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Building the Creole Empire:
Architecture, Urbanism, and Social Space
in the French Colonial World, 1659-1810

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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During the first centuries of French colonial expansion, the imperial towns of Saint-Louis (Senegal), New Orleans (Louisiana), and Port Louis (on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius) witnessed the emergence of buildings that combined European floor plans with patterns of design and site usage that were commonplace throughout the European and the non-European world. These components included wrap-around porches, detached kitchens, and a lack of interior hallways. Architectural historians describe buildings with these features as creole dwellings. These structures often existed within creole towns, which consisted of hundreds of such domiciles. Previous scholars have claimed these structures and their urban surroundings developed as West African and European building traditions coalesced in Atlantic societies. Yet, as Port Louis

demonstrates, towns in the Indian Ocean harbored stylistically identical dwellings despite different population dynamics. This historical reality provokes two pertinent questions: Why did creole buildings and towns in the early West African, American, and Indian Ocean colonies of France exhibit profound non-European stylistic similarities? Who and what were responsible for these architectural and urban continuities?

This dissertation is the first comparative study to answer both of these questions. It contends that Saint-Louis, Port Louis, and New Orleans each hold the potential to transform our understanding of creole architecture and urbanism, in particular, and of creole cultures, at large. In engaging the interconnections between the built environments of these places, I demonstrate that worldwide systems of social control and economic exchange—rather than West African and European mixture—facilitated architectural creolization. The three chapters of my dissertation trace the history of creole architecture and urbanism from 1659, when France founded Saint-Louis, to the end of French rule of Mauritius in 1810. This project elucidates the social mechanisms that rendered creole architecture and urbanism some of the most economically relevant building traditions of the modern colonial world.

The dissertation of Dwight Anthony Carey is approved.

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Introduction: Architecture, Urbanism, and Social Space in the French Colonial World, 1659-1810

Beginning in the seventeenth century, France embarked upon a colonial mission that drew a large number of territories into a global empire. This first attempt at colonization rendered France central to the movement of goods and peoples across the early modern world. Yet, at the onset of French colonialism, the empire built to solidify French authority slowly began to display a decisively non-European character. Across colonial realms, non-European architectural styles emerged within urban centers that abutted rural areas where creole and indigenous populations wielded considerable control. This situation greatly affected the architectural and urban composition of early settlements. Far from satellites that reflected European ideals on the imperial frontier, French colonial towns grew to become landscapes with very little in common with metropolitan France. In incubating buildings and social spaces that were distinct from those of the metropole, the French colonial enclaves of the seventeenth and eighteenth century shared an architectural and urban typology that attested to the link between diverse societies on opposite sides of the world.

Vast oceanic expanses rendered these places accessible to the sailors, merchants, slaves, and administrators who dared to cross the waters that led to these distant enclaves. As colonization wore on, these localities became the first places to harbor the structures, urban plans, and settlement patterns that would typify French imperial built environments for centuries to come.¹ Taking these realities into account, this dissertation engages the

¹ For a discussion of the significance of eighteenth-century New Orleans, see: Shannon Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). For an examination of the built environments of French colonial Senegambia, see: Mark Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island: The*

three most discursively significant towns of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century French colonial empire: Port Louis, Mauritius; Saint-Louis, Senegal; and New Orleans, Louisiana. I trace the architectural development of these enclaves from 1659 when France founded Saint-Louis to the end of French rule of Mauritius in 1810. More precisely, I contend that each of these places can influence our understanding of the divergences and interconnections between the creole built environments of the old French empire. In making this claim, I reveal that Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans stand out because, unlike the sedentary, agricultural societies of French colonial Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion, the places addressed in this dissertation were strategically important enclaves built for the sole purpose of bolstering French ambitions concerning global trade. Together, these towns harbored free and enslaved populations from across the imperial world. I suggest that this tendency engendered the continuities between the buildings and urban spaces of these disparate locales.

* * *

Thus far, architectural historians have largely ignored the relationships between the built environments of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean towns of the first French colonial empire, or the imperial formation engendered during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In doing so, they have focused exclusively on the Atlantic thus rendering the region the basis for understanding French colonial architecture and urbanism, at large. As a result, the Atlantic slave trade and Afro-European exchange have become the

Architecture & Material Culture of Gorée, Sénégal, 1758-1837 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015). And for a discussion of the history of slavery, economy, and built landscapes in eighteenth-century Mauritius, see: Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

predominant means for understanding the conglomerate architecture and urban spaces that characterized the French empire during the long eighteenth century.²

This inclination has influenced dominant understandings of Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans in albeit divergent ways. With respect to Mauritius, the Atlantic focus of contemporary scholarship has led to the outright marginalization of this Indian Ocean island. At present, no architectural historian has studied French Mauritius. Instead, numerous scholars have addressed the French Caribbean, an analogous region located on the opposite side of the world. In engaging this domain, historians have used the term *creole architecture* to describe the conglomerate built environments engendered through the blending of West African and European typologies in this area. But French colonial Mauritius witnessed the emergence of the same architectural styles despite different population dynamics. The discourse on creole architecture has not engaged the implications of this point.³

A similar body of scholarship has also shaped conceptions of Saint-Louis. Historians have posited coastal Senegambia as a parent culture for Louisiana and the Caribbean. Subsequently, notions of fluid cultural exchange—between West Africans

² See Jay Edwards, “The Origins of Creole Architecture,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 29, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 155-189. See also Jay Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions Across the Atlantic World,” *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 161-201; and Jay Edwards, “Upper Louisiana’s French Vernacular Architecture in the Greater Atlantic World” *Atlantic Studies* 8, no. 4 (2011): 411-445. See also: Philippe Oszuscik, “Comparisons Between Rural and Urban French Creole Housing,” *Material Culture* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1-36; and, John Michael Vlach, “Sources of the Shotgun House: African and Caribbean Antecedents for Afro-American Architecture,” 2 vols. Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975.

³ Ibid.

and Europeans—have over-determined the discourse on French Senegambia.⁴ This propensity has shifted attention away from the ways in which eighteenth-century Saint-Louis fostered forms of urban control that prefaced the more rigid systems of French dominance typically associated with the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, the discussion on the emergence of the creole gallery (i.e., the covered porch) has informed our understanding of French New Orleans. This discourse (within the broader field of creole architectural studies) has advanced the contention that creole architectural evolution unfolded as a result of the economic wealth of the greater Caribbean. Consequently, this perspective has obfuscated the ways in which destitution and impoverishment provoked the genesis of creole forms in French New Orleans.⁵

This dissertation argues that a re-examination of architecture, urbanism, and settlement in French colonial Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans can work against these trends. I argue that Mauritius can elucidate a new model for understanding the history of creole architecture. Likewise, I maintain that the under-theorized power dynamics extant in the urban plans and legal codes of eighteenth-century Saint-Louis can

⁴ Several authors have contributed to our understanding of the social and architectural environments of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Senegambia. For more information on social mixture in Senegambia, see: John Hargreaves, “Assimilation in Eighteenth-Century Senegal,” *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1963); Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); and William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). For an engagement of these themes as they relate to architecture, see: Mark Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island: Architecture and Material Culture of Gorée, Senegal, 1758-1837* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Peter Mark, “Portuguese” *Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁵ Ibid.

illuminate the town's place in the trajectory of French control on the African continent. Finally, in examining Louisiana, I suggest that a re-reading of archival materials can reveal the ways in which impoverishment determined architectural change. In considering the social histories of architecture, urbanism, and settlement in Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans, this dissertation rethinks the discursive value of the three most strategic nodes of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century French colonial empire.

I would like to begin this introduction by engaging the histories of colonial contact that gave rise to French imperialism, at large. A brief examination of early imperial campaigns will set the stage for a review of the literature that has served as a point of departure for this dissertation. It is my hope that this project will encourage future study of the marginalized peoples and places that shaped the built environments of French colonialism within and beyond the enclaves examined here.

A Brief History of the First French Colonial Empire

Ironically, the history of French imperialism does not begin with French intervention. It was the Portuguese, rather than the French, who created the conditions for the colonization of the non-European world. In the 1440s, Portuguese merchants began arriving on the Senegambian coast to initiate trade with African groups. Their arrival spurred a period of cultural encounter, which marked the first time that significant numbers of West Africans and Europeans were brought into contact with one another on the African continent. Several decades later, in 1497, Portuguese sailor, Vasco de Gama, undertook his exploratory voyage. These events marked the commencement of a period of global exchange wherein the Portuguese (and their non-European middlemen)

transferred slaves and other commodities—particularly, porcelain, ivory, tea, silk, and gold—between markets in East Asia, India, West Africa, the Americas, East Africa, and Europe. The wealth gained as a result of this kind of economic activity rendered Portugal one of the most successful European nations in the age of early imperialism.⁶

Gradually, the lucrative nature of transcontinental trade compelled other European powers to spearhead commercial ventures. In 1600, the British established the East India Company thus provoking the government of Holland to create the Dutch East India Company (or, the V.O.C.) in 1602. With an eye on these mercantile entities, the French formed a company of their own in the mid-seventeenth century.⁷

In 1664, five years after the establishment of Saint-Louis, the French crown founded the Company of the French Indies (la Compagnie des Indes française).⁸ This entity came into being vis-à-vis the merger of several regional institutions that were already involved in French overseas trade. The Company of Senegal, the Company of the West Indies (Compagnie des Indes Occidentales), the Company of Madagascar, the Company of the Orient (Compagnie des Indes Orientales), and the Company of China combined to create the Company of the French Indies.⁹ Initially, this conglomerate

⁶ See: Peter Mark, *‘Portuguese’ Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁷ Denis Piat, *Île Maurice sur la Route des Épices, 1598-1810* (Paris: Les Éditions du Pacifique, 2010), 49.

⁸ The Company of the French Indies later became known as the Company of the Indies. Hereafter, I will refer to this institution as the Company of the Indies. For more information, see: Piat, *Île Maurice*, 49-54.

⁹ Piat, *Île Maurice*, 53.

handled the establishment of warehouses, forts, and storage spaces in the localities deemed significant for the development of French commerce. These zones first included: the Coromandel Coast (along the Bay of Bengal in India); the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Hispaniola (which includes present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic); the Senegambian coast (particularly, the islands of Gorée and Saint-Louis); and portions of northern North America.¹⁰ What began as the erection of fortresses to house and protect merchandise led to the full fledged colonization of these and many other domains. In this way, the actions of the Company of the Indies spurred the emergence of the French colonial empire.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the company would expand in importance and eventually become the main institution in charge of administering French colonies. Hence, it was the Company of the Indies, rather than the French crown, that eventually managed trade, construction, politics, and town development across the first French colonial empire. This term (the first French colonial empire) distinguishes the “old” colonies of France, which existed under French control long before the emergence of the much larger, second empire at the end of the nineteenth century. As a whole, the first French colonial empire included the following territories: New France (or, French Canada); French Louisiana; Saint-Domingue (Haiti); Guadeloupe, Martinique, and several smaller Caribbean islands; French Guiana; Saint-Louis and Gorée; Île de France (Mauritius); Île Bourbon (Réunion); and French India.¹¹

¹⁰ Piat, *Île Maurice*, 51.

¹¹ See Gwendolyn Mildo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 10.

Throughout this imperial formation, large populations of non-European laborers, small numbers of European settlers, astute middlemen, cosmopolitan sailors, and indigenous peoples encountered one another. The social dynamics that ensued impacted the emergence of creole dwellings, the composition of urban plans, and the anatomy of architectural diffusion. In other words, diverse imperial populations determined the transcultural character of French colonial architecture, urbanism, and settlement. In acknowledging the significance of these realities, this dissertation presents Mauritius, Senegal, and Louisiana as vectors for re-considering the world historical importance of such processes. Accordingly, this project is indebted to several lines of inquiry that have allowed for a more comprehensive engagement of the built environments of imperialism within and beyond the French colonial world.

Discursive Antecedents and New Directions

Three bodies of knowledge have informed the study of the conglomerate built environments of early French imperialism: the discourse on African retentions in African-American visual culture; the scholarship on the architectural histories of American plantations; and broader discussions on cultural creolization. Although these spheres of thought do not address the architecture and urbanism of Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans, specifically, they can provide points of departure for an engagement of the building traditions that emerged in these localities. Thus, at this juncture, I would like to examine the discussions that have weighed upon the study of architecture and urbanism in the first French colonial empire.

* * *

The discourse on African retentions in early American art constituted the first attempt at framing a colonial society in terms of the cultural influences of a marginalized group (particularly, black slaves). For this reason, this discussion laid the groundwork for contemporary research on the non-European dimensions of French colonial built environments. More than any other author, Melville Herskovits shaped the study of African retentions in American art and architecture.

Herskovits was one of the first scholars to assert that black American culture contained explicit signs of African influence. In his 1941 book, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits argued that syncretism was a central component of African-American cultural history. He defined syncretism as the blending of African practices with those from other cultural contexts, mainly, Europe and North America. In his view, syncretism caused the development of a distinct New World culture that contained retentions of not just European, but also of African and indigenous, customs.¹²

The most prominent art and architectural historian to have engaged Herskovits's claims is Robert Farris Thompson. In his 1969 essay, "African Influence on the Art of the United States," Thompson addressed the African design patterns extant in twentieth-century African-American visual culture. Yet the methodology Thompson deployed remains the most important component of his essay. His method consisted of three steps. First, he identified an African-American art object before drawing attention to the lack of a European antecedent. Next, he pinpointed an African artwork that bore striking similarity to the African-American piece in question. After using visual analysis to

¹² See Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

highlight the stylistic continuities between both objects, he presented data on the slave trade—specifically, the transport patterns for African slaves—as a means for establishing a historical line of influence that could connect both works of art.¹³ Subsequently, through combining visual analysis with the study of historical records pertaining to slavery, Thompson developed a model that contested the denial of African influences on American art. This methodology framed much of Thompson’s later scholarship as evidenced in works, such as *Flash of the Spirit* (1984) and “An Aesthetic of the Cool” (1973).¹⁴

Despite its groundbreaking character, the work of Thompson (and by extension, Herskovits) was nonetheless met with sharp criticism from Richard and Sally Price. Although their 1980 book, *Afro-American Arts of the Surinam Rain Forest*, acknowledged the African influences on African-American art, it also critiqued Thompson’s tendency to base his claims on the visual similarities between African and African-American objects. From their perspective, Thompson’s method relies upon a biased selection of examples and improperly infers historical continuity on the basis of visual similarities alone. Overall, in their view, this approach underestimates the extent of African-American creativity and elides histories of African-American cultural change.¹⁵

¹³ Robert Farris Thompson, “African Influence on the Art of the United States,” in *Black Studies in the University: A Symposium*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson, Craig C. Foster, and Donald H. Ogilvie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 44.

¹⁴ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1984). Robert Farris Thompson, “An Aesthetic of the Cool,” *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1973): 40-43, 64, 67, 89-91.

¹⁵ Richard and Sally Price, *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 204.

As they go on to explain, similarities are not, on their own, proof of African retentions. African-American cultures can contain both visual forms that have no resemblance to African prototypes and works that look similar to African objects despite a lack of historical continuity. According to the Prices, what Thompson ignores is the reality that African-American cultures are dynamic entities in which creativity ignites the reinvention of African traditions. Furthermore, African-American cultural genesis unfolds in relation to contemporary social and political circumstances as opposed to a static drive to reproduce African culture.¹⁶ This vision of African-American art stands in opposition to—what they characterize as—a proneness to frame African-American communities as passive receptacles of African culture.¹⁷

Notwithstanding such criticism, Thompson's method has influenced a generation of scholars. Two architectural historians who have expanded upon Thompson's methodological and theoretical insights are John Michael Vlach and Dell Upton. In his dissertation, Vlach investigated the ways in which enslaved persons in Saint-Domingue and Louisiana inhabited Europeanized houses according to African patterns of use.¹⁸ Dell Upton, in contrast, has posited early American plantations as the totality of black and white landscapes. For Upton, these spaces were both interlacing and interdependent. The white landscape encompassed areas—the main house, its rooms, the church, and the

¹⁶ Price, *Afro-American Arts*, 214.

¹⁷ Price, *Afro-American Arts*, 208.

¹⁸ Here, the term “Europeanized houses” refers to domiciles where European authority reigned. The term also describes houses designed according to European precedents. For Vlach's description of such domains, See: Vlach, “Sources of the Shotgun House.”

courthouse—that communicated the centrality of the planter in the context of the plantation. Movement across these spaces impressed—upon the white visitor and the black slave—the status of the planter as the most esteemed member of the plantation hierarchy.¹⁹ The black landscape, however, was a context that slaves made themselves; they combined elements from the white landscape with the slaves’ quarters, workspaces, the woods, and nearby waterways, which were often unfamiliar to members of the plantocracy.²⁰

Such perspectives concerning plantation space are significant because they posit the built environments of slavery as a series of conglomerate forms. Furthermore, both Vlach and Upton positioned slaves as the agents who orchestrated the blending of black and white environments in the eighteenth-century Americas. Through conceptualizing slavery in this manner, Vlach and Upton linked the scholarship on black cultural influence to the simultaneously emergent discourse on creolization.

In large part, scholarship on creolization reflects the work of Stuart Hall and Édouard Glissant. These authors have defined this phenomenon as a process of social and cultural exchange engendered as slavery brought diverse groups into contact in the Americas, West Africa, and the Indian Ocean.²¹ In a retrospective on this topic published

¹⁹ Dell Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *Places* 2, no. 2 (1984), 66.

²⁰ Upton, “White and Black Landscapes,” 70.

²¹ See Stuart Hall, “Créolité and the Process of Creolization,” in *Créolité and Creolization: Documental11_Platform3*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, et. al (Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003), 185-198. See also Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

in 2001, Richard Price returned to the critique of African retentions previously explicated in *Afro-American Arts of the Suriname Rain Forest*. This time, he clarified that, unlike the discourse on African retentions, creolization theory provides the most thorough model for thinking through the histories of cultural exchange that characterized slavery in early colonial contexts. Price contended that Africa was one entity, as opposed to the sole parent culture, that slaves drew upon when building African-American environments. Therefore, slaves borrowed cultural forms from African, European, and Amerindian sources in order to develop the African-American institutions of the New World.²²

Price's idea of creolization holds several implications for the study of early colonial societies. In building upon his earlier claims, he positioned creolization theory as a counterpoint to Africanist discourses.²³ From his perspective, archival and field research demonstrate the stronger plausibility of the creole model.²⁴ Yet, despite Price's tendency to position creolization studies against discourses on African retentions, several scholars have combined Africanist and creolist approaches in order to explain the cultural forms of early slave societies. Linguistic historians, in particular, have most thoroughly applied both discourses to study the languages that came out of colonial encounters.²⁵ With respect to architecture, Jay Edwards (who I will engage more directly in Chapter

²² See Richard Price, "The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective," *NWIG: New West Indian Guide* 75, no. 1/2 (2001): 35-64.

²³ Price, "The Miracle of Creolization," 46.

²⁴ Price, "The Miracle of Creolization," 58.

²⁵ For a discussion of creole languages see: Derek Bickerton, *Roots of Language* (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, Inc., 1981) and Robert Chaudenson, *La Créolisation: Théorie, Applications, Implications* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

one) remains the most preeminent scholar to have brought theories of creolization to bear on the built environments of slavery and colonialism. My dissertation is indebted to his thorough research.

Yet, more than any other body of scholarship, Gwendolyn Wright's research mirrors the approach that I have undertaken in this dissertation. In her 1991 book, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, Wright engaged the social history of architecture and urban planning in three twentieth-century French colonies: Morocco; Indochina; and Madagascar. According to Wright, these places warrant consideration beside one another since they were the most discussed, photographed, and admired paragons of the second French colonial empire.²⁶

What made these places the subject of so much critical attention was their ability to serve as laboratories where metropolitan architects, sociologists, and engineers could experiment with the implementation of urban frameworks that they could not apply in France (because of popular resistance and legal constraints). In Wright's view, the French perceived the colonies as blank slates where they could test new building designs, city plans, and legal codes before administering them in France. Whereas the French tested the viability of incorporating ancient motifs into modern building projects to boost tourism and development in Morocco, they used Indochina to experiment with the balance between urban centralization and local control. Meanwhile, Madagascar became a site for considering the role of architecture in engendering the rationalization of work habits and public health systems.²⁷

²⁶ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.

²⁷ Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 9.

Wright employs these cases to demonstrate how colonialism was integral to the birth of European modernity. She contends that the urban and architectural projects implemented in French colonial Morocco, Indochina, and Madagascar paved the way for twentieth-century innovations in urban design, social control, and pedestrian architecture in France. Hence, her work reveals the role of the colonies in spurring architectural progress in the metropole.²⁸ By and large, this approach mirrors that of Paul Rabinow. His research on French metropolitan and colonial urbanism examines the ways in which social engineers in France employed urban planning to ensure that cities—from French Casablanca to Paris—would conform to social norms. More precisely, Rabinow, much like Wright, calls attention to the sociologists and planners who created models of urban organization designed to cure the social ills, which supposedly plagued cities in France and its colonies.²⁹ Taken together, Rabinow and Wright echo one another thus forging perspectives on the French metropole and its colonies that consider the relationships between the urban forms engendered in both domains.

More recently, Steven Nelson and Patricia Morton have shifted our attention toward the colonies. Both scholars have engaged the ways in which architectural forms from French colonies have served competing political agendas within and outside of imperial enclaves. In his book, *From Cameroon to Paris: Mousgoum Architecture in and Out of Africa*, Steven Nelson examines the importance of the teleuk—a domed house once common among the Mousgoum people of northern Cameroon—as a source of

²⁸ Wright, *The Politics of Design*, 12.

²⁹ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11.

identity for both the French colonizer and the francophone colonized. Nelson traces the modern history of the teleuk—from its usage in traditional Mousgoum contexts to its appearance in colonial and postcolonial media—thus shedding light upon its status as an object of appropriation. From Nelson’s perspective, the cross-cultural transfer of images, texts, and replicas of the teleuk between Africa and the wider world rendered this form a cultural marker that could validate both African identities and colonial (and even postcolonial) projects.³⁰

In a similar vein, Patricia Morton has addressed the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris. Morton explores the ways in which non-European architecture validated the fair’s goal of presenting a scientific justification for French colonialism.³¹ The exposition included pavilions complete with replicas of monuments and local building types from the colonies—among them a Mousgoum teleuk—that visitors could enter. Inside, fair goers found exhibits detailing the industrial projects underway in the colonies. Overall, such architecture made the fair appear as an objective instrument for cataloging the cultures of the colonized and highlighting the technological advancements achieved under French control.³² In addressing these issues, Morton, like her colleagues, elucidates the ways in which architecture reflected the intertwined histories of contact and appropriation engendered as the French colonized the non-European world.

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³⁰ Steven Nelson, *From Cameroon to Paris: Mousgoum Architecture In and Out of Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9.

³¹ Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at The 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 7.

³² Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 13.

My dissertation presents a similar approach. Rather than considering the importance of imperial space for architectural development in eighteenth-century France, my research focuses on the value that the colonies hold for the study of the non-European world. Each chapter considers how people from a disparate array of territories—East Africa, Madagascar, India, North America, West Africa, the Caribbean, France, and Southeast Asia—engendered a composite, colonial culture that recurred across imperial space. In this sense, my project builds upon Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s work on meta-archipelagos: non-European vortexes of cultural collision that extend and repeat themselves across geographic boundaries. From Benítez-Rojo’s perspective, the Caribbean is the quintessential meta-archipelago, a metonym for social mixture that forms, collapses, and reappears worldwide.³³

Unlike Benítez-Rojo, however, I do not attempt to render the Caribbean a model for contemplating cultural contact. Instead, I choose to decenter the region in ways that bring into focus the continents, coasts, and islands that exist within and outside of the Atlantic or the Caribbean world. At the same time, much like the pioneering work of Gwendolyn Wright, this project examines dwellings, towns, and landscapes in an attempt to elucidate the global relevance of French colonial built environments. In doing so, this dissertation brings several under-examined domains—the most overlooked of which is Mauritius—into the discussion on colonial architecture and urban space. Therefore, my project marks the first comprehensive study of architecture, urbanism, and landscape in the first French colonial empire.

³³ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective, Second Edition*, Trans. by James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.

Chapter one addresses two major questions that the case of French colonial Mauritius presents: How and why did this eighteenth-century island give rise to the same architectural typology as the simultaneously emergent colonies of the Atlantic world? What is the relevance of this historical reality? In answering these questions, this chapter chronicles the history of Mauritian architecture from the onset of the French colonial period in 1715 to the end of French rule of the island in 1810. Along these lines, the chapter traces the social dynamics that led to the formation of creole architecture in this Indian Ocean context. I conclude by suggesting that the rhizomatic networks of transcultural exchange, which converged on this island, can provide the basis for reconceptualizing creole built environments.

Chapter two considers the power dynamics of French colonial urbanism in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis. I contend that eighteenth-century urban plans and policies prefaced the implementation of more stringent systems of control in the twentieth century. This chapter begins in 1659 when the French established Saint-Louis and ends at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the period that witnessed the collapse of the first French colonial empire. Significantly, Saint-Louis remained under French control even as Mauritius and Louisiana fell into the hands of other imperial powers. I argue that the sustainment of French authority was possible in Saint-Louis because this town was the first place where the French successfully established an albeit limited system of colonial law and order. This chapter demonstrates how the urban plans and policies of the eighteenth century fit into this process.

Finally, the last chapter approaches French Louisiana. It returns to the discourse on creole architecture in order to challenge the assumptions surrounding creole

architectural change. Over the course of the past three decades, architectural historians have claimed that creole forms, such as, the gallery, emerged and diffused in response to the economic wealth of the greater Caribbean.³⁴ Yet New Orleans witnessed the advent of such forms even as it languished as one of the most destitute domains in the French imperial world. In tracing the social history of architecture in this town, this chapter positions New Orleans as the basis for a revised understanding of creole architectural change. I argue that the case of New Orleans indicates that, rather than a response to colonial wealth, creole architectural genesis was a process that unfolded as settlers adapted generic building components to the resource deprived environment of French New Orleans. This chapter concludes by discussing the ways in which this history can engender a vision of creole architecture that takes into account the economic versatility of this typology.

As a whole, this project came about through archival and field research undertaken in Senegal, Mauritius, Louisiana, and France from 2013 to 2015. One problem that has consistently confronted this study is the fact that the overwhelming majority of buildings erected during the first French colonial empire no longer exist. Likewise, those that remain standing have often undergone significant renovations. Faced with this situation, I have turned to the archive.

³⁴ For more information see: Jay Edwards “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza-Veranda-Gallery,” *Material Culture* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 2-58; Jay Edwards “A Comparative Analysis of Upper and Lower Louisiana and Saint Domingue,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 10, no. 3 (September 2006): 241-271; Jay Edwards “Unheralded Contributions Across the Atlantic World” *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 161-20; Philippe Oszuscik “Comparisons Between Rural and Urban French Creole Housing” *Material Culture* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1-36.

Yet, despite the archival nature of this project, I have engaged the remnants of eighteenth-century buildings where they do exist. As we will see, Mauritius, in particular, presents a number of well preserved examples. On the island, I was able to visit all of the remaining French colonial buildings before photographing and cataloguing the details—the number of rooms, the exterior features, the building materials, and the dimensions—of the dwellings in question. Overall, I found eighteenth-century buildings through using French colonial maps to pinpoint the precise locations of such structures. Most streets in Port Louis—as well as in New Orleans and Saint-Louis—have retained their eighteenth-century names. Subsequently, I have used old maps and plans to match the buildings identified (by address and location) in archival documents to extant structures. In Louisiana and Senegal, I have replicated this method when possible. In places where governmental agencies have already pinpointed the location of eighteenth-century dwellings (in digital field guides), I have also used such research to identify extant buildings.³⁵

³⁵ More precisely, I have used a combination of field guides, eighteenth-century maps and textual descriptions, previous scholarship, and the information from agencies that have identified certain structures to find pertinent eighteenth-century buildings. In Saint-Louis, the Centre de Recherches et de Documentation has produced a field guide. In New Orleans, the Historic New Orleans Collection has catalogued the construction histories of all of the buildings now located in the French Quarter (the site of the old French town of New Orleans). For a field guide on Saint-Louis, see: Suzanne Hirschie. “Inventaire Architectural et Urbain: Île du Saint-Louis du Sénégal.” Université de Lille 2003 [CD ROM] Saint-Louis, Senegal. For a field guide on New Orleans, see: Historic New Orleans Collection. The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Survey. 2013 <http://www.hnoc.org/vcs/>. No such guide exists in Mauritius; thus, I have relied upon the information provided in archival documents. Significantly, several eighteenth-century Mauritian buildings described in this dissertation are now a part of museum complexes and are subsequently identified; such buildings include the Military Hospital of Port Louis and all of the structures at Fort Frederik Hendrik. The museums that these structures are a part of include, The Aapravasi Ghat UNESCO World Heritage Center and the Fort Frederik Hendrik Historical Site, respectively.

As previously acknowledged, my research has largely taken place at government archives. I have worked at: the National Archives of Mauritius; the National Archives of Senegal; the IFAN Library in Dakar; the Louisiana Historical Center; the Historic New Orleans Collection; the New Orleans Notarial Archives; Louisiana State University Special Collections; the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; and the Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer. At each of these institutions, I have compiled both visual and textual sources, particularly, maps, building plans, probate inventories, court proceedings, private correspondence, travel narratives, architectural surveys, textual descriptions of buildings, and censuses. On one level, I have reached my conclusions through conducting visual analyses (when applicable) as well as close readings of these primary sources. At certain points in the dissertation, there are sources, such as, the inventories of signares’ homes (addressed in Chapter two), that have already been the subject of analysis on the part of other scholars. In these instances, I have acknowledged the ways in which previous authors have engaged such documents in their work. I have also used the works of historians as sources of information on the early histories of each of my research sites. Otherwise, I have approached primary and secondary sources differently in each chapter.

In chapter one, the scholarship on creolization has informed my approach to the archival documents and field-based materials gathered in Mauritius. Here, outside scholarship has served as the vector for contextualizing primary source materials within the broader discourse on creole architecture. Similarly, in chapter two, I have interwoven the secondary literature on French Saint-Louis into my analysis of the ways in which eighteenth-century maps and ground plans articulate colonial control. Lastly, in chapter

three, I have used the work of architectural historian, Samuel Wilson, as a source of hard data on French New Orleans while also relying on my own research. Taken together, these approaches encompass my intervention into the discourse on French colonial architecture, urbanism, and social space.

* * *

On one level, Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans share similar histories of social and cultural exchange. More poignantly, however, these localities all carry the potential to expand our understanding of architecture, urbanism, and landscape under French colonialism. Altogether, these enclaves point us toward a new genealogy for creole architecture, a more detailed critique of Franco-West African urban design, and a more critical understanding of the economic adaptability of creole forms.

Today, the buildings, plans, and landscapes of early colonial Mauritius, Senegal, and Louisiana encompass architectural and archival remnants that allude to the composite histories of these sites. As such, these materials are a testament to the far reaching impact of the peoples, places, and economies of the first French colonial empire. In drawing disparate sources into dialogue with one another, the following case studies recall the world historical importance of colonies that were integral to the formation of overseas France. Consequently, this dissertation sheds light upon the non-European peoples, built environments, and lines of influence that made the towns and hinterlands of the first French empire some of the most cosmopolitan spaces in the early colonial world.

Chapter 1

Rethinking Creole Architecture: The Case of French Colonial Mauritius

Even though Mauritius lies in the Indian Ocean, the buildings erected on this island during the eighteenth century were identical to those constructed at the same historical moment in the colonies of the Atlantic world. Throughout the French period (1715-1810), Mauritius, like imperial domains worldwide, harbored a building style known as creole architecture. Structures conforming to this typology were two-story wood or masonry dwellings with gable roofs and stone or earthen foundations. Such buildings combined symmetrical, European ground plans with patterns of design and site usage that were commonplace across the European and the non-European world. These elements included frontal or wrap-around porches, absent interior hallways, detached kitchens, and the broad exploitation of outdoor space. Organizationally, the first floor housed slaves and valued products; the second floor contained the living quarters for itinerate traders. By the time France lost Mauritius to the British in 1810, this architectural style characterized the capital of Port Louis as well as every colonial town in the modern world.

