was a kind of education and perhaps akin to a priest’s time in seminary, it was ultimately much more like a medium’s training, taking place unofficially in home.

The way the spirits of both Voudou and Spiritualism interacted with their chosen leaders were similar too. When possessed by the spirit of a deity, a Voudou priestess or priest became the “oracle” of the spirit. The spirit would possess the body of the Voudouist and temporarily displace his/her spirit, and so the Voudouist’s words and movements were believed to be the words and actions of the spirit. The body of the priestess or priest was a medium for the spirit’s engagement with Voudou practitioners. Thus, the authority of a Voudou priest or priestess came in large part from the spirit who possessed his/her body. It would not be accurate to describe the actions of an Afro-creole medium as spirit possession, but similarities existed. Rey’s first experience as a medium took place in October of 1858 at the home of Sœur Louise. After

705 Grandjean collection, 85-41; 29 May 1872.
706 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 18 February 1869.
707 Long, A New Orleans Voudou Priestess.
levitating a large table, Rey was fatigued, but Louise encouraged him to try his hand at receiving a message. With a pencil in hand, Rey heard the voice of his father telling him “Write our dictation, and then you will not be tired.” Though the hand belonged to Rey, the words written on the paper were of his father’s disembodied spirit. Additionally, most Voudou services took place in domestic homes, like séances, and a Voudou service was often centered on the importance of the leader’s altar, while a séance circled about the table. The spirits often referred to the Cercle Harmonique’s table as not only their gathering place, but also the location of their own spiritual work. Altars would hold various tools for Voudou work, such as oils, candles, and various herbs and roots. Similarly, during meetings of the Cercle Harmonique, pens and séance books sat upon the table.

Spiritualists of the Cercle Harmonique were not the same as Voudouists, though Afro-creoles in either tradition shared a similar religious and cultural heritage. Resonances of Catholicism not only echoed around the séance table, but Voudouists, too, drew upon Catholic traditions. Marie Laveau and her children were baptized at St. Louis Cathedral, and many locals remembered her lifelong involvement at the parish. When offering a categorical schema for “Hoodoo in America,” Hurston identified the New Orleans branch as “Catholic” in its religious affiliation. In addition to resonating with Afro-creoles’ Catholic backgrounds, Voudou and Spiritualism were also attractive religious alternatives for their understanding of religious authority. In neither tradition did power come from an institutional church. Power came to those the spirits desired to have it, and power only belonged with those who worked for republican justice and an egalitarian society.

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710 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 October 1858.
712 For example, “Come to the table in order to become just, wise, and to elevate yourselves by your soul.” Grandjean collection, 85-51; 18 March 1873 (message from “a brother”). “Come to the Table of the Spirit for the purpose of reaping the spiritual bread which has given the force that Truth carries with itself, to those who have accepted it for their guidance and support.” Grandjean collection, 85-49; 9 February 1873. “Keep on at work, my brothers, and elevate yourselves by your soul.” Grandjean collection, 85-52; 27 November 1873.
714 Hurston, “Hoodoo in America,” 318.
CHAPTER FOUR

“TRUTH AND JUSTICE TRIUMPHED”: THE LEGACY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD

“The spirit of a universal republicanism, richly impregnated with grand and philanthropic objects, and contemplating in its sweep the universal liberty and happiness of man, is frequently arrested in its flight from heart to heart, surrounded by the soldiers of the king, bound in chains and hurried to the dark retreats of despotic incarceration.” – Andrew Jackson Davis, The Great Harmonia, Vol. III: The Seers

“Republics have produced great men.” – Robespierre to the Cercle Harmonique, 24 February 1869

“Spiritualism is the solution of all questions of justice and Equity. With spiritualism, the spirit-world has its raison d’être. Spiritualism is the liberation of the Spirit of the material to the spirit-world, freedom of mind gained.” – Béranger to the Cercle Harmonique, 17 January 1872

In May 1872 a spirit named Robert Preaux likened America to the “wife I love” and France to the mother he remembered “with delight.” Like a mother providing the molding ideals a child needed to grow, France offered the “bold principles” that supported republics. The spirit of “93,” meaning the French Revolution, shined everywhere, but Preaux thought it seemed to flourish best in “the heart of America … amidst a people who have already shown its progress.” A creole born on the island of Guadeloupe, Preaux’s spirit proclaimed to now wave a “flag for Humanity.” People should not be divided over race, birth, or privilege. Rather, brothers across the world were entitled to “the same rights everywhere and in everything.” With the spirit of “93” in her heart and Spiritualism as her religion, America could be “the torch” and shine with brilliance. The ideas of the French Revolution were felt in the wider Atlantic World and repeated by the spirits in the séance books of the Cercle Harmonique. Afro-creoles could hear their social and political goals echo in the messages from the invisible world of the spirits—the

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717 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 24 February 1869.
718 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 17 January 1872.
call for harmony, desire for progress, the Triumph of Humanity, the need for moral and just
leaders, the fight against despotism, fair political representation, and a voice for the people. The
French revolutionary motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” resonated in the recorded messages,
and spirits from the French Revolution and republican governments appeared at the séance table.
They encouraged religious liberty, free-thinking, and progress. The ideals of the French
Revolution, though ethereal, were also malleable and could be revitalized and reinvigorated by
the **Cercle Harmonique**. The Afro-creole Spiritualists hoped to bring the French Revolution’s
promises of universal liberty to their immediate environment—a place that denied Spiritualism’s
truth of luminous equality. Spiritualism’s ability to mediate the memory of the French
Revolution and its promises for a republican society offered answers to the politics and violence
of the post-war city. Additionally, this memory of the French Revolution’s legacy took place in a
city that was also a part of a wider Atlantic world and Caribbean world.

Examining the **Cercle Harmonique** in the Atlantic world and Caribbean world adds a
transnational chapter to the story of American Spiritualism. Spiritualism regularly traversed the
boundaries between the material and immaterial and the divide between life and death. Afro-
creole Spiritualism added the transgression of national borders. In American religious history
Spiritualism is depicted as an American religion, but in New Orleans it was more.721 The
influence of the French Revolution, Haitian Revolution, and spirits from French history and
literary culture on the **Cercle Harmonique** also provides another angle on the question of New
Orleans’s nineteenth-century “Americanization.” Generally, the historical paradigm of
Louisiana’s Americanization asserts that after the Louisiana Purchase, an Anglo, Protestant
worldview assumed power in the city.722 Additionally Charles Long has argued that the
Americanization of the Louisiana Territory “was synonymous with a commitment to the

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721 Most work on American Spiritualism does not situate it within a global arena. This is largely due to the nature of
most American Spiritualists. For example Ann Braude’s work briefly looks outside Anglo, Protestant Spiritualists in
the American North who had little transnational influence. Her main subject base is northern women. The **Cercle
Harmonique** was different with their Atlantic world influences.

722 Though historians disagree on how quickly this happened. For example, in *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in
New Orleans* James Bennett concludes Americanization with the rise of Jim Crow, while the contributors to *Creole
New Orleans: Race and Americanization* place it sooner, and in *The Battle of New Orleans* Robert V. Remini links
the Americanization with the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. Additionally, complicating the idea of the city’s
Americanization is one of the goals of a 2004 dissertation, though the historian more or less only substitutes
Southernization for Americanization. Sandra Margaret Frink, “Spectacles of the Street: Performance, Power, and
Public Space in Antebellum New Orleans,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2004).
extension of African slavery as a fundamental institution of American society.”

Situating the Cercle Harmonique in an Atlantic World focused on the nodes of France, Haiti, and New Orleans offers another viewpoint of the city’s Americanization process. For Rey and his fellow Spiritualists, the spirit world would never be fully Americanized and the spirits would continue to provide perspectives that challenged the material world around them. The principles of liberté, égalité, fraternité, and république gave the Afro-creole Spiritualists a transnational orientation, rather than simply an American one.

There is not one single understanding of the Atlantic world that fits New Orleans Afro-creoles. Historian David Armitage’s conceptualization of Cis-Atlantic history provides a helpful but not all-encompassing frame for Afro-creole Spiritualism’s emplacement in a wider context featuring France and Haiti. In his theorizing of the Atlantic world, Armitage has suggested three interrelated concepts of Atlantic history: Circum-Atlantic history, Trans-Atlantic history, and Cis-Atlantic history. Armitage briefly defined Circum-Atlantic history as “the transnational history of the Atlantic world” and Trans-Atlantic history as “the international history of the Atlantic world.” These two types include those works that focus upon the meeting of different peoples in the Atlantic world and the exchanges and interactions between them, their ideas, and their practices. But his conception of Cis-Atlantic world history, as the “national or regional history within an Atlantic context,” seems most apt for this understanding of the French and French-Atlantic world influence on Afro-creole Spiritualism. While Circum-Atlantic history emphasized the connections and movements of ideas and peoples and Trans-Atlantic history is structured on comparison, Cis-Atlantic history “studies particular places as unique locations within an Atlantic world and seeks to define that uniqueness as the result of the interactions between local particularity and a wider web of connections.” Similarly, this project focuses on Spiritualism among Afro-creoles in New Orleans but connected to a more expansive network of ideas, events, and people.

However, Armitage’s Atlantic world conceptualization was based on the Atlantic world of empires, namely the British. Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic provides an additional and

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726 Ibid, 23.
necessary perspective on the Afro-creoles’ place in the Atlantic world. Gilroy defined the black Atlantic through a “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.” Thus former conceptions of national or ethnic identity, often constructed on absolutisms, do not sufficiently theorize the black Atlantic. In contrast, the black Atlantic, which consisted of “webbed networks” and transnational and intercultural networks, transcended any direct relationships between diasporic homes and the African homeland. James H. Sweet’s *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* remapped the intellectual and physical travels, or “webbed networks” to use Gilroy’s term, of the slave Domingos Álvares and the ways African ideas allowed him to negotiate an ambiguous, colonial world. J. Lorand Matory’s work on Candomblé offered another example of Gilroy’s theory in action, crossing across the Atlantic to follow how the Yoruba shape Candomblé and Candomblé’s subsequent influences on Yoruba traditions. While this project does not follow ideas back across the ocean like Matory’s, his work advocated for histories of diasporic religion that note both the power of white domination but still recognize the ability of diasporic Africans to push back and construct new traditions and canons. Similarly, this project is attentive to the racial power dynamic instituted by the African slave trade and the practices developed in diasporic communities to challenge it.

Gilroy and others’ understanding of the black Atlantic along with Armitage’s Cis-Atlantic world history place Afro-creole Spiritualism within a dual-layered frame. The Atlantic and Caribbean worlds possessed a racial and ethnic hierarchy that owed much to the slave trade, but it was also an ambiguous and fluid hierarchy, particularly during the eighteenth century when

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730 J. Lorand Matory’s *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* examines how practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religion on both sides of the Atlantic innovate and reinvent dance in light of their local contexts and then these developments have existed in a black Atlantic transnational network. According to Matory, Afro-Brazilian Candomblé itself is and has been continually reconstructed by Afro-Brazilian and Nigerian culture in light of power dynamics and the movement of bodies and ideas. The dance movements and rituals of healing are culturally contingent upon what ideas of African tradition traversed the Atlantic in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries and localized in a particular Brazilian region and upon how much local white authorities regulated black practice. Also see, Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, eds. *Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
731 Also see, Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*. Like Matory’s work, Sensbach’s follows ideas and Rebecca herself across the black Atlantic world, but like this project is attentive to racial power dynamics.
the Afro-creole class or caste first developed. With this understanding of Atlantic history in mind, this chapter examines Afro-creole Spiritualism as part of an Atlantic world hinged upon New Orleans, France, and the Caribbean. The Cercle Harmonique’s practice included various spirits of the French Revolution, European Enlightenment, and Haitian history in their spiritual network, and the presence of these spiritual identities in the Cercle Harmonique’s network demonstrates how the local practice of Spiritualism in New Orleans existed in relation to a larger Atlantic world. Though they were not atop the racial power hierarchy, Afro-creoles were not passive in the creation of New Orleans religious cultures. They were active in the working of the Atlantic world. Additionally, they called upon powers from the Atlantic world beyond their immediate New Orleans context. In examining the séance records of the Cercle Harmonique, it matters little if the circle members actually communicated with the real spirits of philosophes and other revolutionary thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire, Robespierre, or Lamennais. The authenticity of their Spiritualist practice is not of concern. Rather the significance lies in the rhetorical work that those perceived bonds between Cercle Harmonique and those spirits did for Afro-creoles. In this chapter, that rhetorical work performed in the séances was the forging of bonds between the Afro-creole Spiritualists and revolutionary French and Haitian spirits. The Atlantic world’s age of revolutions continued in the practice of the Cercle Harmonique and their creation of a spiritual republic.

This chapter begins with a brief look at figures from the French Revolution who communicated with the Cercle Harmonique and their ideas that echoed in their spirits’ messages. The next section describes how the French revolutionary thought shaped the circle’s view on humanity’s progress, followed by an exploration of French literature and contemporary historical works and their influence on New Orleans literary culture. Then the chapter examines the ways

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732 Also see Scott, “The Atlantic World and the Road to Plessy v. Ferguson,” for a long approach to the nineteenth century and New Orleans’s place in the Atlantic world in terms of race and politics.
733 John Thornton’s work has done the most to advocate for an Atlantic world understanding that recognizes the agency of Africans and their diasporic descendants. John Thornton, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800 (1992; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
734 Historian Sophia Rosenfeld discusses the productivity and significance of revolutionary pamphlets in this manner in chapter five of Common Sense: A Political History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). “It matters little, then, from our perspective, that the representative of the people, speaking to and from le gros bon sens or le bon sens populaire or le bon sens villageoise failed to exist as a sociological reality behind every text that assumed this authorial voice. It is not authenticity that is our chief concern … Rather, it is the way that the perceived common sense of peasants or women or any social group deemed closer to nature than the old ruling elite helped to foster a new populist ideal, a stereotype to be favorably contrasted with the aristocrat, the wordsmith, the sophist, and all others whose erudition or self-interest had caused them to lose sight of the simplicities that ostensibly unite most other humans …” (192).
the Afro-creole Spiritualists viewed religion in revolutionary France and reimagined revolutionary priests. Next is an overview of relevant revolutions in the Caribbean and the resulting spirits at the *Cercle Harmonique*’s table. Following this is a section on the circle’s views on despotism and oppression and the influence of French thinkers on these concepts. Finally the chapter concludes with a brief section on the group’s notion of republicanism. Intermixed throughout the chapter are descriptions of French Atlantic world figures who helped shape the practice and worldview of the Afro-creole Spiritualists through their writings, their lives, and through their spirits’ presence at the séance table.

“Men are born and remain free and equal in rights”: French Revolutionary Thought

While the *Cercle Harmonique* did not participate in the French Revolution, the ideas of the Revolution and remembering the glory of its intervention in history affected them deeply. That intervention, a reworking of society to be based on the people rather than the aristocracy, was one the *Cercle Harmonique* sought for New Orleans, and the United States more generally. Messages that echoed the broad scope of republicanism and spirits from the revolutionary era were common throughout the pages of the circle’s séance books. The southern aristocracy—white, slave-owning, and power-hungry—was the new *ancien régime*. While they, like France’s *ancien régime*, believed themselves to be atop a God-given hierarchy, Afro-creoles, like Robespierre, Voltaire, and others, thought otherwise. The ever-developing power of white supremacy in Louisiana following the Union occupation of the city and through Reconstruction was the local inheritor and actor of this southern aristocracy. The *Cercle Harmonique*, with the help of the spirits, saw themselves as fighting for the people against this aristocracy, a process that will also be further explored in the next chapter. “Old Societies,” the spirit of a white creole slave-holder told the *Cercle Harmonique*, would have to “collapse and disappear” in order to make way for those built on harmonious ideas. Rather than be divided over economic, social, or political issues, the spirits wanted all to “unite” for “a common good.”

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737 Grandjean collection, 85-34: 18 November 1871. Message from Hughes Pedesclaux. Pedesclaux was a white creole who lived in the Tremé neighborhood who acknowledged his mixed-race children and freed his slaves in 1841. Toledano and Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture*, 99. There was a notary public in New Orleans by the
Much more than the storming of the Bastille in 1789, the French Revolution sparked a new way of thinking about political structures and society. Though the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” was adopted in 1789, it was rooted in older ideas. The politics and social organization of the ancien régime were picked apart by philosophes, those writers who used new Enlightenment ideas to question old knowledge and old institutions. Questioning the authority and “reasonableness” of institutions was a significant part of new revolutionary thought.

Influential to the Revolution were earlier eighteenth-century thinkers and for good reason: Voltaire criticized the Catholic Church, Montesquieu contrasted despotism and liberty, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau looked to the natural to find a just society. Voltaire’s witticisms, his calls to “crush the infamous,” and his historical focus on social forces and culture identified him as a thinker who advocated reform. As a spirit Voltaire taught the Cercle Harmonique that those in positions of undeserved power would tremble in fear of the progress they could “feel” happening around the world.

Montesquieu’s The Spirit of Laws (1748) was influential to participants in both the French Revolution and the American Revolution. Examining the relationship between types of governments and types of societies, Montesquieu wanted to uncover how governments and societies could best secure liberty. Republican governments, in contrast to monarchies or despotic empires, required “virtue” as a primary principle. Montesquieu contended that in order to understand a government or nation, one must examine the motivations and workings of its people, religion, economics, and legal system. The “spirit” of a regime could be determined...
by examining its “ensemble of relations.”

For Montesquieu, and other founders of modern liberalism like John Locke, many of society’s “political ills” were attributable to “the theological cast of its politics.”

One of the ultimate goals of the work of Montesquieu and other philosophes was “to create peaceful and prosperous regimes in which freedom rather than salvation would be the primary political care.” Freedom was not limited to religious beliefs and practices. Slavery too should be abolished. In chapter 15 of Montesquieu’s Spirit of Laws, he wrote, “the state of slavery is in its own nature bad.”

For Montesquieu, there was an essential connection between liberty and republican governments. The spirit of Montesquieu echoed this in communications with the Cercle Harmonique. Montesquieu's spirit taught that recognizing “the rights” of all needed to be “the fundamental basis” for society. Managing liberty was not a simple task though. Democratic republics could be corrupted by the “spirit of inequality” or the “spirit of extreme equality.” In the Spirit of Laws, he seemed to favor a federative republic over other kinds of political organisms, as long as the spirit of moderation kept the leaders in check.

Following the ideas of Montesquieu, despotism had two primary forms: governmental and commercial, or as one scholar has put it, “monarchs and merchants.” Both were caused by greed, but one manifested in political structures while the other in self-interest and luxury. These two manifestations of despotism could certainly be interdependent, as seen in the southern oligarchy and the Redeeming Democrats of the late Reconstruction.

The work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an influential figure to Robespierre, was more egalitarian in orientation than Voltaire or Montesquieu. Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality (1753) identified private property as the source of moral inequality, wealth, and warfare. He preferred the era of the “savage” or natural man, but recognized that a return to this was not feasible or realistic, and in response offered The Social Contract (1762). Though “man is born

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747 Ibid.
748 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 1 October 1871.
751 Voltaire advocated top-down reform, since he believed “the thinking part of mankind is confined to a very small number.” Montesquieu defended the nobility and advocated imperial governmental structures in some cases (such as Asia).
free,” Rousseau lamented, “everywhere he is in chains.” 752 His writing on the social contract sought to fix this by emphasizing the need of the community to protect members equally. While John Locke’s social contract was established between a government and the governed, Rousseau’s was between an individual and the larger collectivity. 753 Rousseau’s appeal to Afro-creoles included his appraisal of slavery. “From whatever angle one looks at things,” he argued, “the right to slavery is null, not only because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless. These words slavery and right are contradictory.” 754 Not only was Rousseau clear in his writings, the spirit of Rousseau was not shy about responding to the naysayers of the Cercle Harmonique’s social and political perspectives. Those who called “the Sublime Idea” nothing more than “Insanity” and equated generosity with “stupidity” were “blind.” Only a person who could not properly see and understand humanity would “deny the Light” carried by the Spiritualists brothers. 755

The influence of Rousseau’s social contract between individual and collectivity can be seen in France’s 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. This particular document would prove very influential around the Atlantic world in Haiti and New Orleans. One spirit visiting the Cercle Harmonique instructed those on earth to let people “speak of rights.” 756 The preamble to the famous French document identified “ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man” to be “the sole cause of public calamities and of corruption of governments.” In response this document’s goal was to name the universal rights of all humanity. 757 The first article stated “men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” noting that “social distinctions may only be founded only upon the general good.” 758 Secondly, “the aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man,” and “these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.” As if echoing the first article of the

753 Neely, A Concise History of the French Revolution, 23.
754 Rousseau, and Gourevitch, Rousseau, 48.
756 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 25 June 1874. Message from André, a brother.
758 Other translations read “social distinctions can be based only on public utility,” perhaps allowing for the nobility and remaining monarchy to maintain their status. Neely, A Concise History of the French Revolution, 86.
Declaration, a spirit explained to the *Cercle Harmonique*, God did not create “privileged beings.”

The assurance and guarantee of these rights were significant in French revolutionary thought, both among Robespierre and French priest Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais (a revolutionary priest who frequented the *Cercle Harmonique*’s table). Heavily influenced by Rousseau, Robespierre would become well-known for his leadership in the Committee of Public Safety and his role in The Terror, but his speeches were also noteworthy. His contention that morality and politics were deeply connected influenced revolutionary thought long after his death. Constitutional governments aimed “to preserve the Republic,” for they were “chiefly concerned with civil liberty,” and a “revolutionary government” concerned itself “with public liberty.” According to Robespierre, a republic was the best option to ensure the liberty and vitality of a moral people. Anyone advocating something else was a traitor to the people. In February 1794, Robespierre delivered what historian R.R. Palmer identified as “one of the most notable utterances in the history of democracy” to the National Convention. Highlighting his dedication to virtue, Robespierre described the desires of other Jacobins and himself as a:

> wish to substitute in our country morality for egotism, probity for a mere sense of honor, principle for habit, duty for etiquette, the empire of reason for the tyranny of custom, contempt for vice for contempt for misfortune, pride for insolence, large-mindedness for vanity, the love of glory for the love of money … We wish in a word to fulfill the course of nature, to accomplish the destiny of mankind, to make good the promises of philosophy, to absolved Providence from the long reign of tyranny and crime.

For Robespierre, these wishes came through virtue, and virtue required the Terror. His spirit never expressed regret for the Terror in his messages communicated to the *Cercle Harmonique*, but this did not mean that Rey and others agreed with Robespierre’s guillotine. Except in extreme cases, the use of violence or revenge was not condoned by the spirits. In a note written

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in the margins, Petit observed how it was better “to love those who make you suffer” than to “have hatred or revenge” in one’s heart.\textsuperscript{765}

However, the Terror and later critiques of the Terror should not overshadow the intellectual influence of the Revolution on civil society in France and elsewhere. Significant to political culture during the Revolutions and in its aftermath was the desire for a unified society focused on the common good.\textsuperscript{766} Fraternité, influential in France and New Orleans, emphasized social bonds. It took the form of “divine friendship” as Robespierre called it and of the spiritual brotherhood as described in the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}’s séance records. According to the spirit of Constantin François de Chassebœuf, or the comte de Volney, a Spiritualist viewed all of humanity as part of a “universal family of which he is a member.”\textsuperscript{767} Early historian of the French Revolution Jules Michelet believed in a kind of egalitarian religion of humanity that could “provide a real remedy for social disintegration.”\textsuperscript{768} Michelet identified the Revolution as the new religion of France, and this new religion was both the “heir and adversary” of Christianity. While both agreed in “the sentiment of human fraternity,” the religion of the Revolution found “fraternity on the love of man for man,” while Christianity rested upon a “dubious history” of injustice.\textsuperscript{769} Historian Pierre Rosanvallon described this religion of Michelet’s as “rather vague, little more than a diffuse spiritualism serving as a sort of prop to the democratic ideal.”\textsuperscript{770} Similar appeals to the primacy of community and all of humanity and to the need for reform would be found in the writings of Lamennais, a popular spirit among the Afro-creole circle. And not just the spirit of Lamennais, but all the spirits would confirm that Spiritualism provided hope that “Liberty and egalitarianism” would not only enlighten people but also “stop fratricidal struggles.”\textsuperscript{771}

It is inaccurate to limit the French Revolution to just the late eighteenth century. It continued long into the nineteenth century, most notably with the Revolution of 1830, which

\textsuperscript{765} Grandjean collection, 85-50. In the margins near 10 March 1873.
\textsuperscript{766} Generality, meaning “the rejection of intermediary bodies and the aspirations to achieve a single, unified society,” emerged as a significant civil desire in France following the Revolution. Pierre Rosanvallon, \textit{The Demands of Liberty: Civil Society in France since the Revolution}, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.
\textsuperscript{767} Grandjean collection, 85-45; 17 September 1872. Message from Volney.
\textsuperscript{768} Rosanvallon, \textit{The Demands of Liberty}, 130.
\textsuperscript{771} Grandjean collection, 85-45; 22 September 1872. Message from Volney.
ended the Bourbon Restoration (1815–1830) that followed Napoleon’s stint as emperor, and the Revolution of 1848, which ended the Orleans monarchy. One of the clearest continuations of the French Revolution was in the intellectual and artistic work of persons in France and the greater Atlantic world. Social romanticism, defined by one historian as “the semi-religious quest for harmony in social existence, in nature, and in the cosmos,” was popular among French writers and thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{772} Novelists and writers like Victor Hugo, Joseph Marie Eugène Sue, Lamennais, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, and Michelet are all associated with the movement.\textsuperscript{773} Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirit believed that “liberal philosophy” helped make men “virtuous” and helped them recognize the “suffering” of others.\textsuperscript{774} In other words, both romanticism and Paul’s spirit believed that a liberal view connected one to the wider world. The literary works of Hugo, Eugène Sue, and others contained a “fusion” of “heroic idealism associated with the national revolution and the notion of the mystical community with nature.”\textsuperscript{775} The influence of these men was felt long beyond French borders.

Support for the French Revolution, its ideals, and its proponents could be found in New Orleans shortly after it began. When Spain joined the First Coalition against France in 1793, the relations between the Spanish authorities and some of the French creole population in the city became tense. French patriotism was particularly high in the city when King Louis XVI was executed for the Republic. Supporters of the Republic sang “La Marseillaise” and the Jacobin song “Ça ira” in the city streets.\textsuperscript{776} Both popular songs of the French Revolution, the latter’s aggressive lyrics encouraged the lynching of clergy and nobility which caused additional anxiety for the Spanish authorities. Though the Spanish colonials in the city were not the same as the aristocrats, nobles, and clergy that “Ça ira” sang about hanging from the lampposts, this antagonism towards authority still strained the relationships between the French in the city who desired a return to French governance and the Spanish who ruled.\textsuperscript{777} One reason why French revolutionary thought, especially that of the Jacobins, spread quickly was because the new Republic government sent Jacobin agents to the larger Atlantic world to spread Jacobin and

\textsuperscript{772} Arthur Mitzman, “Michelet and Social Romanticism,” 663.
\textsuperscript{773} Together the work of these men represented an “alliance of disenfranchised popular elements,” “critical intellectuals,” and “left-liberal and republican elements.” Mitzman, “Michelet and Social Romanticism,” 663.
\textsuperscript{774} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 10 February 1872.
\textsuperscript{775} Mitzman, "Michelet and Social Romanticism," 680–681.
revolutionary thought. Historian Caryn Cossé Bell reported, “at the same time that French Jacobins plotted to invade Louisiana, they urged white Creole Louisianans to ‘cease being the slaves of a government to which you were shamefully sold.’”778 As the nineteenth century progressed, more French émigrés arrived to the city and brought more French revolutionary and romantic thought and influence with them—ideals that sprung the Idea.779

“The triumph of the Idea”: Ideals of the French Revolution and Humanity’s Progress780

Though the progress of humanity might seem slow, the spiritual republic assured the Cercle Harmonique that it would continue, and like the proverbial tortoise, win the race in the end. Centuries might pass before “the spiritual philosophies” would be accepted, but the work of “Voltaire … Volney, Diderot, and 93” had shown that “truth” and the “Freedom of Thought” would shine.781 Many spirits spoke of humanity’s progress and the triumph of the Idea. Though the Idea was never defined in any spirit message, its meaning was rooted in the ideals of the French Revolution and its well-known cry: Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité! Through the Idea the Cercle Harmonique memorialized the legacy of the French Revolution. The Idea was equality; it was harmony; it was brotherhood. “Universal love” was the tool that would secure “brotherly union.”782 Principles like liberty, equality, fraternity, peace, harmony, justice, and equity were often cited together.783 Spiritualism was “the key that opens the soul” to fairness, justice, universal brotherhood, and solidarity.784 The spirit of Montesquieu described Spiritualists as freethinkers and philosophers carrying “the torch of truth.” They would break the “barriers that hindered its [the torch of truth’s] Route.”785

As taught by the spirits, the triumph of the Idea and humanity meant progress. Lamennais’s spirit promised that the “progressive march” of humanity would succeed and that

781 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872. Message from Assitha.
782 Grandjean collection; 85-33; 1 June 1871. Message from Lacour.
783 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 2 January 1872. Message from Ambroise. This message cites all in one sentence as the “movements in humanity” that will “produce” a “good result.”
785 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 10 December 1871.
the “Human Rights” of each person were “guaranteed.” As they climbed the political ladder, he encouraged the Cercle Harmonique to maintain the “purity” of their hearts and work for “all your brothers.” In another message Lamennais taught that “generous and beneficent ideas” were the source of the “social regeneration” of the country and “the forward march of the great social body” to moral improvement. Saint Vincent de Paul agreed because “social improvement” would come from attention to “moral issues” and questions of “a general humanitarian purpose.” Sympathy and Harmony were the laws of the spiritual spheres. Justice and Equity were the main forces of humanity and that could not be changed. “Justice, Equity, Love, and charity” were the “natural laws.” If these laws were implemented in the material world to guide governments and structure legal systems, humanity’s progress would be eased.

According to Volney the spirits submitted “to the laws of harmony and love,” and this was a chief reason why the spiritual world was a far superior place in comparison to earth. Recognition of the superiority of spirit over matter led to the acknowledgement of equality. The process of communicating with the spirit world helped implant “egalitarian principles” in the minds and hearts of Spiritualists. The higher ideals of spirits were built on the fundamentals of democracy and liberality. The spirit of Béranger believed that Spiritualism provided “the solution to all questions of justice and Equity.” Ideally the world of politics should imitate the world of Spiritualism: motivated by mutual enlightenment and structured on the equal exchange of thoughts and ideas. As “a strong and recognized fraternity” Spiritualism provided a useful model for society and government. Additionally, one spirit reported that it was good to listen to ideas “opposed to what you believe” for it could help enlighten one even more.

Letting all have a voice, including disagreeable ones, was part of a liberal and equal society. Harmony was a “powerful weapon” against injustice. Those on earth should “love

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786 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 11 August 1871.
787 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 15 October 1869.
790 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 24 March 1873. Message from “A devoted sister.”
791 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 23 February 1872.
793 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 17 January 1872. This message is echoed by Valmour’s encouragement to the group to remain strong in the principles of “justice” and “equality.” Grandjean collection, 85-60; 10 November 1875.
795 Grandjean collection 85-60; 28 June 1875. Message from “A beloved sister.”
796 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 10 August 1874. Message from “V. de Paule.”
each other” and “be informed of the truth [in order] to live in harmony.” Indeed, Jesus felt joy when people acknowledged the “Solidarity between you and all Beings.” This solidarity and fraternity that Jesus desired did not respect political borders. A person’s background did not determine if s/he would be a good “soldier of humanity,” be him/her “a French, an Austrian, or a Russian.” One’s place of birth did not matter; decisions and actions did. Choosing to conduct one’s life in accordance with the Idea and encourage harmony set one on the path of the universal and spiritual brotherhood. The spirits promised that fighters for humanity would “come with us to the glory” and be rewarded in the spirit world. Though working for egalitarianism was neither simple nor easy, and spirits like Volney knew that “few” of the “workers” would persist. Spiritualism could help to keep them “faithful” to liberalizing and democratizing work but ensured nothing. If members of the Cercle Harmonique continued with their labors, the spirits, like Volney, would show them “glories.” But Voltaire recognized that some “sages” who tried to bring society “into the path of Truth” were soon persecuted. Spiritualists like the Cercle Harmonique were encouraged to continue the struggle in the face of adversity.

The triumph of the Idea would ideally happen without violence. The spirit of Victor Noir regretted that much “generous blood” had been spilled in “the fratricidal struggle” in France—a struggle between “good and evil” taking place both physically and morally. The “selfish privileged” took advantage of others, but “the People of 1871, informed by the lessons of the Past” would fight against those who wished to suppress them. The people might be “crushed in the fight,” but the “innumerable” spiritual army watched over them and guided them. While the body of martyrs like Noir could and would “succumb,” the ideas of those martyrs would continue. Given the timing of Noir’s message, his spirit was likely referring to the Paris Commune and the subsequent “Bloody Week.” The success of Evil was “fleeting” while Good would certainly “triumph one day.” But sometimes violence was necessary for humanity’s

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797 Grandjean collection, 85-54; 3 April 1874. Message from “a devoted sister.”
798 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 26 August 1877. Message from Jesus.
801 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 21 July 1872.
802 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872. Message from Volney
803 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 16 April 1867.
804 Noir’s own funeral has been identified as a “key moment” in the left’s development leading up to the Paris Commune. Donny Gluckstein, Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 73.
805 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 28 May 1871.
triumph. For example, when revolutions cleared the road for progress, they were victories for humanity. The oligarchy craft and enabled prejudices that supported its own undeserved political and social power. And it caused the spirits grief. The oligarchy’s past offenses and the illusions it spread regarding despotism caused much despair for the spirit of Claire Pollard. In response to such corruption, the struggle for equality also required a dedication to selflessness. “The practice of moral thinking,” Montesquieu’s spirit taught, was the best evidence of a worthy person because it indicated a dedication to humanity’s progress. Spirits would also chastise those who worked against equality. Paul, “a brother,” rebuked those who immigrated to the United States, accepted their own “Political and Civil Rights,” and then proceeded to oppress others. This type of oppression was made even more repulsive, as the accused enjoyed their own new rights and freedoms while denying those rights to others. Paul warned that when these men arrived to the spiritual world, they would feel much shame for their past offenses.

Thus those still on earth should “reject the power of the oligarchy.” Though the “oligarchy” tried to divide people with prejudices and oppression, the spirits reported that “the Idea” still worked and would still triumph. Reason inspired brave people to stand up against injustice and unite in harmony as champions “of a Just Cause.” The Cercle Harmonique was encouraged to resist the storms of “Hatred” and “the Lust of Domination” all around them. Oligarchical powers used violence to “ensure their domination” while keeping the masses in ignorance. The worst political oligarchies would even enjoy the suffering of the people.

808 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 16 May 1877.
810 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 1 February 1872. Message from Montesquieu.
811 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 22 October 1874.
812 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 31 August 1872. Message from Beaumarchais.
813 Grandjean collection, 85-60; 25 September 1875. Message from “A friend.”
Furthermore, the combination of “political and religious oligarchies” was a primary cause of prejudices.\textsuperscript{815} The power held by “archbishops, prelates, popes, kings, or chiefs” was not genuine because it was often undeserved. In other words, it was oligarchical. Furthermore, these types of leaders often tried keep their subjects “blind” and prevent them from recognizing their faux authority.\textsuperscript{816} While one’s status on earth was determined by money or race, status in the spiritual spheres was based on characteristics like “wit” and charity.\textsuperscript{817}

Prejudice belonged to the vain and it obstructed justice. The spirit of Rabelais characterized prejudice as “a ridiculous ghost” that maintained “foolish pride.”\textsuperscript{818} Volney taught that prejudices were “born of ignorance” and belonged to “fools.”\textsuperscript{819} Prejudices “born from crazy assumptions” worked against Justice and Equity.\textsuperscript{820} Intolerance was “foolish” and “the greatest sign” of a government’s, a religious institution’s, or person’s “weakness.”\textsuperscript{821} Additionally, intolerance blinded people, but good Spiritualist brothers listened to others “with respect” and understanding.\textsuperscript{822} Prejudice obstructed the ability to recognize truth, and this explained why some people failed to appreciate and observe the equal rights of others. The removal of prejudice meant the elevation of “Reason” and, as a result of this, the recognition of rights.\textsuperscript{823} Completely antithetical to prejudice, Spiritualism dissuaded people from thinking negative thoughts about another.\textsuperscript{824} It instructed people to “forgive” the “injustice and selfishness” of others.\textsuperscript{825}

“\textit{Dear France in triumph free}”: The Influence of French Literary Culture\textsuperscript{826}

As seen in the identity of spirits at the table of the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}, the ideas in their messages, and the wider Afro-creole culture around the Spiritualists, French literature and history was significant to Rey and others. The comte de Volney was a historian, politician, and active spirit among the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}. His work \textit{Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les}
révolutions des empires (The Ruins, Or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires) was published in 1791 during the French Revolution. *The Ruins* argued that if humanity could accept natural religion, then rationality and peace would reign. Volney’s writings were popular in the U.S., most notably appreciated by Thomas Jefferson. ⁸²⁷ Volney’s conception of natural religion was God’s laws of the universe would lead all people “without distinction of country or of sect towards perfection and happiness.” ⁸²⁸ It was an understanding of religion he repeated as a spirit and one the *Cercle Harmonique* saw as Spiritualism.

