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**CARCERAL GIRLHOODS:
THE HOUSE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND “THE PROBLEM” OF THE
GIRL IN NEW ORLEANS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

FEMINIST STUDIES
with an emphasis in CRITICAL RACE AND ETHNIC STUDIES
and VISUAL STUDIES

by

Jessica R. Calvanico

September 2021

The Dissertation of Jessica R. Calvanico is
approved:

Professor Gina Dent, chair

Professor Kimberly J. Lau

Professor Jennifer González

Professor Donald Brenneis

Peter Biehl
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Carceral Girlhoods: The House of the Good Shepherd and “The Problem” of the Girl in New Orleans

By Jessica R. Calvanico

Carceral Girlhoods: The House of the Good Shepherd and “The Problem” of the Girl in New Orleans examines the foundations of the juvenile justice system in New Orleans to argue that histories of criminalization and incarceration are integral to the contemporary construction of U.S. girlhood. Specifically, this work considers New Orleans’s first reformatory—the Catholic House of the Good Shepherd (1873-1956)—for “sexually delinquent” girls as an early model of the contemporary juvenile justice system. Bringing together six years of qualitative and archival research in Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, New York, and California, *Carceral Girlhoods* analyzes the legacies of the House of the Good Shepherd to understand how girlhood is historically created, legally regulated, symbolically reproduced, and extensively distributed.

Carceral Girlhoods is an interdisciplinary examination of New Orleanian girlhood. In it, I unpack work by historians, sociologists, psychologists, political theorists, and criminologists who identify the emergence of a modern legal girl subject in the latter half of the long nineteenth century with what was often called “the girl problem,” or the national moral panic over girls’ emergence in the public sphere. More specifically, my dissertation focuses on the Southern girl problem— influenced by Progressive Era reforms to thwart legal prostitution, the

implementation of child welfare policies, and white supremacist ideologies enshrined in law—as a response to anti-racist activism, women’s suffragists, industrialization and urbanization, and labor organizing around this time. Tracing the relationship between the Southern girl problem and the foundations of Louisiana’s juvenile justice system, *Carceral Girlhoods* offers the first and only detailed case study of the House of the Good Shepherd to argue that the criminalization and incarceration of girls leads to the establishment of the juvenile justice system and the contemporary problem of mass incarceration. By also examining performances of resistance and refusal under the threat of criminalization and incarceration, this work interrogates the very category of *girl* itself by challenging what I see as the carcerality of U.S. girlhood. By “carcerality,” I gesture to the juvenile justice system that literally incarcerates girls as well as to the expectations of the legal and social constraints of U.S. girlhood that figuratively entrap and limit their lives.

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I wrote this dissertation while living in Huchiun, in unceded Lisjan, the home of Chochenyo Ohlone peoples. Parts of it were written and researched on land of the Popeloutchom (Amah Mutsun), the sovereign nation of the Chitimacha, Chahta Yakni (Choctaw) land. The land I currently live and work on, as well as the lands I have previously occupied have been crucial for me to produce this research and text. I acknowledge the settler colonialism of what is now the U.S. is an ongoing project of state violence, white supremacy, and genocide. While this work only partially considers the settler colonialist practices of nation-building, a central part of my research is theorizing the effects of state violence and white supremacy on the process of subject formation with the goal of abolition. To this end, this is an abolitionist project, informed by the visionary and tireless work of abolitionists across space and time, dedicated to imagining and creating new worlds through the eradication white supremacy, state violence, and all forms of oppression.

My work has been generously supported over the years and I could not have done any of this without the various fellowships and grants that helped me to travel, read, think, and write. Thank you to: University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) Chancellor's Fellowship, The Humanities Institute's Summer Research Fellowship, the UCSC Feminist Studies Summer Research Fellowship, the Soroptimist International Sierra Pacific Region Dissertation Fellowship, the Diane Woest Fellowship in the Arts and Humanities at the Historic New Orleans Collection, the UCSC Chancellor's Dissertation Quarter Fellowship, the UCHRI Dissertation Development Fellowship, the UCSC Feminist Studies Dissertation Quarter Fellowship, the SSU Research Summer Fellowship, the Bettina Aptheker Award for the Study of Racial, Gender, and Sexual Violence, and the UCSC Humanities Institute Dissertation Completion Fellowship. The text of this dissertation includes a reprint of a portion of the following forthcoming published material: Jessica R. Calvanico, "Arson Girls, Match-strikers, and Firestarters: A Reflection on Rage, Racialization, and the Carcerality of Girlhood," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Society and Culture* (Winter 2021/2022).

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Introduction: On the Carcerality of Girlhood

Girlhood is a problem.

The problem of girlhood begins not with the girl herself but with others' ideas of the conditions of being a girl, with others' ideas about her body. The problem stems not from those who would be loosely labeled as a "girl" at different points in time and across different places but from implementing a regime to administer and control girlhood.

Girlhood is a problem because non-girls made it that way.

Girlhood became an ongoing problem through a complex layering of ideas about power, control, and bodies. To understand the complexities of this problem, let's start with the obsessive desires to contort, shape, possess, direct, and even save the bodies of a particular group of people. This group of people, hereafter called "girls," is an invention: a name given to sets of bodies that presented a series of "problems" to a state recovering from civil war and genuinely fearful about a new kind of public subject. The state's conception of girlhood as a subject category accompanied girlhood's rendering as a problem.

What has come to be known as "the girl problem" is a dominating force in the conversation about the public emergence of girls as a distinct identity category and has been defined by a socio-cultural-political-historical cementing of the adolescent girl as a burgeoning subject in the unfolding of modernity. Modernity, as Sarah Haley explains, refers to the "contested and complex process of becoming that is linked to

an imagined social and political future.”¹ As the United States transitioned into the twentieth century, this becoming of modernity confused and complicated the creation of girlhood as a concept/category/idea/potential subject position. It seemed as though no one quite knew what girls were or what to do with them, particularly as distinct subjects or subjects-to-be occupying publics outside the domestic sphere.

In the late nineteenth century, national panic over girls’ participation in the public sphere through increased urbanization, industrialization, and immigration in the United States was broadly called “the girl problem.” The girl problem and its legal, social, economic, and cultural responses illustrate how girlhood was initially understood as a chronic pathology, something to diagnose or possibly cure. The state’s response to the girl problem then became criminalization and incarceration.

During this time, white supremacist policies steeped in positivism and masked as Progressive Era reforms also helped create a carceral system broadly understood as American girlhood.² American, or more appropriately perhaps, U.S. girlhood emerges in the state’s creation of an exclusionary legal subject category used to control girls’ bodies. Yet histories of American girlhoods are fraught and complicated; the constraints and definitions of girlhood differ across region and time, as do the

¹ Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 11.

² For a discussion on the direct relationship between Progressive Era policies and the rise of incarceration rate for Black children, see Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy & Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). For an analysis of the contributions of 1940s and 1960s “civil rights liberalism” to the creation of the contemporary prison-industrial complex and subsequent racial transformation of the prison population from majority white to majority people of color, see Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

possible subjects interpolated into the category. For instance, girls' reformatories in the Jim Crow South, like the Samarcand Manor and Training School for Girls, only admitted white girls. In many Southern states, Black girls were sent to adult prisons.³ One exception, however, is the House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans.

In 1873, the House of the Good Shepherd opened its doors to New Orleans as the first reformatory of its kind in the city—an institution for “sexually delinquent” girls. The House of the Good Shepherd was not solely the first but also the *only* reformatory in the Jim Crow South to admit all girls regardless of racial, class, religious, ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds. The reformatory quickly generated a reputation as an ominous place that sent shivers down the spines of those passing on the streets below. Despite its foreboding appearance, however, the New Orleans House of the Good Shepherd was seen by many local leaders as a model for Progressive Era social and prison reform, becoming the city’s official sentencing site for (sexually) criminalized New Orleanian girls.

Shortly after the House of the Good Shepherd opened its doors, Progressive Era reforms across the U.S. saw the creation of new laws that raised the age of consent, regulated prostitution, created and reformed prisons and asylums, and protected some child laborers. From 1873 to 1956, the House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans became the official city sentencing site for girls deemed “sexually delinquent.” But despite its direct impact on thousands of Crescent City girls for the better part of a century, the House of the Good Shepherd remains somewhat of a

³ For a more detailed discussion on this, see Haley, *No Mercy Here*; Ward, *The Black Child-Savers*.

mystery: its records are lost and the building was razed and replaced with the city's newest Whole Foods Market. Besides one chapter in historian Lakisha Simmons's 2015 book, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*, there is no scholarship on the House of the Good Shepherd—no history, analysis, or exploration.

Carceral Girlhoods: The House of the Good Shepherd and the Problem of "the Girl" in New Orleans addresses this absence by exploring what is left of the House of the Good Shepherd to understand the relationship between the girl problem and carceral girlhood. As the only in-depth study of New Orleans's House of the Good Shepherd, *Carceral Girlhoods* synthesizes six years of qualitative and archival research to engage the emergent interdisciplinary field between critical prison studies, girl/girlhood studies, law and society, and New Orleans historiography. In doing so, I explore New Orleans's House of the Good Shepherd as a case study to understand how U.S. girlhood is created and how it continues to be criminalized and punished. To this end, I consider the House of the Good Shepherd and the legal history of girlhood in New Orleans to argue that U.S. girlhood is a carceral subject category.

By carceral, I mean that girlhood as a category is both literally and figuratively a form of imprisonment for those who are subjected to it as a part of their lives. Michel Foucault describes carcerality as assuring "both the real capture of the body and its perpetual observation."⁴ While my use of the term carceral is tied to

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 304.

Foucault’s understanding of the term, I am also leaning on more contemporary formulations of carceral, including Liat Ben-Moshe’s understanding of the term. In *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*, Ben-Moshe describes what she calls “carceral enclosures” to be “not only the physical spaces of containment but...[the] particular logics and disclosures” that uphold those forms of confinement.⁵ I follow these framings of the carceral to consider how both the figurative and literal carcerality of girlhood are determined by the modern liberal (nation) state’s interest in the capture and perpetual overseeing of girlhood.

Moreover, that carcerality stays with subjects who experienced girlhood first-hand, those of us who lived through girlhood. Regardless of age, we former U.S. girls—of all genders, identities, races, ethnicities, religions, sexualities, abilities, or classes—continue to experience a kind of captivity to the lived realities of girlhood in the form of a suspended and captive subjectivity that both limits and punishes us for transgressing its boundaries. The state’s desire to control and possess girls who are seen as threats to a Western biopolitical order manifests in pathologization through medical and psychological practices, criminalization through law and policy, and the subsequent literal incarceration of such purportedly threatening girls. As Sarah Haley explains, “carceral practice contributed significantly to modernity configured through complex, relative, and relational gendered and sexual positionalities.”⁶ The history of girlhood in the United States is about temporality, control, and pathology, with these

⁵ Liat Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 111.

⁶ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 6.

pathologies fracturing along racial and class lines. And more often than not, these pathologies—particularly for non-white, poor, and differently-abled girls—are “treated” within the dominant paradigms/ideologies and practices of the carceral state.

Although I am arguing that the nationalized rendering of U.S. girlhood is always already carceral, I recognize how the intricacies of intersecting identities shape the kinds of carcerality experienced by girls/former girls. The carcerality experienced by Black girls, for example, is much different than the carcerality experienced by white girls because white supremacy is woven into the letter of the law and undergirds North American national culture.⁷ These disparate experiences often result in heightened surveillance and criminalizing, plus more severe punishments for non-white girls—with class, sexuality, religion, and ability often exacerbating these circumstances. In turn, these specific forms of carcerality shape the kinds of futures available to girls/former girls. In most cases, they are experienced as limitations on the possibilities and potentialities of lives.

To understand how U.S. girlhood became a problem, it is necessary to consider three facets of the creation, accretion, and circulation of girlhood: historiography, law, and visibility. In the chapters that follow, I examine the historical articulation and creation of the modern category of girl and the ensuing regimes of

⁷ For more on how white supremacy undergirds U.S. law, see Derrick Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law*, 6th ed. (New York: Aspen Publishers, 2008); Sora Y. Han, *Letters of the Law: Race and the Fantasy of Colorblindness in American Law*, *The Cultural Lives of Law* (Stanford: Stanford Law Books, 2015).

power established to control those who legibly or illegibly fall into the category of girl by considering the historiography of both girlhood and New Orleans. I also analyze the juridical accretion of laws that tether the state's expectations to those bodies understood/assumed to be girls by considering legislation, colonial decrees, case law, the Civil Code, and city ordinances that come to shape the contours of girlhood in New Orleans and end up sentencing or just locking up girls in the House of the Good Shepherd. And finally, I look to visual representations of girlhood—mainly in the form of photography—which imbue girlhood with meaning and extensively circulate those meanings.

Historical Girl Problems

Upon the first read, “the girl problem” hardly registers as one specific problem. Depending on the reader's position in space and time, it is possible to think “the girl problem” to be any of the following popular current conditions of girlhood in the U.S., including (but not limited to): body image, eating disorders, achievement in math and science, finding a husband, prostitution, rape, pregnancy, incest, molestation, development, confidence, cyberbullying, and low self-esteem. The problem is, of course, spatially, temporally, socially, ethnically, racially, linguistically, and culturally constrained, not to mention significantly informed by class. As it were, “the girl problem” is more than a singular phenomenon and speaks directly to the very precarious and slippery question: what is girlhood?

Girlhood is not a new object of inquiry. Much ink has been spilled theorizing girlhood specifically and childhood more broadly. In 1960, French social historian Phillipe Ariès published his landmark and controversial book *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale Sous l'Ancien Régime* (*Centuries of Childhood: a Social History of Family Life*).⁸ Ariès relies on medieval paintings' representation of children as miniature adults to argue that the distinct and separate category of childhood is a modern phenomenon. Ariès's focus on visual culture to emphasize the emerging field of childhood studies is evocative and rhetorically compelling. Still, his grand assertions are at times untethered from evidence, such that painting is assumed to provide sweeping evidence for entire eras and the dominant ideas of those periods. And while his work has come to mark the field of childhood studies colloquially, scholars across fields have been exploring phenomena associated with the categories of childhood, adolescence, and later teenagers.

Philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics attempt to understand age categories in terms of cognition, language acquisition, development, personality, and child-rearing. Many of these scholars use children and childhood as sites of inquiry to understand onto-epistemological particularities of humanity—the child could be seen as a portal into a time before humans, a way to understand the human mind. For example, John Locke offers an early exploration of childhood by linking his theories of epistemology with an understanding of children's capacity for

⁸ Philippe Ariès. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by Robert Baldick. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

thought in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Here he understands the child to emerge into the world as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, possessing the capacity for understanding but asserting the emptiness of that capacity. Comparing them to “idiots,” he nonetheless notes their incipient abilities: “the capacity, they say, is innate; the knowledge acquired.”⁹ Inspired by Locke’s *tabula rasa*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1762 *Emile, or On Education* considers the development of a child’s life as a metaphor for human understanding.¹⁰

In the late nineteenth century, psychologists began to think about childhood as a distinct time of life tied to specific human developmental stages. With the development of psychoanalysis, Freud famously positions these stages in terms of sexuality and drive theory, which he characterizes as “psychosexual development” based on the oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital stages.¹¹ Freud maps these “stages” onto developmental milestones, age ranges, and erogenous zones, which end up forming the foundations of his theory of the Oedipus Complex primarily through his fraught relationship with his patient Dora.¹² Freud’s theory, of course, led to

⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1690), 40-41.

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or On Education*. Translated by Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

¹¹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children*, The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud (New York: Collier Books, 1963); Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

¹² See Sigmund Freud and Philip Rieff, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, 1st Touchstone ed., The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). Many psychoanalysts have interrogated and elaborated on Freud’s theory of the developmental stages, see Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Second ed., revised and enlarged. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963); Melanie Klein, *Our Adult World, and Other Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt, and Reparation & Other Works, 1921-1945* (New York: Delacorte Press/S. Lawrence, 1975); Jacques Lacan, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, (London: Macmillan, 1982); Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in

numerous other theories of childhood and adolescence as inherently developmental, including his American counterpart G. Stanley Hall's concept of the universality of the category of adolescence.¹³

Foucault's theory of biopower in *History of Sexuality* is ultimately a critique of both Freud and Hall by tearing down the entire endeavor of psychoanalysis as a kind of bourgeois state invention. Biopower, Foucault claims, is the "indispensable element in the development of capitalism" that attempts to control the social body through control of individuals' bodies.¹⁴ This kind of control extends to the family and labor structures that distinguish between public and private space. For Foucault, Freud's and Hall's pathological approaches to sexuality fail because repression is not understood to be a social and historical factor but one that has always propelled humanity.

Nonetheless, Hall's work inspired countless volumes of social scientific analysis on adolescences. In fact, in what might be seen as a rebuke of Hall, anthropologist Franz Boas urged anthropologist Margaret Mead not only to go to Samoa but to focus specifically on adolescent girls for what would be one of the most famous ethnographies ever, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of*

Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

¹³ Although *Adolescence* provides a very early and in-depth analysis of adolescence, the physiognomic readings of adolescent bodies as accounting for what is seen as psychological pathologies teeter on the edge of his hysteria over what was seen as a burgeoning social group. See G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911).

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 141.

Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation.¹⁵ Focusing on the lives of adolescent girls in Samoa, Margaret Mead contested the idea of adolescence as a universally difficult moment of development fraught with the burgeoning (and to U.S. audiences troublesome) sexual exploration brought on by puberty, thus in many ways directly challenging the work of Hall.

The early twentieth-century scientific interventions of psychiatry, psychopathy, and eugenics forged a new model of the pathological girl, obsessed with her race, class, and sexuality. In her book *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930*, historian Ruth Alexander evocatively claims that “the girl problem [begins] at home.”¹⁶ Musing on the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Alexander seeks to understand “the new adolescent female” by focusing on two New York state reformatories, offering a history of these institutions that situates their genesis in the agenda to “reform ‘delinquent’ young women (usually in their late teens or early twenties) who had transgressed Victorian standards of feminine virtue but were not yet ‘hardened’ criminals or thoroughly ‘degraded’ females.”¹⁷ These transgressors were most often committed for “prostitution, solicitation, incorrigibility, ‘waywardness,’ disorderly conduct and petty larceny.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1930).

¹⁶ Ruth M. Alexander, *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 14.

¹⁷ Alexander, 3-4.

¹⁸ Alexander, 4.

If in 1885 “the girl problem” was the growing public presence of the individual and increasingly sexualized working-class subject called “girl,” then in 1900, “the girl problem” became the ever-increasing public concern over how and where to rehabilitate her when she transgressed acceptable boundaries. Opening in 1889, Jane Addams’s Chicago Hull House—a local settlement house for girls and women—can be seen as a preventative measure against these possible transgressions.¹⁹ The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was engaged in part of the Progressive Era moral purity efforts, which extended to prison reform, prohibition, child labor, and the regulation of prostitution. As working girls went public and the regulation of prostitution became a growing concern for social reformers, so too did the question of how to police and thwart the spread of what was seen as sexual deviance in girls. Moreover, the WCTU’s efforts failed to offer girls much in the way of “protection” from sexual violence or dangerous working conditions and prevented girls of color from being recognized as members of the newfound public subject formation of girl.

While there is no shortage of research on the girl problem, much of this work considers the historical conditions that led to the panic and eventual state control over the newfound public subject of the working class (and commonly immigrant) girl in northern urban centers like New York and Chicago.²⁰ But the girl problem, seen by

¹⁹ Addams’s Hull-House was a settlement house, which was a project to house, feed, and educate poor and working-class folks. See Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: Macmillan, 1910); Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

²⁰ See Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995);

WCTU reformers as a national and sometimes international concern, has been explored only briefly by scholars working on the U.S. South. Historian Susan Cahn explores adolescent girls' coming of age in the U.S. South in her 2012 book, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age*, but its twentieth-century focus on the relationship between Southern racial politics and girls is at odds with the social, cultural, and political circumstances that led to the emergence of the girl problem in the nineteenth-century South.²¹ While historian LaKisha Simmons explores the same period as *Carceral Girl Problems* in her 2015 book, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*, she attends specifically to the social history of New Orleanian Black girls.²² Historian Karin Zipf's 2016 book, *Bad Girls at Samarcand: Sexuality and Sterilization at a Southern Juvenile Reformatory*, explores the relationship between violence and sexuality through the history of sterilization at a North Carolina girls' reformatory.²³ Although focused more on women than girls explicitly, Talitha LeFlouria and Sarah Haley both have explored the prison-industrial complex, gender, and race in the Jim Crow South.²⁴

Alexander, *The Girl Problem*; Michael A Rembis, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011). For a discussion on the girl problem in Toronto, see Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*, 2nd Revised ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1995).

²¹ Susan Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²² LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015). Simmons book has been an exceptional source of information for this project, as I have relied on her research to provide illuminating insights into the social functioning of the juvenile courts with respect to reformatories and race.

²³ Karin Zipf, *Bad Girls at Samarcand: Sexuality and Sterilization in a Southern Reformatory* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2016).

²⁴ See Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Haley, *No Mercy Here*.

The historical construction of the girl problem showcases how both the girl as category and girl as problem emerges within a specific spatial-temporal frame (North America at the turn of the twentieth century) amidst certain political realignments (Progressive reform). Both the historical understanding of the girl problem and the historiography about the girl problem are instrumental in situating my argument about the carcerality of girlhood. While the historical construction of the girl as simultaneously category and problem present a frame to understand this political, social, cultural, and economic problem, the solution to this “problem” was often sought in the realm of the law.

Legal Girl Problems

As fears over the girl problem took hold across the U.S., reformers sought recourse with the law to manage and control girlhood. One important legal response was the passage of the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910. Also called the Mann Act, the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 sought to regulate the movement of white girls and women across state lines in the interest of “saving” them from what Chicago anti-vice crusaders saw as the rampant global problem of “white slavery.” White slavery was a racist moral panic that equated white girls and women willingly or unwillingly working as sex workers with the trans-Atlantic slave trade of people of African descent and racial slavery in the U.S. The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 was the first federal statute that directly addressed issues related to the girl problem and is

surprisingly still a law, albeit one that has undergone many changes in its century of existence.²⁵

The law's relationship to girlhood is particularly important, because it both creates the category of girl and the regime to punish and control her. While the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 was a federal response, state laws and city ordinances sought to address the girl problem through the passage of legislation that attempted to limit girls' movement. For example, in 1897, the same year the age of consent rose to sixteen in Louisiana, new municipal city ordinances that sought to regulate prostitution resulted in the arrest of many sex workers in Storyville, New Orleans's "red light district." As these reforms began regulating and thus criminalizing prostitution, the rising arrests of girls forced the city to start embracing carceral institutions to house girls who transgressed sexual and gender mores. During this time, the Children's Bureau of Louisiana was established to advocate for legal state "protections" of children. Despite the Children's Bureau of Louisiana's decidedly Protestant agenda and general anti-Catholic sentiment, the House of the Good Shepherd became the main site for housing girls seen as criminals.²⁶ At the same

²⁵ In the 1970s, Congress finally amended the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 to include boys under its "protective" purview. In 1986, Congress majorly amended the statute to "removed the necessity for federal judges to define 'immoral purposes'" (14); for more on this, see David Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Jessica Pliley also outlines how the federal enforcement of the Mann Act eventually led to the establishment of the F.B.I. For more on this, see Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

²⁶ In addition to the House of the Good Shepherd, other Catholic institutions served New Orleans such as the Milne Home, St. Anna's Asylum, and the Catholic Indigent Orphanage. See Chapter 1 for more on the city's establishment of the House of the Good Shepherd as the official sentencing site for "sexually delinquent" girls.

time, the populations swelled in mental health institutions like St. Anna's Asylum for Girls and homosocial orphanages like the Milne Home for Female Orphans and the Poydras Home, as the burgeoning juvenile court system began tailoring the sentencing for arrested girls based on assumed pathologies.²⁷ Eventually, these arrests also led to an increase in the female population at Orleans Parish Prison, forcing the city to begin a state-sponsored juvenile justice system for girls. The Progressive Era wave of moral purity steeped in racism and classism outlined the conditions for girl subjectivization that saw white, non-disabled, chaste, feminine victims as the aspirational form. This aspirational—and impossible—subject of girl birthed the even newer public and problematic subject formation of the girl offender.

As a social scientific and legal concern, the girl offender has been a source of inquiry across many disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and criminology.²⁸ In her 1975 book, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female*

²⁷ See Pamela Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home: More Durable than Marble* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2016).

²⁸ See James Bennett, *Oral History and Delinquency: The Rhetoric of Criminology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Ronald J. Berger, *The Sociology of Juvenile Delinquency* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1991); Augusta F. Bronner, *A Comparative Study of the Intelligence of Delinquent Girls* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1914); Susan Brumbaugh, Jennifer L. Hardison Walters, and Laura A. Winterfield, *Suitability of Assessment Instruments for Delinquent Girls* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010), <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS123427>; Elsa Castendyck and Sophia Robison, "Juvenile Delinquency among Girls," *Social Service Review* 17, no. 3 (September 1943); Aaron Victor Cicourel, *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice* (New York: Wiley, 1967); Rose Giallombardo, *The Social World of Imprisoned Girls; a Comparative Study of Institutions for Juvenile Delinquents*. (New York: Wiley, 1974); Joan Gittens, *Poor Relations: The Children of the State in Illinois, 1818-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Stephanie R. Hawkins, *Resilient Girls: Factors That Protect against Delinquency* (DIANE Publishing, 2010); Ratibor-Ray M. Jurjevich, *No Water in My Cup; Experiences and a Controlled Study of Psychotherapy of Delinquent Girls* (New York: Libra, 1968); Gisela Konopka, *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966); Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*; Margaret Otis, "A Perversion Not Commonly Noted," *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 8, no. 2 (1913); Margaret A. Zahn et al., *The Girls Study Group: Charting the Way to Delinquency Prevention for Girls* (US

Criminal, sociologist Freda Adler proposed the “Liberation Theory of Female Criminality.”²⁹ In it, Adler predicted a rise in “female crime” due to the women’s movement of the 1970s, which saw newfound opportunities for women simultaneously bringing forth new opportunities for crime. Much of criminology is influenced by and/or a response to the positivistic work of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who is considered “one of the first people to bring scientific methods to bear on the study of crime.”³⁰ Lombroso and his co-author, Guglielmo Ferrero, are best known for their book, *L’uomo delinquente (Criminal Man)*, but in 1893 unveiled his feminine partner-in-crime. *La donna delinquente (Criminal Woman)*, published originally in Italian, was the less popular of their two works that proposed a “new human subspecies: the born criminal.”³¹ Lombroso and Ferrero’s positivist method of understanding what they saw as the biologically determined “born criminal” included anthropometric examinations of cadavers of criminals and those deemed “insane.” With their focus turned toward women, Lombroso and

Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2008), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/AbstractDB/AbstractDBDetails.aspx?id=245355>; Michael A Rembis, *Defining Deviance*; Margaret A. Zahn et al., *Causes and Correlates of Girls’ Delinquency* (US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/abstractdb/AbstractDBDetails.aspx?id=248352>.

²⁹ Freda Adler, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975)

³⁰ Lombroso is also called “criminal anthropologist” and “positivist criminologist.” See Lombroso et al., *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³¹ Lombroso et al., *Criminal Woman*, 3.

Ferrero added sex workers to the mix of non-normative, criminal, female biological subjects and included the prostitute in their anthropometric study.³²

Lombroso and Ferrero offer a taxonomy of the prostitute and criminal woman: the occasional prostitute/criminal, the epileptic prostitute/criminal, the hysterical criminal, the political criminal, the poisoner, the degenerate, the sexual psychopath, and the lesbian. Investigating everything from moles and gray hair to sexual sensitivity and facial asymmetry, Lombroso and Ferrero attempt to wholly categorize the criminal woman and prostitute by offering a pathological portrait of her difference. Nonsensical analogies link racist images, charts, and collected “data” to atavistic typologizing of the born female criminal. By comparing images, statistics, and essentializing/white supremacist assumptions about Native and indigenous women to pictures and statistics of so-called “normal women,” Lombroso and Ferrero use their perceived observations of difference to support the analogic structure that likens the criminal woman/prostitute to Native and indigenous women.³³ In doing so, they render both the criminal woman/prostitute and the Native and indigenous women to sub-human status.

According to Lombroso and Ferrero, the prostitute and criminal woman suffer from “moral insanity.” In fact, “the origin [of both criminality and] prostitution”

³² The term prostitute is complex, complicated, and problematic on several levels. I am aware of the problem with “prostitute” and how it is being used, yet I am choosing to use it to stay consistent with Lombroso’s and Ferrero’s text and I do so with skepticism as I hope is apparent in my text. It should be noted that neither the prostitute, nor “the criminal woman” are explicitly defined in Lombroso & Ferrero’s text. In the pages that follow, I use “sex worker” as a descriptor for individuals, “sex work” when engaging in my analysis, and “prostitution” when citing the historical terminology.

³³ In *Criminal Woman*, “normal woman” and “honest woman” are often substituted for each other.

comes from this “moral insanity,” which they claim can be seen in the “lack of natural feelings such as family affection...wickedness as a child, jealousy, and ruthless taste for revenge.”³⁴ Yet, prostitution and criminality are characterized as standing outside of culture, as timeless entities that Lombroso and Ferrero can read throughout nature everywhere from insects, spiders, birds, cows, and horses to primates. For “prostitution, like crime, has been a normal fact of life from the dawn of evolution.”³⁵

Recent laws—like North Carolina’s H.R. 2—also known as “bathroom bills,” issue stark rules governing public restrooms and prohibiting transgender youth from accessing toilets that correspond to their gender identity. Besides further legislating and criminalizing non-normative and queer bodies, the right-wing political public line of support of these laws is steeped in the language of the protection of girlhood, with Republican Texas senator Ted Cruz claiming that “any man, if he chooses, can enter a women’s restroom, a little girls’ restroom.”³⁶ Additionally, restrictive laws surrounding reproductive health care access work to limit and preclude girls—particularly rural, poor, and girls of color—from accessing birth control, abortions, and other forms of bodily autonomy. Likewise, the 2018 nationally televised confirmation hearing of Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh featured Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford, a middle-aged woman, publicly reliving horrors from her

³⁴ Lombroso et al., *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, 213.

³⁵ Lombroso et al., 100.

³⁶ Trip Gabriel, “Ted Cruz, Attacking Donald Trump, Uses Transgender Bathroom Access as Cudgel,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/30/us/politics/indiana-republican-transgender-rights-bathroom.html>.

girlhood as she told the story of the night she was sexually assaulted by Kavanaugh, while his friend, Mark Judge, watched and laughed. Of course, Dr. Blasey-Ford's testimony echoed the 1991 confirmation hearings of now-Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas when the Senate Judiciary Committee called Professor Anita Hill to testify about the many times her then-boss Thomas sexually harassed her. The testimony of sexual violation: a kind of recursive performance of the eternal carcerality of girlhood.

Theoretical Girl Problems

But what is the category of girlhood? Scholars in girl/girlhood studies have long examined this question. Emerging in the early 1990s as a sub-discipline of women's/feminist studies, girl studies sought to understand girlhood as a specific and separate category from womanhood.³⁷ Interdisciplinary feminist scholars who studied girls and girlhood focused on the social and cultural practices and impact of girls amidst what could be understood as Western culture's (at best) dismissal and (at worst) abuse of the girl. For example, sociologist Angela McRobbie's *Feminism and Youth Culture* offers a Marxian analysis of the cultural production of British subcultural communities of girls.³⁸ While early instantiations of girl/girlhood studies did argue for the particularity of girlhood as a subject category, considering girls and

³⁷ Mary Celeste Kearney, "Coalescing: The Development of Girls' Studies," *Feminist Formations* 21, no. 1 (2009): 3.

³⁸ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, Youth Questions (London: Macmillan Press, 1991).

their lives to be discrete objects of inquiry, much of this work reified the problems of the category of girl by arguing for girlhood's importance precisely because it had been previously overlooked by scholars. Moreover, early scholarship in girl studies focused almost exclusively on upper/middle class, white, heteronormative, Western, cisgender girls.

However, recent interdisciplinary scholarship on girls/girlhood has attempted to rectify this early erasure of different kinds of lived and/or embodied forms of girlhoods. This shift in girls/girlhood studies has produced excellent research exploring the lives of non-white, non-Western, queer, and/or undocumented girls, as well as girls with disabilities.³⁹ This work complicates the large body of research on Western girls/girlhoods by expanding who gets to count as a girl. More specifically, the field of Black girlhood studies offers crucial, critical, and intersectional analyses of Black girlhood and the lived experiences of Black girls. For example, scholars of Black girls/girlhood—like Kyra Gaunt, Ruth Nicole Brown, and Aimee Meredith Cox—challenge previous work in girl studies that assumes “the girl” is always already white, middle-class, American, able-bodied, and straight by highlighting the

³⁹ For an analysis of authorship, cultural capital, and self-making practices of Black and Latina girls within contemporary community art scenes see Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). For a transnational exploration of social movements and girl activists, see Jessica K. Taft, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change Across the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). For a discussion on the language practices of Latina girls in gangs, see Norma Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs*. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). For an exploration of girls' practices navigating carceral space, see Lena Palacios, “‘Ain't No Justice ... It's Just Us':” In *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, edited by Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler, 279–95. (Berghahn Books, 2016).

creative practices of Black girls as essential to U.S. cultural production.⁴⁰ This work builds on the work of Black feminists like Angela Davis, Barbara Smith, and Hortense Spillers, whose scholarship illuminates the lives and contributions of Black women while challenging a largely second-wave feminist default assumption of “the woman” as white, middle-class, American, able-bodied, and straight.⁴¹ In this way, recent work in girl studies and Black girl studies specifically follows Black feminist scholars in offering intersectional analyses of race, class, gender, and sexuality to recuperate the girl from white supremacy, classism, nationalism, and misogyny.

However, it is not only academic fields that have attempted to recuperate and celebrate girlhood(s). Popular cultural attempts to recuperate girlhood and celebrate it as a creative and embodied practice have been powerful tools of celebrating identities and socio-cultural practices of girls. Yet, many of these phenomena continue to reify the problem with girlhood as an always already othered category. An example of the reification of the girl can be seen with current and historical pushes to embrace “girl power.” While the celebration of girlhood is absolutely crucial to championing girls' lives—whose lives should be celebrated—what does the reclamation of the category of girlhood do for the systems that present its initial othering? By celebrating girlhood

⁴⁰ See Kyra D. Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Ruth Nicole Brown, *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁴¹ See Angela Y. Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” *The Black Scholar* 12, no. 6 (December 1981); Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*, (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1982); Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987).

to assert its importance in the face of misogyny, heteronormativity, racism, ageism, ableism, and classism, do the trappings of girlhood become fortified by their own categorical reification?

While calls for “girl power” and the field of girls/girlhood studies do make a convincing case for the particularity of the category of girl and the importance of studying the lives of girls, much of this work reifies the category of the girl. However, the reification and subsequent recuperation of the category of girl can be invaluable for research on girls, particularly those who are not white, heteronormative, non-disabled, upper/middle class, and Western. Subsequently, it can also reproduce the limitations of said category.

In *Carceral Girlhoods*, I am not attempting to recuperate girlhood; instead, I argue that girlhood, broadly, is a carceral subject category, entombing the bodies of girls who deviate from its conventions and expectations. To be very clear, however, girl/girlhood studies—and Black girls/girlhood studies specifically—are crucial fields engaging in groundbreaking scholarship that challenges the misogyny, white supremacy, ageism, ableism, and heteronormativity of the practice and category of girlhood. Much of this work even expands ways of seeing girlhood to challenge the inherent problems with the subjective borders that define it.⁴² Savannah Shange, for instance, does this in her monograph, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*, through what she calls “black girl ordinary,” or the

⁴² For an excellent historical interrogation on the limitations of gender, sexuality, and childhood for transgender children, see Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

ordinariness of the experience of Black girls “refusing to be disappeared at the margins of common sense.”⁴³ For Shange, Black girl ordinary—or, as she notes, what is more commonly known as #BlackGirlMagic—“improvises on social and aesthetic choreographies to disrupt the inherited rhythms of captivity;” a kind of Muñozian disidentification.⁴⁴

I turn my focus to those “rhythms of captivity” to understand how girlhood, generally conceived as a subject category—not as an embodied practice—reproduces ideologies and practices of captivity. What I call the carcerality of girlhood focuses attention on girlhood as a distinct subject category that supports and perpetuates girls' physical captivity and limitation alongside the state's ongoing surveillance of them. Girlhood can thus be understood as a legal subject position imagined by the U.S. as a modern liberal state to control and punish bodies of all who might be interpolated as “a girl.” In this way, girlhood subjectivity can be seen as a continuum of punishment and control; the state attempts to first control the bodies registered as (possibly) girls, then punish them into submission. Here, punishment and control can be linked to carcerality, as carcerality refers to physical captivity, limitation, and restrictions placed on bodies. In this way, girlhood is a primarily visual object of profound

⁴³ Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness, and Schooling in San Francisco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 99. For Shange's introduction of the concept of “Black girl ordinary,” see Savannah Shange, “Black Girl Ordinary: Flesh, Carcerality, and the Refusal of Ethnography,” *Transforming Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (April 2019).

⁴⁴ Shange, *Progressive Dystopia*, 99. Muñoz develops his concept of disidentification through an analysis of queer theater. Disidentification, he argues is a worldmaking “modality of performance” that repurposes oppressive cultural forms into queer worlds of possibilities. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

obsession; it rests at the scopic intersections of multiple gazes—not just by the state but by everyone (even other “girls”).

However, understanding girlhood broadly as carceral is not necessarily a collapsing of girlhood into one monolithic category. In fact, the carcerality of girlhood operates differently for differently embodied practices/experiences of girlhood. Thus, girlhood is embodied, practiced, lived, and experienced intersectionally as a dynamic and highly complex matrix for ways of being. For example, a Black girl in the contemporary U.S. South will experience the carcerality of girlhood differently—with disparate degrees of severity, violence, and limitations—than a white girl in early twentieth-century New York. Moreover, girlhood across bodies, space, and temporalities will affect how the broader carcerality of the subject category is experienced. Just as all girlhoods are practiced and embodied differently, girlhood carcerality will function differently for the myriad of girls subjected to its constraints.

