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2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Footwork! Improvised Dance as Dissenting Mobility  
in the New Orleans Second Line

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Rachel Carrico

June 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Priya Srinivasan, Chairperson

Dr. Anthea Kraut

Dr. Marta Savigliano

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The Dissertation of Rachel Carrico is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## Acknowledgments

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and generosity of numerous individuals and organizations. Financial support from several sources facilitated the research and writing process, including a Graduate Student Mentorship Program fellowship and a Dissertation Research Grant from the University of California, Riverside (UCR); a Humanities Graduate Student Research Grant from UCR's Center for Ideas and Society; a grant from the University of California Center for New Racial Studies; a Global South Fellowship from the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South at Tulane University; and the University of California's President's Dissertation Year Fellowship. Awards from the Society of Dance History Scholars, the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association, and the UCR Graduate Student Association facilitated travel to national conferences, where I was able to develop many of the ideas presented in these pages. I also owe significant thanks to the Department of Dance and the Gluck Fellows Program in the Arts at UCR, both of which provided valuable support, financial and otherwise, during my graduate work.

Many of the stories, ideas, and points of view presented in the following chapters belong to the incredible people who generously agreed to share their time and knowledge with me. The voices in these pages represent just a sample of the extraordinary individuals who have shaped my thinking about second lining. Thank you to all who consented to interviews: Camille A. Brown, Roderick Davis, Terrylyn Dorsey, Terry Gable, Leo Gorman, Michael J. Hamilton, Harry Jackson, Scott Kolmar, Stephanie

McKee, Colin Meneghini, Gregory Nogess, Francine Ott, Linda Porter, Brett Powers, Don Robertson, Elsie Semmes, Jordan Shannon, John and Doratha Simmons, Lenwood Sloan, Terrinika Smith, Tyree Smith, Tess Vollmer, Bennalldra Williams, Clarice Young, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, members of the Rebirth Brass Band (Keith Frazier, Phillip Frazier, and Derrick Tabb), members of the To Be Continued Brass Band (Paul Cheenne, Joseph Mays, Edward Jackson, and Tyrone Brown), and Darryl “Dancing Man 504” Young and members of his BrassXcise class (Liz Cajigal, Daisy Camardelle, Samantha Gerlach, Dawn Kaiser, Susan Maye, and Johnny Woodstock). A special thanks is owed to Edward Buckner and the Original Big 7 Social Aid and Pleasure Club; Catina Braxton and the Ice Divas Social and Pleasure Club; Wellington “Skelly” Ratcliff Jr. and the Push for Change Social Aid and Pleasure Club; and Latanya D. Tigner and Dimensions Dance Theater for opening their homes and hearts with generosity of time and spirit. This project is also indebted to the expert guidance offered by archivists and librarians at the New York Library for the Performing Arts, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Louisiana Special Collections at the University of New Orleans, and the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University. Thanks are especially owed to Bruce Boyd Raeburn and his staff at the Hogan Jazz Archives and Rachel Lyons at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation Archive for thoughtful insight during the project’s early phases.

Several groups of people contributed tremendous intellectual labor and emotional support during the research and writing process. The faculty members and my M.A. classmates in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University opened my

eyes to the many dimensions of performance and introduced me to Dance Studies.

Although I have not been her student for several years, Barbara Browning's voice guided me in many phases of dissertation writing. I extend deep gratitude to my teachers in the Department of Dance at UCR—Jens Giersdorf, Imani Kai Johnson, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, Wendy Rogers, Susan Rose, and Linda J. Tomko—whose influences have definitively shaped my thinking about dance, culture, and politics. I am grateful for the thoughtful mentorship offered by Jayna Brown and Rikerby Hinds as members of my exam committee, and for Helen A. Regis, whose pioneering scholarship on second lining has remained a constant source of inspiration, and who has been a consistent supporter, mentor, and role model. Thanks are also due to Freddi Williams Evans, Esailama G. A. Diouf-Henry, Greer Mendy, Matt Sakakeeny, and Kim Marie Vaz for offering important suggestions and questions along the way. I look to these individuals as exemplary models for combining scholarship, social practice, and artistry in New Orleans. Thank you to Jan Gilbert and Kevin McCaffrey, for opening doors and making things possible with the utmost kindness and enthusiasm; and to Cynthia Garza, who took me to my first second line, and has remained a constant friend and dancing/thinking companion ever since.

I have benefitted tremendously from the work of my peers, who have viewed and vetted multiple versions of these chapters over the years. The intrepid members of NOW FREE (New Orleans Writers' Fierce Research Engendering Emancipation) provided invaluable insight into New Orleans history, culture, and politics. Thank you to Heidi Hoechst, Kate Kokontis, Rachel Lee, and especially Catherine Michna, who has been a tireless advocate, indispensable sounding board, and dedicated friend. The suggestions of

this group have indelibly shaped this document. I am also deeply grateful to Shukrani Gray and Daniella Santoro for their companionship in New Orleans. I thank these women for challenging me intellectually, dancing with me, and most of all for sharing their treasured friendships.

I have received dedicated support from the Critical Dance Studies Writing Group: J Dellecave, Hannah Schwadron, and Michelle Timmons Summers. These classmates-turned-colleagues have seen this project grow from exploratory course papers into conference presentations and finally into a dissertation. At every step, they read, debated, line-edited, and discussed my writing with an expert balance of critical engagement and care. I count myself fortunate to have met such a smart and dedicated group of dance scholars and dear friends in graduate school, and look forward to continued collaborations in the years to come. Thanks is also due to the friends and colleagues who have (proof)read drafts and shared their ideas at multiple junctures, in particular, Jamie Coffey, Tara M. Good, Colleen Hooper, Jasmine Johnson, Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, Kara Miller, Vanessa Pierson, Emily Squires, Lindsay Weitkamp, and the participants in the 2013 Mellon Dance Studies Summer Seminar.

Most of all, I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, who have far exceeded the call of duty. Marta E. Savigliano's razor-sharp feedback and suggestions throughout the process pushed me to more seriously consider the politics of dancing at every turn. Anthea Kraut's probing questions, knowing guidance, and caring mentorship has profoundly influenced my research approaches and modes of analysis. Finally, as committee chairperson, Priya Srinivasan provided tireless guidance and leadership that



did not stop at supporting my goals, but enabled the work to grow in ways that I never could have achieved without her. To Priya, your mentorship has pushed me closer to the becoming the kind of scholar that I want to be, and for that, I am forever grateful. This project has been infinitely bettered by the contributions of these individuals and more; its limitations and flaws are my own.

Finally, I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to my family for always believing in me and supporting my work; if you ever had concerns, I never knew it. Thank you for always reminding me that, no matter how difficult things seemed, I would land on my feet. Finally, to Derek, who can really roll: thank you—for everything.

## Dedication

For Wesley, whose life I celebrate and death I mourn with every buck jump.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### Footwork! Improvised Dance as Dissenting Mobility in the New Orleans Second Line

by

Rachel Carrico

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies  
University of California, Riverside, June 2015  
Dr. Priya Srinivasan, Chairperson

On most Sundays in New Orleans, you can find a second line parade. Since the late-nineteenth century, these processions have gathered thousands of people to dance through African American neighborhoods, improvising footwork in time with the brass band's rhythms. This dissertation documents and analyzes the role of dance within the second line tradition, and in so doing, brings scholarly attention to a central yet understudied aspect of New Orleans's black expressive cultures. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, I combine a close study of historical materials (archival footage, print media, and oral histories) with ethnographic data (participation in the second line community and in-depth interviews with dozens of individuals) to provide a history of second line dancing and a detailed account of its contemporary practice. Building upon previous literature, which understands second line parades as performative critiques of racism and capitalism, I show how dancers physically articulate counter-hegemonic histories and ideologies during each procession. I argue that second lining is a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility that has been deployed by disenfranchised peoples for centuries to maneuver within and against the structural and physical violence of racial capitalism. Chapters one and two track how second lining's

form and meanings have changed in response to shifting manifestations of racial capitalism, from dancing at Congo Square in the antebellum era, when the chattel slave trade flourished in New Orleans, to buck jumping in the post-Katrina city under the reign of colorblind neoliberalism. Chapters three and four explore second liners' motivations to dance, which include the formation of collectives, spiritual transcendence, and the reclaiming of their neighborhoods. I argue that, in addition to achieving these goals, second liners give shape to a discourse of dissenting citizenship through their bodily postures and pathways through the cityscape. This analysis of second line dancing and its social implications not only contributes to academic inquiries within Dance Studies and related humanities disciplines, but also engages current discussions regarding state violence in black communities across the United States, speaking to questions pertinent to multi-disciplinary studies of race and ethnicity, bodily performance, and political economy in the urban sphere.

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## INTRODUCTION

On May 12, 2013, I walked up to the starting location of the Original Big 7 Social Aid and Pleasure Club's (SAPC's) second line parade. I arrived with a fancy camera, a notebook, and a flurry of anticipation. I had spent the previous six weeks beginning my dissertation research in New Orleans, attending a different second line parade every Sunday afternoon. But this one was special. I wanted to support the club's president, Edward (Ed) Buckner, with whom I had worked quite closely as an administrator and teacher when he directed a neighborhood youth center. I had last attended the Big 7's annual Mother's Day parade in 2010, since I had been in California for nearly three years, pursuing a doctoral degree in Critical Dance Studies. But now I was back, this time as an ethnographer, and these prior relationships felt very important. As a white, middle-class woman who had relocated to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina now doing ethnography about one of the city's central black performance traditions, I trusted that building on existing relationships was the most ethical way to proceed. Attending Ed's parade felt like a crucial first step.

The Big 7 departed from Ed's house in the Seventh Ward neighborhood. His house sits on a major street with a wide grassy median, known in New Orleans as a neutral ground, separating multiple lanes of traffic. Each second line begins at 1:00 sharp (noon during the winter months' daylight savings time), when the brass band strikes up to accompany club members as they "come out the door." One by one, each SAPC member dramatically steps through a door of someone's house or a neighborhood barroom,



revealing him or herself to the awaiting public.<sup>1</sup> They dress in brightly colored, matching suits and wave feathered flags above their heads. Since membership numbers can range from two to one hundred (with ages in about the same range), this can take a little or a long time. As each member comes out the door, she is expected to “show out”—dropping low, jumping high, spinning, and working her feet so fast that her shoes hover *just* above the pavement. Some club members plan extensive or clever performances for their moments in the spotlight; some just let the spirit or their intuition guide them. Some choreograph a short sequence of new or trademarked steps, only to watch in despair and alarm as the guy in front of them performs those moves first.

The crowd momentarily plays the role of spectator, vocally assessing the SAPC’s color scheme, apparel choices, and dance ability. Four men unfurl twenty feet of yellow industrial rope to create an aisle from the door to the middle of the street, slicing through the dense crowd. Very often, they have to push and cajole the crowd to “Open it up!” After all club members have come out the door, they move into the middle of the street, framed by ropes on either side. The band follows behind the club and the rest of us—hundreds to thousands of family members, friends of the club, members of other SAPCs, neighbors, weekly die-hards, the casually curious, ambulatory vendors, professional photographers, and more—all fall in behind the band, alongside the ropes, or even in front of the club, circumscribed by police escorts who block traffic with squad cars and

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<sup>1</sup> Clubs usually come out the door of someone’s house or a neighborhood bar, but I’ve also seen clubs come out from the high school where most members attended, and from a hotel in the Central Business District. Some clubs pride themselves on staging dramatic entrances, such as emerging from the back of a moving truck parked inconspicuously on the street (Lady Buckjumpers, 2013); from a trolley that rolls up near the crowd (Divine Ladies, 2014); or even once, legend has it, from a helicopter (Sidewalk Steppers, sometime during the 1990s).

motorcycles. The whole procession moves through the streets as a dancing collective for four straight hours, making several pre-planned stops along a pre-determined route.

The choreographic structure of a second line parade is simple. The hosting organization and brass band form the first line or main line, and the trumpet's blare invites all within earshot to form a second line around them, giving the event its name. Second lines are thrown in New Orleans for all sorts of occasions: weddings, conventions, holidays, festivals, family parties, and (notably) funerals, but when New Orleanians talk about "*the* second line," they are most likely referring to the parades that are hosted each Sunday by a different SAPC. The Original Big 7 is one of several dozen SAPCs currently operating in New Orleans. Some were founded over one hundred years ago; some were founded last week. These clubs belong to a constellation of black voluntary organizations that have been active in New Orleans since the late-eighteenth century<sup>2</sup> and have long created alternative access to resources and social networks in

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<sup>2</sup> Harry J. Walker, "Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership" (master's thesis, Fisk University, 1937); and Claude Jacobs, "Benevolent Societies of New Orleans Blacks During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 1 (1988): 22 note 1. A note on the term "black" versus "African American." I sometimes use "black" instead of "African American" as a term that attempts to capture the interwoven histories of New Orleans's populations of African descent, including Caribbean, Creole, and Anglo-American lineages. As Thomas Brothers notes, it would be a mistake to apply the term "African American" to Creoles of color during the turn of the century, since the group of free, light-skinned Creoles was trying hard to be neither African nor American, but solidly French or Spanish. Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 173. However, since the Jim Crow era, New Orleans's multiple African diaspora populations have been increasingly collapsed under the label "black" in the eyes of the law and white supremacist society. Even though lighter skin color and European cultural biases lent Creoles of color a degree of privilege in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social hierarchies, over time, the designations "black" and "Creole" in New Orleans have become not interchangeable, nor historically bound, but "irreconcilable." Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 157-158. My selective use of the term black does not intend to reduce ethnic and cultural differences amongst these populations, but rather to respect shared (though not homogenous) experiences of racialized oppression. See also Arnold R. Hirsch

response to the institutional racism and structural violence that has consistently barred people of color from full access to mainstream politics, economics, and social life.<sup>3</sup> For more than a century, these organizations have employed black brass bands for members' funerals and for social functions, such as dances, picnics, and anniversary parades.<sup>4</sup>

Today, when an SAPC throws its anniversary parade—known as its second line—in the members' home neighborhood, it stages a spectacular performance that legally processes through public streets (with the sanction of a city permit), filling the urban environment with live and recorded music, truck-pulled floats, elaborate regalia, food and drink, theatrical ceremony, spoken, written, and visual rhetoric, and dancing—lots and lots of dancing. As a verb, “second lining” refers to all participatory parade activity, such as walking, strutting, and chanting; but the term also names a distinct dance form showcased during the parade: improvised, percussive, footwork-heavy, and individual yet collective. Second line footwork carries paraders through New Orleans's back-of-town

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and Joseph Logsdon, eds, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 168; Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies,” 32. Malone adds that, in addition to economic and social necessity, African Americans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were “culturally predisposed to creating and joining mutual aid societies” due to the prevalence of secret societies in Africa. *Steppin' On the Blues*, 167 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup> On the history of New Orleans brass bands, see Danny Barker and Jack Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black: The New Orleans Black Jazzman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Mick Burns, *Keeping the Beat on the Streets: The New Orleans Brass Band Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); William Schafer, with assistance from Richard B. Allen, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); and Michael White, “The New Orleans Brass Band: A Cultural Tradition,” in *The Triumph of the Soul: Cultural and Psychological Aspects of African American Music*, ed. by Ferdinand Jones and Arthur C. Jones (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001). On the role of African American mutual aid societies in the development of nineteenth-century jazz music and dancing, see Malone, *Steppin' On the Blues*, 167-186.

neighborhoods, situated in the former swamps beyond the Mississippi River's natural levee. Since the beginning of the city's history, poor and working-class black New Orleanians have been forced to live on marginal land in the back of town: flood-prone areas with low property values and limited job opportunities.<sup>5</sup> More recently, these neighborhoods have suffered many of the same challenges as urban areas across the country: a loss of affordable housing, drug trade expansion, increased prevalence of automatic weapons, and police brutality.<sup>6</sup> Second lines reclaim back-of-town neighborhoods from the forces of structural and physical violence, transforming impoverished, criminalized, and ghettoized areas into sites for spiritual transcendence, community-building, and joyful celebration through dancing.

When we arrived to the Big 7's 2013 second line, my then boyfriend / now husband and I stood on the curb, watching the kids' division as they danced by with their own brass band, followed by the main division of male and female club members, who strutted in front of a second brass band. When I saw Ed pass by, he was showing off his footwork in fancy leather shoes—perhaps made from real or imitation alligator skin. I called his name, but he could not hear me over the roar of trumpets and trombones. "I'll see him later," I thought. He marched in front of the To Be Continued Brass Band,

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<sup>5</sup> Rachel Breunlin and Helen A. Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (2006): 746.

<sup>6</sup> Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About when We Talk about Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 42-51; see also Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

commonly known as TBC.<sup>7</sup> Dancers love TBC's quick-paced, funky beat, and, since second lines involve multiple generations, TBC's adaptations of pop songs from decades past have become crowd favorites. On Mother's Day, the horns were wailing out a brassy version of Whitney Houston's 1987 pop hit, "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," when the procession turned the corner, funneling us from the wide boulevard onto the narrow, residential Villere Street. My boyfriend and I were grooving down the sidewalk, skating over fallen oak tree leaves, singing loudly into the thickly humid summer day: "I wanna dance with somebody! I wanna feel the heat with somebody! I wanna dance with somebody, with somebody who loves me!"

When we reached the first intersection at Frenchmen Street, I stopped to say hello to a friend. We yelled over the band and paused our dancing for a moment to catch up through conversation. She had recently been offered a new job, and I wanted to hear about it. These kinds of conversations create a major ritual function of second line parades: members of a community are accounted for, seen, and acknowledged by others. From March of 2013 until June of 2014, I attended a second line nearly every Sunday, and I almost always stayed with the parade from beginning to end. My Sunday ritual involved taking account of who was present; reuniting when someone returned after a prolonged absence; and asking after people's family members and mutual acquaintances. As I began to conduct interviews and write up my research, I also relied on weekly reunions to schedule interviews and to share drafts. The ritual of seeing each other every

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<sup>7</sup> TBC has become one of the most popular bands in the city in recent years, and during the 2013-2014 season, they were hired for almost every social aid and pleasure club's second line. They play a Wednesday night set at a Seventh Ward night club, Celebration Hall, that attracts all the footwork fanatics, ages eighteen to seventy, to pack the dance floor every week.

Sunday is an important way in which second lines form collectivities, and so my friend and I stood on the street corner and shouted over the band to share news, reconnect, and account for each other.

Pop pop pop.

“Those are not gunshots,” I think.

Everything in my field of vision swirls into a kaleidoscope of brick, sky, pavement, skin.

Pop pop pop pop pop.

“Those are not gunshots. This doesn’t happen at second lines. These are sacred. This doesn’t happen.”

The kaleidoscope fans out into a semi-circle. A wave of bodies pushes toward me. Screams. Shoes scraping the pavement.

I am face down in the grass, under the stop sign. I do not know how I got here. It is quieter now. I feel something wet dripping on my leg and lift my head to look. My boyfriend pushes me back down. “What are you doing?” “I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know.” I turn my head toward the street to look. Blood. Shirtsleeve tourniquets. Supine bodies. A man braced against a brick wall. I hear the first band, several blocks ahead, still playing with the kids’ division. They do not yet know. They are still smiling, dancing, and singing, while just a few blocks behind them, people lie in the street, bleeding.

My friends and I run. As soon as it seems safe to get up, we run. I follow them down Villere Street, sprinting back toward our car. We are the only ones running. We

pass a tall, thin, African American man, who ambles toward the scene and asks no one in particular, “See how they do?” I slow down, almost stopping. Is he talking about us, about me? Does he mean, “See how those white people run as soon as it gets real?” Does he mean, “See how those people will move into our houses, inflate our rents, gentrify our neighborhoods, and absorb our culture, but hit the road as soon as it’s time to deal with the suffering?” Does he mean, “They’re only here to take our culture; they don’t care about us. See how they do?”

“Rachel, what are you doing?” My boyfriend has noticed that I am no longer running. He turns and calls for me to catch up. I do. We run to our car. We drive to the safe enclave of Audubon Park, twelve miles yet light years away from the intersection of Frenchmen and Villere. We sit on a park bench, sipping an iced coffee and eating a chocolate chip cookie, watching joggers, dog walkers, and picnickers revel in the sunshine.

The incident became known as the “Mother’s Day shooting” in what little national media attention it got.<sup>8</sup> But in New Orleans, I could not walk past a newspaper stand for over a week without glimpsing the story plastered across the local papers’ front pages. We now know that two brothers, Shawn Scott and Aekin Scott (ages twenty-four and nineteen, respectively), opened fire on the parading crowd. Nineteen people were shot, and another was trampled in the chaos. Miraculously, no one was fatally wounded, although three people suffered severe injuries and remained in critical condition for weeks, and one victim’s injuries required multiple surgeries over the course of several

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<sup>8</sup> For a thorough, sensitive report on the incident, see Campbell Patterson and Katy Reckdahl, “Celebrating, in Spite of Risk,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2013.

months. The Scott brothers were soon arrested and charged with twenty counts of attempted murder. Authorities maintained that the bullets were intended for a target in the parading crowd, and motivated by gang-related activities. Eventually, all state-level charges were dropped against the Scotts in exchange for a federal indictment. They are currently awaiting trial, along with seven other people, in a drug, weapon, and racketeering case—a move in keeping with the city’s recent efforts to address the murder rate by targeting several drug-trafficking gangs.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until I saw the photograph in the newspaper—a still taken from security camera footage—that I realized how close I had come to death. Or, at least, that is how it felt. The gunman shown in the photo pointed his weapon in my general direction, standing about twenty feet from the place where my friend and I had paused to talk. However, the photograph also revealed why a bullet had not pierced my flesh. In those twenty feet, a densely packed crowd of second liners separated my body from the gun. Apart from the arbitrary paths of the bullets, I was not shot because other bodies shielded me from harm (see fig. 1).

The incident shocked New Orleanians, even though gun violence in the Seventh Ward neighborhood and at second lines, regardless of neighborhood, is nothing new. This shooting felt extraordinary because of the perpetrators’ brazen disregard for the ritual, which led them to spray bullets into a wide swath of the crowd with seeming indiscretion. Almost like churches, second lines hold a place in the social imagination of many New

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<sup>9</sup> Naomi Martin, “Feds Indict 9 in Mother’s Day Gang Shooting, Other Crimes,” *Times-Picayune*, March 11, 2014. [http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2014/03/feds\\_indict\\_9\\_in\\_mothers\\_day\\_g.html/](http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2014/03/feds_indict_9_in_mothers_day_g.html/). At the time of writing, the trial is still pending, having been postponed at least twice.



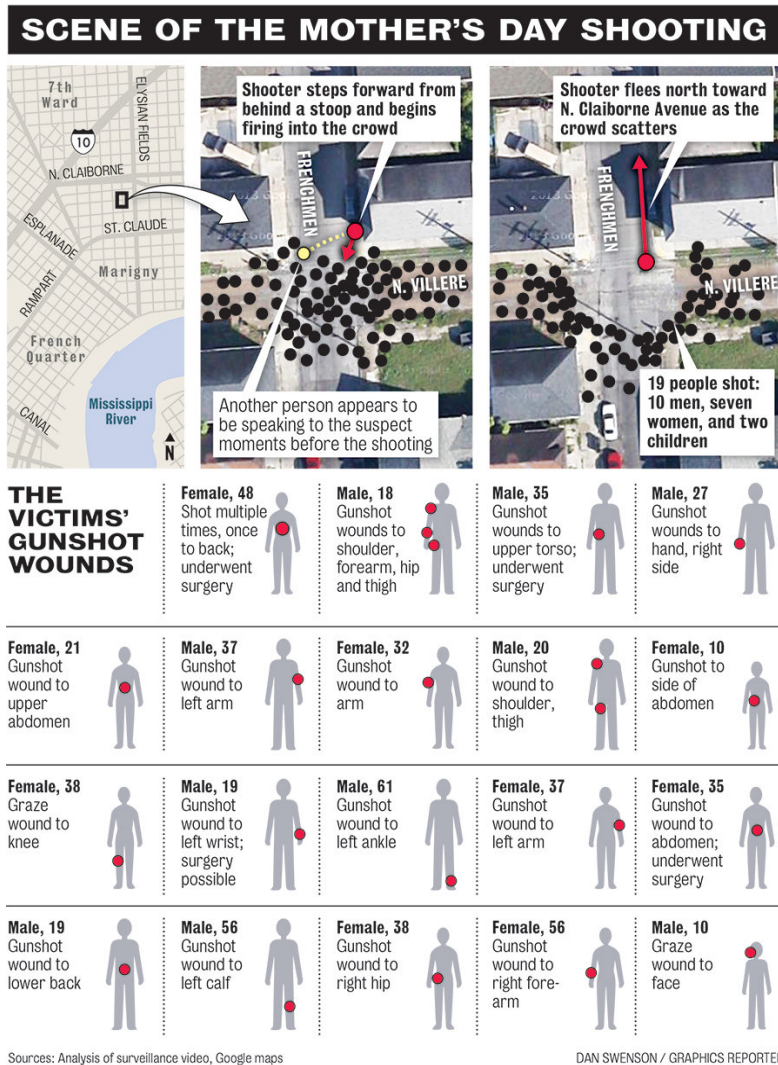
Orleanians as a safe space for communing, healing, and even catching the spirit.<sup>10</sup> SAPCs attempt to maintain the second line as sacred space by directly appealing to those who might see the gathering as an opportunity to settle a score. Club members, who mostly live in the neighborhoods where they parade, are intimately familiar with local geographies of frequent violence and turf wars, often due to personal experiences. Ed Buckner lost a twenty-six-year-old son to gun violence in 2009. Hardly anyone will deny that violence has marred the second line parades in these neighborhoods for decades, but advocates argue that episodes such as the Mother’s Day shooting are not a defining characteristic of second lines themselves; rather, they are a consequence of larger issues in the neighborhoods where the parades take place. In fact, many clubs, including the Big 7, perceive their roles as one of the few antidotes to violence operating in their neighborhoods. Following the shooting, the Big 7 issued a statement on their Facebook page and in the local newspaper:

Crime and violence in New Orleans is a systemic problem and we strongly believe that safeguarding our cultural heritage helps to address the roots of violence. We are a cross-generational organization, ages 5-70. Our young people grow up in this culture, are fed by it, and feel loved, supported and connected in ways that build real security. That’s crime prevention.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Most second liners that I have interviewed refer to moments of transcendence—even if they do not use that word—when dancing at Sunday second lines (see chapter three). Nikki Thanos persuasively makes the argument for second lines as sacred spaces in her blog piece, “The New Orleans Mother’s Day Shooting was Like a Mass Shooting at a Church,” posted on *Bridge the Gulf: Voices from the Gulf Coast*, May 13, 2013, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://bridgethegulfproject.org/node/764/>.

<sup>11</sup> “Mother’s Day Second Line Helps Nourish Not Only the City’s Culture but the Younger Generation: Edward Buckner,” *Times-Picayune*, May 15, 2013, [http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2013/05/mothers\\_day\\_second\\_line\\_helps.html/](http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2013/05/mothers_day_second_line_helps.html/). In an uncharacteristic move, New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu sided with the Big 7’s position. Thirty hours after the Mother’s Day shooting, I attended a community meeting that Landrieu convened in the middle of the intersection of Frenchmen and Villere Streets. He presented a united front with the Big 7 and with the city’s second line culture makers. “This didn’t have anything to do with second lines,” the mayor told us, “and it didn’t have anything to do with the rich



**Figure 1.** "Scene of the Mother's Day Shooting." This graphic was developed by the *Times-Picayune*, using analyses of surveillance video and Google maps, to accompany the news story, "Mother's Day Shooting Investigation Shutting Down Frenchmen Street at the Scene," May 13, 2013, *Times-Picayune*, <http://www.nola.com>. I was standing on the southeast corner of the intersection.

cultural heritage of New Orleans." Patterson and Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of Risk." This position differed greatly from the city's response to shootings that occurred during and after two second lines in 2006, after which the New Orleans Police Department dramatically increased the costs of parade permits for SAPCs, as much as 300 percent for some clubs. After a year of litigation and pressed by the judge, the parties reached an agreement. It set a price cap for the clubs at \$1,985 per four-hour parade, meant to pay for ten police officers. Katy Redkahl, "Permit Fees Raining on Second-Line Parades," *Times-Picayune*, March 29, 2007, accessed April 4, 2014, [http://blog.nola.com/topnews/2007/03/permit\\_fees\\_raining\\_on\\_secondl.html](http://blog.nola.com/topnews/2007/03/permit_fees_raining_on_secondl.html); Clare Garafalo, "Second Line Organizations Not to Blame for Violence." *The Advocate*, May 20, 2013, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://theadvocate.com/news/5977111-123/this-go-round-city-officials/>.

Clubs work year-round to create safe spaces for youth and meet the material needs of their neighbors, but they also explicitly seek to suspend street-level violence during the four hours of their parades. Many clubs include a warning on their “route sheet,” a single page flier outlining the parade’s path through the city, directing participants to leave their guns and troubles at home. In 2013, the Big 7 dispensed with the warning, for violence seemed to have waned in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Other club presidents walk their routes a day before their parades with a plea: “If anyone has scores to settle, please don’t settle them around our parade.”<sup>13</sup> Despite these efforts, many New Orleanians claim that second lines are too dangerous to attend, or to let their children attend. The exuberant energy of a second line can be vectored into multiple directions: passionate, spiritual, otherworldly transcendence; physical healing; deep fellowship with others; and/or violence.<sup>14</sup> While the incidents of physical violence at second lines have spiked and declined over the years, the Mothers’ Day shooting was enough to remind us all that the parades are not immune to the daily violence that plagues the neighborhoods where they roll.