Thus far, scholars have never determined how and why creole architecture became a global phenomenon. Although Port Louis contained a large concentration of creole structures, scholarship on this typology has ignored the Indian Ocean. Also, current models for understanding this paradigm approach it from an Atlantic perspective. Historians, most important, Jay Edwards, have claimed that creole architecture materialized because of the blending of West African and European building traditions in

the early Americas.³⁶ Yet, as Port Louis demonstrates, the Indian Ocean incubated the same built environments despite different population dynamics. During the eighteenth century, Mauritius, in particular, received large numbers of East African, Malagasy, Indian, and West African slaves in addition to European settlers. Therefore, the case of Mauritius presents several questions concerning creolization: Why did creole buildings in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean exhibit such profound stylistic similarities? Who and what were responsible for these continuities? What, if any, theoretical model can explain the architectural congruities that linked French colonies during the long eighteenth century?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions. Mauritius provides an opportunity to rethink the global manifestations of creole architecture. Through investigating textual descriptions, sale records, and images of Mauritian buildings, I consider the processes that rendered creole forms global fixtures within the French empire. I argue that the history of Mauritius indicates the extent to which settlers and slaves relied upon a generalized architectural template when developing French colonies. In Mauritius and across the imperial world, colonizers and slaves combined design precedents—that were widespread in several European and non-European contexts—into a generic and recognizable whole. This form functioned globally because of its familiarity to a broad cross-section of the colonial public. Consequently, such architecture reflected what literary scholar Françoise Lionnet describes as creole cosmopolitanism: a complex understanding of global culture wielded on the part of creole subjects who were as

³⁶ Jay Edwards has explicated this theory in several articles. See Edwards, “The Origins of Creole Architecture;” Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions.”

transient and transnational as colonial elites.³⁷ In bringing Mauritian literary theory to bear on the conglomerate architecture that characterized the island during the eighteenth century, this chapter re-conceptualizes both the world historical importance of Mauritius itself and the meanings conventionally ascribed to creole built environments.

I will begin by examining the geography, the political figures, and the architectural history of eighteenth-century Mauritius. Next, I will consider the influential scholarship on Atlantic creole architecture. Finally, I will address the interpretive possibilities that come out of positing Mauritius as a site that challenges the present genealogy with respect to this building tradition. Subsequently, this chapter explores the social and geographic importance of creole architecture in the French colonial world.

Placing Mauritius: Geography and History on an Indian Ocean Island

In order to understand the creolized architecture of Mauritius, it is essential to first examine the role of geography in the early history of the island. Mauritius lies in the southwest Indian Ocean 800 kilometers east of Madagascar. The nearest landmass is the neighboring island of Réunion (formerly, Île Bourbon, 164 kilometers to the west).³⁸ Over 500 kilometers east of Mauritius is the dependency of Rodrigues. Together,

³⁷ For more information on creole cosmopolitanism see: Françoise Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*. Trou D'Eau Douce, Mauritius: L'Atelier d'écriture, 2012.

³⁸ During the eighteenth century, the French referred to Réunion as Île Bourbon. The French administered both Mauritius and Réunion under the same colonial government.

Mauritius, Réunion, and Rodrigues form the Mascarene archipelago, a group of islands that are 2,000 kilometers east of the African continent (Figure 1.1).³⁹

Mauritius as well as the rest of the Mascarene Islands have no native population. Beginning in the eighth century, however, a vast system of oceanic trade—dominated by Arab seafarers—developed in the Indian Ocean. This commercial network brought the Persian Gulf into contact with the markets of the Malabar coast in India, Canton (or Guangzhou), and the Swahili Coast.⁴⁰ The Arab seafarers who shuttled Chinese porcelain and Indian spices between coastal nodes frequently passed through the Mascarene Archipelago. Although scholars postulate that these seafarers periodically landed on Mauritius before European arrival, the island occupied an extremely marginal position in eighth and ninth-century matrixes of Indian Ocean trade. Accordingly, Arab seafarers never established permanent settlements on the Mascarene Islands since the uninhabited character of the archipelago rendered it undesirable for navigators interested in established markets. Collectively, these factors contributed to the marginality of the region.⁴¹

In 1507, Portuguese navigator Diego Fernandez Pereira landed on Mauritius.⁴² Like the Arab seafarers who came before him, he never built a settlement. In 1638,

³⁹ Figure 1.1. *Islands of the Republic of Mauritius*. Wikipedia, last modified 20 November 2013, accessed 20 August 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritius#/media/File:Mauritius_\(%2Bclaim_islands\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritius#/media/File:Mauritius_(%2Bclaim_islands).svg).

⁴⁰ Denis Piat, *L'Île Maurice sur la route des épices, 1598-1810* (Paris: Les Éditions du Pacifique, 2010), 19.

⁴¹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 2.

⁴² Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 2.

however, the Dutch constructed Fort Fredrik Hendrik on the southeast corner of the island thus inaugurating the era of Dutch colonization (which lasted from 1638 to 1710).⁴³ This episode coincided with the growth of the Dutch East India Company (established, 1602), an entity that merely viewed Mauritius as a possible source of raw timber.⁴⁴ Under Dutch rule, the island remained a backwater that only possessed value because of its potential to support resource extraction. Along these lines, the first dwellings were unimpressive, one-story, stone buildings with palm-thatched roofs (Figure 1.2).⁴⁵ These structures sat within a compound at the fort.⁴⁶ In 1710, the Dutch destroyed these buildings and abandoned the island; their colonial campaign had largely failed since the cost of maintaining their settlement greatly exceeded the price of Mauritian timber in international markets.⁴⁷

In 1715, the French claimed Mauritius under the authority of their trading institution titled, the Company of the Indies. In the same year, they renamed the island Île de France. By 1722, Mauritius contained 111 European settlers and fifty-five slaves. The

⁴³ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 10.

⁴⁴ *Dutch Map of the Indian Ocean*. In Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain*, 10.

⁴⁵ Figure 1.2. *The Vestiges of a Building at Fort Fredrik Hendrik, 1638, Vieux Grand Port, Mauritius*, Photograph by the author.

⁴⁶ Daniel Sleight, “The Economy of Mauritius During the Second Dutch Occupation (1664-1710),” in *Globalization and the South-West Indian Ocean*, ed. Sandra Evers and V.Y. Hookoomsingh (Réduit: University of Mauritius and International Institute for Asian Studies, 1998), 51.

⁴⁷ Perry Moree, “Discovering the Undiscovered Country: Dutch Mauritius, 1598-1710,” in *Globalization and the South-West Indian Ocean*, ed. Sandra Evers and V.Y. Hookoomsingh (Réduit: University of Mauritius and International Institute for Asian Studies, 1998), 4.

European population consisted of seven company employees from France, four Lazarist priests, six Swiss officers, eighty-four Swiss soldiers, six married women, and four children. All fifty-five slaves came from Madagascar. Similarly, in 1725, the island contained 200 persons, 161 of whom were free and 39 of whom were slaves, mostly of Malagasy origin.⁴⁸ As the population grew, Mauritius developed into a site of strategic importance. Merchants would pick up textiles at Indian ports and transport them to Mauritius where they sold the goods to middlemen who then sailed to West Africa. These textiles served as the currency merchants exchanged for slaves at West African ports.⁴⁹ Collectively, these systems of exchange provoked the development of creole architecture in Mauritius and beyond.

The Architecture of French Colonial Mauritius

When the French arrived in 1715, they found a deserted island marked by the vestiges of Fort Frederik Hendrik. Given the undeveloped state of Mauritius at this time, the buildings erected during the French colonial period encompassed the first architectural tradition to leave a sustained impression upon the local landscape. The buildings that emerged—albeit gradually—in eighteenth-century Mauritius set the stage for the development of the island in the centuries to come.

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⁴⁸ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 23-24.

⁴⁹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 20.

In 1731, the Company of the Indies established the colonial capital at a natural harbor on the western coast of the island. This site became the town of Port Louis.⁵⁰ The first buildings in this enclave were one-room, square structures with earthen walls and gable roofs covered with palm fronds. By 1732, Port Louis consisted of sixty earthen structures. These buildings were rectangular with an average length of thirty feet and an average width of fifty feet.⁵¹

Significantly, the architectural character of Port Louis changed dramatically in 1735 when the Company of the Indies appointed Mahé de Labourdonnais as the governor of Île de France and Île Bourbon. Labourdonnais was both an intriguing figure and a formidable agent in the architectural development of early Mauritius. For these reasons, his life narrative is worth recounting at length.

Mahé de Labourdonnais was born in Saint-Malo, France in 1699. At the age of ten, he began working as a crewmember on the small vessels that regularly departed the port of his coastal hometown. In working on the fishing boats that traversed the seas off the coast of Saint-Malo, Labourdonnais gained experience, which would benefit his future career. Predictably, at the age of twenty, he joined the Company of the Indies. His first assignment was in French India where he quickly amassed a considerable fortune through acting as a middleman in the trade of Indian textiles along the Bengali coast. In 1723, Labourdonnais met Philibert Orry, the Contrôleur Général des Finances of Île de France and Île Bourbon, while on a stopover in Mauritius. Upon seeing the state of the

⁵⁰ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 32.

⁵¹ Auguste Toussaint, *Port-Louis: Deux Siècles d'Histoire, 1735-1935* (Port Louis: Éditions VIZAVI, 2014), 38.

island, he convinced Orry to appoint him as the colonial governor in order to rectify what both men saw as the extensive underdevelopment of the island.⁵²

On the heels of this agreement, Labourdonnais arrived in Mauritius in June of 1735. There, he found an island where Europeans lived in poverty alongside their slaves. Megan Vaughan notes that Labourdonnais believed this situation stemmed from the lack of professional architects and engineers in the colony.⁵³ In his memoir, written just before his death in 1753 yet published eighty-five years later in 1838, he contended that, when he arrived, Île de France had only four building engineers.⁵⁴ Therefore, settlers and slaves built impermanent structures without professional oversight. For Labourdonnais, this reality presented a grave problem. If Port Louis was a town full of flimsy earthen structures and devoid of formalized plans, then it could never function as a cosmopolitan trading center. In other words, according to Labourdonnais, Port Louis needed permanent structures in order to prosper within the eighteenth-century commercial world. Moreover, he believed that buildings planned according to known precedents were the best mechanisms for ensuring the success of the island. This conviction prompted him to institute an aggressive plan for architectural development: “Running the risk of failing and out of necessity, I took it upon myself to become a building engineer. I created building plans that were suitable for a French colony and that adhered to my idea of what

⁵² Piat, *L'Île Maurice*, 59.

⁵³ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 36.

⁵⁴ For Labourdonnais' personal account of the state of early colonial Mauritius see: Labourdonnais, Mahé de and Albert Lougnon, *Mémoire des Îles de France et Bourbon: Annoté et publié par Albert Lougnon* (Paris: Albert Lougnon, 1838).

the Company [of the Indies] intended.”⁵⁵ The first building to come out of this process was the Military Hospital (Figure 1.3).⁵⁶ Located at the harbor, this 1735 structure was both the first permanent dwelling in Port Louis and the largest building on the island.

The military hospital was a complex that consisted of two buildings placed parallel to one another with a central courtyard occupying the space between. A garden, a small shed, and a detached kitchen stood within this courtyard. A general store occupied the space adjacent to the main buildings (Figure 1.3).⁵⁷ These main dwellings and the store were all two-story rectangular structures that contained wooden frameworks filled with roughly cut blocks. The exterior walls were covered in argamasse, a local form of limewash.⁵⁸ Each building featured a symmetrical exterior with a single door. Likewise, interiors contained square rooms positioned beside one another with no connecting hallways. In total, the hospital had 240 beds as well as separate areas for the treatment of free and enslaved persons.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Labourdonnais, *Mémoire*, 34.

⁵⁶ Figure 1.3. *Military Hospital of Port Louis, 1735*, Port Louis, Mauritius, Photograph by the author.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Argamasse is the name for a substance used as both a mortar and a coating for buildings in eighteenth-century Mauritius. This substance served as a binding agent that held together the stone bricks, which formed the walls of masonry structures. Usually, builders created argamasse by grinding seashells into a fine paste and mixing this material with sand and small rocks. Then, the concoction would be cooked until it was high in temperature and viscous. Variations on this general formula existed throughout eighteenth-century Mauritius. In some cases, workers would create argamasse through mixing various soils into a paste that was then combined with liquefied coral (National Archives of Mauritius, OA Series 109. Reduit, Mauritius).

⁵⁹ Labourdonnais, *Mémoire*, 19.

This building complex had a profound impact on the architectural and economic development of Mauritius. When describing his time on the island, Labourdonnais claimed that both the design and the location of the military hospital encouraged global trade. For Labourdonnais, the adjoining rooms, absent interior hallways, and the portside location of this compound rendered it a viable site for housing and selling commodities. Early on, the patterns of use that came to define this compound reflected Labourdonnais' vision. In front of the main building, workers negotiated deals with itinerate traders—based at the port—that brought French wine, meat from Île Bourbon, cows from Madagascar, and even turtles from Rodrigues into the hospital. Once there, foreign livestock occupied the central courtyard. Over time, this space became a site for animal husbandry while the detached kitchen grew to become a place for storing the milk yielded from nursing cows. The kitchen was also a storage room for the foodstuffs obtained through trade. Likewise, at the hospital's general store, sailors purchased the materials needed—wood, iron, tools, sand, and foodstuffs—to sustain oceangoing vessels. For Labourdonnais, not only were such patterns of use ideal, but they also confirmed the far-reaching potential of this building. He maintained that, if, for any reason, the hospital was abandoned or moved to another location, the buildings could remain standing and thus become full-fledged receptacles for imported goods and peoples.⁶⁰

In a certain sense, the military hospital met Labourdonnais' expectations. Mauritius gained importance as a commercial node right as the military hospital became a permanent fixture at the wharf. More precisely, the hospital catalyzed economic

⁶⁰ Labourdonnais, *Mémoire*, 15.

growth. Many early inhabitants began migrating to Port Louis in search of employment at the hospital's general store and at the surrounding wharf.⁶¹

These transitions unfolded as the enslaved population exploded. In an attempt to develop Mauritian infrastructure, Labourdonnais expanded French participation in the slave trade in order to acquire laborers who could work overtime to build port structures. In 1738, the number of slaves rose to 1,432 individuals. Of this group, 630 came from Guinée (i.e., West Africa), 440 were Malagasy, 154 came from Mozambique, and 142 were of Indian origin. Furthermore, 153 slaves worked in the building trades at Port Louis alone.⁶²

Both an influx in labors and the subsequent establishment of a new and functioning port rendered the embarcadero a zone of economic progress in the minds of many settlers. Once inhabitants began to associate the wharf with prosperity, its buildings became metonyms for global trade and colonial success. Since the military hospital was the most recognizable port structure, it became an architectural paragon. Subsequent buildings adopted its conventions—a uniform layout, absent interior hallways, symmetry, and architectural permanence, among other features.⁶³

In inspiring architectural and economic development in Port Louis, Labourdonnais himself became synonymous with an agenda of early colonial progress. Yet, unfortunately for him, this image came with a price. After leaving the island in 1740,

⁶¹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 39.

⁶² Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 41.

⁶³ Unknown author, *Diverse Correspondence, 1736, OA Series (1715-1810)*, National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

he returned to India where his long-time adversary, Joseph-François Dupleix (Governor of French India), responded negatively to his success in Mauritius and his potential on the subcontinent. Architecture was a visible sign of Labourdonnais' capability as a colonial leader and, as such, it fed into the insecurity of his rival. Perhaps, in an attempt to put a dent in Labourdonnais' image, Dupleix accused him of aiding the British in their efforts to gain a commercial foothold over the French in India.⁶⁴ In response to this accusation of treason, the French government summonsed Labourdonnais back to France and threw him into prison at the Bastille. After being exonerated on all charges, Labourdonnais died as a pauper in 1753.⁶⁵ His life narrative demonstrates that, whether Mauritians were governors or slaves, they circulated within a tumultuous yet interconnected world of ports, colonies, prisons, and imperial towns. As we will see, in proceeding decades, the buildings that these individuals left behind continued to reflect the globally contentious relationships that put colonizers and slaves into contact with one another.

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By the middle of the eighteenth century, the architectural style reflected in Labourdonnais' Military Hospital had become ubiquitous on the island. One of the many structures that mirrored its design was the main boarding house in Port Louis (built in 1769). According to a 1769 record of sale that details the characteristics of this building, the boarding house was a forty-eight foot long by eighteen foot wide masonry dwelling. The interior consisted of a central room flanked by two smaller spaces. Like the military

⁶⁴ More precisely, Dupleix accused Labourdonnais of obtaining and selling textiles on behalf of the British in French India. Piat, *L'Île Maurice*, 73.

⁶⁵ Piat, *L'Île Maurice*, 78.

hospital, the boarding house lacked interior hallways. Residents moved from one area to another through traversing the doorways that connected adjoining rooms. This house had a detached kitchen and a courtyard (105 feet long by 18 feet wide), all of which sat within a fenced enclosure.⁶⁶

Another building that adhered to a similar style was the storehouse (built, 1769) at Grand Rivière, a freshwater source south of Port Louis. The dwelling was 120 feet long, 36 feet wide, and 22 feet tall; it contained two stories placed atop a stone foundation. The ground floor served as the space for selling commodities whereas the second floor contained the living quarters for the property owner. Most important, the storehouse featured a covered, second floor balcony (or gallery) on two sides. This porch functioned as an outdoor room for the owner of the store.⁶⁷ Likewise, as an overhang that sheltered the entrance to the shop, the balcony shaded customers as they walked into the store and even sheltered passersby as they strolled down the streets of what was, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a budding frontier town.⁶⁸ Overall, like the Military Hospital of

⁶⁶ Unknown author, Inventory of the Main Boarding House in Port Louis, 1769, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁶⁷ Unknown author. Survey of the Grand Rivière Storehouse, 1769, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁶⁸ Over the course of the eighteenth century, the town of Grand Rivière grew as a result of its proximity to an aqueduct (built in 1735), which brought fresh water from the stream of Grand Rivière to the wharf at Port Louis. This aqueduct came into being under the rule of Mahé de Labourdonnais and, over time, it fueled the development of storehouses (like the one described above) as well as farmsteads in the vicinity of the town of Grand Rivière. Ibid. Also, for a more in depth discussion of the kind of commercial architecture described here, see Chapter 3, particularly, my engagement of Louis Nelson's work on the Caribbean merchant store. See also: Louis Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Port Louis, the Grand Rivière Storehouse exhibited commercial versatility; it was initially a silo for grain yet over time it developed into a general store (Figures 1.4 and 1.5).⁶⁹

Moreover, this dwelling was a square structure with a wooden framework, masonry walls, and a limewash coating. The addition of a gallery to a building that conformed to the precedents of the Military Hospital demonstrates the ways in which Mauritian architecture changed over the course of the eighteenth century. Although galleries eventually predominated, such features were not a part of the early architectural history of the island. Instead, galleries appeared gradually. As they became more common, frontal porches proved to be components that builders could combine with existing forms, particularly layouts like the one used at the Military Hospital. In adding galleries to structures in Mauritius, colonial populations introduced what Jay Edwards and Philippe Oszuscik describe as a quintessentially non-European component into the colonial architectural repertoire.⁷⁰

The relationship between the emergence of the gallery in Mauritius and the expansion of Indian Ocean slavery largely supports this point. In 1758, the Mascarene Islands held 22,599 slaves. By 1788, this number grew to 71,197 individuals. In 1808, the islands of Mauritius and Réunion were home to nearly 133,000 enslaved laborers.⁷¹ With

⁶⁹ Figures 1.4 and 1.5. *Grand Rivière Storehouse*, 1769, Grand Rivière, Mauritius, Photograph by the author.

⁷⁰ See Jay Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 155-189. See also, Philippe Oszuscik, "Comparisons Between Rural and Urban French Creole Housing," *Material Culture* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1-36.

⁷¹ Richard B. Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008), 52.

respect to Mauritius, specifically, between 1773 and 1810, at least 685 French vessels arrived on the island with captives mainly hailing from Madagascar, East Africa, and India.⁷² These timeframes match the period when galleries began to appear on Mauritian houses and commercial structures. An investigation of the wide variety of gallery houses and construction practices on the island reveals the importance of these numbers for the architectural history of Mauritius.

Built in 1771, the house belonging to the colonel of French forces at Port Louis was a typical two-story gallery structure. Significantly, the second floor served as the living quarters for the colonel, a man who kept several bushels of foreign merchandise stored in the small rooms on the ground floor of his residence. Although archival documents do not specify what kinds of goods sat in storage, other records suggest that the house, like most others, may have contained cloths from India, alcohol from France, and foodstuffs from Île Bourbon and Rodrigues. The ground floor would have certainly functioned as a transactional space where merchants and the colonel himself most likely sold foreign goods. In terms of leisure, when the colonel was not managing the sale of products, he was taking in the comforts of his second floor balcony. As in the case of the Grand Rivière Storehouse, this feature stood directly off the bedroom thus functioning as an outdoor room within a complex where a prominent individual lived.

A similar space existed at the guard's post at Port Bourbon (currently Grand Port). The house of the commander featured a gallery off the bedroom that also ran along the façade and faced the sea. The gallery was sixty-six feet long and twenty-four feet wide

⁷² Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French," 60.

thus serving as a room onto itself. Not only did this gallery offer the commander a view of the port, but it also provided a conduit for sea breezes to flow into his bedroom at all hours of the day and night. Thus, the commander could survey the port while also enjoying fresh air; his gallery subsequently facilitated the merger of surveillance and privileged comfort. In doing so, it spoke to the (sometimes) elite connotations of this architectural form.⁷³

Yet, far from an element solely reserved for elite residences, galleries appeared on several more pedestrian structures, such as the hospital at the Forge of Mon Desir. The Company of the Indies purchased the forge in 1775 for 216,400 Livres. In the sale record, company representative, Mr. De Epréville, noted that the wood and stone buildings at this worksite were in such poor condition that they encompassed “nothing more than four walls.” According to De Epréville, this characterization also held true for the relatively small, 100-foot-long by forty-two-foot wide hospital, which contained a frontal veranda that faced an open courtyard. This gallery was merely a space where an overflow of workers and slaves could hastily receive medical treatment.⁷⁴ On the veranda, these individuals underwent basic care for the wounds they sustained as they worked at the forge. This situation reveals that, in addition to functioning as a component of elite architecture, the gallery could also serve as a makeshift and a non-elite space.

A gallery attached to a modest building at the forge (built, 1770) of another small landowner, Mr. Constant, further demonstrates the class versatility of this form. Here, the

⁷³ Unknown author, Sale Record, Residence of the Colonel, 1771, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁷⁴ Mr. De Epréville, Sale Record, Residence of the Colonel, 1771, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

gallery acted as an outdoor extension of the atelier. After viewing worksites like that of Mr. Constant, an unnamed representative of the Company of the Indies confirmed the commonplace status of the gallery in 1770. When describing Port Louis, he stated that galleries often served as vestibule entrances on functional structures: “In front of the doors on the façades of buildings [in Port Louis], there is [usually] a gallery.”⁷⁵ As we have seen, settlers employed such spaces in a variety of ways; in some instances, frontal galleries served as shades for increasing salubrity whereas in others they were integral components of active worksites. Altogether, these diverse patterns of use shed light upon the broad applicability of frontal galleries.

Yet, even when they were additions to rather mundane structures, porches required the knowledge and the labor of several slaves. A 1768 report detailing the construction of a gallery house on Rodrigues confirms this pattern. In order to build a small gallery house, the company employed five slaves and one free black, all of whom worked for a total of four months and twenty-two days. Of this group, four individuals were non-specialized laborers while one was a carpenter and another was the head mason. Three laborers came from Madagascar while one was from India and two were merely listed as “black,” a category that could apply to slaves of almost any non-

⁷⁵ Unknown author, Diverse Correspondence, 1770, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

European ethnicity.⁷⁶ Together, these workers collected 2,265 pieces of wood and nails to build a house that was only twenty-six feet long by 17 feet wide.⁷⁷

The General Store of Flacq (eastern Mauritius) followed a similar dynamic. Enslaved individuals built this structure in 1772 on the property of Madame DuBreuil. Like many buildings in the colony, this store was a two-story dwelling placed atop an earthen foundation. It had a wood framework, a frontal gallery, masonry walls, and a limewash coating. In May of 1772, Michel Ribet (the notary in charge of recording the work completed at this site) detailed the extensive amount of labor required to build this dwelling. Madame DuBreuil employed 416 enslaved builders. In total, 404 of these slaves collected the sand and coral needed to produce limewash. It took four slaves nearly six months to “fish” for coral in the nearby lagoon. They completed this phase of the project through utilizing canoes that another group of slaves constructed. After these individuals gathered the appropriate amount of coral and sand, they cooked these materials into limewash. Others detonated gunpowder at a local mine in order to yield stone blocks. Finally, these slaves assembled the General Store.⁷⁸

Every house erected in this manner necessitated this degree of labor. Along these lines, the above records indicate that enslaved individuals brought their knowledge of how to build verandas with them to Mauritius. A 1791 map of Port Louis illustrates how

⁷⁶ For more information on the notion of blackness as it applied to Mauritius in the eighteenth century, see: Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 196-197.

⁷⁷ Unknown author, Architectural Records, 1768, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁷⁸ Michel Ribet, Property Survey, May 1772, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

this process may have unfolded through visualizing the kinds of structures that these groups erected on their own while living on the island. This plan depicts the town as a dense collection of square and rectangular buildings. On the south side of Port Louis is an area, which includes neighborhoods for free blacks as well as Malagasy and Bamana persons. Two straw roundhouses stand next to the Bambara quarter. Each roundhouse features a protruding roof that covers a small veranda, which wraps around the structure (Figures 1.6 and 1.7).⁷⁹ On the other side of town is the Indian Quarter. A map from 1796 states that, even here, “blacks [i.e., slaves] built primitive dwellings for their own use.”⁸⁰

The above plans draw attention to the fact that West African, Malagasy, and Indian peoples influenced the built landscapes of eighteenth-century Mauritius. Megan Vaughan has claimed that, in addition to harboring a Malagasy majority and an Indian minority, the island contained a small yet notable population of West African slaves. In her view, authorities valued this group because of their supposed skills in the building trades.⁸¹ These preferences take on a new meaning when considered in relation to the above map.

More precisely, the representation of West African roundhouses complete with wrap-around porches confirms that the French viewed these forms as noteworthy in the context of Port Louis. At the very least, through depicting roundhouses, officials recorded West African expertise in gallery construction. Along similar lines, the observation that

⁷⁹ Figures 1.6 and 1.7. *Map of Port Louis*, 1791, Maps and Plans Division, National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁸⁰ Maps and Plans Division, National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁸¹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 40.

“blacks” generally built their own homes points to the possibility that, like their West African counterparts, Malagasy, East African, and Indian slaves possibly transferred the domestic architecture of their respective homelands to Mauritius.⁸² What is certain is that all of these groups put their expertise to use when building colonial structures on this eighteenth-century island.

By 1810, 406 slaves worked for the Bureau of Building and Engineering alone. Of this group, 153 were born on the island. Likewise, 193 came from Mozambique, fifty-five hailed from Madagascar, two hailed from India, two came from West Africa, and one was from Malaysia. The French sold these slaves as well as all company buildings to the British in December of 1810.⁸³ Included in this inventory were literally hundreds of structures located on all corners of the island. Of these dwellings, the most strategically significant building complex was the caserne of Port Louis. This fortress served as the base for French (and later, British) military forces. A brick wall surrounded a site that contained over thirty large and small buildings. The most elaborate dwelling was the barracks, which served as a lodging space for soldiers and the head officer.⁸⁴ An examination of this building sheds light upon the kind of architecture that existed in Port Louis at the end of French colonialism.

⁸² For a discussion of this process in the context of the Caribbean, see, Edwards (1989, 1994, 2008).

⁸³ Record of the Transfer of Authority from the British to the French, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

⁸⁴ Record of the Transfer of Authority, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

The barracks was a two story dwelling located at the center of the caserne. The first floor consisted of eight rooms, all of which the military used to store various supplies. The second floor boasted eight additional rooms, which served as sleeping quarters. The building was fifty-six feet wide by 36 feet long. Next to this structure was a detached kitchen; both the barracks and the kitchen were made of masonry with an argamasse coating. Most important, the main dwelling contained a wrap-around porch that encircled the entire first floor. In front of this gallery sat an open courtyard. Yet, unlike most other courtyards, this space was a site for leisure and relaxation complete with a fountain at its center. This water source was a place where officers, in particular, could bathe and cool off on warm summer days.⁸⁵

The presence of a wrap-around porch and a fountain at the barracks of the caserne speaks to the evolution of creole architecture under French colonialism. At the end of the French period, the markers of a creolized style—the gallery, the symmetrical plan with an even number of rooms, locally produced limewash, and the detached kitchen—were functional elements within the official architecture of the island. These components displayed a strong degree of versatility since they appeared on buildings that were both elite and pedestrian. Thus, by the time Mauritius transitioned from French to British rule, these features were recognizable vectors for the creation of military, commercial, and private dwellings in the colony. In many respects, enslaved peoples contributed to the popularization of these forms. Both the composition of the enslaved population and the

⁸⁵ Record of the Transfer of Authority, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

conglomerate buildings they produced attested to the history of architectural creolization in Mauritius.

On the island, colonizers and slaves erected buildings that ultimately diverged from European precedents. For this reason, Mauritian creole architecture warrants an approach that takes into account the worldwide systems of cultural and economic exchange that converged on the island during French colonialism. Through critiquing the historical trajectory and the narrative presented in the discourse on creole architecture, we can begin to think of the ways in which Mauritius can inform our understanding of this paradigm.

Creole Architecture: The History of a Discourse

Thus far, research on creole built environments has focused exclusively on the Atlantic world and has thus ignored the Indian Ocean. This scholarship has also used the specificities of Atlantic history as the bases for several large-scale generalizations concerning creole dwellings. Nevertheless, this material remains relevant for the study of eighteenth-century Mauritius. The authors who have engaged creolization with respect to colonial dwellings have provided a model for the study of architecture and social mixture in the early imperial world. For this reason, I would like to examine their arguments before delving into a discussion of the ways in which Mauritius challenges some of the suppositions of previous research. Hence, I will now switch to an analysis of the discourse that has for years framed our understanding of creole built environments.

The term “creole” comes from fifteenth-century Portuguese. However, in 1948, Buford Pickens became one of the first historians to identify the characteristics of a

creole house in an article on Louisiana architecture in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. In his view, creole built environments possessed a gallery, a symmetrical layout, a detached kitchen, and a plan with storage and living areas incorporated into a single space. Pickens contended that these elements were a part of American colonial architecture as a result of European innovation: “the seeds for the original European species were sowed at different spots on virgin American soil under conditions capable of producing vital new characteristics.”⁸⁶ He went on to claim that European adaptations to tropical climates accounted for the differences between the architecture of the Americas and that of continental Europe. Thus, according to Pickens, galleries and other creole features derived from the technical solutions that Europeans came up with when confronted with new climates. Pickens also asserted that environmental influences on New World architecture thwarted the development of a uniform style across French colonies. He argued that, since each French colony possessed a unique climate, Europeans developed different architectural responses to separate environmental factors.⁸⁷

These ideas shaped future scholarship on creole architecture. Writing in 1977, William Cullison argued that the “French colonial style plantation house” was “essentially a...Norman [western French] farmhouse Americanized through the addition

⁸⁶ Buford L. Pickens, “Regional Aspects of Early Louisiana Architecture,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 7, no. 1/2 (January-June 1948), 33.

⁸⁷ Pickens, “Regional Aspects,” 36.

of a broad encircling gallery.”⁸⁸ Likewise, in a 1984 article, Jonathan Fricker suggested that creole built environments in Louisiana and in the rest of the Americas grew out of the building traditions of medieval France.⁸⁹ Much like earlier scholars, Fricker ignored the non-European character of New World built environments even though he used the term “creole architecture” and subsequently identified all of the elements that distinguish this conglomerate typology.⁹⁰ The oversights of Fricker and his colleagues demonstrate the Eurocentric focus of early scholarship on creole built environments.

In his 1994 article, “The Origins of Creole Architecture,” Jay Edwards described architectural creolization in a way that countered previous arguments. At the same time, his definition of this process grew out of earlier scholarship. He contended that “creole might refer to any architectural tradition genetically descended from a synthesized tropical colonial form...[and] characterized by a distinctive geometric pattern—a European-derived rectangular core that is partially or fully surrounded by peripheral spaces that are always more narrow than the central areas and that includes at least one full-length gallery or open loggia.”⁹¹ In a separate article, Edwards argued that this paradigm appeared across “the Atlantic, Latin America, and the Indian Ocean islands of

⁸⁸ William R. Cullison, “Tulane’s Richard Koch Collection: A Visual Survey of Historic Architecture in the Mississippi Delta,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1977), 457.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Fricker, “The Origins of the Creole Raised Plantation House,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 152.

⁹⁰ Fricker, “The Origins of the Creole,” 138.

⁹¹ Edwards, “The Origins of Creole Architecture,” 157.

Mauritius and Réunion.”⁹² Yet, despite acknowledging the relevance of the Indian Ocean, the body of scholarship that Edwards has produced has focused exclusively on the Atlantic world. Subsequently, his work has posited the building traditions of pre-modern Europe and pre-colonial West Africa as integral to the development of creole architecture.