To understand how girlhood becomes carceral, I turn to theories of subject formation (subjectivization) and the expectation of said subject’s allegiance to the state’s restrictions placed upon them (subjection). Critical race scholars, along with feminist and queer theorists, have challenged the Western liberal logic behind theories of subjectivization and subjection through analyses of difference.⁴⁵ Theories

⁴⁵ Likewise, de/anti/post-colonial scholars have theorized the absence and invisibility of certain individuals and groups under liberal conceptions of the subject. By interrogating Cartesian dualism and Western liberalism, many of these scholars question how these ideologies could support projects of genocide, settler colonialism, occupation, and slavery. For example, Sylvia Wynter critiques theoretical models of subject formation as foundational to Western liberal order, interrogating the very definition of the human by highlighting the problem of the West’s conception of who counts as such,

of difference shape how subjectivization and subjection operate and illuminate how girlhood becomes a state-identified subject category. Foucauldian understandings of subjectivization recognize it as a functional aspect of biopower—the state’s interest and investment in perpetuating itself through its subjects. For Foucault, carcerality plays a crucial role in the cementation of biopower and functions as a disciplining of the body in which people become “docile and useful” to the state.⁴⁶ Judith Butler, however, argues performativity can be seen as a disruption to the Foucauldian reading of the subject as well as the Althusserian model of subjectivization and subjection as co-occurring through a process of interpellation, by which a person becomes a subject through a hailing by the state—or one of its “officers.”⁴⁷ In this way, performativity offers agency and mobility in the discursive, aesthetic, and political choices and actions of said subject. The subject, however, is still subjected to a “grid of intelligibility.”⁴⁸ This grid of intelligibility allows certain subjects to be read as belonging to specific subject groups, while others who remain outside the realm of

see Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003). Gayatri Spivak elaborates on Gramsci’s theory of the subaltern—those obscured from sight, allocated to the margins, made to seem as though they are not there—by ruminating on the possibility and implications of subjectivity for those who are outside its reach, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 305.

⁴⁷ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 2001); Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

recognition are considered illegible or absent. These “grids of intelligibility” function as the rigid borders of girlhood.

Moreover, queer scholars use temporality to challenge the limits of subjectivization. For example, Elizabeth Freeman argues what she calls “sense-methods” can “rearrange the relationship between past and present, linking contemporary bodies to those from other times in reformulations of ancestry and lineage.”⁴⁹ Additionally, Jose Esteban Muñoz ruminates on an escape from the limitations of subjectivity with his proposal of queer futurity, in which folks historically situated outside a “grid of intelligibility”—in his case queers and queers of color—with futures that are always already assumed to be at best stifled and limited, can live out moments of utopia by refuting straight time and embracing a “future in the present.”⁵⁰ Similarly, some feminist theorists have considered temporality in building arguments around the relationship between girls’ and women’s subjectivity. Specifically, this work examines the broad conception of girlhood: a time period in a young woman’s life bookended by infancy and sexual maturity, with the expectation of sexual chastity despite the external sexualization of the girl’s body. Catherine Driscoll argues that girls are stuck, never quite able to become women because of this contradictory conception of girlhood. For her, girlhood is “an assemblage of distinctions between girls and women rather than any

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, *Beside You in Time: Sense Methods & Queer Sociabilities in the American 19th Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 15.

⁵⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 49.

transition from one state to another.”⁵¹ In this way, even women—or anyone who was once forcibly evaluated as a girl—still experience girlhood while simultaneously occupying other subject positions. It is as if girlhood is suspended within those subject(ed) to it.

Moreover, feminist interventions in psychoanalysis have interrogated approaches to theories of the subjectivization and subjection of the girl. For instance, Luce Irigaray—influenced by Lacanian (re)interpretations of Freudian sexual development stages—puts Freud himself on the couch to understand his obsession with “female sexuality.”⁵² In fact, much of psychoanalytic feminism locates Freud’s conception of the girl as the part of the problem in his eventual conception of foundational theories of pathology and the subject. Freud is not the first—nor the only—theorist to use the girl as a metaphor for a theory in need of a propelling and provocative metaphor. Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, see the girl as a crucial aspect of their larger project of theorizing the assemblage; for them, the girl is a critical step in their conception of “becoming” what is basically an anti-subject.⁵³

Moreover, the Situationist-inspired collective Tiqqun published *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, a pamphlet using the cut-up method of

⁵¹ Catherine Driscoll, “The Little Girl,” in *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Gary Genosko, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2001), 1465.

⁵² See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁵³ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Additionally, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze uses Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland to critique modern sense-making practices and Western rationality. For more on this, see Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. Reprint edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

arranging texts to create what they consider is a critique of late capitalism. In *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, the young-girl stands in for consumer culture, popular culture, greed, neoliberal exploitation, and a general array of negative associations with the glut of late capitalism.⁵⁴ In her excellent critique of this phenomenon, Jen Kennedy argues, “the girl is at once debased as excessively consumerist and culturally depraved and idealized as an endlessly transformable object of desire.”⁵⁵ Thus, the use of the girl as metaphor in building (an often political) theory reinforces her place as a full and empty signifier. As such, it is her fullness and emptiness that keeps her as a captive subject, unable to be anything other than another’s metaphor.

INTERLUDE⁵⁶

Disastrous Girl Problems, a ghost story

The voices started whispering even earlier this year. They usually did not start up until mid-August, but this year they were howling by June.

At first, people thought it was the radio or machinery, but everyone quickly came to a quiet understanding that the voices came from elsewhere. Before the store opened, the voices would scream for anyone in the abandoned building. Save the sole real estate agent or few construction workers, no one could hear them. After the grand opening in April, everyone could hear them by May.

While ordering at the meat counter, one lady heard the sounds of a young girl whimpering from within the meat refrigerator. She and the butcher just stared blankly

⁵⁴ Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, trans. Ariana Reines (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

⁵⁵ Jen Kennedy, “The Young-Girl in Theory,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 25, no. 2 (2015): 178.

⁵⁶ This interlude represents my shift in register and voice toward a more creative way of engaging the material and themes. I slip into this voice a few times throughout *Carceral Girlhoods*. These moments are marked with italics or borders.

at one another until he put his head to a piece of flank steak to try and locate the source. Another woman became irritable when she grabbed a yogurt and immediately heard a cacophony of girls screaming over the low, faint sounds of what could only be described as hymns in the background. One cashier heard howling winds, wood cracking, and rain pouring in the bathroom, only to exit the store to a still and sunny afternoon.

Then by early August, people reported seeing things. In the community garden on the block, a child was seen speaking with a young girl who appeared in sepia-tone; she was blurry yet pixelated and water-logged. The teacher froze when she saw who her student was talking to—she promptly stood up and introduced Ms. Dubois to her friend, “this is Susie. She says a hurricane is coming and that she knows because she died in one in 1915.”

On August 5th, ten inches of rain fell on New Orleans in an hour. Within that hour, Midcity flooded. No word came from the mayor. By the next hour, the Seventh Ward was submerged, the Tremé was next, then the French Quarter. People came out of work to find themselves thigh-deep in water and stranded, waiting for updates from the city.

The mayor had made national headlines earlier that year with his press conference after the confederate effigies were removed. Now what remains of their crumbling pedestals can be seen on the Boulevards still baptized with the generals’ namesake, reminders of the insidious white supremacy that remains at the foundations of this country.

Hours passed as the city further descended into floodwater. Outside of the city, no one would remember this particular Tuesday in New Orleans, even as memories of past storms and floods haunt the residents. That evening, the mayor finally explained the source of the swift and substantial flooding—the massive pumps that pump water out of the low-lying flood basin that is New Orleans were operating at half-capacity. Like so many times before, New Orleans sat underwater while the rest of the country obliviously went on with their lives.

One of said pumps is directly in the middle of Broad Street; it gazes onto that block of the Good Shepherd. This August 5th, the parking lot at the Whole Foods on Broad and Bienville flooded, and the water slowly seeped into the store, destroying thousands of pounds of perishables. Expensive, organic food rotted in the filth of floodwater.

It was both the water and the girls that prohibited anyone from entering the block radius. What looked like thousands of girls formed a human chain around the flooded city block; submerged waist-deep in floodwater, from Bienville to Conti and Broad to Dourgenois, sepia-tone girls blocked the perimeter. The Times-Picayune wrote about the sepia girls as though flood water had brought some illness “upon the female

youth of the city,” simultaneously making a select few of them go mad and get ill. Some folks claimed the girls were the dead bodies that floated above ground from the water-logged city, but it hardly explained the fact that the girls stood holding hands in a perfect circle around the block.

Or their sepia tinge.

People struggled to make sense of it, but everyone knew who the girls really were; that block had a reputation.



Figure 0.1: Photograph of the House of the Good Shepherd from the Pump on Broad Street. John Tibule Mendes, *Broad Street showing Convent*. Historic New Orleans Collection. December 14, 1918.

The House of the Good Shepherd had a reputation.

Even those who didn't know its name or what it was exactly knew what it meant.

“If you keep up this attitude, I will send you there, and your father and I will never see you again,” shouted one mother to her disaffected adolescent daughter as they drove down Broad Street.

Another echoed a similar point to her teenage girl while pointing to the top of the building on Conti, “I swear to god, if you’re a minute late for your curfew once more, you’ll be locked up there in the attic with those other bad girls.”

In 1909, before hurricanes had names, one hit the House of the Good Shepherd. This was the first hurricane to cause substantial damage since the Sisters of the Good Shepherd build their convent. It destroyed the chapel, but the rest of the structures remained intact. Just six years later, however, another one hit, this time harder. The Morning Star, the Archdiocese of New Orleans’s weekly newspaper, surveyed the damage, claiming that nearly all the walls had crumbled.⁵⁷ The newspapers painted a scene of the girls incarcerated within those walls: as rain and wind swirled around them, they were tasked with reinforcing and securing those same walls while the nuns sang hymns.

Nearly a hundred years later, Hurricane Katrina hit the city. Local newspapers picked up a story of a pregnant fifteen-year-old girl found floating waist-deep in floodwater, incarcerated and abandoned in the Orleans Parish Prison.

During those murky times, the girls sporadically make their cameos. And from those murky places, the girls emerge, crawling out from under the wooden beams and metal scraps, bloated with what’s left of the floodwater, to remind us that they are still here. Coats of paint and remodeling cannot keep them quiet. And while the storms get worse and the seasons grow longer, they only become louder and sharper, howling and screaming from a place and time disaster, government, and corruption could never erase.

A Note on Method

New Orleans is a haunted place, with a special kind of spectrality to it; it grieves with its ghosts, it relishes in its phantoms, it celebrates its apparitions. The ghosts, residents, and tourists all share the city in complex ways, and the stories told about New Orleans themselves are both haunted and haunting. In New Orleans,

⁵⁷ “Terrible Ravages of Hurricane Among Our Schools and Asylums,” in *Morning Star*, Volume 48, October 16, 1915.

property for-sale signs include the extra selling points of “Haunted property!” or “Real ghosts!” The hotels advertise their purported hauntings on signs proclaiming vacancy, groups of competing ghost tours fill the evening streets trying to get a glimpse of a shadowy desolate window, revelers drink in eighteenth-century taverns both with their own haunted pasts.

Of course, all places have their literal and figurative skeletons in the closet. The U.S. is, after all, an active settler-colonial state that used genocide and slavery as tools of nation-building. Places that are now U.S. cities deserve all the hauntings. But the relationships between the ghosts and residents in New Orleans are quite remarkable; they acknowledge one another, converse, and sometimes collaborate. I notice this mainly in the form of storytelling. In a place like New Orleans, where each block is a patina of lives lived, battles fought, and experiences had, the stories told about the city and its previous occupants are co-authored with the dead.⁵⁸ Historical archaeologist Shannon Lee Dawdy claims, “the past is both spectral and real in New Orleans...the dead are a creative force in ongoing life.”⁵⁹ And it was the dead who helped me to critically engage with how the legacies of the House of the Good Shepherd continue to shape New Orleanian girlhoods today.

I was very uneasy the first time I walked into New Orleans’s newest Whole Foods on the 300 block of North Broad Street in what FEMA and the National Parks Service call the “Mid-City Historic District.” Beyond the apparent apprehension and

⁵⁸ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Patina: A Profane Archaeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 50.

⁵⁹ Dawdy, 8.

anxiety stemming from anti-capitalist critiques of corporatism, monopoly, gentrification, and exploitation that one might have of Whole Foods, my uneasiness that day was an accretion of those aforementioned anxieties and my intimate knowledge of—as well as my intimate desire to know more about— who, what, why, and how that particular block and neighborhood was in the past and is in the present and the lingering ways these temporalities intersect and crosscut each other.

The 300 block of North Broad Street extends from Broad Street on the northwest to Dourgenois to the Southeast. It sits between Bienville and Conti Streets, to the southwest and northeast, respectively. Before Whole Foods opened in 2014, local New Orleans grocery Robert’s Market occupied that lot from the 1960s until its closure in the 1980s and remained boarded until 2014, when Whole Foods opened. Well before Whole Foods and Robert’s Market, the 300 block of North Broad Street housed the House of the Good Shepherd.

For nearly a century, the House of the Good Shepherd incarcerated New Orleanian girls and women and struck fear into those who would pass by it on the street. Mothers would warn their daughters:

“That’s where the bad girls go.”

Local legends flourished about the institution. Even though no one really knew, people would speculate about what went on behind those walls— speculative folkloristics about the reformatory and its bad girls.

Part of my unease that day at Whole Foods stemmed from my preoccupation with the girls and women who once lived in that space: I wanted to know something about them and wondered if I could learn that by circumambulating the block.

I was standing on the newly paved parking lot looking at the pumping station on North Broad Street that would pump water out of low-lying Mid-City during heavy rains. When the pumps fail—which they have and continue to do—Mid-City floods, like it did in 1915 when a devastating hurricane hit New Orleans.

The House of the Good Shepherd flooded then. Large portions of the building were destroyed, eventually leading to its slow decay and closure.

I thought of all my research on this institution, the clues I looked for in the margins of municipal documents, advice on what and who I should be looking for, and stories of where to find them. Meanwhile, the few photographs that remain of the reformatory flashed through my mind in a transhistorical daze.

And somehow, I began to imagine those sepia-toned girls in turn-of-the-century dresses haunting the customers at Whole Foods. It even made me laugh a little, and my unease turned to a kind of morbid joy, thinking of ghost girls stealing yogurts from people's carts or blowing on the back of their necks to send shivers down spines; a hauntology of a carceral girlhood. Girls refusing to be governed even in death and, as Saidiya Hartman might argue, asserting their waywardness.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

Maybe imagining these ghosts was my attempt at salvaging erased and unknowable carceral histories from the paved parking lot, since Hartman argues, “the loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them.”⁶¹ The ghost girls were a manifestation of my hunger.

But why would they appear now, and what does one do with the ghosts?

Avery Gordon explains that “ghosts appear when the trouble they represent is no longer being contained.”⁶² But what does this kind of salvaging a life after death do for those currently erased from the carceral histories being made today? What can salvaging carceral histories do in the present face of mass incarceration, neoliberalism, gentrification, racial and disaster capitalisms, and state violence? Can salvaging the past change the future?

The nominal form of salvage references “a payment or compensation to which those persons are entitled who have by their voluntary efforts saved a ship or its cargo from impending peril or rescued it from actual loss.”⁶³ Hartman, specifically, is notably wary of salvage. In *Venus in Two Acts*, she insists not on salvaging stories of the two enslaved girls found dead on a ship, but on ruminating on the potentiality of those unknowables: “The necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions

⁶¹ Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 12 (June 2008), 8.

⁶² Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

⁶³ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future.”⁶⁴ Here the impossible epistemological limits allow for a possible world beyond those limits.

Of epistemological limits, the House of the Good Shepherd has many.

In 1859, the Order of the Good Shepherd convent first opened its doors to white girls and women in need of shelter or food—a modest operation in the Garden District. The convent remained on Magazine Street until a fire broke out and destroyed the facilities. Shortly thereafter, in 1873, the House of the Good Shepherd moved to that 300 block of North Broad Street. After the move downtown, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd expanded their operation from something like a charity house to a carceral reformatory, enacting Progressive-Era reforms that bloated the population of incarcerated children and youth: they began incarcerating girls of color. At that point, the City of New Orleans made the House of the Good Shepherd the official sentencing site for “sexually delinquent” girls until 1909 with the establishment of the Juvenile Court of Orleans Parish.

One complicated reason for the lack of secondary sources on the reformatory is the problem of the primary sources. Much has been written theorizing the limitation of the text-based archive as a project of empire and the biopolitical state apparatus. Ann Laura Stoler underscores the epistemological limits of colonial common sense ingrained in bureaucratic documents and records, insisting we must read ethnographically “along the archival grain” to understand the archive as violent acts

⁶⁴ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 13.

of colonial governance.⁶⁵ Diana Taylor critiques the epistemological limitation of a material archive, advocating for an expansive reconsideration of performance as an integral and disruptive way to transmit knowledges and cultural histories.⁶⁶ Of course, in theorizing ontologies, subalterity, and silence, Spivak marks the archive as a recursive site of epistemic violences and erasures. In doing so, she poses the eminent question: Can the subaltern speak?

Returning to *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman critiques the limitations of the archive of Atlantic slavery, simultaneously problematizing the absence of the figure of the enslaved girl or woman while undoing the logics of slavery and empire that inscribed her presence only in death. She elaborates: “the archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore’s life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.”⁶⁷

I have found many documents that erase the characters central to the very existence of the text. I have tried to track down the reformatory records to know more than the names listed on a few census records. With little luck, I continue to follow leads:

Sister Anne of the San Francisco Convent of the Good Shepherd put me in touch with Monty Abbott, archivist of the St. Louis Province of the Order of the

⁶⁵ See Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶⁶ See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 2.

Good Shepherd, who suggested I contact Loyola University in New Orleans, who pawned me off to the Jesuit Archives who sent me to the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where I had already been denied access to an alluring set of documents on the Magdalen House.

The archivist there just shrugged and said, “they probably got lost or destroyed in Katrina or another storm before that.”

“The storm” is a central player in *Carceral Girlhoods*, even when it is not immediately present. “The storm”—whether it be Katrina, or another that did not have a name—may well have destroyed those records. “The storm” damaged portions of the building and likely led to the eventual closure of the House of the Good Shepherd. In the seven years I have been working on this project, there have been more storms than I can remember. I experienced some of these storms while in New Orleans. I have read about and listened to stories of countless others.

I was in New Orleans on the tenth anniversary of Katrina. My friend and I returned to the city on the evening of August 31st, 2015, from a trip to the archives at University of Mississippi in Oxford to a somber and pensive New Orleans. My friend was born and raised in New Orleans and had moved to Chicago right before Katrina. On the drive back to New Orleans that night, she told stories about the flood, the storm, and her father who had left the occupied West Bank of Palestine for the West Bank of the Mississippi. She told me stories that many others have told—of displacement, desperation, fear, death, anger, confusion, and bedrooms filled with toxic floodwater. Two years later, I was back in New Orleans for the twelfth

anniversary of Katrina. On August 30th, 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, just 100 miles northwest of New Orleans, the same place where many displaced New Orleanians moved after Katrina.⁶⁸ The city, known for its revelry, fun, and jouissance, once again felt somber and pensive.

For those of us who work on New Orleans, “the storm” is a recurring character. While Katrina may not appear much in the pages that follow, it structures the archives, lives, and spaces with which I engage. However, it is not just Katrina that does the structuring. Past, present, and future storms all are part of the making, unmaking, and remaking of New Orleans and its histories.

With the archivist’s comment, I remembered the 1915 storm that destroyed the laundry where some of the girls worked and the countless fires that burned down portions of the reformatory. In fact, in 1906, a fire destroyed the three-story building that housed the girls of color. Built only a few years earlier with a donation from a prominent New Orleans philanthropist of color, Thomy LaFon, the building was nearly razed but somehow, the *Times-Picayune* claims, no one was hurt or killed.

Both fires and floods were somewhat commonplace for nineteenth-century New Orleans, particularly the House of the Good Shepherd. Even so, the epistemological limits of why and how emerge yet again. Not because it is hard to imagine faulty chimney flues or post-hurricane municipal failures in New Orleans but

⁶⁸ For a discussion on disaster capitalism in the wake of Katrina, see Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

because there is always more to the story than just: a massive fire destroyed the only building paid for by one of the few philanthropists of color, made for the girls of color in a reformatory somewhat unique for a city in the Jim Crow South. Hartman's method of critical fabulation is particularly apt here, not as a form of anti-empiricism necessarily but to consider what she calls the "basic elements of the story" to understand "the production of disposable lives."⁶⁹ In doing so, I imagine one of those sepia ghost girls haunting Whole Foods flash a knowing smile.

But how much of these archives were likely destroyed in a fire or flood? And why would the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have worked to save any records or documents on girls whose souls they considered redeemable yet still subjected to harsh punishments and manual labor? Particularly in the wake of disaster? In this way, the state's municipal failures ensure the destruction of archives rather than the archive as the state's municipal project, which tries to erase certain people and histories. It is the fire and the flood that destroy both the carceral building and its carceral histories. Considering the limitations of the archive as an act of control over the futurities of subjects after death, I decided to look elsewhere, not to salvage from the past but to learn from more unknowables.

So I turned to the dirt.

Ruminating on the aftermath of Katrina, artist Kara Walker describes what remains after the storm as "a murky, unnavigable space that is overcrowded with

⁶⁹ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

intangibles: shame, remorse, vanity, morbidity, silence.”⁷⁰ I turn to the dirt as the unnavigable space of the shame and silence of carceral and criminal girlhood, and I look to the murkiness left behind after the flood water recedes to understand how the deluge creates new worlds while destroying others. In the case of the House of the Good Shepherd, the murkiness seeps through archives and obscures what Dawdy calls the “knowable past.”⁷¹ In *Patina: A Profane Archaeology*, Dawdy ruminates on the stuff that shapes the “knowable past”—the stuff that makes the past knowable at all. In doing so, Dawdy theorizes what is called “Katrina Patina,” or the “multihued encrustations that water and mold left in horizontal strata upon houses, possessions, and even the people.”⁷² In *Carceral Girlhoods*, I rely on Dawdy’s theorization that patina “cites social stratigraphy,” or the “agency of things from the past in constituting our everyday lives in the present.”⁷³ I approach these past things—textual, legal, visual, oral—to showcase how they shape present-day girlhood.

Archiving and archaeology are projects of empire and a biopolitical state apparatus invested in controlling subjects in the past, present, and future. And both projects necessarily engage in a kind of speculative narration to construct worlds from documents, pottery shards, trash. After all, imagine the stories that can be told about the faience rouge pots and French wine bottles found on the black girls’ dormitory site in a convent reformatory. Like Hartman advises, I try to sit with the impossibility

⁷⁰ Kara Walker, *After the Deluge* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 7.

⁷¹ Dawdy, *Patina: A Profane Archaeology*, 25.

⁷² Dawdy, 1.

⁷³ Dawdy, 41.

of knowing these girls' stories, even as ghosts. Sitting with an impossible epistemological limit to sculpt an anti-carceral future that would abolish the possibility of wanting to know about the intimacies of captivity and carcerality because carcerality would be inconceivable.

About a year into my research, I started to dream about the House of the Good Shepherd and "the storm." Sometimes my dreams occurred in waking life and seemed more like daydreams, other times I awoke from vivid nightmares gasping for air; it was easy for my imagination to take hold and easy for this place to seep into my unconscious. Perhaps it was a way to process the remaining mysteries. Perhaps it was the ethical weight of writing about the past. I always dreamt in black and white.

Walking through the gates, I was greeted by four nuns in sculpturally towering, angular habits. I approached the steps of a large brick building on the eve of a great storm. The sky was dark gray, and the clouds were swirling. The hot, damp air gathered around my body like a thick coating as I meekly looked up at the four sisters. I was scared. Both the people and building felt sinister. I wept as I entered the gates and longed for the city that surrounded us. I wished for nothing more than to be walking alone throughout the city despite the imminent storm. I wished to be anywhere but there.

I was quickly deposited in the building, left alone in a chapel to pray for something I could not understand. I could not cry, talk, or move; I just knelt in the

pew and pushed my knees harder into the wood admiring the indents it left on my skin. At dusk, the hurricane made landfall, and I was still in the chapel. Maybe I was invisible? Maybe they forgot I was here?

The storm began with quiet moans, then strengthened with great ferocity, and my apathy faded as I began to fear the swirling wind and rising river. Another girl my age tapped my shoulder and, without saying a word, took my hand. She was an inmate at the House of the Good Shepherd from the Black girls' dormitory; I was supposed to stay with the white girls. My new fellow inmate offered me a place to hide from the storm. Without speaking, we huddled close under her bed in the Black girls' dormitory.

The wind howled, and a powerful snap echoed across the east wing. The sounds of shattered glass and wood cracking momentarily crowded out the wind's howls and hard rain, and then a cold and wet spray of water and wind swept across the room as the windows above us broke open. They were looking for us; I could feel it. And I knew we were in trouble.

Amidst the chaos and destruction, the Mother Superior found us. I was not where I was supposed to be; the Mother's wrath was palpable as her hand tightly gripped the nape of my neck. Fear shook my body. The shaking woke me up, gasping for breath, heart pounding, staring at those same iron gates in the photograph.



Figure 0.2: Charles L. Franck, *House of the Good Shepherd, Entrance Gate*, Charles L. Franck Studio Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1956. 1979.325.2262.

I studied that image once again, now with a different sense of intimacy to those gates and the workings of the institution. I smelled the storm and heard the shattered glass. Those gates have been plastered in my waking mind for the past six years since beginning my research on the House of the Good Shepherd. Now they have emerged in my unconscious mind and try to make sense of an institution both exceptional for its time and also quite regular. While the dream did nothing to illuminate any empirical truth about the House of the Good Shepherd, it helped to highlight the questions that remain over those six years. These unknowables may or

may not uphold my argument, but nonetheless remain crucial to understanding both the reformatory and mechanisms that make and keep U.S. girlhood carceral. The spectrality of *Carceral Girlhoods* is less of a methodology and more of a formative framing device. While there are archival gaps and limits to understanding, the spectrality and unknowables are less a symptom of or desire for wholeness. Instead, the spectrality around the unknowables might be a site of what Anjali Arondekar calls “radical abundance,” a beckoning toward futurity.⁷⁴ After all, the presence of ghost girls is an insistence, as Avery Gordon argues, that something needs to be done. And it is in that insistence that their waywardness produces “the utopian longings and promise of a future world.”⁷⁵

Chapter Overview

In four chapters, *Carceral Girl Problems* explores the House of the Good Shepherd to understand how girlhood became and continues to be carceral. As the first substantive chapter of *Carceral Girl Problems*, Chapter 1, “‘Abduction and Seduction:’ The Legal Making of New Orleans’s Girl Problems,” lays the historical and legal foundations of my argument. In doing so, I elaborate on the critical legal theorists whose work is central to the introductory chapter, then trace the figure of the girl—both in her presence and absence—through Louisiana legal documents from the early eighteenth century through Reconstruction. These legal documents include royal

⁷⁴ See Anjali Arondekar, “In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia,” *Differences* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2014).

⁷⁵ Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, xv.

edicts for the occupied Louisiana territories, case law from the Supreme Court of Louisiana, as well as local city ordinances and help to explain how the legal subject of girl emerged from colonial decrees, legislation, and court rulings on racialization, slavery, religion, age, and marriage.

Chapter 1 argues that the state's interest in managing sexuality, racialization, and religion was instrumental in shaping first the idea of the girl and later her creation as a legal subject in New Orleans. The formation of a girl subject synonymous with middle-class whiteness emerges through the accretion of laws and legal systems in New Orleans. Furthermore, both criminalization and incarceration become the critical factors in how that newfound legal subject was managed. This chapter concludes with the opening of the House of the Good Shepherd in 1873.

Chapter 2, "'Proud to be Among the Very First to Desegregate: ' Imagining/Managing Racial Difference, Black Girlhood, and Catholicism at the House of the Good Shepherd,'" continues where Chapter 1 ends by offering a detailed analysis of how the House of the Good Shepherd managed racial difference within the walls of this exceptional Southern reformatory. Not only was the House of the Good Shepherd the only reformatory for "sexually delinquent" girls in New Orleans, but it was also the only one of its kind in the Jim Crow South to house—and according to the Sisters, "rehabilitate"—girls from all racial, ethnic, religious, class, national, and linguistic backgrounds. This chapter offers close readings of the reformatory's rules on racial segregation alongside those of the New Orleans

Archdiocese to understand how the reformatory managed and controlled the intersection of Blackness and girlhood.

In Chapter 3, “The Carceral Gaze of Girlhood: Sexualization, Whiteness, and the Storyville Girls,” I examine photographs of New Orleanian girls whose lives intersected with the House of the Good Shepherd to articulate the ways that the production and reproduction of the young girl’s sexualized body perpetuate carceral girlhood. These images include promotional stills of the reformatory from the mid-twentieth century, street photography by amateur photographers, and now-infamous commercial photographer Ernest J. Bellocq’s “Storyville Girls” prints. The “Storyville Girls” images are a series of photographic reproductions of twenty glass plates that depict sex workers in New Orleans’s legal district for selling sex, Storyville. This chapter follows the “Storyville Girls” from the archive to the House of the Good Shepherd to late-twentieth-century culture by first analyzing the images of girlhood, then offering an interrogation of the viewer’s gaze to argue that not only is photography of girls always already a sexualized act of looking, but it is also instrumental in the law’s shaping of the subject category.

Chapter 4, “Arson Girls, Match-strikers, and Firestarters: A Reflection on Rage, Racialization, and the Carcerality of Girlhood,” concludes *Carceral Girl Problems* with a gesture toward abolitionist futurity by exploring the possibility of resistance to the carcerality of girlhood. A version of this chapter is forthcoming (Winter 2022) in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Chapter 4 starts with the North Carolina Samarcand Arson Trial of 1931, where twelve white girls

were charged with the capital offense of arson for burning down the Samarcaud Manor State Home and Industrial Training School for (white) Girls. I then read historical examples of New Orleanian girls who set fires to the institutions in which they are incarcerated (including many from the House of the Good Shepherd). In doing so, I consider firesetting as a strategy of political resistance to girls' physical incarceration and what I see as the carcerality of girlhood. Additionally, I examine representations of firesetting girls from literature and film to consider how so-called "match-strikers" translate their rage into the calculated political act of arson as a form of anti-carceral resistance to the category of girlhood itself. While I argue that the acts of firesetting are performances of anti-carceral rage, representations of these "arson girls" perpetuate the kind of suspended category of girlhood as a limiting prison of subjective boundaries entangled with white supremacy and classism.

Chapter 1: “Abduction and Seduction:” The Legal Making of New Orleans’s Girl Problems

The City, Modernity, and Other Girl Problems

“Never before in civilization have such numbers of young girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon city streets and to work under alien roofs; for the first time they are being prized more for their labor power than for their innocence, their tender beauty, their ephemeral gaiety.”

-Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*¹

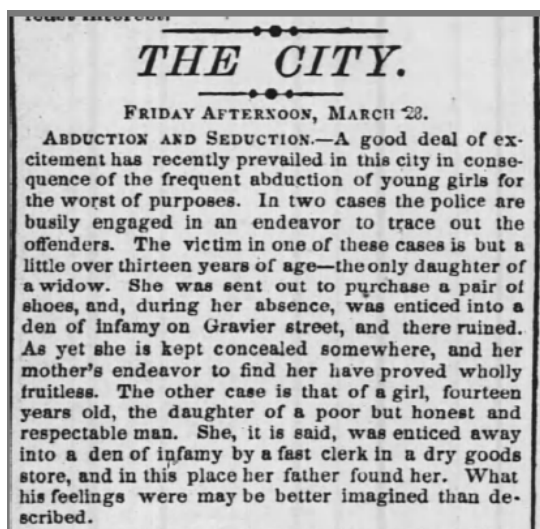


Figure 1.1: “The City,” *Daily Picayune*, March 29, 1856.

In 1856, the New Orleans-based newspaper the *Daily Picayune* published a short editorial entitled “Abduction and Seduction” under the section of the paper ominously and aptly called “The City.” The editorial lamented the “frequent abduction of young girls for the worst of purposes” and chronicled two instances of girls who were snatched up in public, “concealed” in “den[s] of infamy,” and

¹ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*.

“ruined.”² While these stories are neither new nor exceptional, they index a growing nineteenth-century chorus of social and political cries to legislate girlhood and *protect* girls from what was seen as their seduction by the accessibility of vices prevalent in cities. According to this editorial—and many other newspaper editorials and reports from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century—city vices perpetuated first the abduction and, next, the seduction of girls. In all cases, the vices were vast and so vague as to include nearly anything in a city—even if it was not a mainly urban phenomenon—like “a dry goods store” or just an everyday street.³ According to the editorial, for example, a thirteen-year-old “daughter of a widow” was enticed while “out to purchase a pair of shoes,” while another fourteen-year-old “daughter of a poor but honest and respectable man” was enticed by a “fast clerk in a dry goods store.” Both girls chronicled in the editorial are presumed to be in “den[s] of infamy,” despite the “fruitless” efforts to actually locate the girls.

This “abduction and seduction” editorial presages the rhetoric of the coming Progressive Era, during which reformers spewed arguments steeped in moral panic against immigration, urbanization, and the changing sexual and gendered views and practices at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ These arguments led to a slew of reforms at the local, state, and national level, many of which were directly aimed at

² “The City,” *Daily Picayune*, March 29, 1856.

³ “The City.”

⁴ See Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*. In it, David Langum locates Progressive reformers’ three main sites of social and legal reform as immigration, urbanization, and the changing attitudes toward sexual mores. I add gender to this mix, particularly since girls and women were entering the industrial labor force en masse and thereby altering the gendered expectations of working and lower class, as well as poor women and girls.

protecting children from dangerous working conditions, as well as sexual predation, along with a host of vaguely defined city “vices.” Although these reforms aimed to protect children, what constitutes the “protection” of children, or more specifically girls, remains a central question for scholars of girlhood, childhood, and the law. Additionally, many of the subsequent legal “protections” enacted—like the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910—often end(ed) up criminalizing and punishing both those it claims to protect, as well as other historically subjugated groups, like Black people (men, in particular), Jews, immigrants, poor, and/or working-class people.⁵

Interdisciplinary scholars continue to examine the discourse and effects of law, policy, and social mores that purport to protect children, specifically girls, from a host of dangers associated with modernity.⁶ Many of these same laws—including the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910—are still in effect today and rely on arguments about the dangers of modernity to support legislative responses to childhood protection that become central to the growing body of law governing girls’ bodies. In the wake of mass industrialization and urbanization across North America and Western Europe, for example, crusades emphasizing the need for laws preventing the exploitation of child labor emerge.⁷ Historian Crista Deluzio emphasizes the rapid industrialization and rise in immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century,

⁵ The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910—also called the Mann Act—is still a federal law and continues to be used in federal trafficking cases. I discuss the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 in the pages that follow. “Chapter 3: The Carceral Gaze of Girlhood: Sexualization, Whiteness, and the Storyville Girls,” will explore the act in more detail and address its relationship to the making of (white) girlhood.

⁶ See Ward, *The Black Child-Savers*.

⁷ For more on the establishment of child labor laws, see John A. Fliter, *Child Labor in America: The Epic Legal Struggle to Protect Children* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018).

marking the widespread panic of “the girl problem.” In her book *Female Adolescence in Scientific Thought, 1830-1930*, DeLuzio frames “the young, urban, immigrant working girl’s” emergence as an autonomous and sexualized being in public as a substantial threat to Victorian moral codes.⁸ The crux, however, of these cries for child protection rests in the linking of abduction and seduction to ideas about whiteness, femininity, sexual purity, and the city. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the white girl, specifically, was seen as being uniquely vulnerable to abduction. In this vulnerability, she was also primed for seduction by lecherous city men—often code for immigrants, Jews, men of color, and/or poor/working-class men. Furthermore, through this constructed idea of vulnerability, the white girl becomes all that is associated with girlhood; she becomes the “girl”—simultaneously innocent and dangerous, her innocence making her as sexually desirous.⁹ While the juridical response to “the girl problem” purports to protect girlhood from abduction and seduction, I argue this response actually constructed the category of girl as an unracialized legal subject but racialized as white and coded as upper-middle class, to criminalize and punish girls who strayed from the narrow and impossible categorization.¹⁰

According to the so-called “child savers” and other reformers, the modern city opens up the possibility for abduction and seduction. It thus facilitates the girl

⁸ Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 135.

⁹ For a discussion on Deleuze, Alice in Wonderland, and the construction of the girl through psycho-sexual development stages, see Driscoll, “The Little Girl.”

¹⁰ Sora Han elaborates on this in her deconstruction of the “fantasy of colorblindness” of America law. See Han, *Letters of the Law*.

problem. At the same time, narratives of abduction/seduction consolidate the girl subject into a sexually desirous yet helpless waif, instantiating her into law by way of property, marriage, slave, age of consent, labor, and vice laws.¹¹ In this chapter, I explore the legal history of girlhood in New Orleans to understand how New Orleans developed its modern girl problems. Rather than beginning my examination of the girl's emergence in the public sphere in the nineteenth century, like the plurality of studies on the girl problem, I start with the girl's emergence in the city of New Orleans in the eighteenth century with—as Jane Addams would say—“the first time they are being prized more for their labor power than for their innocence, their tender beauty, their ephemeral gaiety,” which is to say, through forced migration, kidnapping, enslavement, and sexual servitude.¹² Therefore, in examining the legal history of New Orleans's modern girl problems, I rely on an understanding of modernity tied to the long nineteenth century to include the French colonial and American antebellum periods.¹³ In this chapter, I examine legal documents, like French colonial edicts, writs of *habeas corpus*, city ordinances, state and federal case law, and the Louisiana Civil Code, to understand how narratives of abduction and

¹¹ Tony Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969).

¹² Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 5.

¹³ I am conceiving of modernity temporally as a period from the Enlightenment through the mid-twentieth century, focusing specifically on European settler colonialism in what is now the U.S. and the establishment of the system of racialized slavery in the U.S. as crucial markers of U.S. modernity. For a meditation on the Enlightenment epistemological transformation, the racialized “dynamics of colonizer/colonized,” and the making of the human subject, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling Coloniality.”

seduction pepper the growing body of laws establishing the legal subject of girl. In the pages that follow, I examine three episodes of “girl problems” in New Orleans and how the law shapes the contours of the legibility of the “girl,” rendering her as always already an emergent “problem” while simultaneously purporting to have solved said problem.