### **Literature on the Second Line**

The scholarly writing on second lines understands the parades as grassroots responses to structural, historical, and racist violence. Along with other distinct, yet related African diaspora parading practices in New Orleans, second lines have been understood as a form of black resistance; a site for activating ancestral memories; an

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<sup>12</sup> Patterson and Reckdahl, “Celebrating, in Spite of Risk.”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 83.

agent of spatial transformation; a mechanism for building community in a fragmented urban sphere; a participatory model for democracy; and a training ground for learning fundamental skills, such as making something spectacular from humble materials, necessary for the poor and people of color to survive oppression.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have named these values and functions as characteristic of back-of-town anniversary parades, and distinguish them from the minstrel-like appropriations of second line parades performed for and by anyone who would like to pay for one, including tourists, conventions, weddings, and political fundraisers. While these events create income-generating opportunities for musicians and (to a lesser degree) for dancers, their prevalence does not indicate a widespread respect or support for the grassroots culture that they mimic. New Orleans leans on the second line parade as a representative expression of the city's identity, and yet, the city heavily taxes the clubs and restricts the legal parameters for playing music in public spaces. Furthermore, as scholars have noted, the city's policies and economies, which have been heavily reliant on tourism since the late-twentieth

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<sup>15</sup> Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map"; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*; Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*; Joel Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post-Katrina: Learning Community from the Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009); Zada Johnson, "Walking the Post-Disaster City: Race, Space and the Politics of Tradition in the African-American Parading Practices of Post-Katrina New Orleans" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2010); George Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2006); Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Catherine Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming: Storytelling, Second-Line Knowledges, and the Struggle for Democracy in New Orleans" (PhD Diss., Boston College, 2011); Margaret Olsen, "The Gift of the New Orleans Second Line," in *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations*, ed. by Lara D. Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Bruce Boyd Raeburn, "'They're Tryin' to Wash Us Away': New Orleans Musicians Surviving Katrina," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (2007); Helen Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (1999); Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (2001); Joseph Roach, "Mardi Gras Indians and Others: Genealogies of American Performance," *Theatre Journal* 44, no. 4 (1992); and Richard Brent Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

century, continue to marginalize the working-class African American residents who have maintained the tradition for more than a century.<sup>16</sup> While these events create income-generating opportunities for musicians and (to a lesser degree) for dancers, their prevalence does not indicate a widespread respect or support for the grassroots culture that they mimic. The city appropriates the second line as an icon of palatable, positive, and respectable black culture to market its own image as an exotic yet safe tourist destination. Meanwhile, the city taxes clubs, prohibits certain parading dates, enforces noise ordinances, and otherwise presents obstacles to staging neighborhood-based second line parades. These punishing measures against second lining performances, which contain and silence black residents, underscore deeper injuries committed against New Orleans's black working class by politicians, police officers, and fiscal elites. The distinctions between neighborhood second lines and their "minstrel-like appropriations," as Regis calls them, lies in the following question: for whom and for what? Second lines can be ordered up for any number of occasions, from destination weddings to mayoral inaugurations to protest marches, and while each performance may or may not reinforce the politics and ethics of SAPCs' anniversary parades, the fact remains that second lines for-hire operate outside of the second line community's ritual calendar, back-of-town parading locations, and communal funding structure. SAPCs' second line parades are collectively funded by the hosting club and, through the club's fundraising efforts, by its members' networks. Second liners make tremendous financial sacrifices to dance through

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<sup>16</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes"; Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory"; Sakakeeny, "New Orleans Exceptionalism in 'The Neoliberal Deluge' and 'Treme,'" *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 3 (2012): 723 - 726; Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire & Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

their neighborhood streets each Sunday, celebrating willfull mobility of black bodies and unrestricted volume of black music. But when hired by a client, they are paid to perform for others' enjoyment. The exchange of cash for dance, performed outside the space and time of second lining as a grassroots ritual, leads at least one SAPC member to hold back when dancing for hire. As he told Helen Regis, he will not "jump as high for the paying gigs."<sup>17</sup> While some of the same residents might attend Sunday second lines and parades staged for other purposes—and even have a similar experience in both situations—the differences can be determined by the occasion prompting the parade, the source of its funding, and city spaces that it inhabits.

Although scholars of the second line frequently cite the central role of bodily movement within the performance tradition, most are concerned with second line dancing as a response to brass band music. However, a few dance historians have documented second lining as a sophisticated dance form with specific aesthetic codes. One of the earliest written descriptions of second line dancing was published in a 1959 article in *Dance Magazine* entitled, "New Orleans' Marching Bands: Choreographer's Delight." The author, Roland Wingfield, is described in the article's short biography as a "young dancer-choreographer" in New York City, specializing in Afro-American themes. He narrates an experience in New Orleans on Labor Day weekend in 1958, in which he unexpectedly encountered a "marching band" (he does not say "brass band") while driving towards "back o' town." He quickly parked his car and hurried back to the scene. As the parade turned onto North Claiborne Avenue, he found himself "no longer walking,

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<sup>17</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 475.

but strutting and suddenly dancing.” He describes the dancing he saw—and probably imitated—as such: “The dancers moved with pelvis thrown forward, the upper body slightly tilted back, loose and responding freely to the rhythm, legs slightly apart and propelling a shuffling step with a subtle bounce.”<sup>18</sup> Wingfield’s description was replicated in several early surveys of African American dance, such as Jean and Marshall Stearns’s 1968 survey, *Jazz Dance*, closely followed by Lynne Fauley Emery’s *Black Dance in the United States from 1619-1970*. However, these anthologies’ discussions of New Orleans largely focus on nineteenth-century performances at Congo Square, and devote little attention to second lining as a contemporary social dance practice.

Rich yet short descriptions of second line dancing can be found in writings on African American dance and New Orleans cultural history. Jacqui Malone’s chapter on New Orleans brass bands in *Steppin’ on the Blues: Visible Rhythms of African-American Dance* includes one page devoted to second line dancing. She writes, “Although different generations incorporate the social dances of their era, there is a characteristic style that is unique to black New Orleanians. The most important thing, however, is to move to the rhythm of the music.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Kim Marie Vaz’s recent book, *The “Baby Dolls”: Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition* (2013), includes a one-page description of second line dancing that highlights the

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<sup>18</sup> Roland Wingfield, “New Orleans Marching Bands: A Choreographer’s Delight,” *Dance Magazine* (January 1959): 34.

<sup>19</sup> Malone, *Steppin’ on the Blues*, 183.

generative importance of dance for brass band music.<sup>20</sup> I am partial to poet, music critic, and activist Kalamu ya Salaam's evocative descriptions of second line dancing, including this one:

When people dance to second line music, they look like a contraction. . . . The rhythms aren't there just to frame out the melodies and harmonies. In a way, the rhythms are the whole thing. The rhythm does what it wants. The sudden twists and shifts of the music cause the dancers to do sudden twists and shifts of their own. The best dancers have a way of merging jerking with gliding.<sup>21</sup>

While these writers' emphases on improvisation, rhythm, and musicality is correct, a detailed account of the aesthetic qualities that comprise second lining's "characteristic style" remains beyond the scope of their analyses.

*Footwork! Improvised Dance as Dissenting Mobility in the New Orleans Second Line* addresses gaps in the scholarship on New Orleans culture and dance history with a close analysis of bodies in motion within the second line tradition. It seeks to illuminate how second liners' movements, along with music and other ritual elements, do the work of subverting and critiquing hegemonic forces. Ethnomusicologists and jazz historians have documented and analyzed the aesthetic and political import of brass band music.<sup>22</sup> Anthropologists and cultural critics have studied the social functions of the parades as

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<sup>20</sup> Kim Marie Vaz, *The "Baby Dolls": Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 38.

<sup>21</sup> Salaam, qtd. in Rachel Bruenlin and Ronald W. Lewis, *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis* (New Orleans: Neighborhood Story Project, 2009), 155.

<sup>22</sup> Barker and Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*; Jason Berry, Jonathon Foose, and Tad Jones, *Up from the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*; Burns, *Beat on the Street*; Charles B. Hersch, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Bruce Boyd Raeburn, *New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Schafer, William, with assistance from Richard B. Allen. *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*; and White, "New Orleans Brass Band."



communal rituals, and noted the political resonances of their ritual structures.<sup>23</sup> Others have framed second lines as performances of collective, ancestral memory that retain and transmit African diaspora histories.<sup>24</sup> Still others have examined the anti-capitalist political economy of second line culture,<sup>25</sup> and documented the second line's aesthetic influence on other fields of artistic production in the city.<sup>26</sup> This study argues that dance is a crucial yet overlooked component to the second line's aesthetic, social, and political ontology. It suggests that, with a close attention to the second lining body, we can ask new questions, and arrive at new insights about the parades' relationships to power, including violence, disaster, and capitalism.

Like music, dance provides a means by which ordinary people can express themselves. For those who are barred from mainstream discourses, dance can be harnessed as a platform from which to express counter-hegemonic worldviews. In order to comprehend second liners' bodily discourses of dissent, we must become literate in its grammar. For example, questioning the presumed "naturalness" of second lining as an expression of blackness can lead to a nuanced understanding about the presumed "naturalness" of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (chapter one). Understanding how second liners' postures and footwork have changed over the decades allows us to track historical shifts in black political and social thought (chapter two). If we learn to sense

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<sup>23</sup> Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map"; Regis, "Contested Landscapes"; Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory"; Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post-Katrina"; Johnson, "Walking the Post-Katrina City"; Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans."

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Turner, *Jazz Religion*.

<sup>25</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 225; Olsen, "Gift of the Second Line."

<sup>26</sup> Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming."

second liners' physical negotiations between succumbing to gravity and resisting it, we might see how the choreography implies a sophisticated approach to surviving oppressive regimes of racial capitalism: a constant oscillation between upward mobility and submission to violent forces (chapter three). Finally, if we learn to read second liners' choreographic uses of the cityscape, then we can comprehend how dancers' uses of time and space articulate radical worldviews about citizenship, white supremacy, and patriarchy (chapter four). In multiple ways, a close study of literal bodily movement illuminates and even complicates a study of large-scale movements of black people (forced and voluntary migrations, disaster evacuations, mass imprisonment, urban entrapment, and freedom marches) and the ideological meanings of mobility pertinent to studies of blackness (social mobility, forward progress, political movements, and the impacts of "letting the spirit move").

### **Elusive Subject and Widening Scope: Dance and Violence**

When I first began this research, I was driven by a desire to know what second line dancing *is*. I was perplexed by a contradiction between the language that second liners used to talk about their dancing (or, more precisely, to *not* talk about it) and the bodily performances that I saw on the street each week. I found that many participants insisted that second lining is no more than a personal response to the music, and yet, the dancing that I witnessed, and attempted to emulate, was incredibly specific. I came to understand that descriptions of second lining as individual expression belong to a widespread conversation, which I call "do-watcha-wanna" discourse, borrowing the

phrase from a popular song by the Rebirth Brass Band.<sup>27</sup> Those who hold a do-watcha-wanna position usually agree that dancing is important to second lines, but insist that there is no right or wrong way to do it: if you can walk, you can second line. At the same time, my own failed attempts to mimic the dancers that I most admired revealed that if *I* did what *I* wanted to do, then I might have a good time, but I would not be moving my body within the kinesthetic vocabulary that characterized most people's dancing. At various points in the research, I would sense that I was approaching something like an object that I could catalog as "second line dancing." I would anticipate that the next interview, the next piece of archival footage, or the next second line dance class would reveal the defining component; and just as I approached it, it would vanish. My quest for the "it" of second lining began to echo the trajectory of a slow-paced parader following behind an elusive brass band, as described by legendary brass band musician Sidney Bechet. In his 1960 autobiography, Bechet lauded the movements of the grand marshal, the high-stepping leader of each funeral or second line procession in the late-nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries. The best of them "could really fool and surprise you. He'd keep time to the music, but all along he'd keep a strutting and moving so you'd never know what he was going to be doing next." He would lead the crowd in one direction, only to turn the corner at the last possible second, leaving the stragglers at the end of the line stranded without a band or a leader.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes second lining as a thing—as an object of knowledge and the subject of this dissertation—took on the

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<sup>27</sup> I take this phrase from the title of a popular brass band song, "Do Watcha Wanna," by one of New Orleans' most renowned brass bands, the Rebirth Brass Band. *Do Watcha Wanna* (New Orleans: Mardi Gras Records, audio CD, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle* (London: Twayne Publishers Inc. and Cassel & Company, 1960), 67.

trickster maneuvers of Bechet's grand marshal. It seductively pulled me into its wake, and each time that I thought I caught up to it, or believed that I could follow, it swerved in another direction and left me deserted, wondering what I was writing about at all.

In its most capacious connotation, second lining truly is do watcha wanna. As long as you are (usually) moving on the beat and (generally) moving forward with the crowd, then you are second lining. But the term also encompasses a constellation of distinct dance forms known as stepping, footwork, and buck jumping. "Stepping" describes a buoyant, high-knee strut; "footwork" is the art of executing intricate rhythmic patterns with the feet; and "buck jumping" refers to what happens when dancers turn up their energetic output, which often manifests in multiple uses of levels, such as dropping to the ground and leaping in the air. Dancers' preferences for each variety of second lining are shaped by many factors, including their neighborhood allegiances (footwork is generally aligned with downtown and buck jumping with uptown); generation (stepping is more characteristic of pre-civil rights era second lining); politics of respectability (buck jumping is sometimes seen as less elegant than stepping); and gender (criteria for excellent footwork and buck jumping are often coded as masculine). Stepping, footwork, and buck jumping are overlapping categories that I separate here only for the sake of discussion. All three forms are individual, rhythmic, and improvised; they simultaneously and constantly erupt and dissolve during the procession; and one dancer will often incorporate all three forms in one musical phrase. Not everyone dances, but those who do dance often shift from walking to strutting to full-blown footwork—perhaps with an occasional bout of buck jumping thrown in—and then melt back into walking. Second-

lining-as-activity constantly shifts to second-lining-as-dancing and back again.

If a parader is walking, strutting, buck jumping or working her feet (what I like to call “footworking”), *how* she moves matters as much, if not more to second liners than *what* she moves. When they see something they like, second liners reward each other with voiced appreciation, encouragement, and challenges to up the ante: “Footwork! Feetwork! Cut up! Roll with it! Show me what you’re working with!” Second liners prize a dancer who liberally expends energy, releases bodily tension, displays a confident attitude, showcases a variety of moves, and sensitively plays with the music’s rhythms. Paraders are usually less concerned with which steps the dancer displays than with the way in which she performs those steps, and, at the heart of it, why she is dancing in the first place. Therefore, even though second lining can be described as a specific, coherent, and legible dance form that is historically rooted and aesthetically sophisticated, the fact remains that what it *is* matters less to dancers—and to me—than what it *does*.<sup>29</sup>

I explore multiple layers of do-watcha-wanna discourse in each of the following chapters. Overall, I argue that do watcha wanna privileges the dancing’s function as a vehicle for spiritual transcendence and a mechanism for forming collectivities; for some, it positions second lining as an expression of collective memory rooted in an African heritage; for others, it performs a right to what Caribbean postcolonial theorist Edouard

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<sup>29</sup> Second lining’s shared concern with form and approach is a common concept in many African diaspora forms. Brenda Dixon Gottschild explains that Africanist epistemologies define dance as a spiritual practice at the center of life, and this shapes valuations of dancing. “Contentwise, any dance can capture the spirit. It is not a matter of what a dance is about—the *what*—but the dancing body’s performance, the living dance in the present moment—the *how*—that is the essential ingredient.” *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 280. Similarly, Thomas DeFrantz argues that the “why” of black social dancing is paramount: the “how” of the dances, bodily forms and steps, are intended to tap into religiosity or to incite action. “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power,” *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. by André Lepecki (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 76.

Glissant has called “opacity,” or the right of the Other to remain unknowable, including unknowable to ethnographers who might ask too many of the wrong questions.<sup>30</sup>

Importantly, do-watcha-wanna discourse requires me to remain attuned to second liners’ *bodily* discourses, detecting the ways in which dancing bodies give shape to values, critiques, and histories. These bodily discourses materialize second lining’s functions as a strategy for survival and a platform for dissent.

When I first began this research, I not only believed that I was on a quest for the “it” of second lining, but I also intended to frame my analysis as a study of dancing in post-Katrina New Orleans because I came to know second lining within that political climate. I first moved to New Orleans from New York City in 2008, joined by a second wave of post-Katrina “gentrifiers,” also known as YURPs (Young Urban Rebuilding Professionals).<sup>31</sup> Cultural geographer Richard Campanella reasons that the second wave began to arrive in 2008-2009; we number about 15,000-20,000, and that number continues to grow. We were/are more specially skilled than the disaster relief volunteers that arrived and left between 2005 and 2008 and were/are serious about planting domestic and economic roots in New Orleans. Many of us also love to second line at weekly parades. When I arrived in New Orleans, I had no job prospects, nor was I connected to a volunteering organization. I had spent the summer of 2007 assisting local artists in producing a site-specific performance and was so inspired by the central role of arts and

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<sup>30</sup> Ceclia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 18-25.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Campanella, “Gentrification and Its Discontents: Notes from New Orleans,” *Newsography*, March 1, 2013, accessed March 17, 2015, [www.newgeography.com/content/003526-gentrification-and-its-discontents-notes-new-orleans](http://www.newgeography.com/content/003526-gentrification-and-its-discontents-notes-new-orleans); Jordan Flaherty, *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six* (Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books, 2010), 84-85.

culture in grassroots renewal efforts that I decided to take up residence in New Orleans in order to offer my hands to local artists' struggle. I took a leap of faith, quit my nonprofit job in New York, packed my things in a minivan, and transplanted my life. It was my first of many voluntary deterritorializations that I have undertaken in the course of my relationship with the city.<sup>32</sup> I arrived with a few possessions, a bit of savings, a set of marketable skills as an arts administrator and educator, and a heap of uncertainty about my role in the neoliberal takeover of post-Katrina New Orleans. Despite the fact that many of my fellow transplants and I were moved by an impulse to do good, the fact of our moving there inevitably contributed to the neoliberalization of post-Katrina New Orleans by cementing the plan to make the city smaller, whiter, and wealthier.

While teaching in public schools (which were becoming overtaken by corporate charters), managing projects in neighborhood arts centers (including The Porch in the Seventh Ward, where Ed Buckner served as director), creating experimental performance with and for mostly white newcomers in Williamsburg South, and dancing through back-of-town streets during second lines each Sunday, I learned that the second line route carved out a contested landscape where the city's marginalized black residents staked a claim to the increasingly privatized city.<sup>33</sup> I wondered what my role was as a participant, versus a viewer, of the performance. I found it quite difficult, if not impossible, for us newcomers to simultaneously accelerate post-disaster neoliberalization *and* to join the

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<sup>32</sup> Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 109.

<sup>33</sup> Johnson, "Walking the Post-Disaster City"; Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 480. See also Eric Hirsch, "Landscape: Between Place and Space," in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, ed. by Eric Hirsch and Micahel O'Hanlon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

second line's counter-hegemonic discourse.<sup>34</sup> The parade's transformative potential is often located in its ability to overturn hegemonic hierarchies by taking *everyone* in who wants to join. Paradoxically, the second line's equal inclusion of white, non-local paraders could potentially threaten its efficacy of spatial-social transformation by dislocating the performance from its history of working-class African American counter-histories and counter-geographies.<sup>35</sup> As white and/or newcomer second liners, our bodies on the line (or, more accurately, *in* the [second] line) can both facilitate and endanger the parades' political potential.

When I began working on this dissertation in 2013, I was most interested in a question that Anthea Kraut posed to me during my prospectus defense: what is the relationship between second line footwork and the choreography of Katrina? However, by 2013, Katrina was often discussed as but one of many crises that had shaped the struggles of the African American second liners with whom I spent time. Eight years after the floodwaters had receded, displaced New Orleanians were still wrestling with an inequitable distribution of resources that prevented 100,000 people from coming home.<sup>36</sup> However, many people had settled into a life that was no longer completely defined by

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<sup>34</sup> Cultural historian Catherine Michna addresses this very paradox of the white/newcomer/gentrifier second liner in her blog post, "On NOLA and Longing: why I'm not second lining this year. A post for my White people." She argues that we white/newcomer/gentrifiers can jump into second lines for years of Sunday afternoons, walking in the shoes of "that romanticized Black figure," and then on Monday morning, "we usually go back to being gentrifiers, or to worrying about being gentrifiers, and then to YEARNING for that imagined alterity, that we imagine as outside of the gentrification process but which, in fact, is central TO it." *Hearing the Hurricane Coming*, September 3, 2013, accessed February 27, 2015. <http://catherinemichna.wordpress.com>.

<sup>35</sup> Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming," 72; Michna, "On NOLA and Longing," n.p.

<sup>36</sup> Bill Quigley, "Katrina Pain Index: New Orleans Eight Years Later," *Huffington Post*, August 27, 2013, accessed February 27, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-quigley/katrina-pain-index-2013\\_b\\_3817165.html/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-quigley/katrina-pain-index-2013_b_3817165.html/).



the storm's impacts. The destruction, displacement, and death caused by the disaster had become, for many, a source of violence that they catalogued alongside others in their personal histories: gunshot-inflicted paralysis, incarceration, unemployment, eviction, foreclosure, and the death of loved ones are just a few of the forms of violence that were exacerbated but not caused by the storm and its aftermath. After the Mother's Day shooting, Katrina also faded as the primary disaster that informed how I thought about violence and second lining. As I learned more about the history of black danced processions in New Orleans, I saw that an entire tradition had been performed on contested landscapes and intertwined with violence, starting with antebellum processions in and around Congo Square. Thus, my scope widened to position Hurricane Katrina as one recent and severe example of anti-black violence that was paradigmatic of and exacerbated by histories of violence.

Throughout the dissertation, I refer to two broad categories of violence: structural and interpersonal. The physical violence that plagues second line neighborhoods, including that which is occasioned by the informal drug economy and the police terror legitimized by the war on drugs, are symptomatic of structural violence. In other words, structural violence creates an environment in which interpersonal violence takes hold. Matt Sakakeeny makes this link in examining the lives of today's brass band musicians in New Orleans. Within structures of everyday violence (economic marginalization, increased incarceration, dwindling social services), Sakakeeny says, "interpersonal violence flourishes."<sup>37</sup> He explains how, in the late-twentieth century, the rise of the

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<sup>37</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 144-145.

prison industrial complex and the shrinking of social welfare programs, combined with a shift in New Orleans's market economy away from unionized jobs to more precarious work in the service industry, have disproportionately affected young black men. In this environment, SAPCs are not the only, or even the primary, voluntary associations that offer financial rewards, belonging, and prestige. Drug trafficking gangs also offer these possibilities. The choice to sell drugs is often the most logical, normalized way for young black men to earn money. In a city where the murder rate is approximately ten times the national average, interpersonal violence presents itself as a viable, even desirable option for young people operating within illegal drug economies as means to establish powerful positions within those economies.<sup>38</sup> Second lines not only reclaim city streets from structural forces of dispossession, but also from the drug economies and subsequent forms of violence that thrive inside of them.

Police brutality comprises yet another form of violence wielded against New Orleans's poor and working-class African Americans. Police-exerted force functions as a direct, physicalized enforcement of state-sanctioned structural violence that certainly occurs in extrajudicial circumstances, but it is also often legally protected, revealing the state's investment in limiting black mobility. The recent murders of Michael Brown (Ferguson, Missouri) and Eric Garner (Staten Island, New York) at the hands of police officers—and the grand juries' refusal to indict the officers in both cases—make

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<sup>38</sup> Citing anthropologist Phillipe Bourgois' study of Puerto Rican drug dealers in East Harlem, Sakakeeny observes the "crucial role that public displays of violence play in establishing credibility on the street." Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 171, qtd. in Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 146.

painfully clear the fact that black lives are still, in 2015, considered disposable.<sup>39</sup> Police brutality in New Orleans, like in most U.S. cities, is disproportionately wielded against working-class black men, including those who participate in the second line culture.<sup>40</sup> Since Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the country, and thus in the world, this is no small matter.<sup>41</sup> However, understanding the devastating impact of mass incarceration and police violence is not only key to understanding the sociopolitical context in which second liners take to the streets. It is imperative as a hermeneutic to understand second lining as a bodily discourse of dissent, for each footwork step is inextricably linked with histories of police power. Bryan Wagner argues that that blackness is imperceptible *except for* the presumed danger it poses to public welfare, and as such, expressions of black culture are always articulating with potential, past, and/or actual forms of policing and punishment.<sup>42</sup> As chapter two outlines, second lining's history as a bodily expression, performed on public streets, only makes its negotiation

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<sup>39</sup> Much in the way that colorblind neoliberalism rationalizes racialized poverty in the name of free market principles—as discussed in detail below—the discourse also rationalizes black males' mass incarceration and murder by police in the name of law and order. As such, the transition from the U.S. welfare state to the neoliberal state also entails a transition to the carceral state. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Globalisation and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism," *Race & Class* 40, no. 2-3 (1999); Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, "The Formation and Contestation of the Louisiana Carceral State" (PhD Diss. Proposal, Graduate Center at the City University of New York, 2014), 1; Jodi Mehamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>40</sup> For example, in 2004, Joe "Shotgun Joe" Williams, trombone player with the Hot 8 Brass Band, was killed at the hands of the New Orleans Police Department. As Sakakeeny writes, when Williams died, "He twenty-two years old, unarmed, and, according to self-identified witnesses, had his arms raised upright out of the open passenger window." The department classified Williams's death as "justifiable," clearing all of the officers involved. "Why Dey Had to Kill Him?" *The Life and Death of Shotgun Joe*, *Oxford American* 79 (2012): 146; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> Cindy Chang, "Louisiana Is the World's Prison Capital," *Times-Picayune*, May 13, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2012/05/louisiana\\_is\\_the\\_worlds\\_prison.html/](http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2012/05/louisiana_is_the_worlds_prison.html/).

<sup>42</sup> Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 6-7.

with police power, and other forms of interpersonal violence, all the more immediate and immanent.

A structural approach to violence also guides my framework for understanding Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the subsequent levee failures, and the inequitable recovery. Whereas structural violence creates an environment in which interpersonal violence predictably impacts the poor and people of color, histories of inequality also structure the impacts of so-called “natural” disasters to unfold in very predictable ways. Violence and disaster, in both ideological/social and physical/interpersonal forms, occupy related yet distinct areas of the contested landscapes through which second liners maneuver with intricate footwork.

### **Mobility, Capitalism, and Freedom**

Second liners’ bodily postures and pathways through the city have given shape, quite literally, to political and cultural values generated by New Orleans’s black populations for two centuries. I argue that second lining can be productively considered as a bodily discourse of *dissenting mobility*. The following section grounds my argument in discussions of mobility and freedom as they pertain to studies of racialized capitalism and African diaspora studies, including African diaspora dance.

Marginalized peoples in New Orleans have long utilized second lining as a tactic for maneuvering within and against different regimes of containment, which have always been intertwined with mutating modes of capitalism. In other words, bodily articulations such as footwork have moved black New Orleanians through ever-changing articulations of racial capitalism, from antebellum slavery through the “neoliberal deluge” of the

Katrina disaster.<sup>43</sup> Cedric Robinson first used the term “racial capitalism” to describe the process by which capitalism’s development and subsequent structures have been permeated, from the outset, by racialized hierarchies.<sup>44</sup> In a U.S. context, the extermination of native peoples and enslavement of Africans were “inextricable element[s] in the material, commercial, and capital development that took place.”<sup>45</sup> Plantation slavery has exerted persistent structural effects on every U.S. articulation of racial capitalism since. The dialectical relationship between race and capital developed under slavery—wherein Africans were commodified as fungible, disposable objects in order to further the logics of plantation-based economies—produced an effective repertoire of forms for creating and managing extreme levels of work and conflict.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cedric Johnson, ed, *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). My use of the term “articulation” builds on Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation, as outlined in “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Poole, England: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1980). Hall argues that historically contingent capitalisms (plural) join up with different structures of social formation to produce time- and place-specific forms of racially structured social formations. Hall draws on articulation’s history in Marxism (capitalism articulates with ideology) and linguistics (verbal expressions of symbolic representation). I add a dance usage, encouraged by one definition of articulation offered by Hall: “joining up” (as in limbs of the body) or “giving expression to” (328). Indeed, dancers frequently discuss articulation as eloquent bodily expression. The dual concept of articulation as simultaneously the joining-up of racism and capitalism, *and* the joining-up of bodily limbs in order to maneuver through and against racial capitalism, guides my thinking throughout the dissertation.

<sup>44</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press [1983], 2000). Robinson maintains that racism was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples “but has its genesis in the ‘internal’ relations of European peoples” (2).

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998), 40; Chris Taylor, “Plantation Neoliberalism,” *The New Inquiry*, July 8, 2014, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/plantation-neoliberalism>; Pelot-Hobbs, “Louisiana Carceral State,” 15-15. Following Woods, Pelot-Hobbs asserts that scholars of neoliberalism have overlooked its Southern lineage, as the hallmarks of neoliberalism (privatization, disinvestment, deregulation, mobility of capital, rise in precarious labor) were also central to restructuring the New South following Reconstruction, long before Friedman, Thatcher, and Reagan implemented such policies (19-20).

Indeed, to track the history of capitalist work is to track the diffusion and intensification of the plantation.<sup>47</sup> In each subsequent epoch, capitalism has articulated with ideologies, such as anti-black racism and, more recently, colorblind neoliberalism, to produce historically and culturally specific structures of dominance and subordination.

As Clyde Woods has persuasively argued, comprehending the role of plantation regimes in American capitalism is especially crucial to understanding socioeconomic and cultural formations in the Mississippi Delta. The port city of New Orleans, once dominated by the cotton industry and home of the largest slave-trading market in North America, has played a key role in the Delta's racial-capitalist history.<sup>48</sup> One hundred and fifty years after emancipation, the hegemony of the "plantation bloc"—a powerful "Southern ethno-class grouping" that has monopolized resources and power for centuries—is still in motion in New Orleans.<sup>49</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century, plantation bloc hegemony had been veiled by official discourses of multicultural diversity and post-racialism that have "explained (away) the inequalities of a still-racialized

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<sup>47</sup> Taylor, "Plantation Neoliberalism," n.p.