For Edwards, the history of creole architecture began during the Crusades. Once warriors returned to Europe, they attempted to build fortified residences that mirrored the castles of the Levant. In Southern Europe, these buildings were square dwellings with corner towers on each side of the façade and stone curtain walls. Beginning in the fifteenth century, Italian builders started to replace curtain walls with open arcades in an attempt to revive Roman style. Such arcades quickly became commonplace on Italian Renaissance villas.⁹³

In Edward’s view, these developments made their way to the Americas in 1510 when Diego Colon (the son of Christopher Columbus) constructed a large villa on the island of Hispaniola. This house mimicked Italian Renaissance architecture on the Spanish frontier. The building, known as the Casa del Almirante, was a two-story structure; the ground floor held government offices whereas the second floor contained the living spaces for the Colon family. In terms of its ground plan, the Casa del Almirante possessed four rooms (termed, gabinetas) that boxed in a central loggia (or exterior, covered porch).⁹⁴ According to Edwards, once Colon finished construction on this house,

⁹² Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions,” 165.

⁹³ Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions,” 169.

⁹⁴ Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions,” 171.

colonizers celebrated its style. Almost immediately, sugar planters with less money began constructing smaller versions of the Case del Almirante. Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, a generalized blueprint—based off of the original design for Colon’s home—emerged for planters’ houses on the Spanish Caribbean islands of Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico.⁹⁵ From Edwards’ perspective, these events catalyzed architectural creolization.

The second aspect of Edwards’ argument addresses the history of slavery. Spain began importing slaves from the Guinea coast to the Caribbean as early as 1517. Edwards contends that these slaves had considerable freedom with respect to the design and the construction of their houses. In his view, such leeway resulted in the introduction of two quintessentially West African elements to creole architecture: the frontal or wrap-around porch and the detached kitchen. Edwards draws attention to the reality that, in pre-colonial West Africa, coastal peoples lived in palisaded compounds that accommodated one extended family or kinship group. Every adult family member possessed his or her own freestanding bedroom unit within the compound. Furthermore, separate structures existed for cooking, storage, and entertainment purposes.⁹⁶ Altogether, each unit possessed a gallery-like structure that served as a frontal veranda; this space was both a site for social exchange and a place for completing daily chores.⁹⁷

In large part, Edwards’ engagement of the architecture of pre-colonial West

⁹⁵ Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions,” 172.

⁹⁶ Edwards, “Unheralded Contributions,” 181.

⁹⁷ Jay Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza-Veranda-Gallery,” *Material Culture* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1989), 23.

Africa draws upon the scholarship of Peter Mark. This body of work discusses the history of architectural creolization in West Africa during the first centuries of contact between Africans and Europeans. Mark acknowledges that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to encounter Africans in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Senegambia. In this context, a building typology developed, which Mark refers to as the Portuguese style house. Such houses combined both European and West African building traditions. Moreover, these structures were rectangular and made of sun-dried bricks with a limewash coating. Portuguese style houses also had palm thatched roofs, a vestibule at the entrance, and a veranda surrounding the entire structure.⁹⁸ For both Mark and Edwards, the transportation of slaves to the Spanish Caribbean rendered the features of the Portuguese house components of an architectural tradition that borrowed from Renaissance style. As European settlers relied on slaves to construct buildings that suited the Caribbean climate, such architecture became a part of an American colonial style.⁹⁹

In concluding his argument, Edwards contends that both the transfer of western Hispaniola (Haiti) from Spanish to French rule and the British capture of Jamaica caused the diffusion of creole typologies throughout the American world. French and British colonizers commandeered Spanish houses. In doing so, they unintentionally established them as architectural blueprints. In Edwards' view, as both powers began to colonize North America, the creolized architectural style that emerged in the Spanish Caribbean

⁹⁸ Peter Mark, "Constructing Identity: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Architecture in the Gambia-Geba Region and the Articulation of Luso-African Ethnicity," *History of Africa* 22 (1995), 314.

⁹⁹ Edwards, "Unheralded Contributions," 176.

spread across the American continent.¹⁰⁰

Taken together, the above authors frame creole architecture in terms of events that were specific to American or West African societies. These scholars have used Atlantic slavery, Spanish Caribbean houses, and the transfiguration of Norman and Italian architecture as a means for reinforcing this methodological focus. In this sense, the above arguments relate to one another because of their tendency to posit Atlantic paradigms as the geneses for creole forms. In other words, Edwards and his colleagues define creole architecture in purely Atlantic terms. Yet identical building forms appeared in Mauritius despite the fact that this island was never a Spanish colony. Moreover, Mauritius never experienced the translation of Italian Renaissance style or large-scale migration on the part of West Africans and Europeans exclusively. If Mauritius was a place where creole architecture emerged despite different social forces, then the narrative commonly posited to explain the global development of this building tradition is in need of revision.

New Directions in the Study of Creole Architecture

The case of Mauritius can contribute to our understanding of the global history of creole architecture. At the same time, this island provides a context for reconsidering our propensity to find explicit antecedents for creole built environments. The decentered processes of cultural transference that shaped Mauritius shed light upon the problems with theories, which posit creole architecture in terms of the unilateral diffusion of house types. Thus, Mauritius can serve as the basis for considering the multiple and rhizomatic

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, “The Origins of Creole Architecture,” 177.

lines of influence that typified this tradition on a global scale. In the pages that follow, I will critique the possible antecedents for Mauritian built environments before shifting our attention to the ways in which the island can yield a perspective on creole architecture that considers both the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean histories of this typology.

* * *

The history of creole architecture in Mauritius invites us to consider the relationship between this island and the other localities in the Indian Ocean world. In particular, the Military Hospital of Port Louis is crucial for this intellectual project. Although the hospital was a distinct catalyst for Mauritian architectural development, the organizational and stylistic components of this structure was not unique to the island. French India, the French Caribbean, French Louisiana, French Senegal and, even, the neighboring island of Île Bourbon harbored dwellings that were nearly identical to the Military Hospital. Subsequently, it is possible that this structure referenced a generalized architectural template that pervaded the imperial world. With respect to Mauritius, both the built environments of other colonies and Labourdonnais' life narrative provide points of departure for considering the ways in which generic forms circulated throughout the French empire.

Of particular relevance to the architectural history of Mauritius is Pondicherry, an eighteenth-century French trading center on the Bay of Bengal in India. In 1735, the same year that Labourdonnais built the Military Hospital, this town boasted a population of 10,000 inhabitants. Megan Vaughan has claimed that the trading houses of Pondicherry

influenced Labourdonnais' architectural plans for Port Louis.¹⁰¹ Several historical realities support this assertion. In Pondicherry, the French colonial government ordered residents to build houses according to a two-story organizational plan. As in many parts of Mauritius, this plan consisted of a first floor that contained storage spaces as well as a second floor, which served as the living quarters for merchants and administrators.¹⁰² Yet the most significant event that linked the official architecture of Pondicherry to that of Mauritius was Labourdonnais' decision to move between both localities. Here, I would like to reiterate that, before Labourdonnais was the governor of Mauritius and Réunion, he served as a trader on the Coromandel Coast, a region of southeast India that encompasses Pondicherry. While working in this capacity, Labourdonnais would have become familiar with the multi-use architecture of this commercial region.¹⁰³ Thus, it is likely that French India was one of the places he imagined when designing Mauritian buildings that "were suitable for a French colony."¹⁰⁴

If the life narrative of Mahé de Labourdonnais suggests the extent to which French India influenced Mauritian architecture, then the history of slavery reveals even more possible antecedents. On one level, the slave population of Mauritius was far more diverse than that of American colonies. Throughout the French period, the enslaved

¹⁰¹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 38.

¹⁰² Partha Mitter, "The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640-1757," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45, no. 2 (June 1986), 103.

¹⁰³ Edward Alpers, "The French Slave Trade in East Africa (1721-1810)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 10, no. 37 (1970), 88.

¹⁰⁴ Labourdonnais, *Mémoire*, 20.

population included what one European observer once described as “blacks from every ethnicity.”¹⁰⁵ Official records listed slaves as Creole (born on the island), Malagasy, Mozambican, Indian, or Guinée (West African). But these labels themselves oversimplified the diverse origins of Mauritian slaves. For example, Guinée slaves belonged to the numerous ethnic groups of coastal and inland West Africa (such as, the Wolof, the Bamana, the Peul) whereas the Malagasy population included individuals from the Ambanivolo, the Merina, and the Sakalava ethnic groups, among others. Persons labeled as Mozambican came from as far away as Malawi, Zanzibar, or the Swahili coast. On the other hand, Indian slaves were often of Bengali, Malabar, or Tamil origin. Once in Mauritius, these groups interacted with one another and thus gave rise to the creole population.¹⁰⁶

Such diversity holds several implications for the study of creole architecture. Histories of mixture and transience point toward a plethora of potential non-Atlantic antecedents for Mauritian built environments. Gillian Feeley-Harnik as well as Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona have argued that compound houses with outbuildings and wooden frames were common in Madagascar before the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ With respect to East Africa, Garth Myers has contended that permanent construction

¹⁰⁵ Unknown author, Description of French Mauritius, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

¹⁰⁶ Allen, “The Constant Demand of the French,” 52.

¹⁰⁷ See Gilliam Feeley-Harnik, “The Sakalava House (Madagascar),” *Anthropos* 75, no. 3/4 (1980): 559-585. And see also Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, “House to Palace, Village to State: Scaling up Architecture and Ideology,” *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 1 (March 2000): 98-113.

characterized Zanzibar and the Swahili coast long before the colonial period. In Zanzibar, houses often contained a “strong wooden frame” with walls covered in limewash.¹⁰⁸

These insights suggest that a large number of Malagasy and East African slaves were familiar with both wooden construction and the production of limewash upon their arrival in Mauritius. Some of these individuals may have put these skills to use when building colonial structures en charpente (with a wooden frame) or when making argamasse. Yet the most convincing example of a possible non-Atlantic precursor—introduced on the part of slaves—to Mauritian architecture lies in the built environments of pre-colonial India. More precisely, the history of the bungalow reveals the potential importance of traditional Indian typologies for the study of Mauritian architecture.

In his 1984 book, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, Anthony King defines the bungalow as a term used to describe a variety building forms on diverse continents.¹⁰⁹ For the purposes of this study, the most significant aspect of King’s work is his examination of the early history of this form. King contends that the bungalow originated in eastern India (on the Bay of Bengal) during the seventeenth century. There, it derived from an indigenous house type known as the Bengali hut. Such buildings were square, gable roof dwellings with walls made from grasses, reeds, and clay. The hut

¹⁰⁸ Garth Andrew Myers, “Sticks and Stones: Colonialism and Zanzibari Housing,” *Journal of the International African Institute* 67, no. 2 (1997), 254. For a more in depth discussion of the colonial architectural history of Zanzibar, see: Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandas of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 30-31. Although this book covers urban planning and policy in the postcolonial period, it nonetheless provides some information on the colonial built environments of Zanzibar that can supplement the data provided in the above article.

¹⁰⁹ Anthony King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 1984), 2.

almost always featured a single wooden door and window openings (usually no more than two) covered with wooden shutters. Most important, Bengali huts contained wrap-around or frontal galleries. Rooms opened onto such galleries, which functioned as outdoor living spaces.¹¹⁰ In pre-colonial Bengal, several huts positioned adjacent to one another comprised family compounds where adult couples lived on their own. These compounds contained detached kitchens and freestanding storage units.¹¹¹

For King, this building tradition became a part of a colonial architectural repertoire when the British appropriated the typology. During the seventeenth century, British imperialists began building structures—known as bungalows—that were organizationally and stylistically similar to the Bengali hut. They used such buildings to house the European merchants and administrators who were stationed in India. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Bengali hut emerged as the primer architectural typology for houses used to lodge Europeans in British India and in other colonies on the Indian subcontinent. Thus, the bungalow was born.¹¹² The slaves and colonizers who moved between India and the Mascarene Islands could be seen as figures who—along with West African, Malagasy, and East African slaves—potentially brought non-European building traditions to colonial Mauritius.

The above discussion moves toward the resolution of questions concerning the origins of Mauritian creole architecture. In this sense, I have mirrored the genealogy

¹¹⁰ King, *The Bungalow*, 30.

¹¹¹ King, *The Bungalow*, 19.

¹¹² King, *The Bungalow*, 30.

explicated on the part of Jay Edwards and his colleagues. It is undeniable that, in many respects, eighteenth-century Mauritius invites the construction of a narrative that duplicates the one elaborated in discourses on the Atlantic world. Both the Casa del Almirante and the Military Hospital of Port Louis were the products of European designs, which settlers valorized and then mimicked when constructing smaller dwellings. On the other hand, the building traditions of the places where most slaves came from were relatively homologous in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean worlds. The Bengali hut, for instance, possessed both a design and a history of appropriation that matched that of the West African compound house. Bengali huts also contained almost all of the same features—a wrap-around gallery, a family compound system of organization, and detached kitchens—as the indigenous houses of coastal West Africa.

Taken together, these continuities could serve as the basis for a theory on architectural creolization in Mauritius that follows the path cleared by Jay Edwards. In this narrative, India, Europe, Madagascar, East Africa, and West Africa would serve as parent cultures within an Indian Ocean history of architectural creolization. In other words, the case of Mauritius could provide the impetuses for a study of the Indian Ocean that reproduces the same questions and methods of analysis that have characterized the scholarship on Atlantic societies. Therefore, we could position Mauritius and the Indian Ocean as forgotten localities within a more inclusive genealogy of creole architecture.

Despite the benefits of such work, I would like to consider another possibility. The case of Mauritius presents an opportunity to engage the relationship between creole architecture and globally informed theories concerning the emergence of cultural forms. For this reason, I would like to consider the possibilities that come out of conceptualizing

creole architecture in terms of both Deleuzian and Glissantian thought.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define the rhizome in ways that hold implications for the study of creole architecture. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is as an organism that functions as a multiplicity without a center and devoid of a point of origin. This paradigm is an assemblage that consists of lines of influence, which together encompass an interconnected system. Instead of possessing a beginning or an end, the rhizome contains only a middle from which phenomena extend and overlap: “The rhizome is an antigenealogy. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots.”¹¹³ In other words, the rhizome is a mechanism that catalyzes the continual germination of diverse forms and processes. Most important, according to Deleuze and Guattari, visual histories and, even, places can embody the rhizome.¹¹⁴

Caribbean literary theorist, Édouard Glissant, has most thoroughly drawn a link between the rhizome and creolization. Glissant describes creolization as a decentered process of social and cultural mixture that unfolds within a “chaos monde”: a worldwide system of diverse peoples and things that are continuously brought into contact with one another.¹¹⁵ For Glissant, creole cultures have grown out of the chaos monde of slavery and colonialism. Such societies continually evolve and thus engender reformulated networks of contact and interrelation. In this sense, creole cultures give rise to perpetually

¹¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

¹¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 94.

shifting “ethnocultural realms” that extend “from the Antilles to the Indian Ocean.”¹¹⁶

In conceptualizing creolization in this manner, Glissant articulates what Kathleen Gyssels identifies as a global “rhizomatic identity,” or a Deleuzian vision that posits creolization as a phenomenon with “multiple roots” that is “always ever evolving [and] mutating...[in the context of] the West Indies...[and] the ‘whole’ world.” As a result, creole cultures embody a rhizome, which connects diverse societies on multiple corners of the globe.¹¹⁷

Both Deleuzian and Glissantian perspectives are significant for a number of reasons. On one level, Glissant’s engagement of the Indian Ocean indicates the value of his theory for understanding the place of Mauritius in early colonial economies of intercultural exchange. At the same time, the Deleuzian notion of the rhizome provides a basis for rethinking the narrative put forth in order to explain the emergence of creole architecture. The insights of Deleuze, Guattari, and Glissant suggest that creolization was a rhizomatic process without a definitive beginning and without a traceable end. The conglomerate built environments that developed as a result of early colonial contact contained lines of influence—the traditions of the Bengali hut, the roundhouse, symmetrical construction, the gallery, and the detached kitchen—that moved between contact zones. These antecedents themselves came about through histories of exchange, which predated the formation of colonial societies. Hence, the buildings that appeared worldwide during the first centuries of French colonialism were architectural pieces within a rhizomatic assemblage of cultural creolization.

¹¹⁶ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 89.

¹¹⁷ Kathleen Gyssels, “Tribute to Edouard Glissant,” *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2011), 133.

Yet the global history of creole architecture does not end there. As Atlantic societies witnessed the collision of Amerindian, West African, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and British cultures, the Indian Ocean experienced a process that was largely similar. Much like in the Atlantic, in the Indian Ocean, European officials encountered non-European slaves as well as indigenous peoples, local merchants, and cosmopolitan sailors. Across colonial societies, these individuals interacted with one another for the same political and economic reasons. These persons and the localities in which they lived were a part of a worldwide system of colonial trade and global slavery. In other words, colonies from Mauritius to North America incubated the same social and relational dynamics—between master and slave, European trader and local merchant, and cosmopolitan sailor and colonial administrator, to name only a few. In this way, the colonies that materialized during the first wave of European expansion reproduced the same social relationships despite disparate geographies.

The architecture of creolization grew out of this global culture of colonial interrelation. The peoples who inhabited early colonies appropriated and combined a series of architectural features that were common in many European and non-European contexts. As India, West Africa, Europe, and East Africa illustrate, the frontal or wrap-around porch, the detached kitchen, the family compound, and the symmetrical plan were recognizable components within the building traditions of numerous societies. Such broadly defined commonalities indicate the cosmopolitan genericism of creole architecture. Creole built environments did not materialize through the unilateral diffusion of building forms from one side of an ocean to the other. Instead, this tradition appeared and diffused across multiple nodes simultaneously as diverse peoples

confronted the same problems and seized the same general elements to construct suitable structures within an interconnected economy. Furthermore, the diffusion of creole architecture hinged upon its propensity to synthesize a variety of prototypical forms within a recognizable whole.

Hence, when Mahé de Labourdonnais claimed to have designed Port Louis according to a set of precedents that “were suitable for a French colony,”¹¹⁸ he alluded to the identifiable typology that was creole architecture. The economic boom that followed solidified the predominance of such forms. Yet Malagasy, East African, Indian, West African, and Creole slaves shaped creole architecture as well. Like Labourdonnais, enslaved persons internalized this framework as they lived and worked in creole buildings. As Megan Vaughan has intimated, an understanding of this typology guided enslaved individuals as they built the trading houses of colonial Mauritius.¹¹⁹ Together, colonizers and slaves determined the architectural future of this Indian Ocean island.

Consequently, the built environments of Mauritius displayed creole cosmopolitanism, a dynamic engendered as diverse colonizers and slaves came into contact with one another. In discussing Mauritius, Françoise Lionnet contends that the Indian Ocean provides a context for rethinking the binaries, which have historically produced separate understandings of creole and cosmopolitan subjectivity. For Lionnet, “creole” is a “well-defined if not exactly static cultural and linguistic identity” that evokes histories of slavery and indenture. From her perspective, the term “creole”

¹¹⁸ Labourdonnais, *Mémoire*, 34.

¹¹⁹ Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, 38.

connotes immobility imposed as a result of colonial domination.¹²⁰ As she explains, this idea circulates within a larger discursive realm in which creole identity indicates inferior status. From Mauritius to the Caribbean, creole cultures connote degeneracy, socially imposed deficiency, and clichés of exotic otherness.¹²¹

The negative valences that have historically distinguished creole identity stand in contrast to the positive connotations of cosmopolitanism. Lionnet defines this paradigm as a construct that applies to a variety of individuals, communities, or circumstances, all of which exhibit a multi-locational focus. Cosmopolitan persons and things project worldliness as opposed rootedness in a specific region. Such entities exhibit a global vision that rejects a provincial fixation on local contexts. According to Lionnet, cosmopolitan subjectivity evokes high culture as well as an educated understanding of a diverse and multicultural world. For these reasons, the cosmopolitan stands in opposition to the creole.¹²²

Yet, as Lionnet acknowledges, Mauritius challenges the ideological binary that has separated cosmopolitan from creole identity. In forging this argument, Lionnet turns to the colonial history of the island. Far from displaying the conventions of an insular society, colonial Mauritius incubated a creole population of slaves that was profoundly cosmopolitan. Enslaved individuals possessed an intimate knowledge of the cultural components—languages, building traditions, and port cities, among other entities—of an

¹²⁰ Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain*, 66.

¹²¹ Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain*, 66.

¹²² Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain*, 68.

oceanic complex that linked India, East Africa, Madagascar, and Southeast Asia to the markets of Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. In Lionnet's view, both the global character of this population and the role of Mauritius in fostering multidirectional affinities indicate the extent to which the island can collapse the cosmopolitan/creole binary. In other words, the case of colonial Mauritius proves that creole subjects can be cosmopolitan. As Lionnet aptly recognizes, Mauritius reveals that creolization is the cosmopolitanism of the subaltern.¹²³

At this point, I would like to switch our attention back to the architecture of eighteenth-century imperialism. In discussing the built environments of British colonial Jamaica, architectural historian, Louis Nelson, echoes Lionnet's claims. Much like her, he maintains that, in the eyes of eighteenth-century Europeans, *creole* was a derisive term that referred to persons and things that were "West Indian-born, culturally distinct, racially blurred, given to physical indulgence, and lacking in refinement."¹²⁴ For Nelson, these stereotypes related to architecture since the expansive definition of *creole* meant that West Indian houses where whites and blacks intermingled became known as creole spaces. Although such populations did not begin to adopt a creole identity until the nineteenth century, eighteenth-century denotations certainly influenced perceptions of the conglomerate houses raised in the colonial West Indies.¹²⁵

Meanwhile, in Mauritius, settlers and slaves were busy erecting buildings that

¹²³ Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain*, 69.

¹²⁴ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 192.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

also referenced a multitude of European and non-European forms. As they worked together, colonial populations familiarized themselves with a typology with lines of influence from across the imperial world. In this way, the buildings and the builders of eighteenth-century Mauritius, like those in the Caribbean, manifested the blurred cultural affiliations derided in creole stereotypes as well as a social outlook of creole cosmopolitanism.

Hence, the verandas, symmetrical plans, limewash exteriors, and detached kitchens that encompassed Mauritian architecture testified to the lingering impact of distinct local cultures—of Bengal, France, Madagascar, East Africa, and West Africa—in ways that cannot be ignored. As these forms predominated, they typified what Stuart Hall refers to as *présence*. Hall describes “*présences*” as the cultural influences that are a part of creole societies through lines of affiliation, which reflect the contributions of diverse groups. For Hall, creole cultures contain a plethora of “*présences*”: *présence africaine*, *présence européenne*, *présence américaine*, and *présence indienne*, among others. *Présence* thus refers to the cultural vestiges—from Africa, Europe, America, India, and Asia—that creole cultures contain.¹²⁶ Like the houses of the Atlantic, the structures that covered the colonial Mauritian landscape spoke to the *présence* of disparate builders and building traditions. In embodying both the diverse *présences* of colonized peoples and globalized genericism, the dwellings of eighteenth-century Mauritius were some of the first entities to reflect the cosmopolitanism of the French empire.

¹²⁶ Stuart Hall, “Créolité and the Process of Creolization,” in *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta11_Platform3*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, et. al. (Kassel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003), 32.

* * *

The case of Mauritius presents several questions that provoke the expansion of current definitions of creole architecture. Similarly, as a place that lies beyond the geographies that have historically been the focus of scholarship on this building tradition, the island offers an opportunity to question existing arguments concerning the diffusion of this typology. Eighteenth-century Mauritius was an abandoned island that French, Malagasy, East African, Indian, and West African peoples inhabited before establishing an architectural tradition that reflected the conglomerate character of this emergent society. Since no one group was from Mauritius, all settlers brought building traditions with them to island thus rendering it a site where eighteenth-century architecture spoke to diverse antecedents, which referenced distant lands and arrived in this territory as a result of globally inflected histories of transference and cultural exchange.

The slaves, administrators, merchants, and sailors who arrived on this island encountered one another in ways that reveal the rhizomatic history of architectural creolization. The diversity of these populations attested to the multiple lines of influence that rendered Mauritian architecture a conglomerate form within an equally conglomerate early colonial world. Through examining this island, we can further elucidate the global significance of creole architecture.

Conclusion: Studying the Built Environments of Creole Cosmopolitanism

Whereas the predominant discourse on creole architecture intimates that the Indian Ocean was a marginal locality, the case of eighteenth-century Mauritius points to the cosmopolitan character of the region. On this island, Indian, Malagasy, East African,

West African, and European populations produced built environments that grew out of a globally uniform system of contact and exchange. This process occurred because, during the eighteenth century, the island was a commercial node that attracted populations from both the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic littoral. In these ways, Mauritius demonstrates that creole architecture was a cosmopolitan, rather than a purely Atlantic, phenomenon.

Accordingly, Mauritian built environments attested to lines of influence that extended in all directions from the wharf at Port Louis. Malagasy, East African, Indian, French, West African, and, even, Malay individuals descended upon this once abandoned island from the east, west, north, and south. As they made Mauritius their home, these groups erected domiciles that often reflected the diverse building traditions of their respective worksites and their respective homelands. Over time, architectural antecedents coalesced to form the conglomerate typology that was creole architecture. As a result of this process, Mauritius, like the other colonial domains where creole structures emerged, fostered mixture in ways that gave rise to generic architectural forms.

Given our knowledge of the groups who contributed to the architectural development of Mauritius, it is tempting to construct a history of local built environments that mimics the one elaborated in the context of the Atlantic world. Despite the lure of this kind of intellectual project, the diverse populations and personalities who came to influence eighteenth-century Mauritian architecture deserve a scholarly approach that recognizes their cosmopolitanism. Just as slaves and colonizers arrived on the island from many directions while harboring attachments to disparate cultures and imperial domains, scholarship on the buildings they produced can embody a theoretical perspective that is rhizomatic in its consideration of architectural mixture. Therefore, the examination of

Mauritian built environments can reflect the globally defined systems of mixture, contact, and interrelation that give rise to this typology.

Taking these possibilities into account, it is undeniable that French colonial Mauritius incubated an architectural style that remains difficult to categorize. Buildings in this colony referenced a range of typologies from across the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean worlds. Furthermore, many of the individuals who inhabited this island—Bengali slaves, Malagasy carpenters, and East African builders—did not figure so prominently in the history of the Atlantic. At the same time, the globalized built environments of French Mauritius attested to the congruities that this colony shared with the spate of imperial domains, which emerged worldwide during the eighteenth century. Accordingly, the inclusion of Mauritius within a history of imperial architecture presents a number of possibilities. This site invites us to question the dominance of the Atlantic in discourses on creole architecture, reformulate the postulations present in creolization theory, and consider the ways in which notions of cosmopolitanism can add to our understanding of creole dwellings.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the built environments of French Mauritius can point us toward a more global understanding of early colonial systems of architectural exchange. Through examining the hospitals, storehouses, military lodges, and residencies of this prosperous colony, we can begin to detach creole built environments from their hemispheric associations. Subsequently, the conglomerate structures of Mauritius can reveal the truly cosmopolitan history of architecture and creolization under French colonialism.

Chapter 2

Rethinking Plans and Policies: The Urban History of French Imperialism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Saint-Louis

Beginning in the seventeenth century, colonial draftsmen envisioned Saint-Louis as a place where Africans and Europeans lived in separation from one another. Provisional maps figured this enclave as a domain where contemporary principles of ideal urbanism prevailed. In these drawings, the town appeared as a neat port city with fortifications that cemented French control over the urban sphere. Only one-hundred years later, government officials attempted to render this fantasy a reality through restricting African movement as well as the degree to which local architecture could abrogate European plans. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, Saint-Louis had become a colonial town with urban plans and policies that asserted the primacy of French order over the African landscape. This kind of urbanism ensured the proliferation of French dominance for centuries to come.

Thus far, scholars have framed seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis as a fluid social environment where mutual affinities between Africans and Europeans flourished. Historians have advanced this argument while also acknowledging that French colonial towns in early Senegambia witnessed the corrosive effects of the slave trade.¹²⁷ But an enhanced analysis of urban planning and policy in seventeenth and

¹²⁷ Several authors have contributed to our understanding of the social and architectural environments of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Senegambia. For more information on social mixture in Senegambia, see: Hargreaves, "Assimilation in Eighteenth-Century Senegal;" Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*; and Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*. For an engagement of these themes as they relate to architecture, see: Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*; Peter Mark, "Portuguese"

eighteenth-century Saint-Louis indicates that this town was neither a site of uninhibited fluidity nor an epicenter for slavery. Instead, this enclave was a place where absolute authority worked to solidify racially inflected, urban ideals. As such, the implementation of urban plans and policies guaranteed the sustainment of French control in modern Senegambia.

This chapter contends that urban planning and policy in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis reflected the nascent convergence of Enlightenment racism and direct rule: a method of enacting French imperial control whereby a centralized political apparatus dictated the intricacies of colonial life.¹²⁸ I argue that, although direct rule is generally associated with twentieth-century West Africa, early plans and policies demonstrate that a similar system emerged alongside racial anxieties in eighteenth-century Saint-Louis. In this setting, a prototype of direct rule strived, and sometimes failed, to ensure both racial separation and the realization of ideal urban designs. Authorities applied this paradigm in an attempt to render Saint-Louis a neat and segregated port city, like the one imagined on the part of seventeenth-century draftsmen. In engaging the seventeenth and eighteenth-century maps, plans, and legal codes of this town, I shed light upon the long-standing power dynamics that have defined French presence on the African continent.

Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹²⁸ For a more comprehensive discussion of the urban manifestations of direct rule see, Ambe Njoh, "The Impact of Colonial Heritage on Development in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Social Indicators Research* 52, no. 2 (November 2000): 161-178. And Ambe Njoh, *Planning Power: Town Planning and Social Control in Colonial Africa* (London: UCL Press, 2007).

I will begin with a discussion of the geography, the pre-colonial history, and the early colonial economy of Senegambia. Thereafter, I will examine the urban plans and policies of this locality before engaging the coalescence of eighteenth-century racism and ideal urbanism. I will conclude by contemplating the implications of these paradigms for the study of the urban spaces of the first French colonial empire. Temporally, this chapter spans the period from 1659 to 1810. In doing so, it engages the bulk of the French colonial era as well as the period from 1758 to 1783 when the British took control of Saint-Louis. Throughout this time, the town remained an enclave where Franco-West African norms of cultural and political order prevailed. In examining the urban history of early colonial Saint-Louis, this chapter thinks through the role of European ideology in the emergence of French colonial control in Senegambia.

Pre-Colonial Senegambia: Histories and Geographies

Saint-Louis lies on the northern coast of Senegal three kilometers south of the Mauritanian border (Figure 2.1).¹²⁹ The town sits on a sandbar, which is two kilometers long by 400 meters wide. This strip of land lies within an estuary where the Senegal River empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Locals call this place N’Dar. As a whole, the area surrounding Saint-Louis lies within the Western Sahel, a transitional climatic zone on the edge of the Sahara Desert. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Saint-Louis was one of only two French colonial towns on the African continent. The other enclave was Gorée, a small island off the Cap Vert peninsula more than 300 kilometers to the

¹²⁹ Figure 2.1. *Map of Senegal*, University of Texas Libraries, last modified 2016, accessed 20 August 2016, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/senegal.html>.

south. Together, these settlements were crucial for the assertion of French interests in eighteenth-century Senegambia.¹³⁰

Although Gorée and Saint-Louis were instrumental for French West African colonization, these landscapes were profoundly marginal in pre-colonial systems of cultural and economic exchange. From the medieval period to the early fifteenth century, coastal Senegambia sat on the periphery of a trans-Saharan trade network. At the time, the Atlantic coast was of little importance to the Saharan merchants who travelled between the inland markets that bolstered desert trade.¹³¹ These dynamics swiftly changed, however, in the fifteenth century, a period that marked the birth of Atlantic commerce.

In 1448, the Portuguese landed in Senegambia and subsequently shifted the economic center of the region toward the Atlantic coast. The Portuguese saw West Africa as both a source of slaves for their American colonies and a mine for luxury goods (primarily, gold and ivory) desired in European courts. In many respects, these preoccupations fueled the lucrative trans-Atlantic trade, a system whereby merchants bought slaves and valued products on the African coast before transporting them to the Americas and Europe. Despite the florescence of the slave trade, Portuguese intervention in Senegambia did not ignite animosity between Africans and Europeans. Rather, the small number of Portuguese traders who settled in Senegambia associated with Africans

¹³⁰ George Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 207.