Though largely unheard of today, the French lyrical poet Pierre-Jean de Béranger was popular in the nineteenth century and was also a frequent visitor to the *Cercle Harmonique*’s table. His songs were part of the nineteenth-century political and social culture of France and of the whole Atlantic world. ⁸²⁹ Upon the return of the Bourbons, Béranger was reprimanded for his critical poetry. His negative perspective of the Bourbon monarchy caused many to paint him as “a prime mover in the victory of the people” in the Revolution of 1830. ⁸³⁰ In fact, his “Le Vieux Drapeau” was the unofficial anthem of the Revolution of 1830. ⁸³¹ His songs kept the spirit of the French Revolution alive during the Restoration. ⁸³² His spirit helped keep the memory of the French Revolution present in the *Cercle Harmonique*. “The victory,” Béranger’s spirit proclaimed in 1870, “is ours; Truth and Justice triumphed.” ⁸³³

His love of France and his distaste of tyranny were often demonstrated in his lyrics. One of his most popular songs “The Coronation of Charles the Simple,” a roast of sorts about Charles X, illustrates his sardonic style crucial to his popularity among the people and his notoriety among royals. Political commentary supplied the core of his writings. In the song “My Republic,” he lauds the governmental system:

For republics I’ve a taking

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⁸²⁹ The prefaces to English editions of his songs also sing his praises. Pierre-Jean de Béranger, *Songs from Béranger*, Craven Langstroth Betts, trans. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes & Brother, 1888). The translator’s “Memoir” of Béranger preceding the translations of songs describes the lyrics as not only embodiments of “a nation” but also “the microcosm of a life” and “the macrocosm of a society” (21).
⁸³⁰ Ibid, 272.
⁸³³ Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
Since of kings I’ve seen enough;
One, my own, I’ll be a-making
Give it good laws quantum suf.
Drink’s the only trade that’s stable;
Nought’s our judge but Gaiety;
All my realm is but a table;
Its device is Liberty.
...
The noblesses are too aggressive;
Let your great ancestors rest.
No more titles even to guests give,
Who may laugh or drink the best.
Should a traitor come between us,
Reaching out for royalty,
Sink the Caesar in Silenus
And preserve our Liberty!
Drink our fair republic’s station!
Settled soon our state shall be:
But this so pacific nation
Fears e’en now an enemy.
’Tis Lisette, that’s us alarming;
In voluptuous bonds are we;
She will reign, for she is charming;
All is up with Liberty!

Béranger was also known for anti-clericalism. For example, the song “Les Révérends Pères” mocked the Jesuits and criticized them for their greed and harshness towards the laity. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the *Cercle Harmonique* and their spirit guides held a particularly low opinion of Jesuit priests too.

American literary magazines in the early to mid-nineteenth century referenced Béranger more often than other French poets during that time; Alphonse de Lamartine was the runner-up. Many of the references to Béranger appeared in national magazines such as the *American Quarterly Review*, the *North American Review*, and the *Southern Review*. He was depicted as “the French counterpart of the American self-made man” and as “a lover of the people whose feelings he transcribed in his songs.”

Locals were particularly familiar with his work. According to the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* in the 1840s, “no centre table will be considered

836 In August of 1865 a group known as “les disciples de Béranger” held a ball and concert in honor of his birthday. *The New-Orleans Times*, 6 August 1865.
graceful (at least in New Orleans) without him.”837 His failing health, his death, and his funeral were all newsworthy in the Crescent City.838 After his death, his influence and his love of liberty did not end. For example, one day in February 1871, the spirit of Béranger arrived simply to say “Vive la liberté!!”839

In addition to writing historical texts that help explain the influence of the French Revolution on world history and culture, Michelet also wrote shorter works. Michelet’s pamphlet *Le Peuple* (1846) sold quickly in France and was translated into English shortly thereafter. In it, he analyzed the effects of France’s shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one and the breakdown and interactions between social classes. He trusted that the French people’s love for their country and the innate goodness of the people would help humanity’s progress. The work reflected Michelet’s hope that the French people would unite under the banner of social justice and fraternity and that this movement could spread beyond France itself. The only government that had “devoted itself heart and soul” to the people was the Revolution.840 The effects of the “truly human genius of ‘89” were harmony, liberty, peace, and egalitarianism.841 Though Michelet’s spirit did not visit the *Cercle Harmonique*, his descriptions of the French Revolution’s ideals bore a strong resemblance to the spirits’ descriptions of them.

Michelet’s work was also well-known in New Orleans. The local newspapers frequently listed book sales featuring his work, and correspondences from Paris printed in *The Daily Picayune* and the *New Orleans Tribune* often raved about his influence in France.842 Following the historian’s death, the local papers reported on his final hours, his funeral, and even the disagreements amongst his widow and heirs.843 As one of “the greatest and most liberal minded men in Europe,” his work was suggested for those who wanted to be well-versed in conversation

837 *The Daily Picayune*, 7 December 1843.
839 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 February 1871.
841 Ibid, 182.
Members of the Cercle Harmonique would have been familiar with Michelet’s work, and thus, his explanation and analysis of France’s history and his hope for the country’s liberal future became part of the circle’s intellectual, interpretative scaffolding. Like Michelet, New Orleanians knew Montesquieu too. The short lived newspaper the Black Republican (1865) suggested his work if one felt “deficient in political knowledge.” The Times Picayune, which was known for not supporting Radical Reconstruction, cited Book 12 in the Spirit of Laws to support their opposition to “radicalism,” claiming that radicalism left hope and freedom impossible.

The intellectual impact of the French Revolution was particularly felt in New Orleans literary circles, among both white and black creoles and French émigrés. French authors were popular. Many nineteenth-century French romantic writers, such as Victor Hugo and Lamartine, had a tendency to infuse their writings with social and political commentary. For example, while Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture was depicted rather negatively among white southerners, he was described quite differently by both creoles of color and Lamartine. Lamartine’s poem “Toussaint Louverture” eulogized him as the “hero of the blacks” and the embodiment of Haiti. Lamartine too was part of the Cercle Harmonique network. The spirit of Lamartine advocated the ideas of Spiritualism and promised “immense happiness” for those who engaged the “spiritual work of God.” He also encouraged the circle along the “Infinite Route of Progress.” Lamartine’s spirit remarked that “[Victor] Hugo” received revelations of enlightenment and helped bring humanity along the road of progress. Reflecting the ideals of the French Revolution and romanticism in their writings, Hugo and Lamartine made noteworthy spiritual friends.

Free black creole intellectuals in New Orleans engaged French romantic literature, both in terms of discussion and production of new, original work (especially poetry). The year 1843

844 The New-Orleans Times, 6 November 1865; The Sunday Delta, 26 September 1858; The Sunday Delta, 28 August 1859; The Daily True Delta, 28 April 1861.
845 Black Republican, 13 May 1865.
846 The Daily Picayune, 7 March 1869.
848 Of Louverture, Lamartine wrote, “This man is a nation.” Lamartine, quoted in Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition, 99.
849 Grandjean collection, 85-41; 14 May 1872.
850 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 9 June 1871.
saw the publication of a short-lived, interracial literary journal, *L’Album littéraire: Journal des jeunes gens, amateurs de littérature* (The Literary Album: A Journal of Young Men, Lovers of Literature). Black creoles, including Joanni Questy, Armand Lanusse, Camille Thierry, Mirtil-Ferdinand Liotau, and Michel Saint-Pierre were frequent contributors to *L’Album*. Social commentary was common in its pages.851 One lengthy essay published in the journal, “Philosophy of History,” described how God’s spirit enlightened humanity and led it towards progress. However, a “weakening of spiritual ideals” led to a decline and “the harshest slavery” supplanted “gentile liberty.”852 Other essays criticized the class distinctions in Louisiana society (rather than equality), condemned the practice of plaçage (arguing that it made black creole women akin to prostitutes), and lamented the influence of Anglo (“British”) materialism on “Louisiana’s honor” and Louisiana’s youth.

Though *L’Album* did not last beyond a year, many of the same authors published in *Les Cenelles*, an 1845 anthology of black creole poetry spanning approximately two-hundred pages, eighty-five poems, and seventeen authors. Additionally, excerpts from the writings of Hugo, Lamennais, Lamartine, Victor Lemoine, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier were also featured in *Les Cenelles*. Many of the anthology’s contributors were educated by French émigrés or educated in France. The intellectual history of French revolutionary thought and romantic literature influenced the poets as well as their in-between status, between black and white, and their Catholic backgrounds.853 This emphasis of their French and creole heritage reflected their own genealogically-cultural ties to Lamennais, Rousseau, Louverture, and even Robespierre.

**“If Catholicism were entirely free”: Spiritualism Reimagines French Catholicism**854

For many thinkers in the French Revolution, political and religious questions were intertwined. Concepts like despotism and tyranny were not limited to politics or religion. Both the ancien régime and the Catholic Church were guilty of oppressing the lower classes and of

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ethical transgressions against the people. The answers were the principles of justice, liberty, and equality—chief ideas running through the *Cercle Harmonique’s* séance records. Though as the previous chapter demonstrated, criticism of Catholicism did not mean a complete departure from Catholic ideas and aesthetics. For some French Catholics of the late eighteenth century, directly engaging the world of spirits was not a far step. In the 1780s small groups of both men and women in Lyon and Paris began experimenting with new ways to commune with the dead that went far beyond seeking saintly intercession. Using the teachings of Mesmer, members of these groups would enter trances and communicate with spirits. One group in Lyon was even led by Abbé Jean-Antoine de Castellas, the dean of Saint John’s Cathedral. This group, known as *La Concorde* transcribed the reports of their trance-seekers, which were then privately circulated among “dissidents unhappy with the rigours of Catholic doctrine.”

Less popular in New Orleans was the French tradition of Spiritism, a similar tradition to American Spiritualism and largely inspired by the fame of the Rochester Fox sisters. French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, writing under the pseudonym Allan Kardec, is considered the founder of Spiritism. His publication *Le Livre des esprits* (*The Spirits’ Book*), first published in 1857, began to systematize and explain Spiritism, and his books were bestsellers in mid-century France. Like Spiritualism, Spiritism centered on communication with the spirits of the dead through mediums and spirit photography. Both claimed a scientific empiricism, with spirit communication as the evidentiary proof for the validity of their beliefs. Kardec advocated “individual progress towards perfection” and the advancement of social reform. Messages received by Kardec and his mediums often “described a universe in which equality was a supreme value.”

Though both French Spiritism and New Orleans Spiritualism looked forward to social regeneration, a big difference between the two was the former’s belief in reincarnation. Reincarnation, Spiritism taught, put spirits on a course of spiritual progression towards spiritual enlightenment. The spirits who visited the *Cercle Harmonique* occasionally referenced

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856 Kselman, “State and Religion,” 84.
Spiritism. The spirit of French revolutionary priest Lamennais described Spiritism as a stepping stone for Spiritualism and categorized it as “the station which will mark the decay of Materialism and the birth of Spiritualism” and “the first step which shows the Spirit luminous.” Lamennais explained that Spiritism could prepare a soul to accept “the blessings of Spiritualism which will safeguard and enlighten it, in order to illuminate it and render it more and more radiant.” On another occasion a spirit named Sylvester Weber noted that while a Spiritist was “a believer in Spirits’ existence,” a Spiritualist was “a believer in the Great Work of Harmony.” Spiritism was better than Catholicism, but the spirits affirmed that the *Cercle Harmonique*’s practice was the pinnacle of religious progression and the core of humanity’s spiritual progression.

Revolutionary French priests also visited the Afro-creole Spiritualists, and like the presence of Sedella and Moni, the participation of these spirits reaffirmed the circle’s own Catholic past. Furthermore, the involvement of these spirits in the *Cercle Harmonique*’s spiritual genealogy also reiterated the circle’s connection to the French revolutionary heritage and Francophone culture in general. The spirit of Lamennais was frequent guide for the Afro-creole Spiritualists. His presence at the *Cercle Harmonique*’s table illustrates how Rey and others refashioned the parts of French Catholicism they approved of and integrated them into their practice. As a popular French revolutionary voice, Lamennais made a valuable addition to the spiritual network of the *Cercle Harmonique*. Though raised in a royalist family, Lamennais became increasingly liberal as the nineteenth century developed, and in the end, he sought to combine the Church with the spirit of the Revolution. Even as he became more radical, he never abandoned the belief that religion provided the only possibility for humanity’s salvation, though his views on religion increasingly became distant from official Catholicism. Lamennais maintained that humanity needed God to preserve order and morality, and though the Catholic Church (meaning the ecclesiastical hierarchy) had become corrupted, the Church’s God was the true God. As he became increasingly interested in politics, he became more critical of the French Church, since it paired with a hostile regime. Rather, the role of the Church was supposed to be fighting for the people, reforming society, and advancing justice. His status as a radical and a

858 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 25 April 1872.
revolutionary was solidified with his 1834 publication *Paroles d’un Croyant* (*Words of a Believer*), a text that resulted in his official condemnation from the Vatican.861

In *Paroles d’un Croyant*, he described three related forces for change: the improvement of the people, the uniting of the people, and God’s guidance. *Paroles d’un Croyant* contained poems, aphorisms, and an Old Testament prophet-like tone. The work’s content ranged from criticism of contemporary religion and politics, hopes for the future, and theological explanations of the world. “When those who have abused their power have been swept away before you like mud in streams on a stormy day,” he explained in the preface, “then you will understand that only the good endures, and you will fear to sully the air the winds of heaven have purified.” Indeed, the preface described a world in “evil times,” but promised a return of “Providence” after “the hardships of winter.”862 The “divine seed” of God’s word brought to earth at Jesus’s birth flowered initially, but “now the earth hath again become dark and cold.”863 Lamennais explained the origins of sin and greed among humans, an event he saw when “transported in spirit to the times of old,” through prophet-like parables. He identified the serpent (also translated as “Fear”) as the cause of greed and despotism, and greed caused men to follow the serpent and become fettered to it. These men then proclaimed themselves to be kings and “excavated as it were a great cavern and there shut up the whole human family, as beasts are shut up in a stall.” This imprisonment of much of humanity was the serpent’s “second” conquest over humans, but humanity will have “another birth” that will deliver it from this state.864 As a spirit visiting the *Cercle Harmonique*, Lamennais echoed his own writings. Rebuking those who were slaves to materialism—who he likened to brutes—Lamennais assured the *Cercle Harmonique* that God wanted Justice and Equity to be prime forces in the world and offered “the work of harmony” present in the world’s “smallest details” as proof.865

*Paroles d’un Croyant* taught that this enslavement of humanity to those self-proclaimed kings was not what God wanted. Together with “Faith and thought,” Christ will break “the chains of the people” and emancipate the earth.866 Equality and liberty were the desires of God, for “God hath made nor small nor great, nor masters, nor slave, nor kinds nor subjects. He hath

861 Papal Encyclical *Singulari nos* (July 7, 1834) expressed “horror, venerable Brothers, at our first glance at this book …” in reference to *Paroles d’un Croyant*.
863 F. De La Mennais, *Words of a Believer*, trans (Charles De Behr, Publisher: New York, 1834), 14.
864 Ibid, 20–23.
865 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872.
866 F. De La Mennais, *Words of a Believer*, 74.
made all men equal.”

Liberty was more than simply a word. Rather, “she is a living power which a man feels within himself and round about him; the guardian genius of the domestic hearth, the protector of social rights, and the first of those rights.”

Tyrants may claim to be supporters of Liberty, but only those who defend rights may rightly call themselves champions of Liberty. Thus, it comes as little surprise that Lamennais criticized slavery since all are “sons of the same God, and brethren of the same Christ.” Lamennais’s writings were read in France and beyond. He was a supporter of the Revolution of 1848 and elected as a deputy for Paris to the Constituent Assembly. During this time, he appeared in the New Orleans Daily Picayune’s brief reports on the French Assembly. During the Civil War, the local radical French Afro-creole newspaper L’Union called him one of the “geniuses” of the “noble Republic.” Mass production of his work Paroles d’un Croyant made his name well-known amongst those interested in the French Revolution and French culture, and passing references in newspapers attest to local New Orleanians’ knowledge of him and his work.

As a spirit, Lamennais argued that “the Fusion of the Races” would advance hand-in-hand with the march of progress. Racism held back humanity’s progress. According to Lamennais those with “Humanitarian Ideas” did not recognize nationalities. This idea was also held by both the revolutionary priest Abbé Henri Grégoire and his spirit who visited the table of the Cercle Harmonique. Grégoire was a Jesuit, the first priest to swear the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and the author of 1808’s De la litterature des negres, often translated as An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes. Grégoire’s eager willingness to work with the National Assembly and the new Republic identified him as a Revolution-friendly priest. His 1788 work, Essai sur la régénération physique et morale des Juifs (Essay on the physical and moral regeneration of the Jews) and its support for full legal enfranchisement for French and global Jews, reflected Grégoire’s support.

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867 Ibid, 34–35.
868 Ibid, 95.
869 Ibid, 57.
870 The Daily Picayune, 4 June 1848, 24 September 1848.
871 “La Liberté,” L’Union, 18 October 1862.
872 Lamennais’s death was even local news, including mention of his current intellectual work (a translation of Dante’s Inferno). The Daily Picayune, 21 June 1855.
873 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 6 October 1871. Message from “Lamennais.”
874 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 6 July 1871. Message from “Lamennais.”
of religious liberty and interest in minority communities. The 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy in many ways placed the French government over the Catholic Church, including the introduction of an electoral process for the naming of bishops and parish clergy. Like Lamennais, Grégoire was one of the French priests known for his revolutionary sympathies and support of republicanism. This love of republicanism remained with Grégoire in spirit too. The spirit of Grégoire identified “social ills” and other evils that obstructed “the reign of God.” In the midst of political turmoil between the Republicans and Democrats during Reconstruction, Grégoire’s spirit assured them that right would succeed in “the party struggle” since “principles triumph over abuse.”

*De la litterature des negres* was in part a response to arguments regarding race similar to Thomas Jefferson’s in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. According to Jefferson, blacks were “much inferior” when it came to reason, “and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous.” Furthermore, their inferiority was an absolute which the black race could not change. Whether their skin color came from “the color of blood, the color of bile, or that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us.” Though this seems a solely inherent matter, Jefferson took social environment into account, for it was “right to make great allowances for the difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move.” While Jefferson was not completely clear on how blacks became inferior, he was positive of the racial hierarchy. Either originally created distinct from whites or made that way “by time and circumstance,” Jefferson affirmed that blacks were “inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”

Perhaps God had not created all men equally for Jefferson, but equality was the case for Grégoire. The priest even sent Jefferson a copy of *De la litterature des negres*, for which Jefferson thanked him. Grégoire’s work deconstructed the justifications for slavery and the racial hierarchy by illuminating and highlighting the accomplishments of the African race. Like Jefferson, Grégoire explained physical racial difference with climate, but Grégoire argued for the essential universality of humanity and recounted the intellectual and moral achievements of

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876 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 4 June 1871.
877 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
Africans and their descendants around the globe and through history. The prejudgment that Africans were inferior to Europeans and Euro-Americans was predicated on false European assumptions of superiority and, even more so, European greed. “Africa,” the priest wrote, “is not even allowed to breathe when the powers of Europe are combined to tear her to pieces.” When it came to the assumed racial hierarchy, blame clearly fell at the feet of those who placed themselves atop it. Grégoire hoped that revolutions would help in the deconstruction of the racial hierarchy, and that societies would be rebuilt based on equality and real merit.

The spirit of Grégoire continued this fight for racial equality and world egalitarianism. In one message Grégoire described John Brown as a “patriot” with a “generous heart” and a “sincere friend of all men.” His anger at American slavery inspired his attempt “to end the terrible despotism” and break the chains on “the feet of his black brothers.” Grégoire was not shy with his high opinion of Brown, a man he called “one of the great figures in American history.” This “American Jesus” sought to regenerate the nation. Brown made “sacred to the American people the principles of Liberty.” The resurrection of Brown’s ideals spurred forward “the great army of the Republic who raised Grant to the Presidential seat.” While Jefferson Davis stood for “darkness” and “hate,” Brown symbolized “love,” “hope,” and freedom.

With his combined interests in republicanism and racial equality, Grégoire is not a surprising member of the Cercle Harmonique’s spiritual network. Many spirits in the group’s spiritual network advocated racial equality and republicanism, perhaps most notably, those affiliated with the Haitian Revolution.

“Death to Tyranny. Long live Liberty”: Revolutions Around The Caribbean

The influence of the French Revolution was felt in the Atlantic and Caribbean worlds almost immediately. In the Euro-Atlantic world the idea of privilege was a main societal organizing principle, and it often had a racial or ethnic component. The rebellion on the island of Saint Domingue starting in 1790 is the clearest example of the French Revolution’s impact on Afro-creole and Afro-Caribbean culture. This influenced Africans and Afro-creoles in Louisiana as well, as evidenced in the 1791 and 1795 Pointe Coupée slave conspiracies and a 1795

881 Ibid, 248.
882 Grandjean collection 85-32; 5 April 1870.
883 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 March 1871. Message from Toussaint Louverture.
conspiracy/potential uprising involving black militiamen. Contemporary local authorities lamented the influence of Saint Domingue’s recent rebellion on their own slave and free black populations. One complained that recent events had “poisoned the populace, who, through imitation, became in general either partisans of an obnoxious tyranny, or zealous adherents of Robespierre and the disrupting monsters who shared his crimes.”

Taking place during Spain’s rule of Louisiana, the rhetoric of the French was attractive to those denied full civil and legal rights. When challenged regarding France’s dedication to humanity, one of the main black creole troublemakers of the Point Coupée conspiracy replied “the French are just” for “they have conceded men their rights.”

Historian Wim Klooster argued that in the Caribbean the message of the French Revolution had a more direct impact on free people of color than slaves. Since free persons of color sought to gain “full legal equality,” they more strongly echoed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, while slaves focused more on their hopeful emancipation. The equality promised in the French document offered free people of color in and around the Caribbean, including New Orleans, the inspiration to demand full legal and civil rights and a language to do so. In short, the writings and rhetoric of the French Revolution provided black “hidden transcripts,” or previously unspoken critiques, a ready means of manifestation.

Starting in 1791 the Haitian Revolution lasted until 1804. Following the 1789 approval of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, many of the island’s free people of color began to argue for their own legal and civil rights. A small group of wealthy free men of color aggressively began to demand voting rights, but it was not until a large group of maroon slaves joined that the revolution began to gain real speed. With resources supplied by the British and the Spanish and the leadership of former slaves Boukman and Toussaint Louverture, the rebellion expelled European power by the close of the eighteenth century. Louverture declared complete black

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887 Court testimony of Don Luis Declouet about Pedro Bailly, quoted in Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, 158.
889 Political scientist James C. Scott defined a hidden transcript as “a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii. The idea of “hidden transcripts” has been used in nineteenth-century historical analysis. See, Cheung, “Les Cenelles and Quadroon Balls.”
autonomy for the island. Freedom had finally come for a black contingent in the new world. Decades later, his spirit stated that freedom came from God and was truly found in the spiritual spheres. As a figure often equated with the fight for black freedom, his contention that “man is not free” but will be free upon death carried weight.\textsuperscript{890} Louverture also proclaimed himself governor-for-life, though this did not last long. Napoleon dispatched a large force to regain control of the island.

Though the second and third round of fighting with the French would end in another black victory, Louverture was not as successful as his fellow countrymen. Taken prisoner in 1802, he later died in a prison in France—home of the despotic power he fought. In the southern U.S., the name Toussaint Louverture would become synonymous with extreme radicalism and violence in most social circles. During the Civil War and Union occupation of the city, \textit{The Daily Picayune} was woe to report that “the American Jacobins” in the North were gaining speed. A man named Wendell Phillips delivered an address at the Cooper Institute, New York and concluded,

A hundred years hence some Tacitus will take Phocion as the noblest model of the Greek and Brutus of the Roman—put Hampden for the glory of England and Lafayette for France—choose Washington as the bright consummate flower of the last generation and John Brown for this, and then dipping his pen in the sunlight, he will write high in the clear blue above them all, the name of the patriot soldier, statesman and martyr—Toussaint L’Ouverture.

The New Orleans reporter lamented that “the bloody wretch who is thus apotheosized, whose name is placed ‘high above’ that of Washington, massacred with fiendish cruelty about three thousand of the white race.”\textsuperscript{891} Others reported more kindly on Louverture during the war. Shortly after the war’s end the \textit{New Orleans Tribune}, in an article that called John Brown “the Christ of the blacks,” Louverture was celebrated as a man who put “the general interest of the noble men who had entrusted [to him] their fate” over his own life.\textsuperscript{892}  

Though less famous in the U.S. than Louverture, Alexandre Pétion, a mixed-race military leader and first president of the Republic of Haiti serving from 1807 until his death in 1818, was also an active spirit at the \textit{Cercle Harmonique’s} séance table. Pétion joined the militia troops and fought alongside Louverture in the initial years of conflict, though he sided with André Rigaud

\textsuperscript{890} Grandjean collection 85-38; 7 January 1872. Message from Toussaint Louverture.  
\textsuperscript{891} \textit{The Daily Picayune}, 19 March 1863.  
\textsuperscript{892} \textit{New Orleans Tribune}, 12 July 1865.
following the revolution and thus left for France in exile shortly thereafter. He attended the School for Colonials and the Military College in Paris and then returned to Haiti two years later in 1802 with General Leclerc (Napoleon’s cousin) to retake the island. After Louverture was taken hostage by the French and rumors of reinstating slavery washed over the island, Pétion joined the black nationals led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines. After black rebels retook control of the island and renamed it Haiti, Pétion moved to the political background until the assassination of Dessalines. Pétion and Henri Christophe both moved for power, Pétion supporting the ideals of republicanism and democracy while Christophe supported a more authoritarian organization. The Kingdom of Haiti in the north was ruled by Christophe, while the Republic of Haiti was led by Pétion. Pétion’s tenure as president saw the parsing and giving of land to soldiers who fought for Haitian independence, the creation of public education facilities for children, and Pétion cultivated a relationship with Venezuelan freedom fighter Simón Bolívar. Historical actors and historians alike gave Pétion the title of “the founder of rural democracy” for Haiti due to his decision to fragment large colonial plantations into small farm plots for soldiers.\footnote{Dantes Bellegarde, “Alexandre Pétion: The Founder of Rural Democracy in Haiti,” \textit{Caribbean Quarterly}, 3.3 (1953): 167–173.}

Pétion and Bolívar met in December 1815 and Pétion gave the leader supplies for his struggle including guns and money. Later Bolívar would recognize Pétion as inspirational and wanted to give him the title “the author of American liberty,” but Pétion declined. In an 1816 letter Bolívar wrote the following about Pétion,

"Your Excellency possesses a quality which is above empires, namely altruism. It is the President of Haiti alone who governs for the people. It is he who leads his equals. The other potentates, content to make themselves obeyed, scorn the love which makes your glory. The hero of the North, Washington, found only enemy soldiers to conquer. Your Excellency has all to conquer, enemies and friends, foreigners and countrymen, the fathers of the country and even the strength of his brothers. This task will not be impossible for Your Excellency, who is above his country and his epoch.\footnote{Letter quoted in Bellegarde, “Alexandre Pétion,” 173.}"

Pétion’s spirit messages complimented contemporary history’s depiction of him. According to the spirit of Pétion, the “virtuous soul” was one that fought against “tyrannical oppressors,” be they political or religious, and fought for “the Freedom of his brothers.” Similar to other spirits, he also taught that racial identities and nationalities were constructions of politics and thus had no real meaning. There was a “common homeland” for all “brothers.” Since the
place of one’s birth happened by “chance,” all should “unite” despite nationality. Pétion and other spirits instructed the *Cercle Harmonique* to “reach out your fraternal hand to your brother, whether he is in Asia, Africa, or Europe. They are all men.” Spiritualists “should recognize neither nationalities, nor races; all men are brothers and equals.” Pétion was not alone in these claims. Swedenborg echoed Pétion and stated that for Spiritualists, there was “neither nationalities, nor races, they are all brothers; the latitude of one’s birth is nothing to him [the Spiritualist].” Even Robert E. Lee agreed with Pétion and instructed all to unite for “the harmony of the races, of the nationalities in this country!” Historians today contend that Pétion’s role in Haiti’s founding was over-emphasized in order to outshine other leaders, such as Dessalines. This may be the case looking back, but the focus on Pétion during the mid-nineteenth century was significant for the practice of the *Cercle Harmonique*. During the nineteenth century, Pétion was recognized around the Caribbean as a figurehead of freedom.

Following the Haitian Revolution, the island was by no means stable. Historians agree that the real winners of the Haitian Revolution were not the newly freed slaves but rather “the old *mulâtre* land-owning elite (the *anciens libres*) and the new noir generals (the *nouveaux libres*) who seized the state.” Members of the mixed-race class, with their lighter skin and higher social status, were often at odds with the newly liberated slaves. Socially, politically, and racially, the island remained diverse. Further rebellions and conflicts were common. The Liberal Revolution of 1843, led by some of the bourgeoisie who wanted to liberalize the country, and the Piquet Rebellion of 1844, led by peasants, demonstrate the instability on the island and the dissent among the peasant class. One general who pushed back against the “suffering army”—the name the pike-carrying peasants gave themselves—was a mulatto named Fabre-Nicolas Geffrard, a man who would later serve as president himself in 1857. Geffrard’s spirit too

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903 Sheller, “‘You signed my name,’” 80.
appeared to the *Cercle Harmonique*. His message was signed “Jeffrard” and argued that both God and “the sun [light]” prove the “equality of men.” He lamented that it took “so much bloodshed” in order for humanity to “recognize the justice of this Principle.”

He might have been referring to world history broadly or his own participation in the Piquet Rebellion.

The island’s instability was likely the inspiration behind one spirit’s prediction. The spirit of Auguste Brouard, a Haitian colonel, prophesized that there would be “no more of these fratricidal struggles” once all of humanity accepted Spiritualism. Humanity would no longer put brothers in chains, and Freedom would be for all. There would be no hatred, no struggle. Instead, there would only be the flag of one “universal homeland” as opposed to many flags “soiled with blood.”

Brouard was part of the Haitian campaign in the 1843–49 Dominican War of Independence, a conflict which created the Dominican Republic. The other side of the Saint Domingue island fell to Haitian control in 1822 under Pétion’s successor President Jean-Pierre Boyer, and waves of anti-Haitian movements on the eastern side of the island followed. Overlapping with the Liberal Revolution of 1843, the Dominican War of Independence continued even after the new republic drafted their constitution as Haitian forces continued to try to regain control. On another occasion, Brouard called “the war,” though he did not clarify which one, a “scourge” and “the result of the desire of domination.” He likened the “Glories of Earth” to children’s toys—simplistic and for the immature. Whether it was about the recent American Civil War or the war he fought in, Brouard’s harsh words about war resonated with other spirits’ messages about oppression and oligarchical power. The spirit of Brouard also supported patience and hard work in the face of conflict. For Afro-creoles hoping for full legal and civil rights during the Reconstruction era, Brouard’s encouragement would hit close to home.

The *Cercle Harmonique*’s knowledge of the Haitian Revolution came from three primary sources: stories from some of the members’ own parents who were born there, contemporary newspaper accounts of current events, and the recent histories of Haiti that were being published and distributed. The first two volumes of Thomas Madiou’s four volume history of the island, *Histoire d’Haïti*, were published in 1847 and 1848. Madiou’s telling of Haitian history highlighted how the world belonged to all people, regardless of race, and that world civilization
would benefit from a “fusion” of the races.\footnote{Bellegarde-Smith, “Haitian Social Thought,” 21.} Beaubrun Ardouin’s eleven volume *Etudes sur l’histoire d’Haïti*, published between 1853 and 1860, also celebrated and romanticized Haiti’s past. Ardouin wrote history with a purpose and believed that “the past is the regulator of the present as of the future.”\footnote{Ardouin’s *Etudes sur l’histoire d’Haïti*, quoted in Nicholls, “A Work of Combat,” 24.} Thus, knowing Haiti’s triumphant history would inspire later generations, like the *Cercle Harmonique*, to continue propagating the revolutionary and republican ideals of their past.

Ardouin downplayed both Louverture’s and Dessalines’s roles in Haitian freedom. Joseph Saint-Rémy’s five volume biography of Pétion reinforced the particular president’s celebrated status in Haitian history.\footnote{Joseph Saint-Rémy, *Pétion et Haïti: Etude monographique et historique*, ed. François Dalencour (1854; Paris: Libraire Berger-Levrault et Cie, 1956).} Each historian emphasized a lack of racial prejudice in the country’s post-Revolution history, largely for diplomatic reasons. Furthermore, even with Madiou’s talk of racial “fusion,” many of the mid-nineteenth-century historians created what contemporary historian David Nicholls calls the “mulatto legend,” which strengthened the mixed-race upper-class’s claim to political power.\footnote{Nicholls, “A Work of Combat,” 16. Though Madiou was a mulatto himself, his work did the least to propagate the “mulatto legend.”} In the accounts of Ardouin and Saint-Rémy, Louverture and Dessalines were not depicted favorably; rather they were despotic, in cahoots with white slave-owners, and prejudiced. Pétion and Boyer emerged as champions of the democratic ideal. Though these particular histories might stress the contribution of mulattos, the common interest of all Haitians and a restrained telling of racial caste prejudice were emphasized. For example, when Louverture was depicted as a pawn of white power, this was both a negative depiction of black, non-mulatto Haitians but also an ideological call-to-arms for all Haitians to combat colonialism. The *gens de couleur libres*, unlike Louverture, had always led the struggle against colonial oppression. Ardouin and Saint-Rémy’s accounts celebrated Pétion as a leader in the fight for Haitian independence and then as the true founder of the republican nation of Haiti. Whether part of this “mulatto legend” or not, these histories of Haiti criticized colonialism and slavery and celebrated the victories of the African race in the new world. And these books were chief sources of Haitian history with which *Cercle Harmonique* members would have interacted. The prevalence of the “mulatto legend” in contemporary nineteenth-century histories of Haiti might explain why Pétion’s spirit visited the *Cercle*
Harmonique and Dessalines did not. Considering Dessalines’s more violent plans, such as ordering the massacre of all remaining whites on the island, his absence is not surprising. In contrast, Pétion’s characterization as republican founder made him an expected friend in the spiritual world.

The Haitian Revolution influenced politics and cultures all around the Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{913} While Afro-creoles sympathized and related with the revolutionaries, many white American protestants were anxious about Haiti. Both the Catholicism of the island and the violence of the black revolution—for the fear of a rebellious race war haunted many Euro-Americans—made many uneasy. Some white Americans who favored abolitionism posthumously converted Louverture to Protestantism because the specter of a successful rebellion associated with both Catholicism and race violence was incompatible with their views on liberalism and democracy.\textsuperscript{914} New Orleans Afro-creoles were different in their views on Haiti and the revolution.\textsuperscript{915} Sociologist Mimi Sheller argued that a “shared vision of democracy based on the post-slavery ideology of freedom” developed among black Haitians and Jamaicans. This ideology included not just a demand for “full political participation and equal citizenship,” but also “an explicit critique of white racial domination and of the unbridled market capitalism that built a world system of slavery.”\textsuperscript{916} Despite Haiti’s struggles and internal conflicts in the following decades, the island and its history was a symbol of black political agency and black republicanism for many Afro-creoles around the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{917}

One of the Haitian Revolution’s main inspirations for members of the Cercle Harmonique was the affirmation that the value of a people or a nation did not depend on race. As the ideals of the French Revolution taught them, the real value of a person came from the spirit, not status. Afro-creole Spiritualism agreed. The belief that the “color of the [material] envelope”

\textsuperscript{913} David Patrick Geggus, ed. The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{915} Additionally, for many African Americans outside New Orleans, Haiti was seen as “a New World exemplar and redeemer for the race.” In short, Haiti was a place of divine potential. See chapter 3, “The Serpentine Trail,” in Maffly-Kipp, Setting Down the Sacred Past.
\textsuperscript{916} Mimi Sheller, Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 5.
\textsuperscript{917} Sheller does not argue that these ideologies meant total liberty for all in the immediate aftermath of post-revolutionary Haiti or post-emancipation Jamaica. For example, her focus in Haiti is the Liberal Rebellion and the Piquet Rebellion in 1843–44 and the radicalism of the peasant classes on the island. Following the Haitian Revolution, the island possessed a “limited liberal democracy” (10).
proved any man’s “superiority … quickly dissipate[d]” once spirits entered the spiritual world. While bodies were raced by skin color on earth, racist spirits were tainted by “defilement of the soul” in the spiritual spheres. Spirits were “pure and holy” as opposed to colored like their bodily envelopes.918 The spirit who delivered this message signed as “M. De St. Méry,” likely referring to white creole lawyer and historian Mederic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry from Saint Domingue. Saint-Mery’s Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’île Saint-Domingue offered a categorical schema for the persons on the island of Saint Domingue, a work he finished shortly before the Haitian Revolution. The work recounted the glory days of white supremacy and slavery on the island.919 Though he celebrated white supremacy while alive, in death his spirit recognized the absurdity of race. While the temporary body was raced, the spirit, and since the true value of a person was their immaterial and immortal spirit, race should not matter.