<sup>48</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*, 65; for a study of the New Orleans slave market, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2009. As Woods details in *Development Arrested*, the social-spatial construction of the Mississippi Delta has formed by twelve major mobilizations launched to restructure the region's political economy, beginning with the elimination and exile of Native American nations and rise of capitalist slavery from 1837-1859 (41-58). Post-emancipation and post-Reconstruction, new articulations of racialized capitalism in the Delta involved prison labor, gang labor, and sharecropping, while separate-but-equal policies enshrined wealth within the plantation bloc (71). Saidiya Hartman adds that emancipation did not so much annul capitalist slavery as transform it into yet a new articulation, wherein freed slaves were also free of resources: self-possessed and indebted, caught in the double bind of freedom. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*, 21, 29.

capitalism.”<sup>50</sup> The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina removed this discursive veil, as the stark images of racial (often black) poverty disseminated by Katrina’s media coverage made visible what *Newsweek* called “The Other America,” which had remained invisible to many in the U.S.<sup>51</sup> As a result, Katrina made it increasingly difficult to deny the deep intertwinements between racism and capitalism, including the human design responsible for the destruction of the so-called “natural” disaster.<sup>52</sup> While the disaster prompted serious efforts at antiracist organizing and activism,<sup>53</sup> the remaking of post-Katrina New Orleans has largely served to advance neoliberalization and thus to protect the plantation bloc’s monopoly on wealth and influence.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathon Adler, “The Other America,” *Newsweek*, September 19, 2005; Eric Ishiwata, “‘We Are Seeing People We Didn’t Know Exist’: Katrina and the Neoliberal Erasure of Race,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, edited by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Clyde Woods, “Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans? Katrina, Trap Economics, and the Rebirth of the Blues,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2005); Woods, “Katrina’s World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009); Herman Gray, “Katrina: Where the Natural and Social Meet,” in *Hurricane Katrina: Response and Responsibilities*, ed. by John Brown Childs (Santa Cruz, CA: New Pacific Press, 2005); and Stephen Jackson, “Un/natural Disasters,” *Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, June 11, 2006, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Jackson>.

<sup>53</sup> Flaherty, *Floodlines*; Amy Koritz and George Sanchez, *Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Rachel E. Luft, “Community Organizing in the Katrina Diaspora: Race, Gender, and the Case of the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund,” *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora*, ed. by Lynn Weber and Lori Peek (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Neoliberal Deluge*; Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007). As Klein has argued, short-run clean up in New Orleans was dominated by *disaster capitalism*, for private corporations were awarded no-bid contracts by the Bush administration and the state eschewed responsibility for addressing the needs of its poor citizens in planning its recovery (3-25). Johnson adds that the longer-term recovery effort has been carried out through more benevolent actors—grassroots organizations, neighborhood associations, and charitable groups. This is what Johnson calls *do-good capitalism* and *grassroots privatization*, in which economic markets are achieved and new markets are created through humanitarian service (xvii-xxxii). In both instances, New Orleans’ recovery has been used to advance *neoliberalization*, as defined by David Harvey: the political project to establish/maintain

Of particular interest to a dance analysis—and especially an analysis of African diaspora dance forms in New Orleans—is the plantation bloc’s continued yet shifting investment in mobility: limiting the social and (freely chosen) spatial movement of racialized subjects in order to more precisely direct the mobility of capital toward accumulation by the elite. While the slave plantation can perhaps be readily seen as a choreographic project to restrict the spatial and social mobility of enslaved persons, more recent forms of racial capitalism participate in similar projects.<sup>55</sup> In today’s post-Fordist mode of “flexible” capitalism, corporate activities have become spread across disparate sites, including “runaway” factories in global peripheries, which are financed by reconfigured investment relationships. Flexible accumulation encourages flexible attitudes toward labor and citizenship, promoting individuals’ migrations and relocations, while corporations’ flexible abilities to shift to (other) offshore labor pools at will weakens working-class movements.<sup>56</sup> Those who are unable to adopt a flexible attitude

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the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore/protect the power of economic elites. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>55</sup> My analysis of is informed by Stephanie Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), which is spatial history of American slavery. Motion concerns Camp the most, as she focuses more on the peopling of plantation space than the built environment. I see her efforts to track the movement of bodies through space over time as a choreographic strategy, and her approach informs my analysis of racial capitalism, including but not limited to plantation slavery, as a choreographic project. Extending Camp’s scope, Katherine McKittrick claims that the “traditional geographies” of the post-emancipation U.S. have wielded plantation logics in order to “place and displace” black men, women, and children. As a result, African American counter-geographies involve imaginative and spatial strategies of moving through and claiming space. Both frameworks argue for white supremacy as a spatial, and I would add choreographic, project to keep black people captive and marginal, and highlight the role of mobility in struggles for freedom. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 1990), 190-1; Aiwah Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 17-19; Anusha Lakshmi Kedhar, “On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers and the ‘Flexible’ Dancing Body” (PhD Diss., University of California, Riverside, 2011).



toward mobility and citizenship might find themselves stuck, especially in U.S. ethnic ghettos, which have become, since the late-twentieth century, ravaged by disinvestment and dispossession.<sup>57</sup> Those who find themselves stuck in such areas, including the back-of-town neighborhoods where second lines roll each week, can be cast off as unworthy of and excludable from neoliberal multiculturalism, due to their inflexibility, criminality, and other deficiencies attributed to those whose existence is not valuable within circuits of capital.<sup>58</sup> What results is a moral and social order wherein the mobility of capital and the freedom of the market are privileged, often at the expense of racialized individuals' spatial and social mobility, and physical and juridical freedom. Therefore, as Hurricane Katrina bore down on the Gulf Coast in 2005, evacuating or staying put could be construed as a matter of choice, as if everyone possessed the freedom to choose his or her own movements. Those who remained inflexible were also disposable.<sup>59</sup> If race had become detached from material conditions in official U.S. discourses post-World War II,<sup>60</sup> then the racialized disaster of Katrina laid bare the deep and persistent impacts of plantation bloc hegemony in the South, and racial capitalism worldwide, which have demanded and restricted the mobility of the poor and people of color for centuries.

In light of the racial capitalist state's choreographic project of containing black mobility, struggles for freedom in African American history have often been connected to

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<sup>57</sup> Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 39-40.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Giroux, "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *College Literature* 33, no. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Melamed argues that, after World War II, white supremacy gradually became residual, and was replaced by a series of state-recognized U.S. antiracisms: racial liberalism (1940s to 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s to 1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s). *Represent and Destroy*, 1.

free movement across space, as seen in narratives of escape, northern migration, and access to transportation.<sup>61</sup> As such, spatial mobility has long served as “a particularly crucial symbol” of freedom for people of African descent in the U.S., to whom it has been consistently denied during.<sup>62</sup> In Stephanie Camp’s estimation, “The struggle for racial justice” in the U.S. has been “in large part an effort to disentangle blackness from captivity and race from place.”<sup>63</sup> Dance has provided one technology for disentangling blackness from captivity, with contradictory effects. On one hand, enslaved people’s illicit dancing (that is, away from the slave master’s gaze) could operate as a mode of survival and resistance, because a body enjoyed by the self contradicts the plantation regime’s symbolic systems and economic order that define flesh as an object of possession, domination, and labor.<sup>64</sup> Second lining’s processional choreography also

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Gilroy’s seminal text for African Diaspora studies, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), made the intervention of re-framing diaspora from a temporal to a spatial concept. He introduces the concept of roots/routes to argue against the appeal of Afri- and Eurocentrism (3, 190). The root/route concept reflects Gilroy’s suggestion that an emphasis on diaspora is a spatial (routed) complement to the temporal (rooted) concepts of history and memory (191, 198) that dominate modern black politics and cultural criticism (205-209). His focus on spatiality foregrounds the trope of mobility.

<sup>62</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 262. See also Michael P. Johnson, “Out of Egypt: The Migration of Former Slaves to the Midwest During the 1860s in Comparative Perspectives,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*, ed. by Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); and Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 66. Examples of mobility as freedom include Homer Plessy’s and Rosa Parks’s actions on public transportation. Homer Plessy challenged racial segregation in the 1890s when he sat in a white-only train car in New Orleans, symbolically critiquing white supremacist efforts at black captivity by transgressing social norms on a machine of locomotion. In 1955, Rosa Parks’ refusal to move from the front of a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama reinforced a belief, voiced by the one dissenting opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, that “[p]ersonal liberty consists in the power of locomotion.” Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 141.

<sup>63</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 141.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68, 91. While writing about a different but related context—slave regimes in Bahia, Brazil—Rachel Harding forwards an analysis similar to Camp’s, insisting that movement is key to re-creating

refutes geographies of containment by asserting spatial mobility.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, black bodily movement has been co-opted as evidence for the need to contain black spatial mobility and juridical freedom.<sup>66</sup> As Brenda Dixon Gottschild notes, a “paradox” exists in which “[t]he people who endured four centuries of slavery in the Americas are the dancing emblems of liberation.”<sup>67</sup> People of the African diaspora have been historically presumed to possess natural gifts for rhythmic, loose, and unencumbered bodily movement.<sup>68</sup> Notions of African diaspora dancers’ natural ability have reinforced assumptions about black primitivity and savagery, ideologies that have rationalized (i.e., made available for reason *and* portrayed as necessary) colonialism and chattel slavery.<sup>69</sup>

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identity and sense of self beyond repressive categories. Harding writes, “From a variety of contexts, the *movement* of black bodies can be interpreted as a movement away from the signified identity of slave and toward an alternative experience of self.” She goes on to cite forms of escape and *marronage* as examples of moving the body across space, but also includes dance as “a means by which the body was oriented to an alternative experience. The same body that contorted under the weight of cane-stalk bundles or barrels of rum or water or years of washing clothes by hand, the same body that worked involuntarily, unpaid, and under duress emphasized, through dance, another meaning of itself.” *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 153.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Brothers makes this argument in the case of second lining during Jim Crow segregation in the early twentieth-century. *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 18-22.

<sup>66</sup> Hartman claims that fun and frolic, such as that displayed through dancing, apparently demonstrated Africans’ contentment and suitedness for slavery. It also aroused white panic over slaves’ idleness and a promoted a constriction of their freedoms. *Scenes of Subjection*, 6-7, 42-47.

<sup>68</sup> Jane C. Desmond, “Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies,” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. by Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); George-Graves, “‘Just Like Being at the Zoo:’ Primitivity and Ragtime Dance,” in *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. by Julie Malnig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Marya Annette McQuirter, “Awkward Moves: Dance Lessons from the 1940s,” in *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, ed. by Thomas F. DeFrantz (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); and Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> Melamed uses this dual definition of “rationalize” to discuss the ideologies that perpetuate racialization beyond color lines in liberal-capitalist modernity. *Represent and Destroy*, 13.

This paradox has persisted over time, adopting new guises to fit within shifting articulations of racial capitalism. As Thomas DeFrantz claims, “African American social dances circulate generously because their social and aesthetic underpinnings fit neatly with neoliberal discourses of freedom,” which promise individuals the freedom to choose between multiple market options.<sup>70</sup> Certainly second lines can be and have been celebrated as spaces of unbounded spatial, bodily, and spiritual freedom. Second liners are free to move through restricted areas, such as traffic lanes and rooftops; free to transgress codes of respectable bodily comportment;<sup>71</sup> and free to “let go” of emotional weight through spiritual release. Second liners are also “free” to do things that are criminalized in other contexts. Police escorts do not prevent second liners from openly smoking marijuana, nor from selling beverages and food without vendor licenses.<sup>72</sup> Of course, this “freedom” is predicated on the authorities’ permission, and they hold the power to revoke this permission at any time. The SAPCs’ history with city hall and the New Orleans police department is marked by constant negotiation and compromise. The

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<sup>70</sup> DeFrantz, “Unchecked Popularity: Neoliberal Circulations of Black Social Dance,” in *Neoliberalisms & Global Theatres: Performance Permutations*, ed. by Lara Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 206. Even though neoliberal policies benefit very few and oppresses many, they gain wide consent by appealing to people’s desire for individual freedom of choice, which is offered by the market. Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 41.

<sup>71</sup> According to New Orleans poet and activist Kalamu ya Salaam, “In New Orleans dance traditions are stronger than so-called ‘social decorum.’ Here it is customary to prance in the streets while exhibiting a profound interest and demonstrable proficiency in overtly sexually-suggestive body movements.” Salaam, “The Spirit Family of the New Orleans Streets,” posted on blog, *Word Up: Kalamu’s Words*, May 29, 2010, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://wordup.posthaven.com/essay-spirit-family-of-the-streets>.

<sup>72</sup> When I asked Officer Hamilton, Second Line Coordinator for the New Orleans Police Department, about vendor licensing, he replied, “Big no comment.” Michael Hamilton, interview with the author, April 12, 2014.

dance between state forces and second liners' transgressions speaks to the discrepancies between many second liners' juridical and bodily freedoms.

A scene from New Orleans writer and activist Tom Dent's 1983 screenplay, "Second Line," highlights the tensions between second lining's spatial, social, and bodily mobilities within a regime of racial capitalism. Dent's main character, Leroy, happens upon a young boy dancing for tips on a French Quarter sidewalk late one night. The boy gives a fabulous performance, "combining second-line, break dancing and tap" for a circle of drunk, white tourists. "There are coins at his feet, and the boy's skill and enjoyment of what he does, does not disguise his extreme effort or extreme poverty." A tall tourist in plaid shorts holds a dollar far above the boy's head, and snatches it away each time the boy jumps to grab it. The kid jumps higher and higher while the onlookers laugh. Leroy cannot watch, for this scene is all too familiar.<sup>73</sup> It not only dramatizes Leroy's own struggles to earn a living as a musician, but also calls up a history of black people's enforced dancing for white people's enjoyment, from plantation cakewalk contests to blackface minstrel shows.<sup>74</sup> As the boy jumps higher and higher for the white man's dollar, which remains perpetually out of reach, his bodily actions crystallize centuries of plantation bloc choreography, which has simultaneously enforced and

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<sup>73</sup> The scene described here is a compilation of the two versions penned in the 1983 treatment and the 1987 screenplay. Tom Dent and Michael Goodwin, "Second-Line" [1983], unpublished screenplay treatment, 25; and Tom Dent, Michael Goodwin and Peter Coyote, "Heaven Before I Die" [1987], unpublished screenplay, 55. Tom Dent Papers, collection 117, box 33, folders 1-3, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>74</sup> In reflecting on Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, Danielle Goldman glosses the scene in which the character Tod Clifton is hawking dancing Sambo marionettes. Clifton asks onlookers, "What makes them [the puppets] dance?" This is a question for the dolls, but also for Clifton. Goldman points out, in the case of Ellison, that the question is "bound with a fraught history of racism and the desire for willful mobility as opposed to passivity." *I Want to Be Ready*, 99-100.

limited black mobility. No wonder, then, that an SAPC member once told anthropologist Helen Regis that the difference between tourist performances and Sunday second lines is that he does not “jump as high for the paying gigs.”<sup>75</sup> His refusal echoes histories of African American dancers who, when commanded or expected to entertain white/paying audiences, manipulated the exchange by holding back. As Katrina Dyonne Thompson writes in her history of U.S. slavery and performance, enslaved persons were expected to “jump around” on the auction block in order to demonstrate saleability. Holding back could undermine the terms of exchange by presenting a less desirable object for purchase, and simultaneously insist upon the exchanged object’s agency in negotiating his or her own sale.<sup>76</sup> When viewed within this historical context, second liners’ decisions about when to jump and how high can be read as critique of black captivity and the regimes of exchange that demand it.

As a bodily discourse, second lining both embraces and comments on narratives of mobility and freedom. Like most African diaspora dance forms, it highlights the paradoxical tensions between freedom in dancing, social mobility, and the freedom to *choose* to move spatially. Stepping, buck jumping, and footworking can all be considered forms of “tactical mobility,” a term that jazz music scholars Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz use to describe the tools necessary for oppressed New Orleanians to maneuver through ever-shifting and often paradoxical power relations. They write:

The nature of power requires activists in New Orleans to embrace *improvisational, tactical mobility* rather than remain rooted in all-or-nothing

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<sup>75</sup> Regis, “Contested Landscapes,” 475.

<sup>76</sup> Katrina Dyonne Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 156.

commitments to either civil rights or human rights. Freedom for oppressed people does not generally follow a direct path on which incremental gains lead to inevitable victory. Instead, power makes concessions grudgingly and only when absolutely necessary. Aggrieved groups not only have to win victories, but they also have to struggle perpetually to prevent what they have won from being contested, co-opted, and contravened. No one knows better than black people in New Orleans (emphasis mine).<sup>77</sup>

The authors' phrase, "tactical mobility," evokes Michel de Certeau's formulation of *strategies* and *tactics*, used to describe power struggles over public space. When walking through the city, de Certeau argues, people must negotiate the "strategies" used to "produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces" according to models that benefit the elite. Those in less powerful positions employ "tactics" to maneuver within and against the laws of the place, "making do" by establishing alternative possibilities for moving through a city that constrains one's possibilities for action.<sup>78</sup> Like Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, dance scholar Danielle Goldman urges that tactics for moving through literal and structural spaces of oppression require improvisation. She locates the political potential of improvisation in the skills employed by the improviser to ably negotiate within "tight places," or the unsteady landscapes circumscribed by one's "race, [...] class, gender, sexuality, time, and even artistic conventions."<sup>79</sup> Improvisers, including second liners, constantly negotiate tight places with flexibility (refusing to stay stuck), using tactics to assert alternative mobilities in the face of powerful, strategic constraint.

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<sup>77</sup> Fischlin, Daniel, Ajay Heble and George Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 162.

<sup>78</sup> On strategies and tactics, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 29-30. For an application of these ideas to walking the city, see the chapter, "Walking the City," in this book (91-110).

<sup>79</sup> Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 6.

Improvisation as a political tool in second line music and dance can be traced to a way of knowing and communicating developed within the blues tradition. Clyde Woods argues that African Americans in the Mississippi Delta gave birth to a “blues epistemology” that has provided “a *tectonic footing* from which to oppose and dismantle the American intellectual, cultural, and socioeconomic traditions [of the plantation bloc] constructed from the raw material of African American exploitation and denigration” (emphasis mine).<sup>80</sup> Second line footwork functions as an improvised, tactical mobility and a tectonic footing that enables dancers to constantly maneuver within *and* against spatial, social, and structural geographies of containment. This sentiment was expressed succinctly and powerfully in a message printed on a T-shirt and worn by second liners soon after Hurricane Katrina: “WATER DON’T STOP NO FOOTWORK.”<sup>81</sup>

Second line choreographies do not simply assert spatial mobility and flexibility in order to counter master narratives of black captivity and stasis; they do so in ways that also critique the very power structures intended to keep black people placed and displaced. In other words, second lining is more than a bodily discourse of mobility—it is a bodily discourse of *dissenting* mobility.

### **Bodily Discourses of Dissent**

My discussion of second lining as a bodily discourse is informed by several dance scholars’ work to explicate the ways in which a repertoire of gestural vocabularies provide powerful modes of communication for subaltern communities whose voices are

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<sup>80</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Matt Sakakeeny saw this T-shirt worn by a member of Cross-the-Canal SAPC at a second line on February 25, 2007. *Roll With It*, 25.



silenced in mainstream discourses and omitted from the archive.<sup>82</sup> First, I draw on Barbara Browning's model of the "body articulate," which posits the body as a thinking/speaking entity that says what cannot be spoken when language is censored or otherwise policed, such as histories of political and cultural oppression. Browning's formulation aptly applies to the second lining body, whose polyrhythmic, polycentric expressions issue critiques of racist structural violence.<sup>83</sup> Second, Thomas DeFrantz's theory of "corporeal orature" informs my analysis of second lining as a bodily discourse. In his study of hip hop dance, DeFrantz aligns movement with speech to describe the ability of black social dance to communicate a critique of racialized cultural histories with a knowing audience and with fellow dancers. Like hip hop dancers, second liners (who often draw on hip hop vocabularies) combine physical pleasure and social critique to perform powerful corporeal orature.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Priya Srinivasan's model of a "bodily archive" extends bodily discourses beyond the moment of live performance to consider

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<sup>82</sup> In Diana Taylor's influential work on the historiography of performance, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), she contrasts the kinds of knowledge available in the written archive with those in the "repertoire," memories and histories held in and transmitted through the bodies of performers.

<sup>83</sup> Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 7, 13. See also Lara Cahill-Booth, "Re-membering the Tribe: Networks of Recovery in Rex Nettleford's *Katrina*," *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 1 (2013). Speaking about a 2006 performance by Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company that commemorated the un/natural disaster that befell the U.S. Gulf Coast in August 2005, Cahill-Booth asserts, "Choreographed dance performance is an active site of transfer through which disciplined and creative bodies communicate unspoken histories and memories" (95). In this case, the unspoken histories and memories are those of bondage, marginalization, and suffering that connect the Caribbean to New Orleans. Notably, scholars of New Orleans brass band music also see it as an expression of the unspoken histories and desires (Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 281-282), an expression of black aspirations and needs (White, "New Orleans Brass Bands," 78), and a "musical articulation" that documents historical moments (Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 149).

<sup>84</sup> "Black Beat," 67.

how the traces of previous bodily interactions are captured in muscle memory.<sup>85</sup> The second liners with whom I dance on a weekly basis contain multiple histories in their bodily archives—histories of learning to dance in the kitchen with grandma and/or in a dance studio with an instructor; walking through the city as a gendered and raced body; ducking (or freezing) at the sound of gunshots; earning wages by laboring with different parts of the body; playing a musical instrument; and many more. Elements of each dancer’s bodily archive manifest in the moment of improvised second line performance, connecting individuals’ personal pasts to an historical and political past.

My focus on bodily discourses is not intended to romanticize black expressive cultural forms as a “pretheoretical or entirely experiential” other to the logical, intellectual realm of language.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, as many dance and performance scholars have argued, the binary between linguistic and corporeal expression serves a Western division between body and mind that is inappropriate and insufficient for understanding the meanings and claims made by many non-Western, subaltern, and minoritarian expressive forms.<sup>87</sup> Second lining, like all dancing, is enmeshed in language; bodily action and language are not fully extricable from one another.<sup>88</sup> As a communicative system of

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<sup>85</sup> Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 17. Similarly, Filipino dance scholar Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns mingles live performance and the archive in her notion of “archival embodiment,” which “gestures to the corpus of Filipino American history and records, choreographed by and onto the Filipino body.” *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 25.

<sup>86</sup> DeFrantz “Black Beat,” 67; on the complex relationship between discursivity, corporeality, and otherness, see Ann Cooper Albright, “Mining the Dance Field: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Dance,” in *Choreographing Difference* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1997), 192-194.

<sup>87</sup> Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, xviii-ix; Browning, *Samba*, ix-xiii.

<sup>88</sup> Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5; Judith Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the

meaning making and record keeping, the bodily actions and gestures of second lining do not need me to translate them into language in order to do their work.<sup>89</sup> If anything, the words on these pages will struggle to approximate the densely theoretical, historical, and political discourses that second liners already articulate with their spines and feet. In the words of one TBC Brass Band song, “Fuck that, y’all, this is how we do it. We ain’t got to talk about it, buck jump to it.”<sup>90</sup>

My reading of second lining as a bodily discourse of *dissent* is inspired by performance scholar Daphne Brooks’ notion of “bodies in dissent.” Brooks uses the term to recognize nineteenth-century stage performers and authors who leveraged their own racialized bodies to “signify on the social, cultural, and ideological machinery that circumscribes African Americans” within geographical, economic, and temporal spheres of captivity and marginality.<sup>91</sup> Brooks’s reading of nineteenth-century artists can fruitfully be applied to second lining, not only in the nineteenth century, but also today. Although its historical contexts have changed, second lining has continued to signify on hegemonic norms.<sup>92</sup> The dancers and actors that Brooks discusses moved through fields

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Street,” lecture transcript (Venice, Italy: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, September 2, 2011), accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.eipep.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>.

<sup>89</sup> Butler, “Bodies in Alliance,” n.p.; Browning, *Samba*, xxii.

<sup>90</sup> To Be Continued Brass Band, “ABungo” and “7<sup>th</sup> Ward Funk,” *To Be Continued Brass Band* (copyright 2007 by To Be Continued Brass Band), compact disc.

<sup>91</sup> Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. famously developed his theory of signifyin (g) to discuss the African American tradition of repetition with revision, which takes many rhetorical forms, most notably, “playing the dozens.” To “signify” is to repeat a received “text”—be it word, musical phrase, or gesture—with an intentional, critical difference. Signifyin(g) revises the text’s received meaning and thereby alters the way

of signification, disrupting stillness and timelessness projected onto blackness by defamiliarizing the hypervisible spectacle of blackness.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, second lining issues a critique of blackness as immobile and timeless by moving large crowds of dancing black bodies through city streets, claiming ownership of the land, and constantly adapting their performances to comment upon current events. Second lines simultaneously defamiliarize blackness as hypervisible, as the parade's participatory choreographic structure discourages visual economies of the spectator-performer divide, and the parades' geographic routes through back-of-town neighborhoods, well off the tourist track, reject the economy of tourist display. As bodies in dissent, second liners rewrite master narratives of "grotesque and immobile 'blackness.'"<sup>94</sup>

My interpretation of "dissent" is also informed by Sunaina Maira's concept of "dissenting citizenship," which is performed through actions that critique the nation while still seeking inclusion in it.<sup>95</sup> Because of a desire for inclusion, dissenting citizenship is always complicit in some ways with the state's power to discipline bodies. And yet, the dissenting citizen's efforts to seek inclusion in the nation is a project quite different from multiculturalism, which, according to Maira, has no room for dissent; multiculturalism encourages a politics of representation but not of resistance.<sup>96</sup> As dissenting citizens,

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the text is read by foregrounding one's relationship to it. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiv, 63-65.

<sup>93</sup> Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Sunaina Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire after 9/11* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 201.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 218, 228, 248.

SAPC members cooperate with the city government and the police department in order to parade within the bounds of the law. Each club must earn a spot on the city's list of thirty-nine available Sundays.<sup>97</sup> Once assigned a Sunday, an SAPC must purchase a parading permit and pay for the requisite number of police escorts, both of which only allow a four-hour parade before overage charges ensue. Despite their cooperation with the city behind the scenes, second liners' performances challenge existing laws and critique the abuses of state violence and capitalism. Many brass band song lyrics reference the police brutality waged against African American New Orleanians, and these songs are sung loudly by hundreds of paraders under the noses of police escorts.<sup>98</sup> Second liners' bodily discourses complement these lyrical critiques of the state. In a social and moral order that criminalizes the public presence of black bodies—as tragically evidenced by the police shootings of unarmed black men, which is garnering national attention at the time of writing—the mere fact of second lining crowds presents a threat to white supremacy and the logics of private property. However, second liners do not limit their bodily critique to street-level discourse; paraders elevate the conversation, literally, by climbing atop buildings, overpasses, and other city structures to dance high above the crowd. These aerial feats perform black ownership of the land by performing an alternative form of ownership rooted in history, memory, and affective attachment to

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<sup>97</sup> The mechanisms of earning a spot on this list are still somewhat opaque to me, but they involve very agile negotiations with multiple gatekeepers.

<sup>98</sup> For example, the Stooges Brass Band's original song, "Why Dey Had to Kill Him?," which was inspired by the death of musician Joe Williams as described in note 36, includes the following refrain: "They have the nerve to say they protect and serve. Oh why? They need to change their logo, because we don't trust the po-po" (colloquial term for "police"). Sakakeeny, "Why Dey Had to Kill Him?" 144.

place. In so doing, they dissent against the neoliberal logics of private ownership as a prerequisite for and symbolic anchor of citizenship.<sup>99</sup>

To be clear, second lining is not primarily a performed negotiation with legal citizenship. However, as illuminated by post-Katrina media rhetoric that labeled displaced New Orleanians as “refugees,” poor New Orleanians of color remain peripheral to the benefits of full U.S. citizenship.<sup>100</sup> Feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty explains how full legal citizenship entails full access to state resources, which includes some and excludes others.<sup>101</sup> She draws on the conclusions made by African American feminists to explain how ideologies of national belonging, or cultural citizenship, are modeled on the middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal, often white family structure.<sup>102</sup> One can be perpetually foreign, despite legal status, if one’s cultural practices of membership lie

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<sup>99</sup> Breunlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map,” 745-746; Regis, “Blackness and the Politics of Memory,” 756-758; Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 225; Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 73-74.

<sup>100</sup> Multiple references to New Orleans as “third world” and its evacuees as “refugees” in American media coverage of the storm revealed and maintained New Orleans’ exclusion from the nation. For a discussion of the use of the word “refugee” to refer to Gulf Coast residents displaced after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, see Robert E. Pierre and Paul Farhi, “Refugee: A Word of Trouble,” *Washington Post*, 7 September 2005. For a similar critique of references to post-Katrina New Orleans as “third world,” see Lynn Duke, “Block That Metaphor; What We Mean When We Call New Orleans ‘Third World.’” *Washington Post*, October 9, 2005. Some displaced New Orleanians reclaimed the title of refugee in order to link the situation to worldwide instances of U.S. imperialism. Flaherty, *Floodlines*, 89.

<sup>101</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,” [1991] in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 64-71.

<sup>102</sup> Collins, “All in the Family”; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* [1990] (New York: Routledge, 2009, second edition); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* [1981] (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1983); Hortense E. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” [1988], in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* by Hortense E. Spillers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

outside the ideological norms of national belonging.<sup>103</sup> The Bush administration's deliberately inactive response to Katrina can be seen as the state's refusal to recognize New Orleanians' full citizenship, and this refusal can be attributed to the city's exclusion from the national family as too black, too poor, and too Third World. I suggest, along with Priya Srinivasan, that full citizenship is constantly negotiated, and that dance makes these negotiations visible.<sup>104</sup>

Maira's definition of dissenting citizenship as an ambivalent performance—critiquing the nation while still seeking inclusion in it—resonates strongly with theories of carnivalesque transgression as a vehicle for social protest *and* a method for disciplining such protest.<sup>105</sup> As Stuart Hall declares, the notion of the carnivalesque is not simply a metaphor of inversion, but a notion that reveals an ambivalence and interdependence between the two poles of high and low.<sup>106</sup> As suggested by SAPCs' cooperation with city hall and the New Orleans police department, second lines critique prevailing hierarchies without intending to completely transcend them; they reveal the

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<sup>103</sup> Maira, *Missing*, 81-89

<sup>104</sup> Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 13-14.