¹³¹ Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 32.

in a relatively amicable manner. One of the foremost manifestations of this culture of mutual affinity was the practice of intermarriage between Portuguese men and African women.¹³²

Significantly, these sexual relationships unfolded in simultaneity to fluid understandings of personal identity, which coalesced around domestic architecture. In sixteenth and seventeenth-century Senegambia, the term Portuguese did not refer to members of a specific European racial or ethnic group. Instead, locals used this term to describe a person of any race or background who spoke creole, practiced Christianity, and worked as a trader. Most important, Portuguese individuals lived in Portuguese style houses, which were rectangular dwellings with palm thatched roofs, vestibule entrances, and frontal or wrap-around porches. These domiciles were made with sun-dried bricks and covered in white clay or lime.¹³³ Organizationally, they suited the mercantile economy. Vestibule entrances and frontal porches provided semi-private spaces for homeowners to welcome traders and conduct business without having to allow such persons into the more private, inner chambers of their homes. Overall, in employing these features as markers of a mercantile, transcultural identity, Portuguese style houses, which existed alongside other African built forms, constituted one of the first creolized architectural typologies of coastal West Africa.

¹³² For a more in depth discussion of the history of intermarriage between Portuguese men and African women as related to architecture and landscape in pre-colonial Senegambia, see Mark, *“Portuguese” Style*.

¹³³ Mark, *“Portuguese” Style*, 16-17.

Here, the domiciles of local Wolof and Peul populations warrant further consideration. The Wolof were (and still are) the predominant ethnic group in coastal Senegambia. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they built round or square houses made entirely of straw. These dwellings almost always contained a single room and a conical roof. A Wolof family compound consisted of several structures positioned around a central courtyard where daily chores and social events transpired.¹³⁴ Peul houses, in contrast, were elongated, tunnel-like structures made of grasses, reeds, and straw. In erecting their houses in this manner, the Peul paralleled the Tukulor, a largely Muslim ethnic group from northern Senegal and Mauritania. Tukulor homes were rectangular buildings with a main doorway on the longer side.¹³⁵ All of these building practices set the stage for the emergence of French colonial architecture in Senegambia. In later centuries, both African and Afro-Portuguese forms would influence the architectural and urban development of French colonial Saint-Louis.

The above histories and subsequent building styles demonstrate that cultural mixture predated French intervention. Rather than initiating architectural transference, French colonizers stepped into a context where cultural contact and architectural exchange were long-standing fixtures of social life. At the same time, French intervention marked a shift in the architectural and urban history of the region. Unlike the Portuguese who integrated themselves into Senegambia in a highly dispersed manner, the French constructed small, dense urban nodes where they exercised strict control over town

¹³⁴ Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 64.

¹³⁵ Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 66.

inhabitants. In doing so, they erected the first colonial domains of modern Senegambia.¹³⁶

The Early Colonial Economy

In 1659, the French claimed N’Dar and named it Saint-Louis in honor of King Louis IX. For local populations, the island was of little significance as the poor quality of the soil prevented successful cultivation.¹³⁷ From the perspective of the French, however, N’Dar and its populations possessed immense potential. These perceptions became clear in 1671 when a group of French settlers—under the direction of a man named Maurice Egrot—wrote a letter to French parliament. Their dispatch became one of the first attempts at characterizing Saint-Louis as a potentially viable locale for French trade. According to their letter, the position of this enclave beside the Atlantic Ocean rendered it the ideal site for “[facilitating] the commerce and transport of blacks to [the French] islands of the Caribbean.” This group went on to maintain that “it is necessary to contact...the commercial authorities in the [French] West Indies to ensure the shipment of as many as 2,000 slaves per year [to those islands.]”¹³⁸

The above views coincided with reports that framed Senegambia as a welcoming environment. Writing only one year before Egrot, Sir Micheau claimed that local women, who he referred to as signares, were “very sociable and accommodating and can provide

¹³⁶ Mark, “*Portuguese*” *Style*, 100.

¹³⁷ Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 52.

¹³⁸ Maurice Egrot, Dispatch from Maurice Egrot, 1671, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

us [i.e., the French] with recourse in our trading activities.”¹³⁹ This comment marked the earliest mention of signares—African women who provided sexual services and companionship to French merchants based in Saint-Louis and Gorée. Over the course of the eighteenth century, this group would harness their relationships with European men to establish themselves as commercial intermediaries—between French merchants and local populations—in Senegambia.¹⁴⁰ Thus, as we will see, signares eventually gained immense wealth within the trading systems that colonizers initially sought to control.

But, by the end of the seventeenth century, large-scale wealth—gained through concubinage or the slave trade—had not materialized. On one level, slavery never became a major industry in French Saint-Louis. By 1688, an average of only 100 slaves passed through the town annually. Senegalese historian, Boubacar Barry, has claimed that, despite low numbers, the slave trade de-stabilized Senegambian society: “[this economy caused] a profound political and social crisis” set into motion only “a few years after the construction of the [French] fort at Saint-Louis.” For Barry, the advent of the Atlantic slave trade in Senegambia ushered in an era of colonial violence.¹⁴¹

Yet, it was the gum trade, rather than Atlantic slavery, that would eventually transform the economic character of the region. Each year from 1659 to 1671, French

¹³⁹ Sir Micheau, Letter from Sir Micheau, 1670, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

¹⁴⁰ James Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 96.

¹⁴¹ Moreover, according to Barry, both French arrival and the slave trade destabilized the region through provoking resource shortages, famines, wars, and shifts in trade and migration patterns. Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 108.

merchants obtained an average 150,000 livres of gum Arabic.¹⁴² During the eighteenth century, the amount of gum traded in Saint-Louis would only increase in response to European demand. In Europe, manufactures used gum Arabic as an adhesive in papermaking, candy, and textile production. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century, European markets received slightly less than 500 metric tons of gum Arabic per year. Although most shipments came from Senegambia via the port of Saint-Louis, local prices remained low. Hence, the product accounted for only ten percent of the total value of Senegambian exports. Beginning in the 1740s, however, this situation changed dramatically. From 1743 to 1746, the Company of the Indies oversaw the shipment of 1,000 tons of gum Arabic to Europe alone. Likewise, by the 1770s, the price of Senegambian gum had risen to five times the price sought in the early eighteenth century. Following this trend, by the 1780s, gum Arabic sold at ten times its early eighteenth-century value.¹⁴³

The steady growth of the gum trade greatly benefited African middlemen. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, groves of gum trees (referred to as gum forests) in present-day Mauritania were the sites where slaves picked the small, yellowish balls, which were the raw materials for the production of this commodity.¹⁴⁴ African middlemen would transport the harvest to trading posts in southern Mauritania (such as Portendick and Arguin) where they sold it to merchants headed to Podor and Île de Bilbas

¹⁴² Unknown Author, *Diverse Reports on Trade in Saint-Louis, 1659-1671*, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

¹⁴³ Curtin, *Economic Change*, 217.

¹⁴⁴ Curtin, *Economic Change*, 216.

on the Senegal River. There, Senegambian sailors would place parcels of gum onto canoes that would drift downriver to the final stop on the African gum trade route: Saint-Louis. At the town wharf, French merchants would load the harvest onto vessels bound for Europe.¹⁴⁵

What these networks reveal is that African middlemen controlled the inland gum trade. Subsequently, these men were able to amass a large degree of wealth. By the end of the eighteenth century, their power and success had begun to attract the consternation of the French. In 1793, French traveler and director of the Company of Senegal, Jean-Baptiste Léonard Durand, wrote that wealthy African traders threatened the “glorious, authentic, and generally...honorable” French settlements of Senegambia. As Durand explained in his travel narrative, *Voyage au Sénégal*, “blacks and Mours” were able to set prices and thus control the supply of gum Arabic in ways that allowed them to gain a foothold over the French. For Durand, these tendencies were disastrous for the colony. They were also indicative of the supposed fact that the “blacks and Mours of the interior” were selfish and irresponsible businessmen who “never thought of the future” of the commercial economy.¹⁴⁶ Collectively, Durand’s statements confirm art historian Peter Mark’s contention that eighteenth-century French colonizers viewed Africans with

¹⁴⁵ Unknown Author, Observations on the Importance of the Colony of Senegal, 1748, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁴⁶ Jean-Baptiste Léonard Durand describes Senegal in the first pages of his travel narrative. For more information, see: Jean-Baptiste Léonard Durand, *Voyage au Sénégal, ou mémoires historiques, philosophiques et politiques sur les découvertes, les établissements et le commerce des Européens dans les mers de l’Océan atlantique, depuis le Cap-Blanc jusqu’à la rivière de Serre-Lionne* (Paris: R. Phillips, 1806).

suspicion.¹⁴⁷ As we will see, French notions of black malevolence fueled assumptions that the separation of Africans and Europeans was utterly necessary within the urban sphere.¹⁴⁸

Planning Saint-Louis: Social Control in Early Colonial Africa

Like nascent commercial networks, urbanization initially proceeded at a slow pace. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, Saint-Louis would eventually emerge as the first site to incubate French experiments with direct rule. The earliest known plan for Saint-Louis was French draftsman M. de la Courbe's 1694 map of the town (Figure 2.2).¹⁴⁹ Much like in the simultaneously emergent colonies of the Caribbean, the only indication of French presence was the European fort, which, according to text on the map, comprised several old buildings. Another European space was the neighboring sandbar where settlers raised livestock. Yet one caption revealed that plans (which, in hindsight, were never realized) were underway to "build a new French fort" on a nearby island. As a whole, the above landscapes stood in contrast to Îsle Dymesec and the mainland, which La Courbe described as Guinée. On Îsle Dymesec, African roundhouses populated an otherwise barren island. These buildings existed within compounds that contained seven to eight roundhouses, all of which possessed a

¹⁴⁷ Mark, *'Portuguese' Style*, 24.

¹⁴⁸ Mark, *'Portuguese' Style*, 136.

¹⁴⁹ Figure 2.2. M. de la Courbe, *Sketch of Saint-Louis and its Surrounding Area*, 1694, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

single door and a conical roof. La Courbe identified one of these settlements as “Yemsec” while naming the other “Imabarre.” On the mainland, a settlement named “Bieurt” also contained such dwellings. Taken together, these spaces encompassed French colonial Saint-Louis at the end of the seventeenth century.

La Courbe’s plan is significant because it demonstrates the extent to which the French viewed African and European space as distinct even at the onset of their colonial campaign. Although La Courbe depicted seventeenth-century Saint-Louis as a relatively underdeveloped outpost, he rendered African and European architecture—and in turn, African and European populations—as discrete entities. Whereas roundhouses characterized the mainland and Dymesec, several markers of French presence (particularly, the fort and open pastures) distinguished different sandbars. Such divergence demonstrates that, even at this early juncture, French colonizers made a concerted effort to plan and envision their colony in terms of the separation of African and European space. Notably, such geographical differentiation preceded the establishment of rules limiting African movement at the end of the eighteenth century. As colonization unfolded, the French administration would eventually develop a legal apparatus to ensure the fruition of La Courbe’s vision for Saint-Louis.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, these visions of segregation met the realities of colonial urbanism. In 1704, draftsman, François Froger, drew a provisional plan that warrants further consideration (Figure 2.3).¹⁵⁰ This plan represented the fort as the center of a town comprised of several small encampments. A drawing of

¹⁵⁰ Figure 2.3. François Froger, *Plan of Fort Saint-Louis*, 1704, Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, last modified 15 October 2007, accessed 17 June 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7759449c.r=froger?rk=21459;2>.

the European citadel (located in the upper left corner of the image) depicted a roundhouse inside of this walled fortress. The African structure housed a French-controlled store, which sold locally obtained merchandise. Significantly, according to an unnamed administrator, this roundhouse was not the sole African dwelling employed to serve the colony. Seven years earlier (in 1697), the Company of the Indies built “a small [African style] caze [or, house] to hold diverse merchandise.” Not only did this structure sit on the “banks of the Senegal river,” but it was also part of a town that “was full of such buildings.”¹⁵¹

Both John Hargreaves and Philip Curtin have suggested that this kind of architectural appropriation reflected histories of cultural assimilation.¹⁵² In Hargreaves’ view, French dependency on African middlemen catalyzed the formation of an African bourgeoisie, which was based in Saint-Louis. Europeans grew to appreciate the favors that African middlemen performed whereas African merchants gradually ascended the ranks of the French bureaucracy and thus adopted French cultural norms.¹⁵³ For Curtin, cultural appropriation was a two-way street. As he explains, both wealthy French and mixed race individuals “absorbed the dominant Wolof culture” as Africans took on French sensibilities.¹⁵⁴ One result was the emergence of what W. Raymond Wood

¹⁵¹ Unknown Author, Description of Saint-Louis, 1697, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

¹⁵² Hargreaves, “Assimilation,” 178.

¹⁵³ Hargreaves, “Assimilation,” 181.

¹⁵⁴ Curtin, *Economic Change*, 121.

describes as a town with dwellings “built in the same manner as native African structures, with mud walls and thatched roofs.”¹⁵⁵

Yet, despite integrating African dwellings into the colonial urban sphere, the French continued to express their desire for a socially partitioned enclave. For example, in Froger’s plan, urban encampments housed distinct colonial populations. Froger designated four spaces for habitation on the part of European employees of the Company of the Indies. Likewise, in Froger’s Saint-Louis, separate encampments existed for free blacks, slaves, and, even, black Christians.¹⁵⁶ In organizing the town in this manner, Froger continued the representational practice of depicting French Senegal as both a socially and a racially divided colony.

Plans for segregation manifested themselves even among individuals who never set foot in Senegambia. Writing in 1728, French priest, Père Jean-Baptiste Labat, echoed La Courbe and Froger. His memoir, which plagiarized much of La Courbe’s work, contended that in the 1720s Saint-Louis consisted of “a fort or compound where the

¹⁵⁵ W. Raymond Wood, “An Archaeological Appraisal of Early European Settlements in the Senegambia,” *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 1 (1967): 42.

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note that Froger’s attempt to construct a town that embodied a racialized politics of special division matched the larger system of social and architectural order, which predominated his plan. Compounds designed to hold separate African and European populations proliferate within a town that Froger organizes according to the division of labor as well; carpenters’ studios, forges, and kilns for producing limewash also occupy distinct and specified areas in Froger’s Saint-Louis. Thus, visions of a colonial polity characterized in terms of distinct living quarters for diverse populations fit within Froger’s larger attempt at rendering Saint-Louis a site that reflected notions of social and occupational order. For more information, see Figure 3, François Froger, *Plan of Fort Saint-Louis*, 1704, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

directors of the Company of the Indies live[d].” He went on to state that “the compound was surrounded by multiple walls, inside of which were many shops and stores that were in poor condition and that were poorly built.” In his view, “the fort was not big enough to house all company employees, so many of them lived in small houses (cases) made of straw that sat outside of the main compound.” For Labat, this tendency posed grave problems since “[employees of the Company of the Indies] were exposed to all of the malevolent plans that the blacks (nègres) had for them. In living in straw houses outside of the official compound, they [Europeans] could not access the support and protection of others or the fort if the blacks attempted to insult or attack them.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, in Labat’s view, both impermanent architecture and the dearth of an urban core reserved for Europeans exposed colonizers to a group (black Africans) that was prone to sinister behavior. Similarly, his statements reveal that, even in the 1720s, the separation of Africans and Europeans was not absolute.

Faced with this reality, Labat maintained that black hostility was only the tip of the iceberg. His work also attributed villainous behavior to “Moorish” populations. In eighteenth-century Senegambia, the term *Moor* referred to Muslims who spoke Arabic and inhabited the Saharan lands north of the Senegal River. Eighteenth-century Saint-Louis was home to several members of this group.¹⁵⁸ When describing the Muslim populations of Saint-Louis, Labat asserted that “only hypocrisy, avarice, cruelty,

¹⁵⁷ Père Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouvelle relation de l’Afrique occidentale: Contenant une description exacte du Senegal et des païs situés entre le Cap-Blanc et la Riviere de Serrelionne* (Paris: P.F. Giffart, 1728), 230-231.

¹⁵⁸ Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 30.

ingratitude, superstition, and ignorance exist among this group.”¹⁵⁹ Consequently, from Labat’s perspective, the maliciousness of blacks and the cruelty of Muslims necessitated a form of colonial architecture that, however inadequate, could encourage the separation of Africans from Europeans.

Predictably, Labat’s 1731 manuscript expanded upon this idea. It suggested that the most effective kind of colonial architecture distinguished itself from local prototypes. More precisely, his book maintained that an ideal French colonial town would consist of wooden buildings divided into apartments for commercial and domestic use. Likewise, the governor’s residence and the fort would contain stone dwellings. This Europeanized town would stand apart from the African village, an area that Labat claimed would hold houses designed for polygamous families.¹⁶⁰ Collectively, Labat’s statements convey his belief that French colonial architecture in Africa should account for the inherent differences between Africans and Europeans. Furthermore, in Labat’s ideal colonial world, urban planning would anticipate the dangers that could arise as a result of close contact between both groups. Over the course of the eighteenth century, his contentions would become ideological pillars of French colonial policy on the African continent.

An undated plan from the middle of the eighteenth century illustrates the march toward this conclusion (Figure 2.4).¹⁶¹ As in previous drawings, Saint-Louis appears as a

¹⁵⁹ Labat, *Nouvelle relation*, 250.

¹⁶⁰ Père Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du chevalier des marchais en Guinée, isles voisines, et à Cayenne fait en 1725, 1726, et 1727* (Amsterdam: Aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1731), 17-19.

¹⁶¹ Figure 2.4. Unknown author, *View of Fort Saint-Louis, on the Coast*, mid-eighteenth century, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies des, Aix-en-Provence, France.

segregated terrain. Along these lines, the town is an enclave divided in terms of religion. On the northern side is the Christian Village (Côté des Chrétiens), an area that stands in opposition to the Muslim quarter (Côté des Mahométiens). A loose collection of roundhouses distinguishes the African, Village de Guet-ndar, which lay on a separate sandbar. Despite spatial distinctions, the Christian and the Muslim village are nearly identical. Both sites are rectangular encampments with picket fences that enclose roundhouses, which possess conical roofs. A rectangular building, presumably a guards' post, stands at the entrance to each quarter. Conversely, a guards' post does not patrol the Village de Guet-ndar, a space that appears as a haphazard collection of identical roundhouses. Most important, the fortress (located at the center of the image) is large enough that a guard could presumably peer (from its highest reaches) into the three encampments that encompass Saint-Louis.

Several points emerge from a visual analysis of this drawing. On one level, the image depicts Saint-Louis as a site where the entire population lives under the surveillance of the colonial government; Christians, Muslims, and (other) Africans exist within eyeshot of several guards' posts and the principal fort. Moreover, French draftsmen depict the town as a place where architectural sameness prevails. In this context of representational uniformity, all populations live in African roundhouses.

But the most salient aspect of this image is its misrepresentation of colonial order and segregation. Accounts of eighteenth-century Saint-Louis reveal that this colony was not a segregated enclave. French draftsman, Pruneau de Pommegorge, maintained that for much of the eighteenth century, the Christian village encompassed a large métise

population as well as Africans and their domestic slaves.¹⁶² For Pommegorge, the Muslim quarter was also a conglomerate locality: “free or captive [black persons], pretty much all of whom were Muslim and some of whom were Christian” lived in this neighborhood. Similarly, in Pommegorge’s view, the Village de Guet-ndar held “several black groups.”¹⁶³ These statements demonstrate that French representations, which posited Saint-Louis as a series of racialized encampments, were, at best, fantastical visions that could never be realized on the Senegambian coast; early colonial plans and drawings exaggerated the extent to which the French could restrict cultural exchange. Overall, early colonial media articulated an ideal that the French would try, yet fail, to achieve throughout their colonial campaign. Although they were never successful at attaining absolute control or segregation in Saint-Louis, the French shaped the trajectory of urban planning and policy in modern Senegambia.

In doing so, they attempted to lay the foundation for what Garth Myers identifies as a “perfect system of colonial control.” For Myers, Europeans worked to make this ideal a reality through processes of enframing. This term refers to a spatial strategy applied across modern colonial Africa wherein Europeans established control through drafting urban plans and policies that manifested three major goals: the assertion of European order; the solidification of sharp delineations between groups allowed in and those cast out of the colonial city; and the creation of systems of surveillance, which patrolled African populations.¹⁶⁴ Together, these efforts converged to insure that the

¹⁶² Pruneau de Pommegorge, *Description de la Nigritie* (Paris: Maradan, 1789), 3.

¹⁶³ Pommegorge, *Description de la Nigritie*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 8-9.

urban sphere would bolster European dominance and ease the accumulation of natural and human resources as well as the legitimation of European power.¹⁶⁵ With respect to urban planning, enframing worked to bring diverse groups under European authority.¹⁶⁶ But no matter how hard colonial governments worked to ensure the seamless implementation of European order, their projects of enframing merely yielded a spotty and imperfect superstructure of European dominance. Accordingly, over time, colonial cities grew to become nodes for urban cultures defined in terms of the practices of African majorities.¹⁶⁷

As we will see, Saint-Louis was no exception.¹⁶⁸ Toward this end, the early history of urban planning reveals how social mixture unfolded beyond the intentions of colonial engineers even at the onset of the French imperial campaign. As imperfect tools of enframing, the first maps and plans for this town encompassed what Denis Cosgrove describes as a cartographic fantasy; such visual macrocosms were contained spaces that imagined a non-European territory as rife for European habitation and control.¹⁶⁹ Consequently, these urban plans set the tone for more concrete attempts at

¹⁶⁵ Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 46.

¹⁶⁶ Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 113.

¹⁶⁷ Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 16.

¹⁶⁸ What I am referring to is the fact that the French founded and began articulating a vision of enframing in Saint-Louis in the seventeenth century, long before the emergence of direct rule in the twentieth century. For a discussion of enframing see: Myers, *Verandas of Power*. For more information on direct rule and its impact on the urban sphere, see: Njoh, *Planning Power*.

¹⁶⁹ Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 3, 82.

asserting French authority in proceeding decades. As the eighteenth century came to a close, Saint-Louis witnessed the emergence of a legal code that institutionalized many of the anxieties concerning racial mixture, which coalesced in early maps and plans. In other words, late eighteenth-century laws attempted to achieve what early plans merely envisioned: the implementation of a colonial superstructure that ensured French dominance over the diverse populations of Saint-Louis. In studying both the institution and the architectural manifestations of these legal codes, we can begin to critique the extent to which French colonial power shaped urban development in eighteenth-century Senegambia. For these reasons, I would like to switch to an examination of these legal codes as they relate to the most salient means through which the French attempted to assert their authority over Senegambian populations: domestic architectural surveys and urban laws.

* * *

In 1758, the British took control of Saint-Louis. The town remained under British rule until 1783 when the French regained the enclave. Just before the reinstatement of French authority, an unnamed merchant bemoaned the widespread disorder that plagued Saint-Louis under British rule. His comments are worth quoting at length:

Since the [British] conquest of Senegal [i.e., Gorée and Saint-Louis]...this colony has devolved into a state of anarchy and incredible despotism. The French administration must re-establish order throughout the colony for the well being of all. [At this point,] officers live in a state of indiscipline, soldiers sleep at their posts...and there is also a dangerous idleness [that exists in the colony] manifested in terms of gangs that are headed by local chiefs. Women are regularly the victims of their outrageous behavior. The rule of law must put an end to this ordeal and make sure that, by day and night, the soldiers are vigilant, the officers do their jobs, and the inhabitants are at peace...in perfect harmony."¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Unknown Author, Letters from Saint-Louis, 1783, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

This call for a state enforced system of social and moral order found expression in the legal codes instituted when the French returned to Saint-Louis in 1783. From the 1780s to the first years of the nineteenth century, the French administration answered pleas (such as the one above) for the establishment of a strict colonial regime. In doing so, they tried to render Saint-Louis the neat and disciplined town initially represented in early maps and plans.

Two events characterized late eighteenth-century attempts at implementing a more stringent form of colonial control. The first was a governmental survey of all properties on the island administered in the 1790s. The second was a series of legal codes concerning architecture and the urban polity enforced from the 1780s to 1808. Together, these motions shaped the trajectory of French authority in modern Senegambia.

In 1791, the French colonial government ordered local draftsmen to survey all private property in Saint-Louis. This decision marked the first time that the French administration undertook such a laborious task. In total, colonial draftsmen identified 175 lots, thirty-seven of which contained extant houses. Most of these dwellings belonged to signares. Mark Hinchman has described the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as the apogee of signare culture.¹⁷¹ As he explains, this period witnessed a phenomenon

¹⁷¹ At this time, signares had amassed a large degree of wealth since the emergent trading patterns of the seventeenth century had now evolved into market driven economies. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the gum trade, specifically, had increased to such a degree that as many as 1,350 barrels of gum passed through Saint-Louis in 1746 alone. In 1784, an unnamed merchant estimated that, by the 1780s, hundreds more barrels had entered Saint-Louis through clandestine means and thus remained in the personal storage units of the town's wealthiest residents, many of whom were signares. It should also be noted that Mark Hinchman has examined the relationship between the wealth of signares and the very house plans engaged above; however, our arguments diverge in that he has focused on these plans as they relate to wealth and urban

wherein signares advertised their wealth through constructing large houses and assembling entire workforces comprised of domestic slaves. Yet, rather than focusing on the wealth of signares, I would like to draw our attention to the ways in which the 1791 survey manifested a politics of surveillance.

Local signare Goné Falle's residence was certainly a noticeable presence on the streets of Saint-Louis (Figure 2.5).¹⁷² Although this structure was a small, single room house, it possessed a double staircase that led to an entrance vestibule, which opened onto a frontal porch. Much like the entrance vestibules on Portuguese style houses, this semi-private space allowed Falle to welcome guests without having to let them inside of her home.¹⁷³ The house itself sat within a large courtyard, which appeared as a vacant space on the corresponding ground plan. Archaeological research—conducted on the part of Ibrahima Thiaw—suggests this courtyard contained several impermanent roundhouses where domestic slaves completed daily chores.¹⁷⁴ It is also likely that Falle stored

development as opposed to a nascent system of direct rule and control. For more information, see Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 180; Hinchman, "House and Household on Gorée, Senegal, 1758-1837" (Unpublished manuscript).

¹⁷² Figure 2.5. *Goné Falle Residence, Ground Plan, 1789, Saint-Louis, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.*

¹⁷³ For further discussion of the ways in which the patterns of use with respect to signares' homes mirrored those of the Portuguese style house, see: Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*.

¹⁷⁴ For an archeological examination of early colonial settlements in Senegambia see, Ibrahima Thiaw, "Every House has a Story: The Archeology of Gorée Island, Sénégal." In *Africa, Brazil, and the Construction of Trans Atlantic Black Identities*, edited by Livio Sansone, Elisée Soumonni, and Boubacar Barry (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2008). See also: Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*, 184.

commercial merchandise, particularly, gum Arabic, in these sheds as well. Government records reveal that courtyard houses—of this order—were often sites for storing such commodities as they awaited shipment. Since signares, like Goné Falle, were often instrumental as middlemen in the gum trade, they used their homes and courtyards as receptacles for inland goods.¹⁷⁵

Signare, Marianne Dimigua, most likely employed her home in a similar manner. Her house was a rectangular dwelling with a frontal staircase that led to a porch, which ran along the façade. Here, Dimigua, like her colleagues across town, could stand on the elevated veranda and survey her slaves as they washed clothes and cooked in her courtyard. So could Mandeau Nour. Her L-shaped domicile combined the same features—the frontal porch, the frontal staircase, rectangularity, the courtyard, and the square lot—as the homes above thus suggesting that, as a household, it likely functioned in much the same way. The same is true for larger homes. In addition to their functional resemblance to other houses, they simply consisted of square portions added on to what was (in late eighteenth-century Saint-Louis) the base module for local architecture: a single rectangular room.¹⁷⁶

In one sense, these ground plans reveal both the wealth signares enjoyed in late eighteenth-century Saint-Louis and the uniform ways in which they lived and expressed

¹⁷⁵ Unknown Author, General Correspondence, Undated (eighteenth-century), Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁷⁶ Unknown Author, Surveys of Marianne Dimigua and Mandeau Nour Residences, 1789, Saint-Louis, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

their affluence. African women owned much of the private property on the island.¹⁷⁷ Collectively, they used their houses to store valued commodities. Inventories of their properties reveal that they also filled their homes with luxury items from across the imperial world. In 1793, for instance, colonial administrators entered the home of a signare named, Combapoule. In a chest located inside of her house, they found 827 pieces of Guinée cloth (from India), 810 coral necklaces, numerous bars of soap from Marseille, and several coverings (presumably to be used as clothing).¹⁷⁸ On one level, this information draws attention to the wealth of products stored in signares' homes. Yet the riches of Combapoule and other prosperous signares have led Mark Hinchman to claim that Saint-Louis was a place where wealth transcended racial identity. In Hinchman's view, this tendency indicates how Saint-Louis was successfully "multicultural before the word existed."¹⁷⁹

Yet the 1791 survey also attests to the extent to which the affluence of signares existed under the authority of the colonial bureaucracy. While signares were free to erect houses that reflected their prominence, their property was still subject to surveillance and demarcation on the part of the French administration. Architectural surveys delineated the boundaries of signares' properties and recorded the exact patterns of organization with respect to their homes. Thus, much like the rest of the colonial population, signares lived under a superstructure that monitored both the parameters and the expression of their

¹⁷⁷ Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 39.

¹⁷⁸ Unknown Author, *Local Inventory Taken in Saint-Louis, 1793*, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁷⁹ Hinchman, "House and Household," 39.

wealth. Signares—as social subjects—were thus no different from the broader colonial public. This cold reality resurfaced just years after the architectural surveys of 1791. At this time, the French regime began to institute a series of architectural restrictions, which solidified their authority over Senegambian populations.

These architectural and urban restrictions first appeared on the legal code in 1793. Such laws fit into three basic categories: social and town engineering; constraints placed on African populations; and rules governing the construction and the maintenance of private residences. Altogether, these regulations attempted to render Saint-Louis a landscape over which the French could exercise complete control. Legal codes sought to figure the town as a space ordered according to the terms that draftsmen—such as, La Courbe and Froger—conceived at the onset of French colonialism. In addressing these laws, we can begin to question the ways in which eighteenth-century statutes prefaced direct rule.

Some of the most far-reaching architectural and urban restrictions were a series of decrees that hindered the ability of Africans from the mainland to enter Saint-Louis. In 1793, the colonial administration ordered slaves to construct a battery on the island of Guetendar. A year later, the same group erected a guards' post on Grand Ilot, another island within the coastal estuary. Subsequent laws as well as official statements made it clear that these fortresses existed to patrol African and Muslim populations. In 1793, an unnamed official complained that “the excessive wealth of blacks from the mainland posed a great threat to the order and tranquility of Saint-Louis and its inhabitants.”¹⁸⁰ As

¹⁸⁰ Unknown Author, *Diverse Correspondence on Saint-Louis (Senegal)*, 1793, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

a solution, the governing council ruled that all blacks traveling to Saint-Louis had to introduce themselves to the mayor before proceeding into town. Any individual who refused to comply with these rules would face imprisonment and possible deportation (back to the mainland).

Despite their harshness, these rules could not prevent Africans from the mainland from clandestinely entering Saint-Louis. Most Africans surpassed entry requirements through sailing down the Senegal River and docking at Saint-Louis at night. There, they waited until daybreak to carry out unauthorized trade in slaves, gum Arabic, and foodstuffs from the interior. Some traders returned to the mainland after conducting business whereas others remained in Saint-Louis—for extended periods—where they often rented rooms in the homes of signares.¹⁸¹ This tendency constituted one of the many ways in which Africans rendered the colonial city—what Garth Myers describes as—a space defined in terms of (often contractual) African social relationships.¹⁸² The government quickly caught on. Three months after the institution of the first decree, the French administration decided that blacks and Muslims from the mainland could only remain in Saint-Louis for a limited amount of time; the mayor would determine the length of stay for each African visitor at the local fort. Meanwhile, soldiers stationed at Guetendar and Grand Ilot would work to intercept clandestine visitors.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ M. Blanchot et al., Records of the Administrative Council, 1795, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal. Also, for further discussion of the practice wherein signares rented rooms in their homes to local merchants, see: Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*.

¹⁸² Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 16.