Spirits from the Haitian Revolution were not the only Caribbeans to appear at the Cercle Harmonique’s table. Rebel efforts on and around Cuba during the late 1840s and early 1850s led by Spanish creole Narciso López to wrestle control of the island from imperial Spanish power found support among fellow revolutionaries in the Caribbean.920 López’s aims were different from those on Saint Domingue decades earlier, since he supported slavery.921 Still, he was primarily known for his revolutionary call and his republicanism. A spirit named Lopez delivered a pro-liberty and anti-despotism message in late 1871. He opened the communique calling for “cheers for independence!” Independence was grand because it removed “superstition and error.” In contrast, the terror of despotism “grips your consciousness.” The people should “lift up and crush [despotism].” Cries of “Long live Liberty!” and “Long live Independence!” emboldened the message with emotion.922 As a spirit, Lopez was concerned with despotism of

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both the political and cultural kind. A “barbarous tyrant” was not the only destructive personality for humanity. “A bad son; an enemy of society; an unjust brother or sister; a cruel master,” and “a hypocrite minister” were destructive too and would impede the progress of humanity.  

New Orleans was both a bastion of pro-López sentiment and a departure point for many of López’s expedition ships. In most New Orleans reporting on the López-led Cuban rebellion, “the old desire to save Cuba to the cause of slavery was curiously mixed with a sincere enthusiasm for political liberty.” At Rey’s séance table, Lamennais proclaimed that López was a worthy spirit whose “blood” and the blood of his compatriots “provoked this spirit of independence which causes the heart of Cuban patriots to beat.” Anti-Spanish riots broke out in New Orleans following López’s execution and over twenty-five thousand dollars of damage was done to Spain’s consulate in New Orleans and to property belonging to Spanish nationals in the city. Commemorative services for López and the other revolutionaries continued in New Orleans, most notably at the 1854 commemoration held at the Mechanics’ Institute. J.S. Thrasher (one of the two main speakers) highlighted liberty and freedom in his speech and concluded that “the Union of the Martyrs was the Union of the Races!” By races, Thrasher meant the Iberian race (Spaniards), Anglos, and Spanish creoles. However, his celebration of “the union of the races” would echo at the table of the Cercle Harmonique.

“Better than these servile despots”: The Struggle against Despotism and Oppression

The twin forces of despotism and oppression were antithetical to Spiritualism and humanity’s progress. It was a “noble duty to fight despotism in whatever form it presents itself,” but some spirits did not learn this lesson until joining the spiritual world. Valmour was happy to explain that he understood “the solidarity that binds us all.” This solidarity was in

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924 A New York Herald correspondent in New Orleans reported in August 1849 that the object of his expedition was to “carry out the formation of the Republic of the Sierra Madre, to separate that territory from the Mexican republic, proclaim its independence, and maintain it by force.” New York Herald, quoted in Chaffin, Fatal Glory, 63.
925 Caldwell, The Lopez expeditions to Cuba, 1848–1851, 90.
927 Chaffin, Fatal Glory, xxii.
931 Grandjean collection, 85-60; 16 August 1875.
opposition to the *ancien régime*’s system of governance. Despotism was “the policy of Brutal France.” According to Volney, religious despotism “distorted” the mind and chained brothers to Ignorance, and paired with political despotism, this was what caused the suffering of the French.  

The savior of the French was the Revolution and its calls for liberté, égalité, fraternité. Republicanism should replace despotism, not only in France but across the material world. Another spirit encouraged the *Cercle Harmonique* to not “bend shamefully under the rule” of those who sought to quell thinking or dissent—in other words, contest despots.  

The spirits of those who wanted to “dominate the masses and live at their expense” suffered in the spiritual world and felt “shameful and unhappy.” For example, Napoleon recognized the error of his ways after his physical death and would appear at the table to warn against pride, as else end up as him, “groaning at the foot of the Ladder of Progress.” While those who lived for justice celebrated in the spiritual world, he “grieve[d] under the multitude of evils I caused, of the intense grief I had spread.” In contrast to a despot, a real leader had “a responsibility for the future” and must guarantee citizens their “free will.” Despots in particular, or simply those with excessive and abusive power, garnered heavy criticism from the spirits. Robespierre delivered a joint message with André Chenier—on Bastille Day no less—and exclaimed “a despot commands and the world is turned upside down.” For Robespierre and Chenier, king was another word for despot. “Canons,” which were invented “to please the foolish pride of Chiefs, and especially of Despots,” should not decide a country’s welfare and governmental policies. The command of a despot turned the world “upside down.” Chenier and Robespierre connected these ideas to current events. The King of Prussia, who was currently at war with France, was singled out for trying to delay progress. Other spirits’ references to moral slavery were similar to Robespierre and Chenier’s condemnation of “tyranny chaining liberty.” Rather, they hoped that the spirit of “93” would keep kings and despots from triumph. Voltaire too chimed in on the idea of despotism, encouraging the circle to combat “depots of conscience.” In contrast, the spirits extolled humility.
In the search for political power, many political despots sought alliance with religious despots hoping the partnership would “strengthen” their power. According to the spirit of Lamennais the powerful and greedy left humanity “moaning,” stuck “under the political and religious yokes.” It was only “the spirit of domination in the heart of man” that “perverted” him to disregard “solidarity” and dream “of chains instead of freedom.” The ego was the source of such perversion, which made a man desire power over humanity rather than humanity’s “glorious march.” While various political powers had lived long off “the sufferings of the people … the march of ideas” pushed against “despots’ political prestige.” Other political and religious despots armed themselves with the “sword,” but weapons could not stop the “march of the Idea.” The Idea was a “torch that guided humanity.” It was the “moral strength” of Jesus and the “energy” of John Brown; “it was Voltaire, Volney; it was [Victor] Hugo.” The Idea and freedom could not be stopped simply by a despot with a sword. Despotism, whether political or religious, was a “calamity.” Securing the “freedom of thought” for all was a necessity, the spirit of Lopez taught, especially if the ones obstructing it were the “mercenaries of Black Robes.”

Napoleon was not the only former despot or king who appeared to the Cercle Harmonique. Others also came to the table to share the knowledge they had gained once joining the spiritual world. After death despots would and did recognize their past errors, and the proof was in their presence at the Spiritualists’ table. The spirit of Louis X, a man briefly king of France in the early fourteenth century, supported the idea of an “Alliance for the common good.” A spirit identified as the Duke of Orleans encouraged the Cercle Harmonique and anyone else listening to “be humble of heart.” Justice, charity, and self-sacrifice made one “worthy of your Creator.” “Human equality” and “universal brotherhood” were key to any properly functioning society.

Indeed, French kings of the past were not uncommon at the séance table. The spirit of Charles IX, the king who approved what became known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, taught that all were equal in the spirit world regardless of the “gold” or “honors” possessed on earth. Furthermore, neither gold nor social status could keep one from undergoing retribution.

944 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 26 March 1872.
945 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 27 January 1872.
Tyrants would appear in the spirit world with their heads lowered and would “howl like me.”

The spirit of Charles X, the king mocked in Béranger’s famous song, had harsh words for those who supported slavery. In one message he asked a long rhetorical question clearly designed to chastise those who favored keeping “under the yoke … thousands of beings.” In response, he explained how a slavery apologist was similar to an “insolent king” with his “head high” and “disdainful” to any who question him. Those who stood ready to shout “Long live the king” were no better. They were simply “puppets.” The age of slavery and monarchy was dead as far as the spirit of Charles X was concerned. “The people,” he said, were “King.” Slavery was wrong because neither one’s status nor one’s race should dictate one’s place in the spirit world. “You talk of races,” the medium wrote for Charles X on another occasion, “German, French, Prussian, Parisian, Bavarian or Austrian, Italians.” But, the spirit asked, when the body is only dust, what was value of race then? Or, what significance was status? Many of the “greats of Earth” were “very small here.” A message that taught how one’s nationality did not matter carried extra weight coming from a French king who ordered the invasion of Algeria. The presence of Charles X and other kings at the table also reaffirmed the possibility of a spirit’s redemption in the spiritual world. Though in error during their earthly material lives, these spirits wanted to share the knowledge they had gained in the spiritual world with those still on earth.

Despotism was not the only form of oppression people encountered. In addition to the political, the primary forms of oppression that most interested the spirits were economic, racial, and social. Lamennais reported that there was truth to the saying “it is difficult for the rich to get through the gates of heaven.” On another occasion Lamennais described materialism as one of the prime causes of “social inequalities.” Ambroise rebuked many of the world’s “captains of industry” for “the exploitation of the masses.” While the economically disadvantaged often had nothing but “suffering persecution” on earth, they were promised “sympathy, love, and charity” in the spirit world. The spirit of “a former peasant” criticized those who disowned their parents out of shame and pride. Claiming a rich and powerful biological lineage was not the

946 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 14 July 1872.
947 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 27 January 1872.
948 Grandjean collection, 85-45; 20 September 1872.
949 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 December 1871. Message from “Lamennais.”
950 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 27 August 1872. Message from “Lamennais.”
952 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 29 June 1873. Message from “a sister.”
way to accumulate political or social capital.\textsuperscript{953} Status should not come from one’s blood lineage.\textsuperscript{954} Furthermore, coming from a noble or rich family could hinder one’s spiritual progression, as this kind of background meant a childhood of privilege and a naturalized sense of entitlement. Those in “privileged classes” forgot that the people they considered “their inferiors” were in fact “children of the same Father, who created all equal.”\textsuperscript{955} Regrettably, a “love of domination,” Montesquieu and Ambroise taught together, seemed natural to many people.\textsuperscript{956} According to Mesmer, those who felt superior over others were typically the ones who also neglected their spiritual education.\textsuperscript{957} Lamennais explained that Spiritualists were to “practice humility” because Jesus preached humility in order to combat “indifference” and “Human Pride.”\textsuperscript{958} Thus the Afro-creole Spiritualists were instructed to “help break the natural or legal chains” that tied people, often “the poor” and “dispossessed,” to “the pariahs of the earth.” If humanity could destroy prejudice, Béranger believed, then “the hydra of physical and moral domination” would be crushed.\textsuperscript{959}

Gendered oppression was another subject occasionally discussed. One particular spirit spoke on multiple occasions about proper gender dynamics and what could be classified as the societal elevation of men and oppression of women. For example, though the spirit of De Sévigné admitted that women were the weaker sex physically, men should always treat women with respect. In particular, a mother—the “sister of charity”—deserved admiration from all.\textsuperscript{960} Fathers, on the other hand, did not inherently deserve such deference. This spirit was that of French aristocratic woman Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, the marquise de Sévigné, a noblewoman remembered for the letters she wrote her daughter during the late seventeenth century. The sentimentality in her writings prompted one historian to compare her with Rousseau.\textsuperscript{961} Her outspoken protest against the inferior level of education received by women in her day and her criticism of a legal system that favored men over women and often placed women at the mercy

\textsuperscript{953} The spirit criticized those who claimed to be descendants of Charlemagne when really their fathers were just “poor devils.”
\textsuperscript{954} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 6 February 1872.
\textsuperscript{955} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 4 February 1872. Message from Jean Duverney.
\textsuperscript{956} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 17 December 1871.
\textsuperscript{957} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 14 December 1871. Message from Mesmer.
\textsuperscript{958} Grandjean collection, 85-33; 5 June 1871. Message from “Lamennais.”
\textsuperscript{959} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 October 1869. Message from Béranger.
\textsuperscript{960} Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 February 1871.
of the men in their family rendered her noteworthy in her day, even “avant-garde” according to one scholar.962 Her wit ensured that her letters would be read for centuries. In her letters she frequently highlighted the completeness of divine will and divine causation and her reverence towards nature reads as a kind of proto-romanticism.963 Her famous correspondences were bound and published in the eighteenth century and reissued again and again.964 A mention of how she signed her letters in a news/opinion story in *The Daily Picayune* indicates a local familiarity with her and her letters.965 The preface of an English edition of her letters described de Sévigné as “a woman who lived in and for others.”966 The editoress of this edition lauded de Sévigné as an exemplar of womanhood and motherhood: knowledgeable, graceful, and thoughtful. Her depiction as a feminist has been called into question. French historian Michèle Longino Farrell argued that her letters were accepted and embraced because “she absorbed and represented the code governing appropriate generic behavior for women at her time.”967 During the nineteenth century though, she was seen as a model woman and thus a sensible spirit to guide the *Cercle Harmonique* on the treatment of women and proper gender dynamics.

The spirit of De Sévigné spoke frequently about how men should treat women. A man who spent his time in “infamous gambling dens” and left his wife—“the poor, virtuous woman”—exposed with no support deserved to be shamed. The spirit also ridiculed the man who viewed his wife “as a servant” to attend “to his whims.” Even those men who listened to her words and thought “I’m not being that infamous” should take an honest look at themselves, for no man was “entirely free from blame.” So many “gentlemen” believed themselves to be “superior to the woman.” De Sévigné rhetorically asked them why and then berated them for making “the laws to your advantage.” “You [men] made injustices for us [women].” The spirit longed for the day

964 Her letters were selected as the inaugural publication of the renowned *Les Grands Ecrivains de la France* series begun by the Hachette publishing company in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.
965 *The Daily Picayune*, 29 January 1854 and 17 July 1850.
966 Madame De Sévigné and Mrs. Hale, *The Letters of Madame De Sévigné to Her Daughter and Friends*, Mrs. Hale, ed. (1868; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1889), iii.
when “all social prejudices,” including male superiority, would disappear. De Sévigné also endorsed the idea of “fair and equitable rights” for both sexes. Her spirit criticized that men created laws that they expect women to follow, yet men did not allow any input from women in the law-making process. Republicanism should include all.

“I am he who believed that France could still be saved by becoming a Republic!”

The spirits taught that republicanism secured the rights of all and ensured that all would be free. According to the spirit D’Apremont, the “work of the Spirit” was felt in struggles for freedom, and a person’s happiness depended on “political independence.” This political independence was best cultivated in a republican society. Montesquieu’s spirit believed that only a government run by “moral and industrious people, with honest views” could function properly. Those who accepted bribes did not deserve respect, and an administration full of dishonest politicians would “crumble” like “an old building” on a faulty foundation. Additionally, a power-hungry political party could not promise a just government. Despots did not accompany republicanism. Power rightfully belonged with those dedicated to honesty, justice, and fairness. Dishonesty and greed fueled injustice, but a republic that followed the ideals of the French Revolution would be egalitarian. Volney described the origin of “antagonism in society” as “the pride” of those who believe themselves “superior” to others and want “to make distinctions” based on those false beliefs. The biggest supporter of a “powerful oligarchy” was “selfishness.” In the United States, the social antagonism was not as bad as it had been during slavery because “prejudices” had become “less severe,” but social prejudice was certainly still a problem though. The ideals of Spiritualism, if adopted by a wide audience, could help remedy the country’s social ills. This focus on antagonism as the origin of social ills was not confined to Volney. A spirit identified as “Oscar, a devoted friend,” agreed that the “antagonism” among people often revealed itself in “unjust claims and unfair prejudice.” Indeed, members of the

968 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 38 March 1869.
969 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 26 January 1872.
972 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 8 November 1871.
973 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 19 June 1872.
974 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 18 August 1872.
Cercle Harmonique should “stay united,” even if “amid antagonisms.” The answer to antagonism was republicanism.

A republican government was one with the spirit of fraternity. Père Ambroise called the “Perfect Government” one that focused on “the Happiness of men.” A government that repeated antiquated norms and backwards laws to hold onto its power worked against “the forward march of the liberal Idea.” Those who held onto old, undeserved power were greedy like “vampires.” Revolutions and reason could fix this oligarchical hold on authority. Rather than an authoritarian mode of government, Ambroise endorsed the political motto: “It’s all for one and one for all, and all for all and everyone.” He continued, “It is brother united to his brother for good and the destruction of evil.”

The spirit of French novelist Eugène Sue lectured the table on ideal government structures and organization. “Governments will have some stability,” the medium wrote, “only when Representation will truly be that of the majority of the nation, and when that majority will work for the general welfare with justice, and especially with integrity and equality.” The leader should “come from the people,” know “their needs and sufferings,” and have a “great heart” so that he does not become a tyrant. A leader with wisdom and a good heart would ensure smart policies and keep small the taxes on necessary goods, “agricultural implements,” and “all that tends to the amelioration and general welfare.” Instead, tax on “articles of luxury” should bring the most revenue for a government. This way, people would be deterred from materialism.

Another famous French republican and martyr who conversed with the Cercle Harmonique was Victor Noir, a journalist shot by Prince Pierre Bonaparte in January of 1870. His spirit returned to say that he “labored for liberty, for republican government, because I have understood that, without this last, man dabbles, or a part of humanity dominates the other to the detriment of it.” Put quite simply, he “loved the Republic because it creates free men!” Like Robespierre and Chenier’s criticism of the Prussian king, Noir criticized Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, a man known for political conservatism and religious oppression of Catholics. During the Franco-Prussian War, multiple spirits took note of the political climate in Europe. Ambroise referenced how many European nations were confused and made unwise political

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976 Grandjean collection, 85-39; 6 March 1872.
978 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 10 June 1871. Message from Eugène Sue.
979 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 11 September 1870.
decisions. Though war was lamentable, it could also be necessary in order to revolutionize old structures and give the power to the people. Ambroise argued that France’s success in the arts throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century was due to “her warlike and adventurous spirit.” But this led to better days and from the chaos of war sprang “the march of the Republican Idea … more than ever.” The social and political progress sought by these deceased figures echoed in the republican ethos that filled the pages of Rey’s séance books.

Republicanism also combattted human and moral slavery since enslavement robbed people of their liberties. According to the spirit of Pierre Soulé, he left his homeland of France for America because he “wanted freedom, Freedom!” However, though he arrived in New Orleans with his heart “beating for freedom,” his pride and ambition overpowered him. He forgot his “holy inspirations,” and after he “sacrificed my republicanism on the altar of slavery” he began to worship “the golden calf.” During this time he “suffered the yoke of slavery” and became a “traitor” to conscience and reason. For these past transgressions, he now asked for pardon. Whether Soulé meant the enslavement of Africans or slavery to materialism is not entirely clear. Regardless, republicanism fought against both of these kinds of slavery. The revolutionary cries of “Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!” as echoed in the messages of the Cercle Harmonique had no room for greed, oppression, or prejudice.

Not surprisingly, the virtues of a republican government were extolled by the spirit of Robespierre. In a republic, “thought is not muzzled” and the general populace was encouraged to consider moral, political, and religious questions. As such, republican societies were distinguished by a “generosity towards suffering nationalities” and “an acknowledgement of the rights of each human being.” Indeed, “the republic is the people marching towards progress.” Republican governments, Robespierre taught, offered “people … the immense advantage of the right of discussion, of religious liberty.” Additionally, the freedom of the press allowed “even the peasant” to know of government happenings. A nation’s leader was important for sustaining a proper republic. While an immoral and unjust “supreme chief” will spread “injustice,” “an honest chief, firm and just” conveyed the feeling of responsibility to his people.

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980 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 29 July 1872
981 Grandjean’s notes, he explained that Soulé left France during the reign of Napoleon III for Saint-Domingue before arriving in New Orleans.
982 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 22 May 1870.
983 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 24 February 1869.

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In many circles of New Orleans society during the Civil War and Reconstruction, the name Robespierre typically denoted immoral and despotic political ideas, perhaps even as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Correspondence from Boston published in The Times Picayune called the words of William Lloyd Garrison and other “ultra-abolitionists … in speech what Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and Barrere were in action.” ⁹⁸⁴ Later during the Revolution of 1848 The Times Picayune used the name of Robespierre as a stand-in for the idea of a violent and unworthy republic. ⁹⁸⁵ During the Civil War, local periodicals increasingly cast Robespierre as a symbol for unruly extremism and evoked the specter of the guillotine. A historical retrospective on his character called him “so cruel, so cold, so ambitious, so vain, and so cowardly,” “the perfection of human infamy,” and “a traitor.” ⁹⁸⁶ Horace Greeley was deemed “a little Robespierre” for his demands for a “traitor” during the Confederacy’s rebellion. The sardonic story reported that Greeley needed to realize that he was the traitor. The office of the Daily True Delta would happily outfit him with some rope and then “he may hang himself to the nearest lamp post, and thus at once satisfy his desire to hang a traitor, and greatly gratify the loyal public.” ⁹⁸⁷ During Reconstruction, the horrors of radicalism and the “destructive and corrupt career of the Radical party” were likened to “the Jacobins of France, and Marat, Danton and Robespierre.” ⁹⁸⁸ While Robespierre possessed a negative reputation among many, he remained a symbol of the French Revolution for the Cercle Harmonique. Robespierre never apologized for his actions during the Terror, though the spirits of Confederate soldiers and leaders like Jefferson Davis would apologize for supporting the slave-holding state. Robespierre’s spirit expressed no shame for his role in the guillotine’s bloodlust. Instead, it was as if his ideals excused his violent behavior. This is not to say that the Afro-creole Spiritualists remembered the French Revolution as a peaceful affair, but rather that they focused on the rhetoric and ideals of the movement.

As the inheritors of French revolutionary culture and the republicanism it inspired, Rey and fellow Afro-creole Spiritualists saw themselves as the successors of Robespierre’s, Lamennais’s, Montesquieu’s, Grégoire’s, and Louverture’s visions. Their own local ancien régime was the white supremacists and former slave-holders of the South. Armed with

⁹⁸⁴ The Daily Picayune, 13 June 1845.
⁹⁸⁵ The Daily Picayune, 26 July 1848; The Daily Picayune, 5 October 1848; Daily Picayune, 30 October 1848. A correspondent from Europe bitterly reported that “the memory of Our Saviour and of Robespierre were toasted in the same breath” during a toast at the new National Assembly. The Daily Picayune, 1 June 1849.
⁹⁸⁶ The Daily Picayune, 12 September 1861.
⁹⁸⁷ The Daily True Delta, 13 April 1862.
⁹⁸⁸ The New Orleans Times, 2 August 1868 and 13 August 1868.
republican ideas and bolstered by their spiritual mentors, they criticized the oligarchy around them. Joining Lamennais and others were American celebrities like Abraham Lincoln and John Brown. As New Orleans became increasingly volatile and violent in the post-war era, Spiritualism continued to keep the Afro-creole members of the Cercle Harmonique politically grounded and focused on what really mattered—the progress of the Idea.
CHAPTER FIVE

“AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE RIGHTS OF EACH HUMAN BEING”: A SPIRITUAL REPUBLIC

“A general Republic, the stepping-stone to Freedom, Association, Justice, Accord, and ………………. Unity.” – Andrew Jackson Davis

“Praise Jesus and Lincoln: one will regenerate humanity, the other the U.S. Republic.” – Lamennais to the Cercle Harmonique, 25 March 1869

“Sympathy, Harmony: these are our laws.” – A brother to the Cercle Harmonique, 17 March 1873

On May 27, 1863, the Union, supporters of abolition, and particularly African Americans acquired a beloved and famous martyr. Captain André Cailloux was an officer in Company E of the Louisiana Native Guards, the first black regiment in the Union Army to see action in a major battle. His death was one mourned by Union supporters, and his company’s attack on Confederate Port Hudson convinced many skeptics of black soldiers’ abilities and effectiveness. His funeral nearly two months later on July 29 was well attended by the New Orleans’s black, white, and mixed race populations. His memory was eulogized beyond the funeral, and local and northern newspapers printed poems celebrating his bravery and courage in the siege of Port Hudson. Even in death, Cailloux’s presence could be felt. More than felt, it was also heard by the Cercle Harmonique. A couple weeks before the funeral, he began to deliver messages to his Afro-creole friend and fellow soldier Rey. Captain Cailloux, the self-identified “brave soldier of Progress,” would prove to be a frequent spirit visitor at the table. Though the Confederate army destroyed his body, his soul lived on. He fought for freedom in “your world,” but achieved freedom “in the invisible world” and “God has rewarded me.” “Man falls! Principle Lives!” he

989 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 24 February 1869.
990 Davis, The Magic Staff, 381.
991 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 March 1869.
992 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 17 March 1873.
993 Ochs, “A Patriot, a Priest, and a Prelate.”
995 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
996 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 8 July 1863.
told Rey’s circle on later in 1871. Cailloux’s messages identified him as a fighter for freedom, a key element in the Cercle Harmonique’s view of republicanism. The “Principle” he referenced was that of liberty and human progress. Though the message was simply those four words, it came on the heels of a brief communiqué from George Washington celebrating the conclusion of the Confederate rebellion and one from radical abolitionist John Brown praising the end of slavery in America. Shortly after Cailloux’s message, Andrew Jackson endorsed the Union. Thus, the cause of the Union—though a glorified understanding of it—and its relationship to the cry of freedom were attractive messages for those arguing for civil and political rights in post-war New Orleans.

Self-understandings of religion, race, and nation often interweave in African American religious history. In Laurie Maffly-Kipp’s Setting Down the Sacred Past she examined how protestant African Americans in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries constructed race histories, or sacred histories of their racial, religious, and national pasts. They were also “communal narratives” which, Maffly-Kipp stated, “are never simply texts.” Rather the communal narratives were “also the artifacts—and the sculptors—of particular collective experiences and desires.” Resisting the dominant Anglo-American understandings of religion and race, these race histories offered new narratives that undermined the definitions imposed by white Americans. The process of writing was a spiritual and intellectual practice that formed a “collective self-awareness.” The communal narrative created by the Cercle Harmonique’s séance records focused on different themes than the race histories examined by Maffly-Kipp but also sought to create an alternative to a white Anglo-American imperial understanding of race and nation. Rather than biblical stories, particularly the story of the exodus, these Afro-creole Spiritualists reworked memories of Atlantic world revolutions and American republicanism.

Our scholarly conceptions of African American religions should not limit themselves to black mainline protestantism or assume that it is the most natural religious orientation for African Americans. Nor does the “Black Church” own a monopoly on political action. Rather

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997 Grandjean collection, 85-34. 2 June 1871.
998 Maffly-Kipp, Setting Down the Sacred Past, 8.
999 Ibid, 11.
1001 Curtis Evans and Sylvester Johnson are the most influential on my thinking of the category African American religions here. Both have written ground-breaking texts that call for academic self-scrutiny to the category of
African American religions envisioned and critiqued politics in a myriad of ways, Afro-creole Spiritualism being one of the many.

The “spiritual republicanism” that historian Bret Carroll attributed to Andrew Jackson Davis resonated with the Cercle Harmonique too. Davis extolled the “REPUBLIC of SPIRIT embosomed and gestating in the dominant political organism” and linked the religious reform of Spiritualism with political republicanism. Carroll described the spiritual republicanism of antebellum Spiritualists as similar to “its political counterpart” because it “avoided the extremes of individualism and authoritarianism by emphasizing spiritual freedom, democracy, and equality on the one hand and self-restraint, social obligation, the rule of natural law, and moral order on the other.” The spirits who came to the table of the Cercle Harmonique echoed the spiritual democracy that Carroll identified in antebellum Spiritualism. Liberty, which governed the spirit world, was supposed to rule the material world too. The anti-clericalism described in Chapter Three intonated at one way this spiritual republicanism echoed in the Cercle Harmonique. Out from under the yoke of the Catholic institution’s tyranny, Afro-creole Spiritualists believed themselves on the road to truth and right. This included both their spiritual understanding of the world and the egalitarianism they desired in society and politics. The previous chapter saw how the Cercle Harmonique memorialized the French and Haitian Revolutions, and all spirits who visited them during the Civil War and Republican Reconstruction agreed on the necessity of republicanism and fraternité.

Spiritualism’s focus on progress, ascension, spiritual progression, and spiritual perfection resonated with the political aspirations of the Afro-creoles who held the séances. From Rey’s earliest practice of Spiritualism in 1858 to his end in 1877, the city of New Orleans underwent numerous political and social changes. The period was full of both highs and lows for the Afro-creole community. In 1858 early on in his career as a medium, Rey received a message from his father extolling the virtues of perseverance and encouraging him to continue his struggle.
Throughout the *Cercle Harmonique*’s entire tenure, the fight for progress did not subside. For every social or political gain, such as the permission to muster for the Union or the election of black legislators during Reconstruction, New Orleans Afro-creoles also suffered defeat, such as the rise of the White League and the inevitable success of the “redeeming” Democrats. Despite these setbacks, Saint Vincent de Paul assured them that humanity was always marching forward and progressing, even if gradually. “Fortunately,” for those on the side of Right, “generous ideas and truth can only triumph in the struggle.”1007 “Nothing can stop the natural Law of Progress,” the spirit of John Henderson (a victim of the 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot) confirmed.1008

Harmony was an organizing force in the spiritual world that would appeal to Civil War-era and Reconstruction Afro-creoles. The political flip-flopping, violence and bullying, and the ascent of Jim Crow confirmed the city’s need for harmony. The spiritual realm was a harmonious union “more and more cemented by the immense grandeur of the noble and admirable thoughts which dwell incessantly there and fill each heart devoted one to the other.”1009 Harmony was lauded as “the supreme law of a perfect union,” while hatred had no place at the table or in a Spiritualist’s heart.1010 When Ambroise explained the progress of spirits, he referred to the union of true Spiritualists in the celestial world as a “harmonious concert.” Indeed, the spiritual world was one to look forward to and aspire to become a part of during séances and then permanently after physical death. According to a spirit, “your world is the glimpse of God’s creation, ours, the compliment of his work …”1011 A “fraternal union,” another spirit explained, was built upon “universal love.”1012 One should endeavor to augment the “beautiful fraternal chain” and unite “all people” with love and charity. Ideally, the laws of Justice and Equity would reign.1013

Unfortunately for members of the *Cercle Harmonique*, their surrounding environment was

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1007 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 5 May 1871.
1008 The *Cercle Harmonique* should remember the dead, for they were the “battling boys who stand by Truth and who will carry you to Victory.” Grandjean collection, 85-32; 18 November 1871.
1009 “Harmonious groups” were the ones best “organized for the production of celestial accords which purify the Soul, elevate it and fill it with sweet and grand emotions.” Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 April 1869.
1010 “Reject from your soul any antagonistic or intolerant thought which could rise up in your soul against whomsoever …” Grandjean collection, 85-36; 1 April 1872. Message from Claire Pollard.
1011 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 April 1869. Spiritualism had the ability to unite those groups spread both across the country physically and spiritually as well. A spirit named Frank instructed the circle to “love your brothers of the diverse circles; and, initiate those who practice Good, those full of Love and Charity! Unite yourselves.” Grandjean collection, 85-60; 20 March 1875.
1012 Furthermore, universal love “shall extend its beneficent effects over Humanity,” and “the advance of Progress will dominant, and Wisdom and Reason will take the place of brute force and hatred.” Grandjean collection, 85-33; 1 June 1871. Message from Lacour.
1013 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 December 1871. Message from Vincent de Paul.
hardly harmonious. Inequality, slavery, war, ruthless political jockeying, and Reconstruction violence hampered the spirits’ promise of harmony, but nonetheless that suggestion of harmony offered an attractive end goal for the republican *Cercle Harmonique*.

This chapter will examine more closely politics and society in Reconstruction New Orleans. First, the Spiritualists’ ideas on justice, wealth, and power will be explored in order to better situate the ideas and advising of the spirits visiting the *Cercle Harmonique*. In response to the injustices of the southern *ancien régime*, the spirits advocated republicanism and equality. The next section follows the city and the circle through slavery and the Civil War. The spirits continued to be critical of slavery and the Confederacy through the tenure of the *Cercle Harmonique*, indicating that liberty and the Union were on the side of progress and the Idea. The following two sections focus on the circle’s and the spirits’ ideas regarding republicanism and the relationship between Reconstruction politics and the spiritual republic. The world of politics in New Orleans following the Civil War was complicated and instable, and the messages received by the *Cercle Harmonique* offered those Afro-creole members solid support and advice amid the mess. The final section examines the celebrity spirits who visited the *Cercle Harmonique* and the significance of their participation and their messages regarding the country’s past and destiny. The war had offered the U.S. the ability to “regenerate” itself, and the spirits hoped to see that happen with liberty and equality as the guiding forces.

“Banish injustices from your heart”: Justice, Wealth, and Power\(^\text{1014}\)

Opposed to harmony was injustice, and from the perspective of Afro-creoles and the spirits, injustice could be easily found in American politics and society, with slavery and white supremacy being two key examples. Fighting injustice was an active practice and a necessary struggle at the séance table and in everyday life. Saint Vincent de Paul rallied the circle to “fight against human errors and prejudices.” Charity, he said, was “the balm” that would heal “social wounds because it teaches Justice towards all.”\(^\text{1015}\) The spirit of Béranger dedicated himself to defending “the rights of the children of God” because it was “so sweet to relieve those who suffer.”\(^\text{1016}\) Those on earth, particularly Spiritualists like *Cercle Harmonique* members, should

\(^{1014}\) Grandjean collection, 85-55; 28 April 1874. Message signed Wilhelmina (Ehrmann).

\(^{1015}\) Grandjean collection, 85-34; 25 July 1871.

\(^{1016}\) Grandjean collection, 85-31; 19 February 1869.
try to alleviate the suffering of others. The “soul of a True Spiritualist” possessed “exquisite sensitivity to the misfortunes of his brother.” Those who did not have a roof over their heads or food to eat needed and deserved others’ support. Instead of money, Spiritualists should devote themselves to the “betterment of Humanity,” for this would lead to “eternal riches.” Greed only yielded “distrust.”

The spirits taught that egotism and wealth bred injustice. Selfishness and “personal interest” would divide humanity and foster hatred. The privileged classes, “indifferent to the misfortune of their fellow creatures,” worked against “the solidarity of all beings!” Sitting atop hierarchies cultivated apathy towards the rest of humanity. Those who thought themselves high and mighty on earth—“the proud and vainglorious”—remained isolated in the spiritual world “bewildered in the midst of the darkness of ignorance.” Vanity would leave one “little and isolated” in the spiritual world, and the “vainglorious” would “suffer” in the eternal realm. Additionally, those who oppressed others, laughed at charity, and obstructed “Brotherhood” came to regret those decisions. After entering the spiritual world, they realized that their decisions furthered unfair social divides. Living a life of leisure, especially if supported by slavery, impeded spiritual growth. It was far better to “experience the product of your work” as opposed to profiting from “the sweat of others.” According to the spirit X, living life as a social or political “victim” was superior to being a social “executioner,” and the spirit promised the “oppressed” that “a time of shame” awaited “the Oppressor.” Indeed, those “overburdened with cowardice and infamies” became “sad and gloomy” in the eternal realm, for now they recognized their “weaknesses of injustices!”

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1020 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 7 June 1874. Message from “a luminous brother.”
1022 Grandjean collection, 85-49; 9 February 1873. Message from “a brother friend.”
1023 The “greatest victory” a person could achieve in life was to not be “a victim of his indifference.” Grandjean collection, 85-36; 12 April 1872. Message from Alpha.
1025 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 September 1871.
1027 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 8 January 1875.
1028 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 18 March 1873. Message from John Salvant. Those who caused injustice would be punished and would feel shame during retribution when they found themselves looking in the “mirror of Judgment.” Grandjean collection, 85-63; 16 May 1877. Message from “Abélard, father.” In death, “Truth” will transform any
Materialism cultivated injustice, ordered social hierarchies, and encouraged economic disparity, and this was a main reason why the spirits taught against it. Materialism fostered a kind of ignorance and egotism that retarded one’s spiritual development on earth. It was the “thousand headed hydra” vomiting out the “egotism” humanity used to “nourish” itself. To take in this nourishment was unwise. A person’s time on earth was fleeting, and it was foolish to devote it to materialistic ends. A spirit named Fisk lectured that “the power of men” lasted but “a moment.” Therefore, if Cercle Harmonique members possessed any power, they were to use it “for the general benefit of every man” and not for their own profit. The spirit of D. Webster warned that one “must never forget the poor” since wealth was fickle. One’s money, and certainly one’s social status, did not define a person. Rather, wisdom did. According to the spirit of A. Lincoln, “the ant, as well as the lion, deserve the attention of men.” One’s status should not dictate one’s importance, and so the Cercle Harmonique was encouraged to “console those whom society rejects.”