First, I examine colonial edicts and the abduction and seduction of girls for sexual servitude and enslavement as part of the colonial nation-building project in New France. I then consider the establishment of colonial and antebellum racial codes—from the French *Code Noir*, the Spanish *Código Negro*, and the American *Black Code*—on the practice of manumission, marriage across the color line, concubinage, and the establishment of the Civil Code and Supreme Court of Louisiana to consider how Black girlhoods were legally controlled. Finally, I look to the effects of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision alongside New Orleans’s Progressive reforms to understand how contemporary girlhood became carceral through centuries of abduction and seduction. By attending to what many socio-legal thinkers and cultural theorists have called “the violence of the law” in shaping girlhood, this chapter traces the figure of “girl” as she emerges—both through presence and absence—in legal texts about abduction and seduction for the past 200 years.¹⁴

¹⁴ Many scholars have explored the concept of the innate violence of the law. For an exploration of the law’s violence, see Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, *Law’s Violence*, The Amherst Series in Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). Lucinda Joy Peach uses Sarat and Kearns’s theory of the violence of the law to argue that the law is, in fact, violent, but its violence is gendered. See Lucinda Joy Peach, “Is Violence Male? The Law, Gender, and Violence,” in *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance*, Gender, Culture, and Global Politics (New York: Routledge, 2001). Saidiya Hartman also notes the law’s violence in her discussion of rape, enslaved women, and the inherent violence of slave law. See Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of*

The “Casket Girls” and *Venus*

According to local legend, the cosmological origins of contemporary Louisiana can be traced to the story of the “casket girls,” a narrative about how Louisiana came to be populated with white people. Functioning as a “first white child” story about France colonizing the Louisiana territories, the now numerous “casket girls” stories have become crucial—albeit often apocryphal—insights into the origins of not only white New Orleans (and Louisiana more broadly) but also white New Orleanian girlhood.¹⁵ Depending on who is telling (or struggling to recall) it, the “casket girls” story encapsulates what Sarah Ahmed calls the affect, or “the mark or trace,” of New Orleans: a story about sexuality, racial classifications, and Catholicism.¹⁶

A wide range of versions of the casket girl story circulate in books, on blogs, and through oral retellings. Some of these versions focus on the word “casket” as referencing coffins or burial objects. Of those versions, some tellers highlight the possibility that the girls purportedly brought burial caskets with them because they were vampires (thereby justifying mythic links between New Orleans and vampires).¹⁷ Other versions focus on the belief that the “casket girls” were sex

Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ For more on the “first white child,” see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, With a New Preface ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Second ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 6.

¹⁷ Of course, one of the most popular vampire books of the twentieth century is set in New Orleans: Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*.

workers in Paris who had been taken off the streets of Paris, incarcerated in Salpêtrière, and then sent to the occupied Louisiana territories in small casket-like containers. Others yet emphasize the importance of the Ursuline nuns who were sent as chaperones of these young girls and their caskets, or small wooden containers holding their clothing and other earthly belongings. Even Antoine François (Abbé) Prévost's 1731 novel, *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux, et de Manon Lescaut*, situates the titular character, Manon, as one of the casket girls, whose love of luxury leads her to engage in sex work which results in her eventual deportation to Louisiana from Paris, and finally her untimely death.¹⁸ Subsequently, Manon has become emblematic of New Orleans, an icon of a city with deep ties to France and a penchant for sordid tales of sex and crime. In *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819*, historian Thomas N. Ingersoll even claims, "Manon came to serve not only as a general eighteenth-century metaphor for the unimproved and degenerative Western Hemisphere but also as a symbol of deprivation, vice, and tyranny in New Orleans."¹⁹

These "casket girls" stories have historical foundations in *The Pénicaut Narrative*, which offers something closer to an unembellished accounting of the "casket girls"—who were a group of (white) French girls ostensibly incarcerated in the Hôpital Général de la Salpêtrière of Paris and sent, with small "caskets" or packs of clothing, to the French-occupied Louisiana territories to marry French men living

¹⁸ Abbé Prévost, *Manon Lescaut*. Translated by Donald M. Frame. (New York: Signet Classics, 1961).

¹⁹ Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 10.

there. Published in 1723, *The Pénicaut Narrative* functions as an annual report to the King of France chronicling the activities and exchanges between Paris and the Gulf colonies over roughly twenty years.²⁰ Although not published in English until 1952, it is considered (by the English translator) as “perhaps the best-sustained piece of literature portraying early French dominion in old Louisiana—that is, along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas and in the Mississippi Valley from the Balize to the Illinois Country.”²¹ While *The Pénicaut Narrative* consists of multiple tomes in many volumes, the text ends abruptly in 1721 when Pénicaut develops an eye infection, loses eyesight, and then departs back to France.²² Before the end of his annual report from that year, however, Pénicaut outlines the events surrounding the transport of 88 incarcerated girls in Paris and their journey from the infamous Hôpital Général de la Salpêtrière of Paris to the Gulf colony of the Louisiana region.²³

On the eighth of January of the year 1721, a flute named *La Baleine* came to the Isle-aux Vaisseaux roadstead and anchored. M. de Chateaugué came on it, to whom His Majesty had given, in France, the cross of Chevalier de St. Louis and who was bringing another for M. de St. Denis. On this ship was M. de la Harpe, of St. Malo, who had a concession established at the Cadodaquioux. Sister Gertrude, one of the officers of the Hôpital Général de la Salpêtrière of Paris, had also

²⁰ Andre Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana.*, ed. Richebourg McWilliams (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1988).

²¹ “Balize” refers to *La Balize*, a French colonial fort and settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi River. *La Balize* was considered a crucial colonial post, particularly for its ability to connect the Port of New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico. See Pénicaut, xxiii, the “Editor’s Introduction” for more on the translation process—apparently portions of the Pénicaut Narrative were translated by Benjamin Franklin.

²² Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 249.

²³ The Hôpital Général de la Salpêtrière of Paris, the notorious asylum for women in Paris is maybe most notable for being the research hospital where famed French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot taught for the majority of his career, and it was here that Freud came to study with him. For a discussion of “the girls of Salpêtrière,” see Olivier Walusinski, “The Girls of La Salpêtrière,” in *Frontiers of Neurology and Neuroscience*, vol. 35 (2014).

come on this ship, with eighty-eight girls from this hospital, all brought up in this house from infancy. Under Sister Gertrude's chaperonage, they had come to be married in the country; and each one had her dot, which consisted of two suits of clothing, two skirts and petticoats, six laced bodices, six chemises, six headdresses, and all other necessary accessories, with which they were well provided so that they could be married as quickly as possible in legitimate wedlock. This merchandise was soon distributed, so great was the dearth of it in the country; and if Sister Gertrude had brought ten times as much of it, she would have found a market for it in a short time.²⁴

The Pénicaut narrative explains the caskets of the “casket girls” stories to be each girl’s “dot,” which held their clothing so that they might be “married as quickly as possible in legitimate wedlock.” The girls were, in fact, abducted and then expected to be seduced by French men in the occupied Louisiana territories, their forced migration across the Atlantic leading to their sexual servitude. Those eighty-eight girls—the “merchandise” that was distributed throughout the occupied land—are given less detailed attention than the “six laced bodices” included in their “dots.” This lack of attention is not surprising because—of course—the “casket girls” story is not exceptional; there are countless examples of forced migration, relocation, concubinage, sexual assault, incarceration, and enslavement in histories across the Atlantic. In fact, in 1719, just three years before *La Baleine*'s journey across the Atlantic, the first enslaved people arrived in French-occupied Louisiana.²⁵ Saidiya Hartman explores the figure of the enslaved Black girl—who she calls “Venus”—across archives of slavery, noting her simultaneous ubiquity and effusiveness. In her

²⁴ Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 249.

²⁵ Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1994).

rumination on this dissonant archive, Hartman emphasizes the impossibility of knowing any of the Venuses because “there are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and have generated few stories.”²⁶ The Venusian epistemological impossibility stands in stark contrast to the countless versions of “casket girls” stories, a simultaneously titillating and cosmological set of tales about a bounded group of specific girls with backgrounds and futures. Likewise, New Orleanian girlhood is also shaped by what literary theorist Hartman calls “the silence in the archive” of narratives about enslaved Black women and girls surviving the Middle Passage.²⁷ Hartman notes the lack of information about the lives and experiences of enslaved women and girls outside the cargo lists and one legal indictment against slave ship captain charged with killing two enslaved girls. The handful of “casket girls” and their mythic stories live on, eclipsing the shadows of hundreds of thousands of present and absent Venuses. Their relationship, however, indexes this larger problem with histories of Louisiana girlhood, specifically its complex relationship to racialization and captivity. The practices of colonial captivity and enslavement—and/or abduction and seduction—both shaped and was shaped by the racial order of the French-occupied Louisiana Territories. However, the racial order and its methods of enforcement were increasingly complicated and changed relatively quickly with the implementation of the *Code Noir* of 1683 and 1724, the

²⁶ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 2.

²⁷ Hartman, 3.

Spanish occupation and their *Codigo Negro*, as well as gendered colonial attitudes toward Native and African peoples.

Despite what historian Jennifer Spear outlines as the growing prevalence of exogamous families between French men and Native/indigenous women, the population in French-controlled Louisiana was dwindling in the early eighteenth century. There were also hurdles to those exogamous marriages and a lengthy fight between colonial officials Henri Roulleaux de La Vente and Jean-Baptise Le Moyne about the legality of said marriages and the legal rights and racial classifications of potential offspring. As marriage between French men and Native/Indigenous women became more commonplace in the occupied Louisiana territories, however, Le Moyne mounted a campaign to sway French colonists against its acceptance. In fact, letters from colonial administrators begin swarming the royal court in France asking for French women to be sent to the colony, “stressing that only marriage to French women would encourage the colony’s young Frenchmen....to establish farms,” ensuring a more “stable and permanent colony based on family farming rather than a transient economy of Indian trade.”²⁸ Jennifer Spear notes, however, “most French women of the early eighteenth century...showed little inclination to migrate across the Atlantic for an uncertain life in an unfamiliar colony.”²⁹ After revoking a Louis XIV ban on “forced migration”—which did not include slavery— Louis XV (à la Phillippe duc d’Orléans as regent) allowed the first ship of unwilling immigrants,

²⁸ Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans*, Early America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 43.

²⁹ Spear, 43.

filled with “prisoners convicted of salt smuggling and women taken from the poor houses” to embark in 1717.³⁰ It was only after 1715, with Louis XIV’s death, that the metropole began issuing decrees against sex/marriage between French men and Native women and girls.³¹

However, the Native/indigenous girls, who willingly and unwillingly engaged in sex with French men, are also largely absent from both Louisiana cosmology and the official colonial records, despite colonial fear over their sexuality being one reason for the “casket girls”’ journey to the occupied Louisiana territories. Girlhood again emerges tied to the establishment of a citizenry, shrouded in a desire to perpetuate whiteness through a national investment in sexuality. Native/indigenous girls, specifically, were seen as both sexually alluring and improper. In fact, Pénicaut himself described the 18-year Natchitoches girl, Ouichil, as “the most beautiful of all the savage girls in the district” whose pleasurable “favors” he was most distressed to

³⁰ See Spear. It is also important to note who this “ban” included in the forced migration of bodies across the Atlantic, since the French involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was still occurring at that point. There are important parallels between slavery and the dispossession and genocide of indigenous/Native people in what are now the Americas as also part of this same project. Of course, all three are distinct, and the bigotry behind the forced movement and incarceration stem from different ideologies, goals, agendas, and understanding of the role of these people, not to mention the place of these people in the colony (world). Slavery and incarceration in the U.S., of course, have been explored, see Angela Y. Davis, “From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System,” in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Kim Gilmore, “Slavery and Prison - Understanding the Connections,” *Social Justice* 27, no. 3 (2000); William Banks Taylor, *Down on Parchman Farm: The Great Prison in the Mississippi Delta* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

³¹ French ideas about assimilation via intermarriage in New France were predicated on the widespread belief in *francisation* (Frenchification), which included legal edicts saying that anyone could become French. As Kimberly J. Lau points out, *francisation* was important for colonial expansion and settlements across North America and depended on the construction of the local Native/indigenous people “as culturally and economically inferior to Europeans,” see Kimberly J. Lau, “Imperial Marvels: Race and the Colonial Imagination in the Fairy Tales of Madame d’Aulnoy,” *Narrative Culture* 3, no. 2 (2016): 141.

leave behind after his winter sojourn.³² Despite frequent sexual interactions between even high-ranking French colonial officials and Native/indigenous girls, Native customs and sexual attitudes—which included an embrace of polygamy for both men and women, experimentation, independence, matrilineality, and divorce—were seen by the French as too sexually progressive, deeming Native/indigenous girls as “unsuitable brides for French men.”³³

It was in 1704, however—roughly twenty years before the ships of “unwilling immigrants” or *La Baleine* crossed the Atlantic—when the first group of white women was sent to French-occupied Louisiana as *épouseuses* (potential wives). All but one promptly found husbands and began their national duties of populating the colony. Eight years later, *La Baron de Fauche* arrived in French-occupied Louisiana carrying twelve girls. The crew included the new governor from France who was instructed to prevent the girls from engaging in “libertinage” or “debauchery” “in the discretion and modesty suited to their sex.”³⁴ These efforts were not successful, as “all sorts of debaucheries” were engaged on the journey to the colony and once there.³⁵ Complaints about the girls began to stir among the colonial officials. These girls were seen as the source of “libertinage, debauchery, jealousy, and quarrels,” unsuitable for French men to marry.³⁶ Officers in the Louisiana colony even proposed building “houses of correction” in which to “put” the girls who made “public

³² Spear, *Race*, 22.

³³ Spear, 28.

³⁴ Qtd. in Spear, 47.

³⁵ Spear, 48.

³⁶ Spear, 49.

scandal.”³⁷ These “correctional” facilities both reference the girls’ previous incarceration in Salpêtrière and gesture toward the eventual establishment of the House of the Good Shepherd and the contemporary juvenile justice system. In these examples, the establishment of French girlhood in the Louisiana territories is tied to the settler-colonial project of nation-building. Thus, the legal mechanisms of control and punishment are used to discipline girlhood into a tool of the state that can perpetuate swiftly changing ideas about Frenchness, racial order, nationality, gender, and sexuality. The imagination of a “correctional” facility to both punish, isolate, and correct the behavior of these future mothers of New France is intimately tied to the establishment of the subject category. Thus, the punitive response to girlhood is inscribed in the girl’s emergence as a viable legal category. Control, criminalization, and punishment are integral to the making of New Orleanian girlhood, tied to her legal baptism.

The girl’s appearance as a possible subject for the law to manage emerges alongside the state’s desire to manage other subjects as well. Thus, the “correction” of girlhood is predicated on the concept of an ideal subject that can come to be seen as the progenitor of the next generation; a pliable body with a fecund and open womb, ready to spread her legs only to a specific type of (white) man. Here, the “casket girls” embody that ideal girl subject in their imagining of a place that can “correct” the behavior of those who will become the foremothers of Louisiana. Yet, the “libertinage, debauchery, jealousy, and quarrels” that plagued both the journey and

³⁷ Spear, 49.

arrival of this new round of “casket girls” highlight the (im)possibility of that “corrective” incarceration. If the abduction and seduction—in this case, the forced migration and assumed sexual submission to a French man in the Louisiana colonies—was a way to “correct” the behavior of girls already incarcerated in Salpêtrière and still could not, how would a “correctional” facility achieve those means? With this, the binary opposition of criminal/innocent or bad/good is made clear as part of the law’s vested interest in creating a girl citizen whose body belongs to the state.

Both the lore and historical context of the “casket girls” story are important factors in the long and complicated history of the legal subject of girl in New Orleans. Not only is the legal girl subject informed by a historically contingent, regionally specific, and shifting understanding of racial categories, but it is also affected by the deep-rooted ideologies and traditions of Catholicism and the complicated approach to the state’s managing of sexuality. I do not begin with the “casket girls” story to reinforce its etiological significance but rather to unpack the prevalence of this story across New Orleans and the meaning that continues to shape how girlhood is imagined and managed in New Orleans today. That this story continues to hold importance in New Orleans participates in the erasure of both Native/indigenous girls who were likely forced and/or coerced into sexual and domestic relationships with French men and the African and/or Black girls violently kidnapped from their homes and forced into bondage. In fact, it is in this erasure that—first the cultural meaning of, then the legal making of—New Orleanian girlhood emerges.

Moreover, the forced migration of girls of Salpêtrière to the French Louisiana colonies as *épouseuses* encapsulates another essential part of this baptismal story: New Orleanian girlhood is always already carceral. I do not mean to employ a tautological argument; instead, I mention this because those “casket girls”—the “first” white girls of French-occupied Louisiana, so celebrated for their sexual debauchery, Catholicism, or possible closeness to death—were already incarcerated before their kidnapping, migration, and forced marriages. The girls of Salpêtrière are all “the abandoned children—orphans or illegitimates—of prostitutes or ‘kept’ women who had been inmates in that house of correction.”³⁸ Salpêtrière thus functions as a model for all the houses of correction, reformatories, convents, orphanages, and juvenile halls to come. In fact, these “casket girls” emerge as a new kind of subject—colonial, Louisiana, trans-Atlantic, pathological, carceral.

New Orleans’s relationship to both race and Catholicism is key to understanding the laws that governed and managed the idea of girlhood. Despite the dichotomous Black/white binary prevalent across the rest of the Jim Crow South, New Orleans has always had a complicated relationship to racial categorization. As I previously noted above, the “casket girls” local legend is essentially a story about the complexities of race, colonialism, and exogamous marriage. Likewise, I employ the term “the color line”—as many other scholars do—to emphasize the fact that racial formations were actively being created and contested for the better part of 200

³⁸ Pénicaud, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 249.

years.³⁹ How race was both imagined and managed by New Orleans coalesced with Catholicism to create a regime of power that closely monitored and governed girls' bodies.⁴⁰ From *Code Noir* to the House of the Good Shepherd, New Orleans's first reformatory for sexually delinquent girls, the management of race, sexuality, and religion are foundational to creating the legal girl subject.

Racialization and the Empire's Management of Catholic Girls

Much like the complicated history of the occupied Louisiana territories, the competing desires of France, Spain, and the U.S. in managing Blackness were instrumental in shaping the legacies of racialization and sexuality. From 1685 to 1724, France imposed two versions of the *Code Noir* on occupied Louisiana territories; in 1777 and 1784, Spain imposed *Codigo Negro*; and in 1806 "the legislature of the Territory of Orleans enacted a comprehensive *Black Code*."⁴¹ These codes governed and shaped the scope and possibility of Black life in the occupied Louisiana territories, outlining the specific ways each colonial power viewed Blackness within its jurisdiction. The *Code Noir*, which historian Tyler Stovall calls

³⁹ Most famously perhaps, W.E.B. DuBois uses the term "the color line" in his opening to *The Souls of Black Folks*, when he begins, "This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of color line," see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For more on the term, "sex across the color line," see Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁴⁰ "Chapter 2: 'Proud to be Among the Very First to Desegregate:' Imagining/managing Racial Difference, Black Girlhood, and Catholicism at the House of the Good Shepherd" offers a close analysis on the management of racial difference within Catholic churches and schools in New Orleans, by looking closely at the House of the Good Shepherd's relationship to racial integration within its carceral walls.

⁴¹ Judith Kelleher Schafer, "Roman Roots of the Louisiana Law of Slavery: Emancipation in American Louisiana, 1803-1857," *Louisiana Law Review* 56, no. 2 (1995): 413.

“the most extensive official documents on race, slavery, and freedom ever drawn up in Europe,” not only details regulations on slave life but defines the “very nature of blackness” in French-occupied colonies.⁴² Because of this extensiveness in documenting the legal constraints and possibilities of Blackness, *Code Noir* is crucial to understanding the legal history of girlhood—particularly Black girlhood—in Louisiana.

Not only did all of these codes dictate the legal regulations on manumission and slavery, the *Code Noir* and *Codigo Negro* specifically outlined the relationship between the Catholic Church and the new colony. In 1724, the Superior Court of Louisiana registered the royal *Edict of March 1724*, later known as the *Code Noir de Louisiane*. It established a set of rules for how the occupied French territories should manage the enslavement of Black people while spreading Catholicism. In 55 articles, the *Code Noir* legally dictated how Black people—both free and enslaved—could live within the occupied Louisiana territories. Additionally, the 1724 *Code Noir* sets specific rules regulating the practice of religion across French-occupied territories, forcing enslaved people of color and *gens du couleur libres* (free people of color) to be baptized and instructed as Catholics.⁴³ Historian Emily Clark explains that Louis XIV used Catholicism “as an instrument of national consolidation,” which combined

⁴² Tyler Stovall, “Race and the Making of the Nation: Blacks in Modern France,” in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, ed. Michael A. Gomez (New York: New York University Press, 2006). For more on Black life in New Orleans specifically, see Jessica Marie Johnson, “Black New Orleans Is the Center of the World.” *The Journal of African American History* 103, no. 4 (September 2018): 641–51.

⁴³ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

with his personal “search for salvation through the propagation of the faith” and resulted in “an aggressively inclusive church.”⁴⁴

Louis XIV’s agenda of the “aggressively inclusive church” spread throughout French-occupied Louisiana territories in the form of Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns establishing monasteries and convents during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, the first Ursuline Convent in Louisiana opened in the French Quarter in 1727 and offered free education to free and enslaved girls and women of color, often in racially mixed spaces, taught by white nuns.⁴⁵ This is not to say the Ursulines were strident abolitionists or interested in racial justice. Still, as historian Walter Stern points out, “to a greater extent than any other group in the city and arguably the whole of colonial North America, the Ursulines demonstrated the capacity of schooling to subvert and shape the social and racial order.”⁴⁶ However, the Louisiana Ursulines did own slaves and directly participated in slave economies and the sugar trade. They also ran an orphanage and school that served white girls and free girls of color. But when local Spanish colonial authorities heard whisperings of an all but integrated school where free girls of color had access to nicer clothes and provisions than white orphan girls, the Ursulines were forced to shut down their orphanage.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Clark, 166.

⁴⁵ In “Chapter 2: ‘Proud to be Among the Very First to Desegregate:’ Imagining/managing Racial Difference, Black Girlhood, and Catholicism at the House of the Good Shepherd,” I discuss the Ursuline convent and the relationship between Catholicism and Blackness in Louisiana in greater depth.

⁴⁶ Walter C. Stern, *Race and Education in New Orleans: Creating the Segregated City, 1764-1960* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2018), 25.

⁴⁷ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 255.

The French *Code Noir*, however, would not remain the law of the land for long. In 1763, Spain took control of the occupied Louisiana territories and established the *Codigo Negro*, which was based on similar Roman approaches to slave laws but was considerably more lenient in the process of manumitting enslaved people. The leniency was a result of the Spanish practice of *coartación*, or the right to self-purchase. The practice of *coartación* was upheld in courts during the Spanish colonial period, despite the French *Code Noir* explicitly prohibiting the right to self-purchase. Even though the territories returned to French control in 1801, France did not take possession of them until November 30, 1803. The *Code Noir* was reestablished for a mere twenty days before the U.S. took control of the Louisiana territories after purchasing the land for 15 million dollars from France, but the colonies did not seem to know about the re-establishment of the *Code Noir*, or they simply ignored it. In fact, from 1803 to 1806, approximately two hundred enslaved people “gained their freedom by either self-purchase or manumission.”⁴⁸ From 1763 to 1806, when Thomas Jefferson appointed Virginia attorney, William C. C. Claiborne as the first territorial governor of Louisiana to help enforce American common law, the occupied Louisiana territories mostly operated under a unique legal system that depended on both the Civil Code and *Codigo Negro*.

After the U.S. acquired the land, the American *Black Code* replaced the short-lived second-round of the *Code Noir* and presented some complicated legal issues for both Louisianans used to civil-law and American lawyers and judges trained in

⁴⁸ Schafer, *Slavery*, 3.

common-law.⁴⁹ At that point, the people of Louisiana were accustomed to the Louisiana Civil Code, tied directly to their specific French and Spanish colonial pasts; this presented a problem for the American common-law system once Louisiana joined the union. Louisianans “feared the imposition of the American common-law system, which not only was in a language foreign to many of the inhabitants, it was also based on decisions made by judges—British or American judges at that—rather than upon a written code of law.”⁵⁰ The 1812 Louisiana constitution established the Supreme Court of Louisiana while simultaneously addressing Louisianans’ skepticism of common-law institutions. In attempting to “minimize judicial discretion by binding the high court [the Supreme Court of Louisiana] to the Civil Code and legislative acts,” the 1812 state constitution affirms: “The Legislature shall never adopt any system or code of laws, by a general reference to the said system or code; but in all cases, shall specify the several provisions of the law it may enact.”⁵¹ Louisiana’s continued reliance on the Civil Code presents some complicated and surprising legal decisions that end up affecting the construction of girlhood. The antebellum Louisiana Civil Code, for example, set the age of “full majority” at twenty-one years old, meaning people under the age of twenty-one needed the consent of both their mother and father to marry. At the same time, the Civil Code

⁴⁹ Although it was short-lived in Louisiana, the *Code Noir* of 1724 continued to pertain to other French colonies. With the U.S. purchase of the Louisiana territories, the American *Black Code* replaced the French *Code Noir* in the Louisiana Territory.

⁵⁰ Schafer, *Slavery*, 16.

⁵¹ Schafer, *Slavery*, 16; Henry Plauché Dart, ed. *Constitutions of the State of Louisiana*, Art. IV, Sec. 11, p. 504.

also stipulated that the age a person could consent to sexual relations was twelve, thereby concluding that rape included a person over twelve years old having sex with a person under twelve. As legal historian Judith Kelleher Schafer points out, this portion of the Civil Code did “specify several provisions” for judges and recorders who were considering the fate of girls who were brought before them on charges of sex work. As a result, judges and recorders operated with sixteen as the de facto age of consent in Louisiana. They thus did not sentence girls sixteen and over to the workhouse if they were already working at a brothel.⁵² These decisions became a kind of proto juvenile court. They presaged what was to come in during the height of Storyville’s—the infamous red-light district during the turn of the twentieth century—existence. In fact, these decisions showcased the transition to a more common-law system, rather than strict adherence to the Civil Code, particularly with the management and punishment of girls. However, judges’ and recorders’ ideas about the presumed sexual maturity of girls were influenced by white supremacy and the specific forms of mid-nineteenth century misogynoir, which saw the adultification of Black girls and girls of color.⁵³ In 1859, for example, free woman of color Catherine Albert filed an affidavit which claimed that Josephine Joubert, a fifteen-year-old girl of color, “was harbored in a certain house of ill fame kept by another”

⁵² Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2009).

⁵³ Recent interdisciplinary research explores adultification, punishment, and the disproportionate punitive effects on Black girls. See Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia González, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood” (Georgetown: Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law, June 2020); Connie Wun, “Against Captivity: Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Educational Policy* 30, no. 1 (January 2016).

woman of color. Albert asked for Joubert's arrest, but Recorder Henry M. Summers refused, establishing "her right to take care of herself," discharging her from custody.⁵⁴ In this case, the Black girl is established as an adult earlier than the white girl. In the recorder's refusal to incarcerate her to the workhouse, she is legally allowed to stay in the brothel, even though white fifteen-year-olds would be considered wards of the state and cared for by the state. While the sentencing of girls under sixteen to the workhouse for sex work was a relatively new phenomenon, the "casket girls" and Venuses remind us of the long history of sexual enslavement, coercion, and carcerality that was foundationally part of the establishment of Louisiana.⁵⁵

The adoption of the *Code Noir* in 1724 comes three years after what local colonial officials saw as the crises of sex across the color line in the occupied Louisiana territories and early waves of "casket girls" arriving in New Orleans. In fact, the 1685 *Code Noir* did not forbid marriage or sex across the color line. It was not until the formal adoption of the 1724—after the "casket girls'" voyages across the Atlantic—that marriage across the color line was strictly forbidden. When the 1724 *Code Noir* eventually banned marriage across the color line, concubinage laws were often invoked in cases of enslaved women manumitted by the slave owner's will. This specific form of concubinage was institutionalized as *plaçage*, where a "white

⁵⁴ Schafer, *Brothels*, 48.

⁵⁵ In one example from 1853, the city sentenced a girl to the House of Refuge because she lived in a brothel managed by her mother. After her mother sued for a writ of habeas corpus, the Fifth District Court ruled against her, claiming she was "not a fit person to have custody and guardianship of her daughter." See Schafer, *Brothels*, 49; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 18 June 1853.

man provided a house and support for his mistress and any children that might result from the liaison.”⁵⁶ Concubinage laws, however, presented a new series of complications to cases of manumission by will because they relied on the flawed and absurd logic of the *Black Code*. The *Black Code* of 1806, for example, stipulated two qualifications for manumission: the first qualification specified that the enslaved person had been of “honest conduct” for four years before emancipation, and the second mandated they were at least thirty years old.⁵⁷ The latter qualification became an obstacle in manumitting children and families, all but ensuring the perpetual enslavement of all girls born into slavery. The age requirement was a holdover from Roman Slave Laws embedded in the *Code Noir*. Still, in 1827, the Louisiana legislature amended the age requirement by offering a loophole allowing enslaved people under the age of 30 to be freed if “given permission by the judge and police jury of the parish of the owner, providing the slave was a native of the state.”⁵⁸ These exceptions were exceedingly rare and depended on the clout of the former slave owner and his relationship to the Supreme Court of Louisiana.

In the antebellum years that followed, the legislature amended manumission laws. Some of these laws presented new obstacles to the manumission procedure, and others softened the rules. Several manumission cases were argued in front of the newly formed Supreme Court of Louisiana involving white slave-owning men’s posthumous attempts to free their enslaved “mistresses” and children. These cases, as

⁵⁶ Schafer, *Brothels*, 31.

⁵⁷ Schafer, *Slavery*, 181.

⁵⁸ Schafer, *Slavery*, 181.

Schafer explains, “usually arose from squabbles over inheritances and legacies left in the will” but still came to shape the subjective legal boundaries for many enslaved girls.⁵⁹ These “squabbles” were common because manumission cases like this faced considerable obstacles from the *Civil Code*, which explicitly regulated concubinage through the stipulation of “forced heirship.”

Forced heirship required that “descending heirs,” or children born from marriage, receive a “specified portion of the property of the deceased parent or grandparent.” Hartman notes the court’s designation of enslaved children as “neither... legitimate nor bastards but as simply ‘not legitimate.’”⁶⁰ In cases where a person dies without descending heirs, their parents—if alive—become “ascending heirs” and automatically inherit portions of their property. Thus, forced heirship in manumission cases legally obscured the existence of “family” who were not tied through blood or marriage. In cases without forced heirs, however, the Civil Code presented another obstacle: immovable property. Article 1468 of the Civil Code forbids “donations of immovables” between couples living in “open concubinage” relationships both *inter vivos* (during life) and *mortis causa* (after death), and since enslaved people were considered “immovables,” they could not be freed. The system of slavery is predicated on that inherent contradiction of the enslaved person as both person and property and, as Hartman explains, “was instrumental in maintaining the dominance of the slave-owning class.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Schafer, *Slavery*, 184.

⁶⁰ The Civil Code describes forced heirs always as “legitimate.” Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 100.

⁶¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 93.

Despite the countless legal obstacles of manumission, Louisiana had one of the largest population of *gens du couleur libres* as well as a complex and unique racial code based on the perception of color, ancestry, lineage, and family history.⁶² Of course, this did not mean that *gens de couleur libres*, often understood to be of a “third racial class,” did not experience racialized state violence.⁶³ In fact, *State v. Harrison* (1856) expressed the idea that free people of color were foundationally different than enslaved people, with a difference akin to that between white men and enslaved Black people.⁶⁴ Laws were passed at the local, state, and federal level to limit their economic power and exploit their labor. At the same time, the proliferation of prostitution through legally designated vice zones combined with the increasingly complex *Black Code* marked New Orleans as a place that trafficked in girls of color explicitly for the pleasure of white men. Putting these relationships alongside the burgeoning national legality of the Jim Crow Era, New Orleans’s girl problem was at once utterly unique, as well as a proxy for the rest of the U.S.

The progression from the French *Code Noir* to the Spanish *Codigo Negro*, then back to the revised French *Code Noir*, and finally to the American *Black Code*

⁶² See Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1992); James H. Dormon, ed., *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Joan M. Martin, “Paçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Denied the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000); Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, “People of Color in Louisiana,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000); Fehintola Mosadomi, “The Origin of Louisiana Creole,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000); Spear, *Race*.

⁶³ Arthé Anthony, “‘Lost Boundaries:’ Racial Passing and Poverty in Segregated New Orleans,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000), 300.

⁶⁴ Schafer, *Slavery*, 21.

showcases the growing legal management of racial categories and Blackness in particular. While the word “girl” is rarely, if ever, mentioned directly, laws on slavery, manumission, and plaçage all come to shape the possibilities of existence for both free and enslaved Black girls. Although the laws that follow the antebellum regulations of sexuality and race will come to assume whiteness in the legal construction of the category, these laws all shaped the possibility of girlhood in the years that follow. The legal category of girl emerges after the public existence of people who may be labeled as “girl.” As a result—unlike with the category of women—girlhood is ascribed to people who later may not come to be included in her racist and classist legal construction.

Age of Consent & Habeas Corpus

In 1878, New Orleans suffered a horrific Yellow Fever epidemic that claimed almost five thousand lives in the area, just one year after the last Union troops finally left Louisiana as the formal period of Reconstruction ended.⁶⁵ The city was still reeling from the violence and damage of the Civil War and the subsequent white supremacist terror that plagued its streets. The 1880 election of Joseph Shakespeare, who campaigned on promises of Progressive reforms, ushered in signs of social and economic shifts: the formation of the Auxiliary Sanitary Association aimed at thwarting the spread of other epidemics, the construction of jetties at the mouth of the Mississippi River opening the Port of New Orleans to larger ships for trade and

⁶⁵ Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1969), 4.

commerce, and the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad linking the West Coast to New Orleans. In 1884, New Orleans even hosted the Cotton Centennial Exposition to show off the economic gains made in New Orleans in the aftermath of the war.

The World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition opened in December of 1884, publicly understood to commemorate the first international shipment of one bale of cotton in 1784. Yet, it is colloquially understood to be a kind of public emergence for New Orleans to be seen as a competing city in the national urban landscape. Despite the completion of the railroads, the Exposition was deemed a financial failure, as it was forced to open before completion due to several workers strikes and a fight with Philadelphia over borrowing the Liberty Bell (spawning fear in the North that Louisiana might melt down the bell, then "cast a statue of Jefferson Davis"). At the same time, many people opted out, still fearful of Yellow Fever.⁶⁶

In many ways, the preparation for the Exposition brought about Progressive reforms in the form of prohibition laws, prostitution regulation, and a rising age of consent. In 1880, the first of such laws went into effect under the first Shakespeare administration in the form of a city ordinance that required all barrooms to close at midnight. Around the same time, in 1886, the temperance movement began to gain momentum with the state legislature passing Sunday closing laws, which were widely ignored in New Orleans. In 1889, the city council passed a law making it illegal for sex workers to live on Canal Street; in 1891, they were forbidden to enter a public

⁶⁶ J. Jackson, *Gilded Age*, 6.

cabaret and drink. In 1895, an initial law was passed to limit the area's brothels within the city limits.

In 1896, the landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the constitutionality of what Justice Henry Billings Brown called "separate but equal." The result, of course, was the establishment of Jim Crow laws throughout the U.S. that prohibited Black people from accessing the same places and opportunities as white people. Shortly after this decision, a weeklong uprising and violent response broke out across New Orleans, provoked by egregious police violence against two men of color.⁶⁷ While the effects of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision had a clear impact on the everyday reality of safety and mobility for people of color in New Orleans, they also affected the zoning and legality of the sale and purchase of sex. In fact, historian Alecia P. Long claims that "prostitution ordinances were the city's first residential segregation ordinances—enforced not on the basis of race but on the basis of gender, occupation, and the public identification of a woman as a prostitute."⁶⁸ The containment of a smallpox epidemic was to blame for the initial panic over the sequestering of sex workers to specific portions of the city, and "physical segregation was a popular solution to a range of social problems at the turn of the twentieth century, including the spread of disease, race relations, and prostitution."⁶⁹ Earlier

⁶⁷ See Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, and Other Lynching Statistics* (1900); William Ivy Hair and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2004), 103.

⁶⁹ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 103.

that same year, the board of health in New Orleans limited the mobility of many Black people into and out of the city for what they claimed to be a way to thwart the spread of disease.

A year after the *Plessy* decision, the Story Ordinances, a series of city ordinances in response to a local court case, *L'Hote v. City of New Orleans* that legalized zones of prostitution, were passed. The Story Ordinances were city leaders' way of appeasing both the reformers angry at the prevalence of sex for sale—particularly so close to the city's central train station—and the businesses of Storyville, which supplied revenue to many disparate people of the city (including the city leaders themselves).⁷⁰ The Story Ordinances established two legal vice districts for the practice of prostitution in the city. The “Uptown District” was explicitly for men of color interested in partaking in the purchase of sex from sex workers of color. Still, much to the chagrin of Progressive reformers, the racial segregation of the districts was hardly practiced and never enforced. The Story Ordinances were not the only attempts at further securing control over New Orleanians of color. An 1870 Louisiana state law that had legalized interracial marriage was revoked in 1894, and many new state laws were written that explicitly outlawed long-term interracial relationships.⁷¹

⁷⁰ “Chapter 4: ‘Unusual Situations and Remarkable People:’ Mary Deubler, Respectability, and the History of Storyville,” in Long’s *The Great Southern Babylon* offers examples of how money flowed in and out of Storyville by way of wealthy “respectable” New Orleanian politicians and entrepreneurs. Therefore, it was also in their financial (and sexual) interest to preserve the red-light district.

⁷¹ Long *Great Southern Babylon*, 209.