<sup>106</sup> Stuart Hall, "For Allon White: Metaphors of Transformation," in *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 8-9. In this essay, Hall is reflecting on Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's influential text, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Stallybrass and White's text builds on Mikhail Mikhaïlovitch Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* [1968] (trans. by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), which introduced the carnivalesque as an analytic category. Stallybrass and White argue that carnival is one instance in a generalized economy of transgression and of recoding high and low relations across a whole social structure. *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*, 19. Hall's essay examines a then-recent and "absolutely fundamental" shift in cultural theory, of which Stallybrass and White represent an exemplary instance. This shift is a turn away from thinking about transformation with a dialectic metaphor of the (Marxist) revolutionary moment, in which low replaces high, and toward the dialogic metaphor of (Bakhtin's) carnivalesque, in which the substitution of one for the other is discarded and the intrinsic reversibility of high/low logics is revealed (1-9, 25).

interdependence of binary opposites—high and low culture, accumulation and dispossession, place and displacement, art and life—without seeking to replace one with the other; they critique the nation while still seeking inclusion in it. Second lining’s transgression, then, lies less in a revolutionary impulse than in its performance of an alternative epistemology. As the following chapters elucidate, second liners enact a radical social and moral order wherein the categories of citizenship, land ownership, family, race, gender, capital accumulation, and willful mobility are excessively, ecstatically, and even parodically reconfigured through bodily expression. As we shall see, even when second liners comply with state regulations and deploy multicultural discourses of inclusion, they are not merely succumbing to dominant co-optation, but are also finding ways for their carnivalesque performances to persist. Even under police surveillance, and even when joined by white tourists, second liners embody an alternative to the social and moral order of racial capitalism, exceeding the modes of overcoming racism that are permitted by colorblind, neoliberal discourses: those that are productive for U.S.-led global capitalism.<sup>107</sup>

Building on these literatures, this dissertation argues that second liners have deployed improvised dance as a dissenting mobility in order to maneuver within and against the structural and physical violence of racial capitalism for more than one hundred years. As an aesthetically specific yet improvised dance form that takes place on public streets, the practice of second lining transforms individual lives, unites collectivities, performs counter-histories, and remaps urban spaces. To traverse the

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<sup>107</sup> Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, x-xi



shifting grounds of anti-black racism wielded on New Orleans's streets, second liners have found tectonic footing in particular dance steps; today, second liners labor to master footwork that eloquently articulates worldviews that oppose, subvert, and reconfigure neoliberal capitalism and post-racial racism.

### **Methods: Third-Lining and Feminist Dance Ethnography**

In 1990, photographer Michael P. Smith wrote that a “third line” had developed at second line parades. This was the sardonic term used by paraders to refer to the ring of photographers, ethnomusicologists, and English professors orbiting around the perimeter, taking notes, photographs, and aural recordings.<sup>108</sup> I am, undoubtedly, one of a new generation of third liners, documenting the tradition from a conceptual distance. However, as a *dance* ethnographer, my research method involves bodily participation as a way of gathering information, getting right in the middle of things in addition to observing and capturing the dancing of others. When I attend parades, I oscillate between second lining—giving myself over to the pleasure and sweat of it—and third lining. Thus, my third-liner uniform does not include the accoutrement carried by some researchers, such as cumbersome recording equipment, a bulky video camera, or even a notebook. To carry more than the essentials on my person would drastically inhibit my physical readiness to dance, which is my primary ethnographic tool. I bring a slim point-and-shoot camera that I can slip into a pocket, and use my smart phone to make aural recordings of the sonic environment and to dictate my jottings for transcription at home.

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<sup>108</sup> Michael P. Smith, “New Orleans’ Hidden Carnival: Traditional African-American Freedom Celebrations in Urban New Orleans,” *Cultural Vistas* (Autumn 1990), 7; Roach, “Mardi Gras Indians and Others,” 471. Sakakeeny discusses his decisions about where to place himself as an academic studying the second line. *Roll With It*, 16. Regis discusses the “third line” of ethnographers, musicologists, and photographers that occasionally block the dancers. “Blackness and Politics of Memory,” 777.

Each Sunday, I tuck only the necessary items into a durable but compact shoulder bag: route sheet, phone, camera, driver's license, chap stick, sunscreen, a little bit of cash (for purchasing water from cooler-pulling vendors), and a peanut butter sandwich (since the pork sandwiches for sale make me feel too full for footwork). I dress to facilitate dancing as well, usually wearing shorts with pockets, a supportive sports bra, and shock-absorbing tennis shoes. My third lining mostly happens between parades, when I play back my recordings, write up my notes, conduct interviews, and read up on pertinent histories and theories.

The movement descriptions that I offer are based on my participation in second line parades from 2008-2015. My first-person accounts of second lining follow SanSan Kwan's methodology of "feeling each other move." Kwan posits the "feeling-each-other sensation as a methodology that can provide a way to study collective movement without presuming to sympathize fully with another's corporeal experience."<sup>109</sup> In other words, a kinesthetic account must be derived from the author's own experiences, for she can never fully know another's corporeal sensations; however, her subjective bodily knowledge cannot stand in for another's, and thus it is limited as a point of departure for generalizations.<sup>110</sup> Gaps between individuals' kinesthetic experiences are only widened by social differences such as race, class, and gender, and by other differences, such as dance training and relation to a place. Thus, while dance may be a legitimate form of

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<sup>109</sup> SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>110</sup> Didre Sklar claims that subjective bodily engagement is the only way to approach the felt dimension of movement experiences, so that the researcher's body cannot be erased in dance ethnography. "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal* 32, no. 1 (2000): 72, 75.

intellectual labor, and while going through the motions can have a profound effect on the dancer, no matter what her background is, the dance ethnographer's body is far from an unproblematic resource for accessing the subjugated knowledge of those she desires to learn about.<sup>111</sup> In fact, as Marta Savigliano makes plain, the ethnographer's very desire (to dance and to know about the dancing) can distort rather than inform her understanding of other dancers' experiences.<sup>112</sup> In short, when going through another's motions, one both can and cannot have the same experience.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the dance ethnographer must translate her kinesthetic experiences into writing. Thus, she engages in a double translation: translating others' somatic experiences into her own body, and her bodily experience onto the page, all in the anthropological service of translating a "strange" culture into intelligibility for a Western-educated readership.<sup>114</sup> As troublesome as it is, translation cannot be avoided in ethnography, for there is no such thing as unmediated access to any culture; it is the author's concealment of translation that is the problem.<sup>115</sup>

Before moving on, I want to not only reveal my acts of translation, but also address some legitimate concerns in doing the translating at all. First, I acknowledge a concern that writing about second lining risks contributing to its codification by allowing grassroots dance knowledge to circulate beyond its street-level zones of creation and

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<sup>111</sup> Browning, *Samba*, xiv-xvi.

<sup>112</sup> Marta E. Savigliano, "Gambling Femininity: Wallflowers and Femme Fatales," in *Angora Matta: Fatal Acts of North-South Translations* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 179.

<sup>113</sup> Browning, *Samba*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>114</sup> Sklar, "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," 73.

<sup>115</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodying Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 69. See also Viswesaran's *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, in which she argues that translation is what goes on in anthropology, not a faithful brokering of a culture on its own terms (76).

performance. Codifying the dance form in writing could facilitate its commodification, which, if history provides any indication, would primarily benefit the careers of non-black/non-New Orleanian professionals (myself included). In spite of these risks, I hold that the act of documenting the dance form honors it as a specific and sophisticated art form, worthy of the critical attention that brass band music has received for decades. The research on New Orleans dance lags far behind histories of the city's music. Dance is often de-legitimized due to its close associations with bodily, ephemeral, and effeminate expression; jazz music, by contrast, can be recorded, circulated, and is dominated by male artists (and male scholars). This dissertation offers one corrective to the music-centric and male-focused literature on New Orleans expressive culture.

A deeper concern involves the politics of a(nother) white researcher recording the histories of black expressive cultures. Indeed, my histories of learning to second line, and the inevitable degree of cultural theft committed by my bodily acts of second lining, simultaneously comprise and compromise my authority on the subject. I did not learn to second line within the family and community networks that shape the bodily archives of many African American second liners who were born and raised in New Orleans, and therefore I was frequently aware of the effort required to learn the steps of a dance form that is purportedly no more than do watcha wanna. The process for those who begin second lining as children is more akin to learning to speak, walk, or to perform other profoundly habitual bodily actions, and my attempts to learn have only served to highlight this fact. My discursive representations of second lining physiology do not always reflect the ways in which most second liners discuss it. My history of learning to

dance and writing about it must be understood as one part of a long history of Euro-American dancers and researchers who have translated the detailed technique of a black vernacular dance form into our white bodies and then onto the page, invisibilizing black subjects in the process.<sup>116</sup> This embodied and textual strategy inevitably substitutes my white body for the black dancing bodies who have created the tradition. In an effort to problematize such substitutions, I follow Sara Ahmed's advice: I make explicit my role in ethnographic encounters, show the mechanics of my translations, and, when necessary, get out of the way (as much as possible) and let second liners' voices tell the story.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, I attempt to show how ethnographers and the people they study are always operating in overlapping and ever-shifting webs of power, which never negate but often exceed a simple story of white appropriation of black culture.

The danger of further invisibilizing black subjects with my first-person accounts extends beyond dance description; it also causes me to wonder about the appropriateness of opening this dissertation by narrating my encounter with physical violence at the Mother's Day second line.<sup>118</sup> On one hand, the story gives you, the reader, a sense of my

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<sup>116</sup> Brenda Dixon Gottschild coined the term "invisibilization" to describe this process of denial and appropriation of Africanist elements. From outright theft to unwitting adoption, including the vast middle ground in between, chronicles of Euro-American cultural invention repeatedly omit contributions of African American cultural workers and/or of Africanist influences. This happens intentionally, to serve economic gain, and unintentionally, as white chroniclers fail to recognize Africanist aesthetics in modern and postmodern performance. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 2-3, 140-141. Similarly, Jayna Brown uses the term "erasure and absorption" to describe, first, the effort to contain agency of racialized expressive bodies by evacuating the black subject and, second, how white Americans, in embodying black dances, absorb the power of the slave body through eroticized ritual. *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 174-211.

<sup>117</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 69.

<sup>118</sup> Browning's ethnographic discretion leads her to include her own account of suffering and disease in the footnotes of *Infectious Rhythms: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (New York:

investment in my subject; it shows that I am willing to put my body on the line and to join second liners in *physically* critiquing, in public space, the structural and physical violence that impacts our lives. On the other hand, by emphasizing a shared experience, the story could obscure the vast inequalities that render drastically uneven the impacts of physical violence on our lives.<sup>119</sup> As Helen Regis notes, death haunts the living in New Orleans, but the particular manifestations of those hauntings depend tremendously on the racialized political and economic space of the city.<sup>120</sup> In other words, physical precarity may be a shared social condition, but precarity is unequally distributed, and not all lives are considered equally grievable or valuable.<sup>121</sup> I fled the intersection of Frenchmen and Villere Streets for the safety and comfort of a white, affluent space. I still retain the ability to leave and enter poor and black spaces more or less at will; to choose when to come and go; to put my body on the line when I want to, and not because I have to. In considering my own positionality, a focus on mobility complicates staid binaries of insider/outsider, or native informant/researcher, that have preoccupied ethnographers (myself included) for decades. As anthropologists have shown, textually deconstructing the walls between these categories does not level the power relations that erected the

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Routledge, 1998). On recounting a “period of uncertainty as to [her] own HIV status” in a footnote, she states her reasons for that textual choice. “One is the patent in appropriateness of my claiming too large a place in a narrative which ultimately so far exceeds my story” (196, note 28).

<sup>119</sup> Deborah D’Amico-Samuels, “Undoing Fieldwork: Personal, Political, Theoretical and Methodological Implications” [1991], in *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, ed. by Faye V. Harrison (American Anthropological Association, third edition, 2010), 69, 75.

<sup>120</sup> Regis, “Blackness and the Politics of Memory,” 754.

<sup>121</sup> Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street,” n.p.

walls in the first place.<sup>122</sup> A focus on mobility, however, does illuminate the ways in which power is always in motion and negotiated by multiple subjects at once.

My history in New Orleans, like many others', is full of voluntary comings and goings. I lived in New Orleans full-time for two years, from 2008 until 2010. When I began my doctoral studies, I did not intend to write a dissertation about New Orleans. In fact, I actively resisted it. I maintained that there were already plenty of carpetbaggers making careers (if not cash) on representing post-Katrina New Orleans, and I did not want to join the throng. However, I did want to learn more about the dance and music traditions that I had witnessed and participated in while living there. To my surprise, I found remarkably little documentation readily available about second lining as a dance practice. I was astonished that such a significant cultural tradition had received scant scholarly attention, and so I began to dig, wonder aloud, ask questions, offer tentative theories, and before I knew it, I had walked into a dissertation topic. Along the way, I returned to New Orleans for summers, winter breaks, and Mardi Gras during each year of graduate school. Initially, I did not return for research purposes, but because large parts of my life were still located there: boyfriends, close friends, a theatre company and children's playwriting festival that I co-founded, ongoing nonprofit and education work, and a Mardi Gras parading group, to name a few. When I moved back in 2013, with the express purpose of conducting dissertation research, I could not conceive of New Orleans simply as a "field site."

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<sup>122</sup> D'Amico-Samuels, "Undoing Fieldwork"; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 5, no. 1 (1990): 7-27; and Faye V. Harrison, "Anthropology as an Agent of Transformation: Introductory Comments and Queries" [1991], in *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, ed. by Faye V. Harrison (American Anthropological Association, third edition, 2010), 68-87.

Like the binary between insider and outsider, the divide between “home” and “field” has been questioned, especially by third world and feminist ethnographers, as the center of anthropology.<sup>123</sup> In a globalized, neoliberal world order, spatial movement takes many forms: migration, immigration, evacuation, relocation, nomadic patterns, leisure travel, courier work, returns home, and more. In the case of post-Katrina New Orleans, forms of movement also include displacement, exile, weekly pilgrimages from Houston or Houma to check on the house, volunteer work, disaster tourism, migrant labor, relocation, and speculators’ visits to survey investment prospects. In light of such voluminous movement and profound stuck-ness, I heed Kamala Visweswaran’s suggestion to direct my attention away from who can or cannot leave “the field,” and to focus instead on which subjects have the privileged freedom to *choose* deterritorialization and which do not.<sup>124</sup>

If a focus on mobility deconstructs binaries between insider and outsider, and field and home, then a discussion of *danced* movement only serves to sharpen the point. Second lining complicates a neat definition of the field of my research by adding a kinesthetic dimension to an inherently geographic concept. Dance scholar Judith Hamera suggests that dance technique can be considered as a “vernacular landscape,” wherein a common bodily language can allow individuals to communicate across difference.<sup>125</sup> I

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<sup>123</sup> According to D’Amico-Samuels, the ideological construct of “the field” as a place “out there” where research subjects are stuck, and where the anthropologist travels, does less to acknowledge power differentials between researcher and researched than it does to obscure “real differences of structural inequality shared in global relationships.” “Undoing Fieldwork,” 75.

<sup>124</sup> Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 109.

<sup>125</sup> Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, 60.



discuss this concept in relation to urban place making in chapter four. Here, I want to suggest that dance technique as landscape can provide a third space, beyond home and field, for the dance ethnographer, wherein questions of access, belonging, and exchange can be negotiated through bodily discourses. One may feel at home in a particular dance technique, yet foreign in a location where that dance technique is practiced. Conversely, one might feel at home on New Orleans's back-of-town streets, yet unfamiliar with the landscape of second line footwork. As a vernacular landscape, second lining provides a space where dancers (including dance ethnographers) can assert differences, form alliances, and choose what information to reveal and conceal.

I include the Mother's Day account and other first-person anecdotes, not to prove myself as an insider in the field of New Orleans's second line spaces, but in order to relay the multiple structures of power that enable and limit all of the ethnographic encounters that have produced this text. I am often reminded of Ruth Behar's discussion of the ethnographer as a vulnerable observer; and yet, ethnographers are even more than vulnerable observers and listeners. They are also vulnerable bodies, and no amount of privilege can entirely shield them from injury, disease, or physical violence. All of us share a condition of precarity, as each body appears in public not only to speak and act, but also to move and engage with others' bodies.<sup>126</sup> Dance ethnography pushes this shared condition of physical precarity into another dimension, as the ethnographer's vulnerable body is also exposed to the corporeal hazards— from a blister to a broken

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<sup>126</sup> Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," n.p.

bone (or worse)—that can result when physical exertion forms a necessary part of knowledge production.

In reflecting on anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo's sudden death while doing research in the Philippines, Behar writes, "Yes, that was what had scared me the most: that you could die doing fieldwork, that the danger of dying was real, because fieldwork is about nothing more primitive than confronting, with our contemporaries, our own mortality."<sup>127</sup> That scares me too. The first few second lines after Mother's Day 2013 were difficult. But most of the time, second lining is not about confronting mortality; it is about defying death by viscerally embracing the beauty and pain and mystery of being alive—acutely, intently, blissfully *alive*. Indeed, death and life conspire at the second line, as we reckon with mortality by pulling all the stops and throwing ourselves into physical exertion, spiritual ecstasy, and emotional release. Most of the time, second lining is about dipping to the pavement for decorative flourish, not hitting the pavement to save one's life. Even still, when dancers embrace gravity as a choreographic technique, there is something of the pain of past and future violence referenced in the very movement that seeks to transcend it.

My belief that second lining choreographies utter a bodily discourse of history and sociopolitical critique caused me to become frustrated with do-watcha-wanna discourse. I also harbored a hunch that popular historical narratives, which, more or less, trace a straight line from Congo Square to jazz funerals to second lines, were too

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<sup>127</sup> Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 172.

simplistic to account for such an extraordinarily complex dance form and its intertwined relationships with state and capitalist forces.<sup>128</sup> These concerns sent me to the archive to study second lining's pasts, which then allowed me to return to contemporary practices with more solid footing in their political and historical contexts.<sup>129</sup> However, searching for the dance history of a marginalized population within institutional archives is anything but a straightforward process.<sup>130</sup> Notions such as Taylor's "repertoire," Browning's "body articulate," and Srinivasan's "bodily archive" allow dance theorists to honor the historical accumulation of physical, social, and cultural forces that all coalesce each time a dancer begins to move. But when turning to the brick-and-mortar archive, dance historians must reckon with the inevitable absences encountered there, especially if studying a social dance form that predates video recording technology and/or the histories that can be recalled by living informants.

My research in the historical archive includes analyses of various artifacts, such as oral histories, videos, and photographs. I combed archives of jazz history and African American history in New Orleans to search for traces of information about dance, buried within information about music and benevolent societies. I read these materials "against the grain," to use Ann Stoler's term, approaching materials familiar to jazz and cultural historians with an eye toward dance, in order to bring new insights to the study of New

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<sup>128</sup> Browning, *Samba*, 9; Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 494; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 17.

<sup>130</sup> Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 9-10; Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 13-17; Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 46-51.

Orleans's black parading traditions.<sup>131</sup> I gleaned some clues about the form and function of black benevolent societies at the turn of the century by scouring Negro newspaper advertisements for society functions, including dance contests, and wanted ads for brass bands; read reflections on vernacular dance recorded by the Louisiana Writers' Project in the late-1930s; and learned about the Depression-era functions and structures of black benevolent associations as recorded by an African American sociologist in the same decade. I listened to oral histories given by musicians and community leaders recorded as early as the 1950s; I viewed video footage and photographs of second line parades dating back to 1963; I read descriptions of second line parades published in a local music magazine in the 1970s and 1980s; and I read black civil rights activists' thoughts on second line culture as noted in their collected papers. By piecing together the scraps of information that had been deemed worthy of saving, collecting, and making available to the public, I began to assemble a fragmented picture of second lining's dance history, augmented by secondary sources, and always in service of better contextualizing the bodily archives of contemporary second liners.

One-on-one interviews formed a core activity in my ethnographic research process, despite valid suspicions about the value of doing so. Aihawa Ong warns against a "common ethnographic assumption [that] holds that speaking subjects are unproblematic representers of their own culture." Instead, she argues, "their truth claims,

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<sup>131</sup> Laura Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

like those of ethnographers, are articulated in webs of power.”<sup>132</sup> My decision to conduct interviews was motivated by a politics of representation, but also by an ethics of transparency. By requesting, arranging, and carrying out interviews with second liners, SAPC members, and musicians, I was able to formally “out” myself as a dance ethnographer. Requesting an interview from a dancer I admired or a widely respected elder was a way for me to announce my interests, invite other voices into the text, and to extend the relationships that began on the street into a different domain. It was through the interview process that some relationships deepened.<sup>133</sup>

In representing interviewees’ voices, I selectively draw upon multiple, and often conflicting, points of view in an effort to deliver a polyphonous and multivocal text.<sup>134</sup>

My attempts to do so are guided by the aesthetic structure of the second line itself, in

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<sup>132</sup> Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 80.

<sup>133</sup> I found that many of my interviewees had rarely or never been asked to speak about their dancing, and the experience of giving words to an intensely personal and frequently spiritual practice felt special for some. I often found myself listening to stories that far exceeded dancing accounts, from painful memories to yearnings to future hopes. I became one of Behar’s vulnerable observers, listening to the stories that recounted hurts that cut deep and raw. I realized that part of the reason that some people agreed to be interviewed was because they wanted a space to be heard, even an ethnographer with an audio recorder in hand and forms to sign. I could only partially direct the conversation if I were to honor what some speakers needed out of the encounter. The interviews also led to many more opportunities for exchange. For example, a local African American newspaper asked me to run a series of profiles on second line dancers, a project that is ongoing at the time of writing. Each time I ask someone if they would like to be featured, they eagerly agree. I am able to use my interview notes to publish several short pieces in an easily accessible, online publication that second liners can post to social media pages and share with friends and family on their smart phones.

<sup>134</sup> When transcribing interviewees’ spoken words, I chose to represent speech in standard English, attempting to neither sensationalize speakers’ speech patterns, which could be construed as performances of southern urban blackness, nor to “clean up” their words so that they conform to normative language use. I follow Matt Sakakeeny’s methodological approach, as explained in his study of New Orleans brass bands, *Roll With It*. Sakakeeny states that he does not attempt to capture speakers’ spoken dialects in print, but at the same time, he does not make syntactical or grammatical “corrections” to nonstandard English (i.e. “you gotta go” would be written “you got to go” instead of “you have to go”) (203 note 21). I have followed his example in all of my transcriptions.

which a panoply of rhythms, voices, steps and gestures coexist, sometimes in competition, sometimes in complementary fashion, and sometimes in what feels like chaos. The second line, like jazz in general, valorizes multiplicity rather than singularity,<sup>135</sup> and it shares this value with feminist ethnography. A feminist, jazz-influenced, textual approach to multivocality not only includes the voices of “informants” alongside the ethnographer’s authoritative voice, but also seeks to destabilize the ethnographer’s singular authority by revealing (some of) the fears, desires, and assumptions that filter her data.<sup>136</sup> Throughout, I locate multiple positions within myself, always gathering information and articulating points of view within webs of power and clouded by my own desires.<sup>137</sup>

Like all ethnographic pursuits, many of my research encounters have been characterized by failure. Documentarians refused to share footage with me; interviewees stood me up; others kept our appointments, but claimed to have forgotten all the details of an event. Many of these failures reminded me that not all knowledge needs to be shared with all audiences, and that sometimes our ethnographic failures to get the data are actually invitations to think more seriously about the imbalances of power that structure all attempts at “subject retrieval.”<sup>138</sup> A notable area of failure entailed my difficulty in securing interviews with African American female second liners. I discovered that

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<sup>135</sup> Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, *The Austin Project*, qtd. in Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, second edition, 2012), 116-117.

<sup>136</sup> Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 16-24; Savigliano, “Gambling Femininity.”

<sup>137</sup> Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 80; Savigliano, “Gambling Femininity,” 181.

<sup>138</sup> Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 94.

gendered norms dictated my interactions with New Orleanians at second line parades in a more scripted way than I had anticipated. It was much easier for me to casually converse with male second liners in the heteronormative, social space of the parades. The barriers of racial difference were more difficult to overcome with women. Much like the salsa clubs that Cindy García writes about, the second line encourages homosocial relationships between women that exceed friendship.<sup>139</sup> Women form necessary alliances that strengthen their navigation through a heterogeneous dancing milieu, stratified by differences of social capital, such as ethnicity, class, neighborhood affiliation, and age. Therefore, interactions between unacquainted women are often brief, and can be underlined by a competition for male attention.<sup>140</sup> As a result, I was able to form initial relationships with, and request interviews from, many more men than women involved in the second line culture.

As many feminists of color have observed, feminism's longing for a sisterhood has proven difficult to establish in the U.S., where race and class differences often trump gendered solidarity.<sup>141</sup> However, if race and class differences threaten sisterhood, then they seem to sometimes enhance the possibility of heterosexual encounters. The erotic specter of cross-racial romance often clouded my attempts to establish a professional

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<sup>139</sup> See Cindy García, *Salsa Crossings: Dancing Latinidad in Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), especially chapter five, "'Don't Leave Me, Celia!' Salsera Homosociality and Latina Corporealities," 124-146.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>141</sup> Collins, "All in the Family," 78; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Davis, *Women, Race and Class*; Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" [1986], in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981).

relationship with men. As I drove one young man home from our post-second-line interview at a fast food restaurant, he confessed that he was unsure if we had just been on a date or not. In some ways, I leveraged the erotic charge that was always already scripting my encounters with men to secure the information that I wanted. In other ways, I resisted sexual attraction as a tool for gaining information. If I wanted to avoid reproducing existing histories of New Orleans culture, which disproportionately feature male actors, then I had to figure out how to gain the perspectives of black women as well.

I began to seek other methods for accessing interviews with women, which did not rely on a chummy fantasy of sisterhood formed through dancing together on the street. I took more formal approaches, such as asking my personal and professional contacts to introduce me to prominent women in the second line community. I also asked male interviewees to introduce me to women who they thought would like to conduct an interview as well. At one point, I was invited to join an all-female SAPC myself, which I accepted. The president of the Ice Divas Social and Pleasure Club, Catina Braxton, approached me during their 2014 parade, just as I was getting down hard with some sweaty footwork. She walked to the rope's edge and said, "I got a spot for you in here next year if you want it." This interaction illustrates another way in which second line dance vocabularies can disrupt stable categories of race, culture, and belonging (including, as discussed above, insider/outsider and home/field). When non-black newcomers to the second line are able to "speak" its bodily language, we reveal that dance cannot be reduced to a representative expression of a pre-existing identity. This



performance can be threatening to the African American counter-narratives at the heart of second lining's bodily discourse. But it can also question assumptions about race and class differences; footwork can transport us across terrains of social distance to join each other on a vernacular landscape of technique. My demonstration of second lining technique offered another form of alliance, beyond the networks of family, neighborhood, and workplace that traditionally conjoin women in SAPC membership. To be sure, the realities of contemporary urban life mean that second liners do not always live and work in neat communities contained to these categories. Nevertheless, if race, class, and geography prevent sisterhood amongst women in social spaces like the second line, then dance technique can provide an alternative common ground on which we might be able to find commonality, and perhaps even take steps toward sisterhood. By joining a second line club, I have been able to build relationships (and alliances) with women in a way that more closely conforms to the social structure of the second line culture, and thus to hear voices—and dialogue in the bodily discourses—of women who participate in second line culture behind the scenes of the parade. Joining a club has not erased the power differentials that divide me from women of color. It has rearranged those differences so that conversations and collaborations can sometimes happen in spite of them.

In each chapter, I have attempted to use bodily knowledge as a window into larger social and political issues, in addition to relying on historical contexts in order to better interpret the dance.<sup>142</sup> In other words, I start with the dancing body and zoom out, instead

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<sup>142</sup> This dissertation falls within both two trajectories of dance ethnography as identified by Diedre Sklar: 1) sociopolitical studies that explore the way that dance works/is worked upon in global politics, and 2) a kinesthetic trajectory, in which ethnographers attempt to develop theory to explain movement as a way of knowing. "Reprise: On Dance Ethnography," 70.

of starting with cultural and sociopolitical contexts before zooming in. I consider how dancers' postures, rhythms, pathways through space, proximities with each other, and uses of levels might tell us something about the sociopolitical critique being performed. I heed the advice of Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, who urges that we researchers and historians of dance "listen to our materials and let the context suggest a methodology."<sup>143</sup> Her edict echoes decades of black and third world feminists' demands that theory must arise from daily experiences of oppressed peoples, and must seek to somehow better those daily experiences.<sup>144</sup> In these pages, I follow second liners' sophisticated tactics of negotiation and resistance, listening, looking, and feeling for the theories articulated through their bodily discourses.

### **Chapter Preview and Key Points**

*Footwork! Improvised Dance as Dissenting Mobility in the New Orleans Second Line* begins with a discussion of Hurricane Katrina before widening in scope to discuss structured, daily disasters that have required New Orleanians to respond with a dissenting mobility long before and after the storm. **Chapter one** builds upon literature in disaster studies and improvisation studies to examine the un/natural disaster of Katrina and its relationship to second line dancing. I argue that the commonplace notion that black people are "natural dancers," which pervades discussions of second lining and other rhythmic, improvised dance forms, reinforces essentialist stereotypes that people of African descent exist closer to nature. Second lining, as a dance form, is not reducible to

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<sup>143</sup> Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Some Thoughts on Choreographing History," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*, ed. by Jane C. Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 169.

<sup>144</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 33-36.

what comes naturally. In chapter one, I feature ethnographic data on second liners' extensive choreographic labor to make this point, revealing the ways in which dancers learn, copy, steal, share, teach, tailor, perfect, and rehearse their steps so thoroughly that they are able to compress an entire choreographic process into an instant of improvised movement. Such thoroughly rehearsed facility might appear to onlookers, and even feel to many dancers, as if it comes naturally.