¹⁸³ Unknown Author, Diverse Letters on Saint-Louis (Senegal), undated, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

But the flow of mainlanders into Saint-Louis continued unabated. Even worse, many African merchants officially entered the town only to overstay their visit. Subsequently, in 1795, the administrative council “authorize[d] a search of all residents’ homes to ensure that no unaccounted for foreigners [were] staying in Saint-Louis for longer than the time of stay granted to them in order to carry out their business.”¹⁸⁴ For their part, African populations were undeterred by these searches; middlemen and independent merchants continued to flood into Saint-Louis on an almost daily basis. For two years, the French government stood paralyzed, unable to close the porous borders of their colonial town. Finally, in 1797, the government ordered all French residents to supply a list of the individuals living on their property. Although the government undertook this inventory to monitor foreign entry, the administration later revealed that this survey also reflected preoccupations concerning racial mixture. The governor M. Blanchot clarified that the purpose of this survey was to monitor the degree to which Africans and Europeans fraternized with one another. Subsequently, the law required African traders to supply the names of their Saint-Louisian business partners.¹⁸⁵

Harsh treatment of local populations permeated all spheres of public policy. For example, restrictions placed upon African merchants matched those applied to griots, a group that the French banned from Saint-Louis in 1793. Sanctions on this population proceeded years of noise complaints leveled against this group on the part of the European residents of the town. In deciding to finally ban griots, the colonial government

¹⁸⁴ M. Blanchot et al., Records of the Administrative Council, 1795, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁸⁵ M. Blanchot, Blanchot Decrees, 1795, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

stated that their crackdown stemmed from a desire to preserve public order and tranquility: “The large number of griots from the mainland (la Grande Terre) who gather on the island of Saint-Louis only threaten the tranquility of this colony as a result of the noise caused by their drums and their singing.”¹⁸⁶ Thereafter, the colonial administration prevented all griots from entering Saint-Louis. Those who clandestinely entered the town or dared to sing publicly would face immediate imprisonment, deportation, and even sale into slavery.¹⁸⁷

Yet archival records reveal that, like merchants from the mainland, griots flagrantly disregarded the colonial government. Two years after the institution of the above law, an unnamed government official noted that most griots regularly sang and beat their drums long after their nightly curfew.¹⁸⁸ Sadly, many of these individuals met the fate promised to them under colonial law. Presumably, by the end of the eighteenth century, numerous griots had been imprisoned for breaking the above rules.¹⁸⁹ Their plight attests to the dangers that awaited those who transgressed local authority. In many ways, laws concerning griots mimicked those restricting the movement of African businessmen; both sets of decrees attempted to render Saint-Louis a Europeanized enclave where French rules determined the pace and the contours of African behavior and social life.

¹⁸⁶ M. Blanchot et al., *Blanchot Decrees, 1793*, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁸⁷ M. Blanchot et al., *Decrees of the Administrative Council of Saint-Louis, 1793*, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁸⁸ According to governmental documents, this curfew was set at 9PM. *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Draconian measures complemented intrusive laws concerning construction practices. In large part, rules dictating the ways residents could build their homes reflected administrative anxieties over the risk of fire. To be fair, in the 1780s and 1790s, Saint-Louis experienced a major fire almost every year. Subsequently, in 1793, the government issued its first decree regarding fire safety. At this point, the colonial administration acknowledged that “the frequency of fires has threatened Saint-Louis and resulted in the devastation of several homes.” They went on to emphatically state that “all residents...are advised *for the last time* to...build houses in brick [emphasis mine].”¹⁹⁰ From the perspective of the administrative council, brick buildings—with walls that were at least seven feet thick—could thwart destruction. Yet, in keeping with their drastic approach, they added that all residents who refused to comply with this rule would face deportation. One year later, the same body set their sights on detached kitchens: “It has come to our attention that several kitchen fires have destroyed entire homes in Saint-Louis. All of the destroyed houses contain a small [straw] case [i.e., roundhouse] that serves as the kitchen.”¹⁹¹ Predictably, the French administration hired a group of inspectors to visit all private residences to search for these cases. According to official rules, when government agents found such dwellings, they had to destroyed them. Next, officials would order residents to replace these kitchens with brick structures that possessed limewash coatings.

¹⁹⁰ M. Blanchot et al., *Decrees of the Administrative Council of Saint-Louis, 1793*, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

On the day this decree went into effect, Blanchot officially claimed that fires occurred in Saint-Louis because “the majority of houses [were] made of straw.”¹⁹² In singling out straw dwellings, Blanchot provided ammunition for the continued destruction of such cases. Following his requests, in January of 1806, the government ordered all persons living in straw dwellings to surround their homes with seven-foot high brick walls. Officials warned that they would gut straw houses that were devoid of such barriers. Coincidentally, the north side of the island experienced a fire only two days later. The next day, the colonial administration responded by prohibiting all new construction in straw. This law applied to European-owned housing complexes as well as Senegambian tapades.¹⁹³ Once again, officials insisted that *anyone*—singares, company employees, sailors, or African merchants—who refused to comply with this policy would face deportation to the island of Babague.¹⁹⁴

Architectural decrees—engendered in the name of fire safety—attempted to purge Saint-Louis of the persons and built environments that threatened the town’s Europeanized core. At the same time, the tendency, manifested over the course of several decades, of these laws to repeat the same shrill and frenzied demands indicates the extent

¹⁹² M. Blanchot, Statements of the Governor, 1793, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁹³ *Tapade* is a French term used to describe the Senegambian compound houses that existed in the vicinity of Saint-Louis in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Like most other kinds of West African compound housing, tapades consisted of several single room roundhouses organized around a central courtyard where daily chores and social events took place. Each adult member of a polygamous family would have their own house within a tapade. For a more in depth discussion of tapades in Saint-Louis, specifically, see Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*.

¹⁹⁴ M. Blanchot et al., Statements of the Governor, 1806, Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal.

to which local populations ignored the colonial government and continued to build traditional straw houses. They used these dwellings to store gum Arabic, cook meals for signares, hold slaves, and even eat and sleep.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, not only were colonial restrictions ineffective in preventing Senegambians from erecting the kinds of dwellings that were long associated with the region, but they were also unable to stop such groups from harnessing local architecture as a vector for autonomy and survival in the Saint-Louisian economy.

The urban restrictions that came to typify Saint-Louis marked the culmination of a decades long effort to render the town a viable colonial space. Through controlling who could enter this enclave and mandating architectural permanence, the French administration tried to engendered a domain where European rules predominated. Along these lines, officials worked to create a town that exhibited many of the qualities that early draftsmen espoused for a colonial center—the separation of Africans and Europeans, architectural permanence, the banishment of African populations to the neighboring mainland, and an urban core defined in terms of French order. Therefore, French imperialists—from La Courbe to Blanchot—attempted to erect a colonial system defined in terms of stringent control over the urban sphere. Although this power structure was never entirely successful, it remains significant because of the ways in which it manifested the emergence of direct rule.

Enlightenment Racism, Urbanism, and Direct Rule in Colonial Senegal

¹⁹⁵ Unknown Author, General Correspondence, Undated (eighteenth-century), Charppy Repertoire, National Archives of Senegal, Dakar, Senegal. See also: Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island*.

The seventeenth and eighteenth-century was a time when imperial power began to expand in Senegambia and across the French colonial world. In many ways, this process manifested itself first in Saint-Louis because of the town's position as one of the earliest imperial enclaves to house a French bureaucracy. By the end of the eighteenth century, French colonizers had nearly realized the vision of authority that they conceived at the beginning of their colonial campaign. The legal restrictions put in place in 1793 worked albeit incompletely to create a town ruled along the lines originally imagined in provisional plans. Whereas the earliest known plans for Saint-Louis merely envisioned a town with separate areas for Africans and Europeans, late eighteenth-century legal codes put tangible sanctions on the entry, behavior, and movement of African subjects. This climate of restriction greatly impacted the region.

The entrenchment of French authority occurred in Saint-Louis because of the coalescence of multiple, yet slightly divergent, paradigms. In particular, the development of Saint-Louis provoked a situation whereby racial anxieties concerning black persons met Enlightenment visions of urban design. More precisely, nascent concepts of the ideal city, which originated in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France, reached their overseas fruition in Saint-Louis. Thereafter, French engineers reformulated these frameworks to ensure black subjection in a colonial setting. Since Saint-Louis was the first Franco-West African colonial outpost, it was also the first place to witness the orchestration of this process. At this juncture, I would like to briefly re-examine the racial preoccupations of Enlightenment thinkers as well as the French engineers who drafted the first plans for Saint-Louis. In relating the work of French draftsmen to Enlightenment

ideas concerning black persons, I seek to elucidate the metropolitan biases that weighed upon early drawings.

In his 1980 book, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880*, William Cohen provided what still remains the most comprehensive critique of Enlightenment racism. According to Cohen, eighteenth-century France witnessed the emergence of theories that posited black persons as the lowest objects on the human chain of being.¹⁹⁶ Three Enlightenment theorists who expressed this view most thoroughly were Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. In particular, Voltaire is famous for his belief that blacks constituted a separate and inferior species: “Their round eyes, their flat noses, their lips which are always thick, their differently shaped ears, the wool on their head, the measure of their intelligence establishes between them and other species of men prodigious differences.” Although Montesquieu did not advance this theory, he was equally contemptuous. His harshest comments with respect to black persons appeared in *The Spirit of the Laws* (published in 1748).

In the above work, Montesquieu claimed that slavery violated natural law and human equality. However, this argument only applied to ancient iterations of the practice; modern bondage, which involved black subjects, was a system that Montesquieu condoned. This paradoxical view stemmed from his belief in black malevolence as well as his larger aversion to blackness itself: “Those concerned [with respect to the issue of modern slavery] are black from head to toe, and they have such flat noses that it is almost impossible to feel sorry for them. One cannot get into one’s mind that god...should have

¹⁹⁶ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 85.

put a soul, above all a good soul, in a body that was entirely black.”¹⁹⁷ Thus, like Voltaire, Montesquieu’s negative understanding of blackness grew out of a fixation on the supposed ugliness of black physiognomy.

In his 1754 essay, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality: Polemics, and Political Economy*, Rousseau took a slightly different approach. In general, his work outlined the distinction between natural inequality (differences in age, height, weight, health, and bodily strength) and political inequality. Unlike natural differences, political inequality grew out of distinctions (in wealth, power, status, and nobility) fostered within the social body that man created.¹⁹⁸ For Rousseau, political inequality constitutes one of the many burdens imposed upon “civilized man”: the individual who resides within a society in which laws govern access to necessities and status symbols, particularly, property.¹⁹⁹

This broadly defined critique of civil society relates to race in a number of ways. In Rousseau’s view, black persons and Native Americans exist outside of civil society. Thus, for Rousseau, black and indigenous peoples—ensconced in the landscapes of Africa and America—experience a more “primitive” and “natural” state of existence that is free of the constraints and inequalities of civil society.²⁰⁰ Moreover, Rousseau

¹⁹⁷ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 250.

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse): Polemics, and Political Economy*, Ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, Trans. Judith R. Bush, et al. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 18.

¹⁹⁹ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, 43.

²⁰⁰ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, 22.

maintains that these groups possess a limited set of wants and needs as well as underdeveloped capabilities of sensory perception:

“His self-preservation being almost his [i.e., the black and the native] only care, his best-trained faculties must be those having as principal object attack and defense, either to subjugate his prey or to save himself from being the prey of another animal. On the contrary, the organs that are perfected only by softness and sensuality must remain in a state of crudeness which excludes any kind of delicacy in him; and his senses being divided in this regard, he will have extremely crude touch and taste, and sight, hearing, and smell of the greatest subtlety. Such is the animal state in general; and according to Travelers, such also is that of most Savage Peoples.”²⁰¹

Therefore, from Rousseau’s perspective, the crudeness and the bruteness of blacks and native peoples indicate their resemblance to animals. But what is most significant about this statement is Rousseau’s assertion that travelers’ accounts confirm this contention.

By the time Rousseau sat down to write the above comments, Senegambia was a landscape that French travelers had described in albeit uneven detail. Indeed, some of the first Europeans to write about the populations of Senegambia were the colonial draftsmen who devised early plans for Saint-Louis. Whether or not they influenced the ideational trajectory of Enlightenment racism, these draftsmen produced statements that reveal the relationship between notions of Africanness fostered in the metropole and on the colonial frontier.

When describing his time in Senegal, François Froger mirrored La Courbe in remarking that, unlike Europeans, black persons comprised a race “without religion.” William Cohen has described this comment as indictment of their presumed indiscipline.²⁰² Nearly one-hundred years later, Pruneau de Pommegorge expressed a

²⁰¹ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, 25.

²⁰² Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 16.

similar sense of derision: “It is impossible to have knowledge of the far interior of the country [of Senegambia], because to reach it one has to cross so many nations which are often so barbaric, that the white who would be brave enough to attempt such a voyage would have his neck chopped off before he reached [his destination].”²⁰³ In this sense, Pommegorge, like Froger before him, mirrored the language and the ideology of metropolitan theorists while also providing a justification for Enlightenment racism that was supposedly based on valid observations of black savagery.

It is undeniable that the feelings of the above figures influenced their plans for Saint-Louis (Figure 2.6).²⁰⁴ All of their drawings envisioned the town as a fortified zone with African groups banished to the neighboring mainland or the island of Guet-ndar. Together, their statements and their corresponding plans reveal that the most prominent architects of Saint-Louis had an aversion to Africans on their minds when designing this nascent town.

At the same time, their concerns related to yet another sphere of Enlightenment thought. As Saint-Louis emerged as a colonial center, notions of ideal urbanism flourished in metropolitan France. Conceptions of the ideal city, which circulated in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, fell under the banner of what scholars have identified as Enlightenment urbanism. Significantly, this intellectual project posited four ideal city types as the bases for a renewed kind of urban development. These town forms

²⁰³ Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, 62.

²⁰⁴ Figure 2.6. Pruneau de Pommegorge, *Plan Particulier de L’Île Saint-Louis et ses Environs*, late eighteenth century, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Dépôt des fortifications des colonies, Aix-en-Provence, France.

included: the fortified city, the port city, the monumental city, and the garden city. As a whole, these paragons attained fruition in the form of new towns designed in metropolitan France in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.²⁰⁵ Since these ideals shaped discourses on urban planning in the metropole, they reached African colonies as draftsmen used these frameworks to establish dominance over black populations.

In her 2008 book on French colonial New Orleans, Shannon Dawdy describes the general features that characterized these four kinds of cities. Although she claims that New Orleans, as opposed to Saint-Louis, most paradigmatically reflected the albeit incomplete convergence of these ideals, her work provides a point of departure for considering the relevance of these city types for the study of Senegambia.

As Dawdy acknowledges, in 1678, theoretician, Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban, became the *commissaire general des fortifications* thus allowing him to implement what she describes as profound changes in French civic life. The most salient manifestation of this power was his plan for the fortified town. Such urban mechanisms would encompass a congested and dense walled city with citadels positioned at various points within the town barrier. Inside of city walls, fortified towns would display orthogonal grids. Straight streets would allow for the swift movement of military forces throughout the urban sphere. Moreover, the placement of citadels at the edge of such towns would make it

²⁰⁵ Ideals of Enlightenment urbanism influenced the construction of cities in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France. For our purposes, the most important ideal city constructed in the early modern period was Lorient. This town was the headquarters for the Company of the Indies, the French trading institution that administered all French colonies at this time. French engineers designed Lorient as a port city. For a more in depth discussion of the role of Lorient, specifically, and the Company of the Indies, in general, in the development of the first French empire see the introduction of this dissertation. Also, see Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71-74.

easier for military forces to patrol movement into the city as well as the behaviors of town residents. Thus, fortified towns re-imagined medieval walled cities through applying more modern techniques of surveillance to densely packed urban centers.²⁰⁶

Another type of town built in France during the Enlightenment period was the port city. Engineers designed port cities to be more open than fortified towns since they existed to facilitate the efficient movement of goods and peoples. However, port cities mirrored fortified towns through possessing both orthogonal grids and a dramatic sense of separation between public and private space. Furthermore, the economies of these towns naturally attracted sailors and foreigners, two groups that authorities viewed with suspicion. Therefore, port cities depended upon vast police forces to monitor transient populations.²⁰⁷

The primacy of the state also characterized monumental cities. In a slightly different vein, monumental cities existed to glorify the grandeur of the French crown. Conversely, garden cities grew out of Enlightenment notions that urban areas should appear as ordered park-like expanses.²⁰⁸ Taken together, ideals for fortified, port, monumental, and garden cities influenced the future of urban development in France and its colonies.

Dawdy identifies New Orleans as the first colonial town to have combined these frameworks into an albeit inchoate whole (that attempted, yet failed, to live up to Enlightenment paragons). But the French established New Orleans in 1718, nearly sixty

²⁰⁶ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 71.

²⁰⁷ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 71.

²⁰⁸ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 74.

years after the founding of Saint-Louis. Altogether, the imposing fortresses and open pastures that dominated La Courbe's 1694 plan, the open, portside town represented on the part of Froger, and the numerous laws instituted to establish absolute control in Saint-Louis attested to the position of this place as the first colonial enclave to witness the extended appropriation of Enlightenment ideals. In other words, the history of this town reveals that Saint-Louis, and not New Orleans, witnessed the reformulation of the above models before anywhere else.

Although Saint-Louis was, arguably, the first overseas locality where the French attempted to apply Enlightenment ideals, the value of this town for the study of the francophone world does not end there. In particular, it is telling that the legal codes developed (at the end of the eighteenth century) to ensure that this town adhered to Enlightenment visions mimicked what scholars have identified as a politics of direct rule. In his 2007 study of urban planning in colonial Africa, Ambe Njoh defines direct rule as a strategy of colonial governance that prioritized the creation of highly centralized polities. In these domains, European administrations overlaid all indigenous institutions. For Njoh, such power structures effaced the differences between local groups through bringing them under the common umbrella of European authority.²⁰⁹

In characterizing direct rule in this manner, Njoh echoes Garth Myers' claims concerning colonial enframing. Yet, unlike Myers' definition of enframing, which he applies to European approaches to African space on a broad social and historical scale, the urban manifestations of direct rule à la Njoh are much more culturally and temporally

²⁰⁹ Njoh, "The Impact of Colonial Heritage," 164.

specific.²¹⁰ As Njoh notes, direct rule is most paradigmatically associated with the francophone colonial federations of the twentieth-century, particularly, French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. In both of these contexts, every aspect of colonial law—from regulations concerning housing to approaches to social ills—descended from decisions reached in Paris and implemented on the part of a French bureaucracy based in African colonies. According to Njoh, this top-down approach to colonization grew out of French attempts at consolidating national and colonial governance in the twentieth century.²¹¹

In linking direct rule to the formation of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa (in 1895 and 1910, respectively), Njoh re-affirmed the notion that restrictive iterations of French colonialism were nineteenth and twentieth-century phenomena.²¹² Yet the coalescent histories of urban planning and policy in early Saint-Louis suggest this intimation is in need of reconsideration. In many ways, seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis conformed to Njoh’s definition of direct rule even though it existed long before the formation of French colonial federations.

In re-conceptualizing direct rule as a phenomenon with seventeenth and eighteenth-century antecedents, we can begin to think through the ways in which this paradigm reflected both Enlightenment racism and Enlightenment urbanism. What I am suggesting is that a historical re-examination of the urban origins and manifestations of direct rule can reveal its correlation with eighteenth-century principals concerning ideal

²¹⁰ Myers, *Verandas of Power*, 63-64.

²¹¹ Njoh, “The Impact of Colonial Heritage,” 166.

²¹² Njoh, “The Impact of Colonial Heritage,” 165.

towns, racial separation, and the policing of cityscapes. The plans and legal codes of eighteenth-century Saint-Louis grew out of a colonial apparatus in which both ideal urban visions (for a port, fortified, monumental, or garden city) and nascent racial anxieties achieved their (albeit limited) fruition in the form of a prototypical system of direct governance. Thus, colonizers orchestrated what Tzvetan Todorov describes as a drive to realize Enlightenment racism through instituting laws that would cause the physical world to resemble the racial universe theorized on the part of eighteenth-century thinkers.²¹³ In other words, early modern precursors for direct rule worked to ensure that Saint-Louis would function according to the dictates of Enlightenment urbanism as well as contemporary beliefs in black malevolence, separateness, and inferiority.

For these reasons, the case of early Saint-Louis suggests that direct rule may have referenced Enlightenment principles. Saint-Louis demonstrates that (somewhat incomplete) mechanisms of absolute control defined French foreign relations since the onset of French interactions within the non-European world. Therefore, eighteenth-century Saint-Louis was more than a fluid social environment or a society uprooted as a result of the slave trade. Rather, this town was a place where the French attempted to synthesize Enlightenment racism, urbanism, and direct rule. The result was an albeit incomplete system built to ensure both black subjection and French dominance in the modern era.

An engagement of the intertwined histories of racial restriction and imperial control in Saint-Louis can inform broader analyses of the urban histories of French

²¹³ Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 94.

colonialism. As one of the first towns to emerge within the French imperial world, Saint-Louis can serve as a vector for contemplating the convergence of French racism, Enlightenment urbanism, and direct rule. Through investigating the urban cultures of this town, we can shed light upon the tensions that shaped the sustainment of French imperial governance in Senegambia and beyond.

Conclusion: Contextualizing Saint-Louis within Imperial Urban History

Both the highly ordered grids and the urban laws of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis speak to a history of colonial power that informed French imperial control. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the urban landscape of Saint-Louis experienced rapid transformations, which attested to the maturation of French imperialism on the African continent. In less than one-hundred years, colonizers went from envisioning the town as a remote outpost to harnessing direct rule in an effort to implement Enlightenment ideals. Collectively, direct rule, ideal urbanism, and racial separation would come to define French approaches to non-European populations in the modern era. Accordingly, the urban character of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis belongs within a discussion of the history of French foreign policy in the colonial and postcolonial world.

The case of early Saint-Louis reveals that previously under-examined maps, plans, and legal codes elucidate a history of hostility, racism, and, even, outright restriction. As the words of numerous colonial draftsmen demonstrate, French colonizers often detested black Africans as well as the Muslim populations of Saint-Louis. Hence, the town that reflected these sentiments was a place where all colonial populations, and

not just black individuals, were the subjects of proscriptions engendered as direct rule established an imperfect system of Enlightenment order.

In many ways, French colonizers could apply this method for managing the colonial city to a diverse range of imperial situations. Techniques for separating Africans and Europeans—encouraged on the part of La Courbe, Froger, Labat, and Pommegorge—as well as racialized urban codes were so deliberately broad that they could suit any colonial situation anywhere in the world. Furthermore, the paradigms that defined early Saint-Louis—including, urban spaces designed to quell European fears of foreign populations and laws implemented to monitor the extent to which colonizers fraternized with colonial subjects—also haunted European approaches to the colonial question in other imperial domains across the non-European world. Subsequently, the problems that framed the urban history of early Saint-Louis were indicative of colonial culture on a much larger scale than previously imagined.

Through positioning the urbanism of Saint-Louis within a global framework of imperial rule, we can elucidate several possibilities in the field of colonial studies. On one level, this means of conceptualizing Saint-Louis can bring its similarity to both Port Louis and New Orleans into perspective. Much like these towns, Saint-Louis can provide a context for contemplating some of the specificities of the genericized colonial culture that emerged worldwide during the first centuries of French colonialism. In Saint-Louis, the urban manifestations of colonial power—as opposed to the architecture of creolization—have served as the bases for our investigation of French colonial history. This approach has considered the extent to which European authority informed the formation of an urban center in Senegambia. Along these lines, I have considered how

Saint-Louis—one of the oldest hubs for French colonial control—functioned as a site for the assertion of colonial power. Therefore, I have positioned this town as a vector for elucidating the ways that urbanism bolstered successful and unsuccessful attempts at asserting governmental authority in the region.

The spaces, plans, and legal codes of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Saint-Louis encompass a history of urbanism that can contribute to our understanding of social control under French colonialism. Through explicating the often-ignored specter of colonial authority in this seventeenth and eighteenth-century town, we can illuminate the role of urban planning and policy in the sustainment of French rule. Consequently, the study of the urban histories that shaped early Saint-Louis can elucidate the power dichotomies, which characterized cultural contact since the onset of French imperialism on the African continent.

Chapter 3

Rethinking Creole Architectural Genesis in French New Orleans

Unlike Saint-Louis or Port Louis, New Orleans, the capital of French Louisiana (1699-1762), never experienced prosperity under French rule. During the eighteenth century, New Orleans amounted to nothing more than a backwater that was profoundly marginal in trans-Atlantic systems of commercial exchange. Initially, earthfast structures devoid of frontal galleries characterized what was one of the most destitute enclaves in the early imperial world. When the French ceded Louisiana to the Spanish in 1762, New Orleans was, for all intents and purposes, a valueless possession. Yet, despite local impoverishment, this town nevertheless witnessed a shift away from earthfast construction and toward the predominance of the gallery house. By the end of the French colonial period, houses with covered galleries were consummate parts of local built environments. Settlers attached galleries to a range of structures from the Ursuline Hospital-Convent of 1745 to the homes of modest laborers. In employing this feature, the residents of French New Orleans effectuated a process of infrastructural change that is most commonly associated with architectural development in the world's wealthiest colonies. Subsequently, they rendered this town a site for architectural genesis not unlike the more prosperous locales of the eighteenth-century French colonial empire.

Scholars of creole architecture have contended that the shift from earthfast to gallery house construction unfolded most paradigmatically in relation to the dynamics of economic success, which shaped the most prosperous colony of the eighteenth-century French imperial world: Saint-Domingue (currently Haiti). In making this claim, architectural historians have posited affluence as integral to the move away from earthfast

construction and toward the genesis of the gallery house. This argument has reified the notion, explicated first by anthropologist, Fred Kniffen, that architectural change always follows wealth in colonial settings.²¹⁴ But, as French New Orleans demonstrates, destitute locales incubated creole architectural development in ways that mirrored wealthier colonies. At this juncture, this reality provokes two salient questions: How and why did creole architectural change transpire in French New Orleans? What does this process tell us about the economic meanings of creole architecture?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions. In doing so, it traces the social history of local architectural change from the initial construction of earthfast dwellings to the sale of gallery houses at the end of the French period. Through following this trajectory, this chapter elucidates a narrative of creole architectural development that questions the one put forth in previous scholarship. I demonstrate that both the advent of the gallery, in particular, and creole architectural genesis in French New Orleans, at large, were not the effects wealth. Rather, architectural change transpired as political and economic turmoil impelled settlers to appropriate the rote typologies, which could meet their basic needs. Infrastructural development unfolded as political challenges recurred and forced new generations of settlers to erect homes under difficult circumstances. As generic typologies that were adaptable to a range of colonial sites, earthfast and gallery

²¹⁴ For more information, see: Jay Edwards “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza,” 2-58; Jay Edwards “A Comparative Analysis of Upper and Lower Louisiana and Saint Domingue,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 10, no. 3 (September 2006): 241-271; Jay Edwards “Unheralded Contributions,” Philippe Oszuscik “Comparisons Between Rural and Urban French Creole Housing” *Material Culture* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1-36; and, Fred Kniffen, “Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion,” in *Cultural Diffusion and Landscapes: Selections by Fred Kniffen*, edited by H. Jessie Walker and Randall A. Detro (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

houses were the frameworks built to suit this inhospitable context. In positioning French New Orleans as a site for thinking through the impetuses for the emergence of creole forms in a depressed setting, this chapter continues the discussion on the widespread social and political meanings of creole built environments.

I will begin with an examination of the early political and economic history of French New Orleans before switching to an engagement of earthfast construction. Next, I will discuss the political crises (particularly the Natchez Massacre of 1729), which eventually prompted the development of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent of 1745. This structure sported a covered gallery just as this form appeared on a range of pedestrian houses. After addressing both this convent and the modest gallery structures erected in its wake, I will engage the existing scholarship on creole architectural genesis. Finally, I will return to French New Orleans where I will consider the value that this town holds for our understanding of creole architectural change. I will conclude by questioning the extent to which French New Orleans can serve as a point of departure for engaging other impoverished locales. In addressing the creole built environments of a destitute enclave, this chapter shifts the discourse on such forms toward the examination of architecture and impoverishment in the French colonial world.

Early Louisiana: Exploration, Expectations, and Realities

New Orleans lies in the Lower Mississippi Valley about 160 kilometers upstream from the mouth of the Mississippi River. Before French intervention, hundreds of indigenous villages—organized around flat-topped ceremonial mounds—dotted the New Orleans area. Initially, these villages belonged to the Plaquemine people, the most

prominent pre-contact group. Historically, the Plaquemine survived through hunting the pelicans, shellfish, crustaceans, and alligators that were abundant in the territory during the pre-contact period.²¹⁵ In the century prior to European arrival, the Natchez, the Choctaw, and the Tunica supplanted the Plaquemine before constructing the same kinds of campsites as their predecessors.²¹⁶

The social and architectural composition of the region shifted in 1540 when indigenous groups encountered Europeans. That year, Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto passed through the area and brought disease and population contraction.²¹⁷ The first attempt at colonization took place more than 100 years later when French explorer, Sieur de LaSalle, tried yet failed to locate the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1685. In 1699, French Canadian explorer, Pierre Le Moyne de Iberville, successfully established the colony of Louisiana (Figure 3.1).²¹⁸ This entity subsequently became the largest territory in the French empire. When Iberville claimed Louisiana, he established France as the power in charge of a territory that extended from the mouth of the Mississippi River in the south to its tributaries in present-day Minnesota; likewise, from east to west, French Louisiana stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. This vast expanse would eventually consist of two administrative units: Upper and Lower Louisiana. The more remote of the two was Upper Louisiana, a sparsely populated

²¹⁵ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 77.

²¹⁶ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 78.

²¹⁷ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 77.

²¹⁸ Figure 3.1. *Stylized Map of French Louisiana (1699-1762)*, Wikipedia, last modified, April 2010, accessed 20 August 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_colonization_of_the_Americas.

domain that encompassed present-day Missouri and Illinois. The marshy lands to the south comprised Lower Louisiana, the site that would eventually house the colonial capital of New Orleans.²¹⁹

Overall, this colony was first and foremost a site of military and strategic importance. Initially, the French saw Louisiana as a buffer against British expansion into the North American interior. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the British controlled the American colonies on the eastern seaboard. The French believed that, through claiming the entire midsection of the present-day United States, they could prevent a British take over of the American continent. Moreover, they thought that French control of eastern Canada and Louisiana could render France the dominant colonial force in North America. Not only would such tactical might guarantee control over an enormous amount of land, but such strength would also give the French unbridled access to the Mississippi River. Presumably, since this artery began in the northern reaches of the continent and emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, unrestricted authority would secure French dominance over trade—in fur, grain, and tobacco—between the North American hinterland and the broader Atlantic world. The French thought that the placement of a town near the endpoint of this river would catalyze commercial exchange. The town would serve as a depot for goods shipped downriver. Thus, in the minds of French officials, this enclave would function as both a gateway to the riches of North America and another example of French commercial success in the early imperial

²¹⁹ The French named New Orleans the colonial capital in 1721. New Orleans (founded, 1717) was the largest town in the Louisiana concession. For more information on early New Orleans, see: Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 75.

world.²²⁰

These hopes quickly fell flat. France was profoundly unable to carry out this ambitious plan. From the onset of the colonial period, poverty and economic stagnation in the metropole hindered the ability of the crown to establish dominance over a territory that was 2,144,510 square kilometers, one of the largest colonies in the world at the time. Consequently, neither Louisiana nor New Orleans ever incubated a prosperous economy. Put more bluntly, French Louisiana was extremely poor.²²¹

Impoverishment was ongoing since the industries that flourished elsewhere failed to gain steam here. Unlike New France, for instance, French Louisiana never developed a successful fur trade; both the inferior quality of local furs and the tendency of these commodities to rot in the humid weather doomed such commerce.²²² Likewise, the crops that colonizers attempted to cultivate usually fell victim to the unrelenting climate of the region. Although settlers tried to grow wheat, tobacco, pine, and corn (at various times during the French period), they often found these crops difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate. Nearly every plant grew during the fertile season only to be consumed by worms and vermin in the hot, humid summer.²²³ This trend briefly reversed itself in 1720

²²⁰ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 158.

²²¹ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 11.

²²² Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 9.

²²³ With respect to climate, New Orleans experiences much more extreme temperatures and weather events, on average, than Senegal or Mauritius. Hurricanes are much more frequent in southern Louisiana than in both places. Also, in winter, New Orleans regularly experiences freezes, a phenomenon that does not occur in Saint-Louis or Port Louis. Winter temperatures were much colder in Upper Louisiana than in Senegal

when colonizers successfully converted several swamps (in Lower Louisiana) into sites for rice and indigo cultivation. Despite their accomplishments, they were never able to produce enough exports to rival the booming plantation economies of the French West Indies.²²⁴

In fact, French Louisiana never reached the point where it could sustain a competitive plantation economy at all. Aside from climatic factors, the inability of the colony to support large-scale plantation agriculture stemmed from the overall lack of healthy, able-bodied slaves. The first shipment of African captives arrived in Louisiana in 1719. In 1721, two ships carrying 182 and 349 slaves landed in the colony. Yet the overwhelming majority of these captives were old and sick. This outcome stemmed from the reality of shipment. During the French colonial period, all vessels—from France or West Africa—bound for Louisiana had to stop first in the West Indies (usually, in Saint-Domingue) for structural refitting and the replenishment of provisions. The undying need for slaves in the Caribbean islands provoked local colonizers to raid Louisiana-bound ships at West Indian ports. There, plantation owners would seize the healthiest slaves and leave behind old and sick captives who were in turn sent to Louisiana.²²⁵

or Mauritius as well. For more information on the climate of New Orleans and the Louisiana territory, see Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 75. For a more in-depth discussion of the failure of cultivation in Lower Louisiana, see: Christopher Morris, "Impenetrable but Easy: The French Transformation of the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Founding of New Orleans," in *Transforming New Orleans and Its Environs: Centuries of Change*, edited by Craig E. Colten (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 27.