In the wake of Shakespeare's election as mayor, the growing group of Progressive reformers who saw prostitution, gambling, and alcohol as the three central vices that plague cities and contributed to the degradation of (Protestant) morality also targeted sex across the color line in their attempts at eradicating the so-called vice from cities. The state legislature, influenced by Prohibition enthusiasts in the form of representatives from northern, heavily Protestant Louisiana, passed the 1908 Gay-Shattuck Law, "designed to forestall prohibition through liquor regulation and to remove women from all places where liquor was sold and consumed."⁷² Part of this ordinance also stipulated that Black and white people could no longer be served alcoholic beverages in the same establishments and prohibited musical instruments and performances from saloons. The Gay-Shattuck Law effectively criminalized business owners, Black New Orleanians, and women who just wanted a drink. The police swiftly enforced the Gay-Shattuck Law, and many of the Storyville establishments saw lulls in their businesses beginning in early 1909. City leaders saw the best compromise for addressing reformers' demands to control the city's vice while protecting (many of their personal) Storyville business interests was to enforce racial segregation. To this end, the city passed another ordinance that reinforced the initial 1897 racial segregation of the districts, this time explicitly directing both Black and mixed-race sex workers to not only work north of Canal Street in the "Uptown District" but to move their residences there as well. Ordinance 4118 C.C.S. was

⁷² Long, 181.

passed in February 1917 and sought to enforce the line between the two existing Storyville districts more robustly.

Enforcing the color line of the Storyvilles did not do much to satisfy the growing Progressive movement. As part of this movement, white women were overwhelmingly becoming politically active in attempts to curb what they saw as the threats of “abduction and seduction” in the form of city vices. During the late nineteenth century, women’s groups formed to facilitate this kind of political activism, which also included a concern for white girls who could be “abducted and seduced” in what was called “white slavery.” The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 was passed to address this rising cacophony of (white) reformers clamoring about what they saw as an urgent and overwhelmingly prevalent problem of the so-called sex trafficking of white girls. Mass hysteria and moral panic spread through the release of movies and the publication of books exaggerating and inventing events of white girls being abducted and seduced. Still, the definition of “white slavery” was quite vague. As legal historian David J. Langum explains, the term “white slavery” “varied in meaning from coerced, imprisoned women to a psychological bondage to purely voluntary prostitution.”⁷³ Additionally, the term “white slavery” clearly gestures toward a racial panic with the qualifier “white” placed in front of “slavery” so as to equate this largely invented crisis with the horrific atrocity of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of people of African descent, while also intending to further entrench white supremacy across the Jim Crow U.S. by stoking

⁷³ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 34.

fear about white girls being treated like enslaved Black people. In this way, the panic over and response to “white slavery” can be seen as a white supremacist political project that used the bodies of white girls to cement racial divisions, resentment, and violence.

As evidenced in my opening example of the 1856 *Daily Picayune* editorial, the panic over girls’ “abduction and seduction” began before the more widely accepted emergence of the Progressive movement after Reconstruction. Early responses to this panic can be seen in the formation of homosocial institutions segregated by gender, meant to keep girls (and boys) busy and out of the public sphere. From 1859 to 1866, for example, the Order of the Good Shepherd worked to establish their community of nuns in New Orleans. The Order of the Good Shepherd is, in many ways, also dedicated to thwarting the abduction and seduction of girls. In fact, the Order of the Good Shepherd locates its roots in a French seventeenth-century community of cloistered nuns called the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, headed by Sister Mary Euphrasia. In the early nineteenth century, before venturing to the U.S., a group of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge broke off to form the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, whose goal was to help “girls who have been abused by the consequences of other people’s sins.”⁷⁴ This original mission functioned as the backbone of the order’s work, and their reformatories spread across the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. And very quickly after the establishment of the Order of the Good Shepherd, Houses of the Good Shepherd began to spread across

⁷⁴ Interview with Sister Kelley.

the world, pledging “to labor for the salvation of souls.”⁷⁵ In 1873, shortly after its New Orleans opening, the House of the Good Shepherd saw a steady increase in its numbers of “inmates”—as the census described them. This is the same year that “Black children” were admitted to the institution in separate facilities.⁷⁶ Later that year, City Ordinance 2207 legally dictated the transport of adolescent girls from the municipal (and secular) House of Refuge to the Catholic House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans.⁷⁷

Four years later, the Mayoralty of New Orleans issued another ordinance “to create a commission for the management of the Boy’s House of Refuge.”⁷⁸ Although not included in the title, the girls’ “house of refuge” was also of concern to this newly formed commission. Rather than specifying who got to join the board of said commission, however, Section 7 of the city ordinance designated what happened to youth:

all children found pilfering, all children found begging within the limits of this city; all children found gathering waste merchandise, lost or refuse articles, unless the same be the property of their guardians, employers or parents; all children engaged in any occupation dangerous to the morals, or of a tendency to produce habits of idleness and vice; all children who are left in idleness and attend no school; all children abandoned to themselves, or who are not provided for by their parents with the protection and care which the law requires, shall be deemed juvenile vagrants, and shall be brought before the Mayor or any other

⁷⁵ Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*, 143.

⁷⁶ Sister Mary Our Lady of Angels Quirk, “If I Forget Thee -’ The History of the Saint Louis Province of The Sisters of the Good Shepherd 1849-1976.” Self-Published by the Order of the Good Shepherd, 1977.

⁷⁷ According to the “Synopsis of City Ordinances from New Orleans Public Library Finding Aide,” listed under “House of Refuge—House of the Good Shepherd” and enacted in 1873; the synopsis claims the ordinance transferred “the inmates from the House of Refuge to the House of the Good Shepherd.” (2207 AS).

⁷⁸ City Ordinance of New Orleans, 2207 AS, 1873.

competent court, and shall be disposed of according to the laws establishing houses of juvenile delinquents and vagrants. All males shall be committed to the Boys' House of Refuge and the females to the House of the Good Shepherd.⁷⁹

Before the establishment of the juvenile courts in 1909, dealing with criminal girlhood was complicated, unclear, and in many ways unprecedented; families would send girls of the household to the House of the Good Shepherd, primarily as unwed mothers. According to the 1898 *Annual Report of the Board of Prisons and Asylums of New Orleans*, anyone arrested, despite age or race, mingled together in the Orleans Parish Prison's courtyard while awaiting trial. Historian Joy Jackson emphasizes how startling this was: "a little girl arrested for removing flowers from a grave in a city cemetery was locked up pending trial as if she were an adult thief."⁸⁰ All this began to change with the widespread Progressive reforms implemented by Shakespeare in 1880. And shortly thereafter, the juvenile court system began to flex its municipal power by sentencing girls to residence there for cases of "sexual delinquency" and even political subversion.⁸¹

While the juvenile courts would not open for another twenty years, at this point the House of the Good Shepherd became the de facto city and court-approved site of sentencing for girl offenders convicted of "sexual delinquency." Yet, the definition of "sexual delinquency" was simultaneously vague and expansive and could include any girl who even hinted at sexual transgression, which could consist of

⁷⁹ City Ordinance of New Orleans, 2207 AS, 1873.

⁸⁰ J. Jackson, *Gilded Age*, 242.

⁸¹ City Ordinance of New Orleans, 2207 AS, 1873.

looking a certain way or being in specific neighborhoods at the “wrong” times, and included vague charges such as “wayward,” “incorrigible,” and “truant.”⁸²

Additionally, rape, sexual assault, and molestation were considered sexual transgressions that often led to the incarceration of girls instead of their perpetrators under the guise of “protection.” The policing and subsequent incarceration of girls were compounded by the growing influence of Progressive Era-reform politics, including the zoning and regulation of prostitution and raising the age of consent from twelve to fourteen in 1884. These legal changes were more legally complicated than they might seem, as the law *de jure* changed in the *Civil Code*. Still, the practice of judges and recorders (before 1909) set the *de facto* age of consent for white girls to sixteen, with a more fungible approach to the presumed age of consent for girls of color. To be clear, however, the change in the age of (sexual) consent at the time when prostitution was still legal in New Orleans set a maximum age for which the state could no longer incarcerate girls for their sexuality. And yet, even after the upward movement of the age of consent to fourteen in 1884—widely considered by progressives, reformers, and even many readers today as progress—girls continue to experience rape, assault, molestation, sexual coercion, and adult women, of course, are to this day incarcerated for sexual transgressions. So why did these age of consent laws not work to stop sexual violence? Joseph J. Fischel has argued that these age of consent laws do not work in part because of how they fail to conceptualize “sexual

⁸² This is according to countless newspapers articles and court cases about girls who were sentenced to the House of the Good Shepherd around this time, for an example, see K.K. Blackmar, “A Women’s City,” *Daily Picayune*, November 10, 1912.

autonomy,” which for him, “avoid[s] two persistent juridical embroilments: sacralizing (and consequently pacifying) the (female) body and overstressing ‘proper’ levels of force and/or consent.”⁸³ To uphold white, Protestant middle-class ideologies invested in protection, purity, and piety, Progressive-era reformers in the U.S. began the process of policing and pathologizing the girl subject. In many ways, these Progressive ideologies exemplified the “sacralizing of the (female) body” by delineating not only the “‘proper’ levels of force and/or consent,” but also the “‘proper’” time for force and/or consent.

Among the reformers attempted to address “girl problems” was Jane Addams. Her Hull House settlement was offered as a shelter, home, and school for immigrant working youth in Chicago in the early twentieth century. As Jane Addams’s Hull House sought to churn out productive young members of urban society through her doctrine of social work, the emergent (and relatively new) sciences of psychiatry, psychopathy, and eugenics forged a new model of the pathological girl—a model obsessed with the girl’s race, class and sexuality.

In her book *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, Addams presents her theories on the girl through a characterization of two immigrant working girls walking in Chicago:

Apparently, the modern city sees in these girls only two possibilities, both of them commercial: first, a chance to utilize by day their new and tender labor power in its factories and shops, and then another chance in the evening to extract from them their petty wages by pandering to their love of pleasure. As these overworked girls stream along the street, the rest of us see only the self-

⁸³ Joseph J. Fischel, *Sex and Harm in the Age of Consent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 94.

conscious walk, the giggling speech, the preposterous clothing. And yet through the huge hat, with its wilderness of bedraggled feathers, the girl announces to the world that she is here. She demands attention to the fact of her existence, she states that she is ready to live, to take her place in the world. The most precious moment in human development is the young creature's assertion that he is unlike any other human being, and has an individual contribution to make to the world.⁸⁴

Although Addams is aware of the girl's limited subject positions (as either laborer or consumer) and sympathetic to her newfound subjecthood ("the girl announces to the world that she is here, she demands attention to the fact of her existence and states that she is ready to live"), she characterizes the girl as ridiculous (her "preposterous clothing and huge hat with...bedraggled feathers"), petty ("self-conscious walk and giggling speech") and naïve (the "most precious moment...is the young creature's assertion that [she] is unlike any other human being"). Despite Addams's construction of the girl as ridiculous, petty, and naive, Addams also opens up a possibility of a different kind of subjecthood—outside of abduction and seduction—for the girl. Addams's girl "announces to the world she is here...she demands attention to the fact of her existence, she states that she is ready to live, to take her place in the world" and in doing so creates a new kind of girlhood—a refusal of abduction due to her frailty, a refusal of her seduction by lecherous men. Although she naively asserts that she "is unlike any other human being," Addams's girl insists she has an "individual contribution to make to the world" and thus transcends the problems of being. These problems sacralize her body and designate "proper" force

⁸⁴ Addams, *The Spirit of Youth*, 8.

and/or consent for her body to experience/exert. Maybe Addams's girl, in "pandering to [her] love of pleasure," is closer to sexual autonomy than initially thought?

The law's construction of girlhood and the social/cultural concept of girlhood are co-constitutive; they shape and perpetuate each other, redefining its boundaries and meanings. Yet, it is in this tautological making of legal and social/cultural girlhood that the "girl" becomes what Hartman would call "a known referent, an a priori unity, a precise bundle of easily recognizable characteristics, traits, and dispositions."⁸⁵ However, in this assumption of knowable girlhood, Hartman warns that "we fail to attend to the contingent and disjunctive production of the category."⁸⁶

This chapter attends to that production by considering the legal making of the category of girl in Louisiana over the past 300 years. Despite the obvious lacunae in any legal history spanning such a significant passage of time, the girls' presence and absence within these histories illuminate how Louisiana and New Orleans specifically legislated girlhood even in cases when it did not use the term "girl." In fact, "girl" remains largely absent from most of the case law and legislation explored in this chapters, and yet, all of these laws—particularly around "abduction and seduction"—come to shape the legal subject category of the girl, which, in turn, shapes the social/cultural concept of girlhood. The problem with the concept of girlhood is that it then determines how actual people interpolated as belonging to girlhood are regulated, controlled, and managed.

⁸⁵ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 99.

⁸⁶ Hartman, 99.

Chapter 2: “Proud to be Among the Very First to Desegregate:” Imagining/Managing Racial Difference, Black Girlhood, and Catholicism at the House of the Good Shepherd

New Orleans’s House of the Good Shepherd was an outlier among Southern carceral youth institutions from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century for the racial, ethnic, national, and religious makeup of its inmate population. The Catholic reformatory for “sexually delinquent” girls incarcerated white girls, Black girls, and other girls of color in an institution led exclusively by white nuns. Moreover, the reformatory’s racial politics were unique for the Jim Crow South—both white girls and girls of color were incarcerated in the same institution from 1880 until the Broad Street location was closed in 1956—even if its racial politics were not necessarily uncommon for Catholic institutions in the Crescent City.¹ The House of the Good Shepherd, like many Catholic institutions established before the 1890s across New Orleans, was racially mixed within the walls of the institution, even as the Reconstruction era racial progress crumbled in the city around it. Despite this unusual feature, the House of the Good Shepherd was far from a beacon of racial justice in the Jim Crow South. It was, after all, a prison for (all) girls.²

¹ In fact, antebellum Catholic churches in New Orleans were racially mixed spaces that helped to enshrine what James B. Bennett calls the tripartite structure of the racial order, which saw society not divided into binaristic black and white, but into three groups: enslaved, free, and white. I discuss this in more detail in the subsequent pages, but for an in-depth look at “interracial Catholicism” in New Orleans, see James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

² See Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*. The argument that undergirds this statement is an abolitionist one against the carceral state. Specifically, I write against carceral feminism, which Liat

For roughly twenty years before its relocation to the larger Broad Street property in 1873, the original Magazine Street facility only accepted white girls as incarcerated residents. Yet, according to a four-hundred-page, self-published history of the Houses of the Good Shepherd in the United States written in 1977 by Sister of the Good Shepherd, Mary Our Lady of Angels Quirk, on July 7, 1873, “a department for Black children was opened [and] seven children were brought from the old ‘work-house,’ which was then abolished.”³ In it, Sister Mary Quirk boasts of what she saw as the institution’s forward-thinking racial politics. She explains, “segregation was still strong in the South, but, eventually the Good Shepherd School in New Orleans would be proud to be among the very first to desegregate.”⁴

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “desegregate” as a verb meaning “to reunite (persons, classes, races, etc.) hitherto segregated; esp. (originally U.S.) to abolish racial segregation in schools and other institutions.”⁵ While this definition implies abolition of racial segregation, the House of the Good Shepherd’s relationship to both racial segregation and desegregation is quite complex. The reformatory continues to be remembered as something of an unusual space compared to other Jim

Ben-Moshe effectively describes as, “the belief that the state and especially the criminal justice system can alleviate violence or abuse against women” (17). This kind of abolition feminist work is rooted in activism by groups like Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. For more on abolition feminism, see Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005); Ruth Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

³ The self-published text chronicles the history according to Sister Quirk of each of the U.S. provinces and convents, detailing who, when, and how each location was built and run. Furthermore, for the remainder of the chapter, I will refer to the author of this text as Sister Quirk. See Quirk, “If I Forget Thee.”

⁴ Sister Quirk, “If I Forget Thee”

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Crow carceral institutions in terms of its racial politics. Despite the unusualness, the House of the Good Shepherd was not necessarily exceptional. Rather, the reformatory operated very similarly to other Catholic New Orleanian spaces—with a kind of ambivalence toward racial justice, begrudging acknowledgment of the importance of Black Catholics, and lowkey embrace of white supremacy. Even though the House of the Good Shepherd was unusual in the Jim Crow South, it was quite common for Catholic space in New Orleans and similar to the racial dynamics of reformatories in Northern cities.⁶

With this in mind, what might “desegregate” mean for the somewhat exceptional Southern reformatory, which always functioned within a more complex structure of the Archdiocese of New Orleans’s negligent ambivalence toward long-standing racially integrated Catholic space? What does the process of desegregation entail when the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision reshaped the idea and enforcement of binaristic racial segregation within sacred Catholic space?

For many, desegregation may seem like a simple and straightforward idea that refers to the policies and actions reversing racial segregation implemented across the Jim Crow U.S. However, the term is rooted in a complex legal and social history. Lawyer Patricia Williams describes complex juridical-political-social-cultural terms like desegregation as “floating signifiers,” untethered from their complex meanings,

⁶ See Alexander, *The Girl Problem*; Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945*, Reissue ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Otis, “A Perversion Not Commonly Noted.”

but for which “legal language flattens and confines in absolutes.”⁷ At the same time, desegregation can be seen as functioning in similar ways to historian Peggy Pascoe’s research on miscegenation—as a legal mechanism to “shape identities and produce ‘race.’”⁸ To this end, legal scholar Derrick Bell meditates on questions about desegregation in his scholarship on U.S. law, race, and white supremacy. As a founding scholar in the field of Critical Race Theory, Bell’s work considers the how U.S. law creates racial categories and how racism is structured into the law, arguing that white supremacy is a feature of U.S. law rather than a bug. Along with legal scholar Cheryl Harris, Bell’s work explores “whether there is an inchoate property right in whiteness” to understand the limitations of the law in redressing racial violence, discrimination, and harm.⁹ In *Silent Covenants: Brown V. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Bell explores questions around desegregation as they relate to “Plessy’s long shadow” over the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which federally outlawed racial segregation in public schools. Referring to the “separate but equal” doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the purported reversal of that doctrine in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Bell’s book considers these cases to unpack the legally fraught and complex ideas of equality, racial discrimination, and desegregation. He argues that segregation is built on an “unspoken covenant committing the nation to guarantee

⁷ Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 6.

⁸ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

⁹ Derrick Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law*, 6th ed. (New York: Aspen Publishers, 2008), xxiii.

whites a superior status to blacks.” With this “silent covenant” in mind, Bell reimagines the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision in an attempt to open up “opportunities for effective schooling...[and] a major educational victory.”¹⁰

Bell explains that through “carefully planned and executed litigation,” Thurgood Marshall—who, about a decade later, would become the first Black Supreme Court Justice—convinced the highest court in the U.S. to hear four school desegregation cases. These four cases were consolidated into *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the details for each case were different, all four cases posed the common legal question: “whether public schools under the Constitution could operate on a racially segregated basis.”¹¹ In a unanimous decision, Chief Justice Earl Warren offered the court’s opinion that “racial discrimination in public education is unconstitutional.” Still, the court needed to deliberate longer on the “manner in which relief is to be accorded.” Relief was accorded a year later, and the court “returned the cases to the district courts with the admonition that orders and decrees be entered to admit plaintiffs to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis ‘with all deliberate speed.’”¹²

Many legal scholars, lawyers, and judges, including Derrick Bell, consider the legal ambiguity of “with all deliberate speed” to be a mistake that placed the onus of admitting “plaintiffs to public school on a nondiscriminatory basis” on district judges,

¹⁰ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20.

¹¹ D. Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 16.

¹² D. Bell, 18.

allowing for an unclear and disjointed strategy for federal “desegregation,” or whatever that really meant.

The meaning of desegregation, particularly when accompanied by the temporally ambiguous “with all deliberate speed,” is somewhat obscure. “With all deliberate speed,” for example, was interpreted differently across the U.S., giving way for white supremacists and segregationists to challenge other district rulings and orders. Bell’s argument stresses that while desegregation is what made *Brown* the landmark Supreme Court ruling it is, the court’s failure to explain what it really meant and how to actualize it led to ambiguity and possibly more violence and resistance. In fact, the plan for implementing desegregation “with all deliberate speed” is so vague that it has taken nearly any possible temporal form, leading to a public school system that is certainly not desegregated in the way (I assume) Thurgood Marshall understood the term.

In *Silent Covenant*, Bell explores flattened floating signifiers to consider how *Brown* fell short of facilitating either equal access to educational resources or racial integration in public schools. To do this, Bell offers a hypothetical alternative opinion of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. Bell’s alternative *Brown* opinion carefully lays out the path forward, which acknowledges that the “separate...standard has been rigorously enforced [while] the equal has served as a total refutation of equality,” avoiding the various pitfalls of the “all but deliberate speed standard” that allowed for a slow and laborious, legally fraught, and violent desegregation of public schools in

the 1950s through the 1970s.¹³ This speculative legal opining highlights the underlying issues with the Brown ruling, forcing readers to reckon with the meanings of desegregation and equality within the scope of U.S. public education today.

Following Bell and Williams, I take up the complexities of the meaning of desegregation to understand how racial difference was imagined and managed within the walls of the first and only reformatory in the Jim Crow South to house both white girls and girls of color. Exploring desegregation this way is about tracing—as Raymond Williams might say—not one specific meaning, but many meanings to show how those meanings have come to be represented and how these different representations are “intrinsically connected.”¹⁴ The House of the Good Shepherd’s management of racial difference within its carceral walls interplays with the varying meanings of desegregation to illuminate how the carceral politics of girlhood are “intrinsically connected” across time and space. By examining the language of racial difference and segregation, as well as the actions taken within the convent-cum-reformatory, the House of the Good Shepherd illuminates a fraught and complicated relationship between racial identity, girlhood, sexuality, and Catholicism in segregated New Orleans.

Tracing how racial difference was imagined and managed by the House of the Good Shepherd, this chapter explores how Progressive Era reforms and Catholic anti-

¹³ This includes the New Orleans School Crises of 1960, but also the Little Rock 9 and the Boston busing crisis. D. Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 22.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 25.

Black racism coalesced to shape the educational and punitive practices of the reformatory. News reports, laws, church doctrines, and photographs reflect the contemporary racial and gendered ideologies and tell a story about the House of the Good Shepherd and the daily role race played in the lives of incarcerated girls there. This chapter explores how race is used discursively and visually across the archival traces that remain from the House of the Good Shepherd to construct a racially tolerant, if not racially progressive historical legacy for the reformatory. These archival traces dictate how racial politics organize said legacy, yet the lack of records of the institution speaks to the flexibility in constructing a specific kind of legacy. To this end, I explore the influence of the Archdiocese of New Orleans on the management of Black girls and girls of color across Catholic New Orleans. Moreover, the meaning of desegregation becomes crucial to understanding the fraught unfolding legacies of the House of the Good Shepherd.

Racial Difference and the House of the Good Shepherd

The very existence of a juvenile institution that housed girls of color in the South before the 1960s is surprising since most Southern states sent youth of color convicted of anything to adult prisons.¹⁵ In this way, the House of the Good Shepherd is considered somewhat exceptional for its racial politics. Sister Quirk, noting the

¹⁵ For more on this horrific policy, see Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*; Susan Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*. Haley describes the establishment of a reformatory for white girls in Fulton County, Georgia as late as 1907, which promptly closed in 1919, because it was not considered a “success” at protecting “the purity of (white) womanhood” (42). Black girls as young as 14 were sent to the adult Milledgeville Prison (263).

Order of the Good Shepherd was “proud to be among the very first to desegregate,” fails to elaborate on what desegregation actually meant for the institution that already incarcerated a racially mixed group of girls.¹⁶ But what does a “racially mixed group of girls” mean when race itself was shifting in meaning and embodiment across the long nineteenth century? How was racial segregation practiced within this carceral homosocial space? Did desegregation reference the intimate spaces of beds, toilets, and infirmaries?

These questions highlight the complicated legacies of the House of the Good Shepherd and the difficulty in describing its exceptionality. One example of this is in historian LaKisha Simmons’s *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*. In it, Simmons describes the House of the Good Shepherd as “biracial, rather than integrated, because within its walls wards were segregated by race.”¹⁷ The use of “biracial” is curious because it implies that the House of the Good Shepherd relied on the idea of a binaristic racial order of Black and white to manage racial difference within its walls, despite New Orleans’s long legacy of a tripartite racial structure that included free people of color and/or mixed-race individuals as a third and separate racial category.¹⁸ New Orleans’s complex code and history of racial configurations and categorizations that defy the binary classifications of Black and white make the early juvenile justice system in New

¹⁶ Quirk, “If I Forget Thee.”

¹⁷ Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*, 142.

¹⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines “biracial” as an adjective “concerning or containing (members of) two races.”

Orleans both exceptional within the South, and also an important model for our future juvenile justice system. The 1870 census, for example, designates a column for “Color,” which then specified to the census taker possible codes for entry: “White (W.), Black (B.), Mulatto (M.), Chinese (C.), Indian (I).” The 1900 census simplified this column to be “color or race,” allowing the census taker to choose which letters would be used (if there was an index of codes, it was not included on the actual census form)—only “W” for white or “C” for “colored” were used in the House of the Good Shepherd’s five pages of the census. In the 1910 census, however, under the column designated for “race or color,” the letters B for Black, W for white, or “Mu” for “mulatto” are all used.

In each census, an additional column lists “place of birth,” which usually includes state of birth, unless the “inmates” were born in another country. Attesting to the shifting geopolitical constructions of racial difference and the privileging of the visual field to read racialization through skin color and physical appearance, “inmates” who immigrated to the U.S. were not racialized according to contemporary notions of racial and ethnic difference.¹⁹ This is most acute in the reformatory’s census records with the “inmate” girls and women born across Latin America and the Caribbean, which includes many different places with complex and drastically different systems of racial ordering. For example, one thirty-three-year-old woman whose name is too faint to read is labeled as an “inmate” with a “W” in the race

¹⁹ For a beautiful rumination on the construction of race as a relational process of queer genealogy across nineteenth century literature, see Brigitte Fielder, *Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

column; she is listed as having emigrated from “Mex. Spanish” in 1875.²⁰ Likewise, both Rosa Vazquez, who emigrated from “Yucatán,” and six-year-old Esperanza Warner, who emigrated from “South America,” were labeled as white. Margaret Martinez, born in Cuba to Cuban parents, is labeled “W,” while Sophia Joseph, also born in Cuba to Cuban parents, is labeled “C.”²¹ Of course, the African diaspora led to robust histories, socialities, and cultural practices of Afro-Latinx and/or Black communities across what is now considered Latin America, including Cuba, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic.²² Likewise, scholars and activists are currently engaged in important dialogues about histories of racialization, the African Diaspora, European colonization, indigeneity, and the construction of whiteness across the Americas.²³ These dialogues interrogate how racialization operates through primary source records like census records.

²⁰ What exactly is meant by “Mex. Spanish” is somewhat unclear, but I add this detail to show how the spatial-temporal racial ordering practices are complex and do not correspond to the contemporary way racial difference is understood in the U.S. In the pages that follow, I use the terms “Black girls” to specifically reference girls who were at the time explicitly considered Black by the texts that reference them. I use “girls of color” in places where the racial ordering was ambiguous, but primary source reference a nonwhite racialization.

²¹ United States Census 1900.

²² Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, Afro-Latino Reader (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Kathryn Joy McKnight and Leo J. Garofalo, *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2010); Matthew Pettway, *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion*, Caribbean Studies Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020); Petra R. Rivera-Rideau, Jennifer A. Jones, and Tianna S. Paschel, *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas*, Afro-Latin@ Diasporas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²³ For more on this, see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1987); Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosenblatt, *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, Race and Nation in Modern Latin America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara, *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Mara Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Peter Wade,

Census records are limited documents that illuminate the kinds of taxonomic linguistic systems available to census takers in a specific space at a particular time.²⁴ Furthermore, the convent was cloistered. Thus, the “inmates,” Magdalens (a contemplative sub-order), and many Sisters would have remained cloistered during a visit by a census taker, who would most likely not be allowed into the building, particularly if he were a man. The information on each “inmate” would have probably been written down and provided to the census taker by the Mother Superior or another Religious. While these records give us some insights into the systems of managing racial difference broadly, they remain tethered to the federal constraints of the American racial imaginary, not the New Orleanian or Catholic New Orleanian racial imaginary. At the turn of the twentieth century, both the New Orleanian and Catholic New Orleanian racial imaginaries reflected complex historical relationships to Empire, enslavement, skin color, class, and the law. These racial imaginaries operated according to New Orleanian histories and socialities, thereby working within a specific racial order that is not necessarily legible across space and time. For example, fourteen-year-old Virginia Rodriguez was incarcerated in the House of the Good Shepherd for vagrancy with no date of release.²⁵ Her father, Joseph Rodriguez,

Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁴ See Kenneth Prewitt, *What Is Your Race?: The Census and Our Flawed Efforts to Classify Americans*, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Clara E. Rodriguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*, Critical America (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Debra Thompson, *The Schematic State: Race, Transnationalism, and the Politics of the Census* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁵ State/Rodriguez, Virginia v. The Mother Superior, House of the Good Shepherd. November 14, 1889. CRDC12914. Orleans Parish Criminal and Civil District Case Dockets, 1846-1920 New Orleans Public Library Special Collections.

filed a writ of habeas corpus on her behalf to facilitate her release, because Virginia received no trial, charge, or formal sentencing.²⁶ While proximity to wealth and education might be assumed since Joseph Rodriguez was able to procure counsel to file the writ of habeas corpus for Virginia's release, the Rodriguez family's racial classification cannot be assumed, or even determined based on their surname alone. Spanish surnames were quite common because the Louisiana territories were occupied by Spanish colonial forces for nearly forty years. During this time, surnames did not necessarily correspond to racial categories, and there were no mentions of either Virginia's or her father's race on the documents in the case docket.

How racial difference was managed within the reformatory's walls remains relatively opaque. According to a 1920 individualized "Progress Report" used quarterly to evaluate "personal characteristics and behavioral patterns," race was not included as part of the report form, a very unusual bureaucratic omission, particularly in the Jim Crow South. A facsimile of this "progress report" was included as part of an annual report on the House of the Good Shepherd by the Child Welfare League of America. This annual report also includes one of the most in-depth and purportedly accurate (since it was neither a state nor Archdiocese affiliated organization) depictions of the facilities for Black girls and girls of color at the House of the Good Shepherd. The report chronicles the state of the facilities used by girls of color in 1920, a "separate unit" from the main building, as the Commission makes clear.

²⁶ State/Rodriguez, Virginia v. The Mother Superior, House of the Good Shepherd. November 14, 1889. CRDC12914. Orleans Parish Criminal and Civil District Case Dockets, 1846-1920 New Orleans Public Library Special Collections.

The building occupied by the colored girls, which is at the rear of the main building, is also three stories and of brick construction. On the first floor is a large ironing room in which the hand ironing for the laundry is done. The dining room, which is suitably equipped, occupies the middle room on the first floor.

A large recreation room decorated and furnished similar to the one in the white girls' department, is also on the first floor. At the time of our second visit to the institution some of the Christmas decorations had been put up and the room was attractive in appearance.

On the second floor there are two dormitories having accommodations for 25 children each. Toilet facilities are adjacent to those dormitories. They seemed fairly adequate except for the fact that no shower baths are provided.

On the third floor of the building there is a school room. There is also an infirmary which is so equipped that it can be used for isolation purposes.

We do not believe the facilities for fire protection are adequate in spite of the fact that there is more than one means of egress in some parts of the building. Official written approval should be secured from the State and City Departments qualified to pass upon public buildings in order to avoid any possible criticism in the event there were a fire. Protection of the girls is, of course, the main objective, but the Sisters should also be urged to take every precaution against overlooking any detail which might lead to a charge of negligence on their part.²⁷

The Commission's urging for fire safety precautions is understandable since, only fourteen years earlier, a fire destroyed the newly created Thomy Lafon Annex for girls of color. The Thomy LaFon Annex was a three-story brick building built in 1894 by the philanthropic donations of Thomy LaFon, a local real estate broker and free person of color. In a *Times-Picayune* article from 1906, the building is described

²⁷ "Progress Report: Convent of the Good Shepherd," University of New Orleans Archives, MSS 34, box 97, folder 1002.

very similarly to the Commission's description of the replacement building on the property by 1920:

The first floor was used a classroom, dining-room and working rooms, in which latter washing, ironing and sewing was done by the inmates, under the supervision of the Sisters of the House of the Good Shepherd. The second floor was used partly as a dormitory and partly as a classroom, while the third floor was entirely devoted to use as a dormitory. The contents of the third floor, consisting of some thirty-odd beds, sewing machines and clothing, etc., in it, were nearly all destroyed, although the inmates and Sisters worked hard to save what they could carry out before the Fire Department and police finally arrived.²⁸

Both these passages illuminate a critical feature of the racial organization of the reformatory: white nuns traversed both Black and white carceral spaces. The article clarifies that "inmates" lived and worked "under the supervision of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd." Since orders of nuns at this time were not racially mixed groups, it is valid to assume the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who supervised the girls of color were white.²⁹ It seems the girls were organized by a kind of binaristic racial ordering, occupying separate spaces, but the white nuns moved into and through both Black and white spaces.

One significant omission, however, leaves a few lingering questions about the internal workings of the convent. The Magdalens, a cloistered and contemplative sub-order of Sisters of the Good Shepherd who lived in another separate facility on the grounds, are missing from any details about the convent. The Magdalens took vows

²⁸ "Thomy LaFon Annex Destroyed by Fire," *Times-Picayune*, October 11, 1906.

²⁹ In fact, orders of nuns in the U.S. were overwhelmingly and exclusively white. There are a few exceptions, including the Sisters of the Holy Family, only the second order of Black women nuns after the 1828 establishment of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore by a group of free women of color, who were part of the city's Haitian refugee community. For more on this see "Chapter 5: Interracial Catholicism in New Orleans," in J. B. Bennett, *Rise of Jim Crow*.

of silence and mainly consisted of former inmates who either decided or were forced to stay in the convent indefinitely; they could not become Sisters of the Good Shepherd because of their previous assumed sexual relations. Because the reformatory (at least since 1873) housed all girls regardless of race or color, it is possible the Magdalens included white women and women of color. However, the census does not include designations besides “Religious,” “inmate,” and the singular “mother” for the Mother Superior. It is unclear whether the Magdalens would be considered “Religious” or “inmate.”³⁰

One surprising insight into the reformatory’s inner workings appears in the November 10, 1912 issue of the *Daily Picayune* with an article called “A Woman’s City.” “A Women’s City” offers an in-depth look at the reformatory, complete with grainy photographs and illustrations of weeping angels. In it, a journalist called K.K. Blackmar chronicles life at the House of the Good Shepherd and the plight of a few “unfortunate, wretched souls” who find “refuge” in the reformatory.³¹ One such

³⁰ The Magdalens at the House of the Good Shepherd were distinct from the Magdalene Laundries in England and Ireland (and later in the U.S.), which were primarily Protestant institutions. The Magdalene Laundries housed young unmarried mothers, sex workers, and/or poor houseless women. For more the Magdalene Laundries in England, Ireland, and the U.S., see Lu Ann De Cunzo, “On Reforming the ‘Fallen’ and Beyond: Transforming Continuity at the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia, 1845-1916,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5, no. 1 (2001); Rodney Hessinger, “Victim of Seduction or Vicious Woman?: Conceptions of the Prostitute at the Philadelphia Magdalen Society, 1800-1850,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 66 (1999); Rene Kollar, “Magdalenes and Nuns: Convent Laundries in Late Victorian England,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 73, no. 3 (2004); Rebecca Lea McCarthy, *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010); Stanley Nash, “Prostitution and Charity: The Magdalen Hospital, a Case Study,” *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 4 (1984); Scott Rogers, “Domestic Servants, Midnight Meetings, and ‘The Magdalen’s Friend and Female Homes’ Intelligencer,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 2 (2011); James M. Smith, “The Magdalene Sisters: Evidence, Testimony ... Action?,” *Signs* 32, no. 2 (2007).

³¹ Blackmar, “A Women’s City.”

character is “Blind Susie,” who Blackmar characterizes in decidedly racist and phantasmagoric ways:

No more wonderful character ever lived in the convent than “Black Susie,” the little negress who passed away some years ago, regretted by sisters and companions alike. Susie was blind from birth and in addition had her two lower limbs bend backward in an awful deformity, that forced her to walk on her knees and gave her the impression of one who had had her limbs amputated from the knees down.³²

It is impossible to know whether Susie was a physical person who actually lived and worked at the House of the Good Shepherd. If she did live, was she also considered an “inmate”? Would she be able to leave of her own volition? Susie very well could be a racist-ableist fabrication by an early twentieth-century journalist. Even if we imagine Susie is a fabrication, what follows in the article illuminates more possible clues about the racial organization within the reformatory’s walls. Blackmar states, for instance, “in spite of Susie’s blindness she had charge of the class in sewing... [and] Susie taught a class of her black compaions [sic] in catechism too.”³³ The hint at how the day was structured for “black companions” at the reformatory confirms that the inmates of color were attending class. At the very least, sewing and Catechism could have been the only classes girls of color were offered, much like the early policies of the Ursulines. These classes, however, were most likely some sort of integrated space, as there is mention of “a sister in charge of Susie’s class.”

Undoubtedly the effects of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision nurture intimidation, terror, lynching, and racial violence across the country, giving way to a

³² Blackmar.

³³ Blackmar.

federally supported policy of racial segregation, the remnants of which still reverberate today. The House of the Good Shepherd, however, continues to stand out, not for racial progressivism or anti-racist policies (that did not exist), but for their dedication to a very nineteenth-century Progressive Era reformist mode that stressed the importance of the redemption and rehabilitation of all girls, regardless of race, or national origin. The House of the Good Shepherd can be seen as a portal into what Sarah Haley calls “the carceral life of race and gender ideology” of the juvenile justice system.³⁴ In her book, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, Haley emphasizes the importance of the history of incarcerated Southern Black women to understand how white supremacy and misogyny continue to shape the carceral regime today. She states, “penal legislation reinforced prevailing cultural ideas about gender roles and social positions, and in exposing Black women to extreme violence, the singular status of white womanhood—indeed the racially specific definition of womanhood—was reasserted.”³⁵ Following Haley, the House of the Good Shepherd is one of the only reformatories at the time that provides insight into the lives and history of incarcerated Southern girls of color.