I look to the Katrina disaster to outline the stakes of my ethnographic findings on second line choreography. Discourses of neglect and ineptitude surrounding Katrina collude with notions of “natural” disasters as unpredictable to absolve politicians, corporations, and fiscal elites from a responsibility to protect the city's most vulnerable residents. In order to emphasize the un-naturalness of Katrina, and to call attention to predetermined decisions that scripted how the disaster would unfold, I characterize Katrina as a *choreographed disaster*. To use the term “choreographed” to describe Katrina is to suggest that decades of studied neglect did more than *fail* to direct where water, capital, and bodies moved (or did not move) once the levees broke. I argue that deliberate inaction contributed to a predictable outcome, choreographed by histories of structural and physical violence, including racialized capitalism, anti-black police power, and environmental racism. By coupling sociological research on the man-made causes of environmental disasters with my own documentation of second liners' choreographic labor, I reveal that, in the domains of both dance and disaster, ideologies of the “natural” hide the methodical ways in which seemingly spontaneous events are carefully rehearsed.

**Chapter two** maps out (some of) the historical precedents that choreographed the Katrina disaster, while simultaneously providing a genealogy of second line dancing since the early-nineteenth century. By tracing the histories of dance and violence side-by-side, I position second lining as a tactic that many black New Orleanians have used to choreograph their way out of crisis for more than a century. Chapter two begins with antebellum performances in and around Congo Square, when free and enslaved Africans, and people of African descent, drummed and danced under police surveillance and the tourist gaze. I chart a kinesthetic genealogy of second lining footwork, performed at Congo Square and beyond, that includes influences from West and Central Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. The dizzying amalgam of second lining's early influences attests to the incredible range of black mobility—across continents, borders, and social barriers—and tells the lie of black bodily containment, in which slave regimes were so heavily invested.

The rest of the chapter concentrates on two important moments—the golden age of the black brass band at the dawn of the twentieth century and the brass band revolution in the 1980s—to detail the ways in which the form and meanings of second line dancing have changed throughout the twentieth century, in response to the shifting landscapes of economic and political disenfranchisement, police power, and vigilante violence. At the turn of the century, second line parades as we know them today began to traverse New Orleans's streets, just as white supremacists curtailed the advances made during Reconstruction with anti-black laws and vigilante violence, attacking the spatial and social mobility of African Americans and Creoles of color. Black brass band parades

moved the Africanist performances honed in Congo Square onto the public streets, traversing the very city spaces where lynchings and mob violence intended to keep black subjects immobilized and inferior. Second liners stepped through the streets with an upright, dignified demeanor that embodied contemporary political discourses of racial uplift. Second lining's form changed, however, in the late-twentieth century, when new sounds and dance styles attracted a younger generation to revamp a waning tradition. Similar to their ancestors, who defied efforts to constrain black mobility during the Jim Crow era, 1970s second liners took to the streets when the "New Jim Crow" attempted to roll back the economic and political outcomes of the 1960s civil rights movements and antipoverty programs.<sup>145</sup> In the final decades of the twentieth century, New Orleans, like many U.S. cities, saw the rise of neoliberal capitalism—including urban disinvestment, the decline of social welfare, mass incarceration, and urban "renewal" (known tongue-in-cheek as "Negro removal") projects—that wielded disastrous impacts on African American communities across the country. During this period, second liners' footwork took on new qualities—crouched, up-tempo, and vigorous—as dancers articulated a dissenting bodily discourse that responded to a changing social order.

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, disaster had been occurring for New Orleans's poor and people of color for centuries, in the form of structural, economic, environmental, and physical violence. In a way, New Orleans had been rehearsing for Katrina long before the hurricane hit, producing a situation wherein the city's most vulnerable residents would suffer the most disastrous consequences of the

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<sup>145</sup> I borrow this phrase from Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow*.

floods and inequitable recovery efforts. At the same time, however, New Orleans's poor and working-class black communities had also been rehearsing *survival* and *dissent* for centuries, as they stole, copied, perfected, and shared second line dance steps, giving shape to a dissenting bodily discourse of counter-hegemonic values and social critiques.

The second half of this dissertation focuses on *why* New Orleanians second line.

**Chapter three** explores two overarching motivations: second liners dance to form collectivities and to achieve spiritual transcendence. Second lining offers a mode of survival and healing, enabling dancers to form collectivities and reach ecstatic experiences through an embodied practice; people rely on these extraordinary, joyful experiences to make it through the week. This chapter begins with a kinesthetic analysis of the second lining body's *grounded-yet-lifted* posture, and interprets this physical stance as a philosophical and political stance. I suggest that the dancer's bodily groundedness indicates his grounding in a collective response to structural violence that rejects the vertical aspirations of racial uplift and the nuclear family structure. At the same time, his bodily liftedness gestures towards spiritual experiences of ecstasy that exceed the aspirational, upward mobility of capital accumulation. The bodily posture necessary to "roll with it" negotiates a tension between succumbing to gravity and resisting it, and in so doing, articulates a bodily discourse of power. The second liner's bodily discourse of grounded-yet-lifted represents an oscillation between upward mobility and submission to violent forces—a state of constant motion and negotiation. Grounded-yet-lifted embodies a carnivalesque transgression in Peter Stallybrass and

Allon White's estimation, performing an ambivalence and interdependence between the two poles of high and low.<sup>146</sup>

Second liners not only subvert hegemonic forces in their postural discourse, but also in their movements through the cityscape. Another reason why New Orleanians second line, beyond forming collectivities and achieving ecstasy, is to reclaim their neighborhoods from the structural forces of capitalist ownership, the terror of police brutality, and the grip of violence related to the informal drug economy. To investigate second liners' impacts on their neighborhoods, **chapter four** zooms out from the level of the body to analyze spatial choreographies. As second line parades traverse New Orleans's back-of-town streets, dancers overturn quotidian laws and norms for moving through the city, flowing seamlessly over pothole-ridden streets and halting traffic; transforming obstacles, such as rain storms and traffic cones, into props that aid rather than halt their performances; and male dancers, especially, scale buildings, slap stop signs, and dance atop parked cars. I argue that, through multiple bodily tactics, second liners introduce alternative directives for traversing the urban landscape to challenge (and occasionally re-inscribe) the patriarchal, white supremacist, and neoliberal ideologies that govern bodily movement through New Orleans on a daily basis. Second liners overturn assumptions about where and how residents are allowed to move (or not move) through racially and economically segregated urban environments. By enacting a collective, ephemeral ownership of the city each week, paraders embody alternative notions of citizenship that challenge the neoliberal logics of private ownership as grounds for one's

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<sup>146</sup> Hall, "For Allon White," 8-9.

“right” to the city and assert dancing as a way to own the streets that presents an alternative to gang-related violence. However, since second lines are always performed with the blessing of a city permit and the accompaniment of police escorts, second liners must negotiate their transgressive performances with the state. Much like the second liner’s grounded-yet-lifted posture, his movement through space relies on an interdependence between disciplinary forces and subaltern resistance, resulting in a performance of “dissenting citizenship” that critiques the state even while seeking inclusion in it.

Taken together, these chapters discuss the aesthetic, political, and social dimensions of second lining by considering the dance form as a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility. Throughout the text, I analyze the multiple mobilities that second lining enacts: bodily mobility (a grounded-yet-lifted posture that is meticulously rehearsed), spiritual mobility (being “moved” in a metaphysical sense), social movements (forming collectivities in resistance to oppression), and spatial mobility (parade routes) through a segregated, and often hostile, urban landscape. Overall, I argue that second lining enacts a dissenting mobility that has given shape to a counter-hegemonic discourse, generated by New Orleans’s black populations for two centuries.



## CHAPTER ONE

### **Un/Natural Performances: Improvised Dance, Hurricane Katrina, and the Second Line**

In December 2006—over a year after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita made landfall on the Gulf Coast—the Big Nine Social Aid and Pleasure Club (SAPC) took to the streets of the Lower Ninth Ward. Even though few residents had been able to return to the neighborhood, the club started their annual parade there, just as they always had. The Big Nine members adorned themselves in color-coordinated suits—in hues of cream and dark brown, with white doves pinned to their shoulders—and carried white-plumed fans and gold-fringed umbrellas. They and their second line followers high-stepped past National Guard soldiers, who had patrolled New Orleans’s streets since September 2005. Some sideliners—second liners who dance ferociously on the sidewalk—footworked on the porches of vacant houses, whose facades displayed the spray-painted X markings left by search-and-rescue teams. The whole crowd buck jumped—danced to second line rhythms with fervent intensity—over the St. Claude Bridge, crossing the Industrial Canal, whose levee breached in Katrina’s wake and filled 3,500 units of housing in the Lower Ninth Ward with devastating floodwaters.<sup>147</sup> Ronald W. Lewis, Big Nine co-founder, recalls that parade. “When we paraded in 2006 after Katrina, it had an emotional impact on people. Our community was being written off, and we stood up as an organization and said, ‘We gonna show the world that we still exist. We’re not going to accept people

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<sup>147</sup> Breunlin and Lewis, *House of Dance and Feathers*, 26.

saying that we can't function as a people in the Lower Ninth Ward anymore.'"<sup>148</sup> As Lewis suggests, second lines have provided (and still provide) a meaningful arena for those most impacted by the storm, levee breaches, and ensuing floods to find spiritual healing, reunite with their displaced communities, and assert their right to return during rebuilding struggles.<sup>149</sup>

Since 2005, the words “disaster” and “New Orleans” have inevitably invoked Hurricane Katrina and the floods that followed it.<sup>150</sup> While this tragic disaster has become closely associated with New Orleans, it is not singular; it was produced by daily disasters that have been occurring in New Orleans for centuries, in the form of structural, economic, and environmental violence wielded against the city's poor and people of color. As such, disaster did not begin with Hurricane Katrina's landfall, nor did it end with the city's recovery from the widespread damage that ensued (if we can call the neoliberalized, inequitable rebuilding efforts a “recovery”). Katrina's devastation made

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 131. See also Tyone Turner's online photo essay of the Big Nine's 2006 second line, “New Orleans Second Line,” *National Geographic Magazine*, March 2007, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/video/player#/?titleID=new-orleans-second-line-parade&catID=1/>.

<sup>149</sup> On second lining's healing and/or political potential in the post-Katrina environment, see Bruenlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map”; Dinerstein, “Second Lining Post-Katrina”; Johnson, “Walking the Post-Disaster City”; Michna, “Hearing the Hurricane Coming,” 223-296; and Nick Spitzer, “Rebuilding the ‘Land of Dreams’ with Music,” in *Rebuilding Urban Places After Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina*, ed. by Eugenie L. Birch and Susan M. Wachter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>150</sup> The disaster of Katrina must be conceived (and is for New Orleanians) in at least two phases: the hurricane that hit the gulf coast and the subsequent failure of the federal flood protection system, including levees, pumps, and canals, that caused the vast majority of the damage (not to say anything about the impact of Hurricane Rita which followed closely behind). Many New Orleanians refer to the disaster as a “federal flood” to put emphasis on the man-made catastrophe and to dispel myths that the city was destroyed by a natural disaster. Colloquially, most people refer to whole event as “the storm,” as in, “I was a teacher before the storm,” or, “My family has been in Houston since the storm.” In this chapter, and I use the shorthand “Katrina” and “the storm” to refer to all the destruction and violence wrought by the hurricane, the floods, and the inequitable recovery that followed.

histories of disaster painfully evident. As the floodwaters rose, the world became increasingly aware of the ways in which colorblind racism had veiled the disastrous impacts of neoliberal capitalism for racial minorities in New Orleans and elsewhere in the United States.<sup>151</sup> This chapter illuminates the ways in which histories of violence, such as those outlined in chapter two, prefigured the disastrous failure of the Gulf Coast's infrastructure and inequitable recovery efforts. In order to emphasize the un-naturalness of the disaster precipitated by Hurricane Katrina, and to call attention to deliberate decisions that scripted how the calamity would unfold, I characterize Katrina as a *choreographed disaster*. To use the term “choreographed” is to suggest that decades of studied neglect and deliberate inaction contributed to a predictably racialized outcome, scripted by histories of structural and physical violence, including racial capitalism, anti-black police power, and environmental racism.

My characterization of Katrina as a choreographed disaster indicates my methodological approach throughout the dissertation, in which I begin with the dancing body in order to understand historical, social, and political issues. Starting with the dancing body and zooming out means that my understanding of how second liners choreograph improvised dance steps informs my understanding of how politicians, institutions, and fiscal elites choreograph disasters. It also informs my investigations into ideologies of the “natural.” How do assumptions about what and who is natural veil choreographic mechanizations—and what does race have to do with it? I argue that anti-black racist ideologies become depoliticized in the seemingly benign domain of dance

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<sup>151</sup> Ishiwata, ““We Are Seeing People We Didn’t Know Exist.””

(“black people are natural dancers”), where they are allowed to reinforce racist stereotypes that justify oppression, such as the oppression so dramatically perpetrated during Katrina (“a natural disaster is to blame for the suffering of African Americans,” who are undeserving of state protection due to their “savage criminality”). Stereotypes about black primitivity that underpin assumptions of second lining as a natural expression of blackness also delimit the terms of citizenship (and thus state protection from man-made disasters) for African Americans.

A set of centuries-old ideologies about what and who is natural versus what and who is not underlie a vast array of social phenomena, including things as ostensibly unrelated as second lining footwork and flood protection protocols. Discourses about naturalness frame black, improvised dance as unmediated, spontaneous, and unrehearsed—in a word, un-choreographed. Discussions regarding natural talent or ability have historically carried racist assumptions that, in the words of Franz Fanon, black people are more connected to the body and nature than white people.<sup>152</sup> Second lining, like many improvised, vernacular and social dance forms, appears to happen spontaneously as an unrehearsed, inspired expression, even though dancers undertake significant choreographic labor in order to be able to dance as they do. Similarly, disasters have also been commonly misunderstood as both natural and spontaneous, which has obscured the social forces that make natural events like hurricanes result in disasters for some and not for others. Discourses about naturalness surrounding Katrina

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<sup>152</sup> In *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952] (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, 1967), Frantz Fanon urges that black man is not more essentially connected to the body, nature, and emotion than the white man; but because he is a slave to his appearance, says Fanon, the black man suffers in his body differently from the white man (138).

frame the disaster as unpredictable, inevitable, and unaccountable to human agency. Such assumptions veil the choreographic mechanizations of structural violence, which ensure that the death and destruction wrought by “natural” disasters predictably and disproportionately affect the poor and people of color.

In this chapter, I trouble ideologies of the natural as they circulate within discussions about second line dance and Hurricane Katrina. I proceed from the premise that second lining, as a dance form, is not reducible to what comes naturally. I feature ethnographic data on second liners’ extensive choreographic labor to make this point, and situate my analysis within a body of scholarship that refutes characterizations of black vernacular and social dance as unrehearsed and spontaneous.<sup>153</sup> In so doing, I join these scholars in exposing the racism inherent in assumptions of black dancers’ natural ability. I look to the Katrina disaster to outline the stakes of my ethnographic findings on second line choreography, arguing that, in the domains of dance and disaster, discourses of the natural work to veil white supremacy, making institutionalized racism appear as if it were the natural order of things. However, I end by complicating my own argument, honoring how and why second lining *does* look and feel natural to many New Orleanians, who maintain that second lining is no more than do watcha wanna. I conclude that ideologies of the natural are differently inflected for different speakers, audiences, and dancers, and are always reinforcing and contradicting one another in a slippery circulation.

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<sup>153</sup> I follow Anthea Kraut in my use of the term “vernacular,” choosing it in order to highlight “the presence and tenacity of a transmissible tradition of African American dance production apart from codified Eurocentric movement systems,” and resist a “tacit correspondence between the vernacular and African American performers.” *Choreographing the Folk*, 19.

## **Spontaneity, Primitivity, and Natural Ability in Black Social and Vernacular Dance**

Any discussion of natural expression in second lining must be understood within a history of discourse on African diaspora dance. Euro-American viewers have long attributed black performers' artistry—in ritual, social, and concert dance—to natural instinct versus intellectual labor. As Robert Farris Thompson summarizes, “The belief that African Americans have an innate ability in these arts [music and dance] represents a stereotype that has endured throughout American history. [...] Blacks were categorized as savages who were oversexualized, immoral, and intellectually and culturally underdeveloped.”<sup>154</sup> Notions of black dancers' natural ability, or gift for rhythm, carry racist assumptions that are not limited to dance, but have been used to rationalize colonialism and chattel slavery.

In 1837, German philosopher Friedrich Hegel gave voice to a common nineteenth-century European view of the “African character” as the absolute alterity to the European, due to its close associations with nature and lack of concern about progress.

The Negro represents the Natural Man in all his wildness and indocility; if we wish to grasp him, then we must drop all European conceptions.

What we actually understand by ‘Africa,’ is that which is without history and resolution, which is still fully caught up in the natural spirit, and which here must be mentioned as being on the threshold of world history.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1983), 6.

<sup>155</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. and qtd. by James Snead, “On Repetition in Black Culture,” *African American Review* 15, no. 4 (1981): 148.

The legacy of Hegel's thinking, and other thinking like his, has formed the ideological underpinning for Euro-American imperialism.<sup>156</sup> Those who were seen as less evolved and unfit for self-rule were believed to benefit from the civilizing social order that resulted from colonization.<sup>157</sup>

The ways in which Africans danced was routinely offered up as evidence of such primitivity. For example, fifty years after Hegel penned the words above, George Washington Cable published an article, "Dance in Place Congo [Congo Square]," in a popular American periodical, *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*.<sup>158</sup> His descriptions of enslaved and free Africans dancing on Sunday afternoons in New Orleans illustrate the combination of wonderment, fear, and disgust with which white observers regarded the spectacle.

See! Yonder brisk and sinewy fellow has taken one short, nervy step into the ring, chanting with rising energy. Now he takes another, and stands and sings and looks here and there, rising upon his broad toes and sinking and rising again, with what wonderful lightness! How tall and lithe he is. Notice his brawn shining through his rags. [...] Now for the frantic leaps! Now for frenzy! Another pair are [*sic*] in the ring! [...] What wild — what terrible delight! The ecstasy rises to madness; one —

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<sup>156</sup> Cedric Robinson claims that Hegel's thinking "has proven to be neither anachronistic nor idiosyncratic. He would be echoed by legions of European scholars (and their non-European epigony) in a myriad of ways in to the present century. The tradition persisted and permutated." *Black Marxism*, 74. While he does not reference Hegel, my analysis is also informed by Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* [1983] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Fabian argues that the discipline of anthropology has historically provided an intellectual justification for Western domination by confirming, in essence, the primitiveness of non-Western others. Fabian argues that ethnographic writing distances the Western anthropologist from the Other as not only geographically remote, but temporally remote, stuck in a prior, primitive age. On the Enlightenment-era scientific rationales given for the "natural" basis of racial hierarchies, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 63-64.

<sup>157</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81.

<sup>158</sup> Cable published this article six years before publishing his novel, *The Grandissimes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), in which he describes a scene of Bras-Coupé dancing at Congo Square, as discussed in chapter two.

two — three of the dancers fall — *bloncoutoum! bourn!* — with foam on their lips and are dragged out by arms and legs from under the tumultuous feet of crowding newcomers.<sup>159</sup>

Cable's prose drips with exoticizing bewilderment, borders between eroticism and revolt, and is shot through with assumptions about the African dancer's primitiveness, or his proximity to the natural world. The dancer's "African character" simultaneously makes him a titillating performer and well suited for slavery, both due to his physical prowess ("Notice his brawn shining through his rags") and in his contented disposition, which is evidenced through the very act of singing and dancing while enslaved.<sup>160</sup> The dancers' performance is impressive to Cable, not as a display of craft, but as evidence of the African's exotic, animalistic character. Cable's portrayal of the dancers as "brisk and sinewy," dancing with "brawn shining" in "ecstasy" and "madness," serves as unmediated proof for Hegel's colonialist formulations of Africa as "fully caught up in the natural spirit." In Cable's dance descriptions, nineteenth-century ideological articulations were not only naturalized but also neutralized in the benign, seemingly apolitical domain of dance. And yet, his (mis-)readings of dance in Congo Square reveal the ambivalent erotic economies motivating colonial and plantation logics. The "Negro" was created by Europeans and Euro-Americans as a "dumb beast" befitted for (and benefitted by) slavery, and necessary for the economic, technical, and financial requirements of the

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<sup>159</sup> George Washington Cable, "Dance in Place Congo," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (November 27, 1883): 523.

<sup>160</sup> Saidiya Hartman claims that the fun and frolic that apparently demonstrated Africans' contentment and suitedness for slavery also came with white panic over slaves' idleness and a constriction of their freedoms. Dance was one such expression of freedom variously demanded, permitted, or restricted. *Scenes of Subjection*, 6-7, 42-47.



plantation.<sup>161</sup> His beastly dancing, at once desirous and derisive for Cable, simultaneously reinforced Africans' suitedness for slavery, aroused white desire for the exotic, and stirred white panic over the primitive power exhibited by the black dancing body, which in turn required strict(er) policing.<sup>162</sup>

In her recent study of Congo Square, historian Freddi Williams Evans makes the connection between claims of enslaved Africans' natural musical abilities and assumptions of their primitiveness (trafficked by writings such as Cable's), or "historylessness" (as forwarded by Hegel).<sup>163</sup> She writes, "The myth that Africans haphazardly beat drums and extemporaneously made up dances reinforced the falsehood that they had no history. While room for improvisation and self-expression existed within performances, centuries-old practices continually passed from generation to generation. [...] African-based choreography [...] largely continued."<sup>164</sup> Much like the dances at Congo Square that Evans describes, in second lining, there is ample room for improvisation and self-expression, and yet, second lining choreographies are passed

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<sup>161</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81. Robinson explains that the portrayal of the African as animal/beast was preceded by an image of him as devil, which appeared as a 'black moore,' and 'an Ethiopie.' Centuries later the Satanic gave way to the representations of Africans as a different sort of beast: dumb, animal labor, the beknighted recipient of the benefits of slavery (82-100).

<sup>162</sup> In *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Eric Lott discusses the "mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation" at work in antebellum blackface minstrelsy (6), which is not unlike the mixed erotic economy at work in Cable's viewing of dance at Congo Square. On the European construction of the "Negro," see Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81; on dance as a "scene of subjection" in slave regimes, see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 6-7.

<sup>163</sup> In response to Hegel, scholar James Snead writes, "Black culture, caught in 'historylessness' (*Geschichtslosigkeit*), is nonetheless shielded from attack or assimilation precisely by its aboriginal intangibility (though particular blacks themselves may not be so protected)." "On Repetition in Black Culture," 148.

<sup>164</sup> Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2011), 90.

down from generation to generation, not “extemporaneously made up” based on the dancer’s African instinct. Acknowledging the choreographic labor that has allowed second lining to continue for more than a century is important in order to understand that, not only in music and food, but also in dance, New Orleanians of African descent have actively created, refined, preserved and innovated specific cultural knowledge for generations. Each generation shares with the next the steps, gestures, and rhythms that have enabled them to maneuver through centuries of struggle.

Hegemonic biases about the natural, raw, and nontechnical qualities of black dance and dancers are not limited to nineteenth-century New Orleans, but trenchant in American cultural history. Dance scholars have documented associations between primitivity and African-derived social and street dances in ragtime, bebop, and hip hop, to name a few.<sup>165</sup> In such diverse expressions, the dance arena has been persistently posited as an “automatic, already-constituted cultural space” where African Americans display innate dance abilities that, in turn, signify their connections to a racially defined “African instinct.”<sup>166</sup> The central role of improvisation in these dance forms contributes

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<sup>165</sup> In her study of ragtime dances, Nadine George-Graves argues that persistent associations of ethnic with primitive have suggested that blacks existed somewhere between apes and whites in stages of social development, and movement has been used as evidence of African Americans’ inferiority. “‘Just Like Being at the Zoo,’” 55-69. Marya Annette McQuirter undertakes a similar project in her analysis of 1940s social dances enjoyed by an emerging population of African American urbanites. She details the “awkward steps” that occur when “black folks learn to dance,” and in so doing, she challenges assumptions of natural dance ability. “Awkward Moves,” 81-103. In her analysis of contemporary street dances in Oakland, California, Naomi Bragin suggests that “nontechnical, spontaneous, disorganized, intuitive, raw, in crisis” are all “concepts bound up in notions of blackness and black performance.” “Shot and Captured: Turf Dance, YAK Films, and the Oakland R.I.P. Project,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 58, no. 2 (2014): 102.

<sup>166</sup> McQuirter, “Awkard Moves,” 87. The reference to “African instinct” manifesting on the dance floor comes from a passage in Malcolm X’s autobiography: “My long-suppressed African instincts broke through, and loose.” Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 62, qtd. in McQuirter, 89.

to misperceptions that skilled, seasoned practitioners possess natural, instinctive abilities. As Anthea Kraut has argued, improvisation has been historically pitted against choreography as “unrehearsed spontaneous expression,” which can disguise the complicated labor of training and rehearsing an improvisatory form, and reinforce assumptions about “instinctive black performativity.”<sup>167</sup> According to Jane C. Desmond, the pleasure aspect of social dancing can obscure an awareness of it as a symbolic system, so that dances are often seen as authentic and unmediated expressions of the dancer’s essential (and often racial) character.<sup>168</sup> The idea that a black dancer could possess natural talent—characterized as physical, animalistic, primitive, and rhythmic—reinforces Euro-American stereotypes of African Americans as dangerous, savage, criminal, and pleasure-seeking (read “lazy,” or a failed capitalist subject). In Desmond’s words, the unstated equation is that African Americans “are how they dance, and they dance how they are.”<sup>169</sup>

These dance researchers echo the explanations offered by African American improvisers themselves, both musicians and dancers, who dispel the myth that they create art without any preparation. As black jazz musician Arthur Rhames explained to ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner, “Improvisation is an intuitive process for me now, but...I’m calling upon all the resources of all the years of my playing at once: my academic understanding of the music, my historical understanding of the music, and my

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<sup>167</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 57. See also Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*.

<sup>168</sup> Desmond, “Embodying Difference,” 43.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* For a sympathetic critique of popular and scholarly discourse on social dance in black and Latina/o communities, see also Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 28-54.

technical understanding of the instrument that I'm playing."<sup>170</sup> Notions of academic, historical, and technical understandings might not seem transferable from jazz music to second line dancing, where informal systems of knowledge transmission occurs in the "alternative academies"<sup>171</sup> of New Orleans's streets, homes, and night clubs. But when second liners improvise with jazz musicians on the street, in an embodied exchange, they also call upon resources, stored in their bodily archives, in the moment of creation.<sup>172</sup> Wynton Marsalis, one of New Orleans' best-known jazz musicians, describes the second line in this way. "Musicians are improvising, and dancers are improvising. And they're doing something they've been doing a long time. So they have to feel it, not only as this moment—here's something that never happened—it's a moment that's always happened."<sup>173</sup> In other words, second lining is neither an exact replication of codified steps nor is it devoid of technique or history. Even though each second line step "has never happened" before, it is recognizable to second liners because they have seen it many times before. The dance that has "never happened" is the moment of improvisation, in which the dancer gives shape to herself.<sup>174</sup> She re-performs or reiterates the dance that

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<sup>170</sup> Paul Berliner, *Thinking Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16, qtd in Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 5-6.

<sup>171</sup> Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, 142.

<sup>172</sup> On the notion of bodily archive, see Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 17.

<sup>173</sup> Dawn Logsdon, *Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*, dir. by Dawn Logsdon (San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel, 2007), DVD.

<sup>174</sup> Goldman defines improvised dance as "literally giving shape to oneself by deciding how to move in relation to an unsteady landscape." *I Want to Be Ready*, 5.

has “always happened,” calling upon her bodily archive to dance the steps that she knows, but doing so with her own approach, timing, and combination of steps.<sup>175</sup>

In her study of bebop, Marya Annette McQuirter calls for more scholars of social dance in African American communities to explicate the actual actions involved in learning to dance, so that we may gain “a fuller and more complex understanding of the role of dance in community and cultural formation.”<sup>176</sup> The following section takes up her call, for, as the choreographed disaster of Katrina makes clear, the stakes of understanding the ruses and effects of “natural” discourses, wherever they may be found, are quite literally a matter of life and death.

### **Practicing, Stealing, Styling, Coaching, and Modeling: How Second Liners Choreograph**

Cable was one of many white viewers in New Orleans (and beyond) who used colonialist ideas about naturalness to describe African-derived dances. However, the labeling of African-derived dance as “natural” occurs differently in the second line world, as practitioners themselves claim that second lining is a natural expression of self and

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<sup>175</sup> Marsalis’ statement is echoed by Jacques Derrida, who explains that utterances can only signify if they are legible, and legibility depends on iterability or citationality. “Signature, Event, Context,” *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27. This is to say that meaning is only made in relationship to prior iterations of the same utterances; all subsequent utterances are reiterations of previous iterations. Margaret Drewal adds that improvised dance is always re-iteration, or repetition, with difference, which is a key concept in black expressive culture. Each utterance is bracketed by quotation marks as it cites previous iterations of the utterance. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3-5, 16-19. Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s theory of signifi(g) discusses the African American tradition of repetition with revision, which takes many rhetorical forms, most notably, “playing the dozens” and this bore tremendous effects on theoretical considerations of improvisation within black culture. *The Signifying Monkey*, 63-65.