Society could be broken down into two main camps: the rich and the poor. The poor were frequently forced “to work at any price” and allow themselves to be taken advantage of by others. Anyone who believed himself “superior” to those “poorer than himself” was foolish. Unfortunately, the wealthy often felt they possessed “intellectual superiority” too. Thus, the rich did not realize that their social duty was to “reach out to those who suffer” and “relieve” them, for only then would society progress. The “struggle between the righteous and the wicked,” or put another way, “the oppressed and the oppressor,” was a chief concern of the spirits. This message was echoed by Henri Lacroix who paralleled the conflict between “evil and good” with the struggle between “the oppressor and the oppressed.” And these were conflicts that spanned humanity’s history. A spirit named Assitha described society as the continual “struggle of the oppressed who wants to break the chains that surround him and the oppressor who wants

person who fostered “injustices” on earth and purify them. Grandjean collection, 85-49; 5 February 1873. Message from Paul Bertus.

1029 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 25 December 1872. Message from Edmond Capdevielle, the devoted brother.
1031 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 1 October 1871.
1032 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
1033 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
1035 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 30 November 1858. Message signed A. Lanna and received “alone.”
1036 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 29 October 1871. Message from “Relf!”

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to keep his iron foot on the heart of his victim to prevent him from fighting." For their part, the Cercle Harmonique was lauded for their courage in the face of “oppression” and power that tried to break them.

Though the Cercle Harmonique appears to have been primarily male, they were not blind to gender inequality and unfairness towards women. Though messages were occasionally addressed to brothers and sisters, the overwhelming majority of spirit communiques were from male spirits to a male circle. Notes from the circle’s first archivist René Grandjean indicate that the permanent members of the circle were all men, with occasional black creole women in attendance. The respected medium Louise is the only definite example of a female Afro-creole regularly practicing Spiritualism with Rey’s group. Many of Rey’s early séances (those in the late 1850s) were held at Louise’s home, and she returned in spirit form to the Cercle Harmonique. “Thousands of spirits” greeted her upon her arrival to the spiritual world and her reward was “grand and magnificent.” A main reason for her spiritual success was her rejection of materialism. While “Louise the Medium was enchanted Matter; Louise the Spirit revolves about eternal perfumed Spheres.” Though women were not the main leaders of the Cercle Harmonique, female spirits visited the circle and some spirits spoke of gender equality and proper gender dynamics. Messages from female spirits also covered similar ground as their male counterparts, indicating that their goals were similar although sometimes gendered. A message from “a devoted sister” echoed the sentiment of many other messages—work for harmony, aspire for spiritual progression, and recognize the happiness of those spirits in the spiritual world.

Women were a rare topic of spiritual conversation, and many of the few messages about women focused on the danger of prostitution. Materialism sparked in men the “craving for money, for the carnal possession of women, for luxury, for excess, for immoderation in

1038 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.  
1039 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 12 December 1871. Message from L’Inconnu (The Unknown).  
1040 Message after message addressed the group as “mes frères” or “my brothers.” An example of a message that refers to “mes frères et sœurs” was from a female spirit, the former medium Louise at whose home Rey first transcribed a message. Grandjean collection, 85-33; 9 June 1871. A few days later when “Boniface” appeared, he also referred to “mes Frères et Sœurs.”  
1041 All the names that Grandjean lists as regular members are men. Grandjean collection, 85-36; Grandjean notes.  
1042 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 9 June 1871. On another occasion, she let Rey and the others know, “The Past is in your midst … The circle, we were. We are still at the circle today, but the Invisibles.” Grandjean collection, 85-64; 15 April 1870.  
1043 Grandjean collection, 85-70; 2 March 1873.
Materialism also led men to ignore the body’s ephemerality, which caused them to “condemn and reject from your society the virginal maid, and to entertain with respect the prostitute who defiles herself with art, and who, by the doubt of her actions hidden by a certain amount of pomp, frolics in your midst.” A spirit identified as C. Boudreau criticized men who “extol vice” and revel in materialistic pursuits. Men’s “shameless” natures were “increasing prostitution” and forcing “your sisters” into states where they became “more and more degraded by your coward and infamous calculations.”

When it came to prostitution, male greed and the unequal power balance between men and women were to blame. One of Petit’s female relatives noted how a man’s actions can ruin a woman. She chastised those men who, instead of offering charity to “the poor woman who suffers with her children,” chose actions that furthered her demise into “the abyss of your immorality.” She was harsh towards libertines “sowing children everywhere,” for those fatherless children would likely follow suit. Without a father to raise them, they would grow up “with the most horrible thought on the virtue of women.” Indeed, for some men, J.J. Rousseau lamented, women were “a hobby,” perhaps “a doll they like to dress nice,” but were ultimately abandoned like “a toy.”

It is possible that members of the Cercle Harmonique, though they strove to greatness, did not always treat women as they should. The father of circle regular Maitre Brion, in a communique he addressed to “my dear son,” explained “an hour here [at the Spiritualist table] pays more than hours of caresses of a woman.” If he had to remind his son to value spiritual work over the touch of a woman, perhaps Brion’s focus was elsewhere.

Prostitution, plaçage, and sexual exploitation of black and mixed-race women have a long history in New Orleans. Though the city’s most famous legal prostitution district, Storyville, was not formed until the very end of the nineteenth century, prostitution, particularly of black bodies, was common long before. Female slaves between ages fifteen and twenty-nine compromised

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1044 Grandjean collection, 85-45; 6 October 1872.
1046 Grandjean collection, 85-51; 20 March 1873.
1047 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 29 April 1872.
1048 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 9 November 1871.
1049 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
a substantial percentage of slaves sold in the New Orleans slave market. The market of “fancy girls,” light-skinned female slaves primarily sold for sexual exploitation, was a lucrative business particularly during the rise of the domestic slave trade after the 1790s. The circle’s and the spirits’ condemnation of prostitution was a social commentary on the sexual politics of their city. Like the essays and poems before them in L’Album littéraire and Les Cenelles about the dangers of plaçage, the Cercle Harmonique’s séance writings identified the corruption of sexual exploitation as a hindrance to progress and harmony.

Thus, while their status was regrettable, prostitutes should not simply be scorned and ignored by the circle. Society, not the women, was culpable. A spirit identified as “a woman who suffered” instructed the Cercle Harmonique to not judge a “loose” woman. The injustices of society had “compelled” her to seek such a “dishonest” living. This particular spirit had turned to prostitution in order to provide for herself. Though she came from a wealthy family and inherited, she married a greedy man who became the “master” of her fortune and then abandoned her. If she wanted food and shelter, she had no choice but to sell her body. Only death put a stop to her suffering. She told the circle to learn from Jesus’s example when he “comforted and consoled” Mary Magdalene.

According to the spirits the natural occupation for a woman was motherhood. A message from Valmour compared these two primary identities of women: prostitute and mother. There was the woman “adorned with attires and jewels, … the ardent and lascivious Woman, easy to be accosted and covered with precious stones … the Courtesan riding in a splendid teem, displaying herself.” In contrast there was “the one who is wise, reserved, modest, and virtuous … the Housewife addicted to her maternal duties and to her tender solicitude for her husband.” These two options, mother or prostitute, left little in between. Women made good mothers because true mothers were selfless, and since abnegation was a frequently lauded trait, some

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1051 Schäfer, “New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements,” 33–56. In her study, Schäfer finds 13.4% of female slaves sold to be between ages fifteen and nineteen, another 13.4% to be between twenty and twenty-four, 11.5% to be between twenty-five and twenty-nine, and 12.1% to be between thirty and thirty-four.
1053 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 22 July 1871. Message from “a women who suffered.”
1054 Grandjean collection, 85-41; 29 May 1872.
1055 In this sense, the spirit of Valmour seemed to reiterate what is commonly referred to as the Madonna-Whore Complex. For a more complex exploration of similar issues, see Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman’s Sphere,” Signs, 25.2 (2000): 451–478.
sprits found women superior to men.¹⁰⁵⁶ A spirit identified as Paul Trevigne, Sr., likely related to the L’Union and Tribune editor, stated that mothers were more solemn than fathers.¹⁰⁵⁷ Real humanitarians should “always respect the poor mother and have pity on her.” Many “poor” mothers—though rich in love—were in their economic state because a man took advantage of them. In many cases it was a father who drank away the money his family desperately needed.¹⁰⁵⁸ Spirits guilty of this would apologize from beyond the grave. A spirit identified as John Sweet regretted that he got “drunk” and would “beat” his wife. He now “stood with remorse and shame.”¹⁰⁵⁹

Though gender equality and the treatment of women were not primary emphases of the Cercle Harmonique, the spirits’ comments on these topics reiterated the group’s dedication to the ideals of liberty and egalitarianism. Men such as those in the Cercle Harmonique who defended women and tried to combat male gender prejudices towards women were admirable. A joint message from Valmour and Vincent de Paul instructed the men to “consider women your equal in everything.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Righteous men fought for women and their rights, while immoral men drove women into prostitution and then reveled in their bodies.¹⁰⁶¹ A romantic pair that featured a woman not afraid to challenge her husband on intellectual or spiritual matters was made stronger and more stable by it.¹⁰⁶² If the wife was willing and encouraged to speak her mind, the pair was on equal footing. Power dynamics should be equal in gender and race relations.

¹⁰⁵⁶ One spirit began his message discussing the problem of “ingratitude,” but spent the latter two-thirds of the message speaking about his wife: “a virtuous and tender woman.” Though the spirit knew little of Spiritualism before leaving Earth, his wife was “was so just, so pure, that her contact has purified” and prepared her husband for his spiritual abode. The spirit signed off with an apology and thank-you for allowing him to speak of “that Dear Half of my existence.” “I beg to be excused for having let myself be captivated in talking of her. I have come to you without any preparation, to tell you my impressions as they came to mind; I could not help paying this tribute to the person so worthy, who has partaken of the sufferings of my life; and who has given me the only joys I have ever known.” Grandjean collection, 85-30; November 1858. Message from Labeyre.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Grandjean collection, 85-51; 30 August 1873.


¹⁰⁵⁹ Grandjean collection, 85-33; 13 June 1871. Though many messages affiliate drinking with wife-beating or neglecting one’s family, a spirit named Marcelles linked “the use of strong drink” to cowardice in general. Grandjean collection, 85-34; 18 November 1871.


¹⁰⁶¹ Grandjean collection, 85-52; 19 October 1873. Message from Jeanne Dastugue.

¹⁰⁶² Grandjean collection, 85-35; 18 December 1871. Message from “a wise and devoted mother.”
“Forward march, humanitarian soldier”: Slavery and the Civil War

One of the clearest roadblocks to progress and racial equality was slavery. The spirits spoke fondly of slavery’s opposite: “the Great Principles of Fraternal Equality and Liberty.” Unfortunately for the Cercle Harmonique, slavery was part of New Orleans everyday life. The city was one of the main centers for the selling and purchasing of slaves, and it was the largest in the lower South. This booming slave market saw high traffic until the Union capture of the city in May 1862, and its high volume activity made it akin to a tourist attraction. The quadroon offspring of owners and their female slaves or any other concubinage relationships were known for their beauty and grace and thus another New Orleans racial attraction and curiosity. Shortly before secession, the Louisiana legislature even passed “An Act to Permit Free Persons of African Descent to Select Their Masters and Become Slaves for Life” (1859). Though it encouraged rather than forced free blacks to self-enslavement, it was part of a wider culture of antagonism towards the city’s free black community.

Slavery was part of the lives of Cercle Harmonique leaders too. Rey’s father Barthélemy owned eight slaves between the ages of two months and fifty years old in 1850. Petit’s grandfather owned a plantation and Petit’s father, Antoine Dubuclet, would have been active in the running and maintaining of the property. After Antoine Dubuclet married Claire Pollard

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1066 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 October 1872.
1067 Schafer, “New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements,” 34.
1068 Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2. For example Frederick Law Olmsted spends the more space discussing New Orleans than anywhere else in A Journey in the Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy (1856; New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), ix.
1069 Judith K. Schafer, “Open and Notorious Concubinage.”
(Petit’s mother), who also came from a wealthy creole family, the couple’s combined estate valued at almost one hundred thousand dollars, which included over one hundred slaves.\textsuperscript{1072} Needless to say, Petit was raised in an environment dependent upon slavery, and this was not uncommon. Free men of color owned some of the largest plantations during Louisiana’s antebellum years. The owning of slaves was common among the New Orleans \textit{gens de couleur libres}, though in some cases it was done so to secure family members’ freedom. In 1830, 11,301 free persons of color owned a total of 753 slaves.\textsuperscript{1073}

Though their mediums’ families may have owned slaves, the spirits spoke harshly of slavery. What the \textit{ancien régime} was to the French Revolution, the slave-holding southern oligarchy was to the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}. The spirit world rejoiced and “rang [bells] to announce to the world that human slavery disappeared from the [U.S.] Republic.”\textsuperscript{1074} With the guidance of Divine Providence, “Human Slavery shall disappear little by little on this continent.” Those who fought for “Progress” and “Truth” would happily march “towards Heaven.” In the post-Civil War era, Lamennais explained, the “generous principle” of “Liberty for all” has conquered, vanquished the interested antagonism which inscribed on its banner: ‘Moral and Physical Slavery.” Though the “Oligarchy will fight again,” it would not defeat Justice and Progress.\textsuperscript{1075} The spirits were happy that the war had ended the “social plague” of physical slavery, but the abolishment of slavery did not mean that society was healed from its effects. The “sore” that remained still needed to be “cauterized.”\textsuperscript{1076}

The end of human slavery and the anticipated end of “moral slavery” were linked with the Idea (republican progression). The recently freed “swelled” the ranks of the “defenders of a gigantic Union” sprung from the ideas begun in “93” (the French Revolution). Slavery’s abolition “threw a great disturbance in the ideas of backwards minds [pro-slavery Americans]” who could not understand their own prejudices.\textsuperscript{1077} An unsigned message asked if the circle could “hear the shrieks” that came from “the slave” who cried during his “degrading punishment.” The unknown spirit asked for “Pardon,” admitting “I was blind” and “I was

\textsuperscript{1072} Vincent, “Aspects of the Family and Public Life of Antoine Dubuclet,” 27.
\textsuperscript{1073} For the numbers, see Christian, “The Free Colored Class,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.”
\textsuperscript{1074} Grandjean collection, 85-41; 27 May 1872. Message from Abner.
\textsuperscript{1075} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 March 1869. Message from Lamennais.
\textsuperscript{1076} Grandjean collection, 85-40; 24 April 1872. Message from Annette Bouligny.
\textsuperscript{1077} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 28 September 1869. Message from Ambroise.
The identity of the spirit is unclear, but considering his need for pardon, the spirit likely engaged in the behavior he lamented—the lashing of enslaved, black bodies. Indeed, death revealed the hypocrisy of those who spoke of Liberty while “riveting chains” for the enslaved. 

The ownership of people preserved the southern oligarchy’s power. Some spirits used the mediums of the *Cercle Harmonique* to deliver general messages for humanity or to reprimand others. The spirit of Paul Bertus, asked “Why do you reject those unfortunate brothers whom you held so long under a degrading yoke?” The “you” of the question could be the federal government, Confederate supporters, all slave owners, or New Orleans society. The censure from the spirit did not end with rhetorical questions; he continued and focused on slavery. Bertus chastised them for chaining those unfortunate brothers “as beast of burden,” denying them “their most sacred rights,” withholding intellectual advancement, and keeping them at “the level of brutes.” Bertus warned listeners about those who wanted another war in order to bring back pre-Civil War society. Instead he encouraged peace and equality. Listeners should heed his words, for if they knew “like us … the chastisement to be the lot of those who, like you, are committing injustices over injustices, how quickly would you change!” However, rather than hearing “the voice of Reason,” these men were “dominated” by “a foolish pride.”

In communicating with the *Cercle Harmonique*, former statesman Daniel Webster found an avenue for apology for his complicity in American slavery. He encouraged members of the circle to forgive ignorant men, admitting that he was ignorant during his “earthly life.” Though he held a position of power, he “had been led to believe, through the many errors of this earthly world, that I was superior to a certain class of my brethren. But what a sudden change I met with, when I was debarrassed [sic] of my material envelope.” This regret could be a reference to his support for the Compromise of 1850 or he was simply apologizing for not endorsing abolition. Webster returned a week later to continue his message for the circle and spoke again on why he was inclined to forgive “those of my brothers whose ambition has led them to spread so many evils through this earthly world.” He explained even that a very “learned man” could develop a Napoleon complex and “begin to think himself above all his fellow brothers … [and] positively

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1078 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 11 December 1871.
1080 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869.
believes that he is a king on earth.” Men such as these had “very bitter regrets hereafter,” no doubt painfully realizing the errors of their ways. Indeed, the spiritual lives of those guilty of “vile and base actions” in their earthly lives are “gloomy.”\textsuperscript{1082}

Both former slave owners and slaves recognized the horrors of slavery. A deceased slave came to the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}, only to be followed by a Confederate officer. The slave, John Jones, noted how the register book used by the Spiritualists was originally purchased in 1822 while “slavery was the curse inflicted upon an age of enlightenment, of Progress.” The “lash” was used to force humans to work, treating them like “brutes.” Slave-owners mistook themselves for masters and “forgot that a Master of all men” would hold them accountable for their actions.\textsuperscript{1083} Jones was merely “a poor slave of man” on earth, but he was now “a pure Spirit of God.” He was happy to see that Reconstruction Louisiana endorsed Liberty for all. The spirits of slaves did not wish vengeance on their former owners, instead Jones and others “let C. D. Dreux first fulfill the other page [of the book] to show how Great we are in our forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{1084} For his part, Chas. D. Dreux, the spirit whose message followed Jones, was “weeping like a child” at his “Past of shame.” Though slavery “was dead,” Dreux continued to feel “ashamed” of his participation in and support of the system. He hoped that men would come to the spirit world “not as slaves of prejudices but as Exponents of Light.”\textsuperscript{1085} This spirit was belonged to Lieutenant Colonel Charles D. Dreux, a native of New Orleans who served in the Confederate army. He was the first Louisianan killed in the war (July 1861), and his funeral was a well-attended event in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{1086} Dreux was popular in the higher social circles of New Orleans and served as a district attorney and a representative in the Louisiana State Legislature.\textsuperscript{1087} An apology from such a high profile figure confirmed that the physical victors of the Civil War were also the moral victors.

\textsuperscript{1082} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 3 February 1866
\textsuperscript{1083} This is one message where the idea of a judgment and punishment from God seems to be endorsed, as opposed to how Retribution was typically described in spirit messages.
\textsuperscript{1084} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 11 December 1871. Message recorded in English, from John Jones.
\textsuperscript{1085} Grandjean collection, 85-35; 11 December 1871. Message recorded in English, from Chas. D. Dreux.
\textsuperscript{1086} In her published memoir, New Orleans socialite Eliza Ripley wrote that “no subsequent [Civil War] funeral was more largely attended that Charles Dreux’s.” Eliza Ripley, \textit{Social Life in New Orleans: Being Recollections from my Girlhood} (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 156. For an electronic copy of Dreux’s funeral march sheet music, see http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/sheetmusic/conf/conf02/conf0252/conf0252-1-72dpi.html
\textsuperscript{1087} Terry L. Jones, \textit{Lee’s Tigers: The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of Northern Virginia} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 12.
The spirit of John Jones came to the *Cercle Harmonique* again the following year. He suffered “under the yoke of a barbarian master” who worked him from dawn until sunset. Though Jones was a slave, he possessed an intelligence “superior” to that of his owner, which roused “petty jealousy” and physical punishment. From then on, Jones kept his head down and tried not to draw the attention of his owner.  

Others also recognized and lamented the violence of slavery. The spirit of Joanni Questy, local creole of color writer and former medium, was disappointed with the past’s “chains of the slave” and “Black Code.”

Since slavery was antithetical to humanity’s progress, it comes as little surprise that the séance records of the *Cercle Harmonique* contain numerous messages that celebrate Lincoln and many messages from the assassinated president himself. Lincoln’s spirit criticized the wealth and power the white upper class reaped from the slave labor in their fields. “King Cotton was a myth,” he proclaimed, “he had an imaginary crown, but Liberty shelters under its aegis thousands of citizens who helped to disperse the last remnants of a huge army.” According to a joint message from Ambroise and Saint Vincent de Paul, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was “magnificent” and struck slavery in its “disdainful face”—a task finished by Grant’s sword. Lincoln was “happy” in the spirit world because “my Emancipation Proclamation” shortened his period of retribution. In other words, securing the freedom of slaves gave Lincoln an immediate spiritual promotion. Upon entering the spiritual realm, he was immediately recognized as “a martyr for a just cause.” The spirits knew that the recently emancipated would “rise despite the obstacles,” such as those who pined for slavery’s reign. “Political affairs” would and should work in favor of those “formerly crushed” under slavery’s “degrading yoke.”

While “Jeff Davis” was not yet dead, the end of slavery was enough for John Brown’s spirit to celebrate. The spirits viewed the Confederacy as the side that fought for slavery and thus against liberty. A spirit identified as B. explained that “the materialism of the Confederacy” was what “armed” John Wilkes Booth, but spirituality broke “the materialism of the privileged.” Though violence should be avoided, the Civil War had guaranteed freedom for

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1088 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 3 May 1872.
1089 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 28 November 1871. Message from Joanni.
1090 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 October 1869. This quotation comes from a message that was part of a rapid succession of spirit messages, that all seem to be in conversation with each other.
1092 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 27 December 1871.
1093 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 (or 7) Nov 1871.
1094 Grandjean collection, 85-39; 15 March 1872. Grandjean notes that this spirit, B., might be that of Booth.
the country’s citizens who had been denied “the most sacred rights and domestic affections.” The denial of their rights had been for the benefit of a group of “autocrats” who had “forgotten the creed of Liberty” and scorned “the beautiful teachings of true Republicanism.” The struggle against slavery took “too long” but adverse ideas and teachings were difficult to erase from “the heart of the nation.”

The Confederacy, much like France’s ancien régime, was fueled by the “insolence” of an “oligarchic power” adhering to “antiquated ideas.”

When Louisiana joined the Confederate States of America, many of the city’s Afro-creole population volunteered to fight for the Confederacy in the Louisiana Native Guards (a black regiment). Though certainly some may have felt obligated or forced to join on behalf of the Confederacy, the city’s Afro-creole soldiers and militia possessed a history of supporting their local government. The city’s free black militia helped quell the 1811 slave revolt along the German coast of the Mississippi River (just upriver from the city and dangerously close to reaching New Orleans), and Afro-creoles proudly recalled defending their city during the War of 1812. Thus, part of Afro-creole identity was providing military support for the local government. Rey and his brother Octave mustered for the Native Guards both for the Confederate and then the Union.

When the Confederate forces cleared out of New Orleans, many white, pro-Confederate residents felt abandoned and despondent. “Poor New Orleans,” one local woman wrote in her journal; “What has become of your promised greatness?” The Louisiana Native Guards were ordered out of the city, but they refused to leave their home unattended. After the Union took New Orleans, these men offered their services to General Butler. Along with two other black creole men, Rey and Octave presented to Butler their guns and their dedication. Butler’s General Order No.63 called for the enlistment of black soldiers for the Union and was met with much enthusiasm. Not all Afro-creoles supported the Union though. In 1863 the Provost Court fined a woman named Emma Walden three dollars for singing a rebel song that began, “Jeff

1095 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 28 November 1871. Message in English from “General Williams (federal).”
1097 Berry, “Negro Troops in Blue and Gray.”
1098 In total, about one thousand Afro-creole men volunteered and joined the Confederate Native Guards.
Davis is a gentleman.\(^{1102}\) Later that year a group of whites and free blacks performed a Voudou ceremony to ensure a Confederate victory. In court a slave girl testified that she saw free women of color perform spells to return local power back to the Confederacy and keep slaves in a position subordinate to the free black class.\(^{1103}\) While some locals hoped the spiritual world would help the Confederacy, the *Cercle Harmonique* and their guiding spirits supported the Union. On August 31, 1864 the spirit of Sedella let the circle know that they had a role to play in “the current revolution.” He also assured them that they would “fight” and “defeat” their enemy.\(^{1104}\)

While at Camp Strong in New Orleans on October, 20 1862 Rey received a message from Lamennais that was later recorded in one of his séance books. In it, Lamennais shamed those believed themselves superior to others since all were “sons of the same father.” Indeed, all “men” were “created by the same Master” and thus “worthy to participate as you [likely meant to be pro-Confederates] in the benefits of civilization.” It was a “shame” that in 1862 “a prejudice of caste” should still rule the nation. Defending “the oppressed” was a “noble cause” of justice and woe to those who fought against liberty. Lamennais encouraged supporters of slavery to imagine their own children when seeing mothers and children separated by slavery. And though soldiers in 1862 could not be sure which way the Civil War would end, Lamennais assured Rey and others at Camp Strong that “no barrier can obstruct the march of good over evil.” Those who “committed the crime” and “chained your brothers” would regret their offenses after the “social and political rise” of the black race.\(^{1105}\) Rey was honorably discharged due to injury from the Native Guards before the Battle of Fort Hudson, which would claim the life of his friend and later spirit guide Captain André Cailloux.

Cailloux was a hero of New Orleans. He was one of the men who volunteered for both sides, as a Confederate lieutenant and later captain of the Union 1\(^{st}\) Regiment Louisiana Native Guards. Cailloux’s death in the unsuccessful Union attack on Confederate Fort Hudson (outside Baton Rouge) was lamented nationally, and he became one of the first black Union troop heroes. Eyewitnesses heralded Cailloux’s bravery. Leading the charge he was seen with “with his left

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\(^{1102}\) *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 February 1863.


\(^{1104}\) Grandjean collection, 85-30; 31 August 1864.

\(^{1105}\) Grandjean collection, 85-32. Recorded into the register book on 10 January 1872, cited as being received by Rey on 20 October 1862 at the Gentilly Station of Camp Strong.
arm dangling by his side,—for a ball had broken it above the elbow,—while his right hand held his unsheathed sword gleaming in the rays of the sun.”

Local newspapers, Harper’s Weekly, the New York Times, and the Herald all covered his funeral, which was both a solemn affair and a social one, for thousands watched or participated in the procession to the cemetery. A local periodical reported that with the death of Cailloux “the cause of the Union and freedom has lost a valuable friend.” Harper’s Weekly’s coverage even included an image of Cailloux’s funeral procession. The American flag was kept at half-mast for thirty days in honor of Cailloux. The celebration of Cailloux’s life and his elevation as a national black military hero offered New Orleans blacks a rally point to argue for black rights and equality. Though Cailloux had fallen, his spirit knew the cause for which he died continued forward.

In addition to Cailloux, the spirits of other Civil War casualties visited the Cercle Harmonique’s table. A spirit named Crowder assured them that he and other spirits were “preparing for you a better world, where Progress will be your Motto.” This spirit was the young black soldier Lieutenant John H. Crowder of the Union’s 1st Louisiana Native Guards. Since he lied about his age, he was one of the youngest officers in the Union. On one April day in 1870, the spirits of many fallen black Civil War soldiers appeared. One of them was Crowder, who reported he was pleased to have “died for Liberty.” A spirit named “Anselme” of the 1st Louisiana Native Guards now resided in a world surrounded by “millions of free citizens.” J. Handsborough, who identified as a Corporal in the Louisiana Native Guards, had been perplexed by harsh cruelties of war and violent conflict. He now advised the circle that it was noble to fight for a principle but not to kill for it. Jack Thompson affirmed that when he “shouldered the musket, it was to battle for human rights.”

1106 William Wells Brown, The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), 171.
1108 New Orleans Era, 20 July 1863.
1109 Ochs, “A Patriot, a Priest, and a Prelate;” and Harper’s Weekly, 29 August 1863.
1110 Ochs, A Black Patriot and a White Priest.
1111 “I succumbed, but the flag flatters.” Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870. Message signed “Capt. A. Caillou.”
1112 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 4 June 1871.
1113 Glatthaar and Crowder, “The Civil War through the Eyes of a Sixteen-Year-Old Black Officer.”
1114 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870. Message received in English from “Crowder, Lt. 1st Native Guards.”
1115 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1116 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
rejoiced because “my brothers are free!” Other spirits chimed in too, including Andrew Jackson. “The union,” a spirit identified as A. Jackson stated “must and shall be preserved!” A spirit named And. Jackson exclaimed: “1814 and 1815! 62 Grant 1869!” likely referring to the Battle of New Orleans, the fall of Confederate New Orleans, and President Grant’s inauguration. Considering Jackson’s role in the Battle of New Orleans and his welcoming of the black militia in the fight, it is likely that this spirit was referring to him.

All were happy to see the war end and the Union win. The storm of war had run its course and now the “calm” had “returned.” The “hydra,” John Brown proclaimed, was “defeated.” The spirit of Brown taught the circle that liberty and equality went hand-in-glove because “Liberty creates Equality; and Equality shows the power of Right over Evil.” The “power of Right” always defeated “Evil” for “the law of God” dictated that “Justice and Progress always come out the victors in the end, when Evil, in order to maintain itself, provokes a conflict.” Part of this particular message’s larger goal was to celebrate the victory of the Union over the Confederacy and emancipation over slavery, and thus, it was very likely that Brown considered the Confederacy and enslavement of blacks as part of “Evil.” The spirit of Sidney Johnson, the vice-president of the Confederacy, described the Civil War as a “terrible time.” His spirit was happy that the side of “freedom” won the war, and he rejoiced in the end of slavery. “Long live Freedom! but for everyone,” he signed off. “Unite brothers, and remember the lesson.” The lesson was one Johnson only recently learned—egalitarianism and the error of slavery. Johnson appeared at the table again on Bastille Day 1872 and echoed the sentiments of many other spirits on the ephemerality of life on earth.

In addition to Johnson, former Confederate soldiers also came to the Cercle Harmonique. The spirit of Colonel Charles Dreux, lamented how he and other Confederates “fought for nothing!” In reply, Cailloux affirmed that he and others who mustered for the Union “fought

1117 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 20 November 1871. Message recorded in English. A spirit who signed as Rousseau, who Grandjean identified as a Gal Rousseau of the Native Guards, noted how God was “strong and powerful!” Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1118 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1119 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1121 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
1122 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872
1123 Grandjean collection, 85-40; 4 May 1872.
1124 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 14 July 1872.
1125 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870. Message in English from “Col. Dreux.”

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for something!” Even the spirit of Robert E. Lee came to the table of the *Cercle Harmonique* once. He identified himself as a representative of “those thousands” affected by “the cruel war that desolated this country.” He was pleased to see that the rights of all were now observed. All the spirits, including him, desired harmony on earth. He wanted those who participated in the “fratricidal struggle” to “forget your foolish pretentions” and recognize the rightful solidarity of all. Supporters of the Confederacy and slavery needed to realize their past errors to grow. Rather than “live in the illusion of the Past,” they must accept “the Truth of the [present] situation.” “Do not dream of chains for slavery” he ordered. Instead, “talk of Freedom” and “Justice … Shout … Vive la Liberté. Long live the Union of beings, that of Friends!” Humanity must recognize the “right of everyone.” His voice on matters of struggle, conflict, and rights carried extra weight for he was the leader of the Confederate Army and one “who commanded the respect of his political enemy.”

Though the victory of the Union was celebrated, war itself was not an inherent good. Lamennais lamented the number of dead from the “terrible and bloody war,” not to mention the assassination of the “apostle Lincoln.” Still, even though war was “a scourge,” it was worth it in this case since slavery was “an abomination.” Saint Vincent de Paul encouraged listeners to walk with “the olive branch in one hand and light in the other” because “those who want war will be paralyzed or destroyed.” War was not the spirits’ aim. Humanity was “not created to make war against his brother.” Rather, humanity’s purpose was “to unite” and “to love.” The “sword” did not create “Freedom” nor did “blood” fortify “the tree of Liberty.” Ideas did this. In contrast to warring countries, the spirits lived together in harmony. Though war could change a society of injustice to one of justice, physical fighting not the only way—nor was it the preferred way—to catalyze change. Rey’s friend in the spirit world, Crowder, partook in the “changes of war” with Rey and others and “was sent to the spiritual life by our foes.” Rey,
however, did not perish in war. He was appointed “to accomplish another work” and “went to the legislature.”

“*The same rights as you*”: Republicanism After the Civil War

Following the end of slavery and the Confederacy, the spirits and the *Cercle Harmonique* hoped the Idea of republican egalitarianism would shape politics and society. According to historian Justin Nystrom, both black and white southerners during Reconstruction chose political party affiliation “largely on self-interest, racial fear, or in the case of some Republicans high-minded ideals.” Afro-creole members of the *Cercle Harmonique* fell primarily in the third category. It comes as no surprise that the spirits supported republicanism and wanted the U.S. to model its post-war self on the spiritual republic of their world. In the wake of the Confederacy’s fall and emancipation, the spirits and *Cercle Harmonique* believed republicanism was liberty’s best bet. Though they believed the politics of the Republican Party were the best option for New Orleans, Louisiana, and the United States, this did not mean the spirits’ hopes would quickly materialize on earth.

New Orleans would prove to be a very messy place during and following the war. The rise of Radical Republicanism was followed a few years later by Louisiana’s “Redemption,” as white conservative Democrats would call their return to political power. Some politicians and locals flip-flopped their political affiliations in the short time. The two parties exchanged gunfire and insults, and even members of the Republican Party were never on the same page. In short, political drama thrived in Reconstruction New Orleans. And though New Orleans may “have seemed like a potentially fertile ground for the growth of Southern Republicanism,” hostility leftover from the city’s wartime occupation “left it an incredibly volatile place.”

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1134 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870. Message from “Crowder, 1st La Native Guards.”
1136 Nystrom has encouraged other scholars to examine the motivations of Reconstruction era political actors without bias, be it of the Dunning school variety or the revisionists. The main question Nystrom asks historians to answer is, “To what degree were Reconstruction politics a struggle between freedom and white supremacy as opposed to being merely a bare-knuckle struggle for power?” Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 83–85.
1137 Nystrom defines the state’s “Redeemers” as “those white Southerners who overthrew Republican rule.” *New Orleans After the Civil War*, 1.
1138 Ibid, 55.
James Hogue has called post-Civil War Louisiana “a unique epicenter of violent politics.” The Union occupation of the city fostered antagonism among Confederate sympathizers and white supremacists and promoted hope among much of the city’s black and mixed-race population. As the New Orleans population of *gens de couleur libres* continued to amass wealth and status during the antebellum era, local and state authorities grew increasingly wary of this class. Following slavery’s abolition and the Union victory in the Civil War and with the spirits as their guides, many Afro-creoles hoped that legal and civil equality would be possible. Spirit message after spirit message imagined the possibilities. Before examining the political complexities of Civil War and Reconstruction politics in New Orleans, the section below offers insight on the spirits’ understanding of republicanism for the United States.

As evidenced in the previous chapter, the spirits unequivocally supported republicanism. “Universal Brotherhood” would be the culmination of spiritual work and political work for equality. And brotherhood was best fostered by a republican outlook. According to another spirit, a government’s strength came from “the morality, the honesty, and the liberal, political, and moral education of the inhabitants.” And this would be a two-way street, for “more advanced citizens” were found in “solid, liberal, and generous” governments. A “wise”—and “solid, liberal, and generous”—government sought to lessen “the burden of taxes” and supported the “liberal” populace by encouraging a “progressive march in sciences, arts, etc.” If people and politicians sustained this type of government and society, “the evils caused to the people by the political corruption of the parties” would cease because political parties would become extinct. Honest discussions would render political parties unnecessary, and all would be working for the perfection of society.