²²⁴ Morris, "Impenetrable but Easy," 26.

²²⁵ For further discussion of the way in which this process unfolded see: Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth-Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 69.

As a result of this trend, from 1731 to 1762, only one slave ship from Africa successfully arrived (with all of its captives) in Louisiana. The fact that a relatively small number of slaves made it to the colony stalled economic growth.²²⁶ To make matters worse, the slaves who did arrive encountered a territory without enough food to support even a modest influx of settlers.²²⁷ Early colonizers found it difficult to navigate the Mississippi River and subsequently exploit the fertile lands of Upper Louisiana.²²⁸

In addition to exacerbating food shortages, this problem prevented the river from serving as a commercial conduit and subsequently inhibited the success of New Orleans. Since most of Louisiana encompassed vacant lands and unused rivers, New Orleans could not claim its presumed status as a burgeoning depot for North American goods. Under these circumstances, both New Orleans and Louisiana languished as some of the least valuable territories in the eighteenth-century French colonial empire.²²⁹

Unsurprisingly, the metropolitan government was largely unsuccessful in encouraging French citizens to immigrate to the colony.²³⁰ From the beginning,

²²⁶ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 11. Hall estimates that around 5,780 slaves landed in Louisiana over the course of the French period (1699-1762). For more information, see: Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 381.

²²⁷ Gilbert C. Din, "Empires Too Far: The Demographic Limitations of Three Imperial Powers in the Eighteenth-Century Mississippi Valley" *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2009), 266.

²²⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 9-10.

²²⁹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 122.

²³⁰ In general, the French found it difficult to recruit citizens to immigrate to their eighteenth-century colonies, New France being an exception. For the most part, the harsh climate of Louisiana and of the other sub-tropical localities (like Mauritius) that encompassed the first French colonial empire precluded large-scale settlement on the part of French citizens. At the same time, it is undeniable that the impoverished and destitute

Louisiana experienced low population growth. In 1706, the white population consisted of 85 French and Canadian settlers. Likewise, a census taken in 1708 revealed that the entire Louisiana concession contained 278 persons.²³¹ This population included: 80 Native American slaves; 14 major officers; 76 soldiers; 12 sailors; 3 Canadians; 1 valet; 3 priests; 6 unspecified workers; and 6 cabin boys.²³² In the eyes of the French government, these numbers were highly troubling. If Louisiana was to grow into a successful colony, then it needed a sizable population of French inhabitants who were committed to cultivating vacant lands.²³³

By 1717, the French government was desperate to find such settlers. Trapped in this unenviable position, it began sending French criminal offenders—particularly, prostitutes, vagabonds, drunks, beggars, debtors, deserters, and even murders—to Louisiana in an effort to make use of their flagging colony. This practice reached a crescendo in 1719 (one year before its discontinuation) when France deported 416 men

state of Louisiana, in particular, deterred many colonizers. For a discussion of dynamics of European settlement as they related to Louisiana as well as other domains within the first French colonial empire, see: Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*; Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island* (for a discussion of these dynamics as they relate to Mauritius; and, Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island* (for a discussion of these dynamics as they related to Saint-Louis).

²³¹ This census recorded all of the persons living in the French controlled towns of the Louisiana concession. Thus, indigenous populations living outside of these zones were not included. For more information on the demographics of early Louisiana, see: Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*.

²³² Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 3.

²³³ For information on the intentions early colonial officials had with respect to the settlement of the Louisiana territory, see: French Colonial Government, *Decrees of the Conseil d'État, 1716*, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

and 30 women to Louisiana alone.²³⁴ According to official policy, the colony would force all male convicts to clear plots of land. The idea was that hard work would serve as a means of reforming criminals and thus rendering them successful members of the budding colonial population. In reality, deportation bred a sense of resentment among convicts. Furthermore, the lack of arable land and the overall paucity of economic opportunities meant that there were few chances for these individuals to become prosperous settlers. Hence, the overwhelming majority of deportées lived in poverty, a condition that led many back into a life of criminality.²³⁵

In many ways, this population embodied the problems of early colonial Louisiana. Their presence and their impoverishment indicate that, by the beginning of the 1720s, Louisiana was easily one of the most lawless and economically depressed outposts in the French colonial empire.²³⁶ It was in this context of disorder, unmet expectations, and financial ruin that the town of New Orleans emerged. As we will see, the dynamics of instability, which plagued Louisiana during the first decades of French colonialism, weighed upon architectural development beyond initial settlement. With this reality in mind, I would now like to consider the built environments of early New Orleans.

Architectural Genesis in Early New Orleans

²³⁴ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 6.

²³⁵ Not very much is known about the places where these individuals lived and worked. However, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and Shannon Dawdy have discussed these populations. For more information on this group, see: Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 5-6; and, Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 31.

²³⁶ Several authors have described Louisiana in this way. See: Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*; and, Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*.

In 1715, the French established New Orleans on a patch of high ground between the Mississippi River and Bayou St. John, a local waterway.²³⁷ By 1719, New Orleans had a population of 519 people, thirty-three percent of whom were West African slaves; the other residents included whites from France as well as Canadian descendants of French, American immigrants.²³⁸ All of these individuals lived on plots of land, which the Company of the Indies ceded to white, male residents. Under colonial law, the company granted lands along the Mississippi River (extending in a southerly direction from the center of town) to whites who were in turn responsible for cultivating subsequent estates. In theory, this practice would encourage economic growth through inviting settlers to make use of the lands along a waterway, which would hopefully become a major commercial artery.²³⁹

Far from encouraging growth, this policy caused tension while failing to boost the local economy or the lot of early colonizers. As early as 1716, the Conseil d'État—which represented the French crown in the colonies—complained to parliament that the company had granted too much land to too few settlers. Consequently, they argued, large swaths of territory were vacant and unused. From their perspective, this tendency was detrimental to the local economy; the presence of large parcels of unused land merely contributed to the low productivity of the colony. In an attempt to solve this problem, the parliament ordered the conseil to reclaim two to four arpents of land from each settler.

²³⁷ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 120.

²³⁸ Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 158.

²³⁹ Company of the Indies Decrees and Records, 1720, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Thereafter, they were to limit the size of all estates to a maximum of six by forty arpents. This motion applied to all settlers regardless of social standing.²⁴⁰

Following these rules, in 1719, colonial governor, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, obtained a six by forty arpent plot of land before building a house along Bayou St. Jean in what is now uptown New Orleans.²⁴¹ When Bienville returned to France in 1722, he sold his domicile and his parcel to local priest, Pere Louis D'Avagour. The sale record provides the earliest documentation of a house built in New Orleans. For this reason, it is worth considering in detail.²⁴²

By all accounts, Bienville was a wealthy man. As the colonial governor, he owned three slaves (considerably more than most colonizers at the time) as well as more than a dozen animals (six mares, a ram, six female sheep, four goats, a pig, and several pigeons).²⁴³ Yet, despite his material wealth, he lived in a Spartan logis—a small country

²⁴⁰ French Colonial Government, Decrees of the Conseil d'État, 1716, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. Also, an arpent is an old French measurement of land area equivalent to square meters that was used in France and its territories until the 1970s. For a full definition of the term *arpent* as well as a brief history of its usage as a unit of measurement in French North America see: Klaus K. E. Neuendorf, *Glossary of Geology* (Alexandria, VA: American Geosciences Institute, 2011), 37.

²⁴¹ Mary Louise Christovich et al. *New Orleans Architecture: Volume 1: The Lower Garden District: Howard Avenue to Jackson Avenue, Mississippi River to Caliborne Avenue* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1998), 3.

²⁴² French Colonial Government, Sale Record of the Bienville Estate, 1722, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁴³ French Colonial Government, Sale Record of the Bienville Estate, 1722, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. Here, I would like to add that, in early New Orleans, affluent individuals often expressed their wealth through owning animals as well as consumables (such as, wine and other alcoholic beverages). Such individuals, however, often lived in modest houses, like Bienville. For more information on foodways and consumption habits in early New

house common among the early settlers of Lower Louisiana.²⁴⁴ This dwelling measured at fifty-two feet squared and stood before a courtyard, which contained a garden and numerous outbuildings. These structures included, a dovecote, a detached kitchen, and a small house for Bienville's slaves: Brief; Brief's wife; and their daughter. In 1722, Bienville sold his house as well as his slaves, his animals, and his property for 1,200 Livres.²⁴⁵

The low sale price reflected the fact that the buildings on Bienville's land were fairly pedestrian. All of the structures on his property were impermanent dwellings that slaves constructed using the colombage-en-bois technique. Builders erected colombage-en-bois structures through creating a wood framework and filling it with mud and manure. Recent research, conducted on the part of Jay Edwards, has suggested that colombage-en-bois derived from building traditions, which proliferated independently in West Africa and Europe long before the onset of French colonialism. More precisely, Edwards has contended that a West African antecedent for colombage-en-bois was wattle

Orleans, see: Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 86. For more information on the resource shortages that influenced early construction, see: Edwards, "Unheralded Contributions."

²⁴⁴ The term *logis* comes from Cajun French. It refers to a basic house with no ornamentation. For more information on the genealogy of this term, see: Jay Edwards and Nicolas Kariouk Pecquet de Bellay de Verton, *A Creole Lexicon: Architecture, Landscape, People* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 126.

²⁴⁵ French Colonial Government (of Louisiana), Record of the Sale of the Bienville Residence, 1722, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. In comparison to houses sold on the simultaneously emergent colony of Mauritius, for example, houses in New Orleans were extremely cheap. For more information on housing prices in New Orleans see the above source. For more information on the cost of architecture in French Mauritius, see: Sale Records of the French Colonial Government, OA Series (1715-1810), National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

and daub, a building practice wherein workers filled reed superstructures with mud and manure.²⁴⁶ Similar conventions manifested themselves across rural districts of early modern France. There, peasants often built houses through filling wooden frameworks with vegetal materials.²⁴⁷ The Bienville estate, which housed a French ruler as well as three African slaves, was, in many respects, the ideal place for the synthesis of these building traditions. At the very least, those living on the property would have been familiar with some form of colombage construction.

Therefore, colombage was one of the few construction methods that suited both the cultural composition and the resource impoverishment of the local environment. To build colombage structures, Bienville (or any other colonizer, for that matter) only needed wood, mud, and manure. Wood abounded in the cypress forests near New Orleans whereas mud and manure were plentiful in and around Bienville's courtyard, which housed numerous animals. Hence, Bienville could use the resources that were abundant in his courtyard to build the very buildings that would house him in Louisiana. With copious amounts of wood, mud, and manure on hand, Bienville harnessed one of the few

²⁴⁶ For more information on wattle and daub in the greater Caribbean, see: Edwards and Bellay de Verton, *A Creole Lexicon*, 204. For more information on wattle and daub in the context of both West Africa and the Americas, see: John Michael Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An African American Legacy," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 67.

²⁴⁷ For more information on the peasant housing of metropolitan France as it related to French Louisiana, see: Benjamin D. Maygarden, "Building in Colonial Louisiana: Creolization and the Survival of French Traditions" *International Journal of Historical Archeology* 10, no. 3 (September 2006): 211-239.

construction methods that would allow for the establishment of an estate in a colonial backwater.²⁴⁸

In taking this course of action, Bienville mirrored the behavior of less fortunate colonizers, such as, farmer, Julien Binard. Whereas Bienville was one of the wealthiest men in the colony, Binard was one of the poorest. When he landed in Louisiana (after traveling from France), Binard barely possessed enough money to construct a modest house. Yet, in this poor man, the colony saw potential. As a farmer, Binard was exactly the kind of settler the territory needed if the French wanted to render Louisiana more than just a collection of vacant lands. In accordance with this line of thinking, the Company of the Indies granted Binard a plot of land in the center of New Orleans in 1723. Here, cultivation, a practice that would hopefully contribute to the economic betterment of the colony, was Binard's responsibility. It was also his duty to build a functional house. Thus, almost immediately, he spent 450 Livres to erect a post-in-ground dwelling—a house made of four wooden stakes driven into the ground with wood panels nailed together to create four walls.²⁴⁹ Binard's one-room house contained a single door, one window opening, and an attached chimney. In terms of size, the house measured at eighteen by twelve feet in length and width. Binard built his house using cypress wood, which he chopped and cut in the forests adjacent to New Orleans. In total, his modest

²⁴⁸ French Colonial Government, Sale Record of the Bienville Estate, 1722, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁴⁹ French Colonial Government, Sale Record for the Home of Julien Binard, 1725, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

abode took nearly four months to build.²⁵⁰ In 1725, Binard sold his home for the meager sum of 100 Livres.²⁵¹

In general, scholars have used the term earthfast construction to describe post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois dwellings like Binard's and Bienville's houses. In their 2011 study of impermanent architecture in British New Jersey, Michael Gall, Richard Veit, and Robert Craig defined earthfast construction as a "technique in which the wooden underpinnings of a structure rest directly on or are supported by earth rather than on masonry foundations or meager stone piers."²⁵² As Gall, Veit, and Craig demonstrate, this kind of architecture was not unique to French Louisiana. Rather, it has appeared all over the world at different historical moments. For Gall and his colleagues, the global ubiquity of earthfast construction stemmed from its status as an inexpensive building tradition that was easy to execute. In comparison to permanent dwellings, earthfast buildings required a relatively small number of skilled craftsmen. On one level, this fact encouraged the growth of this practice in early colonial locales. On a larger scale, this technique manifested itself wherever persons needed to build cheap structures quickly and with limited human or environmental resources.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ French Colonial Government, Sale Record for the Home of Julien Binard, 1725, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Michael Gall, et al. "Rich Man, Poor Man, Pioneer, Thief: Rethinking Earthfast Architecture in New Jersey" *Historical Archaeology* 45, no. 4 (2011): 41.

²⁵³ Gall, "Rich Man, Poor Man," 52. For a discussion of earthfast construction in the Louisiana territory, see: Maygarden, "Building in Colonial Louisiana," 220; Jay Edwards, "Upper Louisiana's French Vernacular Architecture in the Greater Atlantic World," *Atlantic Studies* 8, no. 4 (2011), 434; and, Bonnie Gums, "Earthfast (Pieux en Terre) Structures at Old Mobile" *Historical Archaeology* 36, no. 1 (2002): 13-25. For a

Binard and Bienville certainly fit the profile of persons pressed to erect earthfast houses. Both men employed similar methods of low cost, impermanent construction when assembling their homes. This continuity between the building practices of a rich and a poor settler indicates the ways in which a lack of resources affected all segments of society. Whether settlers were rich or poor, they had no choice but to erect dwellings that reflected the deprivations of the backwater they inhabited.

The colonial government faced similar limitations. Accordingly, from 1715 to the early 1730s, it oversaw the construction of numerous post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois dwellings. One such structure was the first military hospital, completed in 1722. This building, which sat on the wharf on a lot that would later become the site of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, was a rectangular, earthfast dwelling with a gable roof. A wooden still with several wood beams driven into the ground functioned as the foundation of this building. With respect to size, the structure was fifty by twenty feet. Inside, cells divided the hospital into small areas for the sick. As time passed, it became evident that this hospital was too small; overcrowding would eventually provoke the construction of a new infirmary (operated by Ursuline nuns) in 1734. For the time being, however, the hospital would serve the colony alongside other impermanent buildings, such as the barracks for European soldiers and laborers.²⁵⁴

foundational text that has paved the way for later investigations, see: Cary Carson, "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies" *Winterthur Portfolio* 16, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1981): 135-196.

²⁵⁴ Samuel Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital and the Ursuline Convent of New Orleans" *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (July 1946), 559.

Significantly, these structures looked almost identical to the hospital. Built in 1723, this architectural complex comprised two separate barracks for German and Swiss soldiers (conscripted under the French), the barracks for French soldiers, the barracks for a small population of French woodworkers, and the house of the director of the military. All of these buildings had wood frames covered with white planks. The barracks for Swiss, German, and French soldiers each possessed three square rooms positioned adjacent to one other with no connecting hallways; each room had a separate entrance. Although the barracks for French company woodworkers looked similar, they were much smaller. Organizationally, this space consisted of two rooms placed adjacent to one another with a doorway between them and a separate entrance for each room. Conversely, the director's house boasted a single entrance that opened onto a central hall with two square rooms on both sides. Each room had a central partition, which divided the space. Like the other buildings, this structure sat on a wood sill surrounded by wood planks driven into the ground.²⁵⁵

Another official example of an earthfast house was *La Direction*, the administrative and residential home for the directors of the Company of the Indies. Like most other buildings, *La Direction* was a simple structure with timber poles laid directly into the ground, walls comprised of white, cypress planks, and a wood shingle roof. Stylistically, this residence was as pedestrian as the parish church of St. Louis, a modest structure built in 1724. The church possessed a wood frame filled with mud bricks.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Samuel Wilson, *Bienville's New Orleans: A French Colonial Capital, 1718-1768* (New Orleans: The Friends of the Cabildo, 1968), 17.

²⁵⁶ Wilson, *Bienville's New Orleans*, 3.

Scholars have described buildings erected in this manner as *brique-entre-poteaux*, a variation on *colombage-en-bois*.²⁵⁷

Samuel Wilson has demonstrated that this construction method characterized at least one other structure in early New Orleans: the home of Pierre Baron, the chief engineer for the king. Baron used this method to erect his house in 1730. In 1731, he sold his home and returned to France. Shortly thereafter, his abode, like all of the other earthfast dwellings in Lower Louisiana, fell apart in the humid climate. The wood planks used to create the building's frame decayed and the house quickly became another example of a dilapidated structure in New Orleans.²⁵⁸ Perhaps the prevalence of houses like this was the reason why Gonichon, a mapmaker for the Company of the Indies, noted that, as late as 1731, New Orleans was a town filled with shacks of low value “made from sticks and fibers” (Figure 3.2).²⁵⁹ Gonichon certainly saw that wealthy men (like Bienville), modest settlers (like Binard), accomplished officials (like Baron), slaves (like Brief), and company laborers lived in houses that were nothing more than shacks amidst the impoverishment of the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The homes of these individuals reflected the challenges they faced. Residents lived in a marginal territory that was far from the booming economies of the French West Indies. In this context, they used wood and mud—materials found in abundance in the

²⁵⁷ See: Edwards, *A Creole Lexicon*, 34.

²⁵⁸ Wilson, *Bienville's New Orleans*, 32.

²⁵⁹ Figure 3.2. Gonichon. *Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans, telle qu'elle etait au Moins de Decembre 1731 levé par Gonichon*, 1731. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, Louisiana. On this map, Gonichon states, in a caption, that the majority of New Orleans consisted of these kinds of buildings.

Lower Mississippi Valley—to construct dwellings that, however cheap or flimsy, met their needs and matched their skill sets. The woodworkers housed in the company barracks, the slaves living on Bienville’s property, the company engineer, and the substance farmer all possessed the knowledge to build earthfast dwellings. As a result, they raised such structures thus mimicking other settlers within and outside of the early colonial world. As we will see, as colonization wore on, New Orleans would continue to display creole built environments that were analogous to those constructed in other imperial localities.

Architectural Development Under Persistent Political Turmoil

By the 1740s, New Orleans had witnessed the emergence of creole gallery houses, much like the more successful colonies of the eighteenth century. The shift from post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois construction and the advent of the gallery house occurred as colonizers responded to persistent economic and political challenges. At this juncture, I would like to draw our attention to the social issues that spurred such architectural change.

* * *

Several occurrences coalesced to provoke further architectural development in French New Orleans. These circumstances included: the Natchez Rebellion of 1729; the ongoing wars between the French and Native Americans following the uprising; and the role of local Ursuline nuns in providing social services for the victims of these conflicts. Together, these phenomena created the conditions for the construction of successive Ursuline convents, which collectively changed the architectural composition of French

New Orleans. In order to explicate the ways in which these histories related to local architectural genesis, I would like to first consider how these political processes unfolded. With this goal in mind, I will now transition to the rural expanses of Natchez, Louisiana.

During the French colonial period, Natchez referred to an area on the eastern side of the Mississippi River about 282 kilometers northwest of New Orleans (in present-day Mississippi). This region was home to the Natchez Indians, a group that inhabited the area for nearly 2,500 years prior to European arrival. In 1700, a small party of French settlers (particularly, officers, sailors, craftsmen, and miscellaneous laborers) navigated up the Mississippi River to meet the king of the Natchez. This event inaugurated the period of official contact between both groups. By the 1720s, a number of French farmers had settled a three by four kilometer patch of land in Natchez Country.²⁶⁰ As soon as 1722, French Natchez boasted a population of ninety-two European men, twenty-four European women, and seventy-nine slaves, eight of whom were Native American and seventy-one of whom were of African origin.²⁶¹ By 1729, Natchez had grown to include 400 colonizers and 280 slaves.²⁶²

This spike in the colonial population stemmed from modest economic growth. While the rest of the colony languished, Natchez experienced the birth of a small tobacco economy. Although tobacco production could not save Louisiana from financial ruin, French authorities nevertheless believed in the potential of Natchez. From their

²⁶⁰ George Edward Milne, *Natchez Country: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 7.

²⁶¹ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 88.

²⁶² Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 222.

perspective, the conversion of Natchez into a tobacco producing region could result in a crop that could rival Virginian leaf on the global market.²⁶³ Armed with these expectations, at the onset of the 1720s, the colonial government ordered the Natchez Indians to abandon their ancestral lands and relocate to a more remote site. Indian removal would pave the way for further French settlement. Yet tensions quickly escalated and eventually boiled over in late November of 1729. On a cold morning, several hundred Natchez warriors descended upon the French settlement and systematically began killing European men, women, and children. The violence lasted all day and, by the end of the attack, Natchez warriors had killed 200 European settlers and kidnapped 80 European women and 150 African slaves.²⁶⁴

This event later became known as the Natchez Massacre of 1729, one of the deadliest attacks in the history of Louisiana. The rebellion confirmed popular fears that the northern reaches of the territory were dangerous lands.²⁶⁵ These views reflected the shocking reality that the massacre killed off more than one-tenth of the white population of French Louisiana. On a financial level, the rebellion summoned an even more dire situation. The brutal destruction of a promising colonial enclave threw Louisiana into a

²⁶³ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 10.

²⁶⁴ White, *Wild Frenchmen*, 222.

²⁶⁵ M. Rossard, Private Correspondence with Unidentified Man, 1730, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. Private Correspondence coming out of Natchez confirmed popular fears concerning the northern reaches of the territory. Rossard, a man living in Natchez after the attack, explained the dismal state of the settlement in a letter to a friend in New Orleans. His letter joined a host of other dispatches from Upper Louisiana that decried the situation in the territory in the aftermath of the Natchez Rebellion. For more information on such correspondence, see: Private Letters Binder, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

state of financial uncertainty. In a matter of hours, the colonial government saw their only plan for economic viability vanish into thin air. This loss provoked a series of costly Franco-Indian wars (between the French, the Natchez, and the Natchez's Chickisaw allies), which lasted well into the 1750s.²⁶⁶ Collectively, these conflicts nearly destroyed French Louisiana.

Ongoing unrest also pushed settlers away from inland settlements. By 1746, the population of Natchez had dwindled to merely eight settlers and fifteen enslaved Africans.²⁶⁷ Emily Clark has noted that the majority of the people who fled Natchez in the years preceding the attack ended up in New Orleans, the only safe haven within a wildly unstable colony. The most vulnerable population to reach this town were a group of thirty orphaned girls whose parents perished in the attack. Once these girls made their way to New Orleans, they fell into the hands of the Ursuline Convent, a religious institution based in the colonial capital. The flood of orphaned girls into the convent overwhelmed this religious order, which only consisted of twelve nuns. Faced with a profusion of orphans, wounded victims of Franco-Indian wars, and a generally impoverished colony, the town government assigned the Ursulines to a new hospital and convent space (first in 1734 and, again, in 1745).²⁶⁸ Despite their pedestrian functions, these buildings forever changed the architectural composition of French New Orleans.

²⁶⁶ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 8.

²⁶⁷ White, *Wild Frenchmen*, 8.

²⁶⁸ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 75.

In many respects, the history of the Ursuline Convent of New Orleans begins in early modern France. In 1596, a group of French women organized themselves under the Company of Saint Ursula before vowing to teach Christian doctrine. Over the course of the proceeding century, these women spearheaded an educational platform for teaching young girls reading, writing, and arithmetic in addition to the laws of Catholicism. By the seventeenth century, poor economic conditions in metropolitan France propelled a shift in the social mission of the Ursuline nuns. As French cities became havens for homeless, abandoned youth, prostitution, and poverty, the Ursulines began to focus on addressing the social ills of modern France. It was during this time that they gained their reputation as sisters committed to helping the sick and needy.²⁶⁹

The changing mission of the Ursulines coincided with the advent of French colonialism. Imperial campaigns brought a vast array of territories under French control in ways that appealed to many of the nuns who filled the ranks of the convent. Not only did most colonies contain potential indigenous converts, but they also fostered settler populations who desperately needed the help of benevolent Christians. Seeking to meet these needs, the Ursulines founded a convent in New France (Quebec) in 1639. This foray into colonial settlement proved successful and subsequently opened new opportunities for further participation in the imperial project.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 7.

²⁷⁰ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 47.

If New France was a colony that could accept the Ursuline nuns, then Louisiana was a place that undeniably called for the intervention of this group.²⁷¹ As early as the 1720s, living conditions in New Orleans had officials up in arms. In 1723, New Orleans-based Company of the Indies commissioner Jacques Delachaise remarked that above all other problems, poor health care plagued this struggling town. Up to this point, an unmotivated group of male nurses presided over the first military hospital of New Orleans (built in 1722). Most of them, as Delachaise remarked, were more interested in pursuing women than in taking care of ailing patients.²⁷²

Compounding this problem, the small hospital left nurses with no choice but to cram as many as eighty patients into the space. As a result, sanitary conditions were deplorable.²⁷³ For Delachaise, this problem required action on several fronts. In addition to elucidating the need for a new building, the overall situation called for a new population of nurses. From his perspective, the Ursuline nuns could easily fill this role. Their status as female caretakers seemingly confirmed their ability to help a destitute colony address its social and public health concerns. Following this line of thinking, in the fall of 1726, Delachaise brokered an agreement with the Ursulines in France that confirmed the establishment of both a convent and a new Ursuline-run hospital in New

²⁷¹ In contrast to French Louisiana, New France (1534-1763) was a fairly successful colony that experienced much greater economic growth. For more information on the Ursulines in New France, see: Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 48. For a broader survey of the history of French intervention in Northern North America, see: Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²⁷² Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 562.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Orleans.²⁷⁴ The following year, twelve Ursuline nuns arrived in Louisiana. Here, the company expected them to maintain a hospital, provide a home for local orphans, and contribute to the moral betterment of the colony. Despite their hard work, they would only receive an undecorated space and a total stipend of 3,500 Livres. The strained budget of the colony could not allow for anything else.²⁷⁵

When the Ursulines first arrived in New Orleans in February of 1727, they lived, for one week, in the home of Sieur Bernard Deverges, an engineer from Béarn (in southwestern France). Like most houses in New Orleans, this residence was a one-story wood frame structure covered in wood planks and topped with a wood shingle roof.²⁷⁶ The Ursulines quickly moved out of this building and into a house adjacent to the old Bienville estate on the edge of town. This house was also supposed to be a temporary residence. The Ursulines were to live here until the company found the money and the resources to build a permanent conventual space. For the time being, the government would rent the building (from a man named Mr. Kolly) for 1,500 Livres.²⁷⁷ Unfortunately, no images of this house exist. However, Marie Madeleine Hachard, a nun from Rouen (in western France), described this structure in a letter written to her father on October 27, 1727.

²⁷⁴ Wilson, “An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital,” 564.

²⁷⁵ The meager stipend of 3,500 Livres was intended to cover the subsistence of the *entire* convent. Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 43.

²⁷⁶ Wilson, “An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital,” 566.

²⁷⁷ Wilson, “An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital,” 568.

Hachard described the house as a beautiful two-story wood building with a mansard roof. The structure consisted of multiple apartments with a total of six doors on the ground floor. Several widows provided ventilation yet, in accordance with standard practice across Louisiana and the Caribbean at the time, windows had cloth coverings instead of glass panes.²⁷⁸ For Hachard, this aspect of the house made life decisively unpleasant. She complained that:

“[the design coupled with the location of the house on the edge of town] makes us among the first for an infinite number of visits from mosquitoes and gnats...that would like to attack me. These bad insects sting without mercy. We are assaulted by them at night...[and] they will not fail to come to see us in our beds. Whatever precautions we take, we are unable to escape carrying their marks.”²⁷⁹

It is undeniable that the flimsy cloth shades, which undoubtedly rotted in the humid weather, exacerbated what was an already unavoidable bug problem. To add insult to injury, a labor shortage stalled the construction of a new convent. Hachard noted that since skilled workers “were not as numerous here [in New Orleans] as in France,” the Ursulines could “not expect to take possession of [the] new monastery and the hospital for a year, or perhaps longer.”²⁸⁰ In reality, Hachard and her colleagues would live in

²⁷⁸ Marie Madeleine Hachard, *Relation du voyage des dames religieuses Ursulines de Rouen à la Nouvelle-Orléans* (Rouen: A. Le Prévost, 1728). In 2007, Emily Clark translated the aforementioned memoir into English. I have used Clark’s translations here. See: Emily Clark, ed., *Voices From An Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 78.

²⁷⁹ Clark, *Voices From An Early American Convent*, 78-79.

²⁸⁰ Clark, *Voices From An Early American Convent*, 70.

their mosquito infested home for almost a decade before moving into the convent that the government initially promised them.²⁸¹

By 1734, the stress of preceding years had rendered a new space utterly necessary. As mentioned earlier, the Natchez Rebellion of 1729 brought an influx of thirty orphaned girls into the convent. Meanwhile, the space next to the old Bienville estate had reached capacity.²⁸² Sensing the seriousness of the situation, the company built the first Ursuline Convent in 1734. The structure stood in the center of New Orleans near the wharf (next to the future site of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent of 1745).²⁸³

In many respects, this building stood out because it was a three-story dwelling in a town where most structures were either one or two stories. Along similar lines, unlike the previous space, the convent possessed windows covered with glass, a material that did not attract mold during the humid summer.²⁸⁴ Despite its uniqueness, however, the convent conformed to local typologies in that it was a colomage-en-bois building topped with low pitched tile roof. Organizationally, the ground floor was a rectangular space with a central hallway. On each side of this hall were square and rectangular rooms, all of which served separate purposes. In total, the first floor contained: a kitchen; an office; a refectory for the nuns; a refectory for the boarders; a day chamber for the convent's head (Marie Tranchepain); a chamber for servants; a parlor; and a chapel. Similarly, the second floor consisted of a single hallway that divided the space into a series of

²⁸¹ Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 568.

²⁸² Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 573.

²⁸³ Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 573.

²⁸⁴ Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 575.

rectangular, cell-like rooms where the nuns and ailing patients slept. On the top floor, a similar layout characterized a space complete with additional sleeping quarters for the nuns, orphans, boarders, and an overflow of sick patients.²⁸⁵

It did not take long for the problems with this design to become apparent. All of these spaces were extremely small. Furthermore, even though the building was a full three stories, it was still not large enough to safely accommodate everyone. As it stood, caretakers and other healthy individuals had to sleep next to sick people. Likewise, liturgical services had to take place in cramped rooms adjacent to cells buzzing with the noise of sick individuals coughing, wailing, and even dying. More than an annoyance, this situation put the nuns and their patients in danger of contracting contagious illnesses. Thus, what the nuns needed was a space that could safely accommodate all of the individuals living under their care. A building of this sort would hopefully contribute to, and not compromise, the health, the sanitary conditions, and the spiritual mission of the convent. Recognizing the need for this kind of space, the company reluctantly agreed to build a new hospital-convent shortly after the completion of the 1734 structure.²⁸⁶

Initially, plans to erect a new hospital-convent languished as company officials bickered over the budget. Unsurprisingly, administrators sought to keep building costs low.²⁸⁷ In large part, their reluctance to devote significant resources to this project explains why it took so long to begin building a structure. It was not until 1745 that the company finally agreed to erect the Ursuline Hospital-Convent adjacent to the local

²⁸⁵ Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 584.

²⁸⁶ Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 594.