<sup>176</sup> McQuirter, “Awkward Moves,” 90-91.

place.<sup>177</sup> Many second liners, especially African American New Orleanians who grew up surrounded by brass band music and second line parades, insist that second line dancing comes naturally to them. For example, when I asked veteran Tamara Jackson, president of the VIP Ladies and Kids Social Aid and Pleasure Club, how she recalls “getting her footwork,” she replied that it was

Natural. It was just natural. It was natural. It kind of goes back to that Rebirth [Brass Band] song, ‘Do Watcha Wanna.’ You just basically do what you want do, do what you feel. You know, second line—there’s no particular way to second line. It’s all about the individual’s expression, and just following and keeping up with the rhythm and the beat. The beat of the drum, and the horns, and it just motivates you, but everybody—it’s eclectic—but everybody have they own style. Some people are really, really elaborate. And then there’s others that just trot [...]. And *everything is OK*. Whatever style you choose, it’s acceptable.<sup>178</sup>

Tamara’s response echoes an almost ubiquitous discourse about second lining amongst practitioners and admirers alike: second line dancing is something that simply “comes natural” to African American New Orleanians, and because “whatever style you choose, it’s acceptable,” second lining is assumed to require no specialized knowledge nor rehearsal. While we must understand such claims within a context of hegemonic discourses about black vernacular dance, it would be a mistake to subject Tamara’s claim to the same sort of critique as Hegel and Cable. As explicated in more detail below, I

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<sup>177</sup> Second liners’ insistence upon dance as a natural self-expression, which subsumes questions of technique or skill, participates in historical conversations about aesthetics in African diaspora dance. Robert Farris Thompson famously introduced the “aesthetic of the cool” in 1966 to discuss aesthetic concerns in West African dance, wherein effort and labor are not always valuable criteria for regarding dance performance. Effort and labor might evidence the acquisition of technique, but valuing the “cool” values the dancer’s ability to disguise her effort, to make her technique appear effortless or even natural. Such a criterion for performance values the dancer’s mastery over not only her body, but also her emotions, mind, and spirit. Thank you to Anthea Kraut for pointing out this connection. “An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance.” *African Forum* 2, no. 2 (1966): 85-102

<sup>178</sup> Tamara Jackson, interview with the author, April 21, 2014. All quotes from Jackson are taken from this interview, unless otherwise noted.

consider dancers' identification with naturalness as a right to opacity, defined by Caribbean scholar Edouard Glissant as the Other's right to not be understood. But first, I want to consider how do-watcha-wanna definitions of second lining, such as Tamara's, contradict stories of second line choreography.

Many second liners that I interviewed gave detailed descriptions of the ways in which they learned to second line, practice their technique, and coach others. To be clear, there are not necessarily two schools of thought on the subject; the same dancers who discuss their efforts at learning, practicing, and coaching would be equally likely to describe second lining as a form of natural self-expression. Their dancing labor occurs at organized SAPC practices, where members drill choreographed marching formations; at the night club, where individuals steal each others' moves on the dance floor; on the sidewalk, where mentoring relationships develop amongst intergenerational sideliners; and in the home, where mothers and grandfathers encourage their children to hone their dance skills in kitchen competitions. Examples of second line choreographies complicate, and even contradict, popular notions of second lining as a something that is reducible to what comes natural.

A note on my use of the term "choreography" here is warranted. I use the term as a conscious political choice to characterize second liners' multi-layered processes of learning, practicing, and performing. I follow the lead of Anthea Kraut, who argues that "choreography" has historically been used as a term of power and privilege to authorize and exclude, especially in regards to issues of authorship and authenticity in African Americans' contribution to American dance history. The term's historical identification

with solitary versus collaborative invention and its opposition to improvisation as “unrehearsed spontaneous expression” have made the attribution historically unavailable to African American dance artists. To frame second lining as choreographed recognizes a history of labor veiled by notions of authenticity spontaneity, which are imbued with assumptions of natural expression and ability. Furthermore, this move reconfigures the term, “choreographer,” by loosening its equation with solitary invention.<sup>179</sup> I think of choreography as does Jonathon David Jackson: in African American vernacular dance, he writes, improvisation *is* choreography. After all, when second liners improvise, they choreograph—or creatively structure human movement—in the moment of performance.<sup>180</sup>

I do use the term with a degree of trepidation. In the course of my fieldwork, I suggested at times that second lining is “learned,” “practiced, or “rehearsed.” I realized, based on different reactions, that these words can evoke classroom scenarios that undermine the anti-institutional ethos of second lining’s grassroots tradition, and can threaten to remove the power of knowledge transmission from the people who have historically practiced the dance form. This threatens to relocate that power to a disconnected figure—the teacher—who, if history is any indicator, will probably be white. For these reasons, I avoid words like “teach” and “learn” to describe the multiple kinds of actions, some subtle and some explicit, that second liners undertake in order

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<sup>179</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 56-62.

<sup>180</sup> Jonathon David Jackson defines choreography as the creative structuring of human movement that, in improvisation, happens in the moment of performance. “Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dance,” *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 44. For a historical treatment of the term “choreography,” see Susan Leigh Foster’s chapter on the subject in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15-72.



show up at the second line ready to dance in a particular way. When interviewees use words like “practice” or “coach,” I include those terms in my reflections. I have been careful not to impose external modes of knowledge transmission onto second liners’ stories, but to listen carefully to these heterogeneous, and often contradictory, accounts. Even so, I recuperate the term “choreography” as an appropriate term to describe the labor undertaken by second liners.

The first domain of second line choreography can be found, not surprisingly, within the organizational structures of SAPCs, which occasionally hold practices for their members, so that they will be able to perform precise formations and enviable footwork inside the ropes on parade day. No matter how she dances outside the ropes during the rest of the year, once a second liner parades or “comes out” with an SACP, she becomes a first liner or a main liner. The demanding crowd expects the main liner to dance for four straight hours, exuding as much energy as is physically possible, and displaying as much rhythmic precision and variety as she can muster.

The Lady Buckjumpers Social Aid and Pleasure Club (established in 1984) provide an unusual yet clear example of dancers who assiduously prepare for their club’s parade day. In the month before their annual November parade, the Lady Buckjumpers convene for a practice session every Sunday, usually meeting in the yard of the club’s president, Linda Porter, or in her sister’s yard. When Linda tells someone that the Buckjumpers have practice, she usually gets a response like this: “Y’all *practice*?!”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Linda Porter, interview with the author. August 12, 2014. All quotes from Porter are taken from this interview, unless otherwise noted.

When she told me this, Linda raised the pitch of her voice and wrinkled her nose to emphasize the disbelief and even disapproval imbuing that typical reaction. It illustrates the widespread belief amongst second liners that rehearsal is anathema to second lining prowess. However, as a savvy manager with a penchant for public relations, Linda knows that the Lady Buckjumpers must practice in order to maintain their reputation as one of the most skilled, energetic, and dedicated group of dancers in the second line community.

The group has long been distinguished by its performance of short, unison phrases at several moments throughout the parade.<sup>182</sup> I asked Linda about this, and she explained that they have several set “routines.” These routines have names, and a designated captain will call them out during the parade. There is the “Inside,” when the dancers move to the middle of the street and come back into their lines; the “Outside,” when they dance away from the center of the street; the “Criss-Cross,” in which they move to a formation across from a partner, put their arms up, and do-si-do; and then there is the “Circle,” which they can perform when the parade’s forward motion pauses. Everybody will circle up and take turns, two at a time, improvising in the center. Linda reflected, “It looks so pretty when it’s together, you know? And see, people be saying, before our parade, they be like, ‘Where y’all going?’ And we’ll be like, ‘Oh, we got to practice.’ And they think that’s a joke, because they don’t realize that we really put our own into these routines, you know, to be able to have them like we do when we parade.” Linda

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<sup>182</sup> In an early article on second lines, William Jankowiak, Helen Regis, and Christina Turner wrote that the “Lady Buck Jumpers [use] a form of precision team dancing as a symbol of its [the club’s] vitality and artistic sensibility.” “Second-Line Marching Clubs: Inside New Orleans’ Black Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs,” *The World & I*, Vol. 5 (1990): 673.

maintains a level of showmanship in organizing her club's annual performance, and to earn it, she demands weekly practices.

Another club that also practices set formations is the Young Men Olympian, Jr. Benevolent Association (YMO). YMO, which celebrated its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, is known for maintaining more traditional aspects of the benevolent association tradition, such as holding regular business meetings, requiring club members to attend the funeral of a deceased member, and holding practices before their parades. Although YMO has been a bearer of tradition, they have also been the source of major innovations in the second line scene. Over the years, younger club members have formed new divisions within the large organization (which boasts more than one hundred members) that have been instrumental in developing new footwork styles and sartorial fashion. Two of these innovative YMO divisions—the Furious Five (who still parade today) and the Mellow Fellows—were formed in the 1980s. They were two of the earliest groups, along with the Lady Buckjumpers, to parade with the brass bands who were dramatically changing the sound of brass band music in the late-twentieth century (see chapter two for more on this time period). Even though the Mellow Fellows and Furious Five departed from YMO's traditional style of dress (trading in black and white suits for Technicolor ones) and dance (replacing upright, lateral step-touches with lightening-fast footwork and acrobatic buck jumping), these groups maintained the organization's insistence on practice. I spoke with three men who belonged to YMO, with time spent in the Mellow Fellows and/or Furious Five, for many years: Wellington "Skelly" Ratcliff, Jr., Kenneth "Slim" Washington, and

Don Robertson. They were each raised uptown, in YMO's (literal) stomping grounds, and once they became members, they participated in YMO's practices.

Wellington "Skelly" Ratcliff, Jr. joined YMO in the late 1970s, when he was just twelve years old. As a child, Skelly's grandmother brought him to second lines, and, "more and more, she started [to see that] I liked to dance to the music."<sup>183</sup> She approached a senior YMO member, Alfred "Bucket" Carter, and asked if her grandson could join. Skelly recalls that YMO "used to have second line practice just like [Mardi Gras] Indian practice," in which Mardi Gras Indian tribes gather at different bars throughout the city on Sunday evenings, during the months before Mardi Gras, to rehearse the signature forms of chanting, tambourine playing, and dancing. When I asked what exactly was taught during YMO practices, Skelly said that the formations were drilled. In all divisions of YMO, members were assigned specific locations in the lineup. One member was designated as the one to "lead the band," or to make sure that each member stayed in his designated location (lest he be fined). During practice, members rehearsed the transitions into and out of various formations. "They come into one line. Break down, put their fans down. All that was taught." Another veteran member of YMO, Kenneth "Slim" Washington, has fond memories of club practices. He left YMO some years ago, due to the financial commitment required of members, but when we talked in early 2014, he was considering dusting off his black-and-white suit and joining YMO's one hundred and thirtieth anniversary parade in September. Kenneth was one of the founding members of the Mellow Fellows. He recalls, "Us, with the Mellow Fellows,

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<sup>183</sup> Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014. All quotes from Ratcliff are taken from this interview.

we used to go through drills a month before the parade. We'd go in the park and practice for what we going to do that Sunday. So we know how we was going to act that Sunday, what we was going to do. [We practiced] where our spots was, what we going to do. It was off a big radio. We do it about thirty minutes, an hour at the most."<sup>184</sup> By parading in designated spots, moving into various formations and returning to their marching positions seamlessly, clubs like YMO and Lady Buckjumpers present themselves as in control of their performances. As Linda remarked, "It looks so pretty when it's all together," or performed in unison. Therefore, when the club breaks out of drilled, unison choreography and showcases improvised footwork and buck jumping, they leave no question that every movement of their performance—even the improvised movements—have been thoroughly rehearsed.

In fact, club practices allow time and space to practice improvised footwork. According to Linda, the Lady Buckjumpers "do all kinds of things [during practice]. We do a little drinking, so it turns into a New Orleans party. You have everybody dancing and you encouraging them along to do the best they could do. You know, that's one thing I like. We just love being with each other." Similarly, according to Kenneth, the Mellow Fellows would "just have a little fun, get a little ice chest of beer or something and we sit out there and party for that day. Make sure we know what we going to do that Sunday." The party atmosphere does not mean that members can relax at practice, for the spirit of competition drives them to hone their craft. For Kenneth, things started "getting serious" for the Mellow Fellows when they tried to out-dance a rival club, the Scene Boosters.

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<sup>184</sup> Kenneth Washington, interview with the author, May 22, 2014. All quotes from Washington are taken from this interview.

“We wanted to show them [Scene] Boosters up. Them Boosters was tearing it up. Them Boosters came rolling, rolling, rolling. Yeah, them Boosters was rolling.” “Rolling” refers to exuberant, improvised footwork and buck jumping, not to unison, drilled formations, and the Mellow Fellows were determined to come out the door rolling as best they could. To earn the respect of their communities, clubs like the Mellow Fellows and Lady Buckjumpers have to do more than march in clean lines: each member has to display his or her self-styled repertoire of sophisticated footwork and daring buck jumping stunts. According to Don “Ref” Robertson, founding member of the Furious Five division of YMO, “You can do anything you want on that sidewalk”—referring to the sideliners—“but when you main lining, all eyes on you. And everybody you see will be saying, ‘Come on! Come on!’ You can’t please everybody. You try. *I* try. And I pay for it.”<sup>185</sup> Don’s experiences resonate with most other club members, who push themselves to physical extremes in order to please the crowds who demand a constant display of energetic dancing, or “rolling,” throughout the four-hour parade. Although improvised by each individual, “rolling” also requires preparation, but that preparation takes a different form than drilling formations. As Skelly put it, the club “taught you the formation, but you pick up your steps.”

What might look like a mere party at these club practices is in fact an important form of preparation that also occurs in backyards, school yards, kitchens, nightclubs, and innumerable other spaces where second liners dance to the encouragement (and criticism)

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<sup>185</sup> Don Roberston, interview with the author, April 10, 2014. All quotes from Robertson are taken from this interview.

of their families and peers. Like the Mellow Fellows' practices, the Lady Buckjumpers' practices occur outdoors, to the soundtrack of recorded brass band music and lubricated with booze. The club members divide their time between drilling set formations and improvising footwork. In this way, their practices mimic a second line itself: the event demands intense physical output and focused performance, accompanied by alcohol, food, and friendly conversation. Practices give the Buckjumpers time and space to "pick up" footwork moves from each other and try out new buck jumping feats in front of fellow club members before they hit the streets. In so doing, they find out which moves please the crowd and which fall flat. Supported by the encouragement of their club, they push themselves to dance longer, with more effort, and with more variety each time. At their party-practices, the Lady Buckjumpers select steps, rehearse their sequences, and perform for an audience all at once. Their abilities to compress an entire choreographic process into an instant is so skilled that it appears to onlookers, and even feels to many dancers, as if it were natural.

Club practices may provide the most clearly delineated zone of second line choreography, but at every dance event, including second line parades, dancers are constantly "picking up" steps in less formal modes. In fact, the repetitive structure of second line parades disturbs any neat divisions between rehearsal and performance, or "studio" and "stage." During each parade's four-hour duration, dancers are presented with innumerable opportunities to repeat, and thus perfect or embellish, their footwork and buck jump moves. One might seize a few choice moments to dance in obvious spotlights (such as atop an porch or a truck bed), and at other times, might hide in the

crowd while trying out a new sequence of steps. Second lining's ritual calendar, which promises a parade almost every Sunday, offers dancers regular opportunities to simultaneously practice and perform second line choreographies. Each performance, then, is also an opportunity to practice. Skelly outlined the process through which most footwork choreography occurs: observing, mimicking, and tailoring moves to fashion one's own unique style. "You can't think you're going to do anybody's else's steps," he said. "Stealing moves, incorporate it into your own. That's what second lining is."

Tyree Smith, Secretary of Family Ties Social and Pleasure Club, remembers this process of stealing and self-styling when he first started second lining at thirteen years old, because, for him, second lining did not come naturally. He spent his childhood in the Seventh Ward, a neighborhood adjacent to Tremé. Given the stark separations historically dividing these two historically black neighborhoods,<sup>186</sup> it is no wonder that Tyree, even in the early 1980s, had never seen a second line until he ventured into Tremé at thirteen years old. He recalls attending his first second lines and trying to dance.

Oh my god it was hard! It was hard, it was real hard because at first I couldn't keep up. You know, I couldn't keep up with everybody. [...] So, I really was off beat I wasn't really—I felt unorthodox. So I started going on the regular, whether it was uptown, downtown, and I just started watching people. And I was like, 'Oh, I got that move. Oh, I got that move. OK, I can do this, I can do that.' So I just kind of put all that together and kind of created my own style with a little swag from this person, a little swag from that person. That's where I came from. That's what created me. From everybody else. It's always basically stealing. That's all you're doing is stealing different moves.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> For more on the history of the Seventh Ward and Tremé, see chapter two.

<sup>187</sup> Tyree Smith, interview with the author, February 18, 2014. All quotes from Smith are taken from this interview.



Tyree's narrative of creating himself as a second line dancer, which highlights intra-group differences between black New Orleanians, suggests that second lining is a rehearsed set of gestures, not reducible to a natural expression of all African American New Orleanians. He details *how* these gestures are rehearsed: by stealing moves.

However, stealing is just the first step; the second, and more crucial step, is to tailor stolen steps to create one's own unique style. Perhaps the most prized aspect of second lining is originality: you might steal steps from another person, but you have to make the steps your own if you want to be respected on the street. Terrinika Smith, for example, does not want to be seen as a mimic. As a dedicated second liner and member of the Jazzy Ladies SAPC (and Skelly's daughter), she wants to be the dancer generating the moves that others are trying to steal. Terrinika admires second liners who are "not trying to be somebody else. Because if you copy off of somebody else, they going to say, 'Man, they're doing what he doing.' But if you bring your own style, they going to say, 'Man I'm going to go home and try that!'"<sup>188</sup> By going home and trying that step, Terrinika prepares herself to improvise her footwork at the next second line. Practicing at home sharpens her improvisation skills, for when she creatively structures stolen steps in the moment of performance, she draws upon an ever-increasing repertoire. By making moment-to-moment artistic choices—to perhaps repeat, braid, or layer stolen steps<sup>189</sup>—in time with the rhythm, Terrinika choreographs her own carefully crafted footwork style as

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<sup>188</sup> Terrylyn Dorsey and Terrinika Smith, interview with the author, August 8, 2014. All quotes from Dorsey and Smith are taken from this interview.

<sup>189</sup> Jackson, "Improvisation," 42.

she performs it. She does so with such precision, speed, and fluidity that she might appear to be simply doing what comes natural.

The process of stealing, copying, and tailoring steps in the second line echoes a similar process in tap dancing, which, along with second lining, is contemporary manifestation of individual, percussive, foot-driven dancing rooted in nineteenth-century shuffle, jigs, and buck dancing. Tap historian Constance Valis Hill argues that the thrill of improvised dance comes from the ability to make decisions in the moment. Therefore, one cannot choreograph, in advance, an exact sequence of movements and try to pass it off as improvised, or else the vitality, danger, and excitement—the dare—of improvising is lost.<sup>190</sup> And yet, the ability to create such a thrill when making moment-to-moment decisions requires its own method of preparation before the improvising begins. Hill looks carefully at how tap dancers acquire technique: through various forms of mimicry, such as copying, stealing, and sharing, and finally, making mimicked steps one's own. Like the tap dancers that Hill discusses, second liners also engage in a process of structuring movement in the moment of performance, drawing on previous preparation, which includes previous performances at countless second line parades. Second liners steal and copy moves from others, but the artfulness comes in the choreography: creatively structuring the placement of feet, the sequence of moves, and the rhythmic accents in the moment of improvised performance at the second line.

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<sup>190</sup> Constance Valis Hill, "Stepping, Stealing, Sharing, and Daring: Improvisation and the Tap Dance Challenge," in *Taken By Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, ed. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 100. Imitation and innovation is a longstanding and primary mode of learning and choreographic invention in African American vernacular dance forms, not only in tap, but also in social dance forms like Lindy Hop. Stealing steps is described by dancers as an affectionate process of communal learning. See Anthea Kraut, "'Stealing Steps' and Signature Moves: Embodied Theories of Dance as Intellectual Property," *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (2010): 173-189.

Beyond stealing and styling, second liners who are invested in improving their footwork also occasionally find mentors, either from within their families, peer groups, or from older dancers. Tyree recalls that an older friend who paraded with Furious Five would give him advice: “You’re moving too fast. Pick your feet up. Slow down.” Roderick Davis, a member of Sudan Social Aid and Pleasure Club, received similar advice from his uncles as a young child. “They would tell me, just pace myself sometimes, I don’t have to always go fast. Stuff like that. I got all that told to me at a real early age.” Roderick was crowned champion of the First Annual Footwork Competition in 2014, and his reflections on his second lining prowess demonstrate his concentration on skilled mastery of footwork, and competition amongst other dancers. “I’m not going to say it’s cheating, I just felt like I got an edge over a lot of people because I learned so much when I was young. I wanted to learn. I wanted to know everything before it was time to know it. I was looking to see what I needed to do to make everything look like the moves were perfect. I wanted to be perfect.”<sup>191</sup> Roderick began consciously choreographing his second lining style at a young age, and his focus on perfection challenges any notions of second lining as a natural, and thus unrehearsed, expression.

Tyree and Roderick have both taken on the role of mentoring younger dancers. Tyree started a division within Family Ties to welcome young men who love to second line but could not afford the dues of regular membership. Roderick, in his early twenties, receives individual requests for tutelage. “Now, I mean, nobody tell me nothing, they

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<sup>191</sup> Roderick Davis, interview with the author, January 16, 2014. All quotes from Davis are taken from this interview.

come asking me. They come asking *me*. The same people that were older than me, [who] was telling me, [now they are] asking me. ‘Show me how to do this! Show me how to do that! I got to learn this move!’” He said that the wives of some male club members will ask him to come over to their houses the week before their husbands parade with a club, to show them a move or two before they main line with a club. Since most clubs do not hold official practices, like the Lady Buckjumpers and YMO do, club members who want to assistance in polishing their moves before parade day have to seek individual coaching. Roderick told me that he is usually too busy working his job as a restaurant cook to take these requests, but he loves to coach children at the second line, and can often be seen with a train of young people following him, imitating his quick, lanky steps.

Don Robertson has been approached many times by younger second liners who ask for tips and lessons, but he is reticent to offer advice—he’d rather lead by example. However, one young lady did convince him to show her a few of his moves. She asked him, “‘Show me some moves. Show me how you do this here.’ And I said, ‘Look – the boys ain’t going to like that from downtown,’” because Don is from uptown, and since this lady was from downtown, their collaboration could violate the norms of uptown/downtown footwork rivalry. But since Don already admired her dance ability, he decided to make an exception. “I said, ‘Now, if I’m showing you these moves, you know what? You got to make me proud.’ And she did!” Stories of informal mentorship like Don’s reveal yet another layer of second liners’ choreographic labor. Dancers transmit knowledge, perfect technique, and creatively assemble sequences from a shared

vocabulary—in other words, they choreograph their second lining—as a solo pursuit at home, under the gaze of friends and family, and/or under the scrutiny of mentors.

While club practices, second line parades, brass band concerts and SAPC fundraiser dances are important venues for second liners to practice, receive and give coaching, and steal, refine, and invent new moves, many second liners' dance education begins at home. Skelly recalls, "I really learned how to dance from my mom and them. My mom and them would get together, family gatherings, and they'd get in the house, put music on, and you'd be in the room, they'd come out: 'Come show me you know how to dance!'" Similarly, Don's first audience was his was family, who challenged and encouraged him.

My grandparents used to say, when all of us get together, 'Come on, let me see you dance. Let me see you dance.' Back then, for my family, I'm like, 'Naw.' So I didn't do it! Until one day I'm at the second line and I'm dancing, and I say, '*Damn* I'm good!' I said, 'Next time grandma asks to see a move, I got something for her.' So I went to dancing, clicked out in my little zone, came up with all fresh moves.

Kenneth told me a similar story. "I used to come up in the Magnolia [Housing] Project. My mom and them, on a Friday night, they'd get a couple of friends by the house. They'd pay us, [they'd say], 'Come on inside and second line.' And yeah, we'd go against each other. We'd get on the middle of the floor, and we'd jump, we'd jump! And they'd give the winner twenty, twenty-five dollars." When I asked him to describe his footwork style, Kenneth said, "I do whatever I feel," but "when I parade, I know what I'm doing. It's all in my system. That's the effect of what that parade do. When I hear the music, I'm going to get in the groove. That's just me. I was raised with that second line." Kenneth's last comment suggests that second lining is "in his system" can be read as a claim to his

natural ability. However, given his descriptions of group practice, in informal settings at home and in more formal settings with his club, we can also conclude that second lining is in Kenneth's system due to a lifetime of repeated exposure within his system of family, friend, and club networks.

Skelly's, Don's, and Kenneth's dance experiences with family resonate with those of a younger generation. Walter Kimble, a dedicated footwork artist in his early twenties, also claims that his second line education began with his family. Walter started parading with the Sidewalk Steppers SAPC, a Tremé-based club known for its excellent dancers, when he was five years old. He was raised in Tremé; his father was an original member of the Sidewalk Steppers, and his first dance model. As a child, Walter followed his father during second lines, trying his best to imitate as his father dropped to the ground, hopped up, and showcased intricate footwork. In between Sunday parades, Walter and his father danced at home, often in the form of a father-and-son battle. "We'll be at home, and actually my dad, he's a DJ, so he has a lot of second line songs. So he'd put on a second line CD and we'll just second line, and just get better."<sup>192</sup> Walter and his cousin, another well-respected footwork artist, also danced at home together as children.

WK: His momma [Walter's aunt] paraded with my dad, the Sidewalk Steppers. Me and him grew up battling each other. That's how I got better too. We'll be at his house just parading around the house.

RC: In the house or outside?

WK: In the house, because we don't want to show nobody our moves. We tag-team second line too. We do tricks together, like grab our arms and go like a rodeo, fall back, go under each other's legs and stuff. That's team second lining.

The influence of family has also been important for Terrinika. When

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<sup>192</sup> Walter Kimble, interview with the author, May 27, 2014. All quotes from Kimble are taken from this interview.

she was a child, her mother paraded with a club called the Lady Sequins, and these women provided her earliest examples of second lining.

I was five years old when Lady Sequins used to come out uptown on Dryades Street. That was my first second line. It was a group of women and they used to wear these hats with furs, and they used to come down the steps. I was like ‘Man, I want to do *just* what they doing!’ And I went home, and I was like, ‘Mom, look at me!’ And I put her clothes on. [...] I didn’t put her pants on, I just put her little jacket on and her little hat, and her little gloves, [...] and I was like, ‘I’m coming out the door!’ And she was like, ‘Look at this girl, she know how to second line!’ And I was like, ‘I be watching y’all, I be watching y’all.’

As early as five years old, Terrinika was already starting to observe, mimic, and steal moves from the women she emulated: her mother and other Lady Sequins. Terrinika’s early second line experiences are evident in her intricate footwork today. As anthropologist Margaret Drewal observes, when performers “have been trained from childhood in particular techniques,” it enables them “to play spontaneously with learned, in-body formulas. This kind of mastery distinguishes a brilliant performer from a merely competent one.”<sup>193</sup> As Terrinika’s and others’ experiences make evident, childhood training in second line vocabularies produces spectacularly skilled improvisers.

Second lining is performed, in New Orleans, as an aesthetically specific vocabulary of movement, despite practitioners’ characterization of it as simply do watcha wanna. In various settings, from kitchens to nightclubs to sidewalks, second liners practice, perform, prepare, and perfect their dancing. Their choreographic labor challenges essentialist notions of second lining as an uncomplicated expression that dancers access naturally, effortlessly, and spontaneously. However, the ways in which

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<sup>193</sup> Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 7.

second liners choreograph their footwork— practicing, stealing, styling, coaching, and modeling—privileges a do-watcha-wanna sensibility, so that tradition and innovation reinforce one another. Anthea Kraut suggests that, in African American vernacular dance forms, the solo-group dynamic of improvisation both encourages individual embellishment even while it guarantees aesthetic continuity of the performed tradition.<sup>194</sup> Through the exchanges described above, second liners form an “aesthetic community” whose “shared knowledge” has not (yet) circulated far beyond the communities of African Americans in New Orleans who have been second lining since the late-nineteenth century.<sup>195</sup> For this reason, second lining has earned the privileged status as a bodily discourse that most thoroughly articulates the histories, values, and sensibilities of black New Orleans. Put another way, second lining feels like a natural expression of self and place to dancers whose lives and identities are rooted in black New Orleans.<sup>196</sup> This does not mean that current dancers do the same dance as their ancestors at Congo Square—they are constantly inventing new moves. But their shared knowledge, transmitted through informal networks, “ensure[s] that the modifications made by an individual performer” neither violate nor abandon the stylistic codes of the form, even as the

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<sup>194</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 131-132.

<sup>195</sup> Kraut borrows the term “aesthetic community” from scholar Gerald Davis, who defines it as “‘a group of people sharing knowledge for the development and maintenance of a particular affecting mode or ‘craft’ and the articulating principles to which the affecting mode must adhere or oppose [in performance].”’ *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know: A Study of the African-American Sermon* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 30-31, qtd. in Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 132.

<sup>196</sup> As Barbara Browning states, even our most “natural” acts contain choreographic elements. In other words, the things that we find most natural have been learned through acts of transmission and carry with them culturally specific values, constructs, and ideologies. “Breast Milk is Sweet and Salty (A Choreography of Healing),” in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. by André Lepecki (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 104.



aesthetic community rewards individual style showcased through innovations and elaborations.<sup>197</sup> A dynamic play between mastery of the stylistic codes and creative uses of them characterizes the artistic, social, and political landscape in which second liners choreograph aesthetically sophisticated, historically rooted, and politically potent footwork. They continue to choreograph their way through struggle with tectonic footwork and tactical mobility.<sup>198</sup>

### **Choreographies of Disaster**

If we unpack the assumption that second lining is a spontaneous, natural expression of New Orleans's African American residents, then what might we learn about the racialized dimensions of supposedly spontaneous, natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, which overwhelmingly affect(ed) those same people? Put differently, what can second line choreography teach us about disaster choreography? In both dance and disaster, discourses of the natural make the uneven effects of racial capitalism appear natural, necessary, and inevitable. Disasters, as man-made choreographies of violence (and not simply "oversight"), shape and are shaped by the same social forces that come to matter, or materialize, in second line dancing.

In 2010, five years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, *Time* magazine proclaimed, "It took a while, but the prevailing narrative is finally starting to reflect that Katrina was a man-made disaster, not a natural disaster, triggered by shoddy engineering,

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<sup>197</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 132.