In a republican government, the people would have the power and ability to elect fair leaders. The people should be the “King of the Earth” rather than the monarchs John Brown’s spirit observed around the world. Those leaders were “slaves to selfishness.” The power struggle he watched between “Justice” and “absolutism” would one day end, and “Despotism” would lose

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1142 Financial issues plagued Louisiana following the war since slaves were no longer taxed property. Throughout Reconstruction, various tax ideas were presented in the legislature to ameliorate the state’s financial quagmire.
1143 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 12 February 1872. Second message from A. Fabre on that day.
to the “triumphant march of the Idea.”¹¹⁴⁴ Quality leaders could be ensured through election “by popular voice … with the guarantees for the purity of the ballot, and the purity of the elected.” All should be allowed to enter the preliminary elections if willing to produce a signed disclosure of his political philosophy. The general election would then determine who was “the most dignified” to represent “the people.” Upon election, “the people’s choice” would only serve a “limited term” to avoid tyranny. A nation’s leader “ought to be the Father of his brethren” and not act like “the Master of his subjects.”¹¹⁴⁵ Tyranny went hand-in-hand with despotism. Fighting against despotism secured one’s status as a “knight defending the cause of the righteous”—an achievement that glorified the Lord.¹¹⁴⁶

The injustices of the U.S. meant the Afro-creole Spiritualists were to be tireless workers and “thinkers.”¹¹⁴⁷ And thinkers should not be afraid to criticize oppressive regimes, laws, and social systems. Those who fought against “the infamous powers that want to dominate man as master of his conscience or his personal liberty” should be admired. Combatting “prejudice … bigotry, error, and superstition” cultivated a “noble soul.”¹¹⁴⁸ Despotic leaders were frowned upon, as was greed, especially when it was linked to a desire for domination. The spirit of Charles Albert, came at the end of the year in 1859 to lament that though a new year was about to being, men would “continue to live in their cruel egoism” and not cease “their rapid strides” in “this immoderate desire they have to dominate the other.” Only the “Grand Voice of the People” could succeed in stopping the advance of a tyrant’s domination of the people.¹¹⁴⁹ The spirits of those who worked against progress, liberty, and republicanismo felt shame. In death, the spirit of John Wilkes Booth had to admit that nothing could stop the march of progress and “woe to those who want to obstruct the road.”¹¹⁵⁰ On another occasion, a “victim” helped a spirit named “Booth” seek “forgiveness and your prayers” from the “brethren” of the Cercle Harmonique.¹¹⁵¹

¹¹⁴⁵ Grandjean collection, 85-38; 12 February 1872. First message from A. Fabre that day.
¹¹⁴⁶ Grandjean collection, 85-34; 29 October 1871. Message from “Rel!” This message is echoed a few months later. According to the spirit Oscar Cordier, a “defender of humanity” engaged in the fight against both religious and political despotism. Grandjean collection, 85-34; 11 December 1871.
¹¹⁴⁷ Grandjean collection, 85-38; 2 January 1872. Message from Ambroise.
¹¹⁴⁹ Grandjean collection, 85-30; 30 December 1859.
¹¹⁵¹ Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
Indeed, all were worthy of forgiveness, from John Brown and Abraham Lincoln to Jefferson Davis, John Wilkes Booth, and Jesuit exploiters.1152

Sometimes it seemed as though the spirits had group conversations in what was recorded as a rapid fire grouping of spirit messages that the medium simply observed. These rapid pace spirit message happened from time to time, and when they did, politics, republicanism, proper governmental organization, and American society were common themes. One example began with the naming a government and then describing it. Immediately after one spirit shamed the “two despots” of Napoleon the First and Napoleon the Third, another identified the United States “the promised land of Liberty!” In contrast, Russia, England, and Ireland were all cold places. Another spirit called the Confederate government “a dream.” St. Augustine deemed the thirtieth of July (the day of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot) “fratricide” and the fourth of July “freedom.”1153 While “Judge Taney” of Dred Scott v. Sanford fame shouted for “The Past,” both Lincoln and John Brown simply stated “The Present.” Another spirit called Lincoln a “moral victory” and Grant a “physical victory.” Finally, Union and Confederate soldiers together exclaim “Union forever!”1154

In another of these multiple spirit conversations John Brown began the transcript and expressed happiness that “human slavery has disappeared from the United States of America … Moral and Religious Liberty is marching and gaining ground. God be blessed!” Captain Cailloux, Washington, and Napoleon agreed with similar ideas. The spirit of Andrew Jackson seemed to channel Lincoln when he added “The Union Must and shall be preserved.” Another spirit added (echoing the previous group conversation), “The 30th of July is the 4th of July for Black Independence in Louisiana.”1155 In a later spirit conversation, John Brown stated that “to die for the freedom of his brothers, that is walking towards the Spiritual Life.” Jesus appeared immediately after Brown and spoke positively of Brown’s courage and abnegation. As if creating a political holy trinity, Lincoln spoke after Jesus and seemed to echo Brown; “He who dies for Humanity teaches the Glory.”1156

1153 The Mechanics’ Riot, a race riot in New Orleans during which white supremacists shot many black political leaders, took place on July 30th 1866. It will be explored later in this chapter and the following chapter.
1154 Grandjean collection, 85-32. 12 July 1870
1155 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 2 June 1871.
1156 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 13 September 1871.
One reason why republicanism was the best option was its egalitarian basis on a divine order and sacred rights, instead of the old divine right of kings. Providence’s “immutable law” according to a spirit was “the solidarity of all beings.” George Washington taught that the “stability of Government” was based on the wisdom of its laws and of its lawmakers. Peace and attending to the needs of the masses were critical for solidarity. The result should be “Liberty” for “all” and “no privileged classes!” Equal civil and legal rights for all would be required for liberty, and for this reason, Lincoln and others frequently spoke of rights. Those who disregarded the equal rights of their brothers possessed “wild assumptions.” Lincoln encouraged all to “acknowledge” the “legitimate rights” of their brothers, for those rights were “equal to yours.” People should not force the poor and the outcasts to live as slaves. All should be united. A spirit named Simon reassured the Cercle Harmonique that he and other spirits were still with him working for the “Just Rights” that were “due for all!”

Republicanism’s promise of rights could help heal the country’s wounds of war and slavery. The spirit of Georges Bally Dubuclet, a Dubuclet who moved from France to the U.S. only to leave in disgust of slavery for Mexico, lamented the “glaring injustice” of the American slavery system. “Children of the same father” experienced much different lives in this “ungrateful country.” The U.S. ignored some of its citizens’ “just rights” and denied them their “enjoyment of the Republic.” Remembering how appalled he was at slavery, his heart was “relieved” to now see how Republican politics now helped “reduce suffering.” Lunel remarked that a “desire” for “good” inspired a person to be “politically liberal” and “tolerant” of others’ beliefs. This desire for good was inherent for Spiritualism, which stood for “Equity and Justice” and “the rights of each.”

The spirits’ calls for republicanism sometimes referred to Republican Party politics. The spirits wanted all to support the party of the people and this began with children. Since politics were often learned at home, the children of the North and South needed to be taught republican values. A spirit named “A. Dutillet” promised the Cercle Harmonique that if parents raised their

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1158 Grandjean collection, 85-33 24 June 1871.
1160 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874. Message from Simon. This message arrived the same day as a message from Pétion and Brouard, Haitian spirits, and so it is also possible that Simon was Simón Bolívar.
1162 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869.
1163 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 30 December 1871.
children “with liberal ideas” and taught them the truth—“the rights of everyone, love and charity for all”—then they would follow “the Route of the Just.” The spirit of Joanni Questy hoped to see republican youth grow and later thrive in politics. Another spirit noted how a “clash of interests” and differing opinions on Justice caused the “antagonism” between Republicans and Democrats. The spirit also differentiated between the “party of Injustice” and “the party much closer to Justice.” In this description lies an inherent criticism of the Republican Party. While they were better than the redeeming Democrats, their policies and views could be improved. The spirits encouraged Cercle Harmonique members to be good and true republicans in the U.S. and France. It was regrettable, the spirit of Virgil explained in 1860, that “selfishness” crippled “the generous efforts of Republicans.” More “ardent patriots of the Universal Republic” would surface if it were not for the humanity’s tendency towards “selfishness and pride.” Even if “the Republican Party” and various republican speakers, such as Lamartine and Hugo, were imperfect, they were “better than these servile despots” reducing themselves “to the rank of a slave dominating other slaves.” Virgil hoped his children would be “Republican.” Whether speaking of the Republicans in the U.S. or in the Second Empire of France, this promise of the Republican Party’s ability to foster the “Universal Republic” was one New Orleans Afro-creoles could hold onto.

“Political clowns will go to dust!”: Reconstruction Politics and Spirits

Free blacks in New Orleans had long sought full civil and legal rights, and before the war’s end, Union and Unionist clubs formed en masse to organize the push for black rights. In November 1863 the newly organized Union Radical Association in New Orleans prepared a petition for Major George F. Shepley, the military governor of Louisiana, declaring they were “fitted to enjoy the privileges and immunities belonging to the condition of citizens of the United States.” Continuing, they asked if they would be “deprived of the right to assist in establishing in the New Convention a Civil Government in our beloved State of Louisiana, and also in choosing

1164 Grandjean collection, 85-48; 11 December 1872.
1167 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 5 February 1860.
1168 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 27 September 1872. Message recorded in English and signed Dunn.
our representatives, both for the Legislature of the State, and for the Congress of the nation.” In this request for voting rights, they highlighted their status as tax-paying residents of the state and promised their loyalty to the Union.1170

They received no reply, but followed up after this failed petition. In 1864 Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, Commander of the Department of the Gulf, considered suffrage for those who possessed a significant portion of white ancestry. However, due to the mixed-race identities of many slaves, he decided against it. Two prominent, wealthy Afro-creoles even sought an audience with Lincoln in early spring of 1864 but continued to find discussions of their suffrage at a stalemate.1171 When state officers were elected in February 1864 Louisiana, only whites officially could vote. Shortly after the inauguration of the newly elected Louisiana Governor Michael Hahn, he received a letter from Lincoln who congratulated him and wished him luck in the coming constitutional convention. In it Lincoln did not seem endorse universal suffrage for African Americans, but did suggest that “the very intelligent and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks” be allowed at the convention. These men, Lincoln wrote, “would probably help in some trying time in the future to keep the jewel of Liberty in the family of Freedom.”1172

The spirits taught that if the United States could properly embody the ideals of republicanism, freedom and equality were possible. The American republic should imitate the spiritual world which required both a democratic spirit and mutual respect.1173 With the figure of Lincoln and anti-slavery politicians at the helm, the Republican Party seemed the best bet for Afro-creoles to achieve this goal both during and after the war.1174 The spirits taught that the whole country needed to become more republican, not just the former Confederacy. The “invisible army” of human progress knew neither South nor North but rather stood for “humanity and one flag for all and every one.” The flag of the Union “must” include “Harmony,” for “the stars and stripes must and will protect all the citizens of the Great Republic.”1175

1171 The New-Orleans weekly times, 26 March 1864.
1175 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 28 November 1871. Message in English from “General Williams (federal).”
the foundation of the spiritual spheres and each spirit acknowledged that all had the right to one’s own opinion. Respecting the diversity of opinions was necessary for both harmony and liberty. After listening to and respecting the opinions of all, the spirits would then follow the wishes of the majority. Thus the world of spirits was a democracy, where, though majority opinion ruled, even those in the minority were offered a voice. To deny representation to the minority was “a monstrosity” both in the spiritual world and on earth. A society could move towards progress only if all were allowed to vote. In the spirit world, all had representation in decision, and so the spirits disproved of earthly societies that allowed those in power to “misuse” their authority. The shared desire “to further the advancement of each and all through Perfectibility” structured the sublime government of the spirits. In order to make the government of the United States more like that of the spirits, emancipation and universal male suffrage would first need to be secured.

When the constitutional convention met in 1864 to amend the Louisiana Constitution of 1852, the question of emancipation produced a lively debate among the delegates, many of whom were former slave owners. While the ordinance to formerly abolish slavery passed fairly easily (despite some naysayers), the question of black suffrage was met with almost complete disapproval. Many delegates who were supportive of immediate emancipation did not believe any non-whites were entitled to the vote. One delegate even proposed an amendment to the constitution that would deny free blacks the right to vote or the right to move to Louisiana. The question of black suffrage was raised in the Senate later that year with the “Quadroon Bill” which was quickly defeated. In the coming months, many former slave-holders and Confederate sympathizers and veterans quickly gained political power and seats in the legislature through the activity of political clubs, such as the Young Democrats who called the Radical Republicans’ desire “for the blood of Jefferson Davis” both “unchristian and un-American.” Amid all this political maneuvering and change, the city’s racial and ethnic composition changed too. Not only did the end of the war bring a large number of newly freedpeople into the city, but a large influx of German and Italian immigrants added to the ethnic complexity and conflict.

1176 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 9 June 1874.
1177 Immediate emancipation passed with a final count of 67 to 16.
1178 Delegate Edmund Abell’s proposed amendment, Christian, “Ballots or Bullets,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.”
1179 Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 61–62. For quotation, see Daily Picayune, 15 October 1865.
1180 Anti-Italian sentiment boiled over in 1891 when eleven Italians were lynched in New Orleans following the not guilty charge of nine of them for the murder of Police Chief David Hennessy. Humbert S. Nelli, “The Hennessy Murder and the Mafia in New Orleans,” Italian Quarterly, 19.75 (1975):77–95; Barbara Botein, “The Hennessy Case: An Episode of Anti-Italian Nativism” Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association,
The *New Orleans Tribune*, heir of *L’Union* and managed by the same Afro-creoles, proved to be one of the most outspoken forums for black rights.\(^{1181}\) The spirit of John Brown later recognized the political activism of *The Tribune* as the “Blackman” defending himself with “the pen in hand.”\(^{1182}\) *The Tribune* attacked the Quadroon Bill as “a bar to future progress” by solidifying three official racial castes when it was bad enough to have the black/white racial binary.\(^{1183}\) The newspaper developed into a powerful center for proponents of black rights. Their detractors even sought a legal bill to shut the newspaper down in late 1865.\(^ {1184}\) The newspaper led a “Convention of Colored Men of Louisiana” in early 1865 to discuss the struggle for civil and legal rights, and this was but the start of many conventions organized in part by the *Tribune*. In June 1865 the paper called for “The Friends of Universal Suffrage” to meet and later organized a Universal Suffrage Convention in September, during which the delegates declared themselves to be the “Convention of the Republican Party.”\(^{1185}\) The Republican Party of Louisiana’s proclaimed focus was universal male suffrage and the “equality of all men before the law.”\(^{1186}\) These conventions were attended by not just black and mixed-race Louisianans, but their white allies also attended, many of whom were criticized as “carpetbaggers.” The most famous and infamous of these conventions would be held in July 1866 at the Mechanics’ Institute, reconvened to amend the 1864 Louisiana Constitution and extend suffrage to black men.

Up until the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, the main topics of debate and conversation at these conventions were the need for equal rights before the law for all men, an investigation into validity of the Constitution of 1864, and the dispatch of delegations to Washington to voice their opinions.\(^{1187}\) Two men who would later serve in gubernatorial capacities at these conventions were Henry Clay Warmoth, a Missourian and Union officer who arrived to New Orleans in early 1864, and Oscar James Dunn, a non-creole, African American local whose spirit would be active

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\(^{1182}\) Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872

\(^{1183}\) *New Orleans Tribune*, 16 November 1864.

\(^{1184}\) *New Orleans Tribune*, 19 December 1865.


among the Cercle Harmonique. Warmoth in particular attacked the legitimacy of the Constitution of 1864 on the grounds that it was not ratified by a majority vote of the people and furthermore because many people were denied the vote. He gained popularity with his outspoken nature. Though most voting precincts officially denied black suffrage, many blacks were able to cast votes in the New Orleans area. Warmoth came close in the gubernatorial election in 1865, garnering nearly 17,000 votes from blacks and mulattos denied voting rights in Governor James Madison Wells’s government.1188 Concurrently in 1865 the Democratic Party of Louisiana called a state convention in which the delegates, mostly former Confederate soldiers and sympathizers, expressed their support for President Johnson’s proposal for Reconstruction, and—citing the Dred Scott case decision—declared that the state government should be “a Government of White People, made and to be perpetuated for the exclusive political benefit of the White Race.”1189 During the 1866 session of the Louisiana legislature, now dominated by former Confederates, a new form of the Black Codes passed, though vetoed by the Governor Wells. It was in this charged political climate between state Republicans and Democrats that the Mechanics’ Institute Riot of 1866 occurred. The riot claimed the lives of approximately forty black and three white Republicans on one of the bloodiest days during Reconstruction. The Mechanics’ Institute Riot, the subsequent street violence, and the presence of the massacre’s martyrs at the table of the Cercle Harmonique will be explored in the following chapter.

Though the impeachment of President Johnson failed, Republican election triumphs in 1866, motivated in part by racial violence like the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, set into motion a new brand of Reconstruction politics. Major General P. H. Sheridan became the military governor of Louisiana and Texas, and he readjusted the New Orleans City Council appointing several men of color (formerly gens de couleur libres and often those with military experience) to various posts, including Dunn.1190 The Constitutional Convention of 1867–68, nicknamed the “Black and Tan Convention” by some for its mixed delegates, reconfigured much of the state’s law and rule.1191 Those articles related to black rights, such as the integration of schools, were hotly contested by the Democrat delegates. Local newspapers lamented various articles of “the

1188 Hogue, Uncivil War, 27.
1190 Vincent, Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction, 15; and Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 70–72.
1191 In Louisiana and South Carolina, the majority of delegates were not white. Richard L. Hume and Jerry B. Gough, Blacks, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The Constitutional Conventions of Radical Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 158.
Black Crook Constitution” which sought to put the state “under the control of negroes.” The black delegates at the convention were a fairly unified group, both in voting and in background: mainly Louisiana born, of higher social ranking, and many were Afro-creoles. Integrated public education and universal adult male suffrage were key points for black delegates and would remain so for years. The spirits visiting the *Cercle Harmonique* agreed. The “social and moral improvement of mankind” was the spirits’ and Spiritualists’ goal, and this would come with “Fraternal Union” and schooling. Education continued as a focal point of many black legislators, and throughout Reconstruction black legislators were most visible on education committees, while most of the key legislative committees (such as House Ways and Means and Senate Finance) were chaired and filled by whites.

Many of the same delegates serving in the constitutional convention also oversaw the Republican Party’s convention later in 1867 and prepared the party’s ticket for the state’s general election. Over the course of the last few years, the party divided between the more Radical Republicans led by the *New Orleans Tribune* and the more conservative Republicans of which Warmoth was a part. When the convention voted and selected Warmoth as the gubernatorial nominee with Dunn as his running mate, some of the radical *Tribune* faction split and formed their own counter-ticket of James G. Taliaferro and Major Francis E. Dumas. Following the election success of Warmoth, the *Tribune* suspended publication. In addition to Warmoth’s victory, the first state legislature following the recent constitutional convention possessed a strong Republican majority, including some black representatives allowed to take their seats following the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. These victories did not come easy or without voting intimidation at the polls. In parishes near New Orleans, black Republicans were beaten and even shot. At some polls white Democrats gave certificates to African Americans who voted for their ticket so that other white Democrats could “be friendly to those who befriended us.” Local political groups in New Orleans too asserted authority through acts of violence.

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1193 Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction*, 47–70.
1194 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 28 June 1871. Message from P. Galle. Grandjean noted next to this message that Galle was a creole native to New Orleans.
1195 Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction*, 82–85.
1196 Dumas was originally offered the position of lieutenant governor on Warmoth’s ticket but declined.
1197 Quotation from House Misc. documents, quoted in in Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, 75.
Warmoth’s time as state governor was never calm. Rumors of Warmoth’s corruption and turncoat ways spread from the beginning of his tenure as governor. Soon after he secured the gubernatorial position, he began to court his rivals’ supporters in order to develop a wide backing. Warmoth also gained command over a vast array of Louisiana politics including, the state militia, the city’s interracial Metropolitan Police, the voting Returning Board, and voter registration. But this did not mean he easily made friends. Instead, he would be at the center of the Louisiana Republican Party’s fracture. A civil rights bill called the Isabelle Bill in 1868 (for its writer, black representative Robert Isabelle) sought to guarantee the “equal rights and privileges” with regard to travel and business licenses to all persons “without regard to race, color or previous condition,” and furthermore the bill would make segregation a criminal offense. Though it passed the Louisiana House and Senate, Warmoth vetoed it in fear that it would add further kindle the fire of racial tension. He vetoed a similar bill in 1870. Actions such as these alienated him from some of his former black supporters, and following the suspension of the Tribune, other Republican voices, both black and white, began to speak louder. The spirits even warned that not all members of the Republican Party should be trusted for party affiliation alone, and the “mouths” of some “might deceive your fellow citizens.”

Warmoth’s earliest Republican dissenters were in the Custom House faction, overseen by the federal employees of the Custom House including President Grant’s brother-in-law James B. Casey. Some wanted to eclipse the young governor’s power but most felt wronged by Warmoth’s corruption and dishonesty. During this time Dunn began to stray from Warmoth and focus more strongly on guaranteeing black suffrage. Dunn even wrote to Horace Greeley at the New York Tribune to expose Warmoth for his political untrustworthiness and his turncoat tendency to look out for himself alone, calling him “the prototype and prince of the tribe of carpetbaggers.” Frustrated with the governor he served under, Dunn joined the Custom House faction and brought many black Republicans with him. Evening meetings at various ward political clubs grew heated, and members of the rival Republican factions often tried to sabotage the other. Some of the city’s Afro-creoles went with him while others remained loyal to

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1198 Hogue, Uncivil War, 61–65.
1199 Vincent, Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction, 92.
1200 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 November 1870. Message from W. R. Meadows and recorded in English.
Warmoth. Likely included in those who remained in Warmoth’s camp was Rey’s own brother Octave who served in as a captain Warmoth’s Metropolitan Police.

In the midst of Dunn’s accusations that Warmoth wanted to sacrifice the interests of blacks for Democrat support, Dunn briefly oversaw the office while Warmoth recovered from an injury. During this time the Republican State Committee called for a state convention, which Dunn was elected to oversee. Warmoth hurried back to New Orleans to try to take over the August 1871 convention. When he was unsuccessful, he and P.B.S. Pinchback (a black northerner who came to New Orleans in 1862) set up a rival convention. At the conventions’ outset, a run-in between federal troops loyal to the Custom House and some of the Metropolitan Police nearly escalated into a street fight over control of the official convention’s location.

Later that fall during gubernatorial and presidential campaigns, Dunn quickly took ill and passed away on November 22, 1871. His death proved to be a scandal, and though congestion of the brain and lungs was deemed the official cause, rumors of poisoning persisted for years. Like Cailloux’s, Dunn’s funeral included a several thousand person procession. Three former governors served as pallbearers and even Confederate generals participated in the procession.

In one of his early 1872 speeches supporting the Civil Rights Bill, Charles Sumner memorialized Dunn as “an example of integrity” who upheld duty over riches. Dunn immediately became a symbol of black political honor for Sumner as well as the Cercle Harmonique.

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1202 Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 106–108.
1204 Sumner quoted in, Linda English, ‘‘That Is All We Ask For—an Equal Chance’: Oscar James Dunn, Louisiana’s First Black Lieutenant Governor,” in Before Obama: A reappraisal of Black Reconstruction Era Politicians, Volume 1, Matthew Lynch, ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 63.
1205 Dunn was not the only local political figure to appear at the Cercle Harmonique’s table. Others who came but did not deliver politically-charged messages are referenced here. Plantation owner, governor of Louisiana (1853–56), and Brigadier General for the Confederate Louisiana militia Paul Hébert is another local politician and Confederate who visited the Cercle Harmonique, and his message was received before his physical death in 1880. In 1872, when his message was recorded, he was a backer of the Warmouth Republican faction and later hoped Grant would run for a third term (Walter Greaves Cowan and Jack B. McGuire, Louisiana Governors: Rulers, Rascals, and Reformers [Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008], 81–82). It is Grandjean’s notes that identified the Paul Hébert behind the spirit as the local Acadian as opposed to anything in the message itself—which is a message endorsing Spiritualism and its “magnificence”—and so it is possible that the spirit another Hébert. Grandjean collection, 85-39; 20 February 1872. A. Fabre, mayor of the city in 1855, visited the Cercle Harmonique. Grandjean collection, 85-42; 31 May 1872. Grandjean collection, 85-38; 12 February 12 1872. Paul Bertus, who briefly served as New Orleans mayor in 1838 and again February 1843, instructed listeners to “help many beings.” Grandjean collection, 85-55; 3 June 1874. He promised that kindness and selflessness like this would be rewarded in the spiritual spheres, and he also lamented how “erroneous principles” had “dominated” many “misfortunates” in the country. Upon joining the spiritual world, those formerly oppressed would be “refreshed and happy.” Grandjean collection, 85-61; 25 January 1875. Grandjean collection, 85-57; 4 September 1874. Alfred Wiltz, the father of local politician and democrat Louis Alfred Wiltz, also appeared. Grandjean collection, 85-40; 17 April 1872.
The day following Dunn’s death a spirit named Oscar Bellevue who claimed to have died for political reasons advised the circle. Bellevue’s spirit was trying to achieve “a spiritual life full of Progress towards Him” but found himself still “attached a little to Earth.” This attachment came from his desire “to protect Octave [Rey], [P.B.S.] Pinchback, and a host of true and tried friends I left.”

He lamented that these friends were “seeking only material favors” rather than looking to “spiritual interests.” The death of O.J. Dunn—“who now belongs to our Broad party of spirits” —should make them consider “the small weight of what is attached to material life.” It was naïve to depend heavily upon the main political figures and hope that a “big fellow” like Dunn “would preside over their good fortune.” Political inaction among Afro-creoles (and instead relying solely on leaders) would result in getting “their necks broken like Oscar got his.”

It is unclear whether Bellevue’s lament regarding Octave and Pinchback was due to their Warmoth affiliation or because they denied Spiritualism. However, obvious in Bellevue’s message is a plea for more political action. Hoping black politicians would secure rights was not be enough. All who wanted rights would have to work for them or else certain death loomed in their future.

Two and a half weeks following his death, Dunn made his first appearance at Rey’s séance table, and he seemed to speak directly to the tension among the city’s black and Republican population. His message seemed simple (and came in English), “Dividing a house is ruinous to all … United we stand, divided we fall!” Rather, “for the sake of harmony, and for the freedom of all, don’t shatter to pieces the great Work already done.” This message came with much emotion and force, concluding that “as this pencil—broken by my will—so you are to be, if divided you are.”

The following day, the spirit of Dr. A.P. Dostie, the local white dentist and Republican who died during the Mechanics’ Institute Riot of 1866, commanded Louisiana Republicans to unite in one “solid phalanx.” Only then could they muster “the Power to secure victory” for their party and their ideals. Later that month Dunn appeared again and his spirit echoed Dostie and encouraged the Republican Party to remain unified. All republicans would need to harmonize into “a solid phalanx, to be able to vanquish your real political enemies.” Dunn felt responsible for some of the party’s division and apologized for it. “I did not want to

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1206 Message was recorded in English. The flip-flop of “true and tried friends” may indicate that English was the transcriber’s and/or medium’s second language (French being the first).
1207 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 22 November 1871.
1208 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 8 December 1871.
1209 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 9 December 1871. Message recorded in English and signed Dostie.
divide our ranks,” he said, “I was wrong.” He would not take all the blame though, and his words suggested a criticism of Warmoth. Others continued to pit the party against each other, and to these “deceivers” Dunn had a warning. Their “plot” would be discovered.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-35; 26 December 1871. Message recorded in English.} The black New Orleanians’ “real” political enemies were Democrats not fellow Republicans. Conflict among the city’s Republicans Dunn witnessed seemed far less important and detrimental to the party’s processed, common goal.

Dunn’s successor as lieutenant governor was Pinchback, who would later become the state’s first black governor following Warmoth’s impeachment. Leading up to Warmoth’s impeachment trials, the Louisiana legislature was a mess. The Custom House ring arrested Warmoth, Pinchback, some of the Metropolitans, and a few Warmoth-loyal legislators in early January, and this put into motion a political power standoff that ended with the shooting of a Warmoth Republican the following week and the set-up of a rival legislature.\footnote{Handbill, 19 January 1872, quoted in Christian, “Let Freedom Ring,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.”} While the official house functioned at the State House, a dual House of Representatives run by the anti-Warmoth Custom House group openly defied Warmoth from the Gem Saloon on Royal Street. When rumors spread that Warmoth planned to remove some of the black anti-Warmoth representatives from the chambers at the State House, a Custom House handbill announced a rally for “LIBERTY OR DEATH.”\footnote{Handbill, 19 January 1872, quoted in Christian, “Let Freedom Ring,” in “The Negro in Louisiana.”} Warmoth, with the backing of the Metropolitans and the state militia, quieted the rabble-rousing of the Custom House ring by the end of the month.

The political muddle was not limited solely to the Republican Party. Following the war, the main Carnival krewes (Rex, Comus, and the new Twelfth Night Revelers) consisted of former Confederates who celebrated Anglo-Saxon supremacy, but even they failed to work together. Rival parades during the 1872 Carnival season between Rex and Comus kept Democrats from capitalizing on the turmoil internal to the rival party.\footnote{James Gill, Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997); and Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 117–120.} This did not mean that the streets were safe for Republicans or blacks. In February 1872 a spirit identified himself as one who suffered and was killed. He described “political crimes” as the acts of “cowardly oppressors” who wanted to hold onto their undeserved power. The spirit’s own “miserable persecutors” were “shivering with fear” when they killed him, while he remained courageous and was not afraid to accuse them of “cowardice.” The spirit identified himself as “François
Sénateur,” a man who Grandjean noted was from New Iberia and assassinated “at the beginning of the republican regime by democrats.”

To make political matters more complicated, there were five political parties by the general election in November 1872. The two main contenders for governor were Republican nominee William P. Kellogg, a former Union cavalry colonel, and Democrat John McEnery, a former Confederate colonel. The campaign and election were particularly partisan, bitter, and even violent. The printing press of a Republican newspaper in Carroll parish was burned by the Ku Klux Klan in October. Voter intimidation on behalf of various Democrat-affiliated organizations and social clubs was widespread, especially in the more rural parishes. Employers threatened to fire black employees if they voted Republican, and the locations of polls in predominately black areas were often not advertised or published. During the campaign, the spirit of Dunn encouraged the Cercle Harmonique to remain confident and hopeful of their political outlook. They should not “despair of the political aspect” of their situation.

Amid the volatile election culture around the one year anniversary of his death, Dunn again came to the table with a message of black unity. Dunn instructed the Cercle Harmonique and other advocates of “the salvation of your Sacred Rights” to keep working. “Tell the boys! Do not Despair! Hold on together. I am in the light.” It was important that they keep together “in rank” and “Unite in solid phalanx!” The results of the 1872 gubernatorial election were fiercely contested and the result was dual governments, one headed by Kellogg and the other by McEnery. Both held inauguration ceremonies on January 14 and installed governments, Kellogg’s Republicans at the Mechanics’ Institute and McEnery’s Democrats/Fusionists at Lafayette Square. The State Returning Boards were divided. As acting governor Warmoth claimed McEnery the winner, which led to accusations of election stealing and his impeachment. As acting governor, Pinchback declared Kellogg the winner.

Republican Senator Oliver H. P. Morton from Indiana was brought in to investigate the election results and determine the rightful victor, a role he would repeat for the election of

1214 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 3 February 1872.
1215 Hogue, Uncivil War, 91–96.
1217 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 27 September 1872. Message recorded in English.
1218 Grandjean collection, 85-37; November 22, 1872.
1874. Both times he backed the Republican candidate. This made him an ally to the black Republican cause, and after his death in 1877, the spirit of Dunn assured Rey that “Morton” had joined him and others in “the happy land” and had met with “old friends and late foes.” In the end President Grant agreed with Morton and seated Kellogg as governor with federal support. This did not stop McEnery’s dual government or its influence, and Democrat dissent manifested in public culture. The 1873’s Carnival theme for the Mistick Krewe of Comus was “The Missing Links to Darwin’s Origin of Species.” While many costume designs were of animals, both fanciful and real, others carried a clear political bite. Some animal designs were meant to be specific figures. For example, the “Ass” was depicted as Charles Darwin, both in the design image and in the parade. The Hyena was General Butler, the Tobacco Grub was styled as President Grant, and the Rattlesnake was Warmoth. The “Negro” was portrayed as Darwin’s missing link personified. The only animals that were identified as contemporary figures were those with political and social views that opposed the Mistick Krewe social apparatus. In short, they were the butt of the parade’s joke.

New political allies were forged during this instable time and black political support for Kellogg waned. The short-lived Unification Movement of spring and summer 1873 consisted of primarily elite Afro-creoles and upper-class whites who sought to hold onto the antebellum social hierarchy of black, free black/Afro-creole, and white. The group’s manifesto was remarkably progressive and radical, going further than the civil rights provisions already in place. However, with the strong influence of conservative whites in the group, the Unification Movement was not supportive of racial equality in actuality. As explained by Unification Movement committee member and former Confederate general Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, “it would not be denied that, in traveling, and at place of public resort, we often share these privileges in common with thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and other who have worse sins to answer for than the accident of color; but no one ever supposed that we thereby assented to the social equality of these people with ourselves.” Indeed, political rights should not be confused with equality. For Afro-creoles who joined, it was a chance to secure their own

1221 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 2 November 1877. Message recorded in English and signed Dunn.
1223 *Daily Picayune*, 1 July 1873.
political rights and develop new allies. Other Afro-creoles and blacks reprimanded the Unification Movement but the flirtation with the idea of compromise revealed the instability of the state’s Republican Party.

Violence was another element to the dual government tension. The so-called First Battle of the Cabildo in March 1873 was McEnery’s attempt, complete with his own militia headed by former Confederate officer Frederick N. Ogden, to overrun the Metropolitan Police at the Cabildo near Jackson Square. The Colfax Massacre in Grant parish on Easter Sunday in April 1873, the “bloodiest single instance of racial carnage in the Reconstruction era,” was caused by a conflict between two rivals who both claimed a local office in Grant parish. What began as a localized result of the competing McEnery and Kellogg legislature “ended with a group of white men slaughtering a sizable portion of the district’s black militia.” This incident was not alone; similar events transpired in St. Martinsville and later in Coushatta in August 1873. The most successful rebellious act of McEnery’s Democrats happened in late summer 1874 in New Orleans.

Chapters of the White League formed across Louisiana, starting first in St. Landry Parish in April 1874 and then developing into a military-style campaign for white conservative Redeeming Democrats. The New Orleans branch, headed by Ogden, formed in the wake of a fear-mongering and false story published in the Daily Picayune about a pending and planned outbreak of black on white violence by local “Black Leagues” on July 4. It warned that these men would “fire and kill” those in their way and then “supported by the other colored people who would rally to their support … kill all the men and keep all the women.” Odgen led the White Leaguers in the Battle of Liberty Place in New Orleans in September of 1874, which resulted in the brief rule of a rouge Democrat government for three days until federal intervention. McEnery loyalists, most of whom were aligned with the newly formed White League, exchanged gunfire with the racially integrated Metropolitan police and took over the

1224 Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 151–155.
1225 Hogue, Uncivil War, 104–106.
1227 Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 158.
1228 Hogue, Uncivil War, 123–131.
1229 Daily Picayune, 30 June 1874; and Daily Picayune, 4 July 1874.
city. Even as the city seemed overrun by white supremacy, Valmour assured the circle that they could “rise grandly by the harmony” they cultivated. Valmour instructed listeners to “respect your brother” and not judge anyone—not easy advice in such a volatile place. Everyone was “responsible for his actions” he warned. Come Retribution, White Leaguers would recognize their offenses.

Afro-creoles continued to support the Republican government and party in the wake of the Battle of Liberty Place and its related intimidation. A group of black New Orleanians wrote that though “our homes may be destroyed” and “our people massacred … as long as the national Republican party shall be true to our liberties in the future as it has been in the past, we shall neither be seduced nor coerced from our partisan fealty.” This support did not mean that they fully approved of the party. While they proclaimed to be part of the party, they lamented that their “integrity and capacity are ignored in the councils of the party.”

Kellogg formed the Committee of Fifty, a group of black men, some of whom came from the writers of previously quoted address, to respond to recent violence and recommend ways of keeping order. However, a significant faction of the group began to dissent when Kellogg tried to dismiss its most outspoken black members.

Voter fraud and intimidation were rampant in the election of fall 1874 as well. Signs with “2 x 6” printed along with the image of a skull and crossbones were posted across New Orleans on election day with the intent to scare black voters. In some cases armed white Democrats also stood near the polls. Merchants in Shreveport promised to withhold supplies from any local planters who rented land or employed laborers who voted “the radical ticket.” To incite fear of black political power a New Orleans newspaper reported that the city’s “Radical Africans” roamed the streets and attacked blacks they believed voted Democrat.

While the Republican Party initially seemed successful in elections for seats in the state legislature, the Wheeler

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1230 Like the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, this event and its spiritual aftermath will be explored in the following chapter.
1231 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 8 September 1874. Message from Valmour.
1232 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 6 September 1874. This sentiment, that all were responsible for their actions, was expressed in other messages too. Grandjean collection, 85-52; 22 November 1873. Message from “A devoted mother.” Grandjean collection, 85-59; 4 January 1875. Message signed “A Brother!”
1235 Vincent, Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction, 186.
1236 New-Orleans Times, 10 November 1874.
Adjustment reclaimed some of those seats for Democrats. The compromise overseen by William A. Wheeler came after another gun-toting standoff in front of the statehouse in early January 1875. Fistfights erupted inside between Republican and Democrat representatives. In addition to the seats lost, even fewer of the black politicians remaining in the legislature served on committees in the coming months. Though Kellogg would win the governor seat again in this election, only the federal presence in the state kept the office his.

As the political situation for the black Republicans in Louisiana worsened, some members left the Cercle Harmonique as 1875 proceeded. For the duration of 1876 and 1877, Rey appears to have practiced Spiritualism alone, recording the messages on sheets of loose-leaf paper. The spirits remained hopeful though. In November 1875, Dunn explained that he was now “pursing a course of studies” that would enable him “to act in a better state of knowledge, as a missionary of Peace and Harmony through the Land and for the good, for the Elevation of a part of the citizens who are yet held in a state of bondage, for the want of humanity, by the enslavement of unhappy Brothers under the yoke of their past ideas of Rights.” All in all, he was pleased to have watched the changes in “the unworthy tendencies of a part of the citizens of the Republic.” Fighters for freedom should not despair as he and other spirits were still there to help “the success of the Good Cause—the triumph of Liberty over Slaveocracy.” Those on earth would “vanquish the foes,” and if they remained “true to the principles of Justice and Equity,” those ideals would “run high in your Land of Liberty and Freedom.”