Because there is so little in the way of research on the institution, and the contemporary lens through which its legacy is viewed remains tethered to ideas of what a southern carceral institution is assumed to look like, the fact that girls of color

³⁴ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 5.

³⁵ Haley, 5.

were inmates is all the more remarkable. But this does not signify a racially inclusive, let alone anti-racist philosophy. The opacity surrounding the House of the Good Shepherd elicits questions about the internal racial politics that set the everyday rules of interaction, expectations of incarcerated girls, and life at the reformatory. Despite the House of the Good Shepherd's policy of accepting girls of color as inmates, the role racial difference played within the everyday lives of girls at the reformatory remains something of a mystery. The "desegregation" of the institution, as Sister Quirk claims, however, seems to be more of an aspirational, revisionist approach to telling the story of the work of the Order of the Good Shepherd in rosy terms for the audience of her tome in 1977.

Returning to Simmons's description of the reformatory with this in mind, does "biracial" accurately describe what exactly was happening within the walls of the House of the Good Shepherd? The short answer is no. The long answer is more complicated than a simple "no." The long answer explores the lack of information about the daily functioning of the reformatory alongside the complex and unique histories of the racial order in Louisiana. The long answer also must consider racially integrated Catholic space in New Orleans, as well as the ambiguities around Jim Crow racial policy terminology. Was New Orleans's House of the Good Shepherd the rare, desegregated Jim Crow institution? Was it a biracial institution—internally racially segregated? And what is to be made of grappling with the legacy of this institution that appears to be quite unique when considered alongside other contemporary Southern institutions? What is illuminated about the making of carceral

girlhood by understanding how racial difference was managed in New Orleans's House of the Good Shepherd?

Photographing Jim Crow Catholicism

Sunday, March 15, 1953, seemed like any other Sunday in New Orleans; dressed in their Sunday best, Catholics came to Mass, as usual. This Sunday, however, Catholic New Orleanians were all read a pastoral letter penned by the Archbishop of New Orleans, Joseph F. Rummel. Rummel's letter—entitled *Blessed are the Peacemakers*—outlined how the Archdiocese would proceed to racially desegregate churches within Orleans Parish, declaring, “let there be no further discrimination or segregation in the pews, at the Communion rail, at the confessional and in parish meetings, just as there will be no segregation in the kingdom of heaven.”

Three years later, on Sunday, February 19, 1956—just a few years after the decision on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (347 U.S. 483) and before New Orleans public schools were forcibly desegregated by court order—Archbishop Rummel released another letter to the parish. This letter insisted that New Orleans Catholic schools, like Catholic churches, were to be desegregated. In the letter, Rummel writes, “Racial segregation as such is morally wrong and sinful because it is

a denial of the unity and solidarity of the human race as conceived by God in the creation of man in Adam and Eve.”³⁶

In 1955—just one year after *Brown v. Board of Education* and before Rummel’s second pastoral letter—commercial photographer Charles L. Franck took a series of promotional stills of the House of the Good Shepherd featuring photographs of incarcerated girls of the reformatory. Franck’s photographs document both the physical structure of the House of the Good Shepherd, as well as what are presented as everyday scenes of girls’ lives within the reformatory. These scenes show what appears to be posed girls doing various activities that come to embody the reformatory goals: turning its “inmate” girls into rehabilitated, chaste, and pious women.

In 1884, the Catholic House of the Good Shepherd became the official sentencing site for girls deemed “sexually delinquent” in New Orleans, functioning essentially as a private contractor operating on behalf of the city to lock up and “rehabilitate” girls who strayed from gendered, sexualized, and racialized concepts of purity, respectability, and chastity. At the House of the Good Shepherd, this meant evaluating its inmates on “personal appearance,” “emotional stability,” “reliability,” “attitude toward self-improvement,” “attitude toward authority,” “reaction to frustration,” “attitude toward others,” “group relations,” and “attitude toward

³⁶ Loyola University Special Collections, “Segregation Sinful, Says Archbishop,” from *New Orleans Item*, Monday, February 20, 1956.

property.”³⁷ The Franck photographs present girls in the House of the Good Shepherd staged in gendered vocational training like sewing, nursing, and dancing, showcasing the evaluated and rehabilitated girl, free from the “sexual delinquency” that brought her to the reformatory in the first place.

These photos coincide with a fundraising push that sought to secure funds to build a new facility across the Mississippi River in the late 1950s. During this time, Sister Stanislaus Lyonne was brought to New Orleans as the new Mother Superior for the House of the Good Shepherd from the San Francisco Province to address threats of closure after repeated fire code violations from hurricane and flood damage and mounting debts owed to the city.³⁸ Sister Stanislaus was put in charge of organizing a project in New Orleans that was similar to the San Francisco convent. Sister Stanislaus commissioned Franck’s photographs as promotional material to show potential donors and philanthropists the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Sister Stanislaus secured the funds for the new complex on River Road in the West Bank, which began construction in 1956, opening in 1959.³⁹ Over the next ten years, however, the residential facilities of the House of the Good Shepherd would close, the new River Road facility would open, and New Orleans’s city-run juvenile justice residential facility, the Youth Study Center, would open with the passing of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act of 1974.⁴⁰

³⁷ From “Progress Report: Convent of the Good Shepherd,” University of New Orleans Archives, MSS 34, box 97, folder 1002.

³⁸ Sister Quirk, “If I Forget Thee”.

³⁹ Sister Quirk, “If I Forget Thee”.

⁴⁰ Sister Anne interview.

The medium of photography functions as a crucial tool in viewing how carceral Black girlhood of this moment informs and is shaped by Haley's delineation of the "carceral life of racial and gender ideologies." In her book, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow*, Elizabeth Abel outlines how photographs of segregation signs in the Jim Crow South can affirm and challenge racist ideologies by essentially creating mini-icons of the markers of segregation and then circulating them widely. Building on both Barthes's theory of photography and Peirce's semiotic theory of signs, Abel understands photography as having "its own iconographic and compositional conventions that translates the iconic 'message without a code' into the cultural codes that infuse the image with connotative meaning."⁴¹ But Abel notes the complex relationship between the varying interpretative lenses employed when viewing the photographs and, in so doing, emphasizes that photographs of Jim Crow signs across the South were both simultaneously used to support and challenge the policy and ideology of segregation. What might this mean for Franck's photographs of girls at the House of the Good Shepherd? How might the interpretive framework of the present affect the understanding of what the photographs actually did for both the institution of the House of the Good Shepherd as well as the burgeoning national juvenile justice system?

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 each show a small group of girls in what appear to be their respective dormitories or the segregated infirmaries, tending to the bed of one girl

⁴¹ Elizabeth Abel, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 65.

who is either sick or performing illness. Each photo also shows an adult woman who gleefully seems to be instructing the group of girls in the vocational skills of nursing or medical care. The staging of the two images is almost identical, marked in the foreground by similar perspectives on the orientation and organization of the bed and girls. Illuminating the “carceral life of racial and gender ideologies” of midcentury America, these two photographs showcase a kind of racially segregated yet parallel educational space.



Figure 2.1: Charles L. Franck, *House of the Good Shepherd, Infirmary*. Part of the *Charles L. Franck Studio Collection*, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1956. 1979.325.2279.



Figure 2.2: Charles L. Franck, *House of the Good Shepherd, Dormitory*. Charles L. Franck Studio Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1956. 1979.325.2269.

In Figure 2.1, a group of Black girls attends to the bedside of a third girl who lays in the bed with a thermometer in her mouth, linen draped over the headboard of her bed, staring up at one of the girls who appears to be taking her pulse. A variety of medical supplies, a bowl, pitcher, and some towels rest on two chairs next to the bed. Conversely, in Figure 2.2, a white girl lays in a bed propped up at the waist while three other white girls stand at her side. Each girl holds a folded newspaper while intently watching the adult woman who is dressed as a nurse who appears to be instructing them on how to use this folded newspaper as a splint for broken bones.

And while the two images look almost identical, they reveal much more about the intersection of race and class, informing concepts of expertise and pedagogical access. For example, examining the clothing of the Black girls' white instructor in contrast to the white girls' white instructor, the Black girls' white instructor does not appear to be a nurse, and the white girls' white instructor, dressed in a nurse's

uniform, seems to be a certified nurse. Here, race and class intersect to shape the white girls' access to expertise, next to the Black girls' access to some substitute for expertise. The white girls in Figure 2.2 had the privilege of access to expertise, even while incarcerated in a reformatory, reinforcing what Bell and others outline as the success at creating separate facilities, but the failure of creating equal ones.

The images illuminate how theories about education, vocation, and pedagogy work alongside carceral girlhood and sexual delinquency to create punitive and rehabilitative regimes. And these ideas stem from that dynamic of injury/illness. In fact, education, vocation, and pedagogy were a focus of religious, Progressive reforms that brought about the foundations of the juvenile justice systems. These kinds of Progressive reforms echo a "Republican Motherhood" ideology that imagines the child as a malleable and impressionable work-in-progress under the care of the pious, educated, reformer mother-like figure. But "Republican Motherhood" is born from a Northern, American, Protestant, Revolutionary mentality, which did not focus on girls in the domestic sphere, but instead concentrated on the increasing use that adult women could have to the boys of households.⁴²

In this way, labor and education were distinctly part of the House of the Good Shepherd's ideologies about race, gender, and age. To complicate the analysis one step further, however, the purpose of the photographs needs to come back into focus. As promotional stills used for fundraising, what effects might it have on

⁴² Elizabeth J. Clapp, *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998).

understanding the juvenile justice system to examine the images as performative icons outlining the difference in expectations of Black and white girls? What is clear with these photographs are the racial, gendered, class-based, and ultimately Catholic expectations of racially segregated propriety and girlhood that wealthy Catholic donors needed to see to support the reformatory's continued existence. Reaffirming the expectations of wealthy donors is an integral part of these photographs, which are clearly staged and stylized, cultivated to produce some idea of the reformatory to elicit monetary investment for newer, better facilities. If this is the case, what are the girls in these photographs, if not props upholding the institution? Are they marketing ploys? Or little icons of once bad girls *en route* to becoming good, Catholic girls—the ultimate redemption of a young soul upon whom others' sins were forced, contributing to society and assuring the public of their marrying abilities? Barthes considers this as a question of ownership, a legal issue, provocatively asking, “to whom does the photograph belong?”⁴³ In these photographs, the House of the Good Shepherd takes up the task of making girls into subjects of the church, agreeable to the state along the lines of race and class. Girlhood, as captured in these photographs, is made into an object that can be neatly packaged to tout the same tagline that makes the House of the Good Shepherd such a fascinating site: the first and only reformatory in the U.S. South to accept girls of all races.

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, First American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 13.

The ways racial difference is visually performed in these photos illuminate how segregation and desegregation policies were enacted at the reformatory in the days just after *Brown v. the Board of Education*—ultimately, it seems actions toward desegregation were not taken. And, twenty years after these photos were used to entice generous Catholic donors to support the building of a new facility, the Order of the Good Shepherd had closed their New Orleans project altogether—the new reformatory had completely shut down, and Sister Quirk was already busy remembering the New Orleans institution was “one of the first to desegregate.”

Historical Foundations of Racialized Education in New Orleans

On November 14, 1960, Gail Etienne, Leona Tate, and Tessie Prevost—also known as the McDonogh Three—started their first day at a new school, McDonogh 19 Elementary School, in New Orleans. Etienne, Tate, and Prevost, along with Ruby Bridges, who was starting her first day at William Frantz Elementary School, were not merely starting their first day at new schools, with all the excitement and anxieties that come along with first days and the possibilities of new friends. On their first day at new schools, these four girls were tasked with desegregating the entire New Orleans public school system. All four girls were six years old.

Of the four girls, Bridges is perhaps the most widely known (at least in part) because she has been memorialized in Norman Rockwell’s *The Problem We All Live With* as a small Black girl, clad in a bright white dress and shoes, with her books in

hand, accompanied by a square formation of white Deputy U.S. Marshals.⁴⁴ Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With* is inspired by the black and white photograph of Bridges walking down the steps of William Frantz Elementary School, a small girl descending stairs in the shadow of an adult white male U.S. Marshal leading her way.⁴⁵ Bridges is flanked by another set of U.S. Marshals, whose white arm cuffs designating their professions dialogically engage with the shiny badges proudly displayed over their hearts; the law is present, the law is order, the law is there to protect the constitutional ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and yet it was also there to protect *Plessy* and *Dred Scott*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Rockwell's painting hung in the West Wing of the White House from June through October 2011. Ruby Bridges was invited to the White House to meet President Obama. Video from the event shows President Obama and Bridges standing in front of the painting. President Obama then thanks and credits Bridges's brave walk with his ability as a Black man to become President of the United States.

⁴⁵ See Figure 2.3.

⁴⁶ See Derrick Bell's *Silent Covenant* for an excellent conversation on the general legal and political impressions of *Brown* and *Dred Scott*. For a Critical Race Feminist reading of *Dred Scott* through the experience of *Dred Scott*'s wife, Harriet Robinson Scott, see Lea S. Vandervelde and Sandhya L. Subramanian "Mrs. *Dred Scott*" in *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader*, Second ed. Adrien Katherine Wing (New York: New York University Press, 2003).



Figure 2.3: Six-year-old Ruby Bridges escorted by U.S. Marshals from William Frantz Elementary School, New Orleans, LA, November 1964 (Uncredited DOJ photographer).

Bridges glances up just enough to capture the viewer's gaze, as two men in the background glare at the scene unfolding before them. One of these background men, a white police officer, smirks at another—almost obscured from view—observing Bridges's descent and thus the relationship between Black girlhood and the state on display. Their smiles are sinister and grotesque; they have been caught grimacing at a scene of girlhood compelled by the state to confront the historical and ongoing violence of the law.⁴⁷

Rockwell's painting offers a slightly different perspective; all the men's faces are hidden from the viewer's gaze, and we only see Bridges's entire body. *The*

⁴⁷ For more on the violence of the law, see "Chapter 1: Abduction and Seduction:" The Legal Making of New Orleans's Girl Problems," footnote 14.

Problem We All Live With is oriented to Bridges's height and its perimeter crops the Deputy U.S. Marshals at their necks: four headless adult, white, male bodies framing a small Black girl in front of a wall scrawled with the n-word, as they tend to this "problem."

"The problem" referenced in Rockwell's title most likely refers to the many political battles of the Civil Rights Movement—specifically the entrenchment of white supremacy in U.S. law and culture, anti-Black racism, and state violence—but "the problem" here works doubly to also reference the problem of girlhood, or "the girl problem." Historians, sociologists, psychologists, political theorists, and criminologists locate the emergence of a modern legal girl subject in the latter half of the long nineteenth century with what was often called "the girl problem," or the national moral panic over girls' emergence in the public sphere.⁴⁸ The girl problem, however, endures far beyond the turn of the twentieth century in the ways girlhood is imagined and managed by and in the interest of the state. This is to say, girlhood is a tool used to govern and control those bodies interpolated as (possibly) girl.⁴⁹

That the four students who desegregated the New Orleans public school system—which has come to be known as the "1960 New Orleans School Crises"—

⁴⁸ I have discussed the girl problem at length in the introduction and return to its ongoing resonance in the introduction and each chapter in this dissertation. For more on the girl problem, see Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981); Alexander, *The Girl Problem*; Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*.

⁴⁹ I use interpolation here as a gesture to Louis Althusser's theory of subject formation. Althusser's theory provides the example of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as the police given the power to interpolate subjects. For more on his theory, see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

were a group of six-year-old girls is not surprising; girls' bodies continue to be political flashpoints across U.S. history. Whether the Salem Witch Trials, the Social Purity Movement, or so-called bathroom bills, girls' bodies are used as political tools to simultaneously communicate purity and danger. Despite what many scholars of Black girlhood have rightly outlined as the erasure, over-sexualization, and adultification of Black girls, with the New Orleans School Crisis of 1960, the national focus of U.S. culture and politics turns to scrutinize Black girls' bodies, which simultaneously become a violent spectacle and an icon of purity and possibility. In this way, the logic that governed girlhood writ large across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—which assumed whiteness and often saw Black girls not even as girls—gets a mid-century upgrade, that 1) positions Black girls to be similarly situated to white girls in their ability to communicate biopolitical notions of purity, while simultaneously 2) pretends to want to “protect” them, only insofar as it supports a set of politics aimed at consolidating state power. Likewise, girlhood communicates a specific assumption of innocence and futurity, which in turn emphasizes the cruelty of Jim Crow school segregation. With this focus on Etienne, Tate, Prevost, and Bridges come a renewed understanding of the stakes of girlhood as defined by the law. As their bodies desegregate these white schools, girlhood—specifically Black girlhood—recursively performs the limitations of its legal rendering. Again and again, girlhood is used as a political tool by the state as both a full and empty signifier

for the use of any and all who need to elicit an emotional—often hysterical—response from a set of publics.⁵⁰

The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 is an important episode in the Civil Rights Movement and just one of many examples of Black children’s bodies being part of the activism. In both the New Orleans School Crisis and Birmingham Children’s March, for example, Black children are both being subjected to state-sponsored white supremacist violence and becoming an icon of futurity and hope in the struggle against U.S. apartheid.⁵¹ Much has been written on Bridges and the New Orleans School Crisis of 1960, offering a vast cannon of media chronicling its lasting impact on the Civil Rights struggle, New Orleans race relations, and white supremacy’s entrenchment U.S. public education.⁵² Liva Baker’s *The Second Battle for New Orleans: The Hundred Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools*, for example, locates the struggle over the integration of New Orleans public schools in the larger history of Black social and political progress from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Era and the steady and violent white backlash. Donald DeVore and Joseph Logson’s *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991* offers a similar

⁵⁰ I discuss the moral panic of girlhood and its relationship to the whitening of girlhood in more detail in “Chapter 3: The Carceral Gaze of Girlhood: Sexualization, Whiteness, and the Storyville Girls.”

⁵¹ I am thinking specifically of Emmett Till, Claudette Colvin, the Little Rock 9, and The Birmingham Children’s March/Crusade of 1963. For more on children’s roles in the Civil Rights Movement, see Rebecca De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America’s Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁵² I offer details on the academic texts that explore the New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 in the subsequent sentences, however, there are many texts about Bridges specifically. See Ruby Bridges, *This Is Your Time* (New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2020); Robert Coles and George Ford, *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (New York: Scholastic, 1995); Euzhan Palcy, *Ruby Bridges* (ABC, 1998).

temporal overview of the history of New Orleans schools steeped in rich archival data. Recently, however, Walter Stern's *Race and Education in New Orleans: Creating the Segregated City, 1764-1960* synthesizes urban planning, geography, and history to understand how schooling in New Orleans "profoundly shaped the development of New Orleans's racial order and urban landscape."⁵³ Not only does Stern temporally reframe the "construction and institutionalization of white supremacy" in New Orleans schools as beginning before Reconstruction, with the kidnapping and enslavement of a seven-year-old West African girl named Marie Justine Sirmir and her eventual founding of the first school for Black children in New Orleans, but he also traces how education and racial order are co-constitutive processes that shape both policy and the built environment in New Orleans. It is not surprising then that Stern also begins his book with Sirmir and ends it with Bridges—the (Black) girls' body again becoming the site on which racial politics are staged and fought.

Black girls have fraught relationships with the institutions that legislate, govern, surveil, and incarcerate girlhood. For example, Black girls are "on the receiving end of punitive, zero-tolerance policies that subjected them to violence, arrest, suspension and/or expulsion."⁵⁴ But, according to the policy brief, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*, Black girls are mostly

⁵³ Stern, *Race and Education*, 3.

⁵⁴ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* (New York: African American Policy Forum and Columbia Law School's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015.)

excluded from the analysis of those policies, leading to the miscalculation of policymakers that Black girls “are not also at risk.”⁵⁵ Likewise, Black girls “receive more severe sentences when they enter the juvenile justice system than do members of any other group of girls, and they are also the fastest-growing population in the system.”⁵⁶ However, this inequitable policy failure is not a recent phenomenon, and Black girls have been on the front line of the so-called “school to prison pipeline” for the better part of the twentieth century.

Interdisciplinary scholars of Black girlhood, including Aimee Meredith Cox, Ruth Nicole Brown, Kyra Gaunt, and Savannah Shange, have challenged the persistence of this policy failure by arguing that the cultural practices of Black girls challenge and reimagine the possibilities of girlhood.⁵⁷ Brown calls this “Black girl genius,” and the recent cultural phenomenon of #Blackgirlmagic embraces a version of this by emphasizing the power of Black girls’ innovation, power, and resilience in the face of white supremacy and sexism. This academic and cultural work redefines the perimeters of girlhood, celebrates Black girlhood, and illuminates “Black girl genius” in the face of intersecting forms of misogynoir.⁵⁸ To be sure, Etienne, Tate, Prevost, and Bridges exemplify “Black girl genius” in their continued bravery,

⁵⁵ Crenshaw et al., 5

⁵⁶ Crenshaw et al., 6.

⁵⁷ See Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play*; R. Brown, *Hear Our Truths*; Cox, *Shapeshifters*.

⁵⁸ Moya Bailey defines this as a “word I made up to describe the particular brand of hatred directed at black women in American visual & popular culture” in her essay, “They Aren’t Talking About Me...” on the Crunk Feminist Collective website (<http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>). For more on “Black girl genius,” see Dominique C. Hill, “Blackgirl, One Word: Necessary Transgressions in the Name of Imagining Black Girlhood.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 19, no. 4 (August 2019): 275–83.

tenacity, and survival in the face of white supremacist violence and state-sponsored terrorism. Using Aimee Meredith Cox’s theory of the social choreography of Black girls’ “creative and strategic engagements with the state,” Savannah Shange proposes “Black girl genius” is endemic to Black girlhood, making it “Black girl ordinary” to “stay dancing in the face of state-sanctioned slow death.”⁵⁹

“Black girl ordinary” shapes how these four girls interact with the state and how they are remembered. The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 exemplifies how girlhood, memory, and race intersect to construct progressive histories and meanings; Bridges’s brave walk is filled with hope and possibility for an integrated future devoid of the Jim Crow racism of the past. As Etienne, Tate, Prevost, and Bridges—escorted by Deputy U.S. Marshalls—desegregated the New Orleans public schools, they became the faces (and bodies) of the ensuing New Orleans School Crisis of 1960. With this example, as with Franck’s 1955 photographs of the House of the Good Shepherd, the image of the Black girl in school both shapes and is informed by legal making of the category of girl in New Orleans.

The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 is often understood as a part of the “backlash theory,” which posits that the racial progress realized through the Civil Rights Era created white backlash specifically against racial integration in schools and the broader Civil Rights Movement in general. This theory accounts for what was seen as a post-war exodus of white families from cities to suburbs, also understood as “white flight,” as well as much of the racial, social, and political ordering of the

⁵⁹ Shange, “Black Girl Ordinary,” 6.

postwar U.S., including the rise to racial resentment of the white working class, their shift away from an affiliation with the Democratic Party, and a general radicalization of conservative politics toward a conspicuous embracing of white supremacy.⁶⁰ Instead of locating Tate's, Prevost's, Etienne's, and Bridges's walks to their new schools as the reason behind mid-century white supremacist activism and violence, however, I follow Walter Stern's argument that the New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 is part of a longer history, which emphasizes "the centrality of schools to New Orleans's development and social structure," and in doing so, locates the beginning of New Orleans's fight over education and racial order with the 1727 arrival of twelve French Ursuline nuns in the occupied Louisiana territories.⁶¹ Beginning with the arrival of the Ursuline nuns and understanding the larger Catholic ambivalence toward Black Catholics illuminates the House of the Good Shepherd's complex and at times confusing racial history of desegregation.

Catholic Ambivalence

After years of struggle to be recognized as "a teaching order of canonical nuns," in 1612, the first cloistered community of Ursulines were recognized in Paris, and as a teaching order, they swore four—not the usual three—solemn vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and teaching.⁶² During the seventeenth century, the Ursuline

⁶⁰ Walter C. Stern, "Long before Ruby's Walk: New Orleans Schools, Race, and Thinking beyond Backlash," *The Journal of African American History* 103, no. 4 (September 2018).

⁶¹ Stern, *Race and Education*, 5.

⁶² Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 25.

Order built schools across France to educate girls in Catechism, reading, and writing. When they arrived in New Orleans in 1727, they continued this tradition by creating a school dedicated to teaching Native/Indigenous girls, as well as girls of European and African descent, both enslaved and free, throughout much of the eighteenth century. Despite Louis XIV's 1724 edition of the *Code Noir*, which issued a set of rules outlining how Black people—both free and enslaved—could live in French-occupied territories, Catholic institutions across New Orleans historically did not follow strict or clear rules on how racial separation was to function or be enforced within church walls. The 1724 *Code Noir*, however, did set out specific rules regulating the practice of religion across French-occupied territories, forcing all enslaved people, enslaved people of color, and *gens du couleur libres* (free people of color) to be baptized and instructed as Catholics.⁶³ Historian Emily Clark explains that Louis XIV used Catholicism “as an instrument of national consolidation,” which combined with his personal “search for salvation through the propagation of the faith” resulted in “an aggressively inclusive church.”⁶⁴ This doctrine can be located amidst a larger national Counter-Reformation project to restore France to Catholicism, and in many ways allowed for Catholic institutions, like the Ursuline convent, to “ignore the categories that were structuring relations outside the convent walls.”⁶⁵

The doctrine of an “aggressively inclusive church” spread throughout the French-occupied Louisiana territories in the form of Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns

⁶³ Clark, 164.

⁶⁴ Clark, 166.

⁶⁵ Clark, 61.

establishing monasteries and convents during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The aforementioned arrival of the Ursuline nuns attests to this doctrine and saw the opening of New Orleans's first convent in the French Quarter in 1727. While the Ursuline and Jesuit presence throughout the occupied territory helped to spread the doctrine of an "aggressively inclusive" Catholic church, the Ursulines faced suspicion and anger from French colonial officials who were not interested in educating girls and saw the use of nuns in the colonies to be for practical duties like nursing and domestic work.⁶⁶ The Ursulines, however, offered free education at their convent to both free and enslaved girls and women of color, often in integrated space, taught by white nuns. This is not to say the Ursulines were strident abolitionists or interested in racial justice. They owned slaves and directly participated in slave economies and the sugar trade. Yet, as Stern points out, "to a greater extent than any other group in the city and arguably the whole of colonial North America, the Ursulines demonstrated the capacity of schooling to subvert and shape the social and racial order."⁶⁷ In fact, the Ursulines "applied a spiritual universalism to the objects of their missions that blurred or rearranged social and racial distinctions in favor of a hierarchy of pious belief and practice."⁶⁸ For the Ursulines, the *only* eligibility requirement for admission to their schools was a pupil's gender.

The Counter-Reformation inspired *Code Noir* doctrine of an "aggressively inclusive" Catholic church resulted in racially integrated Catholic space across New

⁶⁶ Clark, 48.

⁶⁷ Stern, *Race and Education*, 25.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 64.

Orleans. In addition to the *Code Noir*, the system of parish organization that grouped all residents of a particular geographic location all but ensured Catholic churches were serving local Catholics regardless of color or status. This evidence is further corroborated by the high frequency with which white people stood as sponsors at Black baptisms.⁶⁹ These interracial Catholic spaces, however, still adhered to certain prescriptions of the racial order. For instance, there were two distinct sections of seating within churches before Emancipation: the middle section was reserved for whites and free people of color, who often mixed in pews, while enslaved Black people sat on side benches.

In *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, historian James B. Bennett chronicles what he calls “interracial Catholicism” across much of the nineteenth century. This kind of interracial space of worship in the Southern U.S. was quite unusual and speaks to the uniqueness of New Orleans’s Catholic tradition rooted in *Code Noir* and the French Counter-Reformation. Bennett also explains that the Catholic church’s ambivalence toward its parishioners of color resulted from a recognition of the need to preserve its membership numbers. This was quite difficult, however, since the Archdiocese did not want to alienate the Black Catholics, who made up two-thirds of its New Orleans’s membership or the white Catholics who strongly believed in the white supremacist Southern racial order. However, internal operations did begin to change, and the postbellum seating within Catholic churches allocated all people of color to the newly installed boards along the back and

⁶⁹ J. B. Bennett, *Rise of Jim Crow*, 138.

sidewalls, prohibiting them from sitting in the pews with whites. These changes were intended to please white Catholics who were vocally displeased with sharing their spaces of worship with Black Catholics until 1895 with the opening of St. Katherine's, the city's first parish exclusively for Black Catholics.

Francis Janssens served as the white Archbishop of New Orleans from 1843 to 1897 and considered himself a proponent of Black Catholics. He stewarded the opening of St. Katherine's, which he saw as a refuge for Black Catholics who could worship peacefully without the violent racial order playing out in pews. Some Creoles of Color in the late nineteenth century, however, saw the opening of St. Katherine's to be insulting and a further cementation of the white supremacist policies that sought to keep Black people living under state-sponsored racial terrorism, which had justified lynching and already begun legally segregating train cars, schools, commerce, and sports.⁷⁰ Janssens's legacy illuminates the ongoing ambivalence of the Archdiocese of New Orleans toward Black Catholics. Although he considered himself dedicated to Black Catholics and racial justice—he re-established the Order of the Holy Family, the first and only all-Black order of nuns started in New Orleans and publicly condemned lynching—Janssens saw the establishment of separate Black Catholic churches as a benefit to Black Catholics of New Orleans.⁷¹ Janssens's

⁷⁰ The term "Creoles of Color" references a specific group of people, who sometimes identify simply as "Creoles." Creoles of Color specifically references people of color, usually with mixed ancestry that includes African, European, and/or Native/Indigenous backgrounds, who are descended from free people of color. See Sybil Kein, ed. *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000).

⁷¹ J. B. Bennett, *Rise of Jim Crow*, 173. The history of the Sisters of the Holy Family is fascinating, as is their founder, Henriette Delille. For more on Delille and the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, see Edward Tracy Brett, *The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family: African American*

ideological approach to managing Black Catholics in the late nineteenth century mirrored the language of “separate but equal,” which found the racial segregation of riders in train cars constitutional with the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

In 1873, under Janssens’s leadership, the Order of the Good Shepherd opened its doors to all the girls of New Orleans and seamlessly entered into a centuries-long complicated Catholic relationship to the racial and social ordering of New Orleans. The “aggressively inclusive” Catholic church doctrine illuminates the mission of the House of the Good Shepherd, which saw its duty as serving “homeless, wayward, and criminal women and girls” regardless of racial background. Despite the House of the Good Shepherd’s aggressive inclusivity, it also mirrored the ongoing ambivalence of Catholic institutions toward Black Catholics of New Orleans. In doing so, the reformatory quietly capitulated to the growing demands of white supremacist Catholics of New Orleans, who sought to extend clear rules on racial segregation into the church. In this way, the House of the Good Shepherd encapsulates what Stern calls the “the interplay between race, education, and urban change...[to] underscore the fluidity of race as a social construct and the extent to which segregation often evolved through a dynamic, improvisational process.”⁷²

Louisiana’s method of documenting racial difference in the census also has its roots in the implementation of *Code Noir*. As Shannon Dawdy explains, before 1724,

Missionaries to the Garifuna of Belize (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*; M. Shawn Copeland, *The Subversive Power of Love: The Vision of Henriette Delille*, Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality; 2007 (New York: Paulist Press, 2009); Mary Bernard Deggs, Virginia Meacham Gould, and Charles E. Nolan, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, Black Women Writers Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

⁷² Stern, *Race and Education*, 3.

“race” as a category of human classification was not widely nor clearly articulated, and thus, the terminology used to “describe origin, color, and legal status” in the occupied Louisiana territories “varied widely from census to census and enumerator to enumerator.”⁷³ Moreover, even after the Louisiana *Code Noir* established a binary system of marking difference in skin color with the terms *blancs* and *noirs*, modeled in part after the 1685 *Code Noir* of Saint Domingue, “on the colonial ground...these terms appear to have been little used,” and many French colonial Louisianans continued to deemphasize the difference of skin tones, hypothesizing that the difference of culture and thus ideology was a more important social distinction.⁷⁴ This was not an uncommon belief in the mid-eighteenth century, and, as a result, the “early Louisiana censuses are most concerned with legal status, and secondarily with origin and color.”⁷⁵ This concern with legal status can be seen in both the law and the church, with the Louisiana Supreme Court willing to recognize a tripartite racial structure as late as 1856 and the Catholic church offering separate seating to parishioners based on legal status, with free people of color and white people often sharing pews as late as the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁶

⁷³ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 154.

⁷⁴ Dawdy, 155.

⁷⁵ Dawdy, 155.

⁷⁶ *State v. Harrison, a Slave*, 11 La. Ann. 722 (1856). Louisiana Supreme Court decision ruled in favor of a state law that officially recognized *gens de couleur libre* as a distinct legal category. Jennifer Spear points out the importance of this decision “on the eve of the Civil War,” at interrupting the narrative that New Orleans’s racial system “was effortlessly Anglo-Americanized in the years following the Louisiana purchase.” For more on this, see Jennifer M. Spear, *Race*, 183.

With the U.S. purchase of the Louisiana territories in 1803, there was an effort to “Anglo-Americanize” New Orleans. This, however, was an uphill climb both legally and socially. Louisiana legal historian Judith Kelleher Schafer, for example, notes the suspicion with which Louisianans viewed Anglo common law and the lasting influence of the Civil Code. Likewise, the lasting influence of the tripartite racial order, rather than a binaristic one, helped to perpetuate New Orleans’s reputation for racial mixing, miscegenation, and an exceedingly complex set of racial categories. Upon visiting New Orleans in 1850, Fredrick Law Olmsted reported on these racial categories for his Anglo-American readers by fabricating three categories and mischaracterizing others, because he incorrectly mapped Médéric-Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry’s description of Saint-Dominique’s racial hierarchy onto New Orleans.⁷⁷ The Olmsted example additionally illuminates the ignorance with which the Anglo-American U.S. viewed New Orleans while highlighting these racial and social distinctions.

From the late seventeenth century onward, the Catholic church has continued to play an important role in the practice of managing racial difference in Louisiana. The ideologies of difference were to some extent practiced within the church’s walls with the antebellum seating arrangements and the continual feature of interracial Catholicism until 1895 with the opening of St. Katherine’s, New Orleans’s first separate Black parish. The House of the Good Shepherd is no exception. Although the Sisters of the Good Shepherd arrived in New Orleans in 1853, they did not open

⁷⁷ Spear, *Race*, 182.

the North Broad Street location until 1873. When the House of the Good Shepherd eventually did open its doors, they—like all Catholic institutions in New Orleans at the time—accepted girls of all races into the reformatory. The ambivalence of white Catholic officials in New Orleans was also at work in the House of the Good Shepherd’s approach to racial management for all of its existence at the Broad Street location. Although the House of the Good Shepherd was a somewhat exceptional institution in the context of the U.S. South for its approach to race and gender as a reformatory for girls during Reconstruction and Jim Crow New Orleans, it was, in many ways, an ordinary Catholic institution trying desperately to keep both its Black and white Catholics as loyal parishioners.

Chapter 3: The Carceral Gaze of Girlhood: Sexualization, Whiteness, and the Storyville Girls

The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 was passed in the wake of a moral panic during the U.S.'s rapid lurch toward the twentieth century. This particular moral panic was fueled by progressive reformers' concerns over immigration, urbanization, and changing sexual attitudes.¹ The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910—also called the Mann Act after Illinois congressman James R. Mann—was based on the Constitution's interstate commerce clause and the 1904 international treaty for “the suppression of white slave traffic.”² The treaty was a formal agreement signed by heads of state in Europe and the U.S. to ensure “women [of]...an efficacious protection against the criminal traffic known under the name of trade in white women.”³ To address what was seen by many Progressive reformers as the urgent and rampant issue of “white slavery,” Congress passed a law to regulate the movement of (white) girls and women across state lines rather than eradicate the sexual exploitation of girls and women generally.

¹ For more on the relationship between “the girl problem” and the Progressive Era, see my “Introduction: On the Carcerality of Girlhood” and “Chapter 1: ‘Abduction and Seduction’ The Legal Making of New Orleans’s Girl Problems.” For a discussion the Progressive Era and the passage of the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, see “Chapter 2: Prostitutes, Progressives, and Moral Panic, 1907-1914” in Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*; Jessica R. Pliley, *Policing Sexuality*. For a general overview of the Progressive Era, see Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

² Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 41.

³ The treaty (35 Stat. 1979, Treat Series 496) is titled, “Suppression of White Slave Traffic,” and was signed by Heads of State from Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, “Great Britain and Ireland and British Dominions beyond the Seas,” Italy, Netherlands, “Portugal and the Algarves,” Russia, Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland in 1904. At that time, it was verbally signed by the U.S. and “proclaimed by the President of the United States June 5, 1908.”

“White slavery” is an amorphous, vague, and racist term that gestures to the moral panic over a largely imagined global network of men abducting white girls and holding them captive in brothels as sex workers. As anthropologist Roger N. Lancaster explains, “moral panics can be defined broadly as any mass movement that emerges in response to a false, exaggerated, or ill-defined moral threat to society and proposes to address this threat through punitive measures.”⁴ In the case of the “white slavery” moral panic, the punitive measures emerged in the form of the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 which, legal historian David Langum notes, “victimized” far more women and girls than “so-called white slavery.”⁵ Moral panics also include two notable features: taboos and scapegoating. In the case of “white slavery,” the taboo and scapegoating emerged in the idea that white girls were engaging in sex with nonwhite men. Lancaster further elaborates, “panics around ‘white slavery’ crystallized pervasive anxieties about the economic decline of the Victorian middle class and white skilled workers who were native-born. Social reformers fancifully imagine that white women and girls were being kidnapped and forced to sexually service black, brown, and yellow men.”⁶

During the late nineteenth century, the term “white slavery” became synonymous with a racist panic over white girls and women working as sex workers. The partnership between “white slavery” and prostitution in the U.S. emerges through an apocryphal story published in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1907 by famed muckraker

⁴ Roger N. Lancaster, *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 23.

⁵ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 11.

⁶ Lancaster, *Sex Panic*, 23.