²⁸⁷ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 43.

wharf. The colony's unwillingness to prioritize this project manifested itself in the fact that construction did not begin until 1749.²⁸⁸ By this point, the persistent effects of earlier conflicts—manifested in terms of the Natchez Rebellion, the Franco-Indian Wars, and the influx of orphaned girls placed under the Ursulines's care—engendered a situation wherein the colony desperately needed a space that could adequately serve wounded soldiers, destitute orphans, and increasingly impoverished settlers. The company had to do something to address, once and for all, the social and physical ills faced on the part of these populations. Hence, it erected the Ursuline Hospital-Convent. The nuns would occupy this space until 1899 when they moved into a more elaborate building.²⁸⁹

In October of 1749, company draftsman, Ignace François Broutin, drew a ground plan for the structure (Figure 3.3).²⁹⁰ This image constitutes the only existing plan for this space. As the plan acknowledged, the coming years would mark the completion of this project. First, however, Broutin contracted local plantation owner, Joseph Villars Dubreuil, to build the structure. Dubreuil assembled a labor force comprised of the slaves

²⁸⁸ Figure 3.3. Ignace François Broutin. *Batiments à bâtir que la roy projete pour loger les religieuses Ursulines hospitalieres de la Nouvelle Orleans 8bre 1745* (Verso), 1745. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, Louisiana. On the back page of this building plan is a textual description of the project written by Ignace François Broutin. Here, he gives an albeit vague description of the timeline of construction. See also: Kingsley, Karen. *Buildings of Louisiana*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

²⁸⁹ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 47.

²⁹⁰ Figure 3.3. Ignace François Broutin. *Batiments à bâtir que la roy projete pour loger les religieuses Ursulines hospitalieres de la Nouvelle Orleans 8bre 1745* (Recto), 1745. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, Louisiana. In the ground plan, all spaces colored in yellow represent the sites projected to be built as of 1745. All spaces colored in red represent the spaces projected to be built as of 1749. As the back of the document indicates, all of these spaces were completed in 1753, the date that marked the end of construction. There is no existing ground plan from 1745.

from his plantation, which stood on the outskirts of New Orleans. Although the exact number of slaves who worked to build the hospital-convent is unknown, it is certain that these individuals toiled day and night on a project that would drag on for four years.²⁹¹ When construction ended in 1753, the completed structure measured at 120 by forty feet. It consisted of a square shaped convent with a small hospital attached. The convent, in particular, was a two-story dwelling. A bakery, a chapel, and an administrative space, which was forty by twenty-one feet, occupied the first floor; the second floor housed the rooms where the nuns and the orphans slept. All of these areas formed a square around a central courtyard, which was twenty-seven by twenty-one feet and served as a makeshift cloister (Figure 3.4).²⁹²

The hospital was much smaller. This dwelling consisted of a rectangular main building as well as a frontal addition where the nuns treated officers from the Company of the Indies. In the back of the main building, a kitchen and a laboratory occupied two separate dwellings, which builders attached to opposite ends of the main hall. These structures stood in front of a large garden where the nuns grew plants that they used to cure ailments. The garden also served as an informal burial site for nuns, patients, and local paupers.²⁹³ Overall, the buildings, which comprised this fairly self-sufficient

²⁹¹ Roulhac Toledano, ed. *New Orleans Architecture Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006), 3.

²⁹² Figure 3.4. *Main Building of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, 1749*, *Main Building of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, 1749*, Library of Congress Online, last modified 2006, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011630835/>. The main building of the convent still exists today; however, it has been heavily restored since the eighteenth century.

²⁹³ Clark, *Voices From An Early American Convent*, 118. Recent research has revealed that paupers were often buried in the courtyards of religions structures, like the

compound, were made of brick and possessed gable roofs. The entire hospital-convent stood within a walled enclosure, which included a frontal, entry courtyard.

Yet the most significant feature of this architectural complex was the covered, open gallery (i.e., an open porch), which builders attached to the administrative headquarters. This gallery lay directly off the space where the nuns spent most of their daylight hours. Therefore, it faced the cloister thus providing an outdoor room where the nuns and their orphans could congregate beyond public view. In this private sphere, they could stand outside on hot, humid days while enjoying shade and shelter. The gallery could also allow for proper airflow thus easing the discomfort of living and working in a humid, sub-tropical climate.²⁹⁴

At the same time, this space could serve as a covered walkway that would allow the nuns to move between the convent and the hospital without stepping into the rain or into the piercing sun. Significantly, Louis Nelson's research suggests another possible function. Nelson explains that, in the early colonial Caribbean, covered galleries were often spaces for daily exercise. Children and adults would walk back and forth under covered galleries in order to move their limbs and stretch their muscles. Within and beyond the greater Caribbean, persons of greater means viewed exercise—specifically exercise undertaken in a covered, outdoor space—as beneficial for pediatric as well as

Uruline Hospital-Convent. For more information on burial practices in French New Orleans, see: Leonard V. Huber, *New Orleans Architecture Volume III: The Cemeteries* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1989), 4. See also: Wilson, "An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital," 614.

²⁹⁴ See: Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 5.

adult health.²⁹⁵ This outlook reflected eighteenth-century medical knowledge, which posited fresh air as curative and thus integral to the wellbeing of Europeans in warm climates.²⁹⁶ Most important for our purposes, Nelson briefly mentions that at least one orphanage in colonial North America made use of its gallery as a site for pediatric exercise.²⁹⁷ Since the Ursuline Hospital-Convent was an institution in charge of ensuring the health of young girls, its gallery may have certainly functioned as a space for physical activity. In other words, it is quite possible that the Ursuline Hospital-Convent and its covered gallery modestly applied contemporary trends in health and wellness on the streets of French New Orleans.

At this juncture, I would like to draw our attention to the fact that, by the end of the French period, galleries like the one on the Ursuline Hospital-Convent existed throughout New Orleans. Settlers employed these structures in ways that resembled the patterns of use applied on the part of the Ursuline nuns. In 1762, for instance, the company erected a new Intendance (i.e., director's house) on a plot of land behind the Ursuline Hospital-Convent. Like its neighbor, the Intendance was a symmetrical, two-story dwelling with a private, first-floor gallery that ran along the back of the building and ventilated administrative spaces.²⁹⁸ In displaying this feature, the Intendance recalled the private homes in its vicinity. One such house was the residence of Gerard Pellerin. At

²⁹⁵ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 204.

²⁹⁶ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 205. For further discussion on European ideas concerning salubrity and how they impacted architecture, see: King, *The Bungalow*.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. Here, Nelson is referring to the George Whitefield Orphan House (built, 1739-1740) in Bethesda, Georgia.

²⁹⁸ Wilson, *Bienville's New Orleans*, 44.

the end of the French period, Pellerin built a two-story house beside the Mississippi River; the first floor contained his workshop whereas the second floor held his sleeping quarters. More pertinently, the first-floor boasted an eight-foot wide gallery. Much like those on the Ursuline Hospital-Convent and on the Intendance, this porch ventilated the place—in this case, the workshop—where Pellerin spent most of his waking hours.²⁹⁹

At least two more records reveal that, beyond the vicinity of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, the physical properties of the gallery had salubrious associations. Just after the French period came to a close, a man named, M. Millet, built a house and bar in the center of New Orleans. His domicile sported a gallery topped by a gable roof, which funneled rainwater onto the street and away from his property.³⁰⁰ Louis Nelson has noted that covered galleries of this sort prevented houses from becoming too damp through guiding moisture away from interior spaces. Many early colonizers (and Europeans, in general) believed that a dry house devoid of the miasmatic waters, which caused disease, was a healthier space.³⁰¹ Perhaps Millet built his covered gallery with these concerns in mind.

If he did, his gallery would have rivaled the one on the home of French widow, Elizabeth Lacombe. In October of 1764, an unnamed notary visited Lacombe's house to find her sick, in debt, and on the verge of death in her bed. The notary who came to appraise her scant belongings observed that her small house contained a gallery off the

²⁹⁹ Unknown Author, Sale Record of the Pellerin Estate, 1764, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁰⁰ Unknown Author, Court Proceeding Over M. Millet's House, 1768, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁰¹ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 205.

bedroom. He mentioned that the gallery faced a modest courtyard thus presumably providing a steady stream of fresh air into the room of a sick woman who desperately needed relief from the oppressive heat. Much like the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, the Intendance, and the homes of Millet and Pellerin, the modest house belonging to Lacombe deployed a gallery, which, in the eyes of one contemporary observer, potentially brought the curative properties of fresh air into the home of an old, sick woman. Although Lacombe would die soon after this information on her home became a part of the historical record, the archival documents on her house would live on and attest to the importance of the gallery as a ventilative device in eighteenth-century New Orleans.³⁰²

What these examples indicate is that, by the end of the French period, gallery houses—with all of their social and medical associations—had become a part of the architecture of a colony that would never achieve sustained commercial success. Their integration into the architectural repertoire of French New Orleans stemmed from a number of factors. On one level, galleries were fairly easy to build and they came about vis-à-vis construction practices that were similar to those employed to erect earthfast houses. To build galleries, workers merely cut wood beams into columns before planting these stakes into the ground and expanding roofs to meet supporting members.³⁰³ Such construction techniques indicate that, like post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois

³⁰² Unknown Author, Appraisal of the Home of Elizabeth Lacombe, 1764, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁰³ Unknown Author, General Record of the Construction of a Gallery House, Undated (French period), Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

structures, galleries required neither an extensive skill set nor a large labor force to build. Once completed, they recalled an almost indiscriminate number of European and non-European typologies. Galleries could reference conventual cloisters, the frontal verandas of West African compound houses, and even the porches attached to native North American dwellings (of the greater Caribbean).³⁰⁴ Hence, their genericism hastened their appropriation.

At the same time, the growing popularity of the gallery also stemmed from a modest increase in the enslaved population. From 1746 to 1763, the number of slaves in Louisiana rose from 3,630 to 4,598 individuals.³⁰⁵ As the case of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent reveals, slaves undoubtedly helped raise the gallery structures of New Orleans. As we will see, Jay Edwards has masterfully demonstrated how this group introduced West African style verandas to the greater Caribbean at this historical moment.³⁰⁶ Yet another reality remains understudied: the fact that the emergence of the gallery was a symptom of architectural change catalyzed as economic failure consumed French New

³⁰⁴ Structures that could be thought of as antecedents to the creole gallery appeared on a range of houses across the European and the non-European world prior to colonial contact. Among the Taino peoples of the Caribbean, in particular, a typology known as the bohio house existed. Such buildings were single-room dwellings with a frontal veranda attached. For more information on the bohio house, see: Oszuscik, "Comparison Between Rural and Urban," 9-10.

³⁰⁵ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 182-183. Hall contends that the increase in the enslaved population at this time was the result of a "natural increase" spurred as a result of the fertility of enslaved women. As explained earlier, only a small number of slaves—190 to be exact—arrived in Louisiana from West Africa during this time. Likewise, from 1748 to 1756, small numbers of African slaves arrived from the plantations of the French West Indies. These groups would have been familiar with gallery houses since this typology also proliferated in the French West Indies at this historical moment.

³⁰⁶ See: Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza."

Orleans. In many ways, the Ursuline Hospital-Convent of 1745 provides a point of departure for thinking through the implications of this point. Like Pellerin, Saulet, Lacombe, and even the first settlers of French New Orleans, the Ursulines erected their domicile under strict financial limitations. Hence, this order, the hospital-convent, and the buildings constructed before and after its emergence can lead us toward an understanding of creole architectural genesis that takes into account local histories of economic strain.

Theories of Creole Architectural Development

French New Orleans presents an architectural history that remains difficult to categorize. This economically depressed enclave, which began as a collection of earthfast dwellings, nonetheless witnessed the emergence of creole gallery houses. As a whole, these transformations demonstrate that New Orleans experienced the same processes of creole architectural evolution as the wealthier colonies within and outside of the French colonial empire. For this reason, this town invites a scholarly approach that takes into account the social and economic factors that provoked architectural change on the margins of the French imperial world.

Over the course of several decades, scholars of creole architecture have paved the way for the implementation of this approach. Four authors in particular have been instrumental in defining the economic mechanisms that have guided architectural change in creole societies. These architectural historians include, Jay Edwards, Philippe Oszusick, Fred Kniffen, and Louis Nelson. Whereas Jay Edwards and Philippe Oszusick have rendered the gallery a vector for engaging creole architectural development, Fred Kniffen has posited a more general theory on colonial architectural genesis that has

served as a basis for contemporary scholarship. More recently, Louis Nelson has revised Kniffen's model through addressing the far reaching impact of architectural development in eighteenth-century Jamaica.³⁰⁷

What links these diverse scholars is their shared tendency to posit economic wealth as necessary for architectural change in creole contexts. Although their work has not addressed the link between architecture and economic stagnation in French New Orleans, it still holds value as a result of its role in engendering a comprehensive model for understanding the fiscal impetuses for colonial architectural change. Therefore, such scholarship can provide a roadmap for addressing both the economic and the political mechanisms, which propelled the genesis of creole typologies in French New Orleans.³⁰⁸ For this reason, I would now like to consider the scholarship that has informed our understanding of architectural development in the greater Caribbean.

No scholar has been more instrumental in the discourse on creole built environments than Jay Edwards. One of the major issues that Edwards has addressed in his groundbreaking work is the question of how and why the gallery materialized during the eighteenth century. In engaging this problem, he has posited the emergence of this feature as the result of three social and economic forces: cultural contact between Africans and Europeans along the West African coast; the subsequent growth of

³⁰⁷ See: Edwards "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 2-58; Edwards "A Comparative Analysis of Upper and Lower Louisiana," 241-271; Edwards "Unheralded Contributions;" Philippe Oszuscik "Comparison Between Rural and Urban;" Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*; and Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing."

³⁰⁸ See: Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza;" Edwards, "Creole Architecture: A Comparative Analysis;" and Oszuscik, "Comparisons Between Rural and Urban."

Hispaniola as a cultural hearth and a booming economic center; and the development of lines of influence between the French colony of Saint-Domingue (on Hispaniola) and New Orleans in the eighteenth century. Edwards has pinpointed these phenomena as integral to the birth and the diffusion of the gallery across the French colonies of the greater Caribbean.³⁰⁹

He begins his engagement of this architectural paradigm with the observation that few galleries existed on American homes prior to 1700. He argues that, by 1800, however, “an extended porch had become a standard feature of rural domestic architecture in almost every American community from the Mississippi Delta to the St. Lawrence River Valley.”³¹⁰ In his view, the rapid emergence and diffusion of this typology was not a matter of unilateral European influence since frontal or wrap-around porches were never integral components of European domestic architecture. For Edwards, this reality indicates the role of two non-European localities—coastal West Africa and the Caribbean islands—in the emergence of creole galleries in the colonial Americas.³¹¹

At this point, Edwards turns to the work of John Michael Vlach. In his research, Vlach has contended that frontal porches were common in coastal West Africa (specifically, in the area stretching from northern Senegambia to northern Angola) during

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza,” 3.

³¹¹ Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza,” 5.

the eighteenth century, the period when the slave trade began to intensify in the region.³¹² During this time, galleries stood in front of a wide range of pedestrian compound houses. What Vlach and Edwards each make clear is that the meaning of this feature would undergo rapid transformation once captives began boarding vessels bound for the plantation societies of the early colonial Caribbean.³¹³

As explained in chapter one, Edwards posits the Caribbean as the place where the frontal gallery became a part of colonial built environments. For our purposes, I would like to examine the economic connotations of this argument. In Edwards' view, galleries became integral components of houses designed according to European precedents first on Hispaniola because this island was the place where one of the wealthiest men in the Americas lived. This man was Diego Colon, the son of Christopher Columbus. In 1510, he built an elaborate villa (the Casa del Almirante), which contained a frontal, open arcade. Shortly thereafter, settlers seeking to mimic the grandeur of this house began adding galleries, which referenced Colon's arcades, onto their homes. Thus, the actions of wealthy men like Colon and the aspirational desires of those of slightly lesser means contributed to the transposition of the gallery in this Caribbean context.³¹⁴ This economy of affluence and aspiration caused Hispaniola to become what Edwards describes as a cultural hearth for creole architecture: a node where a high degree of wealth provoked the

³¹² See: Vlach, *Sources of the Shotgun House: African and Caribbean Antecedents for Afro-American Architecture* (2 Volumes), Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Folklore, Indiana University, 1975.

³¹³ For more information on this topic, see: Vlach, *Sources of the Shotgun House*. Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza."

³¹⁴ Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 33.

initial emergence of creole typologies. In his view, Hispaniola was the place where creole house types arose before spreading to other, more economically marginal localities across the Caribbean basin.³¹⁵

Hence, for Edwards, architectural genesis and diffusion with respect to Hispaniola followed wealth and economic success. In the seventeenth century, Hispaniola housed a burgeoning plantation economy centered around sugar production, a practice that began on this island in the 1650s before becoming a major industry. Significantly, the sugar boom coincided with the transfer of the western half of the island from Spanish to French rule in 1659. From this point to the end of French control in 1804, western Hispaniola, or Saint-Domingue, incubated the most successful sugar economy in the early modern world. In addition to harboring a vast amount of wealth, Saint-Domingue was, by far, the most successful imperial setting in the first French colonial empire. It was in this context that both Saint-Domingue and the island on which it stood progressively developed into an even larger cultural hearth (than what existed before). From Edwards's perspective, creole architecture continued to proliferate in this locality because the "economic activities surrounding sugar production...[in turn] provid[ed] increasingly higher levels of income and concomitant architectural development."³¹⁶

Whereas Hispaniola was a cultural hearth, French Louisiana experienced the effects of architectural diffusion. In explaining the mechanisms that fostered this reality, Edwards draws attention to the link between both colonies. Here, I would like to reiterate that, during the eighteenth century, all ships (whether slaving vessels or carriers from

³¹⁵ Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 27.

³¹⁶ Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 47.

France) bound for Louisiana stopped first in Saint-Domingue. For Edwards, this reality meant that many of the slaves and settlers of eighteenth-century New Orleans had spent time on the island and were thus familiar with creole gallery houses. Such acquaintance with Caribbean built environments spurred the diffusion of such frameworks to Louisiana. Edwards pinpoints this process as unfolding in the mid-eighteenth century, the period that witnessed a modest increase in the enslaved population of New Orleans. He maintains that, around this time, the gallery became a benchmark of elite architecture: “For those [settlers] who could afford the luxury, such features [particularly, the frontal gallery] accompanied the very earliest phases of permanent construction in southern Louisiana.”³¹⁷ Therefore, in his view, in both the backwater of Louisiana and in the cultural hearth of Hispaniola, galleries denoted wealth during the first centuries of French expansion.

In many respects, Edwards’s arguments concerning the emergence and the diffusion of the gallery reflect Philippe Oszuscik’s contention that creole typologies of the eighteenth century were “changes in tradition [that] occur[ed] first in a cultural hearth and then radiate[d] outward.”³¹⁸ According to Oszuscik, eighteenth-century New Orleans was a secondary economic outpost where innovations—initially engendered in the Caribbean—arrived before spreading to the more destitute reaches of the Louisiana territory.³¹⁹ In applying this understanding of architectural genesis and dissemination to

³¹⁷ Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza” 11, 41.

³¹⁸ Oszuscik, “Comparison Between Rural and Urban,” 27.

³¹⁹ Oszuscik, “Comparison Between Rural and Urban,” 21.

the study of creole architecture, both Oszuscik and Edwards reference the work of anthropologist, Fred Kniffen.

In his article, “Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion,” Kniffen articulated a model for the emergence of colonial architecture that has informed much of the discourse on creole built environments. For Kniffen, colonial architecture owes its existence to processes of transformation that begin the moment settlers lay claim to a foreign territory. In his view, architecture changes in response to two major phases of colonial economic development: initial settlement and sustained growth.³²⁰

Initial settlement defines the first years of colonization. During this time, settlers erect impermanent dwellings that are devoid of stylistic adornment. The sole purpose of such buildings is to ensure rote survival in a new environment; there, a lack of resources results in profoundly Spartan dwellings. According to Kniffen, such architecture gives way to buildings that display international stylistic innovations once economic prosperity allows for the appropriation of novel forms. Economic improvements generate a class of wealthier settlers who adapt architectural innovations in an effort to display their affluence. As Kniffen explains, the interplay between initial settlement and sustained growth indicates that affluence is fundamentally integral to architectural change in colonial settings.³²¹ He relates this notion to architectural diffusion through suggesting that, as wealth radiates out from economic centers, architectural innovations spread as

³²⁰ Kniffen, “Folk Housing,” 50.

³²¹ Kniffen, “Folk Housing,” 53.

well; they reach less prosperous locales where settlers appropriate them in an attempt to communicate their status in the context of lackluster economies.³²²

One of the most significant reformulations of this theory appeared in architectural historian, Louis Nelson's 2016 book, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica*. This work engaged the buildings erected on the island and in the larger Anglophone world during eighteenth and nineteenth century. More precisely, it addressed the ways in which the wealth generated vis-à-vis the local plantation economy affected architectural development in Jamaica as well as in the localities—from England to coastal West Africa and, even, Scotland—drawn into contact with the island as it became a major commercial node. For Nelson, his book was the story of Jamaican wealth as told through the buildings—on three continents—that once reflected the riches and the global influence of this Caribbean island.³²³ For us, his book is significant because it constitutes the most recent attempt at expanding upon the model for colonial architectural genesis that Kniffen, Edwards, and Oszusick articulate.

Nelson, like Edwards before him, begins his study through explicating the link between the sugar industry and Caribbean architectural fluorescence. He literally picks up where Edwards leaves off and notes that, after the transfer of Jamaica from Spanish to British rule, the island ceased to be a backwater in the shadow of Hispaniola. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Jamaica rose to prominence as the largest producer of sugar in the British colonial world. The sugar industry depended upon the labor of black

³²² Kniffen, "Folk Housing," 64.

³²³ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 3.

slaves who vastly outnumbered the white Jamaican elite, a group that, according to Nelson, basked in their status as “the wealthiest Britons outside of Britain.”³²⁴

Nelson goes on to contend that the astonishing success of British Jamaica propelled the development of new typologies that expanded upon those that the Spanish left behind.³²⁵ One such form was the Jamaican creole house. Like Spanish antecedents, such dwellings possessed frontal or rear galleries and a central hall flanked by smaller rooms. Whereas wealthy free blacks appropriated this typology in an attempt to display their affluence, plantation owners preferred such houses since covered galleries allowed them to sit outside and survey the slaves on their estates.³²⁶

Jamaican creole houses existed alongside merchant stores—two-story dwellings with a first floor where shops welcomed visitors and a second story where vendors lived with their families. Significantly, second stories extended to cover pedestrian walkways below; a colonnaded arcade always supported these extensions, which, in turn, sheltered shoppers as they walked along urban streets and peered into store windows.³²⁷ For Nelson, the town of Falmouth, on the northern coast of the island, pioneered this building tradition. In the early nineteenth century, Falmouth was the busiest Jamaican port after Kingston. The booming economy rendered this town a node for the exchange of Atlantic

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ For more information on this process, see my engagement of Edwards in Chapter one.

³²⁶ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 70.

³²⁷ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 181.

goods, which vendors sold in merchant stores.³²⁸ Yet these buildings were not the only structures to reflect mercantile prosperity. Further afield, busy sugar mills embraced mechanized production in ways that rendered Jamaica at the forefront of British industrialization.³²⁹

Nelson concludes his book with a discussion of the white Jamaicans who traveled to England where they introduced Caribbean forms into local built environments. There, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, they constructed country houses with covered galleries that referenced those of the Caribbean.³³⁰ Many of these individuals also exerted their influence on the British landscape through investing in projects, such as, dock construction in London and Bristol, that allowed them to bring Jamaican wealth and knowledge to bear on the metropole.³³¹

In highlighting the contributions of these figures, Nelson draws a link between the house types of colonial Jamaica and the spaces of imperial England. He reveals that Jamaican wealth was so immense that its principal heirs were able to travel overseas and transfer preeminent typologies from the Caribbean to the British Isles. In other words, he demonstrates that Caribbean wealth engendered a system of architectural diffusion wherein innovations moved from the colony to the metropole.³³² Subsequently, he revises

³²⁸ Louis P. Nelson, “The Falmouth House and Store: The Social Landscapes of Caribbean Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Building the British Atlantic World: Spaces, Places, and Material Culture, 1600-1850*, edited by Daniel Maudlin and Bernard L. Herman (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 190.

³²⁹ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 121.

³³⁰ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 260.

³³¹ Nelson, *Architecture and Empire*, 246.

³³² Ibid.

Kniffen's model in ways that shed light upon the impact of colonial wealth on architectural genesis in the imperial homeland.

Collectively, the above scholars, from Edwards to Nelson, define wealth as integral to architectural genesis and diffusion within and outside of the Caribbean. They contend that creole forms moved from cultural hearths in the West Indies to marginal terrains and, even, economic centers.³³³ What their work reveals is that the association between economic success and architectural development—explicated first by Kniffen—remains central to our understanding of creole typologies.

Yet builders in New Orleans integrated creole forms into a larger architectural repertoire despite the fact that the town, its institutions, and the larger colony were extremely poor. This process unfolded at the same time as these frameworks circulated within much wealthier colonies. Therefore, the case of French New Orleans can provide a context for engaging the ways in which creole forms could emerge as non-elite typologies within an economically stagnant colony. Building upon the insights of Jay Edwards and his colleagues, I would like to propose a revised theory on creole architectural genesis that considers this process in relation to the structures of an impoverished town. In doing so, I would like to think through the ways in which the broad genericism of creole forms determined their adaptability under challenging economic circumstances. With these goals in mind, I will now return to the topic of architectural genesis in eighteenth-century New Orleans.

³³³ See: Ibid; Edwards, "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza," 48; and Oszuscik, "Comparison Between Rural and Urban," 27.

New Orleans: New Perspectives on Creole Architectural Change

By the end of the French colonial period, houses with covered galleries were noticeable components of the built landscapes of French New Orleans. On one level, an examination of these buildings could elucidate the reasons for their adaptation in this imperiled enclave. More pertinently, an engagement of the broader histories of infrastructural change, which informed the emergence of these spaces, can lead us toward a revised understanding of colonial architectural transition. This perspective would take into account the dynamics of economic strain, which informed architectural genesis in French New Orleans. Subsequently, this approach would build upon the fiscally minded scholarship of Jay Edwards and his colleagues.

At this juncture, in light of previous scholarship, I would like to pause to consider the similarities between French New Orleans and the other localities addressed in this dissertation. When examined from a broader perspective, the dynamics of architectural change that unfolded in New Orleans mirrored those of French Mauritius. Gallery houses replaced earthfast dwellings around the same time in New Orleans and Port Louis. In both Mauritius and Louisiana, galleries were outdoor passageways that allowed for the steady flow of fresh air into living and working quarters.³³⁴ An increase in the enslaved populations of both colonies coincided with the growing popularity of galleries in each place. Certainly, the congruous circumstances, which accompanied creole architectural development in Port Louis and New Orleans, can reveal the extent to which both

³³⁴ Galleries became a part of the architectural repertoire of Port Louis in the mid-eighteenth century, around the same time as the feature appeared on the Ursuline Hospital-Convent in New Orleans. For more information on the gallery as it existed in Port Louis, see Chapter one.

enclaves were a part of the same colonial system. As explained in chapter one, transoceanic trade—in slaves and inanimate commodities—linked eighteenth-century American colonies to the imperial domains of the Indian Ocean. When considered in terms of global commerce, analogous histories of architectural genesis could elucidate the continuities between colonies on opposite sides of the French imperial world.

But the case of French New Orleans can lead us toward another conclusion. If networks of exchange linked Port Louis and New Orleans, then realities unfolding on the ground spoke to the differences between these two places. Whereas Mauritius grew to become the foremost node for trade in the eighteenth-century Indian Ocean world, Louisiana languished on the margins of the French colonial empire.³³⁵ However, as we have seen, neither colonial defeat nor a lackluster economy affected architectural development. Like the more successful enclave of French Mauritius, French New Orleans nonetheless witnessed creole architectural change.

Taking this paradox into account, I would like to call for a reconsideration of the notion, explicated first by Kniffen, that colonies undergo a process of social and architectural progression wherein affluence supplants poverty and thus catalyzes the introduction of novel building forms.³³⁶ As we have seen, French New Orleans does not fit so neatly into this narrative. Here, it was thrift employed in the face of political and economic turmoil that sparked infrastructural development. Dismal social and economic conditions in the first years of settlement precluded the erection of anything other than

³³⁵ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 9-10.

³³⁶ Kniffen, “Folk Housing,” 67.

post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois structures. When the Natchez Massacre orphaned an unprecedented number of girls, the company had no choice but to turn to the Ursuline nuns. These sisters were women living in a territory run by men who expected them to quietly aid undesirables in a colony with limited assets.³³⁷

Accordingly, they moved from one mosquito infested house to the other before inhabiting a convent that was their own. Once they finally took possession of a conventual space in 1734, they quickly realized that the colombage-en-bois dwelling that the company built would not help them address the needs of a colony reeling from Indian attacks. Toward the end of the French period, the company attempted to put an end to these problems through raising the Ursuline Hospital-Convent of 1745. Unlike previous structures, this cost effective building came complete with a salubrious gallery that may have also served as a site for physical activity. Overall, this addition became a functional component within a complex built to ensure that the Ursulines would carry out the same kind of work in New Orleans as what they were known for in France—caring for the sick and needy. In integrating a Caribbean vernacular form (the covered gallery) into an architectural unit that replicated many of the same intentions as a French convent, this dwelling translated metropolitan frameworks on the colonial frontier.³³⁸

But the history of architectural change in French New Orleans does not end there. Shortly after the construction of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, galleries came to typify a range of pedestrian spaces across French New Orleans. Therefore, as the French period

³³⁷ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 48.

³³⁸ See: Figure 4. Ignace François Broutin. *Batiments à bâtir que la roy projete pour loger les religieuses Ursulines hospitalieres de la Nouvelle Orleans 8bre 1745* (Verso), 1745. See also: Wilson, “An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital.”

came to a close, New Orleans boasted an architecture that expediently met local needs for health and survival. Throughout this process, political and economic tumult remained a constant fact of life; neither the commercial economy nor government finances improved during this time. What also remained unchanged was the need for spaces that could adequately address mounting social and public health concerns.

Thus, over the course of the French period, local built environments—whether they were post-in-ground, colomage-en-bois, briques-entre-poteaux, or gallery houses—appeared in response to the needs of settlers eager to ease the pain of ongoing impoverishment. In other words, the earthfast structures of the first decades of colonization, the Ursuline convents, the new Intendance, and successive gallery houses came about as diverse settlers made recurrent attempts to build sufficient shelter. During the first half of the eighteenth century, a seemingly unending series of political and economic setbacks pushed the residents of New Orleans to the point of desperation over and over again. Destitute settlers had to repeatedly chose whichever typologies could cheaply and expediently meet their needs. Subsequently, they seized the most basic forms when building houses that could potentially ease the pain of life on the colonial frontier. Post-in-ground, colomage-en-bois, briques-entre-poteaux, and gallery houses were the results of these frenzied efforts. Each of these typologies emerged as hardships impelled settlers to appropriate forms—that were simple and recognizable to a broad cross-section of the colonial public—in an effort to expediently ameliorate their unenviable situation. Over time, continued attempts at building suitable structures yielded the introduction of diverse typologies.³³⁹

³³⁹ See: Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Piazza.”

As a whole, this history reveals that architectural development in French New Orleans did not follow wealth or economic progress. Instead, political violence and economic failure catalyzed architectural change. This tendency indicates that, at the very least, some of the elements of a creole typology circulated irrespective of the economic success of the colony in question. Earthfast construction predominated early on in rich and poor colonies alike. Similarly, whereas the gallery could proliferate in the burgeoning node of French Mauritius, it could also suit the needs of budget conscious settlers in eighteenth-century New Orleans. What such versatility indicates is that these forms were never specific to any one colony or any one set of economic circumstances. Their appearance across both booming and depressed colonies spoke to their applicability to the diverse conditions engendered under global colonialism. As economically expedient and structurally simple forms, such typologies could suit even the most depressed colonial enclaves. In this way, they were profoundly generic elements that settlers could easily integrate into colonial contexts of extreme resource impoverishment. Repeated experimentation with these generic forms drove architectural development in French New Orleans and beyond.³⁴⁰

Architectural change in French New Orleans unfolded in response to dynamics of conflict, limitation, and, even, desperate need. This reality suggests that unrest and necessity provoked the germination of creole forms in this destitute enclave. The gallery house, post-in-ground domiciles, and colombage-en-bois structures were the rote

³⁴⁰ See: Gall, "Rich Man, Poor Man;" Maygarden, "Building in Colonial Louisiana;" Edwards, "Upper Louisiana's French Vernacular Architecture;" Gums, "Earthfast (Pieux en Terre) Structures;" Carson, "Impermanent Architecture."

typologies that colonizers could draw upon when forced to build housing under budgetary and political constraints. Collectively, these forms encompassed creole modalities, which met demands for shelter in French New Orleans. As such, they indicate that, in this eighteenth-century town, creole built environments developed vis-à-vis the appropriation of generic, inexpensive, and easily adaptable features into an architectural repertoire that referenced the hardships and the challenges of colonial life.

Conclusion: Architecture and Destitution in French New Orleans and Beyond

An examination of settlement in French New Orleans can inform our understanding of creole architectural development within and outside of this impoverished town. Over the course of the French colonial period, New Orleans incubated a range of building traditions—colombage-en-bois, post-in-ground construction, briques-entre-poteaux, and the gallery house—that spoke to the economic challenges, which consistently plagued this town. The circumstances that propelled the emergence of these typologies indicate the ways in which destitution informed architectural genesis on the colonial frontier.