While the Republican Party maintained control of the governor’s seat through the end of 1876, Kellogg would prove to be the end of the line. The successful “redemption” of neighboring Mississippi threw fuel to the fire of the Louisiana White Leaguers. When impeaching Kellogg did not work, focus turned to the upcoming 1876 election which pitted Marshal Stephen B. Packard of the old Custom House Ring, against Democrat candidate General Francis Nicholls of Confederate army fame, both of whom claimed victory. Like Kellogg and McEnery years earlier, both held inauguration ceremonies and installed governments—Packard’s behind federal guards and closed doors and Nicholls’s across town near Lafayette Square with public fanfare. The

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1240 Grandjean collection, 85-61; 26 November 1875. Message recorded in English from O.J. Dunn.
following day entire regiments of White Leaguers surrounded the Packard statehouse and staged a bloodless coup. The Compromise of 1877 solidified Nicholls’s victory.Republican Reconstruction was over.

“Praise Jesus and Lincoln”: U.S. Celebrities, America’s Past, and America’s Destiny

Before the end of Reconstruction and while Afro-creole hopes for a spiritual republic on earth still flourished, certain spirits who could be considered American political celebrities visited the séance table and brought validation to the Cercle Harmonique. Messages from Montezuma, Pocahontas, and Lorenzo Dow were already mentioned in Chapter Two, and they were not the only famous figures at the séance table. The presence of these and other celebrity spirits, particularly Abraham Lincoln and John Brown, bestowed an air of authority on the spiritual network of the Cercle Harmonique. The spirits also extolled various celebrity spirits as champions of freedom and the Idea and thus confirmed what the Cercle Harmonique already knew: the spirits that they admired endorsed their goals. Those figures most often praised by the spirits were Lincoln and Brown, and then Washington and various local martyrs. “Washington! Lincoln! Grant!” the spirit of Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr Victor Lacroix shouted in one short message, followed by “Fraternité! Liberté! Egalité!” Jacques Dellile noted how Lincoln, with the “stroke of a pen,” proclaimed Freedom; Brown had advanced that Freedom with his death; and the “sword of Grant” helped secure victory for the Union. Together John Brown and Jesus worked for the triumph of moral ideas and the progress of equality. Additional lovers of freedom like Robespierre, Moses, Luther, Calvin, Swedenborg, Diderot, and Volney stood as “apostles” of the revolution. The invocation of these historical figures reinforced the Cercle Harmonique’s emplacement in a prestigious spiritual genealogy.

The chosen celebrities of the Cercle Harmonique worked together for a common goal—the victory of the Idea in the United States. The spirit Ambroise provided descriptions for various political figures that identified their relationship to the Idea. Washington would always be the

1241 Hogue, Uncivil War, 165–176.
1243 Other famous persons that appeared to the Cercle Harmonique include British figures. A spirit who signed off as “Arnold Benedict” equated stories about ghost hauntings to “fairy tales.” Grandjean collection, 85-40; 27 April 1872.
1244 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
1245 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 26 January 1872.
“high majestic figure representing the march of ideas” and Lincoln would be remembered by humanity as “the victim sacrificed by Error and Rage of the enemies of Justice.” Booth, on the other hand, was infamous for “killing” and “wanting to stop the relentless march of Progress.” John Brown represented “the faith in God and the good law.” Napoleon the 1st served as the synonym for “despotism and unbridled ambition.”

Lincoln was the most celebrated of all by the spirits, and he continued to work for the nation’s best interest after his death. The figure of Lincoln memorialized at the séance table was a glorified version of the president, remembered as a warrior for equality who continued to fight. The Cercle Harmonique was not alone in their struggle. Rather, “Lincoln and other workers who, being more enlightened and advanced here, devote themselves to the work of liberating the Great Republic from its shameful stain.” While the Afro-creole Spiritualists on earth were breaking “all chains which tie you to Evil,” Lincoln and others were breaking “those chains which have been forged for your political enslavement.”

A joint message from Ambroise and Saint Vincent de Paul suggests that the Cercle Harmonique celebrated Lincoln’s birthday. The message included an explanation for Lincoln’s greatness: his great soul recognized the horrors of slavery. Additionally, his willingness and courage to speak out, as seen in the Emancipation Proclamation, and to step into “this fratricidal struggle” were admirable. The spirits went as far to call Lincoln “one of the most brilliant figures in the country,” the “Torch of Liberty,” and even the “American christ.” Jefferson Davis, as the leader of an “Immoral Republic” with its “cornerstone” of slavery, was the “American Judas.” Another spirit explained that just as Jesus showed the world love and charity, Lincoln performed a parallel act and “honored his nation.” His martyrdom for the cause of freedom was a frequent focus on the spirits, a topic that will be closer explored in the following chapter.

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1250 “The glorious birth of Lincoln, as you celebrate today …”
1251 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 12 February 1872.
1252 Grandjean collection, 85-50; 18 February 1873. Message from Lucile Bienvenue.
The spirit of Lamennais also likened Lincoln to Jesus. Both suffered for their progressive perspectives, but Lamennais recognized that “struggles are necessary, be they moral or physical.” While Jesus died on the cross “to prove to humanity the power of his teaching,” Lincoln succumbed to the bullet of an assassin to show the danger of “pride and lust for domination.” Lincoln “sealed with his precious blood, the funeral stone which must cover Human Slavery.” Jesus “died for Humanity,” while Lincoln “was sacrificed for wishing to liberate the black race, subdued under a degrading yoke by brute force; and to elevate the white citizens of the south, subdued under a moral yoke more powerful than a physical one.” Thus, Jesus and Lincoln fulfilled analogous roles. Indeed, Lamennais concluded his message saying, “Praise Jesus and Lincoln: one will regenerate humanity, the other the U.S. Republic.”

What Jesus set into motion for humanity—salvation—Lincoln did for the United States, and having the spirit who died for the greater good of the country on their side gave the Cercle Harmonique courage and confirmation in their struggle.

Lincoln was a very active spirit as well, and his messages always referred to slavery, politics, freedom, or a combination. Lincoln encouraged the circle to continue on despite political and social setbacks. Though “the monstrous oligarchy … wanted and still wants to crush out the germ of civil rights for the dark skinned children,” the members of that oligarchy would later meditate on “their horrible crimes and their depravity of manners.”

Similar to how spirits of the French Revolution rebelled against the ancien régime, the spirit of Lincoln referenced his own struggle with an oligarchy, and because he fought slavery, he had a better spiritual existence. Lincoln and other members of the “beautiful, spiritual, liberating army” helped humanity’s progress “despite obstacles.” For his part in this struggle, Lincoln was “happy” and enjoyed “the reward” of “my Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the new citizens and saved the republic.” In addition to fast-tracking Lincoln’s Retribution, the Emancipation Proclamation also saved the soul of the nation. “Inscribe on your banners,” the former president commanded about the Civil War’s outcome, “‘Victory is ours’!”

On the national day of Thanksgiving declared by his successor Andrew Johnson on the seventh of December 1865, Lincoln came to the Cercle Harmonique to celebrate freedom. “My

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1254 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 4 September 1874.
1255 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 27 December 1871.
1256 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
brothers,” he began, “today is the day of fasting, of prayer, and thanks for the peace and freedom that you have acquired at a price worthy of torture.” It was a day to honor the breaking of “the chains of slavery.” Though the war had been long, no one should be surprised of the Union victory since “freedom must reign over all the earth, because it originated in heaven.” Lincoln did not take any credit for the freedom of Americans, because it was God who made freedom, “not men.” But Lincoln assured them that he would “always be here to defend [freedom].” Part of this message was a criticism of the racialized element of slavery. To make his point, Lincoln, in a style many other spirits used as well, posed a rhetorical question to the circle; “Is it your fault if God created his children with different colors?”

Lincoln’s message, the séance record reported, was “immediately” followed by the appearance of another spirit who wanted to chime in on the topic. Saint Vincent de Paul wanted his “dear children” to have courage, for they had gained their “freedom with blood.”

Lincoln and John Brown often came to the Cercle Harmonique the same day, almost as if the presence of one called the other. They held similar positions in the circle’s spiritual network for both were considered martyrs for the cause of liberty. According to Brown, the “freedom of the people” had two main components—“freedom of political and religious powers.” The most “perfect” government was built on “the consent of men,” “the true faith,” and “harmony of mankind.” This was how the republic of spirits worked and it was how the material world should operate. Following his message, Lincoln appeared and promised that the “crowns of kings” would fall before “the upward march of humanity.” The chains of “physical slavery” broke as “human progress” continued. The spirits often lauded Brown and Lincoln in tandem as well. The spirit of Joanni Questy praised “the great and sublime figure of Lincoln” and “the majestic form” of Brown. He also asked the country the rhetorical question: “Are you not ashamed of Booth?” Revolutions carried out by those who carried “the spiritual banner”—like Brown with his sacrifice or “Grand Lincoln” with the Emancipation Proclamation—brought the Idea into the social and political structures of the earthly world. These were fighters who dreamed of freedom and a world without “chains.” According to another spirit, John Brown’s

1257 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 December 1865.
1258 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 December 1865.
1261 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 28 November 1871.
choices and action made him a “noble” man and an “Apostle of Peace and Love.” He fought for “the magic word of Freedom!!!!!!!”\textsuperscript{1263} John Brown also praised himself. He reported that Brown “triumphed” for he was willing to tell “the truth,” meaning Liberty. He now resided on a “bright and shining Pedestal” because he supported “the idea of the Freedom Lovers!” Though he was executed for upholding truth in the material world, in the spiritual spheres he was rightfully “recognized” for having “worked for the Good and Justice.”\textsuperscript{1264}

John Crowder and André Cailloux were both local celebrities who appeared at the séance table during multiple meetings. The glory of Cailloux’s funeral was mentioned previously, and the memory of his bravery lasted after the captain was laid to rest. When the \textit{New Orleans Tribune} sought the establishment of “a permanent delegation of colored men at Washington to advocate the cause of the colored people of this State” in 1865, they did so in order to ensure the legacy and liberties of “the posterity and relatives of Caillou, Crowder …”\textsuperscript{1265} On another occasion the \textit{New Orleans Tribune} called upon the memory of Crowder and Cailloux to inspire others to fight for civil and legal rights.\textsuperscript{1266} Their spirits did the same. The spirit of Crowder reported that he was happy to have “joined the worthy sons of Liberty” and enroll “under the Banner of Freedom.”\textsuperscript{1267} Crowder instructed those on earth to “throw away prejudices” and “be true to your brothers as you must be to God.” Spiritualists should fight for “moral and intellectual advancement” and march towards progress with “Light and happiness for all” inscribed on their banners.\textsuperscript{1268} “Give a man power and money,” Crowder warned, and “you will see what a great change” in his actions towards even “his most intimate friends.” Prayers and hopes for monetary success—even from friends—indicated the power of materialism and thus worried and bothered the spirits.\textsuperscript{1269} Cailloux told the Afro-creole Spiritualists to be “ready” and “faithful to the Post.”\textsuperscript{1270} He assured the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} that he continued to look after them and care for them in a “very brotherly” way. He also wished he had become a Spiritualist during

\textsuperscript{1263} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 26 April 1872. Message from Jacques Stanislas – a devoted brother.
\textsuperscript{1264} Grandjean collection, 85-59; 11 January 1875.
\textsuperscript{1266} “Address Delivered to the Citizens of Louisiana,” \textit{New Orleans Tribune}, 15 September 1865.
\textsuperscript{1267} Grandjean collection, 85-33; 13 June 1871.
\textsuperscript{1268} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 6 September 1871. Message recorded in English.
\textsuperscript{1269} Grandjean collection, 85-32; 29 October 1870. While some messages were signed with Crowder and his rank, this message was simply signed “Crowder,” indicating that various medium-scribes recorded the names of spirits slightly different. As with all messages from Crowder, this one was recorded in English, reflecting Crowder’s own African American, as opposed to Afro-creole, background.
\textsuperscript{1270} Grandjean collection, 85-37; 27 June 1873.
his earthy life instead of remaining “sadly indifferent” from the practice. Other spirits also recognized Cailloux’s glory. According to a message from John Brown, the Captain’s “great heart” and “great soul” wanted to give pardon to General Robert E. Lee. Though Lee commanded over the Confederate army, the wisdom Cailloux gained in his new existence in the spiritual world, along with his compassion, urged him to forgive his former enemies.

The political celebrity spirits who came to the séance table were always figures seen as supporters of liberty, republicanism, and equality. Another spirit at the Cercle Harmonique’s table who possibly matched a person still alive at the time of the communications, and in this case a famous person, was J. W. Hutchinson. It is possible that this spirit is a reference to either John W. Hutchinson or Jesse Hutchinson of the Hutchinson Family Singers. The Hutchinsons were familiar with both republicanism and Spiritualism, as the older brothers of the family, including both Jesse and John, became Spiritualists. The Hutchinson Family Singers were dedicated to nineteenth-century reform issues, most notably abolition. John edited the Hutchinson’s Republican Songster in 1860 in honor of, as the title page exclaimed, “Lincoln and Liberty!” The spirit of J.W. Hutchinson communicated one of the few messages recorded in verse, either a poem or a song. The poetic message celebrates the “Light” and the spirit’s delight being there with God and (John) Brown.

It is not a stretch to conclude the Cercle Harmonique was familiar with the songster, because Hutchinson would not be the only musical spirit guest at the table. A spirit identified as

1271 Grandjean collection, 85-58; 13 December 1874.
1272 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.
1273 Lamennais reported that “Hutchinson” watched over the Cercle Harmonique. Grandjean collection, 85-51; 24 March 1873.
1276 In the preface to Joshua Hutchinson’s (one of the brothers) short book about his family published in 1874 is a letter from William Lloyd Garrison remarked how “never before has the singing of ballads been made directly and purposely subservient to the freedom, welfare, happiness, and moral elevation of the people.” Joshua Hutchinson, A Brief Narrative of the Hutchinson Family: Sixteen Sons and Daughters of the “tribe of Jesse” (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1874), 7.
1277 John W. Hutchinson, ed. Hutchinson’s Republican Songster, for the Campaign of 1860 (New York: O. Hutchinson, Publisher, 1860).
1278 The spirit also referenced a local black New Orleans legislator, James H. Ingraham. Ingraham was an organizer and Captain of the Louisiana Native Guards, an active member of the “Convention of Colored men of Louisiana,” and a delegate of the Constitutional Convention of 1867–68. J.W. Hutchinson dictated, “So Ingraham / In Light I am / And for ever!” Grandjean collection, 85-39; 22 February 1872.
L. Gabici appeared in October of 1875 and began his message assuring the group that it was him. In the short message that followed he congratulated “Henri” for being a Spiritualist.\textsuperscript{1279} L. Gabici was the same name as a music composer associated with the Union side of the Civil War and a local music teacher in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{1280} Gabici composed the music for the song “Stand By Our Flag,” a song that celebrated the country’s dedication to freedom and justice. He published sheet music of this song and others he composed from downtown New Orleans.\textsuperscript{1281}

Many of the celebrity spirits who visited the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} delivered messages about America’s political destiny. Calls for the United States to live up to its claim that “all men were created equal” frequented the séance table. When discussing moral and chattel slavery, Saint Vincent de Paul proclaimed that “the voice of Reason and Logic” was everywhere destroying the “chains of slavery.” He continued, “in the United States, you owe refuge to the oppressed of the Earth, without distinction of races, religions, nationalities.”\textsuperscript{1282} America should strive to become more like the spiritual world. The world of the spirits was more perfect than the world of earthly man, which meant it should be emulated on earth. Cailloux affirmed that the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}’s spiritual “brothers” were surrounded by “equality.”\textsuperscript{1283} Similarly, Ambroise taught the circle that “Your world is the glimpse of God’s Creation; ours, the complement of his work …”\textsuperscript{1284} The happiness that one could hope to find on earth would be met in the spiritual world “by Harmony, Peace, Quietude, Love, and charity overflowing each soul with brilliant rays.”\textsuperscript{1285}

America’s future would ideally be one marked by liberty and freedom, like the spirit world. Brown promised that the “Oligarchy of your country will be defeated” and the “Truth of Rights for all” would be universally recognized. He and other “souls of Progress” were working “to bring the triumph of Justice and Equality” to earth. The \textit{Cercle Harmonique} could “count on us!”\textsuperscript{1286} Following this message from Brown, the spirit of Charles Sumner appeared. Though his body had died, he was “still living and full of the strength of my Just Cause!” The nation could

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\item[1279] Grandjean collection, 85-60; 21 October 1875.
\item[1280] The American Musical Directory, 1861 (New York: Thomas Hutchinson, 1861), 39.
\item[1282] Grandjean collection, 85-31; 5 April 1869.
\item[1283] Grandjean collection, 85-30; 8 July 1863.
\item[1284] Grandjean collection, 85-31; 18 April 1869.
\item[1286] Grandjean collection, 85-59; 14 January 1875.
\end{itemize}
rely on his efforts. Everyone would still hear him and heed his words, from those living “in the Castle” to those in “the log cabin.” He assured that the spirits continued to fight slavery in its physical and moral forms. On the heels of Sumner’s spirit came the spirit of O. J. Dunn, another local celebrity, who reported that he united “with others to comply with the Desires of good to see Peace and Harmony within the Land!” He instructed the group to not falter for “triumph is ours.” Closing out this sequence of politically oriented spirits was one identified as “L’Official” who echoed the previous messages. “Yes! Victory is ours!” Nothing—not the “Dagger, the Pistol, powder, shot canister”—could “prevent the success which will show Human Rights preserving all alone the line.”

To struggle and bring America in line with the Idea, and thus its true destiny, was noble and honorable work. A group message from three spirits, Cailloux, J.P. Lana, and Anguies Pédéslaux told the circle to “work with courage” because “the reward will be great for the noble children of Progress, who seek Truth.” Thus, “Forward march, humanitarian soldier(s).” With his spiritual wisdom, Cailloux affirmed that it was “beautiful to fight for the cause of justice.” Indeed, he was happy to “die for the holy cause of Liberty” and “break the terrible chains of human slavery.” Additionally, though a Catholic in life, he was pleased to find his “old companions seated at the Holy Table of Truth.” A spirit named P.B. reported that “Progress” could extinguish “certain political and social prejudices of the country.” The freedom of newspapers was one reason for this progress, and P.B. delighted in independent journalism’s rise in Louisiana. It helped destroy “the slave aristocracy of late memory” by providing a forum for speech. The whip, the prison, or the gallows could not spot the righteous from exposing the horrors of “fraternal suffering.”

The spirit of Henry Clay (“your friend”) believed that Spiritualism could help the country, and the world, reach its destiny. Spiritualism taught him the “love …due to the great human family.” The lessons learned by the Cercle Harmonique were not meant just for them “in particular, but for all!” In spirit, Clay believed that “Man must contribute to the great philosophical work of the Improvement of Humanity,” and that the circle’s involvement in

1287 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 14 January 1875. Message recorded in English from Sumner.
1288 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 14 January 1875. Message recorded in English from O.J. Dunn.
1289 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 14 January 1875. Message recorded in English from L’Official.
1290 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
1291 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
1292 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 7 June 1871.
1293 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 4 June 1871. Message was signed “Your friend, Henry Clay.”
Spiritualism allowed them to “develop accordingly.” Clay also spoke in support of black political advancement, likely in apology for owning slaves and constructing laws that sustained slavery, such as the Compromise of 1850 and its fugitive slave laws. The “elevation” of blacks and their “ascension to the greatest honorary posts in the country” could be prevented by no one. Clay supported the political progress of blacks in part because they have earned it by bringing “together the different parts of the Union with his blood which has been spilt in profusion.” Not only would African Americans rise politically and gain governmental positions, their “unquestionable rights will command authoritatively” and their “vote will weigh heavily in the seal of the destiny of the nation; and, believe me, it will be appreciated and solicited.” Their participation “in everything” would make the United States “greater than ever.” Though the polls were frequent sites of race violence in New Orleans and Louisiana, those sitting at Rey’s séance table could be certain of their “moral enfranchisement.” The guarantee of black rights was part of America’s fate.

Washington was lauded as the “Father of the Country,” and therefore, the political and social destiny of the country was wrapped up with his legacy. Washington also came to the circle as did his wife. A spirit named Washington celebrated the Union victory and the resulting hope for real racial justice. In a hectic séance segment where spirits came to the medium rapid-fire for brief messages, Washington came to celebrate the Confederate defeat and lament Lincoln’s assassination. “Lincoln, the martyr soldier of peace falls. The Sword of tyrant weighed in the balance, the Rebellion is dead.” Later in September of that year, Washington returned and shouted to the medium “Rejoice!” “Vive l'Égalité!” and “Vive la fraternité!” “Liberty,” the former president explained, “is not an empty word” and would triumph together with fraternity, equality, and justice. Though he was the country’s first president, Washington chose not to highlight his national pride. He claimed to be “not French nor Prussian, not African nor Italian, but men; brothers. I'm not American, I am of Humanity; Its flag is mine!” While his message did not highlight his status as the nation’s first president, the significance of his

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1294 Grandjean collection, 85-33; 4 June 1871.
1295 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 14 July 1870.
1298 A Mrs. Washington stated that “Ladies” would “play a great role in the Progress of humanity.” Grandjean collection, 85-51; 5 July 1873. Message recorded in English.
1299 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 2 June 1871.
1300 Grandjean collection, 85-34.
position would not be lost on the Afro-creole Spiritualists who received his message. Having the support not only of Lincoln but of Washington too further justified the work and message of the Cercle Harmonique, and provided the support and validation denied by many of their peers. Lamennais compared July 4th 1776 to the birth of Jesus, as both began new eras in humanity. He explained, “Jesus engraved the beneficent seal of his beautiful doctrine, in the heart of humanity; and which announced the Luminous Star that Washington made to shine, in order to direct Nations towards the haven of Safety—the Universal Republic.”

On George Washington’s birthday in 1869 (February 22), Thomas Jefferson appeared at the Cercle Harmonique for his only message. Washington’s birthday was to be celebrated as it marked the birth anniversary of a man with a God-given “mission to create a new nation and a new government” and “a new people” shaped by his “political ideas.” Though this new nation had not yet fulfilled its destiny. Rather it had a dark stain on its history: the “incomprehensible abuse” of the slave-holding class. Slave-owners treated slave girls as “toys” for their own pleasure. Members of this “aristocracy” did not realize that the harm they caused blacks and “poor whites” hurt themselves even more. However, with the defeat of the Confederacy, “a shining new era for the Young Republic” began. The “tree of domination and injustice” was defeated, and “the darkness” that had “invaded the Republic” was disappearing “before the bright light brought by Justice.” Finally, the “last sighs of the oligarchy of the South” were over, and now, the U.S. could be the world’s great republic. The country’s “new citizens” (freed people) would defend her “with more courage” and ensure that she fulfilled her promise “to shelter the oppressed and disinherit of the earth.”

As the violence of the post-war South increased and the political turmoil in Louisiana worsened and became part of the norm, the celebrity John Brown made increasingly frequent appearances at the séance table. In February 1872, he told the Cercle Harmonique, “I was battling against an evil … black brothers were attached to the plow, as beasts of burden.” But his fight ended in his death. “I paid, strangled with a rope … And I am free from your atrocities; Brown is luminous!” Having made clear his position and his support for political equality and referencing the relationship between the execution of his physical body and black freedom, he told the medium “this gibbet and this body of a hanged man, it is the Flag of Equality that you

1301 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 July 1871.
have hoisted yourselves to the top of the Mast of Liberty.” The message was part support for the circle, but also a rebuke to former Confederates and advocates of white supremacy. “The Republic is marching on,” Brown proclaimed, “with gigantic steps, towards the Union of the Races.” Violence will not have “the force to stop the progress of the Citizen.”

Through his message was to the Spiritualists he warned, “Brown and Lincoln are contemplating the work of God; and you, poor brothers, you are marching in the darkness of your hatred and shame.”

Shortly thereafter, during the same meeting, Lincoln arrived at the table also with a message directed at white proponents of racial violence; “Like me, thou hast killed him [Brown]; but the Idea has progressed. Beware! Thy hate blinds you; let thee be enlightened by the Idea! A man may disappear! But the Idea never stops advancing.”

Reconstruction Louisiana was a violent place which created martyrs for the Idea. To sacrifice oneself for egalitarian republicanism, for progress, and for liberty was something to be admired. Death was not so horrible because in death one left behind a violent, materialistic place and a raced body. After death, one joined the ranks of the true spiritual republic.

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1303 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.
1304 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872
“The spirit who is unhappy here, owes it solely to what condition in which he has placed his mind and soul … Your flesh covering is an obstruction, but, it does not constitute an insurmountable barrier, an infallible force which can overcome you incessantly and ceaselessly! Flesh is a garment—nothing more—and which naturally entails the consequences of its burden on you.” – A luminous brother to the Cercle Harmonique, 9 June 1874

New Orleans politics could indeed be a violent affair. In early 1875, William Weeks, a leader in the city’s Republican Party, died in a brutal fight with George E. Paris, another Republican, at the New Orleans Republican Club. Governor Kellogg appointed Paris as Harbor Master, and when he alleged “that Weeks had interfered to defeat him,” Weeks responded by calling him a “dirty liar.” This quickly devolved into a fistfight. Weeks pulled out a gun while Paris armed himself with a large knife, and by the end of the fight, Paris had stabbed Weeks multiple times. A few days following his death Weeks appeared before the Cercle Harmonique and instructed them to “forgive the unhappy men who sent me here suddenly,” as he was “bound to forgive George.” Both a victim of Paris’s knife and his own selfishness for power, Weeks recognized that there could be no harmony without forgiveness, and the Idea—the spirits’ promise of egalitarian republicanism—could not succeed in local politics without

1305 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872. Message from “Lunel, the devoted brother.”
1307 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 26 December 1871.
1308 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 9 June 1874.
1310 Grandjean collection, 85-59; 29 January 1875. Message recorded in English from William Weeks.
harmony. But besides lack of harmony and cooperation, the other major impediment to the Idea’s progress was violence.

Racial violence inspired by white supremacy was part of southern culture during Reconstruction. In addition to physical violence against non-white bodies, the emerging American nationalism also enacted ideological violence. While much of the U.S. rallied “around a newly robust white Christian identity” during Reconstruction, the spirits visiting the *Cercle Harmonique* offered a distinctly different religio-racial vision for the nation. Historians Joshua Paddison and Edward J. Blum have excavated how this “white republic,” to use Blum’s term, was remade after the war by powerful white Americans. This new national vision was gendered male, racially white, and protestant, and it was seen as forward progress after the Civil War. Those who did not fit this “robust” image were left behind. In contrast, the spirits and the *Cercle Harmonique* commented on the horror of racial violence, the importance of the black liberty, the value of the Idea’s martyrs, and the insignificance of skin color. While the martyrs visiting the Afro-creole Spiritualists also possessed a masculine boldness, like the reforged white republic, they ascribed to a different understanding of the nation’s greater good. As the previous chapter noted, the spirits encouraged listeners to fight for equal civil rights for all—regardless of race or nationality. This was a worthy cause, worthy even of death, because racial and nationality identification markers were not spiritually bound. As this chapter will explore, physical bodies possessed race, but spirits did not. Unlike other American Spiritualists who believed that a person’s race remained with them in the spiritual spheres, the *Cercle Harmonique*’s messages pointed to a race-less spiritual republic. Race and the

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1315 Blum’s narrative examines both the male and female elements of the white republic, though both his white male and female historical subjects ascribed to an imperial and domination-focused ideology.
1316 In *Ghosts of Futures Past*, Molly McGarry explores how Native American spirits’ ethnic identity as Native Americans was significant for the white mediums who contacted them. In chapter five of *Body and Soul*, Robert Cox examines how some American Spiritualists supported slavery as a means for harmony and for promoting the “sympathetic union in the nation” (153). Among some practitioners, the spirit of George Washington “spoke of
violence it caused on earth was a stark contrast to the “bright” spirits and harmony in the spirit world.

The Cercle Harmonique’s views on death, martyrdom, and the material body formed in response to the racial violence of New Orleans. Slavery, the Civil War, and the bloodshed of Reconstruction intimately made tangible the violence that could be done to black bodies. This chapter will first look at the violence and glory of martyrdom as taught by the spirits. Suffering for the Idea or for the sake of the black equality cause marked one as admirable, and the violence of the Civil War and of New Orleans’s Reconstruction era meant there were many local opportunities for martyrdom. The presence of martyrs made clear the danger of supporting the Idea. The next two sections focus on two particularly violent events in New Orleans’s post-Civil War history: the Mechanics’ Institute Riot on July 30, 1866 and the Battle of Liberty Place on September 14, 1874. The Mechanics’ Institute Riot created new local martyrs for the cause of black civil liberties, and the spirits of those martyrs were vocal on issues related to their politics and their death. The spirits also offered comfort and support in the wake of the violence of the Battle of Liberty Place and the temporary White League city rule that followed.

Next the chapter looks at death and the spirit’s exit from the material world. While a martyr’s death was the most glorious way to die, death was spiritual promotion for all since it marked the spirit’s exit from the corrupt and violent material world and its entrance into the spiritual spheres. As the spirits put it, the physical body was only a “material envelope” that temporarily “enmeshed” the spirit. The chapter concludes by looking specifically at the spirits’ rhetoric concerning the body and the spiritually insignificant but socially significant concept of race. The spirits explained that black bodies suffered physical and social violence for no reason other than the color of their temporary, material envelopes. However, race did not exist in the spiritual world. It was only a part of the material world inscribed on material bodies. Spirits contrasted their physical bodies with their spiritual existences and emphasized their “bright” and harmonious spirits.

immediate abolition and leveling equality, but also of social hierarchy and racial subordination” (137). If the spirits visiting this group of Spiritualists supported a racial hierarchy this suggests that racial difference remained in the spiritual world.
“To die for his brothers is walking towards the Spiritual Life”: Violence and Martyrdom

While the spirit of Union Captain André Cailloux was a celebrated martyr for the Cercle Harmonique, this did not mean that Afro-creoles should take up arms as part of their everyday struggle. On the whole, the spirits visiting the Cercle Harmonique discouraged violence, unless it was a last resort and for the greater good. For example, the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul celebrated the “sword” of Grant for delivering “terrible blows” to the “oligarchy.” However in most cases, violence was cowardly and destructive. While the detractors of justice used violence to hinder the progress of the Idea in the material world, Père Ambroise cautioned the Cercle Harmonique against violence. “The voice of the gun” was “the strident advocacy of brute force,” and it silenced “the voice of reason,” which was the advocate of “the rights of each.” With righteousness and justice on its side, the Idea did not need violence.

Violence had spiritual consequences for those who wrought it. Tormenters would face both their “crimes” and their “victims” warned Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr Victor Lacroix. He noted the murderer’s hypocrisy: “devoured” by “hatred and thirst for domination” he would bring death, a “moment” he “fears,” to his victims. These “wolves” tormented the “lambs” with no regard for the consequences of their actions. It would not be so in the spiritual spheres. Upon entering the spiritual world, one’s actions on earth became universal knowledge. While this alone could bring infamy, most spirits’ shame was self-inflicted during Retribution when they recognized their past offenses. A spirit named Louis Pépé cautioned the Cercle Harmonique to “not mess with the blood of your brothers,” because in the spiritual world, everyone recognized and confessed their “mistakes.” The spirit of a Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr warned that one may “kill the body, but the Spirit follows you.” While this might have been a cautionary threat of haunting, it was certainly a reference to the eternal nature of the spirit and temporary existence of the body.

The violence of the Civil War and Reconstruction era created martyrs for the cause. While death was not to be hurried, as this chapter will later explore, it was not to be feared either,
particularly for the martyr. Dying for a just cause, like the Idea, ensured a place of prestige in the spirit world. In her analysis of martyrs in the Victorian era, Maureen Moran concluded that martyrs were “heroic because they oppose the orthodoxy of their day … their self-obliteration becomes the method of self-assertion and self-definition.”\textsuperscript{1323} With death, a martyr solidified his/her identity as a radical and a dissenter. The martyrs referenced at the table of the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} were created in the wider network of nineteenth-century politics. They were both a new kind of “saint” and a hopeful symbol of oligarchy’s demise. Like the Jesuit martyrs of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the martyrs for the Idea died in a larger battle between “good” and “evil.” Though the Jesuits’ battle was more cosmic than the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}’s, the latter’s battle being less apocalyptic, both the Jesuits and the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} understood their fight to be for the triumph of good in the midst of corruption. The Jesuit martyr stories included references to demons and depravity in contrast to the martyr’s holiness, and the spirits visiting the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} championed the Idea while contesting the exploitation of oligarchies.\textsuperscript{1324} Additionally for the Jesuits and Afro-creole Spiritualists, the martyrs’ deaths were glorified because they died for a cause. For the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}, that cause was republican egalitarianism. During one meeting Victor Lacroix’s spirit offered to the group the “eloquent prayer of the martyrs,” which was simple: “God is Just. God and my rights.”\textsuperscript{1325}

Because Justice presided over the spirit world, the spirits guaranteed spiritual reward for martyrs. And so, those who died for their brothers or for the Idea knew their sacrifice was not in vain. For example, the Union crowned its dead because “the martyrs of the holy cause are rewarded.”\textsuperscript{1326} Another spirit whose body died during the siege at Port Hudson in 1863 explained that he woke up “glorious,” because, as a martyr, his “few mistakes” were forgiven.\textsuperscript{1327} The spirit


\textsuperscript{1325} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 16 April 1872. Message signed “Victor Lacroix.”

\textsuperscript{1326} Grandjean collection, 85-34; 20 November 1871. Message signed “St. Leger and others,” who Grandjean noted died at Port Hudson.

\textsuperscript{1327} Grandjean collection, 85-40; 24 April 1872. Message signed “Louis St. Martin.”

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of another who was murdered did not lament that his “body fell in the dust” because his soul was “elevated to Him and the Idea that led me.” Indeed, in the spirit world, “martyrs appear with a halo of glory” and resided in “sublime regions.” Leaving their bodies behind, the spirits of martyrs were at home in the spiritual spheres, for they were surrounded by spirits who also recognized the beauty of equality and brotherhood. The material body of Captain Cailloux “fought” and “succumbed” in the material world, but his soul, now in the spirit world, knew that “true freedom” always won. Cailloux encouraged those on earth to continue fighting because “God wants freedom.” To fall in the fight was not lamentable; rather, “victims” were necessary. He and other martyrs were the “first steps” to freedom and would lead others to the “temple of equality.” Though a martyr dies, “his work remains.” Only a person’s body could be murdered, not the spirit, and oppressors should know the spirits of those they tortured or killed were “waiting” for them. Those persecutors would feel “the shame” of “infamy” when they met the “beautiful and bright” spirits of martyrs because the martyr was a “shining Sun showing how the cruel hatred of those who want to oppress their brothers.”

Though the spirits emphasized and championed the spirit over material body, they still took note of the physical body—namely, the martyr’s blood. This was true of colonial Jesuit martyr stories too, as the tales of priestly heroism were often accompanied by gruesome descriptions of their torture. According to the spirit of Lunel, those still on earth should not weep for “the blood of the martyrs of the Idea.” Rather they should feel pity for those who persecuted and killed them. The killers’ “profound mistake” was that they “defiled their hands with the blood of innocents.” In some cases the martyrs’ blood became akin to a devotional symbol. While the martyr’s blood did not offer salvation like the blood of Jesus, it did propel

1329 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 4 November 1871. Message signed “The Unknown.”
1330 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 16 June 1872. Message signed “F. D.”
1331 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 8 July 1863.
1335 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872. Message from “Lunel, the devoted brother.”
humanity’s progress, and for that, it was dear.\textsuperscript{1337} According to the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, “the blood of martyrs nourishes and fortifies the hallowed ground of Liberty.”\textsuperscript{1338} Lamennais echoed this sentiment the following month stating that “the blood of martyrs does not stop the march of progress. On the contrary, the beautiful and true principle triumphs always, and scattered blood is the beneficent dew that feeds, that bears fruit.”\textsuperscript{1339} A group of “martyrs of the war,” likely the Civil War, assured the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} that the blood of martyrs ensured a beautiful and bountiful harvest.\textsuperscript{1340} Cailloux believed this too. As a martyr himself, he knew that his blood “fortifies the Land of Liberty.”\textsuperscript{1341} While the loss of a leader might be lamentable, that martyr’s blood could hasten the progress of the Idea.