<sup>198</sup> As discussed in the introduction, my analysis of second lining as a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility is informed by Clyde Woods' notion of "tectonic footing" in blues epistemologies, and Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz's notion of "tactical mobility" as deployed by New Orleans artists and activists. Woods, *Development Arrested*, 29; Fischlin, et. al., *Urgency of Now*, 162.

not an overwhelming hurricane.”<sup>199</sup> While *Time* correctly identifies engineering failures as a human cause of Katrina’s catastrophe, it does not consider the inequitable social structures that rendered those failures more disastrous for certain populations. Analysts, social critics, and activists took up that position in scholarly articles, blog posts, and in-depth journalistic accounts published quickly after the storm.<sup>200</sup> For example, Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires’ edited volume, *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, addresses New Orleans’s pre-Katrina terrain of poverty and racism that enabled the catastrophe to disproportionately impact New Orleans’ poor and black residents.<sup>201</sup> Best-selling author Michael Eric Dyson made similar claims for a wider audience. His account, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane*

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<sup>199</sup> Michael Grunwald, “Katrina: A Man-Made Disaster,” *Time Magazine*’s “Timeframes”, November 24, 2010, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://content.time.com>. Disaster sociologist Katherine Tierney also acknowledged that public response to Katrina marked a turning point in the United States’ history with calamity, finally giving mainstream traction to the notion that natural disasters are man-made. “From the Margins to the Mainstream? Disaster Research at the Crossroads,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 210-211.

<sup>200</sup> Beyond the examples cited in this chapter, other texts that explicitly name Katrina as an “unnatural disaster” include William R. Freduenberg, Robert Gramling, Shirley Laska and Kai T. Erkison, *Catastrophe in the Making: The Engineering of Katrina and the Disasters of Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press/Sheawater Books, 2009); Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); and Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), which grew out of two “Race, Place, and Environment” symposia held Dillard University in New Orleans in October 2006 and May 2008. The Social Science Research Center created a website shortly after the storm, *Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, as a platform for quickly published, widely available analyses of the social, versus natural, dimensions of the disaster. Accessed March 17, 2015, <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org>. See also Cedric Johnson’s edited collection of essays, *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), and Vincanne Adams’ single-authored text, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). Both of the latter two texts join other critiques of the “natural” disaster but add a focus on the recovery, writing against neoliberalization in the “second-order disaster” that was the recovery from the storm and floods.

<sup>201</sup> Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds., *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

*Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, opens with a chapter entitled, “Unnatural Disasters: Race and Poverty.” Dyson censures the American majority for a societal refusal to face poverty and racism in everyday circumstances and a willingness to express outrage, which can substitute for compassion, in the event of a disaster. “When a disaster like Katrina strikes—a *natural* disaster not directly caused by human failure—it frees us to be aware of, and angered by, the catastrophe. After all, it doesn’t directly implicate us; it was an act of God.”<sup>202</sup> Critical responses to Katrina, such as these, revealed the stakes of mislabeling the disaster as natural.

In 2010, a greater percentage of the public might have come to understand that disasters are caused by human actions, but this was not a new idea in disaster research. In the words of Gregory Bankoff, “history prefigures disaster.”<sup>203</sup> Since 1980, anthropologists and sociologists have viewed disasters as constructed features of human systems, as opposed to a previous view of disasters as unpredictable events.<sup>204</sup> Anthropologists use the term “produced vulnerability” to describe the social forces that render some populations more susceptible to disaster than others.<sup>205</sup> Vulnerability to the event depends on histories of colonialism and underdevelopment—and in the case of

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<sup>202</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas Books), 3-4.

<sup>203</sup> Gregory Bankoff, “Rendering the World Unsafe: ‘Vulnerability’ in Western Discourse,” *Disasters* 25, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>204</sup> Disaster theorists who articulate the point of view of produced disaster also include Anthony Oliver-Smith, “Anthropological Research on Hazards and Disasters,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996); and Tierney, “From the Margins to the Mainstream?”

<sup>205</sup> Oliver-Smith, “Hazards and Disasters.”

New Orleans, we can add histories of neoliberal disinvestment in social welfare—that reproduce contemporary inequalities.<sup>206</sup>

The concept of produced vulnerability helps to explain why Katrina’s impacts were so drastically uneven. All New Orleanians were jeopardized by the federal, state, and local governments’ systematic neglect of the city’s flood protection system and the coastal wetlands that protect Louisiana from hurricanes.<sup>207</sup> But poor and working-class African American New Orleanians were positioned to suffer the most. Since the beginning of the city’s history, these residents have been forced to live on marginal land: flood-prone areas with low property values and limited job opportunities.<sup>208</sup> Combined with other forms of systemic racism and neoliberal policies typical of many U.S. cities since the mid-twentieth century—such as governmental disinvestment in public housing, inequitable public schools, lack of affordable health care, a prison industrial complex that targets black and brown residents, and the privatization of social safety nets—New

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<sup>206</sup> Davida Finger and Rachel E. Luft, “No Shelter: Disaster Politics in Louisiana and the Struggle for Human Rights,” in *Human Rights in the United States: Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. by Shareen Hertel and Kathryn Libel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 292; Oliver-Smith, “Anthropological Research on Hazards and Disasters,” 305, 314.

<sup>207</sup> Exacerbating the decades of neglectful maintenance to Southeast Louisiana’s levees and pumps, the Bush Administration (supported by Democrats) proposed a \$641 million cut to the Army Corps in 2001 and an additional \$390 million in 2002. Half of the funding for the Southern Louisiana Flood Control Project and \$389 million in disaster relief funding were also cut. Johnson, *Neoliberal Deluge*, xxx. Coastal wetlands are often overlooked as part of flood protection, but they are vital in helping to reduce flooding from hurricane storm surges: for every 3.4 miles of healthy coastal wetlands a storm surge must travel over, the surge is estimated to diminish by one foot. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service estimates that over half of the wetlands in the Gulf of Mexico were lost between 1780 and 1980. Mostly due to damage caused by the construction and development of the oil and gas and logging industries, an estimated 396,800 acres of freshwater wetlands were lost between 1998 and 2004 in the Gulf of Mexico, almost 25 times higher than those estimates for the Atlantic Coast. “Wetlands,” *Gulf Restoration Network*, accessed March 1, 2015. <http://www.healthygulf.org/our-work/wetlands/>.

<sup>208</sup> Breunlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map,” 746.

Orleans's history of abandoning its poor and working-class black residents (a large percentage of the city's population before the storm<sup>209</sup>) produced a large, racially-defined population with a much greater vulnerability to any natural disaster. Hurricane Katrina may have been unpredictable, but the fact that black residents suffered more loss than white residents was not.

The danger of labeling the disaster as "natural" is that it then becomes unavailable to analysis, protected by a cloud of inevitability and resignation to the idea that the forces of nature are beyond anyone's control. Authors like those cited here repeatedly responded to Katrina with a viewpoint that, after five years, took hold as a prevailing narrative: the disaster of Katrina was un/natural. In other words, Katrina revealed that, "what we intuitively understand as natural and the effects of forces purportedly beyond our control, on closer and more sustained critical reflection, show the operations of social relations and social logics."<sup>210</sup> This is not to say that tornados, earthquakes, and hurricanes are completely caused by human action (although research on climate change as a factor in more frequent and severe natural hazards further blurs the distinction between natural and social causes<sup>211</sup>). Nevertheless, the research has made two things abundantly clear. First,

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<sup>209</sup> The poverty rate in New Orleans prior to the storm was twenty-three percent, seventy-six percent higher than the national average of thirteen percent. Of those living in poverty, a large percentage was comprised of African American residents. According to U.S. Census data from 2004, sixty-eight percent of the city's population identified as African American. African American New Orleanians earned a median income of \$18,939, as compared to \$31,479 for white New Orleanians, and significantly lower than the national average for African Americans, \$22,575. In 2004, New Orleans residents also lived with markers of poverty beyond earned income, such as lack of health insurance, lack of access to vehicles, and lower-than-average Medicaid payments. "Who Are Katrina's Victims?," *Center for American Progress*, September 6, 2005, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.americanprogress.org>.

<sup>210</sup> Gray, "Where the Natural and Social Meet," 89.

<sup>211</sup> Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 16; Tierney, "From the Margins to the Mainstream?"

a person's ability to prepare for and recover from calamity is heavily determined by social forces such as class, race, gender, and citizenship status; second, the floods following Hurricane Katrina incurred most of the city's damage, and the floods were due to engineering failures and decades of neglect, not the natural force of the storm.

In light of these facts, governmental insistence upon labeling Katrina as a natural disaster can be considered as tantamount to discursive violence. In 2001, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called its members to replace the language of "natural disasters" with "un/natural disasters."<sup>212</sup> And yet, to this day, the Federal Emergency Management Agency still calls Katrina "the single most catastrophic natural disaster and costliest hurricane in U.S. history," and the Army Corps of Engineers attributes the flooding to "[t]he damage wrought by the storm [which] was unprecedented."<sup>213</sup> Both entities carefully avoid any language that would attribute destruction to human agency, and keep the disaster firmly in the category of the natural. Such utterances re-perform ideologies of the natural in order for disasters like Katrina to appear spontaneous and unrehearsed, thereby denying the fact that every step leading to the disaster was, in the words of political scientist Cedric Johnson, "a conscious step toward the valuing of the investor class over all life."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> The IFRC's Secretary-General Didier Cherpitel wrote at the time, "In many cases, nature's contribution to 'natural' disasters is simply to expose the effects of deeper, structural causes – from global warming and unplanned urbanization to trade liberalization and political marginalization. The effects of man's action are often evident – many natural catastrophes are un/natural in their origins." Quoted in Jackson, "Un/natural Disasters," n.p.

<sup>213</sup> "Louisiana Recovery Office," *Federal Emergency and Management Agency*, accessed March 1, 2015. <http://www.fema.gov/louisiana-recovery-office/>; "New Orleans District." *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/Missions/HSDRRS/RiskReductionPlan.aspx>.

<sup>214</sup> Johnson, *The Neoliberal Deluge*, xix.

Disaster sociologist Katherine Tierney called Katrina a “disaster by design,” which, I argue, could also be called a “choreographed disaster:” a “natural event” that became a disaster due to human decisions, designs, and plans executed long before (and after) the hurricane hit.<sup>215</sup> The histories of neglect, design, and (in)decision that prefigured Katrina can be seen as a vast disaster choreography. Multiple levels of government, guided by neoliberal ideologies, choreographed the movement of water, bodies, and capital with more precision and intention than “neglect” surrounding a “natural” disaster would suggest. Studied neglect of the city’s flood protection system before the storm amounted to more than inept oversight, but was shaped by active decisions, such as bipartisan, widespread tax cuts to federal flood protection and disaster relief programs in the early 2000s. This recent history is not surprising if we consider the fact that federal levee systems had their origins in facilitating big business, with public protection as an afterthought.<sup>216</sup> While partially accurate, discourses of neglect and ineptitude surrounding Katrina can emphasize a lack of action by the powerful on behalf of the city’s most vulnerable. To characterize the disaster as choreographed suggests even

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<sup>215</sup> Tierney, “From the Margins to the Mainstream?,” 507, 510.

<sup>216</sup> The engineering of levee systems has been prioritizing economic profit over social welfare since long before the ideological mandates of neoliberal capitalism took root. Prior to Roosevelt’s 1936 Flood Control Act, New Orleans’ levee system was largely a localized matter. The Flood Control Act produced public benefits but its chief goal was to facilitate and enhance commercial activity and national security. Johnson, *Neoliberal Deluge*, xxvi-xxxii. Even prior to 1930s federal responsibility, U.S. flood control began in the late nineteenth century as a way to promote economic development. Over the course of the twentieth century, demands on the program to provide public safety incrementally increased as the number of people (often poor African Americans and other marginalized groups) living in flood-prone areas dramatically rose. These demands were not met with coordinated policies at local, state, and federal levels, but with patchwork programs that left poor people of color in vulnerable positions. Karen O’Neill, “Who Sank New Orleans? How Engineering the River Created Environmental Injustice,” in *Katrina’s Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, ed. by Keith Wailoo, Karen M. O’Neill, Jeffrey Dowd, and Roland Anglin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

more strongly that decades of studied neglect did more than *fail* to direct where, when, and how water, capital, and bodies moved (or did not move) before, during, and after the levees broke. Politicians, corporations, and fiscal elites made active decisions that scripted how the disaster would unfold. Hurricane Katrina is not best understood as an unpredictable, spontaneous, and aberrant event caused by natural forces, but as a predictable outcome choreographed by histories of economic, environmental, and social disaster.

While *Time* magazine proclaimed that Katrina was a man-made versus a natural disaster, the magazine omitted any discussion of racism in its acknowledgement of the man-made disaster. The age of colorblindness makes it difficult to openly acknowledge the active role of institutional racism in the choreography of disaster. Several scholars have suggested that the post-civil rights era brand of colorblind or post-racial racism in the U.S. has effectively shifted the discourse around racism to deny race at all.<sup>217</sup> Instead, inequalities can be blamed on individual circumstances (“lack of effort, loose family organization, inappropriate values”) and the need to keep law and order (“more black men are in jail because they commit more crimes”). The terms of colorblind racism makes it easy to deny, and difficult to prove documented patterns of race-based discrimination in labor markets, mortgage lending, college admissions, and the prison

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<sup>217</sup> Writing specifically about Katrina, Eric Ishiwata claims that colorblind racism is the reason that the “sudden emergence” of what *Newsweek* called “the Other America” during Katrina was so shocking for much of the United States. He writes, “America’s Others had been rendered invisible by the ideological force of ‘colorblind racism,’ a neoliberal fantasy that has effectively recoded the incongruent effects of systemic racism in stringently individual and nonracial terms [...]. What reigned [prior to Katrina], then, was an artfully pliable form of governmentality that structured political life in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class while simultaneously disavowing the very significance of these categories.” “‘We Are Seeing People,’” 35-36. See also Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; and Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*.



industrial complex. Colorblind racism allows dramatic inequalities to appear less like choreographed, produced situations and more like the natural and inevitable order of things.

Discourses of the natural not only factored into Katrina's devastation by veiling its choreographed histories, but also by leveraging ideologies of black primitivity to justify inequitable disaster response. In the discourse of post-Katrina, nineteenth-century rhetoric of the beastly "Negro" found a new guise, when black primitivity was used to withdraw, versus impose, state forces. As Michael Eric Dyson and Clyde Woods have illustrated, the media framed African American flood victims as violent outlaws and animalistic savages, spreading exaggerated reports of looting and unsubstantiated rumors of social anarchy, including instances of rape, theft, and murder. Reports—such as an "alert" that appeared on *Fox News* television about "violent gangs [...] roaming the streets at night"—suggested that these victims (and citizens) did not deserve the intervention nor the protection of the state, but should be left to kill each other.<sup>218</sup> As Dyson surmised, "The message seemed to be: 'If this is how they act, if this is who they are, then their inhumanity is a justification for not rushing to their rescue.'"<sup>219</sup> This message has not been limited to times of acute crisis, as in the post-Katrina weeks, but has guided a studied neglect of the United States' black urban poor for decades, and it echoes Jane Desmond's formulations of presumptions about social dancing: they are how

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<sup>218</sup> Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, 170-171; Woods, "Do You Know What It Means," 1014-1015.

<sup>219</sup> Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*, 174.

they dance, and they dance how they are. Crime and dancing are both offered up as unmediated evidence of a primitive black racial character.<sup>220</sup>

Understanding how Katrina's devastation was in part permitted under the guise of natural causes, and how the state's criminal (lack of) response was justified with appeals to black savagery, underlines the stakes for understanding how ideologies of the natural find safe haven in discourses of dance. By no means are they equivalent, but given the tenacity and persistence of such messages, it is important to locate these ideologies where they exist—even, and perhaps especially, in arenas that seem simply for pleasure, frivolity, and benign appreciation of black expressive culture. In discourses surrounding dance and disaster, associations made between blackness and the natural share roots in racist biases that equate the "African character" with an essential primitive nature that lacks history, reason, and intellect. In the realm of dance, assumptions about "how they are" are given permission to persist, located far from the clearly injurious media images of savage crime. If we pay close attention to the ideologies that imbue rhetoric about dance, we will see that discussions about dance are always about much more than dance.

### **The Right to Opacity: Recuperating the Natural**

I conclude this chapter by returning to Tamara Jackson's claim that second lining comes naturally to her. Her perspective resonates with another second liner, Doratha

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<sup>220</sup> Media images of black suffering and discourses of black savagery not only distorted the lived realities of African American disaster victims; they also overshadowed the struggles of middle-class black residents and white residents in general. As Breunlin and Regis observe, the majority-black Ninth Ward "became a metaphor for poverty, race, and neglect [...]. At the same time, poor whites flooded out of their homes in adjoining St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes were underrepresented among the images of desperate victims waiting to be rescued. Even now, the more affluent Lakeview, Pontchartrain Park, and Gentilly neighborhoods are not defined by the deaths in these areas in the same way as the Ninth Ward." "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 748.

“Dodie” Smith Simmons. When I asked Dodie how she began second lining, she replied with a chuckle, “Quite easily... It’s something that comes natural.”<sup>221</sup> Claims of natural dance ability, as made by Tamara, Dodie, and many African American New Orleanians, trouble any straightforward critique of the natural, such as the one that I have laid out above. What does it mean that Euro-Americans have found the African character of naturalness as justification for colonialism, even while Tamara and Dodie experience natural expression as freeing, healing, and joyful? To pursue these contradictions, I conclude with several stories told to me by Dodie and her husband John. Their anecdotes and reflections demonstrate that ideologies of the natural have different material effects in different contexts, injurious in one domain but empowering in another. And yet, ideologies are unruly; they do not stay neatly tucked into discrete boxes of transparent meaning. Differently inflected for different speakers, audiences, and dancers, ideologies of the natural are always reinforcing and contradicting one another in a slippery circulation.

In the fall of 2013, I interviewed Dodie and John Simmons at their apartment in the Mid-City neighborhood of New Orleans. John, a white British trumpet player, came to New Orleans in the 1960s. He was one of many British jazz musicians at that time looking to learn technique from older, accomplished musicians at Preservation Hall, a music venue for traditional jazz opened by Alan Jaffe in the French Quarter in 1961. Dodie has lived in New Orleans since 1945, when she was two years old. She was raised in the Ninth Ward, where no second lines rolled through neighborhood streets until the

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<sup>221</sup> Doratha and John Simmons, interview with the author, November 8, 2013. All quotes from Doratha and John Simmons are taken from this interview, unless otherwise noted.

late-twentieth century. But she was surrounded by music played at local bars and at fish fries or rent parties, which, before jukeboxes were available, always featured a trio or at least a pianist. “There was always music around. We would have a good time with music and dance.” Occasionally, she would follow a jazz funeral or, when she was in high school, she and her classmates would dance in the schoolyard, pressed up against the fence, as a brass band paraded past. When I asked Dodie how she began second lining, she replied with a chuckle, “Quite easily.”

No one teaches you how to second line, it’s just something you do from the feel of the music. [...] I was surprised when you were saying that people are teaching second line, because I’ve never heard of that before. It’s something that comes natural. It’s part of the African tradition. [...] Nobody taught you anything. You’d go to a funeral or a social aid and pleasure club [parade], you’d see little kids, two, three, four years old, and they’re doing incredible steps. And you’re wondering, who taught them? Nobody taught them. It’s just something that you feel. It’s just something that comes from within.

Even though Dodie had never heard of anyone teaching second line, she was once drafted to do just that. Upon graduating high school in 1960, Dodie became heavily involved with the civil rights movement in New Orleans, and because “we didn’t make much money in the civil right movement,” she spent her evenings listening to music outside the windows of Preservation Hall. By 1966, Dodie’s constant presence at the club led to a position on staff. In the early 1970s, she became one of the original organizers of a new jazz music festival that came to be known as the Jazz and Heritage Festival. Through this work, she was drafted to organize tours of traditional brass bands to countries such as Germany, Japan, Thailand, and Portugal. It was on a return trip to Portugal that she was asked to offer a second line dance class as part of the band’s visit.

The third year that I went to Portugal they asked us to do a class to teach people how to second line. [...] I would talk, and people didn't want to get up because they didn't want to be embarrassed. And I said, like I always say, 'Can you walk?' And I'd have everybody to walk and the band would play. 'Listen to the music, move to the music.' After a while they're all dancing. I'd say, 'See? I told you [that] you could second line. Anybody can second line. There's just no way to second—to say that there's exact step that you got to do. You just let the music move you.

Dodie told me another story about a different trip to Portugal, which contradicts the previous story in some ways. If teaching the Portuguese to second line proved that anybody can do it, then the following story complicates that do-watcha-wanna narrative.

I was standing in the back of the band, and I saw these three or four black guys dancing like we second line in New Orleans. So I thought, 'Oh this is somebody from New Orleans!' So I go running across, talking to these guys. I say, 'Where are you from?' They say, 'Algiers.' [I say,] 'Oh! Across the river!'

Dodie, John, and I exploded with laughter at this part of the story, because we knew that Dodie had assumed that these men were from the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans, an area located directly across the Mississippi River from the French Quarter; but in fact, they were referring to the capital of Algeria. She laughed to recall her enthusiastic yet erroneous assumption, and shook her head. "Stupid me. No, no. They look at me. 'No, we're Africans.' [I say,] 'But we dance like this in New Orleans. You're second lining!'" I asked what kinds of movements they were doing to make her think that they were from New Orleans.

Just like we do. [...] They were dancing around with one leg straight up in the air, and their hands up. They were all dancing like that, and doing all the moves that we do. And here we think this is something we started, [but] this is something that's from the motherland [of Africa]. So that was great to see. And to just realize that a lot of this stuff that we do in New Orleans is a carry-over from the cultural heritage of Africa.

For Dodie, second lining is something that comes naturally to her—and to the majority of second liners, who have historically been people of African descent—because of her/their cultural heritage. No one had to teach her, nor the children doing “incredible steps,” because cultural inheritance is not taught. However, Dodie does not limit second lining ability to people of African descent. The Portuguese people she “taught” to second line were able to do it simply because they were moving to brass band music. These two stories contradict each other somewhat. If second lining is a carry-over from the cultural heritage of Africa, and therefore naturally available to people of the African diaspora, then what explains the ability of Europeans, or anyone else who can walk, to second line?

Further contradictions emerged during the course of our conversation, especially when John told a story about attending Sunday brunches at the Hilton Hotel to hear his fellow musicians play with Plessy Adams and the Heritage Hall Jazz Band. “He [the bass player] would get people up to second line and you could always tell, right? [This is] what he used to say. You had these ladies—” Here John paused his story to stand up from the couch, next to his coffee table, and imitate the Hilton patrons’ dancing. He began lurching forward with his feet glued to the floor—“You had these ladies doing the Honky Hop.” John laughed as he sat back down and Dodie jumped in to decode the joke for me.

DS: Because most of the customers at the brunch would be white.

JS: (Still laughing) That’s what he would call it.

DS: Look at P.- she was white but she was a great second liner, because she hung around musicians she worked at Dixieland Hall [a club on Bourbon Street]. You just feel the music and let it move you. You don’t have to take no class.

If white second liners are able to become great dancers, and to avoid the Honky Hop, then according to Dodie, this ability does not come from technical instruction. It comes

from a willingness to feel the music and let oneself be moved. Of course, one could argue that the patrons at the Hilton were feeling the music and letting it move them as well. But Dodie credits P.'s great dancing with the fact that she hung around musicians. Due to her repeated exposure to the music and to other second liners, she was able to perform a version of do watcha wanna that was legible to Dodie as "great" (and perhaps natural) second lining, which meant it appeared more like an expression of African cultural heritage and less like the Honky Hop. Due to repeated exposure, P.'s dancing was legible as second lining. P.'s preparation probably involved the same techniques described by the second liners quoted above: watching, stealing, copying, and crafting stolen moves into her own style, perhaps even guided by the tutelage of one dedicated coach and/or the watchful eyes of fellow paraders.

Why do some second liners insist upon second lining as do watcha wanna, as something that comes naturally, even when they themselves recognize that some dancing is (more) legible as second lining than other kinds of movement, and even reward "good" second lining? On one level, questions of natural expression hinge upon a dancer's interest in competitive performance. In the quote cited above, Tamara acknowledges that people come to second lines for many reasons, and not everyone is interested in dancing "elaborately," which usually means showcasing footwork and/or buck jumping. For those who are happy to "trot," questions of preparation, skill, and legibility are perhaps less pertinent. Those who consciously engage in efforts to learn, perfect, and teach second lining—such as Linda Porter, Wellington Ratcliff, Kenneth Washington, Don Robertson, Roderick Davis, Terrylynn Dorsey, and Terrinika Smith—discuss second lining in terms

of competitive performance in addition to dancing as a natural expression of their selves, place, or past. The capacious, inclusive ethos of second lining means that it is, at once, do watcha wanna *and* an aesthetically specific, historically grounded dance technique. It is anything done when a parader walks in time to brass band music, and it is also a recognizable set of specific aesthetic codes, or “how we dance in New Orleans.” In the words of one veteran second liner, “You’ll be second lining, some people be doing what they do. And then they have some people that have *footwork* and it becomes an art.”<sup>222</sup> It is a walk, a trot, a buck jump, and series of intricate footwork steps. The same dancer often enters the each of these modes from block to block, switching between representative second line footwork styles and do-watcha-wanna dancing (which might allow the second liner to bring in other repertoires, such as hip hop, salsa, or social dances from bygone eras), and lingering in the gray areas in between.

Beyond the inclusiveness of second lining technique, I also see a glimpse of resistance in the contradiction between what second liners say and do. It could be viewed as the expression of a marginalized people exercising a right to what Edouard Glissant has called “opacity.” According to Glissant, a Caribbean-born, post-colonial philosopher and poet, westerners insist on a right to understand Afro-Caribbean cultures (New Orleans falls under this banner), or to see them transparently and clearly, and do not accept that some cultural practices are complex enough that an outsider (or perhaps an insider) could never grasp them in their totality. He writes, “If we look at the process of ‘understanding’ beings and ideas as it operates in western society, we find that it is

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<sup>222</sup> Terry “Squillee” Gable, interview with the author, January 24, 2014.



founded on an insistence on this kind of transparency. In order to ‘understand’ and therefore accept you, I must reduce your density to this scale of conceptual measurement which gives me a basis for comparisons and perhaps for judgments.”<sup>223</sup> In a colonialist formulation, understanding can operate as an act of aggression because it constructs the Other as an object of knowledge. In turn, a refusal to be known can function as a tactic of resistance to oppression.<sup>224</sup> Second liners’ insistence that the dancing is no more than what comes naturally, uttered while performing a definitive aesthetic vocabulary, is one gesture toward the right to opacity, or the right to not be understood in the hierarchical, objectifying way that usually operates between ethnographers and their subjects.

A discourse of the natural, forwarded by practitioners as *do watcha wanna*, can be seen, then, as a form of subaltern resistance. By refusing to define second lining as an object of knowledge, *do watcha wanna* adherents keep second lining out of the technical realm of formalized knowledge transmission. With a tricky, slightly deceptive refusal to be known, second liners exercise agency in keeping the dance form circulating in the historically marginalized communities that created and maintain it. *Do watcha wanna* conceals from outsiders what insiders already know—that footwork and buck jump skills are honed in the social-ritual spaces of kitchen floors, back yards, and back-of-town streets—and anyone who has to ask for dancing tips might have suspect motives for gaining this information. Second lining’s performance in public spaces might prompt the

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<sup>223</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 204, trans. and qtd. in Britton, *Edouard Glissant*, 19.

<sup>224</sup> Britton, *Edouard Glissant*, 19-20.

urgency for disguising its secrets in discourse, versus in performance.<sup>225</sup> Dodie, Tamara, and others who insist that second lining is their natural expression, forward a counter-hegemonic discourse that reinforces the dance's sociopolitical context on the fringes of capital and institutional frameworks, and honors the dance's history as a form developed in response to racial capitalism. Furthermore, do watcha wanna prioritizes *why* second liners dance over *how* the dancing is done, valuing the dance's function as a vehicle for spiritual transcendence and community-building over the details of right and wrong technique.<sup>226</sup> Do watcha wanna grounds second lining in its social-ritual spaces and maintains authority and ownership over this cultural knowledge within the second line community. While there is political power in critiquing discourses of the natural in hegemonic domains, such as the critiques outlined in this chapter, it would be a mistake to subject claims like Dodie's and Tamara's to the same sort of analysis. There is political power, too, in black dancers claiming natural dance ability and in thereby claiming a right to opacity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on Hurricane Katrina to explore the ideological relationships between second lining and disaster. I argue that second lining and Katrina

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<sup>225</sup> In this way, do watcha wanna as a performance of opacity differs from "spectacular opacity" as discussed by Daphne Brooks. Brooks offers the phrase as a way to understand how performers "create figurative sites for the reconfiguration of black and female bodies on display," confounding stable categories of race and gender by, paradoxically, revealing their bodies to a public gaze. While spectacular opacity resists of "the 'dominant imposition of transparency'" willed onto black bodies by white spectators through bodily performance, do watcha wanna resists the imposition of transparency through discursive performances that contradict bodily ones. *Bodies in Dissent*, 8.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas DeFrantz considers the implications for non-black dancers learning black social dances outside of a black social sphere. He says that these dancers outside can copy the steps—the *how*'s—but cannot so easily repeat the *why*'s—tap into the dance's religiosity or their ability to generate action. "Black Beat," 76.

unfold(ed) within a set of centuries-old ideologies about what and who is natural versus what and who is not. In the realm of black vernacular dance, hegemonic discourses have portrayed black people as endowed with innate performance capacities, and dance has been used as evidence of black people's primitive, even savage, African instinct. In disaster discourse, attributions of the natural to catastrophes like Katrina veil the social and political inequalities that render an environmental event, like a hurricane, more disastrous for the poor and people of color than for wealthy whites. In both dance and disaster, colonialist assumptions that black people are closer to nature—instinctive, primitive, and/or savage—persist. The culminating effect is to veil the mechanizations of white supremacy, making institutionalized racism appear as if it were natural, necessary, and inevitable. Understanding how Katrina's devastation was in part permitted under the guise of natural causes, and how the state's criminal (lack of) response was justified with appeals to black savagery, demonstrates the stakes for understanding how ideologies of the natural find safe haven in the seemingly benign discourses of dance.