When considered in relation to the economic difficulties of French New Orleans, the typologies listed above appear as part of a local architecture of colonial struggle. Both gallery houses and earthfast typologies served an imperial locality where few innovations—from plantation agriculture to plans for Indian removal—could materialize or succeed. Significantly, it was political and economic instability that paved the way for the emergence of these forms. Together, the houses of French New Orleans shared a

common history; they all came about as responses to the glaring hardships of colonial Louisiana.

At this point, the case of French New Orleans elucidates several possibilities. On one level, the issues addressed in this chapter illustrate the ways in which the study of colonial impoverishment can provide a basis for reimagining the history of creole architectural genesis. In this chapter, the homes of diverse settlers have served as a window into a world of necessity and adaptation. This macrocosm demonstrates that, despite impoverishment, New Orleans experienced a process of architectural change that mirrored that of some of the most successful colonies within and beyond the French imperial world. Such continuities can serve as the bases for an approach that challenges the assumptions, which have engendered separate understandings of architectural genesis in successful and unsuccessful colonies. Through addressing the extent to which creole forms flourished within economically stagnant zones, we can begin to forge a perspective that considers how the adaptability of these components hastened their integration into a diverse range of sites.

As an upshot, this intellectual praxis can shed light upon the destitute peoples and places that often came to define French colonies. Since New Orleans was one of many territories (from French Guiana to Île Bourbon or Réunion) that languished on the fringes of the French empire, it can serve as a point of departure for approaching other economically marginal localities. Thus, French New Orleans can act as a vector for considering the fiscal constraints that shaped architectural development outside of booming economic centers.

Through focusing our attention on the instances in which conflict and decline guided creole architectural genesis, we can engage the ways in which creole forms reflected the social and financial needs of destitute colonies. This chapter has positioned architectural evolution—from post-in-ground and colombage-en-bois structures to the emergence of the gallery house—as the basis for an engagement of the depressed imperial town that was French New Orleans. It is my hope that this discussion can encourage further study of the buildings, the peoples, and the places that existed beyond wealthy commercial nodes. In approaching these entities, we can begin to consider the totality of circumstances that informed architectural genesis across the diverse geographies of the eighteenth-century French imperial world.

Conclusion

After months of warfare between French and British naval forces in the waters off the coast of Mauritius, the British defeated the French in the final days of the year 1810. Shortly thereafter, on December 30, the French colonial government signed an Act of Capitulation, which ceded the island to the British and confirmed that, from this day forward, the territory would no longer be a part of the French empire. According to this agreement, Mauritius and Rodrigues would immediately come under British control. The new government would respect the property rights of the French landowners who decided to follow the laws of the nascent British regime. This policy allowed for the continued proliferation of the kinds of creolized built environments, which emerged during the French period.³⁴¹

Although creole buildings would continue to dominate urban and rural parcels, such dwellings could not mask the fact that the British takeover marked a fundamental shift in the history of Mauritius, in particular, and of the French empire, more broadly. Colonial transition proceeded several events, the totality of which marked the recession of French power on the global stage. The loss of Mauritius came only seven years after the French ceded Louisiana to the United States, six years after the end of the Haitian revolution, nearly fifty years after the transfer of Canada to the British (in 1763), and in the midst of British consolidation of imperial authority on the Indian subcontinent. Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first French colonial empire was, at best, a shell of its former self and, at worst, a defunct relic cast into the annals of colonial

³⁴¹ French Colonial Government, Act of Capitulation of 1810, December 30, 1810, OA Series, National Archives of Mauritius, Coromandel, Mauritius.

history. At this point, only the small enclaves of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana, Saint-Louis, Gorée, Réunion, and Pondicherry remained French possessions.³⁴²

Yet one advantage persisted despite such crushing colonial losses. The geographic distribution of the remaining outposts meant that France occupied colonial lands across three continents and in two major oceanic zones. With these territories, the French would continue to hold on to the vestiges of their old empire thus making the emergence of the much larger, second French empire possible at the end of the nineteenth century. The worldwide networks of transcultural exchange that gave rise to creole architecture in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, the governmental attempts at exerting power over African populations in Saint-Louis, and the development of an architecture of thrift in New Orleans paved the way for future endeavors in French colonial architecture, urban planning, and town formation. In this sense, seventeenth and eighteenth-century histories of architecture, urbanism, and settlement informed later attempts at administering French dominance across the non-European world. In this sense, Saint-Louis, New Orleans, and Port Louis were some of the first theatres for architectural mixture, authoritative urbanism, and budget conscious settlement in the French colonies.

Each of these sites provide a context for thinking through the world historical relevance of these processes. Likewise, these localities present the most apt contexts for investigating the relationships between the built environments of French colonialism and the social networks that bolstered imperial economies. Over the course of three chapters, I have attempted to draw attention to the political importance of the architectural and

³⁴² For more information on the history of French imperialism and on the decline of the first French colonial empire, see: Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island* and Piat, *Île Maurice*.

urban landscapes of French colonial Port Louis, Saint-Louis, and New Orleans. By this point, however, we cannot deny that the paradigms, which shaped the development of these towns, also characterized other localities within and beyond the French empire. As each chapter has suggested, creole architecture, urban restrictions, measured settlement, and transcultural exchange characterized built environments forged wherever European and non-European peoples came into contact with one another.

Therefore, the cases examined in this dissertation reference one part of a much larger, colonial history of architecture, urbanism, and settlement. In other words, Saint-Louis, Port Louis, and New Orleans incubated social paradigms and built landscapes, which repeated across colonial realms, across space and time. Hence, these enclaves circulated within a recurrent matrix not unlike Antonio Benítez-Rojo's repeating island.³⁴³ For instance, the kinds of built environments that appeared in Mauritius and in the Atlantic colonies of France also emerged in Réunion and French India as well as in the British, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese colonies of the Americas, Eastern and Southern Africa, and, even, Asia.³⁴⁴ Similarly, the systems of urban organization that typified early colonial Saint-Louis manifested themselves in the first and the second French colonial empire as well as in localities beyond the grasp of France. Finally,

³⁴³ Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 4.

³⁴⁴ For more information on these colonial domains, see: King, *The Bungalow* (for a discussion of the architecture of British imperialism worldwide); Mark, *'Portuguese' Style* (for a discussion of Portuguese colonial architecture in Africa and the Americas); and Edwards, "The Origins of Creole Architecture," Edwards, "Unheralded Contributions Across the Atlantic World," Edwards, "Upper Louisiana's French Vernacular Architecture" (for a broader discussion of creole architecture in the Atlantic world). See also: Oszuscik, "Comparison Between Rural and Urban" (for a discussion of French colonial architecture in Louisiana and in the greater Caribbean).

colonial populations had to think of economical ways to build adaptable structures in nearly every imperial site that came under European control in the modern era.³⁴⁵

What these tendencies reveal is that my research on French colonial Mauritius, Senegal, and Louisiana can serve as a point of departure for engaging creole architecture, colonial urban planning, and the adaptability of gallery forms worldwide. In recognizing this possibility, this dissertation has attempted to present the urban spaces of Louisiana, Senegal, and Mauritius as vectors for reconsidering the assumptions that have for years obfuscated social realities of architectural and urban exchange. I have aspired to call into question what we have previously thought were irrefutable claims through engaging the built environments of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French imperialism, in particular. I have also positioned Louisiana, Senegal, and Mauritius as mechanisms for contemplating the importance of architecture, urbanism, and settlement in the French colonial world. It is my hope that this project will encourage further investigation of the built environments of imperialism within and beyond the first French colonial empire.

The prejudices, inequalities, restrictive forces, and rhizomatic cultures of contact that informed creole architecture and colonial urban planning did not die with the collapse of the first French empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Instead, these phenomena continued to shape architecture, urbanism, settlement, and social life across the non-European world. Consequently, as Mauritius, Senegal, and Louisiana entered into new phases of their imperial histories, the approaches to the built environment set into motion at the onset of French expansion became the bases for infrastructural development in the nascent territories of British Mauritius, French

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Republican Senegal, and American Louisiana. In no small way, seventeenth and eighteenth-century histories of architecture, urbanism, and settlement determined the trajectory of control in some of the most politically contested domains of the modern imperial world. For this reason, the built environments of these enclaves deserve to be remembered for their contribution to imperial culture on a global scale.

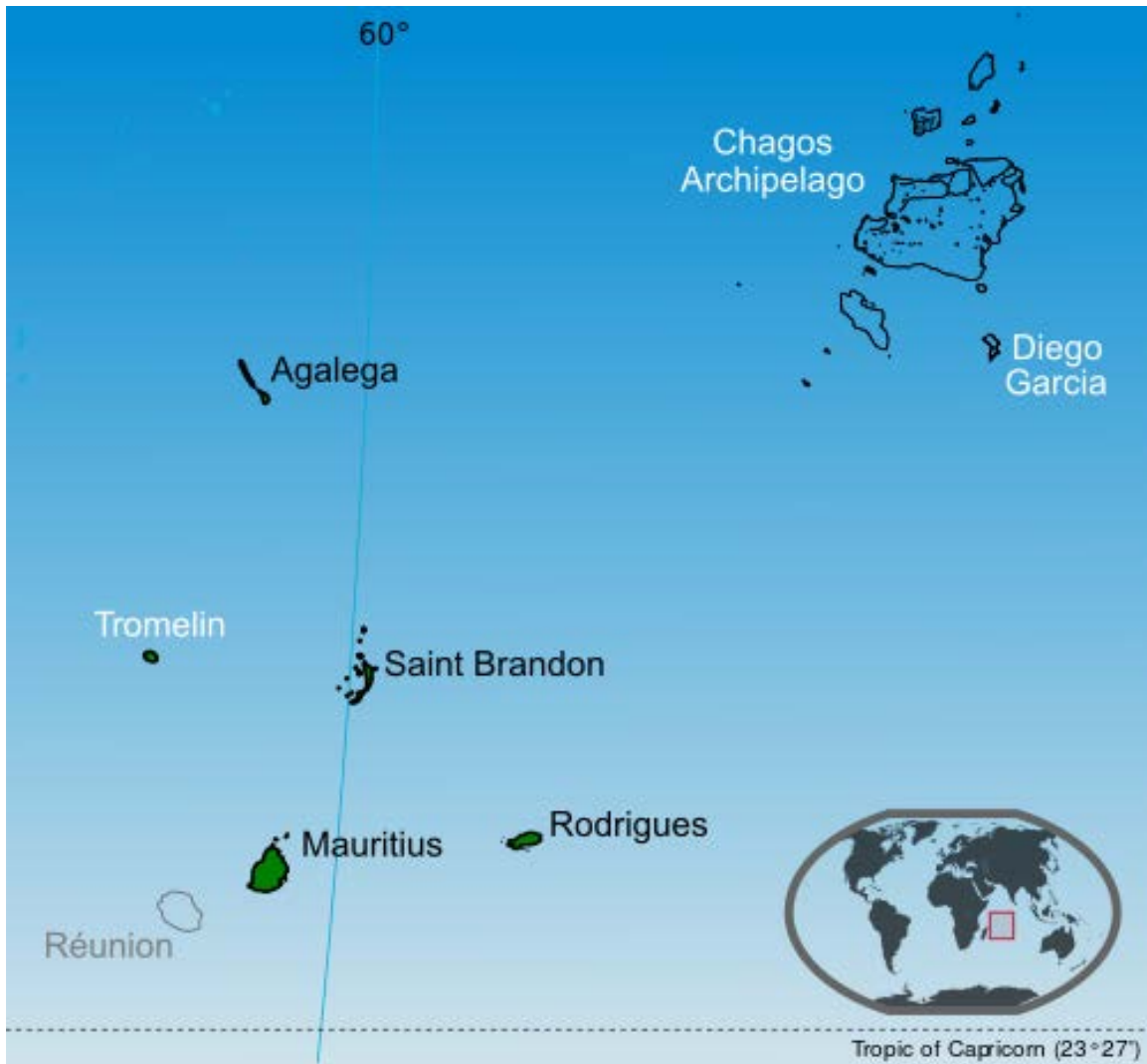


Figure 1.1. *Islands of the Republic of Mauritius*. Wikipedia, last modified 20 November 2013, accessed 20 August 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritius#/media/File:Mauritius_\(%2Bclaim_islands\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritius#/media/File:Mauritius_(%2Bclaim_islands).svg).



Figure 1.2. *The Vestiges of a Building at Fort Fredrik Hendrik, 1638. Vieux Grand Port, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.*



Figure 1.3. *Military Hospital of Port Louis*, 1735. Port Louis, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.



Figure 1.3a. *General Store of the Military Hospital of Port Louis, 1735. Port Louis, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.*



Figure 1.3b. *General Store of the Military Hospital of Port Louis (interior), 1735.* Port Louis, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.



Figure 1.4. *Grand Rivière Storehouse*, 1769, Grand Rivière, Mauritius, Photograph by the author. The original gallery has since been removed.



Figure 1.5. *Grand Rivière Storehouse (interior)*, 1769. Grand Rivière, Mauritius.
Photograph by the author.



Figure 1.6. *Map of Port Louis, 1791.* Maps and Plans Division, National Archives of Mauritius. Coromandel, Mauritius.



Figure 1.7. *Map of Port Louis (detail), 1791.* Maps and Plans Division, National Archives of Mauritius. Coromandel, Mauritius.



Figure 2.1. *Map of Senegal*, University of Texas Libraries, last modified 2016, accessed 20 August 2016, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/senegal.html>.

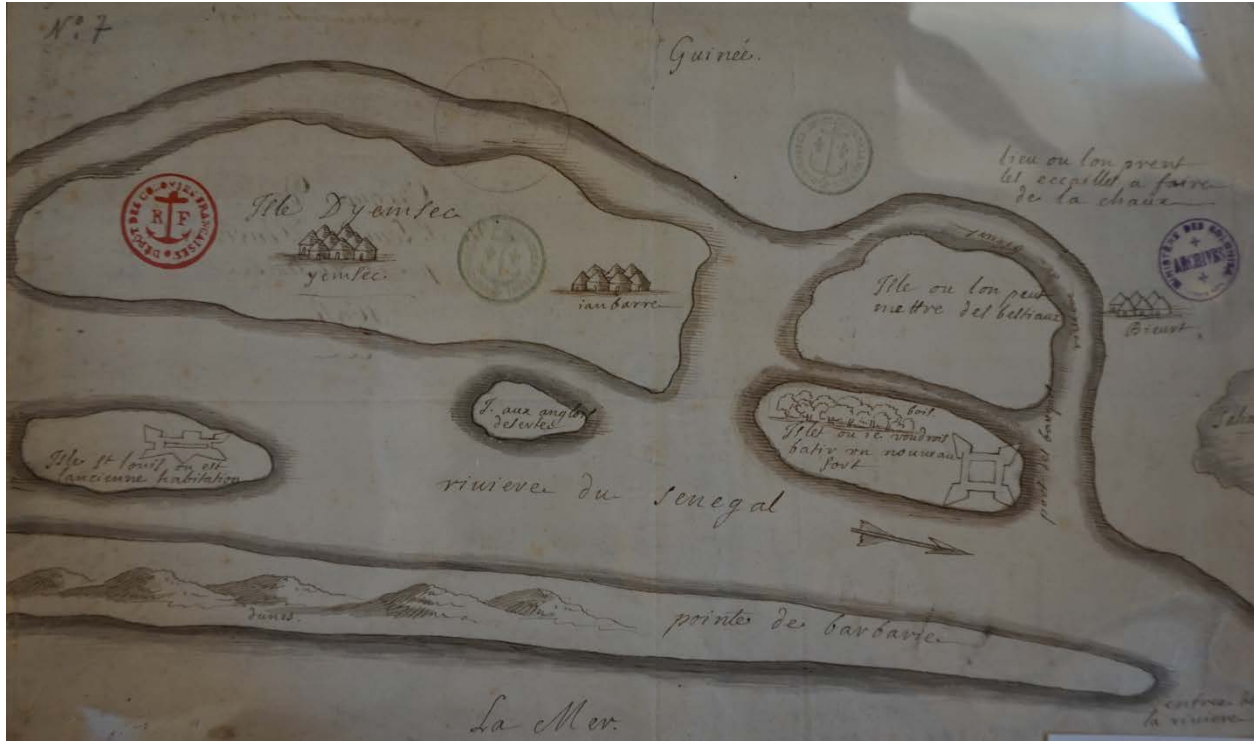
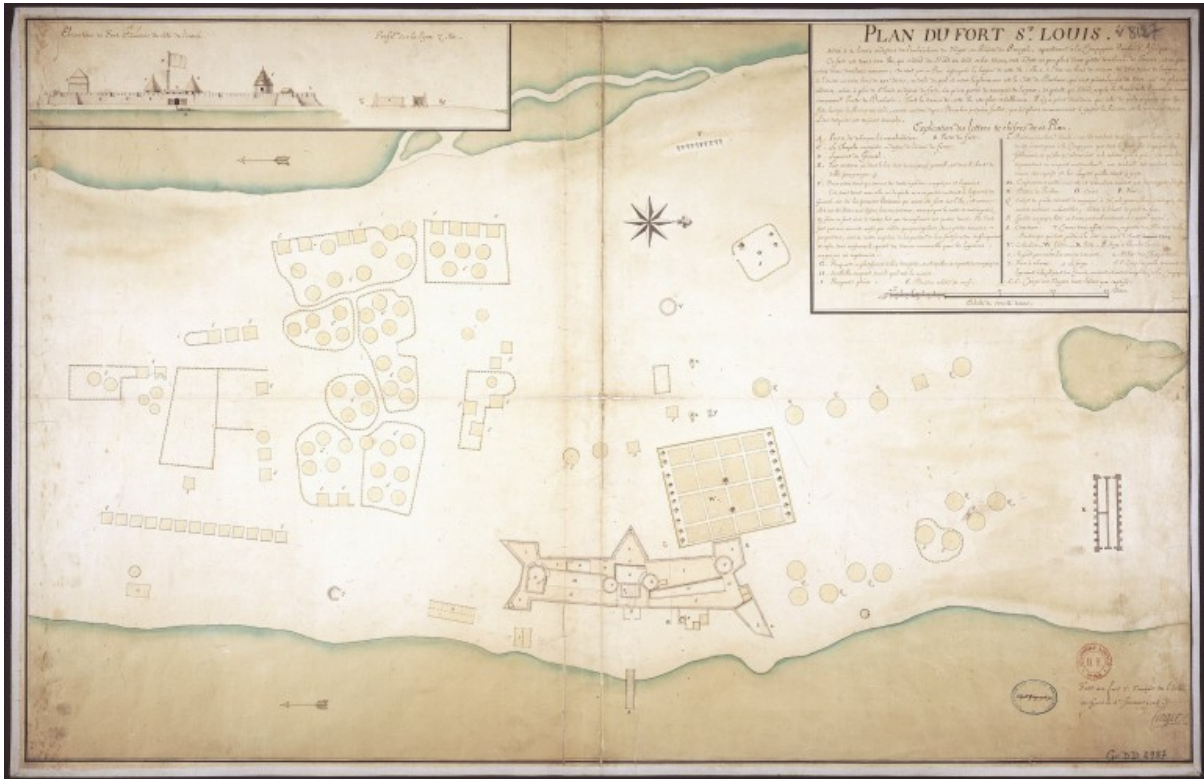


Figure 2.2. M. de la Courbe, *Sketch of Saint-Louis and its Surrounding Area*, 1694, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2.3. François Froger, *Plan of Fort Saint-Louis*, 1704, Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, last modified 15 October 2007, accessed 17 June 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7759449c.r=froger?rk=21459;2>.

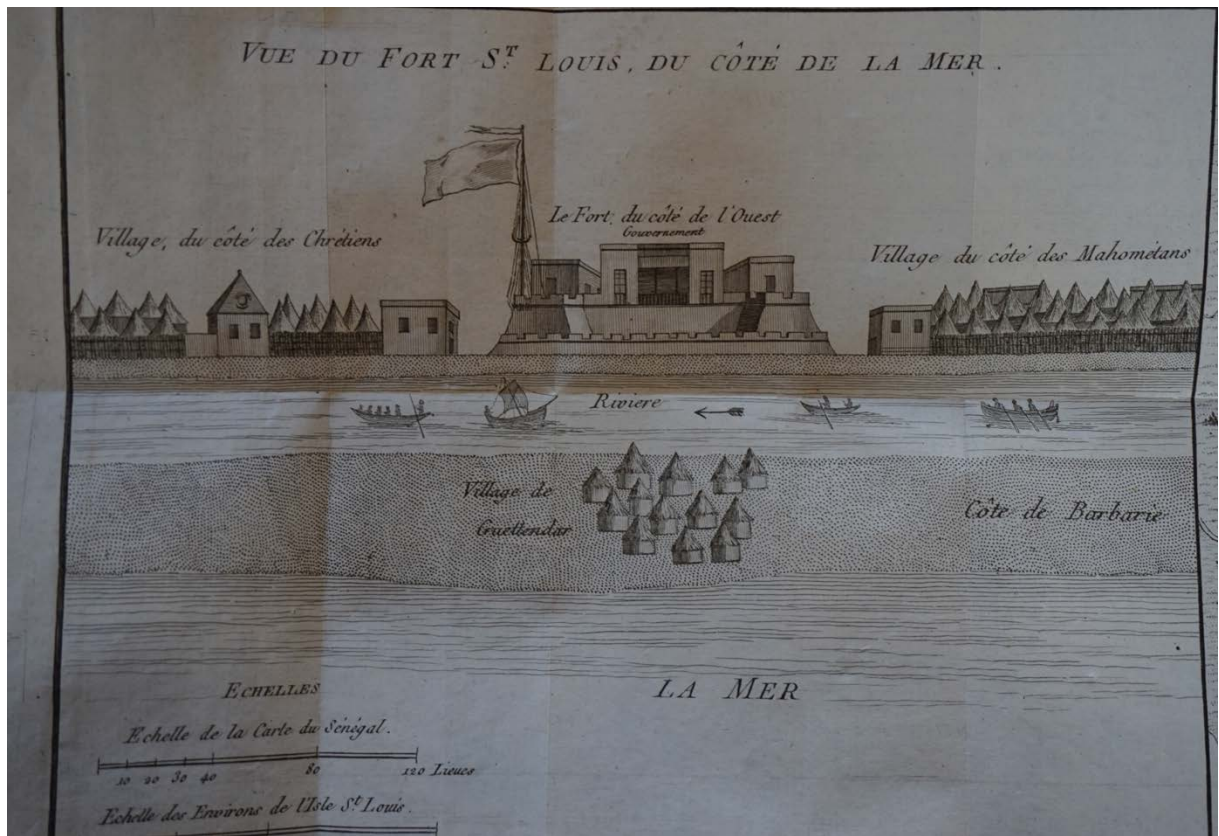


Figure 2.4. Unknown author, *View of Fort Saint-Louis, on the Coast*, mid-eighteenth century, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

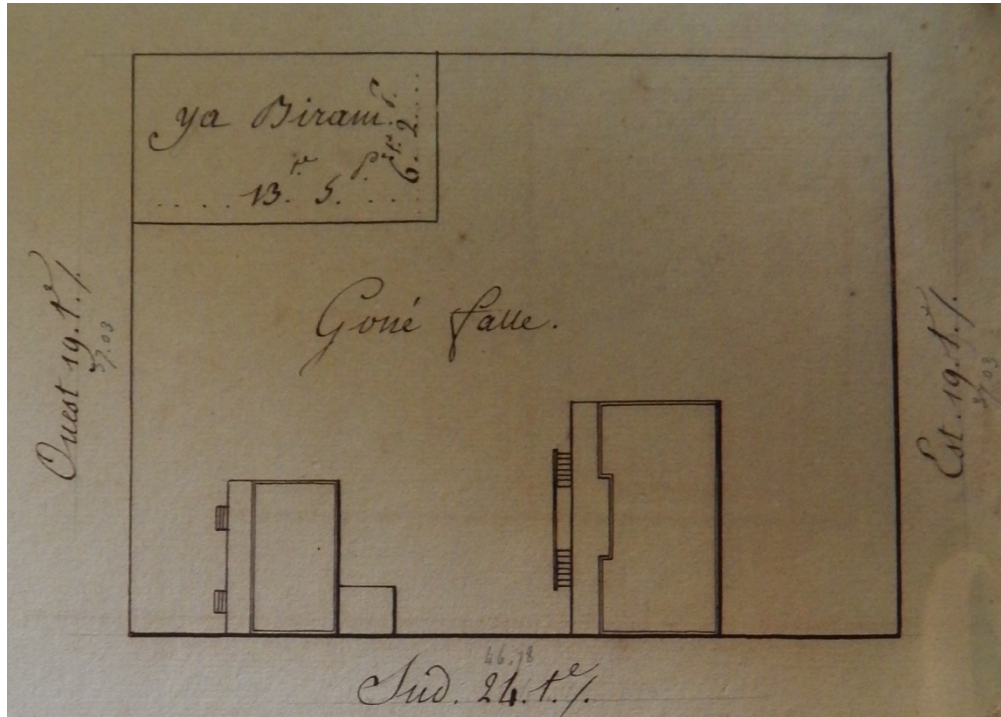


Figure 2.5. *Goné Falle Residence*, Ground Plan, 1789, Saint-Louis, Senegal. National Archives of Senegal. Dakar, Senegal.

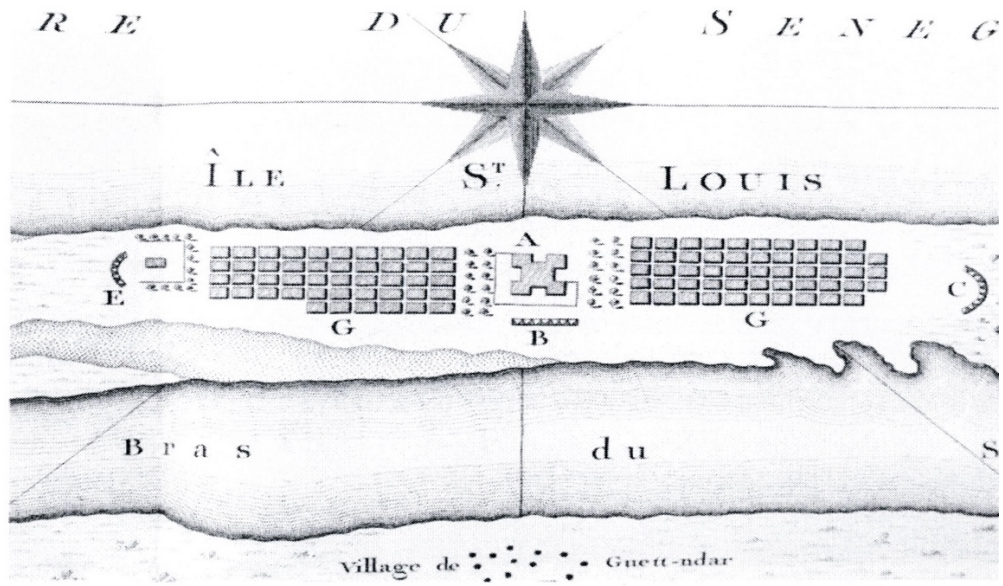


Figure 2.6. Pruneau de Pommegorge, *Plan Particulier de L'Île Saint-Louis et ses Environs*, Late 18th Century, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

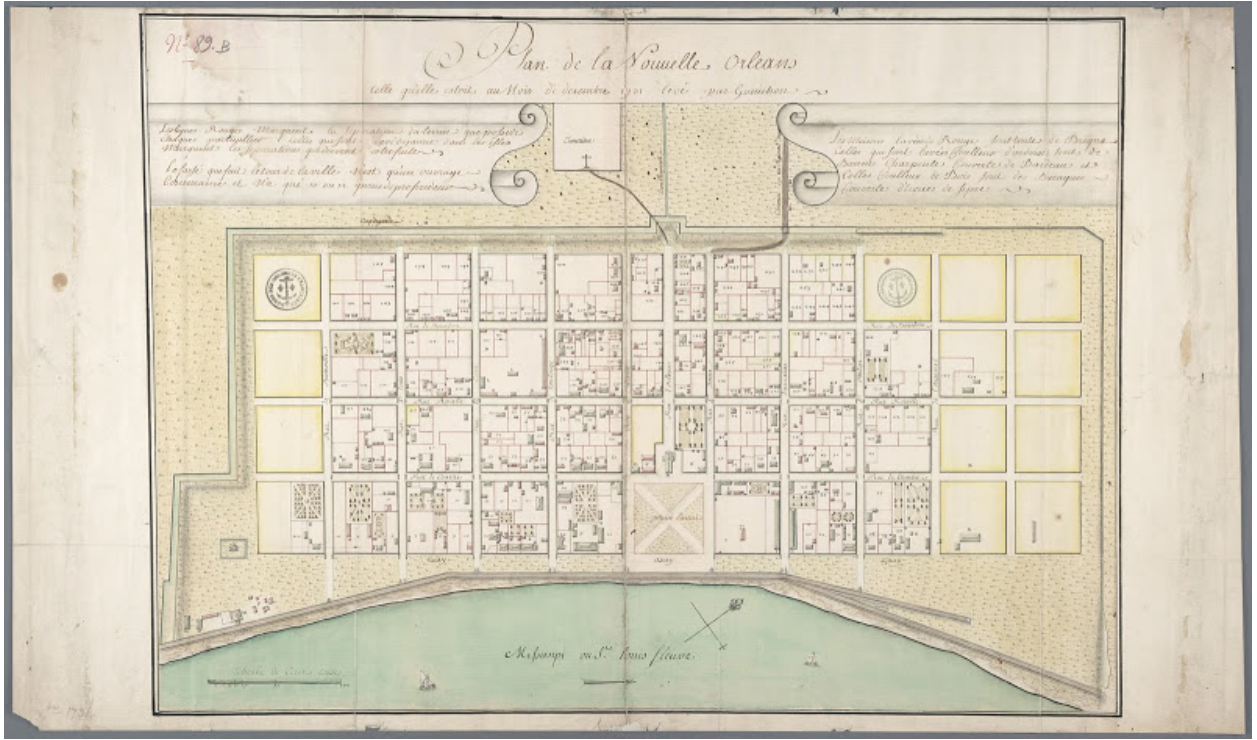


Figure 3.2. Gonichon. *Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans, telle qu'elle etait au Moins de Décembre 1731 levé par Gonichon, 1731.* Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, Louisiana.

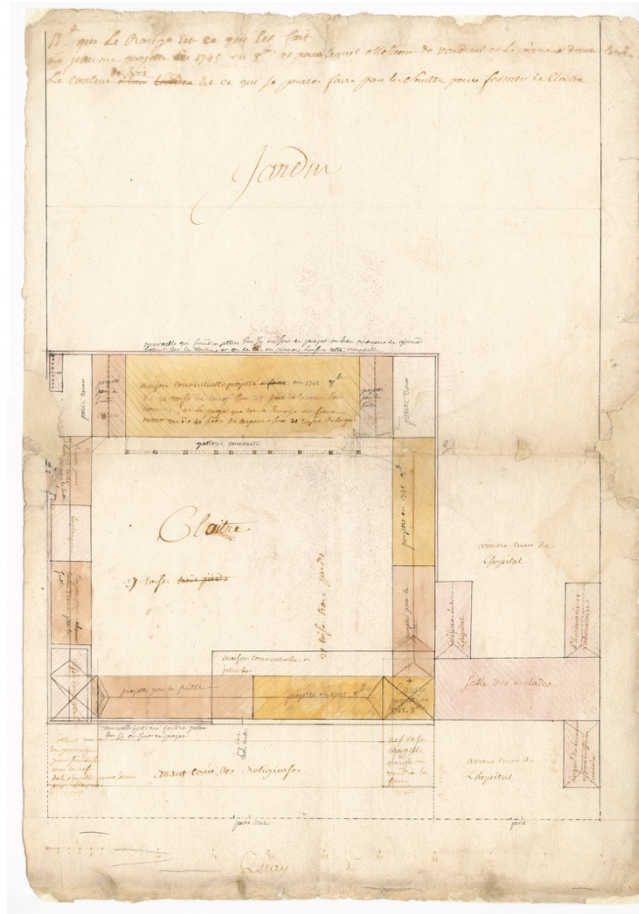


Figure 3.3. Ignace François Broutin. *Bâtiments à bâtir que la roy projete pour loger les religieuses Ursulines hospitalieres de la Nouvelle Orléans 8bre 1745* (Verso), 1745. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, Louisiana.



Figure 3.4. *Main Building of the Ursuline Hospital-Convent, 1749*, Library of Congress, last modified 2006, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011630835/>. The main building of the convent still exists today; however, it has been heavily restored since the eighteenth century.

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