Martyrs served as ideological role models for the \textit{Cercle Harmonique}.\textsuperscript{1342} Their courage was to be emulated, as well as their dedication to and confidence in the cause. Furthermore, those the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} saw as leaders of the cause of liberty were frequently cast as the Idea’s martyrs. As implied in the previous chapter, much of John Brown’s celebrity status centered on his place as a martyr in American history. According to the spirit of French priest Grégoire, Brown willingly “sacrificed” himself for the nation, and like Jesus (another “apostle of Liberty”) “died for principle.”\textsuperscript{1343} He was a martyr, “a worthy child of God,” and the “soldier martyr of a holy cause.”\textsuperscript{1344} A spirit identified as B. explained that it was Brown’s “Spirituality” that gave him “the courage of the martyr.” In contrast, “materialism” was the weapon of the Confederacy and of John Wilkes Booth.\textsuperscript{1345} Jesus explained that Brown’s martyrdom was inspired by “his courage and selflessness” and thus “honored humanity.”\textsuperscript{1346} Brown’s spirit recognized similar glory in Jesus’s actions. Those on the side of truth should not fear torture or
death because they will be rewarded in the spirit world. Martyrs deserved and would receive justice.

Brown was not alone as a celebrity martyr. He was joined, most notably, by Lincoln, whom the Cercle Harmonique celebrated as an assassinated icon of freedom. The spirit of Henri Grégoire described both Brown and Lincoln as victims of “political assassinations” and “martyrs.” They were linked martyrs as well since Brown “began the agitation that Lincoln soothed.” A martyr’s death—Lincoln’s, Brown’s, or a non-celebrity martyr—symbolized humanity’s forward movement. In this case Brown stirred to action the cause of freedom and Lincoln affirmed it with the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln’s spirit recognized his and Brown’s status as martyrs. Both he and the “noble martyr [Brown]” were “murdered,” but the Idea “progressed.” Rather than be blinded by hate, intolerance, and violence, Lincoln hoped that all would be enlightened by the Idea.

Many of the self-professed or referenced martyrs were political or military figures. In the nineteenth century, the American sphere of politics and war was primarily a male one. This is not to say that women did not engage the political sphere, but men were the main players in electoral politics, party conventions, such as the one at the Mechanics’ Institute in 1866, and law. Thus, martyrdom in Afro-creole Spiritualism was gendered. The martyrs who appeared at the table of the Cercle Harmonique ascribed to a kind of male boldness combined with submission to the greater good. These male martyrs were extolled for their words and their actions. In historian Allan Greer’s study of colonial saints he stated, “Crudely put, holy men were admired

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1348 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1349 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.
1350 Grandjean collection; 85-57; 4 September 1874.
1352 Though vastly different in many other ways, this idea of martyrdom holds some similarity with the notion of gendered martyrdom in the Ku Klux Klan. Kelly Baker’s recent book demonstrated how “the act of self-sacrifice became the penultimate representation of a ‘real’ man” for the KKK. Kelly J. Baker, Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK’s Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 102. Militarism was a key component to this image of masculine martyrs as well.
for what they said and did, holy women for what they were.” He elaborated on this gender division, stating that men pursued “more active roles” and made “their voices heard in the historical record” while women “were celebrated as virginal ‘treasures.’” Similar to the martyrs of New France studied by Greer, the martyrs who appeared at the table of the *Cercle Harmonique* or the spirits who referenced martyrs frequently focused on their actions and their personal characteristics that inspired them to action. According to Lunel, the courage of an “Apostle-martyr” came from “spiritual force” and mastery over the material. Courage was not a gendered trait, but the martyr’s courage frequently helped them endure violence and even torture. For example, the spirit of the slave Jean Pierre self-identified as a “poor martyr” because he died by his master’s whip. Others, particularly the martyrs of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, said they were killed “like dogs.”

The *Cercle Harmonique* valorized death and martyrdom but also seemed to avoid violence. The Spiritualists did not actively put themselves in situations where their martyrdom would be probable despite how often they were told of the glory of martyrdom. Rey served in the Civil War and was active in local politics, but he did not attend the convention at the Mechanics’ Institute in 1866 where black politicians and Union veterans were massacred. Though the spirits did not want people to actively seek out death, their celebratory descriptions of martyrdom were meant to encourage action. Thus, this is an occasion where the Spiritualists’ behavior does not seem to align with the spirits’ messages. The spirits’ glorious account of martyrdom may have been an outlet for the Afro-creoles’ anxieties about death. Death by racial violence was a part of *Cercle Harmonique* members’ everyday life, and the spirits’ declarations that a violent death meant a glorious spiritual life could provide comfort.

Additionally, progress’s martyrs were enlightened and far smarter than their oppressors. The “blind man” who killed a martyr believed that his actions would “hide the Light,” but the spirits of martyrs like Lincoln and Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyrs Telesphere Auguste and A. P. Dostie knew better. Even if those who championed humanity’s progress were murdered, the Idea could not die. Additionally, the power of a martyr did not die with his or her body.

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1353 Greer, “Colonial Saints,” 328.
1354 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872. Message from “Lunel, the devoted brother.”
1355 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 16 June 1872.
Martyrs of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot like Dostie, Auguste, and Victor Lacroix, could melt hate with “the power” of their “love.”

“The martyrs of July 30 surround the song of victory”: The Mechanics’ Institute Riot

The Mechanics’ Institute Riot of 1866 was one of the bloodiest days in the post-Civil War U.S., and the day’s martyrs came to Rey’s séance table. As detailed in the previous chapter, this particular convention at the Mechanics’ Institute was to discuss black suffrage. Led by the Radical Republican newspaper The Tribune, delegates associated with the Friends of Universal Suffrage began to meet in 1865 to discuss the lack of equality and black voting rights in the state’s 1864 Constitution. This led to more conventions, including an official one of the state’s legislatures in July of 1866 to discuss amending the state’s constitution to include black suffrage. “Union men,” the published invitations concluded, “come in your might and power.” Other local periodicals spoke less favorably of the proposed convention, calling the Friends of Universal Suffrage “the small minority of the fractional rump.” White Democrats met at Lafayette Square just before on July 24 to discuss their opposition to Republican plans.

The Mechanics’ Institute convention began its preliminary meeting the previous Friday evening (27) before an audience of antebellum gens de couleur libres and whites. Some of the white delegates in attendance, such as John Henderson, were outspoken supporters of black suffrage, but white men like Henderson were the exception rather than the rule. The call to reconvene the 1864 convention largely generated bitterness and anger among the local white population. Regardless, the meeting was well attended, and local blacks surrounded the building in hopes of hearing the conversations inside. An opening address at the convention declared: “As President Lincoln and the Union Army were unable to restore the Union until the colored men came to their aid, so the Union men of this State feel that they cannot maintain the

1361 New Orleans Daily Crescent, 27 July 1866.
principles of the union of the States without the aid of the patriotic colored men.”

This revolutionary spirit for racial equality however had unintended and unfortunate consequences.

As if foreshadowing the violence to come, records indicate that local white dentist A. P. Dostie (often referred to as Doctor Dostie) advised blacks to arrive armed on the thirtieth in order to protect themselves. According to an eyewitness unsympathetic to black suffrage, Dostie told those assembled: “The very stones of the streets of New Orleans cry for the blood of these traitors, these rebels. We shall have a meeting here on Monday, in this hall in the second story, come armed; we want no cowards; come armed; if any white man molest you, knock him down.” Others reported that while Dostie endorsed self-defense, his speech did not support violence. Whatever Dostie’s words, they were reported in the white press as inflammatory and extreme, and the report would have been taken as fact. The previous year white Democrats had nicknamed Dostie the “Robespierre of the Union party in New Orleans,” equating him with revolutionary rhetoric and violence. At the end of the meeting that Friday night, Dostie led a large torchlight procession of local blacks down to the Henry Clay Statue at Canal and St. Charles singing: “John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; But his soul is marching on.” The police confronted Dostie’s group and arrested ten of them. In the process, four policemen were wounded and two blacks were killed. Despite this, spirits and hopes were high if not a bit resigned before the convention’s official opening on Monday.

Monday July 30 began triumphant for local blacks but the day quickly turned sour. With drum and fife, blacks marched to the meeting and were joined by more on the way, but a parade of participators and observers of the convention were stopped by local whites just before noon. Those en route to the convention were shot upon, one black was arrested, but many paraders eventually made their way to the Mechanics’ Institute. Unfortunately, they were followed by a developing mob. Rioters began shooting into the building, and with the help of local white police and fireman, they forcefully entered the building and opened fire on the delegates. Some of those assembled for the convention tried to fight back, but they had few weapons among them. Many

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1366 The Daily Picayune, 16 April 1865.
1368 Hogue, Uncivil War, 39; and Times-Picayune, 28 July 1866.
were shot or clubbed. Some jumped out the windows to escape the mob’s gunfire. By the time federal troops arrived to stop the riot, approximately forty-four people had died and 200 were wounded. Most of the casualties were black. Only three white delegates and one white rioter died.1369

The white victims were Dostie, Henderson, and convention chaplain Reverend Horton. The mob shot Horton twice and fractured his skull with clubs. Dostie was clubbed, shot, stabbed, and dragged downstairs to street level by his hair. His body was taken to a local police station with one policeman sitting on his head during transport. He died the following week.1370 The damage done to black bodies was no less gruesome. The rioters mutilated and even looted the dead. Victor Lacroix, a wealthy Afro-creole and Union soldier, was found dead and disfigured, missing his watch and wallet. According to former Governor Michael Hahn’s testimony after the event: “The hall was all bloody and strewn with dead, and the chairs and railings were broken to pieces, and there were bullet-holes all over the walls. I staid, perhaps, a few seconds looking at it: The floor was covered with blood, and in walking down the stairs the blood splashed under the soles of my boots.”1371 Some of those fleeing the Mechanics’ Institute were pursued by white police officers and shot. A black man selling watermelons a few blocks away was seized and shot. A black carpenter walking home with his tools was attacked and struck in the back of the head with his own hatchet. The homes of local blacks were raided and their weapons were seized, and many of the city’s outspoken black population went into hiding.

A federal committee of U.S. Congress was convened after the riot, interviewed witnesses, and complied a gruesome report on the event. Early in the report, the committee declared:

It is in evidence that men who were in the all, terrified by the merciless attacks of the armed police, sought safety by jumping from the windows, a distance of twenty feet, to the ground, and as they jumped were shot by police or citizens. Some, disfigured by wounds, fought their way down stairs to the street, to be shot or beaten to death on the pavement. Colored persons, at distant points in the city, peaceably pursuing their lawful business, were attacked by the police, shot, and cruelly beaten. Men of character and position, some of whom were members and some spectators of the convention, escaped from the hall covered with wounds and blood, were preserved almost by miracle from death. Scores of colored citizens bear frightful scars more numerous than many soldiers of a dozen well-fought fields can show … men were shot while waving handkerchiefs in token of

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1369 Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 3; and Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition* 262.
surrender and submission; white and black with arms uplifted praying for life, were answered by shot and blow from knife and club; the bodies of some were 'pounded to a jelly;' a colored man was dragged from under a street-crossing, and killed in a blow; men concealed in outhouses and among piles of lumber were eagerly sought for and slaughtered or maimed without remorse; the dead bodies upon the street were violated by shot, kick, and stab; the face of a man ‘just breathing his last’ was gashed by a knife or razor in the hands of a woman …

The horror of that day was put to paper by the federal government and by the Cercle Harmonique. Though Rey and others may have desired to attend, they had remained home that day.

The spirits of those who died in the 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot were quite vocal about matters relating to the politics surrounding their deaths. Though their bodies were dead, the spirit of W. R. Meadows, a spirit identified as a Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr, stated, “progress cannot be stopped.” The “hour of reward” had “struck for the suffering blacks” and now the “paramount” human rights denied to some were available for all. Slavery hindered the “human rights” of slave-owners and slavery supporters too because slavery had spiritually enslaved them. Those who believed themselves to be “giants” now should recognize that they deserved punishment for their obstructions to “the law of Justice.” Though justice would be rendered to all, Meadows knew it would not come quickly or all at once. In a similar message, Victor Lacroix’s spirit came to his fellow Afro-creoles to assure them “nothing can obscure the road to Progress.” Lacroix identified the Mechanics’ Institute Riot as a “massacre of innocents.” The African American’s and Afro-creole’s “only crime was being black.” “Our blood flooded the streets of the Bloody City [New Orleans]. Your blood … that of the martyrs has not been shed in vain. Because of the tragedy Congress had responded to the atrocity.” It is worth noting that Lacoix had a personal connection to Rey’s family. François Lacroix, Victor’s father, was a member of the Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indignee along with Rey’s father, and François Lacroix may have been an occasional member

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1373 For example, mixed-race schools would come—“the sooner the better.” Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 November 1870. Message recorded in English.
1374 Grandjean collection, 85-31, 21 February 1869.
of the *Cercle Harmonique*. François was likely in attendance during the meetings featuring his martyred son’s spirit.

In October 1869, Dostie visited the table with one of the *Cercle Harmonique*’s rare English messages. Though he was killed like “a dog,” his murderers would pay for their deeds. To the circle, he gave a message for those who oppose black rights: “I am alive and I am awaiting your arrival in the Land of Justice and Equality! God is to be your judge, but Dostie will be the one who will ask him forgiveness for your great Sin.” Though viciously tortured on July 30, Dostie harbored no resentment for his attackers. Immediately following his message other victims of this infamous New Orleans riot came to the table including Lacroix who instructed them not “weep for your martyrs.” The spirit of Telesphere Auguste, another spirit identified as a Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr, also followed Dostie that day. He too was murdered “like a dog” for fighting “the monstrous tyranny that enslaved my brothers.” Now his spirit, like the spirits of all martyrs, continued to fight “relentlessly by all possible means that God puts at my disposal.” Lincoln and a group of “martyrs of the war” rounded out the day and explained that while a man could be killed, the Idea would not die. The martyrs of war described themselves and all martyrs as “champions of truth and justice.” The martyrs of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot had joined a larger group in the spiritual world, led by their beloved, martyred president.

A couple years later, the spirit of John Henderson visited the table with another of the rare English messages. He celebrated the Mechanics’ Institute Riot for “the 30th of July has been satisfied by our blood as the day of Independence of the Black men of Louisiana!” But he also lamented how he was “killed as a mad dog by a furious mob.” Though his death was gruesome, being a martyr for republican progress paved the way for a lovely afterlife in the spiritual world. Henderson was “satisfied to have been a victim of the cruelty of fanatical enemies of Human Rights; for it has given me Light, and I am going forever towards Eternal Progress!” In the spiritual world, he worked to “inspire many to faith against prejudices” and that these prejudices that he fought “will soon disappear as an evidences of the strength of the Power of Justice to all

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1375 Reference to Lacroix’s participation in Rey’s circle in Daggett, “Henry Louis Rey,” 14.
1376 Dostie was not a creole himself, which is perhaps why his messages tended to arrive and be recorded in English.
1380 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 25 October 1869.
mankind.” He and the rest of the “Invisible army will help you and will carry the Day, and Victory will be inscribed upon your Banner, oh! friends!” He promised that one day racial prejudices would no longer be a problem, but only if members of the *Cercle Harmonique*, along with other Spiritualists across the country, continued to struggle. A lofty goal to be sure, but certainly one Afro-creoles would see as worth pursuing.

Similar to martyr narratives in Catholicism, these spirits did not shy away from identifying the violence of their deaths. The spirits of multiple Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyrs referenced dying “like a dog,” and this phrasing pointed to the miserable nature of their deaths. The Mechanics’ Institute Riot was certainly horrific. However, the martyrs’ deaths were not shameful for the victims. Rather the spirit messages from the martyrs and other spirits cited the unfairness of their deaths and the cowardliness of their killers. To die for the Idea was to die a meaningful death, and the martyrs were courageous. Martyrs of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot hoped their deaths ushered in a new political age in the U.S. For example, the spirit of Reverend Horton identified the actions on July 30 as the “cruelty of human beings” and the consequence of “the miseries of the human heart … developed … to their fullest extent.” Though his death was not in vain, for “the blood of the friends of freedom is not to be lost to the sacred cause of Justice.” Since he “died in glory” his spirit now existed in glory too. He and “Dostie, Zanno, Lacroix, Auguste, and millions of spirits” were “watching like angels and good spirits do” over the *Cercle Harmonique*.

Not surprising, the Mechanics’ Institute Riot became a watershed date in the *Cercle Harmonique*’s and the spirits’ timeline of black civil rights. In a brief message a few years after the 1866 violence, Saint Augustine came to the circle to say “July Thirtieth? Fratricide. Fourth of July? Freedom.” Lacroix also identified July 30 as Louisiana’s 4th of July. The spirit of Dostie told the *Cercle Harmonique* to: “Remember the 30th of July! The blood of those who fell is a teaching and commands you to be united as a solid phalanx.” Those who died in the

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1381 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 18 November 1871.
1382 Theatricality and descriptions of a martyr’s gruesome death from witnesses have been significant in the history of Catholic martyrs. See Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 104–133.
1383 Grandjean collection, 85-38; 1 January 1872. Message recorded in English and signed “Horton.”
1384 Grandjean collection, 85-32.
1385 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870. Message signed “V. Lacroix.”
1386 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 9 December 1871. Message recorded in English.
violence sometimes appeared on the anniversaries of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot. On the ninth anniversary, T. Auguste encouraged the Afro-creole Spiritualists to continue “forward” with “glory” for their “progress.” He also reminded them that he and other victims of the violence had forgiven their murderers. Not only Auguste, other martyred spirits spoke of forgiveness from time to time. On another occasion, Lacroix recognized that “for many” he was known as a “Victim of the 30th of July 1866.” As a spirit, though, he arose “with happiness” not only because of his martyr status but also because he forgave all on earth, even those responsible for his death. The spirit of Dostie appeared on the eleventh anniversary of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot to proclaim that he was “not dead!” Though his body had been “mutilated,” his spirit was still “battling [those] against human rights!” He also reminded the Cercle Harmonique that those “who have acted like wolves” will have to face the consequences of their actions in the spiritual world. Though he does not refer to Retribution or self-punishment through shame, he warned that all “will be called to account for your wrong deeds!”

In addition to its victims, other spirits noted the anniversary of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot. A couple of days before the four year anniversary, a spirit identified as DuBuys drew attention to that “terrible massacre.” The slaughter was the work of “proud and miserable assassins” who wanted “to prevent the conquest of political rights” and deny blacks the right to vote. But because of their “cruel fanaticism” and their “innocent blood-soaked hands,” the march of rights progressed “faster.” Similar to the references to the martyrs’ blood in the previous section, DuBuys believed that the blood of martyrs sped the Idea’s advancement. It is unclear if martyrs’ blood was powerful because it was supernatural or if its power derived from its ability to garner support. Nothing drew attention to a political issue quite like a massacre. Either way, the Cercle Harmonique should commend the martyrs for their sacrifice. According to the spirit of Auguste, the death of the Mechanic’s Institute Riot martyrs marked the proclamation of rights. If the Mechanics’ Institute Riot was a landmark on the Idea’s timeline, then the death of martyrs helped move that timeline forward. When a martyr died, the spirit of Lacroix told the

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1387 However there were July 30th’s that recorded no message from either a martyr nor a message that recognized the date.
1388 Grandjean collection, 85-37; 30 July 1875.
1389 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 1 December 1873.
1390 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 30 July 1877. Message recorded in English and signed “A. Dostie.”
1392 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870.
Cercle Harmonique, “the disinherited of the earth rise.” Immediately after Lacroix delivered this one line message, Dostie appeared to say, “We died, but principles never, nor the soul!” The continuation of Dostie’s and other martyrs’ principles marked humanity’s progress.

Support from the spiritual world would help guide those on earth, particularly as the goal of full equality seemed more and more unattainable. For example, Saint Vincent de Paul assured the Cercle Harmonique that the “martyrs of July 30, 1866” looked out for the group and were “fighting for your spiritualist victories.” That 1866 summer day might have been the city’s bloodiest day, but it was indicative of larger political and social tension that would last through the nineteenth century. Political and social tension was on the rise in and around New Orleans leading up to the contentious election of 1872, and this made it an auspicious time for the spirits of 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyrs to communicate with the Spiritualists. On the sixth anniversary of the violence, the spirits of Lacroix, Dostie, Henderson, and “others” informed the circle that their blood, the blood of martyrs, fortified the earth and humanity’s progress.

Referring to the white slave-owning patriarchs and leaders of the old South as members of an oligarchy, they reassured them that “the idea is a blazing torch which is there, luminous!” This promise would be tested just a few years later in 1874 when the White League took over New Orleans.

“Your rights acquired, proclaimed, and maintained”: The Battle of Liberty Place

All throughout 1874, street violence by white Democrats supporting McEnery against Republicans and blacks was common. Most often, various white supremacy groups—such as the KKK, the White League, and the Regulators—would search the city for mixed-race schools to threaten and harass or find black New Orleanians to bully and beat. In early September shortly before what became known was the Battle of Liberty Place, the spirit of Abraham Lincoln grieved over “the shedding of the blood belonging to the unfortunate ones who have lost their lives under the blows of the monstrous oligarchy who wanted and still wants to crush out the germ of civil rights from the dark skinned children.” Lincoln offered a message of hope for

1393 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870.
1394 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 4 April 1870. Message recorded in English.
1395 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 22 September 1874.
1396 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 30 July 1872.
1397 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874.
the righteous on the ladder of spiritual progress and a warning for those who blocked its path. He advised the circle,

this blood shed will have served to create the elect army who are recruited here by the progress of beings out of the body, and they will be your guides who will show you the way toward which they will lead you, as the one which will cleanse you from your defilement and infamies! There will be triumph for the martyrs, and there will be shame for the oppressors!1399

In addition to the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, the spirits directly responded to other events in the immediate environment of volatile Reconstruction New Orleans. The clearest example of this was spirit communiques from Saint Vincent de Paul and others after the Battle of Liberty Place between the New Orleans Metropolitan Police and members of the White League. The previous chapter briefly introduced the White League’s development in New Orleans, an organization very critical of black civil liberties and Republican Governor Kellogg’s administration. In the days leading up to and during the Battle of Liberty Place and the ensuing White League rule, their pro-white agenda clearly manifested in their words and actions. The spirits advising the Cercle Harmonique noted the event and encouraged the Afro-creoles to remain confident in their rights and progress.

Late on Saturday September 12, 1874, the steamer Mississippi arrived to the port of New Orleans, and its cargo included guns and ammunition for the city’s White League members. In anticipation that the Republican mayor would seize their weapons, the White League prepared for a confrontation. During the preceding weeks, White Leaguers’ weapons already had been taken by local Metropolitan Police through raids sanctioned by the local Republican administration. White Leaguer J. Dickson Bruns wrote a proclamation published in the Sunday Daily Picayune lamenting and decrying the violation of the White Leaguers’ Second Amendment Rights. Similar to rhetoric used by the Afro-creole periodicals L’Union and Tribune, Bruns’s piece asserted, “Declare that you are, of right out to be, and mean to be free.”1400 The White League also mass distributed a handbill throughout downtown to announce a meeting featuring prominent city leaders that Monday morning at eleven at the Henry Clay statue. Former Confederates and White League leaders, such as the lead defense attorney for the Colfax Massacre perpetrators, delivered fiery speeches and had the crowd chanting “Hang Kellogg!” at

1399 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 4 September 1874.
1400 Daily Picayune, 13 September 1874.
one point.  With a large crowd turning into a mob on their side, leaders of the White League began to make their way towards the guns aboard the docked Mississippi. In the meantime other White League leaders strategically placed barricades throughout downtown.

When word of this mass meeting reached the Metropolitan Police, forces were dispatched to the Clay statue where the White League now assembled with upwards of 3000 armed men. Crossfire between the two groups devolved into disorganized charges for ground and more bloodshed. White League snipers took out the Metropolitan officers operating howitzers, and within an hour the White League outnumbered and overpowered the racially integrated police and Louisiana State Militia units. Sixteen White Leaguers died, along with thirteen mortally wounded or dead policemen. Six bystanders were also dead or dying, one young man mortally wounded while crossing the street. The following morning, the Metropolitan Police and militia surrendered the police station and state arsenal to the White League. The result was the creation of a temporary government controlled by Democrats and Confederate veterans until federal forces restored Republican rule. McEnery was out of town during the melee and so former Confederate Colonel D.B. Penn was installed as acting governor. Penn asked those assembled to go to church and thank God for their victory and ask for his continued favor and protection. After seizing Kellogg’s office, one White Leaguer wrote a note for his wife late on the night of September 14: “I never have seen so complete an uprising of the people and their faces indicated the reaction a change of government must produce. The citizen troops were received with a complete ovation.”

Members of the Cercle Harmonique were publically quiet during the upheaval, and the spirits did not advocate fighting back. On September 15, the spirit of a devoted sister warned that hatred only “begets … bad feelings” and “evil.” During the Democrats’ occupation of the city that followed, Saint Vincent de Paul comforted the circle, telling them not to worry “about the Political unrest taking place right now.” They should “stand firm” in their “liberal views,” and, if anything, further dedicate themselves to “Rights for all.” In short, all republicans in the city should remain confident throughout the White League’s rule because the spirits would take care

Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 171.

Quoted in Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 175.
Grandjean collection, 85-57; 15 September 1874. Message from “A devoted sister.”
of them. Despite Paul’s urging for hope and confidence, no doubt Rey was concerned for his brother Octave who served in the Metropolitan Police.

Governor Kellogg remained safe during the violence on the 14th and the resulting White League rule. Under the protection of a small band of federal troops, he was barricaded at the U.S. Custom House. The White League’s actions immediately angered President Grant, who swore to go to New Orleans and “clean them out” himself if necessary. He sent General William H. Emory to head the federal troops tasked with restoring order to the city. Emory arrived the evening of September 16 on the same train as McEnery who was making his way to New Orleans to join Penn and the White League. Knowing they would be overpowered, McEnery and Penn surrendered to federal troops the following day and Kellogg was restored as rightful governor four days after what local white New Orleanians dubbed the Battle of Liberty Place.

Saint Vincent de Paul offered the group encouragement more than once in the wake of the violence. On the 15th he lamented, “the blood shed yesterday demonstrates how much hatred there is in the hearts of those men who seek to enslave their brothers.” But he assured them “you will see the civil rights of each one proclaimed and they will be maintained!” He and other spirits would take care of the righteous dead, the “martyrs.” Those still in the material fight on earth should realize that this was only “the passing of some accumulated clouds, but which will let appear the clear sky of the Future!” He recognized that his words were “written at the time of the apparent triumph of the oligarchy,” but he classified them differently. His message was meant to reiterate the “certainty that you will realize the full conquest of your proclaimed and maintained rights.” He encouraged them to preserve their courage for while “you have been the victims, the unfortunate ones slaughtered by barbarian brothers who were blindfolded by their hatred, envy, and the prostitutions in their thought.” The Afro-creole Cercle Harmonique should “fear nothing: the sun of realization is rising beautiful and magnificent … Oh, my children! Forward! And wait with expectancy for what your guides promise to you.” Later that week, the spirit of Paul Lacroix (perhaps related to Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyr Victor Lacroix) echoed the saint’s sentiment and used similar language too. “You will be victorious,” he told them, “for you, your rights acquired, proclaimed, and maintained, notwithstanding any contrary appearance.”

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1405 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 16 September 1874.
1406 Quoted in Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 176.
1407 For more details on the Battle of Liberty Place, see Nystrom, New Orleans After the Civil War, 170–176; and Hogue, Uncivil War, 131–143.
1408 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 15 September 1874.
current “turbulence of the oligarchy [the inheritors of old southern power] will cause its fall which will be apparent to everyone” including “its own hideous and repulsive face!” Though confident, his message also recognized the current uncertainty and fear. Lacroix assured them “we are watching over you! Have confidence in us.”

Following Paul’s message on the 15th was the spirit of Alexander Lanna who sought to comfort and embolden the Cercle Harmonique. “Do not weep for those who were violently released from the material [world/envelope] in the discharge of Duty,” Lanna stated. He then differentiated between the spirits of those who died for the Idea and the spirits of oppressors. While the spirit of “the martyr of a just and sacred cause” and the spirit of one blinded by “hatred and anger” held different views in the material world, everyone in the spiritual world affirmed “natural Rights.” God intended all to have equal rights, though the oligarchies on earth would try to deny civil rights to blacks. Any spirit, even of a slave-owner or a former French monarch, could not argue against human rights. It was distressing that political rights were not universally established in the material world, but the spirits had hopes for its future even in the face of racial violence.

The day following the firefight between the White League and the Metropolitan Police and state militia was a spiritually active one. The spirit of C. W. Culbertson, a 2nd Lieutenant in the Confederate Louisiana Infantry, also appeared to report that he was crying and moaning during his period of Retribution. His spirit suffered since he had “ignored these great and noble thoughts of Freedom and Equality for all beings” and instead wanted to protect the ideas of “the proud oligarchy of race.” This was an auspicious time for a Confederate spirit to grieve for his past ideology and actions. Now surrounded by the wisdom of the spirit world he recognized the universal truth of rights and equality, just as all white supremacists would after their deaths. Following Culbertson, a spirit identified as André appeared to remind the Cercle Harmonique that spirits might arrive to the spiritual world “imbued with their Prejudice,” but he promised that these spirits encounter Truth and then “work for the good.”

In the days that followed the Battle of Liberty Place and the restoration of the Republican administration, the spirits tried to reassure Rey and others. A “devoted brother” reminded them

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1409 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874.
1410 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 15 September 1874.
1411 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 15 September 1874.
1412 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 15 September 1874. Message from André, a brother.
that they must remain focused on “the solidarity of beings” as their guiding “principle.” It was quite possible that some members of the Cercle Harmonique or their family wanted revenge on the White League because this spirit discouraged them from retaliating against another “because he oppressed you.” All needed to “respect the laws” and let the legal system rectify injustice, rather than take matters into their own hands. “The law must be equal for all,” the brother lectured, because all are equal before God.1413 Indeed, violence was not the answer according to the spirits; rather, peace should be the modus operandi for change.1414

As order was restored in New Orleans following the Battle of Liberty Place, the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul reflected on martyrs, violence, the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, and the recent unrest. He assured them that a “large amount of spirits” rallied around them, including “martyrs” who had “fallen to the fatal bullet of the Infamous Oligarchy.” Despite the apparent power the oligarchy wielded, members of the Cercle Harmonique were not to worry because “the Sun of Liberty” shined “brightly” on them with the promise of “redemption.” Even if they felt despondent, they were not hated “outcasts” or “pariahs on this arid land.” Though a “Blood Pact” had been “signed to destroy you” and a “hungry pack of carnage” came for them on “14 September 1874,” their civil rights were “proclaimed and maintained.” The Cercle Harmonique also had the “hearts of martyrs” on their side. The spirit of the Afro-creoles’ favorite saint then referenced “the massacre of July 30, 1866” as a step in their “redemption,” which was connected to the proclamation of their “Civil Rights” on “September 14, 1874.” Though these days were soaked in violence, the spirits assured them that “the Table will not be stained with blood.” Rather Paul and others “are with you, we know your pain, your expectations, and we talk and proclaim your arrival with dignity recognizing your Civil Rights.”1415 This repeated reference to their rights—proclaimed and maintained—offered hope in the wake of such instability and violence.

Unlike the Mechanics’ Institute Riot, the Battle of Liberty Place was not an event referred to multiple times over the Cercle Harmonique’s final years. While the city’s Republican Party more generally and black Republicans specifically bounced back from the horror of the Mechanics’ Institute Riot and achieved a certain amount of political power, the White League’s

1413 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874.
1414 For example, Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869. “Do you wish for another war? Say so. No, you will answer; we want peace! You want peace but you do not want to work for it.” Message from Paul Bertus.
1415 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874.
takeover of the city in 1874 revealed how vulnerable they were. The Republican government only regained local power with the help of federal troops. White supremacy’s and the Democratic Party’s “Redemption” of the state loomed on the horizon. However, the spirits’ immediate response to the unrest following the events of mid-September 1874, like the presence of Mechanics’ Institute Riot martyrs and references to that 1866 day, reflected the Cercle Harmonique’s wider interest in politics, republicanism, and progress.

“Freed from matter”: Death and the Material

Due to the violence of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, death was a highly visible part of New Orleans life. Though to die a martyr was the most glorious and respectable way to die, death was a fortunate release for all. “To die,” according to the spirit of John Brown, was “to be born.” Leaving the “material envelope” behind, the spirit underwent a “glorious transformation.” One should not fear death, because material life was a “painful struggle” and the arrival of the soul to the spiritual world was a “glorious birth.” After death and now “free of materialism” spirits could finally be truly “free.” Death began a soul’s purification and was freedom for the spirit. Additionally, death was also the great leveler; rich or poor, no one could escape it. Though death was a reward, it should not be forced or sought after. Suicide was “an insult to God.” One who committed suicide had “failed in his mission.” And for him, “death is a terrible awakening.” Those who committed suicide not only set a poor example, they were “unhappy and miserable” in the spiritual world. In stark contrast to the martyr who died for a cause, the self-inflicted victim of suicide left earth with no glory.

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1417 Grandjean collection, 85-34; 19 (or 7) November 1871.
1421 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 June 1870. Message from B. Rey.
1422 The spirit of Auguste explained that from the “the martyr of the Idea” to the supporters of “fanatical despotism,” the spirits of all ended up in the same place—the spiritual spheres. Grandjean collection, 85-45; 29 September 1872.
1426 Grandjean collection, 85-43; 2 August 1872. Message from Alfred Morant, accompanied by J. St. Hubert and others.
The spirits told the Cercle Harmonique to “not fear death” but also not to “hurry” it. Everyone needed to remain on earth for the “natural period” of their “existence in the flesh.”\textsuperscript{1427} Important lessons could be learned on earth, and there was work to be done. Even still, it was vital to recognize how fleeting one’s existence on earth was. The “material body” was the property of earth, while the “soul” belonged to “the spirit Land.”\textsuperscript{1428} One’s existence in the spiritual spheres was eternal. The material world and the material envelope—the body—were both temporary, and release from both meant the progress of a spirit. The material life was “so short,” and once one was separated from the material envelope, the spirit would be rewarded or punished according to how much s/he did for the “noble mission.”\textsuperscript{1429}

The spiritual spheres and the spiritual body could be compared with the material world. The material existence was “short-lived” while the spiritual life was “eternal.”\textsuperscript{1430} In the material world, there were “tears” while in the spiritual world, there was “unspeakable joy.”\textsuperscript{1431} In the material world there was “corruption” and “conflict,” but the world of the spirits was governed by “sharing.”\textsuperscript{1432} The spiritual aspect of humanity was much stronger than the material.\textsuperscript{1433} Truly, when compared to the spiritual, the “material” had “little value.”\textsuperscript{1434} The soul’s immaterial immortality was the reward for struggling through the material world and being burdened by a material body.\textsuperscript{1435} The spirit was akin to divinity, while the body was mortal, human, tainted. The body held the spirit back, and so, to be “separated from matter” was “good fortune.”\textsuperscript{1436} When spirits left their material envelope behind, they severed all ties to the material and lost all interest in silly “material goods.”\textsuperscript{1437} The things of earth were “ephemeral” and only served “foolish vanity.”\textsuperscript{1438} The spirit of New Orleans white creole, plantation owner, namesake of a creole

\textsuperscript{1427} Grandjean collection, 85-57; 16 September 1874. Message from “A Guide.”
\textsuperscript{1428} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 4 March 18725. Message recorded in English from J.
\textsuperscript{1429} Grandjean collection, 85-42; 22 June 1872.
\textsuperscript{1430} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 1 April 1873. Message from Moni. Another spirit called the body was only “temporary.” Grandjean collection, 85-52; 27 October 1873. Message from Jules Sylvestre. Pauline Hermann, “a mother!,” Lunel described the material life as “only a short passage.” Grandjean collection, 85-33; 13 June 1871.
\textsuperscript{1431} Grandjean collection, 85-49; 4 February 1873. Message from Louisa Leblanc.
\textsuperscript{1432} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 6 March 1869. Message from “your father and your mother.” Rey was the medium for the message.
\textsuperscript{1433} Grandjean collection, 85-43; 23 July 1872. Message from Volney.
\textsuperscript{1434} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 18 July 1873. Message from Rosalie Dubuclet.
\textsuperscript{1435} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 6 July 1870. Message from Luc.
\textsuperscript{1436} Grandjean collection, 85-31; 7 March 1869. Message from Père Antoine.
\textsuperscript{1438} Grandjean collection, 85-50; 11 March 1873. Message from Alfred Valdes.
neighborhood, and former Louisiana state senator Bernard de Marigny described the “Grandeurs” of earth as simply “mirages,” while the splendors of the spiritual world were eternal.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-39; 12 March 1872. Message from Bernard de Marigny.} Being a former plantation owner and wealthy man, his disregard for rich material goods from beyond the grave was telling.