George Kibbe Turner. In the story, Turner claimed, “Russian Jews” were responsible for a “loosely organized association” that furnished Chicago brothels with women.⁷ To support this, Turner offers “proof” in the fact that Chicago prosecutor Clifford G. Roe purportedly found a note, apparently thrown from a brothel by a sex worker, which claimed she was a “white slave.”⁸ Roe then clamors on about the so-called “magnitude” of “white slavery,” unequivocally tying it to racial slavery in the U.S. when he proclaims, “the white slave... is a slave as much as the negro [sic] was before the civil war [sic].”⁹

Needless to say, women and girls engaging in sex work is something of an historical constant, regardless of color or the system of contemporary racial ordering.¹⁰ Furthermore, the panic over so-called “white slavery” deliberately and callously minimizes the horror of the actual transatlantic slave trade and racialized slavery in the U.S.—a system that legally supported and encouraged the sexual

⁷ Langum, *Crossing Over the Line*, 27. Emma Goldman also discusses “white slavery”—or prostitution, more broadly—in her essay, “The Traffic in Women,” which argues that prostitution is neither novel, nor does it necessitate the kinds of panic-induced laws being passed. Instead, Goldman argues, prostitution is a problem of capitalism, which enforces the subjugation of women and therefore creates a market for prostitution based on the devaluation of women’s labor. Gayle Rubin also has an essay entitled “The Traffic in Women: Notes of the Political Economy of Sex,” which explores what she calls the “sex/gender system” through a Marxist reading of Freud and Lévi-Strauss. Rubin then writes a follow-up piece unpacking the problems with the term “traffic” and offering a critique of the rhetoric of “white slavery.” See Emma Goldman, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Anarchism and Other Essays*. (London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911); Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Gayle Rubin, “The Trouble With Trafficking: Afterthoughts on ‘The Traffic of Women,’” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁸ Langum, 27.

⁹ Langum, 27.

¹⁰ For more on this see Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1987); Nils Johan Ringdal, *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

possession and control of Black girls' bodies by white slave owners.¹¹ Not only does the term "white slavery" perpetuate an insidious form of anti-Black racism that glosses over the cruelty of racialized slavery in the U.S., but it is also rooted in what anthropologist Gayle Rubin outlines as "northern European (generally thought of as "Anglo-Saxon" or Nordic") Protestant supremacy against groups seen as socially and 'racially' inferior."¹² This form of moral panic-induced white supremacy is also linked to turn-of-the-twentieth-century forms of racial terror, specifically the lynching of Black men. In fact, white supremacist logics that justified the ruthless murder of thousands of Black men by white mobs depended on the "myth of the Black rapist," which located white girls and women as perpetual victims to the sexual threats of Black men.¹³ Angela Davis explains, "the myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications."¹⁴

¹¹ As Jessica Marie Johnson explains, enslaved African women and girls "did not control sexual or reproductive access to their bodies or lineages," see Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Davis, "Reflections." After the transatlantic slave trade was abolished in 1808, enslaved women's bodies were considered valuable for breeding more enslaved people. For more on breeding, and sexuality and slavery more generally, see Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris, *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas*, Gender and Slavery (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

¹² Gayle Rubin, "The Trouble With Trafficking," 72.

¹³ For more on lynching, lynch law, white womanhood, sexuality, and the racist myth of the Black rapist, see Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); David Marriott, *On Black Men* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); David Squires, "Outlawry: Ida B. Wells and Lynch Law," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2015); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings*, Classics in Black Studies Series (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States* (Project Gutenberg, 2005); Robyn Wiegman, "The Anatomy of Lynching," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3 (1993).

¹⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage eBooks, 2011), 267.

Lisa Duggan ruminates on the relationship between early twentieth-century lynching narratives and lesbian love murder stories to argue both appear “at the end of the nineteenth century, as threats to white masculinity and to the stability of the white home as fulcrum of political and economic hierarchies.”¹⁵ Instead of focusing on lesbian love murder stories, this chapter explores how the moral panic over white slavery can be understood alongside “the girl problem” as a threat to the stability of “white masculinity” and “the white home.” For example, Chicago anti-vice crusader Ernest A. Bell’s book, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls, or, War on the White Slave Trade*, was released the same year that Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, and functions as a kind of “white slavery” panic manual for racist parents and adults, providing a lengthy text, equipped with illustrations and photographs depicting white girls in various states of incarceration (Figures 3.2 & 3.3), being lured by swarthy and vaguely ethnic men (Figure 3.4), or dead (Figure 3.5). These images are clearly intended to impart paranoia over what many “crusaders” understood to be the pervasiveness of the “white slave trade,” and the imminent danger white girls faced when leaving the home. Likewise, through representational practices, these images help to perpetuate a scopic regime of power that delineates the boundaries of girlhood, enforcing them as white, captive and an object of sexual desire. Both the objects and representational practices encompass what Nick Mirzoeff might call a

¹⁵ Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.

“complex of visibility,” or the “classifying, separating, and aestheticizing together” to articulate a “claim to authority” that is made to seem “self-evident.”¹⁶

This chapter argues that modern U.S. girlhood is made through a “complex of visibility” that depends on constructions of whiteness, sexualization, the law, and carcerality. In it, I consider how visual depictions—mainly photographs—and the law intersect to shape girlhood as white, sexualized, and captive. I first examine images from *Fighting the Traffic in Girls* alongside the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 to understand how girlhood became white through visual representations and the law. I then analyze Ernest J. Bellocq’s photographs of girl sex workers from New Orleans’s Storyville amidst the “white slavery” panic that engage what I call “the carceral gaze of girlhood,” or the convergence of fantasy and scopophilia in the act of looking at images of sexualized girlhoods in captivity. Finally, I consider images of girls incarcerated in New Orleans’s House of the Good Shepherd to argue that these images engage the same kinds of logics of carceral girlhood.

In this chapter, I also take up art historian Carol Mavor’s very pertinent question: “to what extent can the photograph serve as a commentary on the legal system that governed all of the little girls?”¹⁷ Rather than considering the photograph as merely a commentary, I am concerned with the reciprocal relationship between photography and law. Considering the relationship between the laws governing girls’ lives and photography of girlhood illuminates the relationship between the visual and

¹⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visibility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2-4.

¹⁷ Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 19.

the legal, both as semiotic processes integral to subject formation. The co-constitutive processes of subject formation and incarceration emerge at the intersection of law and photography. This chapter considers the relationship between the photograph as a representation of white girlhood, the gaze of the (adult viewer) as a form of sexual surveillance, and the law as a remedy for the transgressions observed from said surveillance.

While Mavor asks this question specifically about Victorian girlhood and its relationship to a scopic regime of photography, my use of Mavor's provocative question here employs what archaeologist Shannon Lee Dawdy calls the patina approach to understand both knowable and unknowable pasts through reading visual patina of the built environment.¹⁸ I use Dawdy's theory of patina—particularly as it relates to New Orleans historiography—as a heuristic to consider the problem of girlhood as a continuum of punishment and control by examining layered meanings of visual cultures and the law. I analyze the photographic patina of New Orleanian girlhood as it spans time and space to consider how the visual uses of the girl's body play into the jurisprudential making of girlhood. Furthermore, I consider how the visual legacy of Victorian girlhood continues to shape the racialized and classist expectations the state places upon girls' bodies. By examining examples of visual girlhoods across New Orleans that circulate at the margins of the House of the Good Shepherd, I trace a kind of genealogy of carceral girlhood.

¹⁸ In my introduction, I discuss Dawdy's theorization of patina, as well as my use of the term as a transhistorical methodology to connect knowable and unknowable pasts to the unfolding present.

There is, however, a dearth of images of the House of the Good Shepherd. Besides extremely grainy images accompanying newspaper articles (Figure 3.1), there are no known photographs inside the reformatory, nor are there photographs of the girls before the 1950s. Therefore, we must look to albums of photographs that can help analyze sexualization and the problem of visual girlhood.¹⁹ Cultural historian Tina Campt theorizes the album as a “haptic archive of re/collection...constituted in the service of the state.”²⁰ Specifically, I consider albums of photographs of two commercial New Orleans photographers, Charles L. Franck and Ernest J. Bellocq, who had intimate knowledge of the House of the Good Shepherd.²¹ Franck was hired to take promotional photographs of the reformatory in 1956 to help raise money for the grievously indebted House of the Good Shepherd. These photographs are the only known photographs taken of girls while incarcerated in the House of the Good Shepherd and come nearly eighty years after the reformatory opened in New Orleans. Bellocq’s photos, on the other hand, showcase a kind of girlhood that would be familiar to the House of the Good Shepherd in its heyday: sex workers in 1912. Separated by nearly a half-century, both photographers were employed by the city to document landscapes, real estate, and municipal projects. Yet, it is their collections of

¹⁹ In *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt theorizes “albums” of prisoner photos from the Breakwater Prison in South Africa. She reads the album as a “haptic archive of re/collection, albeit one constituted in the services of the state” (75). I will return to Campt’s reading of these “prisoner photos” in my analysis of Bellocq’s *Storyville Portraits*. See Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁰ Campt, 75.

²¹ For more on Franck’s work photographing girls at the House of the Good Shepherd, see “Chapter 2: ‘Proud to be Among the Very First to Desegregate;’ Imagining/Managing Racial Difference, Black Girlhood, and Catholicism at the House of the Good Shepherd,” which explores the management of racial difference within the walls of the convent.

photographs of girls that work to uphold the visual—and as I will argue, carceral—legacies of Victorian girlhood.

Making Girlhood White, Captive, and Sexualized

In *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI*, feminist scholar Jessica Pliley explains, “white slavery was a term that evoked racialized understandings of female vulnerability, prompted vigorous debates about prostitution, rampant sexuality, and urban life, and conjured a particular set of conceptions that rendered women as both victims and as subjects of sexual surveillance.”²² Figure 3.2 is a visual rendering of the archetypal “white slave” under this form of “sexual surveillance.” Her likeness features extensively throughout *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*. In fact, this same image appears on the cover of the book. Figure 3.2 can be considered a representation of who members of the Chicago Vice Squad imagined being on the other end of that note: a beautiful white girl in distress, held captive for sex by networks of lecherous (nonwhite) men.

Figure 3.3 is the photographic complement of Figure 3.2. Both of these visual representations of girlhood traffic in a kind of fantasy of girlhood in captivity, a fantasy driven by imagining the (sexual) rationale for punishing girls. While neither of these images is explicitly sexual, both of them invite the viewer to imagine these girls engaged in sex because sex is the reason they are behind bars, in need of saving.

²² Pliley, *Policing Sexuality*, 2.

Gayle Wald defines girlhood not as “a universal component of female experience” but as “very specific practices and discourses about female sexuality, women’s cultural-political agency, and women’s social location.”²⁴ Wald muses on the appropriation of girlhood, which “like the word *girl* itself, signifies ambiguously; as a mode of culturally voiced resistance to patriarchal femininity; as a token of a sort of ‘gestural feminism’ that is complicit with the trivialization, marginalization, and eroticism of women...that potentially recuperates girlhood in universalizing, ethnocentric terms.”²⁵ In being “just a girl,” Wald claims “such recuperation of girlhood has been staged in terms that equate girlness with whiteness.”²⁶



Figure 3.2 & 3.3: Pages from Ernest Albert Bell’s *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls; Or, War on the White Slave Trade; a Complete and Detailed Account of the Shameless Traffic in Young Girls*, 1910.

²⁴ Gayle Wald, “Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23, no. 3 (1998): 590.

²⁵ Wald, “Just a Girl,” 590.

²⁶ Wald, 590.

Not only is the text of *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* steeped in racist and xenophobic fears of the Other, the images of the girl's body are rendered through a regime of what cultural historian Nicole Fleetwood calls carceral visibility, or the process by which incarcerated people are simultaneously "invisible and hypervisible, but also unseeing and unseen."²⁷ Although Fleetwood's concept of carceral visibility speaks to the contemporary prison-industrial complex, the girl in *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* is visually depicted in a state of captivity, seen to us, the viewers, but hidden from the public, hence the description as "a book designed to awaken the sleeping," or those who do not know about "white slavery."²⁸ Yet, these images employ a different kind of carceral visibility than what Fleetwood discusses in her book *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* because the images are sensationalist fantasies of captivity rather than actual images of girls incarcerated within the prison-industrial complex (although some of those photos follow). In Figure 3.2, for example, a young white girl peers upward from behind bars while a man looks at her, fingers pressed, the faintest smile maybe present on his out-of-focus face. The image is captioned with what can only be assumed to be her prayers and pleas: "My god! If I could only get out of here." The caption then explains, "the midnight shriek of a young girl in the vice district of a large city, heard by two worthy men, started a crusade which resulted in closing up the dens of shame in that city."²⁹

²⁷ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Making Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 16.

²⁸ E. Bell, *Traffic in Young Girls*, front cover.

²⁹ E. Bell, image caption.

The carceral visibility at play in this image is the display of a white girl who remains unseen to the “two worthy men,” but seen to the viewer; she is simultaneously unseeing, in so far as she peers upward, averting the viewer’s gaze.

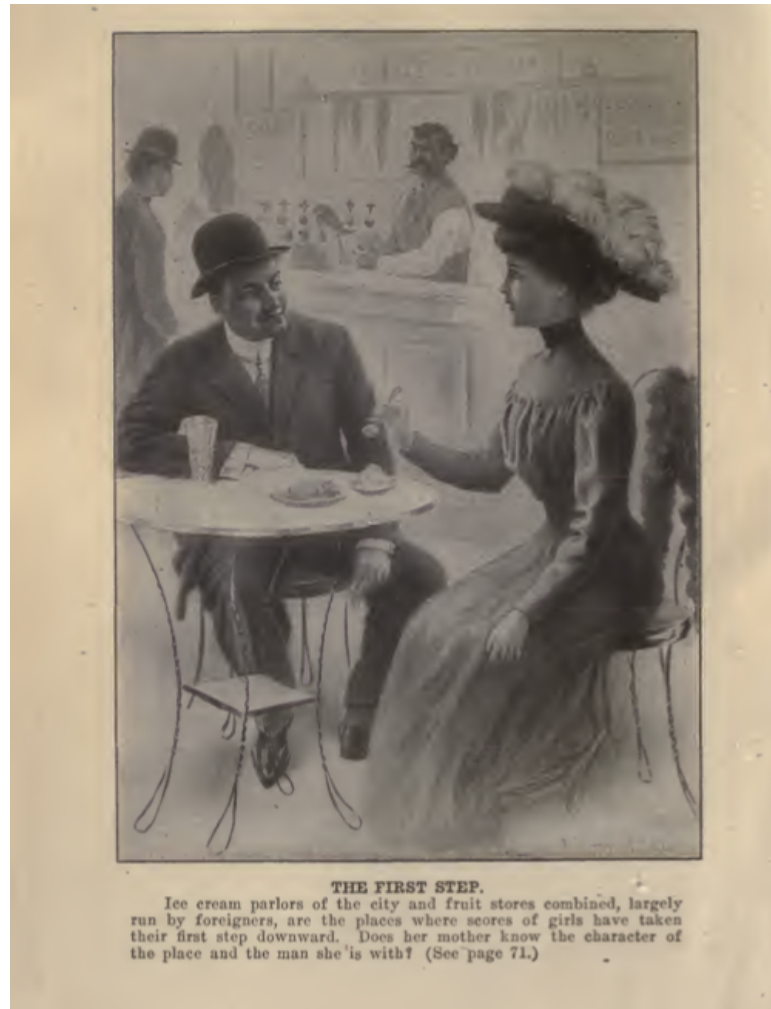


Figure 3.4: Page from Ernest Albert Bell’s *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls; Or, War on the White Slave Trade; a Complete and Detailed Account of the Shameless Traffic in Young Girls*, 1910.

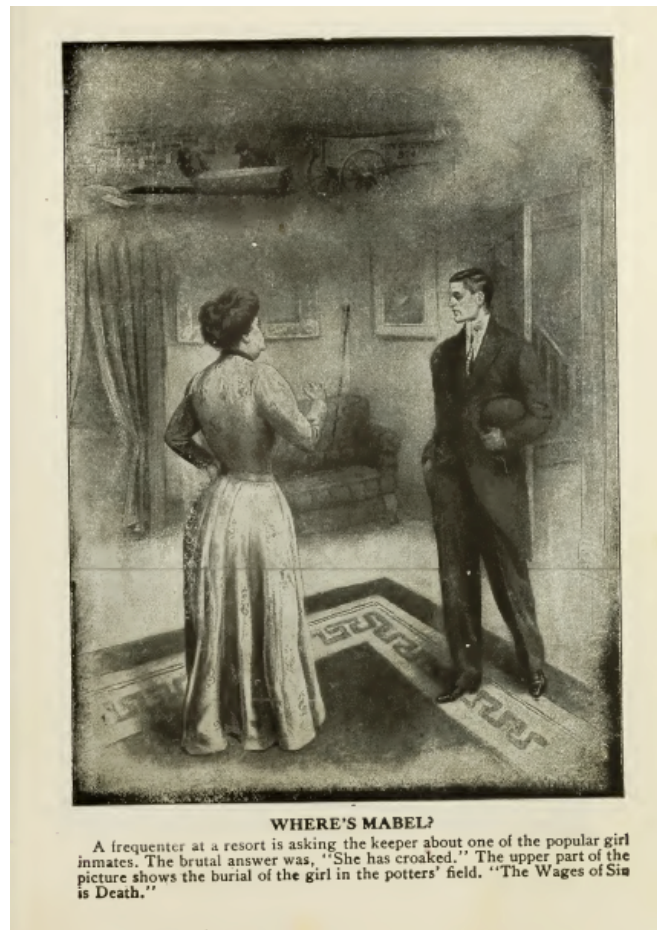


Figure 3.5: Page from Ernest Albert Bell's *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls; Or, War on the White Slave Trade; a Complete and Detailed Account of the Shameless Traffic in Young Girls*, 1910.

While the white girl averts the viewer's gaze, the viewer can take in most of her body, seen in anguish behind bars. The bars create a symmetrical image, the center of which crosses right at her breasts where her hands are grasped in prayer. The viewer focuses on her breasts to be reminded that she is devout, in danger, and Christian. These crossed bars over clasped hands replace a would-be crucifix as she pines for her salvation. Although Figure 3.3 does not compel the viewer's gaze to focus on the incarcerated white girl's breast, a faint cross appears in the background,

echoing piety and salvation. The viewer gazes onto these white girls' captive bodies; they are damsels in distress, an all-too-familiar sight.

These images are also examples of what Michelle Brown calls “penal spectatorship,” or the mundane practice of viewing scenes of punishment that are made to seem normal.³⁰ However, the images in *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* command a different kind of spectatorship that integrates the viewer into a sexualized gaze onto the girl's body while simultaneously racializing her as white—practices that are now disappointingly made to seem normal. By looking at these kinds of images, the girl's body simultaneously becomes a source of sexual desire and a site of criminalization.

While echoing carceral visibility and penal spectatorship, these images are distinct from Fleetwood's and Brown's theorizations because they tether whiteness and sexualization to a panoptical view of the girl's body; she is under threat and perpetually watched. The carceral gaze of girlhood, thus is the watchful eye of the adult, viewing her body as always already a source of sexual desire and purity, as well as a site of racialized biopolitical interest. In the viewing and obsession of the possibility of the girl's body as a constant source of sexual desire, her body becomes that irresistible source of sexual desire and thus what keeps her captive, in her home, in the “dens of shame,” or in the jails, reformatories, and prisons to which she is sentenced.

³⁰ Michelle Brown, *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society, and Spectacle*, Alternative Criminology Series (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Instead of closing “the dens of shame” in “large cit[ies],” the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 forbade the transport of girls or women across state lines for “immoral purposes.” The relationship between *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* and the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 echoes the relationship between law and visibility. The book and its countless images of white girls in states of duress, captivity, fear, and danger render girlhood generally to be always already white and the obvious object of sexual desire. To this end, the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 became a way to further punish white girls for adults’ sexualized fantasies of them. Still, it did nothing to protect the many nonwhite girls from the threat of racial and gender violence in the U.S. Furthermore, what of all the nonwhite girls experiencing sexual assault, molestation, and/or exploitation? Why does so-called “colorblind” U.S. law have a federal statute that still exists (!) to protect one group?³¹

In this way, the law’s relationship to the visual regime of power is co-constitutive; both visual representations of girlhood and the law work to create the category of the girl as a white, feminine, and sexualized object of desire. These images show us clothed girls held captive behind bars. While the images are not necessarily explicitly sexual, they engage in a kind of carceral gaze, which compels the viewer to operationalize a scopophilic viewing of the incarcerated girls. In this way, what does it mean to look at images of girlhood? Is gazing at girlhood always a sexualized act?

³¹ For more on the myth of colorblindness in U.S. law, see D. Bell, *Race*.

Pretty Baby and the Storyville Girls

An excellent way to explore these questions is through considering explicitly sexual images held within the albums of carceral girlhood. Commercial photographer Ernest J. Bellocq offers a particularly compelling set of images taken around 1912 in New Orleans's red-light district, Storyville. These images, known as the "Storyville Portraits," consist of eighty-nine portraits of sex workers in Storyville and became somewhat well-known in the latter half of the twentieth century, reappearing in fine arts and popular culture. In 1970, thirty-four of these images were reproduced by contemporary photographer Lee Friedlander for a photography show at the Museum of Modern Art. These images were also included in a book, *Storyville Portraits: Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, released by the Museum of Modern Art Press, also in 1970. These images were also the subject of the surprisingly under-the-radar 1978 film *Pretty Baby*.

The film borrows its title from Ragtime composer and pianist Tony Jackson's song, *Pretty Baby*. *Pretty Baby*, the film, features twelve-year-old Brooke Shields playing a twelve-year-old sex worker who marries a fictionalized version of a thirty-something photographer, Ernest J. Bellocq, in New Orleans in the early twentieth century. The film takes place in a sensationalized version of Storyville, New Orleans's municipally sanctioned red-light district. In the film, twelve-year-old Shields plays Violet, the daughter of Hattie, who is also a sex worker. They live in the fictionalized Madame Nell's brothel in Storyville with a handful of other sex workers

in 1917, as the social pressure of Progressive Era reformers in New Orleans begins to build around outlawing prostitution.

Pretty Baby is controversial for a variety of reasons, the least of which is the celebration of a particular kind of white girlhood sexuality read onto the body of Shields, who seems to be the only young girl in all of New Orleans.³² In *Pretty Baby*, not only does twelve-year-old Shields play a twelve-year-old sex worker who marries a physically abusive, lecherous adult man over twice her age, but she is also repeatedly shown being physically assaulted by adult men. In one scene, she is taken into the barn and beaten by the house handyman. This beating was Violet's punishment after she aggressively disrobed and sexually assaulted a young Black boy who worked in the brothel. However, Violet is not punished because she is sexually assaulting another person. Violet is punished because the person she assaults is Black. With this example, we, the viewers, are engaged in the carceral gaze of white girlhood. We are conditioned to accept Violet's sexualization and expect it. We are also conditioned to see her body punished and expect it. As Violet is punished for crossing the color line, we hear the same screams as when her virginity is "taken"—her punishment, a kind of sexualization to control white girlhood and enforce the myth of white purity, all at the expense of Black boy/manhood.

The film opens with Violet's mother, Hattie, in labor, delivering Violet's new brother. The opening shot zooms in on Violet's face, carefully watching something,

³² Young girls, including those around the age of twelve were commonplace as sex workers and residents in the district. In the film, only one other girl is shown; she lives in the brothel with Violet and never utters a word. However, there are references to other adult women's girlhoods growing up in the brothel.

someone. We hear screams and moans of what sound like performative orgasmic ecstasy, but as the camera zooms out, we see Hattie's screams are labor pains, and Violet is intently watching her mother with an unflinching gaze. As Violet becomes a big sister, she also gets initiated into her first experience with sex work. As she stumbles around the parlor, whispering to her housemates the news of her brother's arrival, she interrupts flirting, sneaks peanuts, and tries to steal one sailor's drink. When he catches her, he aggressively grabs Violet and sits her on his lap. Screaming across the room, he asks, "You selling little girls now, Madame Nell? White slavery, huh?" right before stroking Violet's face and asking if she knows how to kiss. Violet demurs.

In the film, Shields exhibits the attributes of what art historian Anne Higonnet calls the "ideal of Romantic childhood:" she is innocent (a giggling virgin at the beginning of the film) and feminized (her cheeks are rouged and lined blue eyes round and soft). Yet, she is steeped in the projections of adult sexual desire (her virginity is auctioned off for \$400 to a man who appears to be in his fifties, after outbidding a few sailors and an elderly man called "senator"), becoming what literary theorist James Kincaid explains is the child "assembled in reference to desire, built up in erotic manufactories."³³ However, the Romantic, idealized child paves the way for the erotically manufactured child insofar as the invention of innocence becomes the basis for the child as a *tabula rasa*, not as a metaphor for human consciousness as

³³ James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

John Locke posits. In this way, the Romantic, idealized child is engendered as pure and innocent, and thus a blank slate for the projection of adult erotic fantasies.³⁴ In Figure 3.6, we (the adults) see this at work.

In Figure 3.6, twelve-year-old Shields playing twelve-year-old Violet reclines fully nude in a hyper-sexualized scene that attempts to give a backstory to some of Bellocq's most infamous (and real) "Storyville Photographs."³⁵ Figures 3.7 and 3.8 showcase the "Storyville Girls" photographs that Violet emulates in this scene. The image of Violet as Storyville Girl is striking, overwhelming, unsettling; it lingers in the mind, with all its complications and entanglements, it stays with the viewer. We, the adult viewers, are consuming the image of an explicitly sexualized twelve-year-old and watching her perform the role of child sex worker for the pleasure of the adult men on screen. As Laura Mulvey explains, Shields-as-Violet "on display" functions on two levels: "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium."³⁶

Much lore surrounds both the initial photographing of the subjects as well as the damage to the film in the form of scratches on the faces of some of the so-called "Storyville Girls."³⁷ *Pretty Baby* offers a wholly fictionalized account of Bellocq and

³⁴ Locke, *Human Understanding*.

³⁵ This is not the first time a Shields as a child was hypersexualized in popular culture. One of contemporary photographer Richard Prince's most (in)famous pieces is *Spiritual America*, a print of photographer Gary Gross's 1975 photograph of 10-year-old Brooke Shields, originally meant for publication in Playboy Press's *Sugar and Spice*—a 1976 book of contemporary photographers' sensual/erotic/soft-core pornographic photographs of women and girls. *Spiritual America* is Prince's repurposing of a photograph of a then ten-year-old naked Brooke Shields.

³⁶ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 11.

³⁷ See Figures 3.9 and 3.10 for examples of a "Storyville girl" photograph with scratches obscuring the face. In the film, Violet is jealous that Bellocq is busy photographing other girls after their marriage. Violet then grabs the glass plates and scratches them with the point of a pair of scissors.

his art by linking him, his photographs, and the damage done to them directly to Violet, who is also based on a “real” Storyville girl.³⁸ In fact, the character of Violet was developed by director Louis Malle and screenwriter Polly Platt from a short interview with a former sex worker.³⁹ This interview was initially conducted by eccentric researcher and local historian Al Rose and first published in his infamous and exhaustive book, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District*. Rose interviews “Violet” in the early 1960s when she is in her mid-fifties about life as a child sex worker in Storyville. The interview with Violet is included in the book, alongside countless newspaper facsimiles, police reports, and other oral histories woven together in what can only be described as a gossip rag meets folklore book.

³⁸ Violet is the name given to this person in the book, but it is noted that Violet is a fake name.

³⁹ There is a particularly interesting episode of the Hollywood history podcast, *You Must Remember This*, on the making of *Pretty Baby*. This episode appears in a season focusing explicitly on Platt’s career as a producer and screenwriter and offers what is a surprising, and almost—what I can only describe as—a postfeminist sex-positive reading of Violet’s sex work. My point with this note and the chapter more broadly is not to make a judgement about sex work and its liberatory potential, nor am I necessarily making an ethical argument about how girls’ sexuality should be viewed. I am interested in the relationship between the production and proliferation of images of girlhood and how they contribute to the sexualization and carcerality of girlhood.



Figure 3.6: Violet posing for Bellocq. Still from *Pretty Baby*, 1978.

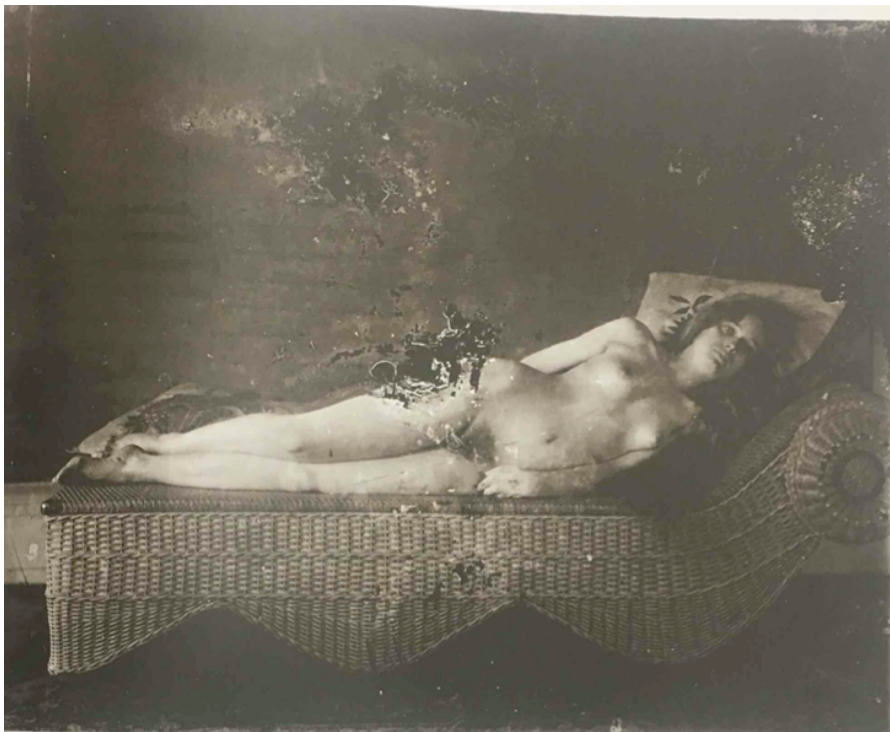


Figure 3.7: Ernest Bellocq, Plate 18, from *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*. Re-produced from prints made by Lee Friedlander, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970 (1912).

Shields is only twelve years old, barely an adolescent, the same age as Violet in her story to Rose. Mavor describes this time of pubescence as “it” when she recalls Alice (in Wonderland) who, “like all of us privileged with growing up, she grew into *it* and in spite of *it*, some years after getting back out of the White Rabbit’s hole and crossing through Looking-Glass’s narcissism.”⁴⁰ The “it” of adolescence, in all its “wavery” becomings, also stays with those of us who grow through and in spite of “it.” It sticks to us. Shields is the Odalisque, a subtle knowing gaze reflected back at us, the adult viewers. Is this what Mavor calls the “Medusa gaze turn[ing] air into glass and stop[ping] us in our tracks”?⁴¹ Or, are we adults just looking at an adult man’s fantasy of erotic and sexually available pubescent white girlhood?



Figure 3.8: Ernest Bellocq, Plate 8, from *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*. Re-produced from prints made by Lee Friedlander, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970 (1912).

⁴⁰ Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), xxix.

⁴¹ Mavor, *Becoming*, 16.

Pretty Baby is an attempt to keep Shields—or the idea of her—stuck with both the memory of the “White Rabbit’s hole” and in the “Looking-Glass’s narcissism.” Adolescence, however, falls short as a sufficient descriptor of what that “it” really means for Alice or Shields because adolescence is gendered and not neutral in its gendered expectations; it is also racialized and certainly not neutral in its racialized-gendered expectations. For Alice and Shields, it is in the racialized-gendered perception of what their bodies are expected to become that the “it” Mavor ruminates on seems to take its hold. “It” is girlhood, the effects of gendered adolescence on those of us who were deemed destined to live through “it.” Girlhood, after all, is the accretion of gazes and desires placed upon bodies expected to live/have lived through “it.” When we—as adults and viewers—look at Shields, we see “it,” some of us may feel “it.” Others may still even be in “it.” This dissonance hints at life after the violent cascade through the rabbit-hole, not quite arriving in Wonderland, but more like a world to come of toddlers in tiaras and tiny beauty queens; a world steeped in sexualized and carceral expectations of girlhood tied to whiteness and retrograde ideas of purity and innocence. The dissonance echoes throughout this new world of girls in makeup and curlers with tiny bodies adorned in mini ball gowns; it emerges in the public obsession over JonBenét Ramsey’s dead white body and the continued search for her killer, or in the recent moral panic over the 2020 Netflix French film

Mignonnes (Cuties) and the perpetually ensuing debate over when it is acceptable to sexualize a young girl, and what kinds of young girls it is acceptable to sexualize.⁴²

The dissonance between Violet as the Romantic child and erotically manufactured child recalls Mary Zaborskis's provocative concept of "age drag." Zaborskis argues that gender and sexuality are temporal ideas that get mapped onto the body. For Zaborskis, it is exactly this kind of painted on pageantry that "destabilize[s] the when of gender."⁴³ This destabilization is also reminiscent of Kathryn Bond-Stockton's argument in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, which claims that childhood is a queer category, and the problems begin when non-children try to translate the discrete and bounded concept of children's sexuality into that of adult worlds.⁴⁴ The problem of children's sexuality emerges from the hermeneutics of non-children's engagements with it, an omnipresent lens that cannot be removed. But why is the child—specifically, the girl—more often than not inherently sexual, and how does the visibility of girlhood indulge that sexualization? Moreover, what do we non-children get from obsessing over children's sexuality? How do non-children understand the culture of childhood outside the constraints of adulthood, which always understands childhood as a lived experience of the past?

If we non-children are to take up these questions, then the task at hand must be to consider the sexuality of children without the baggage of the sexuality of adults.

⁴² In my Conclusion, I discuss the legal and social controversies surrounding *Cuties* and its ties to moral panics of girlhood.

⁴³ Mary Zaborskis, "Age Drag," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2015): 117.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

Mavor calls this “impossible goal” blasphemous because it flies in the face of more than a century of the Freudian adult world of sense-making trying to understand, obsessing over, and controlling the sexuality of girls.⁴⁵ But what would it mean to “acknowledge the sexuality of children (even more specifically, that of the girl) while making every attempt not to project our oppressive desires onto their bodies”?⁴⁶ Is it always an impossible task?

What is roughly a thousand words in a much lengthier and thorough dissection of a fascinating place in time becomes the basis for this feature-length film. And yet, Violet’s interview, the closing of Storyville, along with the fact that some of Bellocq’s glass plates were defaced serve as the main historical inspiration for *Pretty Baby*. In a 224-page book filled with explicit details of sex acts, violence, and actions deemed to be criminal activity, it is notable that Malle and Platt only use half a page as the basis for his hour and forty-five-minute film. In fact, *Pretty Baby* can be seen as an obsessive focus on a story about a child sex worker.

What exactly are we viewers watching when we see twelve-year-old Violet’s virginity being auctioned off to a sea of grown men? The problem is that both the enjoyment of the film and the uproar over it amplifies a specific kind of sexualization of girlhood framed by the dialectic of protection and exploitation, and the ensuing debate over the display of children’s sexuality offers important insights into the fine line between the protection and exploitation of girlhood. However, this fine line

⁴⁵ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 11.

⁴⁶ Mavor, 11.

becomes the basis for Progressive Era laws, like the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, enacted with the explicit purpose of creating white girlhood as sexually (and racially) pure, then “saving” white girls from sex with nonwhite men.

This kind of sexualization engages in both age drag and the trappings of an adult-like vision of sexuality traced onto a child's body. Yet, something specific happens to both girlhood and a conceptualization of girlhood sexuality in Shields's performance of Violet—the viewers are forced into engaging in that same act of sexualization and thus complicit in the sexualization of the subject in the act of viewing. This may bring us—as adults—to ask what we are doing when watching *Pretty Baby* or viewing images of the Storyville girls? Are we consuming what has been deemed illicit, dangerous, and/or criminal? Does the intent of the viewer dictate what the object of visual inquiry is? What does it mean to view a child's body made up in the image of adult sexuality?

If we—again, as adults—follow *Pretty Baby*, one might assume Violet to be who poet Natasha Trethewey calls Bellocq's Ophelia, one of the beautiful and sad figures who sat for Bellocq while she had nothing else to do at the brothel, the slightest hint of a story to tell to whoever might focus on those “poised lips.”

Trethewey writes:

How long did she hold there, this other
Ophelia, nameless inmate in Storyville,
naked, her nipples offered up hard with cold?

The small mound of her belly, the pale hair
of her pubis—these things—her body
there for the taking. But in her face, a dare.

Staring into the camera, she seems to pull
all movements from her slender limbs
and hold it in her heavy-lidded eyes.
Her body limp as dead Ophelia's,
her lips poised to open, to speak.⁴⁷

The film wants us to think of Violet that way, as Ophelia, mad, soft, beautiful, tragic, feminine, and silent. But Violet, at least in Al Rose's account, does speak, and, the Violet of *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* does not speak of death, remembrance, or herbs, nor does she sing verses indexing her madness; Violet does not sound anything like Ophelia. Rose offers context about the interview and frames Violet before offering us her story.

She understood the serious purposes of the inquiry and, although sensitive to the possibility that her recollections might appeal to the prurient interest of some, she showed no tendency to exploit the fact that by reveling in her. She displayed neither shyness nor false modesty but, rather, a refreshing matter-of-factness.⁴⁸

To make *Pretty Baby*, Malle purchased the rights to Al Rose's book for \$50,000 to own Violet's story.⁴⁹ In the course of the interview, Violet explains—in explicit detail—her experiences as a sex worker. She begins by calling herself a “trick baby,” explaining that her “father was just one of them johns that paid [her] mother for a fuck.”⁵⁰ Violet was born in “the attic of Hilma Burt's house on Basin Street” and had only known life in a brothel at the beginning of the twentieth century. She chronicles

⁴⁷ Natasha D. Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia: Poems* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 148.

⁴⁹ Al Rose Collection, Hogan Jazz Archives, Tulane University.

⁵⁰ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 148.

her experience growing up in brothels in Storyville and her eventual foray into the sex work profession beginning at the age of ten by aiding her mother in cleaning a “john’s” penis before their intercourse.