The spirit was “enmeshed in matter”—both in terms of body and environment—while on earth.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-31; 13 February 1869. Message from Ambroise.} A result of materialism was “the corruption of the [material] envelope,” and this corruption was remedied completely when the spirit left the material world behind.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-60; 4 June 1875. Message from “A bright brother.”} The material aspect of a person would disappear but the mind and spirit remained and would “emerge triumphant” after leaving the body.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-31; 12 March 1869. Message from Moni.} “Freed from matter,” the spirit entered a higher realm.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-32. Message from Mesmer.} Thus spirits told the \textit{Cercle Harmonique} to take comfort in the forthcoming “destruction” of the material.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-43; 14 July 1872. Message from Augustin Carrière.} Those rid of the material envelope should consider themselves “blessed.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-33; 17 November 1873. Message from V. de Paule.} In leaving the material behind, a spirit could move forward, and the realization that death was “Regeneration” caused “great happiness.”\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-54; 8 April 1874. Message from Joseph Labeau.} As such, the spirits told them not to fear death since as “regeneration,” death was really a new life.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-52; 17 November 1873. Message from Alfred Domingon.}

The material world and the material envelope also distracted humanity from its ultimate goal. Materialism was the “great” motivator that caused “bloody struggles” on earth.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-33; 17 November 1873. Message from V. de Paule.} Warfare was “the expression of Materialism,” while Reason was the manifestation of “Good” and of the Spiritualist.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-33; 17 November 1873. Message signed “Boniface.”} Not just war, the material world also encouraged material desire. When a person’s mind was focused on the trappings of the material envelope or clothes or “luxuries of all kinds,” her/his spirituality was neglected.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-38; 30 December 1871. Message from “A devoted brother.”} A soul was filled “with spiritual beauties” once it was free of earth’s materialism.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-38; 10 February 1873. Message from V. de Paul.} The pleasures of the material world were as fleeting “as dust” easily lost to the wind. Real pleasure came from mastering passion.\footnote{Grandjean collection, 85-35; 21 December 1871. Message from Jesus.} A spirit identified as V. Wiltz admitted that he “ignored my Route when in the material envelope” and instead “lived...
under the pressure of my passions.” Since his death, he discovered the “truth” and was now “happy.” Another spirit confessed that he had “his hours of folly, of weakness, of cowardice” while in his “envelope.” He reported that he was far happier now after he “elevated himself by his soul” and hoped listeners would learn from his mistakes.

Indeed, death was simply a new kind of spiritual awakening. It was silly to weep before a dead body, and only the ignorant would “mourn” the passing of “the material envelope.” People should not cry for the corpse left behind, because what people on earth called death was really “the release of the Spirit.” A person obtained “spiritual glory” when s/he left the “coarse envelope” behind. One should “look forward” to “the release of the Spirit” from the material body.

Rey’s father reported that he did not fully understand that his body was merely an envelope until immediately following his death. Once a spirit entered the spiritual world, it was as if a veil contingent on the material body disappeared and the spirit could then more clearly see the error of materialism. Additionally, while the spirit moved on, death was final for the body. Once a spirit left the material envelope, the body would not be reanimated. Scary stories of ghosts and “promenading” skeletons were absurd and silly.

Some spirits directly commented on their bodies and in the process highlighted the distinction between spirit and body. “Rest” was necessary for material bodies because, as Mesmer taught, matter unfortunately had “mandatory requirements.” Spiritual bodies, in contrast, could constantly undergo progress. Another spirit reported that after death, she was surprised to look upon her own body. It was in this moment she realized all her suffering on earth was connected to her body and not to her spirit. The spirit of A. H. Jackson knew that his body was “in a ditch, surrounded by water” and “covered with earth,” but he rejoiced for his

1453 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 20 November 1873.
1454 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 17 November 1873. Message from J. Soniat.
1459 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 28 November 1858.
1462 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 11 August 1872.
1464 Grandjean collection, 85-30; 8 December 1858. Message from C. B. Grandjean guessed that this was Charlotte Brown.
soul was “abroad, free forever from evil and temptations.”\textsuperscript{1465} The spirit of an “ex-student in medicine” chastised those who believed the “corpse” a spirit left behind for “decomposition” was the only legacy of one’s “Intelligence.”\textsuperscript{1466} A person’s value lay in the eternal spirit.

A corpse had little significance because the body was only a material envelope, only matter the spirit manipulated and maneuvered.\textsuperscript{1467} Brothers and sisters who had escaped their bodies gained access to full knowledge, and through Spiritualism, those who had “got rid of the flesh” advanced “the Knowledge of Truth” and brought that knowledge to those seated at the séance table.\textsuperscript{1468} While the body was only a “material envelope … the soul is the soul.”\textsuperscript{1469} A variety of spirits repeated the description of the body as a material envelope, from deceased family members to anonymous brothers to Abraham Lincoln. Confucius defined the “death of the material envelope” as a spirit’s “disappearance into the Great Whole.”\textsuperscript{1470} Similarly, the spirit of Vincent de Paul stated that the “liberation of the flesh” allowed the spirit to join the “Superior Existence” of the world of the spirits.\textsuperscript{1471} The material envelope presented “defects” that limited the “development of the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{1472} A spirit would find “more happiness” once “freed from the material envelope and from materialism.”\textsuperscript{1473} Leaving behind the material envelope would be a “relief” from the “pain” caused by enslavement to “excess of passion.”\textsuperscript{1474} Volney told his brothers that they would be happy to leave their material envelopes because once they left the material behind, they could truly “be on the chariot of Progress.”\textsuperscript{1475}

In addition to an envelope, another spirit likened the body to a “dress,” and once a spirit was devoid of it, the spirit could take on a “wonderful and eternal body.”\textsuperscript{1476} In either case, envelope or dress, the body was a temporary covering for an eternal spirit. After leaving the material world, the spirit underwent glorious “transformations” showing the spirit’s magnificence and beauty.\textsuperscript{1477} Valmour explained that after he left his material envelope, he felt

\textsuperscript{1465} Grandjean collection, 85-39; 24 March 1872. Message recorded in English.
\textsuperscript{1466} Grandjean collection, 85-50; 5 March 1873. Message from T. Valdes, ex-student in Medicine.
\textsuperscript{1467} Grandjean collection, 85-52; 22 November 1873. Message from a devoted brother.
\textsuperscript{1468} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 22 March 1873. Message from “Robert, a delegate.”
\textsuperscript{1469} Grandjean collection, 85-36; 1 April 1872. Message from Desitha.
\textsuperscript{1470} Grandjean collection, 85-41; 6 May 1872.
\textsuperscript{1471} Grandjean collection, 85-59; 1 January 1875. Message from V. de Paul.
\textsuperscript{1472} Grandjean collection, 85-57; 4 September 1874. Message from Paul Bertus.
\textsuperscript{1473} Grandjean collection, 85-52; 28 November 1873. Message from Anais Syndreybranchet [spelling?].
\textsuperscript{1474} Grandjean collection, 85-53; 24 January 1874. Message from Charles Lévègue.
\textsuperscript{1475} Grandjean collection, 85-43; 25 July 1872. Each of these Volney messages were separate, individual messages.
\textsuperscript{1476} Grandjean collection, 85-54; 3 April 1874. Message from “A devoted sister.”
\textsuperscript{1477} Grandjean collection, 85-56; 8 June 1874. Message from “A bright brother.”
“happy and relieved.” While his body was “dead,” his spirit was “bright.”\textsuperscript{1478} The spirit was better off without a body since matter bound and limited the spirit. This becomes more significant when considering how the physical body was also a raced body. Bright spirits like Valmour’s and Rey’s were encased temporarily in black bodies in the material world.

\textbf{“Black in the land of America”: Violence towards Raced Bodies}\textsuperscript{1479}

For the spirits inhabiting black bodies, acceptance and legitimation would come in the spiritual world. “There would be no justice” if the spirit did not exist beyond the material body and the material world.\textsuperscript{1480} Claire Pollard, the spirit of Petit’s mother, noted that “the duty of the Spiritualist is charity towards all.” Her son and all other Spiritualists should keep their souls clean of “any antagonistic or intolerant thought” because their goal was to establish “a chain of love and peace.”\textsuperscript{1481} For the Cercle Harmonique, charity meant devotion to the downtrodden and justice meant real equality. Together charity and justice would bring redemption for all souls, and charity and justice could bring redemption for black New Orleanians. These concepts remained in the spiritual world too, as seen in the martyr’s forgiveness of his killer. According to John Brown, the penance-like period of Retribution “would show the Black luminous, all swords broken, Charity as companion, in the middle of his oasis, with arms open, saying: ‘Come, my brothers, to melt your hatred before my love and my forgiveness!’”\textsuperscript{1482}

Both blacks and whites would be luminous in the spirit world because in spirit form and before God, there were only “equal beings.” One spirit noted that if Jesus had possessed a “black envelope” and was “capped with wooly or crisped hair,” he would have been “disowned by many.” His race should not matter, but the spirits knew that in the material world, it would have. Those currently on earth had no idea what race Jesus was—whether he was “black, yellow, or white.” And his race was nothing compared to the charitable nature of his soul.\textsuperscript{1483} Race marked one’s material body but not one’s spirit or soul. After death when one left the material body, the spirit became race-less. The spirit guides noted that race meant little in the spiritual spheres and should therefore hold little significance on earth. Antoine Dubuclet, likely the spirit of Petit’s

\textsuperscript{1478} Grandjean collection, 85-51; 20 July 1873.
\textsuperscript{1479} Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870. Message signed “A black man, once.”
\textsuperscript{1480} Grandjean collection, 85-60; 4 June 1875. Message from “A bright brother.”
\textsuperscript{1481} Grandjean collection, 85-40; 1 April 1872.
\textsuperscript{1482} Grandjean collection, 85-38; 8 February 1872.
\textsuperscript{1483} Grandjean collection, 85-40; 24 April 1872. Message from Annette Bouligny.
grandfather, explained that though his hair “looked black” on earth, his spirit manifested as his “real Being” in the spiritual world. Confucius affirmed that there were “no different races” because all were “children of the same father.” The “great lesson” of death and the end of the “material envelope” was equality and solidarity. The “flags” of nations should be replaced with “the universal flag” of humanity. Lamennais agreed and explained that Spiritualism disregarded categories like “race” or “nationality.”

Most of the Cercle Harmonique’s Spiritualist contemporaries believed that a person’s race remained with them in the spiritual spheres, while the Cercle Harmonique’s messages pointed to a race-less spiritual world. Additionally, some of those other Spiritualists believed in white racial superiority too. The contemporary world of New Orleans society and politics, and American politics, illuminate why the Afro-creole Spiritualists believed that when a spirit left its material, raced body it also left its racial identity behind. One’s worth resided in his/her spirit not body. By looking forward to a spiritual world without race, the Cercle Harmonique revealed their views on racial identities—inconsequential to life. They believed that, in theory, a person’s race had no real meaning, and this idea was formed in a city where race increasingly often defined and dictated one’s status and experiences.

Though the spirits deemed race irrelevant, they were aware of the racial realities of the material world and the consequence of raced bodies. Martyr of 1866 Mechanics’ Institute Riot, Victor Lacroix lamented how “the black son of the Republic” had “being pushed to work” in the fields like “a flock of sheep.” Those in power had decided to refuse their black brothers their full rights and force them into “human bondage,” but their “only crime was being black.” Despite the dehumanizing aspect of slavery, African Americans had fought back as “valiantly” as “lions.” Fortunately, with emancipation a “new route” had emerged in American political and social culture that was granting “all the rights” to these “new citizens.” The United States should provide “all the privileges” of a republic to each of “its children.” For his part, Lacroix and

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1484 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 6 May 1870.
1485 Grandjean collection, 85-41; 6 May 1872.
1486 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 6 June 1872.
1487 For example, Swedenborgian physician William Henry Holcombe labeled the indigenous populations of Native Americans and Africans as the most primitive races. Above them in the racial hierarchy were Asians, with whites on the top. Robert Cox, Body and Soul, 153–154. Also see, C. Ferguson, “Eugenics and the afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and the spiritualist purification of the race,” Journal of Victorian Culture, 12.1 (2007): 64–85.
1488 Grandjean collection, 85-31; 21 February 1869.
others, as this chapter explored, were willing to give their lives and become martyrs for the guarantee of equal and full civil rights, a cause worthy of their deaths.

Though American culture and society might deny racial equality, the spirits noted with joy the possibility of political egalitarianism and interracial solidarity. The spirit of plantation owner Bernard de Marigny was happy to report that “the Black is on the rise!”—quite the exclamation for a former slave owner. He was not alone in his hopes for racial harmony. A spirit identified as “a black man, once” recited a poem to the Cercle Harmonique medium on a particularly busy day in October 1870. Though he was “Black in the land of America,” his “hands” were “pure in the spirit-land.” He implored the “White men of America” to put race aside and “Join the sons of Africa” in “love.” He and other spirits endorsed racial unity as a step towards true republicanism and the progress of the Idea. The value of a Spiritualist came from her/his dedication to the Idea and justice, “despite the burden of the flesh he wears.” The world of the spirits was void of races and thus free of racism. The spirits and the Cercle Harmonique hoped the material world would come to imitate the spirit world’s racial void and thus racial solidarity.

The spirit of a slave named Jean Pierre explained that he was someone’s “property” and forced to call that someone “my master” because he possessed a “black envelope.” Pierre was

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1490 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 26 October 1870. Message recorded in English. Full poem repeated here:
Black in the land of America,
But my hands pure in the spirit-land.
I look with joy that from Africa
No Americans, to spirit-land.
Are sent.
I went
Forgiving
And Helping.
For I was right
From darkness, light
I received.
Never deceived
Are men in the spirit-land.
Oh, Come and join our band
White men of America
Join the sons of Africa.
In love we live
In love forgive
White men
Black men.
harshly whipped and suffered. He “dreamed of hatred and vengeance” towards his master. Though angry during his life as a slave, he noted that upon his death—a death caused by the whip—all his “hatred” remained with his physical body. He saw “another myself,” one “bright and shiny.” Pierre was free and no longer known as “the slave Jean Pierre” but was now called “the Sublime One.” He forgave the slave-owner who whipped him to death. He knew that he would one day see the spirit of his former owner and promised that when the slave-owner saw the “noble and sublime” spirit of his slave, he would feel shame. Pierre’s message was followed by a spirit who lamented the crude manner in which Pierre’s body had been laid to rest. His “funeral oration” was the complaint of his owner: “What is this body? Is this the dog negro? Bury it now!” Comparing black bodies with animals, this attitude was the “hideous face” of New Orleans before the Civil War. But Pierre had escaped the racism of the material world when he left his black envelope behind.

Indeed, it seems that the races of material bodies no longer existed in the spirit world. The color of spirits was typically described as “bright.” The former slave Jean Pierre noted that while his material envelope was “black,” his new self was “bright and shiny.” Lamennais explained that spirits possessed “luminous” bodies. The soul gave off a “radiant glow” in the spiritual world and this glow illustrated one’s “true value.” The transformation a spirit underwent after death happened according to “the state of his soul” rather than according to physical appearances or social status. And unlike the color of one’s skin, one could be held accountable for the “state of his soul.” The soul appeared in the spiritual world “relative” to its spiritual “beauty or ugliness” in the material world. A spirit would manifest “more beautiful” in the higher spheres due to the spirit’s dedication to “love,” “charity,” and “abnegation.” This was especially true for a martyr. The victim of a violent death arose “a

1492 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 16 June 1872.
1493 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 16 June 1872. Message from F.D.
1494 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 18 June 1872. Message from Raoul Daunoy. Also see the message from Valmou referenced at the end of the previous section; Grandjean collection, 85-51; 20 July 1873.
1495 Grandjean collection, 85-42; 16 June 1872.
1496 Grandjean collection, 85-44; 25 August 1872.
1497 Grandjean collection, 85-56; 8 June 1874. Message from “a bright brother.” The spirit X also reported that one’s existence in the spiritual world was based upon the “state” of one’s soul. Grandjean collection, 85-59; 2 March 1875.
1499 Grandjean collection, 85-57; 20 September 1874.
1500 Grandjean collection, 85-52; 5 December 1873. Message from a brother.
Spirit bright and luminous, grand, and with sublime beauties and glories.”¹⁵⁰¹ In death, black bodies were replaced with bright spirits.

According to the Cercle Harmonique’s séance records, this emphasis on a spirit’s light and brightness meant that the spiritual world was without race. As spirit guides Confucius and Lamennais taught, race truly meant nothing. However, light or brightness would seem to visually register as white. Thus, while the spirits described a race-less spirit world, it might be more accurate to identify the spiritual spheres as a world without a race hierarchy. Instead of different races, everyone appeared white. If this lightness was akin visually to whiteness, this points to the overwhelming power of whiteness to present itself as neutral. Historians of American religion have recently scrutinized how whiteness naturalizes itself in American religion and the study of American religious history.¹⁵⁰² However, whether the spirit world was without race as the spirits said or only void of a racial hierarchy, either case stressed the necessity of racial equality and racial solidarity.

Though racial difference did not exist in the spirit world, some spirits felt it was necessary to “manifest … according to their previous earthly state.” Spirits would appear different after undergoing spiritual “changes and transformations.”¹⁵⁰³ In the spiritual spheres, spirits would find their friends “transformed,” “sublime,” and part of an “immortal phalanx.”¹⁵⁰⁴ One reason why some spirits chose to appear similarly to their material envelopes was for the sake of human understanding. Out of concern that their former friends might not recognize or understand their spiritual forms, many spirits looked similar to their material appearances when communicating with mediums. Communication between spirits and the living occasionally could be better facilitated if the spirit manifested akin to his or her living self. The spirits could see “beyond what you are allowed to glimpse.”¹⁵⁰⁵ This was true in terms of human progress but also physical sight. Spirits could see in ways those on earth still limited by their physical bodies could not.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Grandjean collection, 85-54; 8 April 1874. Message from Louis Fazende.
Intermixed with the messages specifically for the *Cercle Harmonique* were messages for humanity more broadly, and occasionally these universal messages related to racial issues in America. Spirits like John Brown rebuked former Confederate sympathizers, and while those types of messages may have been in part for the circle (members did volunteer in the Confederate army and Rey’s own father owned slaves), more than likely the communiques were meant for society on a larger scale. A message from R. Preaux Jr., concluded with the instructions, “Extend your hand to your black brother; do not reject him. He belongs to God the same as you. He is entitled to the same rights as you. Render justice to him, and fear that future one which shall show to you your hatred and egotism.” Preaux instructed all to offer justice to blacks because they had been denied it socially, culturally, and systematically by the legal system.

Identity markers like race and nationality were superficial and no hierarchy should be based upon them. Slave owners and their allies would later feel shame for “their mistakes and their cruel oppressions against unfortunate beings whose only crime was the color of their skin.” Supporters of slavery and segregation were shamed by the spirits for how they “divided men.” The spirit of W. R. Meadows proclaimed that he and others would “unite them [all men] in a brotherhood, under a flag which knows not nationality, no race; but men, brothers!” Humanity needed to shed itself of racial prejudice and tied to this was nationalism and national exceptionalism. The responsibilities of the *Cercle Harmonique*, though residing in New Orleans, went far beyond national borders. A Native American spirit named Poloah (whose appearance followed spirits named Pocahontas, Pacoha, and Piloho) was happy to report that the “peace pipe and tomahawk”—mementos “of barbarism”—had been “buried forever.” While this message contained a negative view of Native American religions, it also expressed a universalizing sentiment. Poloah and other Native American spirits were now part of the enlightened “spiritual brotherhood” that included themselves, the “Chinese,” and the “Hottentots.” “Brothers” of all communities worked together under the “Grand Chief,” meaning God. On another occasion, a spirit simply identified as *L’Inconnu* (The Unknown) taught that once Americans extracted all prejudices from their hearts, they would realize that they were

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1506 Grandjean collection, 85-36; 19 July 1872.
1508 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 9 November 1870. Message recorded in English.
1509 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 27 December 1871.

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“citizens of the world, and not American citizens.” They should consider “all children of the Globe” to be their brothers. Nationality, along with race, lost its significance in the spirit world. And so, white supremacists should feel shame for their views. However this was not the reality of post-war New Orleans. The power of the White League, the chaos and fear of the Battle of Liberty Place, the temporary White League rule that followed was a sizeable nail in the Cercle Harmonique’s coffin.

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1510 Grandjean collection, 85-35; 12 December 1871.
CONCLUSION

“I TELL YOU, MY CHILDREN, IT DEPENDS ON YOU”: BEYOND THE CERCLE HARMONIQUE

“You will be happy and I am always there for you.” – Your friend, Mesmer” to the Cercle Harmonique, 10 December 1865

“Patience for your brothers! Courage for yourself. Continuing to work. Forward to us.” – Saint Vincent de Paule to the Cercle Harmonique, 18 November 1877

“Dear Petit, Dear Assitha My heart is filled with good feelings for you. I am the one who loves you above all.” – Mme. Dubuclet to François “Petit” Dubuclet and his daughter Assitha Dubuclet, 2 December 1906

At the beginning of 1876, it seems Rey was alone in his practice. Other members of the Cercle Harmonique had either died or simply stopped attending the séances. Why some members stopped attending the meetings is not always clear in the records, but perhaps some lost their faith in Spiritualism. The progress of the Idea was slow, particularly when compared to the resurgence of white supremacy and the Democrats’ “Redemption” of the South. The spirit of Cercle Harmonique member Jules Mallet apologized for his later indifference and acknowledged that Lavigne and Rey were right to keep the practice going. Mallet’s spirit admitted he had begun to doubt the effectiveness and truth of the practice of Spiritualism, but in death, he recognized his uncertainties were wrong. Emilien Planchard continued to practice with Rey until November 1875 when he lost his job and possibly left town. It is unclear when and why Petit left the practice. In early December 1875, Rey lost his home in a great fire further disrupting what remained of the circle’s practice. Rey’s home insurance had expired two days before the fire, and the fire spread quickly, leaving him little time to rescue his “precious objects.” René Grandjean does not report in his notes if Rey sacrificed other belongings in order to save his séance record.

1512 Grandjean collection 85-31; 10 December 1865. Message signed Your friend, Mesmer.”
1513 Grandjean collection, 85-63; 18 November 1877.
1515 Grandjean collection, 85-37; 8 October 1875.
1516 Grandjean collection, 85-37; Grandjean notes.
books or if they had been in the care of a friend, such as Petit or Lavigne, at the time of the fire.\textsuperscript{1517}

For the final two years of the séance records (1876 and 1877), Rey recorded the spirit messages he received on sheets of loose-leaf paper later bound together. Though alone, the spirits of “many” told him to not be “discouraged.”\textsuperscript{1518} He owed it to his family and to all his brothers to continue to “carry” the light “with him as the one who can enlighten all!”\textsuperscript{1519} Other spirits chimed in too and affirmed that Rey must “hold your position” of “fraternal respect.”\textsuperscript{1520} Rey’s devoted spiritual advisor Saint Vincent de Paul remained with him through the end. Though “the midst” of “worldly pain,” Paul comforted Rey and reminded him of his many guides “who are constantly supporting and guiding you to your happiness.”\textsuperscript{1521} In Rey’s final recorded message on November 24, 1877, a spirit identified simply as “Friend!” encouraged him: “Ah! Today, how your heart is full of hope, confidence, and assurance of ultimate success. Remember that we are with you, always.”\textsuperscript{1522} Rey joined his spiritual friends and guides on April 19, 1894 at the age of sixty-three.\textsuperscript{1523} If Rey continued to believe in Spiritualism beyond November 1877 is unknown, but it is no small coincidence that Rey’s séance books end in 1877, as Republican Reconstruction in the South came to a close. It seems likely that Rey lost his faith in racial harmony in the material world. The spirits’ Idea did not deliver on its republican promise.

From 1791, the year the Haitian Revolution began, to Reconstruction’s end in 1877, the lives of religious Afro-creoles in New Orleans changed greatly. Afro-creoles saw both a rise and then fall in their civil and legal rights. Starting as a French colony, the Francophone base to New Orleans society, politics, culture, and religion was diluted over the years but never dissipated. The free black population pulled much cultural influence from the French and developing creole culture, and this included religion. Unlike most urban centers in the early American colonies and early republic, Catholicism was New Orleans’s dominant religion, and Afro-creoles had Catholic backgrounds. French and Spanish Catholicism preached a message of universal salvation, welcomed into the church both slave and free, and baptized children of all races and from

\textsuperscript{1517} Grandjean collection, 85-61; Grandjean notes.  
\textsuperscript{1518} Grandjean collection, 85-63; 12 November 1877. Message from “Beaucoup” (Many).  
\textsuperscript{1519} Grandjean collection, 85-63; 21 November 1877. Message from “Friend!”  
\textsuperscript{1520} Grandjean collection, 85-63; 20 November 1877. Message from “Rite.”  
\textsuperscript{1521} Grandjean collection, 85-63; 6 November 1877.  
\textsuperscript{1522} Grandjean collection, 85-63.  
\textsuperscript{1523} Grandjean collection, 85-63; Grandjean notes following final message.
interracial, unwed relationships. The city’s connections to the black Atlantic and Caribbean worlds added to this Catholic influence, and the city developed a strong black Catholic population. Not only Catholicism, but revolutionary ideas also crossed the Atlantic and found a receptive audience among the Afro-creoles on the island of Saint Domingue and in New Orleans.

During the years of Spanish colonial rule, the regulations on slave manumissions were more lax and the population of the gens de couleur libres grew. Further buttressing the gens de couleur libres through the early years of American rule was the arrival and influence of refugees from Saint Domingue. But with American rule also came strict regulations on the free black population. It was harder to become “free” and that freedom increasingly was limited. City ordinances reduced the number of business and career possibilities for free blacks and made it more difficult for additional free blacks to enter Louisiana. Afro-creoles also watched their opportunities to create social clubs and benevolent societies dwindle. Though they may have owned a significant amount of New Orleans’s wealth, particularly among the creole populations, their social visibility became increasingly blurred and hidden. Even if an Afro-creole was not a slave, the harsh reality of slavery and the racial hierarchy it supported shaped one’s everyday life.

In tandem with these limitations on the gens de couleur libres was the increasing religious and ethnic diversity. The developing beliefs and practices of Voudou offered some of the city’s Afro-creoles, both slave and free, a religious alternative to the churches of their white owners or neighbors. Additionally the influx of Italian and German immigrants along with the arrivals from further north expanded the city’s cultural milieu far beyond its earlier French, Spanish, and African influences. Mesmerism and Spiritualism gained popularity among the city’s creole populations, too. The French Catholic dominance of the city remained but was gradually punctured with pockets of other ethnic Catholics and protestants. At the same time, authority in the parishes shifted from a trustee system to a more centralized hierarchy. Along with this growth in clerical authority was a clear increase in female participation in the Catholic Church. A group of Afro-creole women formed a new religious order to push back against assumptions of their race’s spiritual and social inferiority. Racial, social, and cultural friction was on the rise as Louisiana seceded and the Civil War reached New Orleans.

Once the Union took New Orleans, the Afro-creoles’ status began to climb again. Afro-creoles served in the army and hoped that in return for their service they would be awarded civil
and legal rights. This would be a hard fight, and it was not until after one of the country’s bloodiest post-war days, July 30, 1866, that black suffrage was federally guaranteed. Radical Reconstruction was a hopeful time for the country’s black population, but the Mechanics’ Institute Riot proved an auspicious beginning. New Orleans Afro-creoles and African Americans voted and served in government positions from local city committees to lieutenant governor. This hopeful time was both temporary and not without political tension or corruption within the Republican Party. Additionally, though the Confederates were defeated, white supremacy was not. Negative reports in the local newspapers denigrated black politics and demonized black alternative religious culture. The creation of the White League in New Orleans demonstrated the continued strength of old white southern power. Another bloody day followed in September 1874 when the White League overtook the city and for a brief time removed the Republican government from power. While the federal government restored Republican rule, it was clear that the political and social climate of the city, state, and region were changing. The end of Radical Reconstruction and the Democrats’ “Redemption” of Louisiana came as no surprise a few years after the Battle of Liberty Place.

It was during the promising but temporary period between the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction that the Cercle Harmonique held their most productive and active meetings. Spiritualism provided the Afro-creoles at the séance table with a new medium to express their political, social, spiritual, and racial goals. They looked to and listened to the spiritual world, governed by egalitarian republicanism. The Cercle Harmonique hoped that humanity would progress as the spirits foretold and promised. Harmony would replace social friction, charity would replace materialism, pure spiritual leaders would replace corrupt priests, republicanism would replace despotism, egalitarianism would replace oligarchic rule, “bright” spirits would replace material bodies, and death would release the spirit from the corrupt material world into the higher spiritual spheres. Ideally, political and religious authority was to be equal among the people, and if any system should dictate authority, it should be a meritocracy of charity. The French revolutionary motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” was revitalized by the Cercle Harmonique to convey the group’s political ideology. Communication with the spirits provided the Afro-creoles a forum to express their political protests, identify injustice, and celebrate republicanism. The world of the spirits was the ultimate republic, and the Cercle Harmonique hoped it could be imitated on earth.
Spiritualism mediated the political, social, and religious turbulence of the late antebellum period through Reconstruction. The rich literary culture of Afro-creole men was sublimated into the *Cercle Harmonique*’s practice, as their Spiritualism emphasized similar concerns as published in *Les Cenelles*, *L’Union*, and the *New Orleans Tribune*. The participants in the Afro-creole literary and educational circles often appeared in the practice of the *Cercle Harmonique*, either as spirits or seated members. The presence of Catholic spirits and Catholic ideas allowed them to remain connected to their Afro-creole religious heritage, while the spirit’s criticisms’ of priestly power enabled the *Cercle Harmonique* to separate themselves from the institutional church’s support of the Confederacy and corrupted ideas of institutional religious authority.

Spirits of the French Revolution and Haitian Revolution echoed their worldly agendas in their spirit messages, decrying despotism, slavery, inequality, and oligarchy. The “spirit of 93” unleashed the Idea in the world, and the Afro-creole members of the *Cercle Harmonique* wanted egalitarian republicanism to mold the post-Civil War U.S. The world of the spirits was harsh towards slavery and the Confederacy and identified white supremacy as the new oligarchy in need of defeat. America’s destiny was to fulfill the republican promise it made to all its people. The spirits recognized that this would not be an easy process and celebrated martyrdom for the cause of black liberty. Martyrs for the Idea appeared to the Afro-creole Spiritualists and reaffirmed the meaning of their deaths. Death itself was not be feared since it meant release from a material and raced body. After death one could enlist in the real spiritual republic.

A close examination of the Afro-creoles’ séance records provides a clearer depiction of their lives. The Afro-creole men (and few women) seated at the table engaged in a dynamic religious culture that connected them to a deep spiritual genealogy. Members of the *Cercle Harmonique* did not abandon religion when they left the Catholic Church. Resonances of Catholicism reverberated through the practice, but it was also a significant religious change from a church they saw as disconnected from the people. And the people were who mattered. The political nature of so many of the messages illustrates the *Cercle Harmonique*’s democratic and republican hopes for the immediate world. The spirits spoke directly to their needs and their situation—a population who first watched their little social prestige fade and then feel great hope for a truly harmonious world. Members of the *Cercle Harmonique* worked out their frustrations and voiced their hopes through Spiritualism as their social status wavered and their political rights developed in fits and starts. They looked forward to humanity’s progress and felt
vindicated by the spirits’ promise that it was on the horizon. But members of the Cercle Harmonique seemed to slowly lose their faith in racial harmony and shrunk to one medium by the close of Reconstruction.

While the end of the Cercle Harmonique meant the end of Afro-creole Spiritualism, it did not mark the end of the Afro-creole cause for equal civil liberties or the end of alternative black religious cultures in New Orleans. First developing in the 1880s black Mardi Gras Indians are a masking tradition involving intricate hand-sewn suits complete with beads, feathers, and sequins—the result of months of hard work and a tradition passed down through the tribe. Keeping rhythm on hand-held instruments, the music and chants of early Mardi Gras Indian practices came from the drum beats of Voudou. Maskers dressed as Indian warriors, and the frequent violence in early Mardi Gras Indian history indicate that this practice mediated the city’s changing racial dynamics and solidification of white supremacy. Early on, black Mardi Gras Indians often fought against rival tribes and whites they encountered during their processions, and these interactions could lead to violent dance-offs, bloody fights, and even death. The religiosity of black Mardi Gras Indian performances was reminiscent of other Caribbean locations of the African diaspora where embodied performance was stressed. Dance movements, drum beats, and powerful chants are integral parts of Voudou ceremonies and Mardi Gras Indian performances. In addition to Voudou’s influence on dance and music, it is possible that these performances emerged as a new kind of spirit possession, in which the spirits of Indian and Afro-maroon warriors inhabited the bodies of black Mardi Gras Indians.

Other than the word Spiritualist, there seems to be no direct connection between the Afro-creole Spiritualists of the Cercle Harmonique and the Spiritualist churches that first became popular in early twentieth-century New Orleans. The Spiritualist churches better resemble

Voudou than nineteenth-century Spiritualism. However, the Spiritualist church leaders like Mother Leafy Anderson also looked to spirit guides. Additionally, both Spiritualist churches and Afro-creole Spiritualism drew from local Catholic culture, though in vastly different modes. The most significant commonality between the two traditions was their location outside normative New Orleans religion. Like Mardi Gras Indian traditions and Voudou, both Spiritualism and the Spiritual churches offered black New Orleanians religious alternatives that lay outside white institutional churches and institutional religious authority. For all these practitioners, power was drawn directly from various spirit worlds and presented an alternative to the power of white supremacy and its politicians.

The close of Rey’s last séance book was not the conclusion of spiritually potent black alternative religious cultures, nor did it mark the end what historian Caryn Cossé Bell termed the Afro-creole “protest tradition.” The 1890s development and action of the Comite des Citoyens, or Citizens’ Committee, reflected the continued Afro-creole dissent from the black/white racial binary. This organization protested the Jim Crow laws in the city and orchestrated Homer Plessy’s 1892 train ride, prompting the 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson and its famous “separate but equal” ruling. The Comite des Citoyens also criticized the opening of New Orleans’s first black “national” parish, St. Katherine’s, in the 1890s. The organization’s official newspapers, The Crusader and The Daily Crusader, identified St. Katherine’s as a “Jim Crow parish” and called for an official protest of the parish. The Crusader printed their official resolution calling all black Catholics to boycott the new parish, and they connected their objection to St. Katherine’s to the protest against the separate train car laws. Despite the Comite des Citoyens’ inability to stop Jim Crow laws or St. Katherine’s

1528 Bell, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana.
1530 “National” or ethnic parishes were built and opened with frequency in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These parishes focused on a specific ethnic or immigrant population rather than diocesan area.
1531 Once The Crusader learned of St. Katherine’s it became a centerpiece in their local dissent. When asked for their stance on the proposed parish, the editors quoted one of their previous articles: “If the Catholic authorities desire to lose their communicants among the colored population of this city the surest and most direct way to it is the organization of separate church edifices.” The Crusader, “A Separate Church;” in Folder 5, Clippings from The Crusader, Rousseve Papers.
1532 “Citizens’ Committee,” The Crusader, 14 February 1895; folder 14, Rousseve Papers. Also see, Clark, “Creoles, Catholics, and Color Lines.”
dedication mass and opening, their outspoken protests show the continuation of Afro-creole dissent from the racial binary dominating the material world.

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Postscript

Though November 24, 1877 marks Rey’s final entry in his séance books, it is not the spirit message with the latest date. René Grandjean, the son-in-law of François “Petit” Dubuclet, was a French émigré who arrived in New Orleans in 1911 by way of Cuba and Haiti. Grandjean married Assitha Dubuclet in 1913 and later became the caretaker of Rey’s séance books. In addition to his role as Cercle Harmonique archivist, he was a Spiritualist and an amateur historian who shared notes with Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes. Based on his conversations with Petit, Grandjean made historical notes in the pages of the register books and wrote brief reflections on the content in the margins. Of Rey’s passing, Grandjean wrote: “Rey … the dedicated worker, the noble Apostle went to the world of spirits to find the apostles that had preceded him and with whom he had communicated their instructions to all.”

Grandjean also copied eight short spirit messages from 1906 in the end pages of one register book. These messages date before Grandjean’s arrival in New Orleans and were addressed to “François,” “Petit,” “Dear child,” “My daughter,” and “Assitha.” With the exception of one message from “V. de Paule,” the other messages were signed “Mme. Dubuclet” or “sa mère” (your mother). From where Grandjean copied these message is unknown, but it indicates that even if Petit left Rey’s circle in the final years, he did not cease believing in Spiritualism and even introduced his daughter Assitha to the practice. The messages are ones of love, family, and encouragement. They reveal the spirit of a loving mother and wife who continued to look after her family, but these final messages lack the political potency of the Cercle Harmonique. Gone were the days of Voltaire, O.J. Dunn, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, Robespierre, and A.P. Dostie. The political nature of the earlier messages depended on those seated at the table.

1533 Grandjean collection, 85-63; Grandjean notes.
1534 Grandjean collection, 85-32; 30 August 1906; 29 October 1906; 11 November 1906; and 2 December 1906. Messages recorded in French.
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