Figure 3.9: Ernest Bellocq, Plate 31, from *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*. Re-produced from prints made by Lee Friedlander, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970 (1912).



Figure 3.10: Ernest Bellocq, *Storyville Girl Reclining on Couch*, original image ca. 1905, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1981.177.1-22.

It is hard to pinpoint what is the most striking part of Violet's speech. Naming how the speech strikes us—as adults—is perhaps more difficult. It is, however, quite something to read a frank account of a child worker performing sex acts with her mother. Violet's first experience with sex work is also depicted in *Pretty Baby* when Hattie is with a john who eyes Violet. Hattie explains to him, "Only French, she's still a virgin," and Violet closes the door behind her to join her mother.⁵¹ In Figure 3.11, we see Violet and Hattie posing for Bellocq, a photo inspired by Bellocq's portrait of a mother and daughter in Storyville (Figure 3.12.). The relationship between girls and their mothers has, of course, been theorized *ad nauseam*. In his lectures on *Femininity and Female Sexuality*, Freud outlines what he sees as the Oedipal tendencies of girls' "libidinal relations to her mother;" the mother is the girl's first object of sexual desire.⁵²

Women reformers of the Progressive Era relied on the Victorian holdover of a commoditized "cult of the child" as a way to return to "one's early years as a lost utopia" in their approach to girlhood since motherhood specifically became the avenue through which middle-class white women could engage in civic life.⁵³

Historians point to "Republican Motherhood" as a politically and socially engaged

⁵¹ In Storyville, "French" was most often a reference to oral sex, but sometimes could include anal sex. See Pamela D. Arceneaux, with a foreword by Emily Epstein Landau, *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*, ed. Dorothy Ball (New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017).

⁵² Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, and Peter Gay, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, The Standard Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 148. See "Femininity" (1925), and "Female Sexuality" (1931).

⁵³ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 2.

activism for middle-class white women. This conception of womanhood depended on white women as indexes of the relationship between a woman and her biopolitical child-rearing (and bearing) capabilities.⁵⁴ The trope of motherhood related to carceral girlhood in New Orleans during the Progressive Era emerges as the organizing principle for Progressive Era reformers and first-wave feminists entering politics. Motherhood was legible as the acceptable role women could occupy while arguing for a place in the national political conversation since these concerns bolstered the idea of maternalism as the defining female value. Ann Laura Stoler elaborates on the importance of the mother as a model of “restraint of passion and individual self-control” for her children during the Victorian Era.⁵⁵ The mother is responsible for her daughter’s (the girl’s) actions because it is the mother who must exert restraint or self-control at home, communicating to the girl how she can act in public. The relationship between women and girls is seen as a maternal kind of interaction, one which will extend from the social mores of the time to account for why a woman would be able to share opinions and engage in civic life.

⁵⁴ Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*.

⁵⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1995).



Figure 3.11: Mother and daughter, Hattie and Violet, posing for Bellocq. Still from *Pretty Baby*, 1978.

As “Republican Motherhood” becomes the organizing principle for Progressive Era reformers, mother-like relationships take shape across the social fields inhabited by girls. Madams of the brothels throughout Storyville assume the role of mother figures for the girls who work for them as sex workers. One of those madams, Lulu White, presided over Mahogany Hall and is described as “perhaps the most colorful, and certainly the most notorious of all Storyville madams and prostitutes.”⁵⁶ According to her bio in the self-published guide to Mahogany Hall, also known as “Lulu White’s Octoroon Club,” Miss Lulu, as she preferred to be called, claims to be a “famous West Indian octoroon” with “beautiful black hair and blue eyes, which have justly gained for her the title of the ‘Queen of the Demi-monde.’” Her actual ethnic and racial background is still disputed, with many historians claiming Miss Lulu was, in fact, the daughter of an Italian immigrant. The

⁵⁶ Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 40.

Bluebook—a printed guide and map of brothels and sex workers distributed to Storyville patrons—provides images and bios of roughly twelve girls the likes of whom White boasts about like a mother: “the poet has said that there are others, lots of others, but there is only one Corine Meyers, and we do not stretch the point when we re-echo and say this is true,” and “there are lots of pebbles on the beach, but there is only one Middy Cook. She is a native of Alabama and a girl to be proud of.”⁵⁷ Moreover, it was not uncommon for mothers and daughters (whether “real” or performed by two women and/or a woman and a girl with a believable age discrepancy) to sell sex as a pair.



Figure 3.12: Mother and Daughter Pair of “Storyville girls.” Ernest Bellocq, *Two Storyville Girls Posing in Swimsuits*, original image ca. 1905. The Historic New Orleans Collection. 1981.177.1-22.

However, engaging in civic life meant taking up specific kinds of political engagement aligned with maternalism and middle-class values, like universal suffrage, prohibition of alcohol, child labor laws, the regulation of prostitution, and

⁵⁷ See Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*.

raising the age of consent. In Figure 3.4, we return to *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls* and observe what Bell outlines as “The First Step,” ostensibly where the girl problem begins—in ice cream parlors. The caption reads, “ice cream parlors of the city and fruit store combined, largely run by foreigners, are the places where scores of girls have their first step downward,” and depicts a worried girl eating ice cream while a man leers at her across the table, as a store full of men look on.⁵⁸ Ann Laura Stoler writes of this in her critique of Foucault’s understanding of children’s sexuality. She notes the “social grammar of prescriptions for making a child into a bourgeois adult rested on distinctions that affirmed the virtues of whiteness and the moral high ground of bourgeois civilities at the same time.”⁵⁹ In Figure 3.4, we see the transgression of the virtues of whiteness, since the girl eats ice cream in a place owned and theoretically surrounded by those Bell calls “foreigners.” In this example, the “foreigners” come to index any kind of Othered body that threatens “the virtues of whiteness,” and the girl’s transgression emerges at the moment when she shares space with the “racial and class’ lower-orders.”⁶⁰ The caption further muses on the “character” of the men around her while implicating motherhood into this scene by proposing: “does her mother know the character of the place and the man she is with?”⁶¹

Moreover, the mere existence of Violet’s story is unusual, as it remains one of the only first-person accounts of children selling sex in Storyville—a common

⁵⁸ Bell, *Traffic in Young Girls*.

⁵⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 151.

⁶⁰ Stoler, 151.

⁶¹ See Bell, *Traffic in Young Girls*.

occurrence at the beginning of the twentieth century. So much of what remains in the archive exists in the form of newspaper articles, legislation, or court transcripts. All the juvenile court records remain restricted because they deal with minors. The Historic New Orleans Collection's Records of the Children's Bureau of Louisiana offer the bureaucratic look at what happens after a child is caught in a place like Storyville. Yet Violet's account is offered up as a single edited monologue, not the conversational answering of questions that it actually was. What was edited out and why is unknown to the reader, and besides, the account is merely the textual residue of a fifty-six-year-old telling a story about losing her virginity at ten to a man of fifty. Again, we read the adultized first-hand account of a child's experience of sexuality.



Figure 3.13: Lewis Carroll, *Alice Liddell as a Beggar-Child*, 1858.

The Storyville portraits also examples of captured adultized gazes onto girlhood. As adults, we examine Figures 3.7, 3.8, and 3.10 almost as girlish role-playing, yet understand them to be distinctly sexual. In our looking, we are brought into a situation of engaging in the sexualization of girlhood. Gazing at the Storyville girls, looking at “it” does not sit well. And yet, these kinds of images—the girl as Venus, the girl as Odalisque—are quite common. Similar examples can be seen in Charles Dodgson’s (Lewis Carrol’s given name) portraits of young girls. *Alice Liddell as a Beggar-Child* (Figure 3.13) is reminiscent of a Storyville Girl; a bold girl-child stands facing the camera, eyes locked on the viewer with a defiant gaze. The *Portrait of Evelyn Hatch* (Figure 3.14) showcases a tiny Odalisque, or as Mavor calls her: “Venus of Oxford.”⁶² *Evelyn, Violet* (Figure 3.6), and our reclining nude Storyville girls (Figures 3.7, 3.8, and 3.10) all confront us with their gaze; Olympias caught in what Susanne Regener calls “compelled photos.”⁶³ Whether any of these photos were, in fact, “taken without the permission of their subjects” is unclear because it opens up a conversation around the temporally and culturally constructed idea of consent and agency. Can a child of four give consent to be photographed nude? Can a girl of twelve who works as a sex worker with her mother consent to being photographed? Does her gaze give us a clue as to her thoughts on being photographed?

⁶² Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 11.

⁶³ I am really using Tina Campt’s description of Regener’s concept, which originally appears in German. Campt elaborates on Regener’s concept in *Listening to Images*.



Figure 3.14: Lewis Carroll, *Portrait of Evelyn Hatch*, 1878.

To Gaze Upon Girlhood

There are a series of compelled photographs that showcase New Orleanian girlhood and the problems of sexualization. Charles L. Franck's promotional photographs, taken inside the House of the Good Shepherd in the 1950s, also engage in a kind of sexualization of girlhood through the carceral gaze upon girlhood. While none of these images are explicitly sexual, and there are no nude photographs of girls incarcerated at the House of the Good Shepherd, Franck's photographs function similarly to the prison photographs Tina Campt describes as "compelled photographs" in *Listening to Images*.

Of course, these are not Bertillon mugshots, and they do not appear to be photographs documents for purposes of the state (like those done by Bellocq in the annual reports by the Children's Bureau of Louisiana). Still, Franck's images of the incarcerated girls of the House of the Good Shepherd present a similar kind of problem as Bellocq's Storyville girls (as well as Carroll's portraits, *Spiritual America*,

and *Pretty Baby*): even when girlhood is not explicitly outwardly sexualized, girlhood is still sexualized.



Figure 3.15: Charles L. Franck, *House of the Good Shepherd, Dormitory*. Charles L. Franck Studio Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1956. 1979.325.2270.

Take Figure 3.15, *Girls in Their Dormitory*, for example. Not only are we viewing a group of white girls lying on their beds, but we are also far enough away from them to understand the spatial boundary Franck faced when snapping the picture. We are at a healthy distance from the girls, separated because to get too close might be too tempting; to get too close might force us all to confront the possibility of a man, a girl, and a bed. We gaze out to a sea of Olympias, reclining and gazing back.

Conversely, in Figure 3.16, the girl's gaze is averted as she bows her head in prayer. Her performative piety on display for potential investors, understanding what and who these girls are ("good" Catholic girls) to communicate the possibility of who they could be in the world. These incarcerated girls are not only included in these compelled photos but they are being used to sell an image of girlhood latent with the expectations of heterosexual domesticity and desire. This girl poses in a position of submission to ensure the rich men can invest in the prison for girls that reproduces a chaste and subordinate idea of a suppliant girl-subject.



Figure 3.16: Charles L. Franck, *Chapel with Girl at Prayer*. Charles L. Franck Studio Collection, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1956. 1979.325.2265.

When we tell ourselves stories about the problems of sexualizing girls, do we not enact a form of that sexualization by assuming girls are always already a source of desire? Why is it that girlhood is automatically assumed to be an object of sexual

desire? In the overarching acceptance of that, do we not subtly admit defeat at preventing the sexualization of girls/girlhood?

The carceral gaze of girlhood is twofold: in one way, it is about sexualization, and in the other, it is about whiteness. In this way, the gaze of girlhood is a gaze that is undergirded by desire and racism. Moreover, the photographing of girlhood is steeped in a kind of racial, sexual fantasy; it dictates how girls should be viewed, not by example, but by negation. These photographs shape the interpretation of girlhood by the public and the law, the latter using these images to write laws purportedly aiming to “protect” girls while criminalizing all those around her.

The carceral gaze of girlhood is steeped in whiteness and cast upon all girls, regardless of their outwardly perceived racialization. That whitewashing of girlhood is an important facet of how the representations and legality of pathological girlhood functions. Whiteness coupled with coquette-ish sexuality (at once chaste, victim, and seductress) become the unspoken markers of Victorian and Progressive girlhood. The racialization and sexualization of the aspirational category of unqualified girl pave the way for anyone who may have been legible or semi-legible as a girl to be instantly pathological. In this way, girlhood is a fiction predicated on aspirational delineations of racial and sexual performance. Girlhood as fiction exists as both an unconscious and representational subject formation. Some girls might appear to be just girls, but in reality, there is always the shadowy, lurking transgression that they try to conceal.

Saidiya Hartman ruminates on the lacunae of photographs, emphasizing the impossibility of constructing a history about a photographic subject if nothing is

known of the subject. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman ponders an image of a “small naked figure reclin[ing] on the arabesque sofa,” noting that the lack of information—a name, a home address, even an official date—obscures her identity because Black girlhood was understood to be inconsequential by culture producers and archivists at the time. Hartman, however, reads the girl in photographs of her absence, “peering out of the third-floor window” in photographs of tenements in “police briefs and charity reports.”⁶⁴ To find the girl—in an act of doing justice to her—Hartman constructs a fabulist tale of her life, interwoven with other girls similarly situated, made into a constellation of Black girlhood in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century. Although speculative futures can emerge from Hartman’s critical fabulations, the point of this chapter is not to necessarily read a life into a photograph of an otherwise unknown girl. Rather, to address the absence of both information about photographed girls at the turn of the twentieth century and documentary evidence of lives lived at the House of the Good Shepherd (until the 1950s), we examine Bellocq’s Storyville Girls photographs, because these images help us to understand how girls were visually rendered amidst the threat of incarceration in the House of the Good Shepherd. In addition to being what might be called an early street photographer, Bellocq was a commercial photographer whose photographs often appeared in Orleans Parish municipal documents. In fact, countless

⁶⁴ Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 13.

photographs by Bellocq are included in the annual reports of the Children's Bureau of Louisiana from 1899 through 1920.⁶⁵

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, sociologist Avery Gordon credits a photograph with her psychoanalytic detour. This experience reads a bit like cascading into a haunted rabbit hole following “the traces of a woman ghost.”⁶⁶ In her detour-cum-fall down the rabbit hole, Gordon is consumed by the absence of Sabina Spielrein—a patient and then psychoanalyst whose work shaped both Freud and Jung—in the 1911 group portrait of the Third Psychoanalytic Congress at Weimar. Spielrein is not there. Despite her innovations in psychoanalysis and her own treatment by Jung and Freud, she is absent from the photographic documentation of an event she attended, “there is photographic evidence of her absence.”⁶⁷ The photographic evidence of her absence opens up space for an intervention in sociological method because, for Gordon, it is the detour that moves us toward “the materiality of institutional story-telling, with all its uncanny repetitions.”⁶⁸ In the space of these uncannily repeating stories is where Gordon claims “our unruliness” can emerge. For Hartman, the photographic absence of thriving details of Black girlhood dictates the need to tell these repeating stories with uncanny repetitions, noting that waywardness projects in and through the fabulist tales.

⁶⁵ Records of the Children's Bureau, Historic New Orleans Collection.

⁶⁶ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 32.

⁶⁷ Gordon, 38.

⁶⁸ Gordon, 40.

Given both Gordon and Hartman, I return to the album of images of carceral girlhood to ponder those uncanny repetitions at the margins of unruliness and waywardness to consider, not the individual lives behind the photographs, but what causes those absences in the first place. In this way, photography works with the law to construct the subject through its capturing of her while also, as Allan Sekula argues, “define both the generalized look—the typology—and the contingent instance of deviance and social pathology.”⁶⁹

That photographs are captured images is a seemingly uncontroversial statement. Presumably, a photographer sets up a camera and—if taking a photo of a human subject—focuses the lens on said subject, then triggering another function, captures an imprint of a moment in time. Tina Campt notes the temporality of the space between the photographic capture and the creation of the photograph. Campt, analyzing photographic albums of prisoners, notes what she calls the second haptic temporality as “the anteriority of the future subjunctive.”⁷⁰ Campt succinctly encapsulates that anterior future subjunctive in a concise statement that is quite useful for considering our “album” of photographic subjects: “If you are ever released, you will still be ours.” As adults, we might do well to apply Campt’s analysis to Bellocq’s images of sex workers and the few promotional images of the House of the Good Shepherd from the 1950s. Both sets of images work in the interval of this second haptic temporality—a perpetual state of capture, suspended in time and space with

⁶⁹ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” October 39 (Winter, 1986), 63.

⁷⁰ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 81.

photographic proof as evidence. In these encounters of capture, the subject is perpetually confined to an adult viewer:

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” the police officer tells the girl on the street before throwing her in the House of the Good Shepherd.

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” the Mother Superior tells the children prisoners as they sew the lace.

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” the Sisters of the Good Shepherd tell the novitiates of the cloistered Magdalens (sub-order of Good Shepherd Sisters).

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” the madams tell the Storyville girls in their “houses of ill-repute.”

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” Bellocq whispers to his pubescent girl subjects.

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” we—as adults—think when viewing images of girlhood.

Images of girlhood are sticky, their subjects quite stuck in the place of that image, despite the lives they live after the moment of capture. In this way, the gaze comes to recreate that second haptic temporality, mimicking the stickiness of said interval, sentencing its subject to a lifetime suspended in the captured moment. As I have argued elsewhere, girlhood as a subject category is carceral—both in its juridical and cultural understanding—the link between the juridical and cultural is perhaps

most clear in the analysis of photographs of girls.⁷¹ The photograph is the visual object of a sustained gaze at two levels. The first level is that of the photographer, whose gaze of their subject is literally captured in a moment. The second level is that of the viewer of the photograph, who gaze of the subject always mimics that of the photographer. Thus, viewing the photograph is a mimetic process of inhabiting the photographer's perspective and compelling the subject to relive that moment over and over with each glance. In this way, our gaze sentences the subject within the frame to a lifetime attached to its captured form.

The Devil's Mansion & The House of the Good Shepherd

New Orleanian local legend address this kind of suspended form of carceral girlhood in *The Devil's Mansion*, which tells the story of the Devil who “not inappropriately” lives in New Orleans with his French “girlfriend” in a “stately mansion in St. Charles Avenue.”⁷² While the Devil is away “on business,” his “coquette [takes] another lover, a dashing young Creole of the city.” Upon learning of his girlfriend's new lover, the Devil proposes a deal: gold and her hand in marriage if the side lover agrees that he and his new wife will take the name “Monsieur and Madame L.” Elated, the young man tells his bride-to-be of what he assumes is their

⁷¹ See “Introduction: On the Carcerality of Girlhood” for more on this.

⁷² The idea that the devil would “not inappropriately” live in New Orleans is a key part to my reliance on New Orleans as my site of research. The assumed and normalized relationship between stories, the supernatural, and New Orleans indexes a kind of exceptional and colloquial approach to New Orleans. I argue later that this exceptionalism, even if it is constructed, is an important understanding of the place of New Orleans in the historical construction of criminal girlhood.

fortune and vows over dinner in the grand dining room in the Devil's mansion. In a fit of rage, realizing the L is for Lucifer, the girl strangles him with a napkin.

At that moment, the Devil appears, kills her, and brings them to the roof, where he eats them both. But in his fit of passion, the Devil forgot that he was, according to the legend's logic, prohibited from working under the light of a full moon and becomes stuck to the roof, dying there from his folly. After years, all that was left of his body was his head marking the damned mansion. Each night, in fact, passersby look up to see the Devil's head, then watch the dining room windows as the girl kills her paramour. The grand dining room appears at dusk, the crystal chandeliers descend, and a girl and her male lover appear. After she kills him, Madame Lucifer remains in the mansion pacing and screaming until dawn, disintegrating with the daylight. Night after night, she materializes in her high drama-filled carceral mansion, her immortality both a prison and a testament to her survival as the only one who endures.⁷³

But who and what is this French girl, girlfriend, coquette? As the Devil's girlfriend and domestic partner, she might fit the archetype of the Devil's whore, often represented as a powerful witch or demoness, but this coquette is somewhat different.⁷⁴ While it is her sexuality that catalyzes the legend's violence and death, the

⁷³ Benjamin Albert Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions, and Folkways of the People of the South* (New York, NY: Bonanza Book, 1977), 548.

⁷⁴ In North American folktale tradition, a witch is often portrayed as the "Devil's whore," because rituals would demand the witch have sex with the Devil to procure powers, see tale type G303.6.22. in Ernest Warren Baughman, "A Comparative Study of the Folktales of England and North America" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1953). In more contemporary popular culture, the "Devil's whore" is represented as a ruthless, cold, and cunning femme fatale. Most notable is the comic book character,

coquette is more than just a witch or demoness, and two foolish “men sealed her fate.” For, in the destruction of her Devil boyfriend and the murder of her paramour, the coquette becomes Lucifer. As Madame L, she is the only one to at least partially “survive” the violence, albeit as an apparition. While the flesh and skull of the Devil hang over the mansion, Lucifer remains inside, her body visually rendered whole (despite her Devil boyfriend having eaten her corporeal body), performing her doomed violent act indefinitely. Her paramour appears too, then dies; the (former) Devil is already dead, his body rotting away atop mansion, but the girl, she endures. The girl is immortal, incarcerated in a time-loop of murder, sex, and deception, on view for all to see.

“If you are ever released, you will still be ours,” we say as onlookers to the eternally imprisoned girl.

Conclusion

*“There is a house in New Orleans
They call the rising sun
It’s been the ruin of many a poor girl
And me, oh god, I’m one.”*

-Libby Holman, “House of the Rising Sun”⁷⁵

“Madame Satan,” who makes her comic debut in a 1941 Pep Comics #15 issue. After she dies trying to defraud a man, she meets Satan in Hell and becomes his lover and minion on Earth, causing chaos.

⁷⁵ The lyrics to “House of the Rising Sun” are often changed based on when the song is being sung and who is singing the song. Singer/actress Libby Holman recorded a version in the 1940s/1950s, accompanied by Blues legend Josh White. In Holman’s version, she is the protagonist, using she/her pronouns throughout her tale of haunting punishment. The protagonist (or maybe antihero) eventually is incarcerated, with the lyrics “I’m going back to New Orleans to wear that ball and chain.” Interestingly, Libby Holman was also arrested for the murder of her husband, but eventually was released.

In closing this chapter, I want to return to Mavor's question: "to what extent can the photograph serve as a commentary on the legal system that governed all of the little girls?"⁷⁶ In many ways, the photograph is both a commentary as well as a reflection of the legal system. In fact, the carceral gaze of (white) girlhood amplifies the logic of laws that governed all girls' bodies. With the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, so-called "white slavery" images are used as both proof of and fodder for further moral panic. The act of looking at girlhood is thus a scopophilic act of sexualizing her and holding her captive.

The House of the Rising Sun, Devil's Mansion, and the House of the Good Shepherd all work to discipline girlhood, to create/produce/punish girls for "it"—that horrible gaze upon girlhood that entraps, holds captive, and dictates the possibilities of one's own body. We examine images of girls—all of whom are trapped, all of whom are carceral—and at the second order of haptic temporality, who stay stuck in the recollection of our adult gazes upon them: "*If you are ever released, you will still be ours.*"

⁷⁶ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 19.

Chapter 4: Arson Girls, Match-strikers, and Firestarters: A Reflection on Rage, Racialization, and the Carcerality of Girlhood

My dreams are about fires that I have set, want to set, or wish I had set...I want to see the chaos as well as the destruction that I or others have caused.

Sarah Wheaton, *Memoirs of a Compulsive Firesetter*¹



Figure 4.1: *News and Observer*, Raleigh, NC, May 21, 1931. Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

I left a cigarette at the base of North Carolina historical marker K-34 on Highway 211 at Samarcand Boulevard. Peering into the woods from the country highway, I thought of the “bad girls” at Samarcand Manor State Home and Industrial

¹ Sarah Wheaton, “Personal Accounts: Memoirs of a Compulsive Firesetter,” *Psychiatric Services* 52, no. 8 (August 1, 2001): 1035–36.

Training School for (white) Girls, the alleged girl arsonists smoking cigarettes before entering the Moore County Courthouse in Carthage, North Carolina, for their capital punishment trial in 1931.² I thought of the fires at Samarcand, smoking girls out as they fled the burning buildings, running through the woods, and rioting in their jail cells. I thought of all the fire and smoke and fifteen-year-old Margaret Pridgen lighting her cigarette and then using the match to set the paper dress in her closet on fire.

Samarcand, North Carolina, is not quite a town. It appears as a loosely defined area on contemporary maps, approximately two by seven miles nestled between Highway 211 and Downey Creek; its only notable building is Samarcand Training Academy. There are a few houses on Samarcand Boulevard that could be abandoned, all of which are surrounded by tobacco fields. It is quiet and desolate, about twenty miles from the nearest town of Carthage.

By the time the Carthage Fire Department got to Samarcand Manor State Home and Industrial Training School for (white) Girls, the fires had spread from the disciplinary ward of Chamberlain Hall to Bickett Hall, and its staff had coerced sixteen girls into admissions of guilt. The police later took these sixteen girls to the Carthage jail, where they continued to rage and set fire to objects in their cells.

Much attention has been paid to the Samarcand arson trial by historians of the U.S. South.³ Karin L. Zipf's *Bad Girls at Samarcand: Sexuality and Sterilization in a*

² See Figure 4.1.

³ For another historical retelling of the Samarcand arson trial, see Barbara Bennett, *Smoke Signals from Samarcand: The 1931 Reform School Fire and Its Aftermath* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018).

Southern Juvenile Reformatory locates the Samarcand arson trial within the more extended history of the eugenics movement in Jim Crow North Carolina, noting how this trial brought forth legislative and public support for the North Carolina Sterilization Bill that permitted the state to sterilize thousands of people, including an inordinate number of Black women and girls.⁴ Susan Cahn's article "Spirited Youth or Fiends Incarnate: The Samarcand Arson Case and Female Adolescence in the American South" argues that North Carolina's response to and punishment of the Samarcand girls was part of the larger project of the New South, which sought to codify white supremacist social orders by controlling "Southern girlhood."⁵ Almost 90 years later, the "bad girls" of Samarcand continue to spark curiosity and interest in scholars of girlhood, the U.S. South, and juvenile justice, as well as lawyers, activists, and even novelists.⁶ Yet, despite the growing interest, the North Carolina State Archives continues to restrict access to more of these records. The simultaneous

⁴ Zipf, *Bad Girls at Samarcand*. According to the Nell Battle Lewis Manuscript Collection at the North Carolina State Archives, the records kept at Samarcand would label the girls according to their behaviors toward the staff while incarcerated. These labels were listed in Lewis's notes on each of the accused girls from the trial. Her notes are organized by girl and each girl's entry included a section called, "Data in Files at Samarcand." This section included the labels given to the girls at Samarcand by the staff and doctors and included terms like, "bad," "very bad," and "not so bad." All the girls accused of starting the fires were labeled "bad" and "very bad."

⁵ Susan Cahn, "Spirited Youth or Fiends Incarnate: The Samarcand Arson Case and Female Adolescence in the American South," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 4 (1998).

⁶ For a legal analysis on the Samarcand arson trial, see Chapter 5, "'Escape of the Match-Strikers': The Samarcand Arson Case of 1931," in John W. Wertheimer, *Law and Society in the South: A History of North Carolina Court Cases* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009). For an earlier version of this chapter, see John Wertheimer and Brian Luskey, "'Escape of the Match-Strikers': Disorderly North Carolina Women, the Legal System, and the Samarcand Arson Case of 1931," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (1998). For a historical creative nonfiction version of the arson trial at Samarcand, see Melton McLaurin and Anne Russell, *The Wayward Girls of Samarcand: A True Story of the American South* (Wilmington: Bradley Creek Press, 2012).

interest in and obfuscation of histories of these “bad girls” highlights the ongoing tension between the possibilities and limitations of girlhood.

This chapter, however, is not another text on those “bad girls” of Samarcand. Rather, it is about the limitations of girlhood and the possibilities of firesetting. I begin at North Carolina historical marker K-34 because stories of “arson girls” resonate far beyond Samarcand.⁷ Stories of arson girls can be thought about alongside those of historically marginalized and/or oppressed people who burn down buildings as revolutionary political acts and/or methods of political resistance.⁸ The story of the match-strikers of Samarcand is just one example from a genealogy of stories about girls who burn down buildings. Stories about arson girls span both fictional and non-fictional worlds. For example, there are countless examples from popular culture and literature of girls who burn down buildings—specifically buildings that might be seen as carceral (e.g., schools, homes, reformatories, detention facilities).⁹ Likewise, there are many stories of girls setting fires (or allegedly setting fires) to carceral buildings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century U.S. regional newspapers. Not only are stories of arson girls—both of Samarcand and beyond—further examples of the

⁷ Girls that were accused or convicted of arson were often called “arson girls” in U.S. newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For an example of the use of “arson girl” in the media, see the *Semi-Weekly Spokesman-Review* 1932. At this time, newspapers would also use the terms, “match-striker,” and “firebug” interchangeably. “Arson girl,” however, was the only gender-specific term I could find that was used to describe a girl who sets fires. I will use all these terms, plus “firesetter,” interchangeably throughout this chapter.

⁸ The uprisings supporting Black Lives Matter and demonstrations against police brutality and the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery (plus the many, many more) have sparked conversations about arson and looting as political tactics. These conversations come in the aftermath of the burning of the Minneapolis Police Department’s Third Precinct Building on the night of May 28, 2020.

⁹ In the pages that follow, I discuss many examples of arson girls from fiction and non-fiction, but this chapter is by no means an exhaustive list.

use of firesetting as a crucial method of political resistance to subjugation, I argue that they are also glimmers of resistance to the carcerality of girlhood. If, as I argue, girlhood is carceral, then how do girls enact anti-carceral forms of resistance? More simply put, what does prison abolition look like when one's life is prison?

Maybe it looks like girlhood rage.

Unbridled Girlhood Rage

There is a vested interest by the state in controlling the use of rage when it fomented in certain kinds of bodies. Historically, these bodies included anyone who did not conform to the visible markers of upper/middle-class whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and adulthood. Specifically of interest to the state is the fomenting of rage in girls' bodies, as it is at once anticipated and criminalized by a biopolitical agenda codified through law, policy, and social mores.

Recently, rage has become the focus of many popular books examining the effects and importance of women's anger—2018 was the year of rage. For example, feminist critic Soraya Chemaly's *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger* explores the psychological foundations and implications of women's anger as a feature of the intersection of misogyny and white supremacy.¹⁰ Journalist Rebecca Traister's *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* argues women's anger has been and continues to be essential for political revolution in the

¹⁰ Soraya Chemaly, *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger* (New York: Atria Books, 2018).

United States.¹¹ Additionally, cultural theorist and Black feminist Brittney Cooper's *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* is a memoir-cum-manifesto on "eloquent rage" and the possibilities of what Cooper understands as "Black-girl feminism." In it, Cooper argues for an eloquent rage that builds new and better worlds full of justice and equity led by Black girls and women; she concludes, "Black-girl feminism is all the rage, and we need all the rage."¹²

By focusing on the political potential of rage while critiquing the racialized and gendered ways rage is understood and tolerated, rather than distinguishing between righteous anger and what Chemaly disparages as "unbridled rage," it is clear that even unbridled girlhood rage is a discrete political act that challenges white supremacy and misogyny. Specifically, examining girls' rage through the act of firesetting—not just for the political and revolutionary possibility and power of anger—illuminates how "unbridled rage" can be an important tool in dismantling the carcerality of girlhood.

Stories of arson girls—both fictional and "real"—interrupt a dominant narrative of girlhood that necessitates the righteous anger many feminists have lauded.¹³ This anger, however, engages in what Lisa Marie Cacho calls "dismembering social value" by refusing the dominant mode of social respectability that claims it is acceptable for girls are angry as long as they don't engage in

¹¹ Rebecca Traister, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

¹² Brittney Cooper, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* (New York: Picador, 2018), 11.

¹³ See Lily Dancyger, ed., *Burn It Down: Women Writing About Anger* (New York: Seal Press, 2019).

senseless physical acts of rage; as long as they don't burn anything down.¹⁴ Burning down the building that both literally and metaphorically incarcerates girls, however, might be the only way for them to get free: free from both the actual prison (jail, prison, reformatory, asylum, or “industrial training school”) and the carcerality of girlhood. If freedom—albeit a staggeringly complex set of ideologies equipped with various practices—is one of the foundational and overarching goals of feminism, then “unbridled rage” might be the means to an end—an end that embraces an anti-carceral future.¹⁵

In the case of Samarcand, this kind of “unbridled rage” can be inferred from those bad girls’ responses to interview questions in countless newspaper articles and psychiatric evaluations. Rage might be assumed after learning about the tragedies and traumas all these firebugs survived, including poverty, rape, incest, assault, molestation, and domestic violence. Rage is likely even expected when considering the treatment of these match-strikers at the Samarcand Industrial Training School for (white) Girls, which included whippings, beatings, solitarily confinement, squalid

¹⁴ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 32.

¹⁵ While volumes have been written on the goal(s) of feminism both as historical and contemporary issues, as well as the subsequent difficulties both in outlining a shared, agreed upon definition of feminism, feminists have ruminated on the concept of freedom as a central goal of feminism; see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. (Women of Color at the Center: Selections from the Third National Conference on Women of Color and the Law),” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991); Angela Y. Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012); bell hooks, *Feminism Is For Everyone: Passionate Politics* (South End Press, 2000); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Paths, 1984). For more on an expansive concept of feminism has extended to theories that incorporate both intersectionality and coalition building to incorporate various geopolitical and historical struggles against oppression, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983).

conditions, and the refusal of medical treatment for those with venereal disease and/or other health issues.¹⁶ In fact, Margaret Pridgen—one of the only girls who admitted to starting the fire in Chamberlain—explained to a journalist why she helped set another fire to her cell in the Carthage jail: “I just feel mean.”¹⁷

Feeling mean is not necessarily rage, but it can precede rage. Feeling mean might even be a way to make sense of the affective, emotive, and physical responses rage can generate in bodies. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed reads this circulation of emotions as both stickiness and movement, noting how emotions “shape the very surfaces of bodies” as reactions “to the contact we have with others.”¹⁸ In this way, rage experienced on a personal level is often an embodied contradiction; it can be simultaneously overpowering and empowering, both hot and cold. Rage can feel like possession by the self or another. At times, rage can offer profound focus toward precision, self-possession, and control. At other times, it can act as a catalyst toward a loss of control over one’s thoughts, actions, and body. Rage spirals and blacks out. Rage is visceral and can be infectious; it can spread quickly and with force as proximal others can often feel someone else’s rage palpitating through their own bodies. Rage is contagious when those around feel mean. Rage, as Ahmed might say, sticks.

¹⁶ For more on the treatment and punishment of girls incarcerated at Samarcand, see Zipf, *Bad Girls at Samarcand*.

¹⁷ Bess Davenport Thompson, “Twelve Samarcand Girls Gets State Prison Terms,” May 21, 1931, Nell Battle Lewis Manuscript Collection, North Carolina State Archives.

¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 4.

Firestarters

According to nineteen-year-old Sarah Wheaton, who identifies as a (now recovering) “compulsive firesetter,” rage animated the act of setting fires during her girlhood. In her 2001 personal account of her emotional response to firesetting, Wheaton describes feeling “abandoned, lonely, or bored,” which triggers anxiety or “emotional arousal [right] before a fire is set.”¹⁹ She details “severe headaches, a rapid heartbeat, uncontrollable motor movements...and a tingling pain.”²⁰ However, it is in the exact moment of lighting the fire that Wheaton experiences “an intense emotional response like tension release, excitement, or even panic.”²¹

Wheaton’s exploration of her experience as a compulsive (girl) firesetter helps to clarify the kind of affective processes that might help define girlhood rage: emotional arousal, triggered by loneliness, resulting in uncontrollable movements that end in feelings of release, excitement, or panic. In a critical rumination on her own rage, Kimberly J. Lau describes the embodied feelings of rage as it passes through her body akin to general anesthesia but non-sedative and fast: “cycling through my closed circuit of a body and certainly not knocking me out.”²² Lau goes on to link her bodily experience of rage to what Lauren Berlant calls *nonsovereign relationality* as a politically ideal alternative to “integration as the desired state of subjectivity.”²³ Berlant and Edelman define nonsovereignty as “the subject’s constitutive division

¹⁹ Wheaton, “Memoirs of a Compulsive Firesetter,” 1035.

²⁰ Wheaton, 1035.

²¹ Wheaton, 1036.

²² Kimberly J. Lau, “Half-Cup Rage,” *Ethnologia Europaea* 45, no. 2 (2015): 59.

²³ Lau, 59.

that keeps us, as subjects, from fully knowing or being in control of ourselves and that prompts our misrecognition of our own motives and desires.”²⁴ For Lau, it is rage that ushers forth nonsovereign relationality because rage helps catalyze a disintegration of the self as it animates material actions in the world.

Wheaton’s description of her nonsovereign emotive state before firesetting could apply to many acts often understood to be animated by girlhood rage (and which are of concern to a biopolitical state apparatus) including self-harm, addiction, sexual promiscuity, disordered eating, and/or suicide. Research in psychology and sociology often links these acts—including fire setting—to sexual assault, rape, molestation, as well as other forms of childhood violence and trauma; these traumas and their corresponding acts are also part of a network of responses to and performances of girlhood rage.²⁵ Additionally, popular representations of girlhood rage are often tragic and usually focus on its manifestation as one or more of the aforementioned acts (self-harm, addiction, sexual promiscuity, disordered eating, and suicide). While popular representations dramatize, distort, sometimes glamourize, and often voyeuristically obsess over these tragic enactments of girlhood rage, they also help to constitute the very category of girl itself, codifying those representations into

²⁴ Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Theory Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), viii.

²⁵ See Kristine E. Hickle and Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, “Female Juvenile Arsonists: An Exploratory Look at Characteristics and Solo and Group Arson Offences,” *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2010); Dominique Roe-Sepowitz and Kristine Hickle, “Comparing Boy and Girl Arsonists: Crisis, Family, and Crime Scene Characteristics,” *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2011); Lynn A. Stewart, “Profile of Female Firesetters: Implications for Treatment,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 163, no. 2 (August 1993); T. G. Tennent et al., “Female Arsonists,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 119, no. 552 (November 1971).

the presumptions and expectations of U.S. girlhood. During the 1990s and early 2000s, these kinds of representations saturated popular media. When non-comedic films and television shows tell stories about girlhood, they primarily focus on the unraveling of white girls, arguably plagued by rage, who enact the aforementioned responses. Films like *Kids* (1995), *Girl Interrupted* (1999), *Thirteen* (2003), *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), and countless others depict a kind of descent of (white) girls plagued by their own rage and stuck in desperate and tragic situations where nefarious others do wrong to them. While popular film and television representations of girls of color experiencing rage are historically scant, those that do depict raging girls of color often relegate them to embody marginal racist stereotypes—like the Jezebel or the Angry Black Woman—that read anger and danger as pathological to non-white girls' bodies.²⁶

Similarly, several popular psychology texts released in the 1990s aimed at parents with daughters—such as Mary Pipher's 1994 best-selling U.S. phenomenon *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*—purport to help stop what is seen as the descent of (white) girls during adolescence.²⁷ These stories and their corresponding representations of girlhood rage carry with them warnings of what this

²⁶ For more on the history of these stereotypes and how they function, see Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon, 1997). Notable exceptions that depict girls of color as main characters whose rage-fueled actions tell tragic tales with a triumphant moral include *Girlfight* (2000), *Precious* (2009), and the recent television series *Euphoria* (2019).

²⁷ *Reviving Ophelia* spent three years on the New York Times bestsellers list and there is even a Lifetime Original Movie from 2010 based on the book. Additionally, Pipher's daughter, Sarah Gilliam, revised and co-wrote the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of the book.

kind of rage can do, often ending like Shakespeare's Ophelia, a tragic and beautiful (white) girl dead by her own hand in a river full of flowers.²⁸

While girlhood rage-fueled acts—like self-harm, sexual promiscuity, and suicide—and their racialized popular cultural representations perpetuate the problems of girlhood, I consider the specific act of fire setting. Specifically, I read examples from literature, film, and historical newspaper accounts of girls who use firesetting—or its legal name, arson—as a kind of prison abolitionist political strategy.²⁹ Rather than conceptualizing firesetting as a response to an individualistic psychological pathology, I read these cases as collective forms of political resistance to a world that continually exploits, fetishizes, as well as criminalizes and incarcerates this kind of sensationalized descent of girlhood.

While the physical acts of firesetting can be read as performances of anti-carceral rage, not all representations of girls as firesetters tell abolitionist stories. In fact, one of the most famous representations of a girl firesetter traffics in the obsession over white girls' bodies as reproductive tools in producing future white populations. Stephen King's *Firestarter* (both the book and the film) follows the fugitive seven-year-old pyrokinetic girl, Charlie McGee, on the run from “the Shop,” a top-secret United States government intelligence agency.³⁰ Charlie is the daughter

²⁸ I would like to note here the parallels between *Reviving Ophelia*, Shakespeare's Ophelia and Trethaway's version of Bellocq's Ophelia. These Ophelias highlight the imagined and dangerous consequences of girls expressing their sexuality.

²⁹ While arson often refers specifically to the legal classification of the criminal interpretation of what might be understood as “firesetting,” I am using these terms interchangeably. I will, however, provide a discussion of the legal definition of arson in the coming pages.

³⁰ The first quarter of *Firestarter* features Charlie and Andy on the run, staying in motels, telling lies to strangers, and using aliases, which mirrors another infamous novel about girlhood, *Lolita*. Both *Lolita*

of Andy and Vicky, who both participated in a clinical test of a new hallucinogen called Lot 6 that resulted in dire, violent, and often fatal ends for the study's participants. Charlie's mother and father met during the trial, fell in love telepathically, then procreated to produce an Aryan baby girl—who is constantly described as “blond” and “pretty” with “blue eyes” in the book and played by an eight-year-old platinum blond Drew Barrymore in the film—with the unparalleled “power to someday crack the very planet in two.”³¹

As with most of Stephen King's writings and films, there is much to critique about *Firestarter*, including his writing of both women and girls, as well as characters of color. And yet it is through King's lackluster and often misogynistic writing of women and girls that *Firestarter* offers an important lens through which to view representations of girlhood, carcerality, and rage: fire. For Charlie, fire is her only defense, and it quickly escalates beyond her control, leaving her exasperated while emotionally volatile and fragile. For example, after setting nearly ten Shop officers on fire and burning down Mender's Farm, Charlie is hysterical, screaming and crying, only to faint into her father's arms. Charlie possesses control over fire, an elemental master of existence, akin to a Prometheus of sorts. However, during the firesetting, Charlie does not seem phased by her unfettered power over life and death. She uses it to decimate, destroy, burn, hide, and kill. Meanwhile, her father fears her power, even questioning her humanity and put off by the dissonance of her girlish appearance and

and *Firestarter* feature a paranoid father-figure and his “daughter” traveling across the United States right after the death of the daughter's mother. Likewise, both novels explore the multiple ways expectations of girlhood can imprison its subjects.

³¹ Stephen King, *Firestarter*, Pocket Books paperback (New York: Pocket, 2016), 59.

the deadly powers she possesses. In fact, he reflects in “horror” at the “small Mona Lisa smile touch[ing] the corners of her mouth” while she lights nearly ten Shop officers on fire.³² “She’s enjoying this!” Andy thinks, repulsed.³³

The Shop searches for and eventually incarcerates Charlie to control and study her powers. For the Shop—a proxy for the state—Charlie is a global existential threat that they want to control: a seven-year-old white girl with the ability to extinguish life on Earth. Charlie is viewed as something like a nuclear weapon, exceptionally destructive and incomprehensibly powerful. With power and violence like this, the Shop will stop at nothing to possess and control this girl-as-weapon-of-mass-destruction. Charlie, a girl on the brink of adolescence, is so volatile, so potentially destructive to the biopolitical and white supremacist order that the only answer to her unparalleled powers is to lock her up in a fireproof room to protect the planet from her adolescence. The supposed threat posed by girls to a Western, liberal biopolitical order is similarly situated to the Shop’s interpolations of Charlie as a threat to the state, as the initial response to threats posed by both bodies alike and unlike Charlie’s own. Much like Samarcand Manor and the girls’ reformatories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state is invested in locking girls up to control the bodies deemed both threat and weapon.

This white-girl-as-weapon-turned-fugitive trope peppers popular culture imaginings of girlhood and stands in opposition to popular cultural representations of

³² King, 85.

³³ King, 85.

tragic girlhood rage. For instance, Netflix's *Stranger Things* (2017) features a very similar character to Charlie in fugitive adolescent Eleven, who develops telekinesis and psychokinesis because her mother was a test subject in the CIA's MK Ultra experiments. Additionally, Nickelodeon's 1994 show, *The Secret World of Alex Mack*, follows the titular adolescent, Alex Mack, after she is drenched in a top-secret chemical called GC-16, giving her telekinetic powers while she hides from the Paradise Valley Chemical Plant. Other examples like Marvel Comics' story of Jean Grey as the Dark Phoenix imagine the transformation of Grey, a telekinetic mutant called "Marvel Girl" into the all-powerful, terrible, and invincible "Dark Phoenix" after encountering the power of the "Phoenix Force," an immortal, universal life force. In one story arc, Grey as Dark Phoenix, becomes so powerful she must be captured and tamed to protect the universe.³⁴ While class (in the case of Eleven and Charlie) and ability (with Jean Grey as mutant) are essential aspects of these representational forms, the popular culture trope of girl-as-weapon-turned-fugitive is largely a meditation on girlhood as interchangeable with white femininity: something so unwieldy yet so powerful (it can create, sustain, and produce white life on Earth), it must be controlled. While these popular representations of white-girl-as-weapon-turned-fugitive purport to subvert girlhood as a powerless category by showing girls as powerful destroyers, they traffic in the kind of white supremacy that upholds the category of girlhood as a kind of carceral practice.

³⁴ The Marvel Cinematic Universe's 2019 film, *Captain Marvel*, traffics in a similar trope and in the climatic fight scene, just as Carol Danvers becomes Captain Marvel, realizing her power and scope, the catchy and familiar guitar strum of No Doubt's *Just a Girl* begins. For a detailed analysis of "strategic performances of girlhood" in No Doubt's *Just a Girl* see Wald, "Just a Girl."

Echoes of this trope emerge in Naomi Alderman's 2016 book, *The Power*, which explores the making of a matriarchal world order after "the day of the girls," where girls and women across the Earth begin to possess a power akin to the ability to shoot electricity (and in some instances, light fires) from their hands, and the ensuing, mainly male, carnage. The book begins with a letter from Neil Adam Armon, a man living in a future matriarchal world trying to get his "historical novel"—also called *The Power*—published.³⁵ The bulk of the book is his manuscript, which offers a cosmology of his matriarchal world where men are a subjugated class leading to an apocalyptic world-shattering. The central figure behind the transformation is Allie, a mixed-race girl in foster care who uses the power to kill her rapist foster father. Allie then escapes—as a fugitive—ending up at a convent, only to be reborn as Mother Eve, leading a following of girls and women into this new matriarchal world. However, this new matriarchy is not a second-wave feminist utopian fantasy about how great it would be if girls ran the world, but rather a dystopian musing on the ruses of power and its subsequent ability to rot anyone who seeks it.

Nonetheless, Allie/Mother Eve's fugitive girlhood looks much different from that of Charlie, Eleven, Alex Mack, or even the Dark Phoenix. For one, Allie/Mother Eve is a survivor of childhood molestation and sexual assault, and her powers are not uncontrollable; she has practiced her self-possession and ability to shoot electricity and light fires and uses this power to essentially rule the world by installing a cruel regime enacting revenge on the now powerless men of the world. Likewise, after

³⁵ Naomi Alderman, *The Power*. North American ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016).

escalating the world to the point of destruction, Allie/Mother Eve realizes she had been duped, a pawn in someone else's plan. *The Power* traffics in a kind of world-building that reproduces the trappings of girlhood by representing its danger to the Western liberal order in the form of a non-white girl. This danger is different than that posed by Charlie—who is presumably able to be controlled—and Allie/Mother Eve is not only a calculated and controlled killer but is also duped by her white foster mother into destroying the world. Where Charlie—whose whiteness stands in for her innocence—accidentally kills, burns, and destroys, Allie/Mother Eve—whose non-whiteness continues to mark her as Other—purposely destroys the world while being blamed for a future world of perpetual cruelty.

Arsonists

the fire frees us
the fast-ass women the fall-in-love women the freaks
the fire is full of the all-out women
the walk-out women the sweet
the fire is finding the love-lost women
the worth-it women the ones
fire is blazing the brash blues women
the black-eyed women
the wiry women with guns
the fire is becoming the sun
our work here is not done

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*³⁶

³⁶ Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

Firesetting as a tool of resistance for poor, incarcerated, enslaved, and subjugated peoples is a longstanding tradition. In fact, the legal term arson that officially criminalizes the act of firesetting reflects the state's desire to protect private property over personhood. Sarah Haley reminds readers that "arson carried a mandatory life sentence for much of the nineteenth century."³⁷ Haley offers a few anecdotes of individual cases of Black girls charged with arson, including that of thirteen-year-old Florida Thomas, who was "sentenced to a life term in 1890 for an arson in which no property was damaged" and fifteen-year-old Pleasant Morgan who "was given a seven-year sentence for attempted arson."³⁸ In some states, like North Carolina, arson is considered a capital offense—a crime against the state—which is why the death penalty was initially considered as punishment for the twelve "bad girls" at Samarcand. While the judge dismissed the death penalty as punishment, they were eventually incarcerated in an adult men's prison and placed in the only fireproof cells at the prison: those on death row.

Stories of girlhood incendiarism are pervasive in newspapers from the turn of the twentieth century in small blurbs, often espousing the contemporary and local flavors of white supremacy, misogyny, and classism. For example, in 1875, thirteen-year-old Bertha Guth set fire to the Poydras Asylum, an orphanage for white girls in the Garden District of New Orleans. As punishment, Guth was transferred downtown to the House of the Good Shepherd, a juvenile reformatory that incarcerated "sexually

³⁷ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 42.

³⁸ Haley, 42.

delinquent” girls of all races, ethnicities, classes, and religions. Limited to a thirty-four-word entry in a two-inch square box in the New Orleans Office of the Mayor’s Records of the Deposition of Destitute Orphans, 1852-1891, Guth is but a ghost in municipal records. Her first and only appearance in the archive ends with her incarceration after attempted arson.

In 1906, a fire destroyed one of the buildings at the House of the Good Shepherd, the Thomy LaFon Annex, which housed girls of color. The newspaper story covering the fire in the *Times-Picayune* claims no girls were injured, and the source of the fire was a faulty chimney flue. Curiously, however, there is no fire insurance report, so much of the story behind this fire has been razed along with the building. Similarly, in 1902, the *Times-Picayune* published a story about Bertha Coleman, who “tells one of the best snake stories ever told.”³⁹ Coleman was accused of “incendiarism” for setting fire to her employer, A.H. Wilson’s, house. The *Times-Picayune* concludes, along with Wilson, “that a colored girl named Bertha Coleman had set the place afire through revenge or malice.”⁴⁰ After apparently complaining about Coleman to neighbors, Wilson claims she was “discharged.” According to the *Times-Picayune*, Coleman was angry, “and she doubtless conceived the idea of setting Mr. Wilson’s place on fire to revenge herself for her dismissal.” After her arrest, Coleman “admitted that she had been the cause of the fire” but only because she “had seen a reptile of the species that caused all the trouble in the garden of Eden,

³⁹ “A Girl’s Snake Story, Which Does Not Permit Her Arrest for Arson,” *Times-Picayune*, May 30, 1902.

⁴⁰ “A Girl’s Snake Story.”

and she poured coal oil on it and set the oil on fire to scotch the snake.”⁴¹ The snake then slithered away, setting fire to Wilson’s woodshed, but Bertha Coleman was charged with arson. The last line of the article is particularly telling: “Bertha was charged with arson. The damage was slight.”

But what became of the Berthas?⁴² Where did Bertha Coleman go, and what happened at her trial? Did she have one? How did her body operate in space, and what did this mean for her possible memory/legacy? Likewise, what happened to Bertha Guth after being sent to the reformatory? Was the LaFon Annex fire really a case of arson?

After following starts and leads through census records, court dockets, insurance records, fire reports, and death certificates, I could not find anything on either Bertha or the LaFon Annex fire. Sarah Haley notes the difficulty in accessing this kind of information but offers some insights into similar types of cases involving Black girls either convicted of or possibly framed for arson, explaining that despite the excessive number of Black girls incarcerated for arson, “many of them were accidents, minor crimes, or acts coerced by adults.”⁴³ Examples of this emerge in the newspaper accounts of Black girls accused and/or convicted of arson, from the story of Bertha and the snake to another about Cecelia Williams, who was arrested for

⁴¹ “A Girl’s Snake Story.”

⁴² I note here another famous Bertha who allegedly burned down the building in which she was incarcerated: Antoinette/Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For an excellent engagement with both texts, see Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

⁴³ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 42.

attempted arson in Philadelphia after a man threatened to burn down the home she worked in if she would not run away with him.⁴⁴

As Angela Davis notes in her groundbreaking 1981 article “Reflections of the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” arson is a “form of sabotage...frequently carried out by women” in communities of enslaved people because they had the most direct access to the domestic sphere.⁴⁵ Because of the proximity to the domestic hearth of the plantation, Davis sees arson specifically as a crucial tool of counterinsurgency for both enslaved and free Black women engaged in abolitionist and anti-slavery activities during the eighteenth century. However, the punitive responses to Black women and girl arsonists were particularly severe and draconian in the Jim Crow South. Black women and girls were often erroneously charged with arson to justify their arrest and incarceration. Sarah Haley explains that in early twentieth-century Georgia, Black girls “were often the targets of arson prosecutions,” noting that “fifty percent of black women convicted of arson whose ages were recorded were under the age of seventeen.”⁴⁶

What if girls who commit arson—particularly those who are already incarcerated—do so as a way of asserting control over the biopolitical state apparatus? Moreover, what if arson—particularly of a carceral institution—is also a way of maintaining a necropolitical control over the networks that create and enforce the carcerality of girlhood? In “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe discusses the

⁴⁴ “Attempted Arson: Detection of a Colored Girl in the Act of Firing a Home,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 24, 1885.

⁴⁵ Davis, “Reflections,” 10.

⁴⁶ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 42.

concept of martyrdom and self-sacrifice as “taking power over his or her death and to approach it head-on.”⁴⁷ What if these girls—who commit arson while incarcerated—are engaging in a kind of self-sacrifice, not necessarily with the intention of strictly freeing themselves, but doing so to bring attention to the carcerality of their subject position? As Mbembe asserts, “what connects terror, death, and freedom is an ecstatic notion of temporality and politics,” thus firesetting girls and their performances of arson are not only asserting their political resistance to carcerality but also pushing themselves toward fugitivity as freedom, for once they escape a burning building, they are on the run.⁴⁸ In exercising a necropolitical control over both their personal futurity as well as that of their fellow carceral girls, the choice to burn a building is rooted in a kind of investment in a futurity of the present, what Mbembe calls “a vision of the freedom not yet come.”⁴⁹ It is not that the possibility of their deaths (or the deaths of their fellow carceral girl subjects) is the intended outcome, but that arson “is experienced as a release from terror and bondage.”⁵⁰ As a result, the act of arson—while it may be considered malicious under U.S. law and seen as a way to exert necropolitical control over both other girls’ bodies and those complicit with the carceral politics of the state—is not necessarily done with the intent to kill. Rather, arson is one of the only ways incarcerated girls can both enact rage and perform anti-carceral strategies of resistance.

⁴⁷ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 38.

⁴⁸ Mbembe, 39.

⁴⁹ Mbembe, 39.

⁵⁰ Mbembe, 39.

Across most of the U.S., arson currently and historically is legally defined as “the willful and malicious burning of the dwelling house of another.”⁵¹ According to lawyer and jurist William L. Clark’s voluminous and widely embraced 1894 index of case law and legislation across the United States *Hand-Book of Criminal Law*, the crime of arson has four requirements: “(a) there must be some burning, though it may be slight, (b) It must be of a dwelling house, or an outhouse used in connection therewith, (c) The house must belong to another, at least as occupant, (d) The burning must be caused maliciously.”⁵² Relying on the English Common Law definitions of both property and motive, the punishment for arson has mainly been an issue handled by each state. Motive, however, is a notoriously tricky and complicated aspect of any criminal case, particularly the ability to prove that something was caused with malicious intent. Likewise, how do prosecutors prove that any “burning...[is] caused maliciously”?

Motive is a particularly opaque and challenging concept when involving arson girls' destructive or even murderous actions. In *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, Kathryn Bond Stockton complicates the question of motive and murderous children with an analysis of Truman Capote’s *In Cold*

⁵¹ See William L. Clark Jr., *Hand-Book of Criminal Law*, ed. Francis B. Tiffany, Second ed. (St. Paul: West Publishing, 1902), 255. Notably Louisiana is one of the only states in the United States that does not exclusively rely on English Common Law for informing its state legal system. Instead, Louisiana civil code incorporates elements of both French and Colonial Civil Code and Spanish legal systems due to its colonial occupation of each Empire. Their current definition of arson is as follows: “the intentional damaging by any explosive substance or the setting fire to any property of another, without the consent of the owner” or “the starting of a fire or causing an explosion while the offender is engaged in the perpetuation or attempted perpetuation of another felony offense even though the offender does not have the intent to start a fire or cause an explosion” (Louisiana State Legislature website <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/law.aspx?d=78556>).

⁵² William L. Clark Jr., *Hand-Book of Criminal Law*, 255.

Blood and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*. Both examples explore two children who "fe[lt] like killing" and eventually did kill."⁵³ Musing further on the question of motive, Stockton then asks: "who, if anyone, feels like killing? What, if anything, is this feeling? And what kind of feeling is a motive for murder?"⁵⁴ For Stockton, it is exactly the idea of motive as the "motion propelling an action," that the sturdy legal ground of even something resembling a motive starts to undo itself; "the problem of motive" is the broad understanding of it "as a form of explanation," rather than a "living, growing, cubist form of dramatically mismatched feelings and movements from different temporalities and multilayered sideways inclinations."⁵⁵ For girl firesetters then, motive might be seen as one of these "sideways inclinations" toward anti-carcerality that also insists on nonsovereign relationality as a kind of necropolitical control over their own social deaths.

Firesetting Futurities

It was well over 100 degrees, and the air was thick; heat radiated off everything. Before visiting marker K-34, I stopped at the Moore Country Courthouse. The courthouse sits in the center of town on a slight hill in the middle of a traffic circle. Standing on either side of the courthouse, one could see two miles in each direction. As I circumambulated the building, I did not see a soul in sight. In fact, I did not see another person until I locked eyes with a guard holding a semiautomatic

⁵³ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 156.

⁵⁴ Stockton, 156.

⁵⁵ Stockton, 157.

rifle at the gates of what is now Samarcand Training Academy, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's training facility for correctional officers.⁵⁶ My heart was pounding as the guard gestured at me to come closer. I swiftly turned the car around, feigning ignorance and shrugging toward him. Thinking of the girls at Samarcand, the punishments, the arson trial, sterilization, the death penalty, and their daily living conditions, I sped away from that dead-end road watching the guard and his gun shrink away in my rearview mirror. My heart continued to pound as I thought of the countless fires and the hundreds of girls running from burning buildings into these dense woods nearly twenty miles from any place or person that could hear them scream.

Saidiya Hartman describes her genre-bending book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* as a “counter-narrative” to the preponderance of archival documents that present Black girls as “a problem,” with the goal of untethering “waywardness, refusal, mutual aid, and free love from their identification as deviance, criminality, and pathology.”⁵⁷ Returning to her idea of “a dream book for existing otherwise,” in which she “explores the utopian longings and the promise of a future world that resided in waywardness and the refusal to be

⁵⁶ Some signs for the training facility, as well as certain historical texts use the alternative English spelling “Samarkand,” which is the name of a city in present-day Uzbekistan that is also one of the oldest cities in Central Asia, possibly settled in the Paleolithic Era. Notably, the closest city with a fire department to Samarcand Manor State Home and Industrial Training School for (white) Girls is Carthage, North Carolina. Carthage is also the name of a Phoenician State from the 7th century BCE in present-day Tunisia.

⁵⁷ Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, xiv.

governed,” Hartman helps to imagine what it takes to get free from a physical and subjective prison.⁵⁸

For the firebugs, match-strikers, and arson girls, their refusal to be governed burns brightly as they use their rage to light the fires of their waywardness and, in doing so, challenge the carcerality of girlhood itself. Hartman’s recuperative storytelling of the archive proclaims futurities for the girls whose stories end in racist newspaper accounts that only mention what they were charged with or where they were incarcerated. This dedication to reimagining stories of waywardness has become a kind of method of reading both the archive and media more broadly; I thought of this book that day I visited Samarcand Manor State Home and Industrial Training School for (white) Girls.

I thought of the Berthas, Florida Thomas, Pleasant Morgan, Cecelia Williams, and the girls in the LaFon Annex at the House of the Good Shepherd. I thought of other girls whose names I did not know and the horrors we live through both in girlhood and beyond; I was mad and burning with rage.

As Sara Ahmed would say, this rage was sticky and stuck across space and time, fiction and reality. While righteous, this is the rage that precedes the act of firesetting, an abolitionist act that challenges carcerality itself. This is not a rage of respectability or reason; it is a rage directed toward freedom and destruction.

As I sped down Samarcand Boulevard, I could almost hear the screams and laughter of raging girls in the tobacco fields. In burning down the walls that

⁵⁸ Hartman, xv.

incarcerate them, arson girls reclaim a futurity outside of the prison by asserting their necropolitical control over the other incarcerated girls and the state more broadly. As they run from the burning buildings, their refusal of the carcerality ascribed to their bodies transforms them into fugitives. Their rage allows them to access nonsovereign relationality, which functions as a tool for them to become fugitives. It is only through this fugitivity that futurities—outside the carcerality of girlhood—are possible.

Conclusion: Carceral Presents, Abolitionist Futures

“The Young-Girl’s body is an encumbrance; it is her world, and it is her prison.”
Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*¹

Carceral Girlhoods considers the House of the Good Shepherd for “sexually delinquent” girls as a case study for understanding the girl problem of New Orleans. This particular case study not only presents the first in-depth analysis of the House of Good Shepherd, but it also uses that case study to argue that U.S. girlhood is a carceral subject category. As I have explained, my use of the term carceral gestures to Foucault’s construction of the term as it relates to both physical imprisonment and the disciplining of the body into submission.² In my understanding of the term carceral, I also rely on more contemporary scholars working at the intersections of abolition feminism and critical carceral studies who conceive of carcerality as broadly related to the many physical spaces of incarceration and the corresponding ideologies behind spaces that lock people up, including prisons, jails, detention centers, residential institutions, and psychiatric hospitals.³ Both physical incarceration and the ideological mechanisms that perpetuate these systems inform my use of the term carcerality.

¹ Tiqqun, *Theory of the Young-Girl*, 48.

² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

³ For more on the use of carceral, see Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*; Michelle Brown and Judah Schept, “New Abolition, Criminology and a Critical Carceral Studies,” *Punishment & Society* 19, no. 4 (September 7, 2016); Elias Walker Vitulli, “Queering the Carceral: Intersecting Queer/Trans Studies and Critical Prison Studies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2013).

Carceral Girlhoods argues that girlhood, as a subject category, is carceral. Throughout *Carceral Girlhoods*, I have argued that the girls who are subjected to the expectations of the category are both figuratively and physically subjected to carcerality. The carcerality of girlhood is anchored to specific forms of punishment and control by the state that are sometimes physical and other times figurative. With my case study, the House of the Good Shepherd and U.S. girlhood can be seen as parallel structures, with examples from the House of the Good Shepherd illustrating different modes of carcerality girls face due to the subject category to which the state and its officials assume them to belong.

While I was completing *Carceral Girlhoods*, I received an email from Marianne, a former nun who asked me about her mother's cousin, a Sister of the Good Shepherd at the New Orleans reformatory during the late nineteenth century. Her email reminded me of the day I visited the Convent of the Good Shepherd in San Francisco to talk to Sister Anne; both were full of warmth and kindness. In San Francisco, Sister Anne carefully explained how the Order worked, its history, and its continued dedication to helping women and girls. Marianne generously shared family documents and information to understand, as she put it, whether her mother's cousin was "a hero or abuser."

The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is quite complicated. The House of the Good Shepherd in New Orleans (and the Order of the Good Shepherd more generally) worked with young girls and women who were either former sex workers or children of sex workers, as well as with girls deemed "sexually delinquent" first by

basically any adult, and later by the juvenile court (established in 1909). The original mission of the Order of the Good Shepherd was to care for sex workers and their families, as well as houseless girls, women, and children.

The difficulty in answering this question is really about understanding the conditions of girlhood around the turn of the twentieth century in New Orleans. Many girls were part of the sex trade in Storyville, the city's Red-Light District; others were victims and survivors of abuse at home and possibly living on the streets. The so-called "girl problem" led to the city articulating a need for a place that could be a site of refuge and rehabilitation for these young girls, who were (through no fault of their own) deemed "sexually delinquent." In certain ways, the House of the Good Shepherd was a site of refuge for some girls, but it was also a site of incarceration, particularly after the establishment of the juvenile court. Many girls were sent to the House of the Good Shepherd by adults—in some cases, the adults were police or male family members, but it really could be any adult, white man on the street—who decided any girl out in public deserved to be locked up.

Whether this Sister of the Good Shepherd was a "hero or abuser" is perhaps impossible to know, but speaks to the complexity of the space of the convent as a place of both refuge and incarceration. By focusing on the House of the Good Shepherd as a case study to understand the carcerality of girlhood, I have traced the ways the legal categorization of girlhood led to the creation of girlhood as a problem, which, in turn, established a system to criminalize and incarcerate girls. In four chapters, *Carceral Girlhoods* demonstrates the role of the House of the Good

Shepherd in the making, problematizing, and incarcerating of girlhood. Chapter 1 opens *Carceral Girlhoods* by outlining the legal history of girlhood in New Orleans. In it, I argue narratives about the “abduction and seduction” of girls structure the laws establishing girlhood as a legal subject category. Tracing the figure of the girl in her presence and absence through these legal documents also illuminates the socio-cultural-political conditions under which the House of the Good Shepherd emerged in Reconstruction-era New Orleans. Chapter 2 examines the inner workings of the House of the Good Shepherd to understand how the reformatory—notable in the Jim Crow South for incarcerating girls of color and white girls—managed racial difference within its walls. This chapter positions arguments about racial desegregation in New Orleans alongside histories of white New Orleanian Catholic ambivalence to Black Catholics to understand the reformatory’s unusual racial politics. Chapter 3 then argues that photography and the law are co-constitutive in the making of carceral girlhood. Specifically, I examine images of carceral girlhood in Storyville and the House of the Good Shepherd to demonstrate how the gaze upon girlhood racializes, sexualizes, and holds captive girls. Finally, Chapter 4 meditates on the possibilities of life beyond carceral girlhood. In it, I trace the figure of the girl as arsonist through popular culture and turn of the twentieth-century newspapers—including at the House of the Good Shepherd—to argue that incarcerated girls who burn down their carceral institutions demonstrate resistance to the carcerality of girlhood. This chapter lingers on the possibility of a different kind of girlhood, untethered from the carceral state, an abolitionist girlhood. Or maybe an abolition of

girlhood? Of course, I do not mean abolishing the lives of girls or their futurities. Instead, I ruminate on the possibility of life beyond the carcerality of girlhood. What futurities might open up to those who would be girls, free from the carcerality of girlhood?

I want to be very clear, the problem of girlhood and girlhood's subsequent carcerality is neither the fault of, nor caused by the girls trapped in its prisons. Girlhood is a problem for non-girls. As the girl became a problem, the regime to punish, control, and incarcerate her emerged. I recognize that some girls live their lives full of joy and exuberance, embracing their girl identities, celebrating their girlhood. I also see those who may have lived through girlhood return to these memories with fondness. Likewise, scholars, activists, and thinkers of girlhood rightly do incredible work celebrating queer and trans girls and girls from the global racial majority.⁴ Scholars of Black girlhood, specifically, have been beyond helpful in my thinking of the limits and constraints of the category of girl. Girl joy, and specifically Black girl joy, is politically powerful and transformative.

My argument is not about the possibilities and potentialities of the lives of individual or even groups of girls; rather, I am concerned with how the girl became a universalized legal subject category and the problems it presents for nearly everyone else. In this way, girlhood as a social-cultural-political-economic idea is carceral. It is driven by the state's expectations to discipline girls' bodies as the potential heirs to the next generation. We—as adults—see this at work daily. We are bombarded with

⁴ For a list, see footnotes 36, 37, and 39 in my Introduction.

stories and images of the girl. She is everywhere: in the news, on TV, in social media feeds, on billboards, in films, in laws. Not only do we see images of girlhood across screens and pages, but we cannot help but traffic in images and narratives about the simultaneous punishment and victimization of girlhood. The girl is everywhere, and carceral girlhood is all around us.

In 2021 alone, for example, nearly 100 anti-trans bills aimed at controlling children's bodies have been introduced and/or signed into law in U.S. state legislatures. On March 18, 2020, Idaho passed House Bill 500, or the “Fairness in Women’s Sports Act.” This state law specifies that “athletic teams or spots designated for females, women, or girls shall not be open to students of the male sex” and establishes a protocol for any possible dispute. The protocol designates a physician must evaluate the “student’s sex based solely on the student’s internal and external reproductive anatomy; the student’s endogenously produced levels of testosterone; an analysis of the student’s genetic makeup.”⁵ In this law, the girl’s body—specifically her genitals—must be scrutinized to determine if she is, in fact, a girl according to the state’s definition. The girl is analyzed, her body evaluated, her genitals inspected, all so the state can claim they care about her “protection” by punishing and criminalizing other girls.⁶

⁵ Fairness in Women’s Sports Act, House Bill 500, 65th Legislature of the State of Idaho (2020).

⁶ Some contemporary, queer-feminist activism and scholarship is invested in abolishing the gender binary, and/or abolishing gender more generally to eradicate the enforcement of the binary and this kind of policing, criminalizing, and punishing of bodies—particularly those that may not normatively adhere to expectations of either side of the gender binary. Calls to abolish the gender binary and/or gender are rooted in an understanding of the system of gender as inherently violent and co-constituted with the state. This understanding of the gender binary, however, presents a complicated and tenuous set of questions for transnational feminists working in coalition across religions, ethnicities, ideologies,

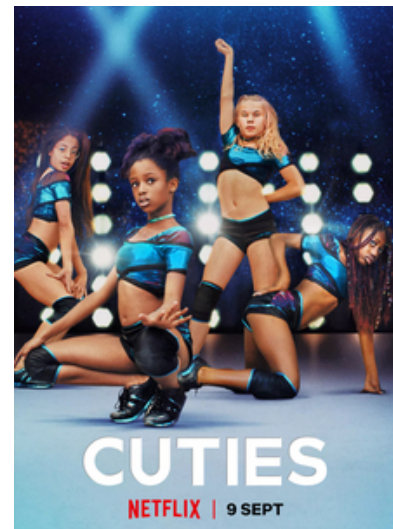
The law’s investment in policing girlhood extends to representations of girlhood as well. For example, on September 11, 2020, Texas Senator Ted Cruz sent then-Attorney General William Barr a letter urging the Department of Justice to investigate whether Netflix “violated any federal laws against the production and distribution of child pornography” with their release of the French indie film *Mignonnes (Cuties)*. The film follows Amy, an eleven-year-old Muslim girl from Senegal living in the Paris *banlieue* (suburbs). Amy joins a dance team with three other adolescent girls who learn to dance from hypersexualized videos of women dancing on social media. The overall narrative of the film, however, emphatically—in an almost antiquated Pollyanna-ish way—condemns the sexualization of girls (the main character, Amy, is only truly happy when she trades her tiny shorts, crop tops, and thrusting for sensible jeans, t-shirts, and neighborhood jump rope). Yet, what is genuinely surprising about *Cuties* is that the initial source of outrage was not even the film’s specific content, the gyrating, or subsequent girl flesh on screen; what started the international uproar over *Cuties* was a photograph.⁷

The French version of the film used a different photo to promote the film than the American version. The French promotional photograph (Figure 5.1) shows a group of

and state borders that may rely on gendered categories for political organizing, religious observation, and community building. While my research on girlhood is certainly not invested in upholding the gender binary, I do—of course—study a gendered formation that is both part of and integral to the functioning of the system of gender. Although my research focuses on this category of girl, I am not invested enforcing the boundaries of girlhood, or the gender binary for that matter. Instead, in crafting my argument around carceral girlhood, I am attempting to highlight the ways limiting (and often binary) systems of gender, race, class, and sexuality construct and constrict the possibilities of subjectivity.

⁷ For more on photography and moral panics, see “Chapter 3: The Carceral Gaze of Girlhood: Sexualization, Whiteness, and the Storyville Girls.”

girls running through the streets holding bags in what appears to be a joyful romp after a shopping spree; they are laughing, smiling, and jokingly wearing bras and lingerie over their modest clothing. The American promotional photograph (Figure 5.2) shows the group of girls dance-posing, clad in blue and black short-shorts, crop tops, and knee pads. One girl is on her knees with her back arched, another squats slightly, and Amy, crouching so low to the ground that she balances on her toes, opens her legs toward the camera, just shy of the viewer's gaze.



Figures 5.1 & 5.2: *Cuties* promotional posters. From left to right: French and U.S. posters, Netflix, 2020.

Before U.S. audiences even viewed the film, a photograph of not only sexualized girlhood but non-white sexualized girlhood generated a moral panic. After the film was released, the panic spread to the courts. A grand jury in Texas's Tyler Country indicted Netflix on disseminating child pornography. At the same time, QAnon Facebook accounts speculated the film was part of a phantasmagoric, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, featuring a child sex trafficking ring run by a global cabal of child-eating, blood-drinking, Satan worshippers. As unprecedentedly ridiculous as

it all may sound, this type of obsession over the sexualization of children — specifically girls — and subsequent use of it to vilify people of color, immigrants, Jews, and the working class is as American as apple pie, white supremacy, red scares, and union-busting. This panic over racialized girlhood and sexuality is not new; it is just the newest international hysteria that reproduces the same carceral gaze of whiteness and sexuality onto girls' real and represented bodies.

As the prelude and blueprint for today's panic, we, as adults with varying proximities to girlhood, should consider analogous moments like the Salem Witch Trials, the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, and the so-called Satanic Panic of the 1980s. All of these — including QAnon — are organized around an obsession with the white girl's body as a source and symbol of white supremacist racial purity. All of these panics highlight the ideologies that uphold carceral girlhood run amuck—ideologies steeped in classism, misogyny, white supremacy, and heteronormativity aimed at perpetuating state power.

I opened *Carceral Girlhoods* with the proclamation: girlhood is a problem. In the pages that followed that proclamation, I explored the making of New Orleanian girlhood alongside the history of the House of the Good Shepherd to demonstrate how carceral institutions for girls perpetuate and traffic in the racist, gendered, and sexualized ideologies that criminalize and punish girls. Girlhood is carceral because—as a subject category—it is a creation by the state to entomb and incarcerate those it deems transgressive, criminal, or a threat to the biopolitical order. Girlhood is the idea of the condition of being a girl, fabricated by the state to

perpetuate a colonial and white supremacist order. Girlhood is the hell we put those who would be girls through just for being. Girlhood is the idea that the girl herself can be used as a simultaneously full and empty signifier for whatever argument needs to be made. Girlhood is (still) a moral panic. As a moral panic, girlhood is a response to a series of socio-political-cultural-economic-legal problems. As a response, girlhood was transposed onto said problems, becoming the problem itself. The problem of girlhood creates the conditions and systems to incarcerate girls in physical prisons. The problem with girlhood now is that it is carceral.

Girlhood is a problem because girls' bodies are seen as encumbrances, troublesome burdens to her and the world. The ideas about girls' bodies imprison them in a world of other people's expectations, assumptions, fantasies, power, and possession. The prison of the girl's body is a miniature carceral world girls carry around with them, full of meaning and empty in value. Girlhood is only valuable for a moment as a biopolitical body that is able to produce more workers, whiteness, or enslaved people seen as property. In aspirational forms, girlhood is constructed as sexually "pure," white, and in need of protection. However, the enacted legal protections only limit, criminalize, and punish girls for their failure to meet an impossible set of standards. *Carceral Girlhoods* is invested in understanding the limitations of legal subjecthood and the regimes of power that enforce those limits.

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