To assume that second lining, as an improvised, black vernacular dance form, occurs spontaneously, without any form of preparation, is to hold a distorted view of the craft. To challenge such a view, I have offered a sampling of second liners' labor to learn, perfect, expand, refine, and pass on their second line choreographies. Through years and often decades of consistent practice, second liners become so skilled at choreographing their footwork steps in the moment of performance that they appear and even feel as if they dance naturally. This is what it means for Kenneth Washington to express that second lining is in his system. This does not necessarily mean that he possesses an

instinctive performance capacity due to his racialized identity, but that his system of family, neighbors, fellow club members, and friends have provided him with innumerable opportunities during his nearly sixty years of second lining to observe, steal, show, refine, and critique his footwork. He is able to creatively structure his movement in the moment of performance with such a fluid integration of impulse and gesture that his steps, turns, dips, and pauses appear and feel as if they come spontaneously, effortlessly, and naturally. By detailing second liners' choreographic labor, I aim to challenge stereotypical assumptions that these dancers possess an essential, primitive, and instinctive dance ability.

Similarly, by exposing some of the decisions, actions, and even inactions that prefigured Hurricane Katrina's landfall, and the floods that followed, I join disaster theorists and cultural critics who insist that Katrina was an un/natural disaster, and I add that Katrina was a choreographed disaster. New Orleans's history of racial capitalism, from plantation slavery to neoliberalism, has had disastrous consequences for New Orleans's large African American population, many of whom were, in 2005, vulnerable to any natural hazard. Hurricane Katrina may have been unpredictable, but the fact that black residents suffered more loss than white residents was not. The suffering incurred by Katrina, borne disproportionately by New Orleans's poor and people of color, reveals the stakes for interrogating premises of the natural as they circulate in disparate contexts, including the context of second line dancing.

And yet, second lining provides an added complexity in examining the relationships between naturalness, blackness, and racism. Many practitioners

themselves—especially African Americans from New Orleans—insist that their second line dancing comes naturally to them; that it is a natural expression of New Orleanians; or a natural consequence of their African cultural inheritance. Such claims must be understood within a history of discourse about black vernacular dance, for they might lend evidence to racist stereotypes about black dancers’ natural abilities. However, we must regard each claim to natural dance ability in its specific context, considering the political imperatives for honoring and/or troubling such points of view at different times. By suggesting that second lining footwork comes naturally, dancers refuse to make the dance form transparent, and retain a right to opacity, or a right to not be fully understood by academic investigations such as this one. Seen in this light, I try to make sense of the common sentiment expressed by locals who explain they learned to second line “naturally” without returning to the more familiar trope of the natural capacity of black dancers.

I thus conclude with a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion: that, as a white researcher who followed her first second line in 2007, there is a limit to what I can know, and thus enable my readers to know, about any of this. In Glissant’s formulation, my attempts to understand second lining as an aesthetically sophisticated, historically rooted art form can appear as an act of aggression in that my study constructs second lining as an object of othered knowledge that can be understood by the ethnographer if she scrutinizes it closely enough. Revealing the mechanisms for training in the dance form can be an anti-essentialist project to debunk stereotypes about black primitivity that underpin assumptions of second lining as a natural expression of blackness and delimit

the terms of citizenship (and thus state protection from man-made disasters) for African Americans. On the other hand, this kind of analysis can also reinforce a different set of imperialist assumptions, which hold that the social, improvised dances of the African diaspora are thoroughly knowable to western society, as long as we learn to read the codes and/or execute the movements. According to Glissant, the only way to show respect for New Orleanians' bodily and verbal discourses of dissent is to honor the impossibility of truly "understanding" them.<sup>227</sup>

In this dissertation, I argue that second lining can be productively considered as a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility. Second liners' choreographic labor certainly dissents against racist assumptions of black primitivity, but at the same time, denials of such labor also contribute to the dance form's dissent, when "dissent" is defined as an ambivalent position of critique coupled with cooperation. Second liners' contradicting bodily and verbal discourses engage in this kind of ambivalent performance, one that refuses to stay put and rejects a static position, but is always embracing the interdependence of opposites, in the spirit of carnivalesque transgressions. Second lining is at once technically specific and do watch wanna, a natural expression and a thoroughly rehearsed performance, no more than what you see and completely opaque, improvised and choreographed. Second liners' dissenting mobilities have allowed them to maneuver through many disasters with tectonic footwork, including the daily disasters of structural and physical violence that prefigured Hurricane Katrina. The long history of second lining's intertwining with violence is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>227</sup> Britton, *Edouard Glissant*, 20.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**Taking It to the Streets for Two Hundred Years:**  
**A Genealogy of Second Lining**

The year is 1963. First shot: The Eureka Brass Band leads the Independent Aid and Social Club (established in 1940) in their anniversary parade throughout the streets of New Orleans. Amidst the African American members of the band, club, police escort, and crowd of dancers who follow them is Jules Cahn, the white man standing atop a car, capturing it all with a 16-millimeter camera. He films the second liners during one of the parade's stops, as they stand on the sidewalk and lean against the exterior walls of a building. A sign hanging above the door tells us that they have paused outside the Athenaeum Club, while a second sign proclaims its "White Only" policy. Next shot: the paraders dance toward the camera, processing down the wide, main thoroughfare of St. Charles Avenue. They keep their feet near the ground, zigzagging down the street in a soulful step-touch. Women especially rock their hips side-to-side, proudly thrusting their hips behind them. When moving forward, the second liners employ a leaned-back, springy, lilting, forward-rolling step. Young men march with high knees, pouring weight into the concrete with even steps, accenting this marching step with skip-jumps and forward-moving ball changes, almost always keeping their elbows bent and arms close to the rib cage. They have just passed under the elevated Pontchartrain Expressway overpass, its concrete and steel structure visible in the background. A police officer walks in front of the procession, swinging his nightstick rhythmically at his side. Next shot: a close-up of a statue that towers above the paraders as they round a traffic circle. A twelve-foot likeness of Confederate General Robert E. Lee stands atop a sixty-foot

granite column, arms crossed, facing north, as buoyant second liners step-touch underneath him, indifferent to his looming presence. One last shot – just two seconds – shows the dancing procession again. End of reel.<sup>228</sup>

These brief clips, viewed in succession, reveal layers of historic, institutionalized violence through which second liners have maneuvered since second line parades began traversing city streets in the late-nineteenth century. In 1963, New Orleans's residential patterns, fueled by white panic over legal integration, were becoming increasingly divided along lines of race and class.<sup>229</sup> Three years earlier, Ruby Bridges and three other African American girls had walked into two white elementary schools in the Ninth Ward, protected by federal marshals from the crowds of white working-class mothers who cursed, spit, and threw eggs at them.<sup>230</sup> These four young girls embodied black social mobility, symbolizing a deep threat to white supremacy. That same year, the Louisiana

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<sup>228</sup> Jules Cahn, "Negro Marching," 16mm, color, silent, recorded June 1963, Jules Cahn Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>229</sup> As discussed in chapter four, New Orleans's racial geography ironically formed more segregated patterns in the early 2000s than it did in the early 1800s, following a slow transformation throughout the twentieth century that was shaped by metropolitanization of the city space, suburbanization of its environs, the end of legalized segregation and racially-defined patterns of mortgage lending. Richard Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 183; Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 198-199; Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 10; Thomas, *Desire & Disaster*, 19.

<sup>230</sup> Kent Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 19, 24. Ruby Bridges integrated William Frantz Elementary School in the Upper Ninth Ward, just two miles from the spot where Homer Plessy had boarded a white train car 70 years earlier, leading to legalized segregation, and a few blocks from the spot where, in the 1970s, the Black Panther Party staged a bloody stand-off with the New Orleans Police Department. Bridges, along with the "McDonogh Three" (Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost, and Gail Etienne) who integrated McDonogh 19 Elementary School in the Lower Ninth Ward, became the public face of integration after *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the *Plessy* decision in 1954. For more on *Brown v. Board of Education* and its lasting effects on institutional racism, see Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707-1791.



state legislature sought to limit black geographic and social mobility, passing 43 new Jim Crow statues and tightening eligibility limits for mothers receiving welfare.<sup>231</sup> By 1963, the integration of public schools had sent multitudes of white middle-class residents fleeing to the suburbs, taking their tax base with them, and exacerbating class divisions along lines of race. In 1963, three quarters of all black families earned incomes near the poverty level, and almost half were living well below the poverty line. Over fifty thousand black families were living in substandard housing. Black neighborhoods had grossly inadequate street lighting, drainage, schools, public transportation, health facilities, police protection, and political influence. Infant mortality rates in these areas were twice as high as the rest of the city. One-half of residents in black areas had less than an eighth-grade education, compared to one-third of other New Orleanians. Despite tremendous need, the city's social welfare services ranked among the worst in the nation.<sup>232</sup> Violent crime, including police brutality, occurred at much higher rates than the national average.<sup>233</sup> In 1963, second liners strutted through the last vestiges of legalized segregation, high-stepped in the shadow of slavery, and skipped around urban renewal developments that frequently displaced poor people of color. This process was not new. Long before and after 1963, second liners footworked and buck jumped through,

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<sup>231</sup> In addition to passing numerous new Jim Crow laws, by 1959 the state legislature had enacted a law that prohibited women from receiving Aid to Dependent Children benefits if they had an illegitimate child while receiving payments. When implemented in 1960, it purged over 22,000 children from the program (ninety-five percent of which were African American children). Germany, *After the Promises*, 228.

<sup>232</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 3, 32-33.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 131.

underneath, and around multiple incarnations of racial capitalism and its attendant structural violence.

In this chapter, I contend that, in tandem with musical innovations, second lining's history has unfolded as a cultural response to the disastrous effects of racial capitalism. The following pages trace a genealogy of second lining, from the mid-nineteenth century to the late-twentieth century, by outlining its close relationship to violence.<sup>234</sup> Each dancerly influence from the early- to mid-nineteenth century, which can still be seen in the bodily archives of second liners today, brought with it a unique historical relationship to slave labor and trade as the seed of U.S. racial capitalism. I focus on three distinct periods: early- to mid-nineteenth century dance performances in and around Congo Square, turn-of-the-century brass band parades, and the second lining renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s. In each era, black New Orleanians articulated bodily discourses in public spaces, putting their dancing bodies on the line by jumping *in* the second line, moving through the very spaces where police officers and white citizens used force to thwart their mobility. As I argue throughout the dissertation, second lining takes shape as a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility that both enables dancers to survive oppression *and* dissent against it. To be sure, this is not a thing of the past: the recent murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner (and more) at the hands of police officers and white citizens evidence that black lives in the U.S. are still, in 2015, considered disposable at the hands of the state. The following genealogy of

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<sup>234</sup> In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach posits a “genealogy of performance” as a historiographic model that does not “search for origins,” but instead documents the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations. Genealogies of performance are appropriate for tracking change over time in second line dance, since the approach attends to counter-memories as they are publicly enacted to refute the official record and/or discourse (25-26).

performance traces second lining's development on the streets of New Orleans as a multivalent mode of black mobility that challenged violent power structures, even as those structures took on new articulations over time, from slavery to Jim Crow to the New Jim Crow.<sup>235</sup> As dancers refused to stay put, they exercised bodily mobility in dance, spatial mobility in procession, and the potential of social mobility in organized gatherings.

The two most notable moments in second lining's history occurred in two epochs: first, during the turn of the twentieth century, known as the "golden age" of brass band music, and second, in the 1970s and 1980s, when a young generation brought on a second lining renaissance. During the golden age, when second line parades first began to criss-cross the city, black New Orleanians asserted bodily mobility amidst the onset of Jim Crow laws, which sought to curtail the mobility of black bodies by legalizing segregation. In second line parades and at nightclubs during the 1970s and 80s, young brass bands, and an exploding number of second line dancers, developed a funky new sound and exuberant footwork styles. Their sonic-kinetic renaissance emerged just as the New Jim Crow took hold, delimiting terms of citizenship and economic options for African Americans in cities across the country. But long before brass band music and second line dancing experienced a renaissance, and before it even reached its golden age, enslaved and free people of color drummed and danced on Sunday afternoons in Congo Square, and paraded through New Orleans's streets behind black brass bands. This is where we begin.

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<sup>235</sup> I borrow this phrase from Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow*.

## **Dancing in Antebellum New Orleans: Congo Square and Scenes of Subjection**

Contemporary second lines draw from a wide variety of embodied practices, musical genres, ritual structures, and sartorial and textile traditions from Central and West Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and North America. Some early influences include African processions and masquerades; eighteenth-century French military drum and bugle units; antebellum Afro-Creole militia parades; Masonic rituals; Irish, Italian, Spanish, and French Catholic saints' day processions; African American freedom marches; and post-Civil War civic and ethnic brass bands.<sup>236</sup> By 1838, the local *Picayune* observed “a real mania in this city for horn and trumpet playing.”<sup>237</sup>

Black New Orleanians shared in the mania. Music historian Henry Kmen claims that “a procession in the streets on holidays” was a notable “early dancing custom” of black people in New Orleans, popular as early as 1825.<sup>238</sup> Dance historian Lynne Fauley Emery likens these antebellum processions in New Orleans to the Caribbean processional festival John Canoe. She concludes that, “With the many West Indians living in New Orleans, it would be surprising if the John Canoe-men had not put in an appearance.”<sup>239</sup> Burials also occasioned processions for people of African descent. Black music theorist Samuel Floyd traces contemporary second lines back to the ring dances performed during burial ceremonies at Congo Square. He argues that, eventually, “the ring straightened

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<sup>236</sup> Helen Regis, “Introduction: Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs,” in *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis* by Rachel Breunlin and Ronald W. Lewis (New Orleans: Neighborhood Story Project, 2009), 127-128; White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 72-73.

<sup>237</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 73.

<sup>238</sup> Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 228.

<sup>239</sup> Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619-1970* [1972] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 1988), 172.

itself to become the Second Line of jazz funerals, [...] where the ring was absent because of the necessity of the participants to move to a particular remote destination (the return to town from the burial ground).”<sup>240</sup> Processional dances, be they funerals, martial parades, or other forms of holiday processions, certainly required footwork for the simple function of moving the crowd forward through the streets. Even if the footwork entailed no more than walking in time to the music, those steps carried black people through antebellum New Orleans, as they maneuvered through institutional and physical violence of a complex slave regime.

Antebellum New Orleans’s system of slavery developed inside of a unique colonial history. As historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall contends, to be black in colonial Louisiana, as opposed to other colonies in the Americas, did not always mean being a slave; slavery did not always equal powerlessness, and white did not always mean powerful. Early populations of free people of color lived alongside French white colonists, often poor, and French outlaws cast off in penal colony fashion. Survival in the swampy, hostile environment required settlers’ openness to people of other races and cultures, as American Indians and Africans were needed for survival skills and technology. Racial superiority, Hall argues, was simply not a luxury afforded to those who wished to survive in colonial Louisiana. The 1795 slave uprising at Pointe Coupée, just upriver from New Orleans, comprised a turning point in the Louisiana plantation bloc’s attitudes toward slave control, as they tempered racial openness with racial

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<sup>240</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 51.

terror.<sup>241</sup> Around the same time, the successful slave uprising in Haiti also incited terror in Louisiana's plantation bloc, while bringing an influx of fleeing Haitian elites, and their slaves, to New Orleans.

By the early-nineteenth century, New Orleans had transformed from a wild colonial outpost to one of the most important cities in North America, and this transition depended heavily on slave labor and exchange. While slavery in Louisiana was shaped differently from other American colonies, slavery in New Orleans also took on an urban character quite distinct from rural Louisiana plantations. Importantly, enslaved Africans and people of African descent lived and worked alongside free and freed people of color. John Blassingame estimates that, by 1860, New Orleans's population included 10,939 free blacks: mulatto children of white men, manumitted or born free; those freed through military service; those who purchased their freedom; and freedpeople who emigrated from other U.S. states, Haiti, Europe, Mexico, or several other countries.<sup>242</sup> Bondspeople worked in homes, on docks, in shops, and on the streets as domestic servants, stevedores, seamstresses, municipal laborers, prostitutes, and street vendors. Some bondspeople were highly skilled artisans, who were hired out by their masters and often permitted to hire themselves out on appointed days.<sup>243</sup> Due to the high degree of mobility required of New Orleans's slave regime, disciplinary measures required indirect forms of violence.

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<sup>241</sup> Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 344-345. Clyde Woods introduces the term "plantation bloc" to describe a powerful "Southern ethno-class grouping" that has monopolized resources, power, and discourse for centuries in the Mississippi Delta, including New Orleans. *Development Arrested*, 21, 29.

<sup>242</sup> John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 10.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

According to Daniel E. Walker, New Orleans's urban slave society was controlled in part by regulating physical space and promoting socially degrading images of blackness.<sup>244</sup> One important location in which the complex power relations were negotiated in antebellum New Orleans was Congo Square.

Many second liners, community historians, and academics claim that the second line tradition of dancing on Sunday afternoons, in particular, comes from the antebellum era, when slave owners would permit bondspeople to play music and dance in various locations, most notably in Congo Square. Under French rule, the *Code Noir* of Louisiana designated Sunday as a non-work day for the colony, and local custom extended this privilege to enslaved Africans; the tradition continued under Spanish and American rule.<sup>245</sup> On Sundays, from the early-eighteenth century until at least the 1850s, enslaved and free people of color gathered on a grassy expanse just outside the city limits now known as Congo Square. They sold handmade goods, spoke native languages, played music, and danced.<sup>246</sup> Even though Congo Square was not the only place where New Orleanians of African descent played music and danced, it holds the status as the longest-lasting designated location for enslaved and free Africans (and people of African descent) to drum and dance openly in North America.<sup>247</sup> As such, it served as an incubator for the development of creolized, African-derived cultures, and its impact, not only on New

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<sup>244</sup> Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), vii-viii.

<sup>245</sup> Evans, *Congo Square*, 1.

<sup>246</sup> The exact dates during which this area was dedicated to the Sunday dance and music festivities of enslaved and free people of African descent has been estimated and debated by historians. These dates are taken from Evans, *Congo Square*, 23.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Orleans's dance and musical culture, but also on American culture at large, is significant.

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In Congo Square, oppressed people could express themselves through the creative, culturally rooted, bodily mobility of African and African-derived dance; at the same time, black mobility in Congo Square was heavily policed, and black subjectivity forcefully disciplined. As Katrina Hazzard-Donald declares, "Contrary to the interpretations of several historians of slavery, the establishment of Congo Square represents a restricting rather than an encouraging of slave dancing and culture."<sup>249</sup> In other words, city officials designated the space to increase control over bodily expression, not to facilitate it. In fact, the mayor's designation of Congo Square as a sanctioned place for gatherings in 1817 may have been an attempt to contain the movement of enslaved persons during their free day and thus control threats of revolt.<sup>250</sup> In 1811, Haitian-born slave Charles Deslonde led a group of between 200 and 500 enslaved men in the largest slave revolt in American history, just thirty-six miles outside New Orleans. Aided by

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<sup>248</sup> Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet single out Congo Square as the location where Kongo-derived traditions were not only maintained, but also mixed with many other African and European dances and music to form "new creole styles which eventually reverberated all the way to Broadway and the entire world." *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 149. See also David E. Estes, "The Neo-African Vatican: Zora Neale Hurston's New Orleans," in *Literary New Orleans in the Modern World*, ed. by Richard S. Kennedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 67, 73; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 57-58; and John Storm Roberts, *Latin Jazz: The First of the Fusions, 1880s to Today* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999), 7-8.

<sup>249</sup> Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, "Dancing Under the Lash: Sociocultural Disruption, Continuity, and Synthesis," in *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. by Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 117.

<sup>250</sup> Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862," *The Journal of Negro History* 69, no. 2 (1984): 67.



federal troops, French planters thwarted the uprising. To discourage any further revolts, they beheaded one hundred of the slave-rebels' corpses and displayed their heads on posts, dotting the Mississippi River's banks from New Orleans's city center to the heart of the plantation district, some forty miles upriver.<sup>251</sup> Deslonde's rebellion and the plantation bloc's violent response undoubtedly impacted officials' designation of a sanctioned Sunday meeting place, in order to better monitor slaves' recreation. Then, during the 1830s and 1840s, gatherings at Congo Square were suspended, perhaps due to fear of revolt fostered by slave insurrection in Virginia, led by Nat Turner in 1831. When the New Orleans city council reinstated Congo Square in 1845, they declared that attendees must present written permission from their owners, and police were to be present.<sup>252</sup> The city's perceived need to police the gatherings grew as they attracted white visitors, who stood outside the area's fenced-off perimeter and gazed upon performances of the city's already well-known African-influenced culture. As a chronicler wrote in 1895, "White people, from motives of curiosity or fun, invariably attended these innocent pastimes."<sup>253</sup> As these events imply, the history of Congo Square provides an important component of second lining's genealogy, and not only because the dances practiced there aesthetically influenced second lining's form. Congo Square's history evidences the ways in which dancing, like all forms of black mobility in New Orleans, has long required negotiations with violent oppression and surveillance.

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<sup>251</sup> Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 147-148.

<sup>252</sup> Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture," 67.

<sup>253</sup> Henry C. Castellanos, *New Orleans As It Was* (New Orleans, 1895), 158-59, qtd. in Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture," 66.

Before I discuss the relationships between dancers and police power at Congo Square, I want to consider the kinds of dances performed, in order to trace a few lines of contemporary second lining's performance genealogy. The notion of footwork threads together histories of dance technique, racist violence, and gendered divisions therein. Footwork is a defining feature—many would argue that it is *the* defining feature—of contemporary second lining. Rodney Armstrong, a member of the Dumaine Street Gang Social Aid and Pleasure Club (SAPC), expresses this point of view, which is common amongst today's paraders. "Well, basically, I mean anybody can dress up and walk a parade. Come on, you got to have at least some kind of footwork with you. You got to be able to move your feet, even if you just move your body. I mean, come on, you got to move something. I mean, but the footwork? You got to have that footwork."<sup>254</sup> As Armstrong intimates, moving your body—such as the hips, torso, and arms—is not enough if you want to be considered a true second liner. Even though many New Orleanians refuse to define second lining, preferring a do-watcha-wanna approach, most would agree with Armstrong: if you are parading with a club, or want to be competitive within the informal social ranking of dancerly fame, then you got to have that footwork. The kind of footwork that Armstrong is talking about was equally important to one antebellum social dance in New Orleans: the Congo dance.

In New Orleans, perhaps more than other locations in the U.S., and more like its Caribbean neighbors, African diaspora people danced the bamboula, calenda, chica, and

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<sup>254</sup> Rodney Armstrong, radio interview with DJ Action Jackson, December 1, 2013, accessed December 1, 2013 WWOZ New Orleans 90.7, <http://wwoz.org/>.

“the Congo dance.”<sup>255</sup> Congo dance was general term was used to describe various versions of a popular social dance that was practiced in Congo Square, but also on the levee, in public squares, in backyards, bar rooms, and street processions.<sup>256</sup> This was a partner dance in which men advanced and retreated in relation to a woman while leaping and spinning in the air; women barely moved their feet, making slow, sustained, undulating movements with the torso and hips, sometimes while waving a handkerchief.<sup>257</sup> Journalist and travel writer Lafcadio Hearn recorded his observations of people dancing “the Congo” in a New Orleans backyard in 1885. He wrote, the “women do not take their feet off the ground—it is as lascivious as is possible. The men dance very differently...leaping in the air.” Elsewhere, Hearn described the dance similarly: “The women did not move their feet from the ground. They only writhed their bodies and swayed in undulatory motions from ankles to waist. [...] The men leaped and performed

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<sup>255</sup> Each name listed here has been used to describe different dances in disparate places at different times, and therefore, hold highly context-specific meanings. For a discussion of complex uses of the term “kalenda” in the Caribbean, see Julian Gerstin, “Tangled Roots: Kalenda and Other Neo-African Dances in the Circum-Caribbean,” in *Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures*, ed. by Susanna Sloat (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010). Despite these dances’ complex and difficult-to-trace histories, New Orleanians’ oral histories often cite these African-derived dances as the ones danced at Congo Square, and the roots of contemporary second lining. Such narratives are circulated through popular media, such as documentary films. To give a recent example, in the film *Faubourg Tremé*, Lenwood Sloan, founder of the Louisiana Living History Project, claims, “Every time I see some kid second-lining, and doing bamboula, chica, and calenda, the first three dances to arrive in [*sic*] Africa, and not even knowing it, and not even caring, then I say, ‘I’m standing on the history.’” Logsdon, *Faubourg Tremé*. For a discussion of African-derived dances in Congo Square, and the difficulty of historically tracing the dances done there, see Julian Gerstin, “The Allure of Origins: Neo-African Dances in the French Caribbean and the Southern United States,” in *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, ed. by Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler, and Cécile Accilien (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 127-130.

<sup>256</sup> In *Congo Square*, Evans parses out four different descriptions (written by Latrobe, Hearn, Fortier and Holmes) of what she called “Kongo-Angola-influenced dances” in Louisiana, noting commonalities across region and decades (1819-1888).

<sup>257</sup> Evans, *Congo Square*, 92-93. Blassingame gives very similar descriptions of two dances performed at slave balls and at Congo Square called the “carabine” and the “pile chactas.” *Black New Orleans*, 3.

feats of gymnastic dancing.”<sup>258</sup> Hearn’s descriptions are representative of others, recorded in various locations throughout New Orleans and across several decades in the nineteenth century.

The gendered roles noted within the Congo dance, especially in regards to footwork, signal some of the most significant resonances between contemporary second lining and the nineteenth-century Congo dances.<sup>259</sup> In second lining today, the athletic, gymnastic movement and elaborate footwork is most often and most visibly executed by men, while women are perceived as keeping their feet on the ground more often than men, while punctuating their footwork with hip and torso undulations. The second line community’s valuation of footwork carries with it gendered implications, for women who want to be considered as serious second liners—“real rollers” or “knockers”—find that they must minimize undulations of the hips, torso, and shoulders, and focus on their feet. The masculinist imperatives in second lining movement, and its history of favoring male dancers, might have one root in the dances performed at Congo Square.

The exaggerated mobility of male dancers, as described by white observers such as Hearn, might also reflect the observers’ perceptions that black male mobility is more threatening to white supremacy than women’s. Enslaved men, such as Nat Turner and

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<sup>258</sup> Elizabeth Bisland, ed., *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn Including the Japanese Letters* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 331; and Hebert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (St. Simons Island: Mockingbird Books, 1964), 191-192, both qtd. in Evans, *Congo Square*, 91.

<sup>259</sup> The handkerchief is another historic tie between the Congo dance and second lining. It is an iconic second lining prop sometimes said to resemble releasing doves at a jazz funeral (see chapter four, note 516). However, today, the handkerchief is relegated to kitsch at tourist-driven second lines. Sunday second liners favor utilitarian terry cloth towels, used to wipe away sweat, over nostalgic but less absorbent handkerchiefs.

Charles Deslonde, had more access to large-scale mobilities of resistance, such as *marronage* and revolts. Stephanie Camp suggests that bondswomen found other, subtler, shorter-term forms of resistance against captivity. She gives the example of illicit nighttime parties where dancing together allowed women to reclaim their bodies as a source of pleasure, pride, and self-expression, refuting their bodies as sites of violent, sexual, and/or paternalistic domination.<sup>260</sup> Gendered divisions in bodily resistance can be seen in somewhat of a microcosm in the Congo dance, wherein men exerted larger-scale movements around the space, while women kept their feet planted, and found movement—possibly pleasurable movement—in their swiveling hips and undulating torsos.

Contemporary second lining footwork suggests that the dance form contains diasporic roots in Africa and the Caribbean, but the footwork also suggests North American influences as well. In 1853, a traveler named Henry Didimus described heel-and-toe steps he witnessed in Congo Square: “The feet scarce tread a wider space than their own length; but rise and fall, turn in and out, touch first the heel and then the toe, rapidly and more rapidly.” This description could accurately be applied to a second liner’s basic footwork showcased at an parade today; in fact, some dancers call basic footwork the “heel-to-toe.” Lynne Fauley Emery explains that Didimus calls this dance the Bamboula, but she doubts his ability to accurately name the dance he sees, and sides with Jean and Marshall Stearns’ interpretation.<sup>261</sup> Jazz dance historians Jean and Marshall

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<sup>260</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6-9, 66-68.

<sup>261</sup> Emery, *Black Dance*, 162.

Stearns ignore Didimus' Bamboula ascription, and conclude that he gives "a fair description of a basic step in the Afro-American vernacular, the flat-footed shuffle."<sup>262</sup>

Stearns and Stearns' suggestion provokes a question: what other danced influences, beyond African and Afro-Caribbean dances like Congo and Bamboula, might account for second lining's history? Importantly, how did these dances carry differing responses to the geographies of containment imposed by the slave trade?

The centrality of footwork in second lining complicates the narrative of second line dancing as a retention of African and Afro-Caribbean dances preserved and contained in Congo Square. Second liners' bodily archives signal that New Orleans has seen the migration of black people for hundreds of years, from Africa, the Caribbean, and North America.<sup>263</sup> Although little has been written about African American vernacular dances (such as the shuffle, jig, and buck dancing) in New Orleans dance histories, beyond the sources cited above, there seems to be very convincing evidence in second liners' bodily archives that these dance forms, popular elsewhere in North America in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries, deserve to be considered. It is highly likely that dances popular in the markets of Charleston, the levees of the Ohio valley, and the minstrel stages of New York City made their way to the port city of New Orleans, through which a stream of visitors and immigrants flowed, and where theaters,

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<sup>262</sup> Jean and Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* [1968] (New York: Schirmer, 1979), 19.

<sup>263</sup> On the notion of the bodily archive, see Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris*, 17.

markets, and levees competed for selection as chosen performance spaces.<sup>264</sup> In forced, voluntary, and fugitive migrations, African diaspora peoples have brought with them various dance forms, and melded them into a distinctive footwork style that, still today, carries with it histories of black mobility in spite of various forms of structural and physical violence.

Shuffling, jigging, and buck dancing all name variations on an individual, percussive, foot-heavy dance performed by African Americans in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries. As Stearns and Stearns propose, the heel-and-toe articulations of the flat-footed shuffle is a basic step in a wide array of African-derived vernacular dances in the Americas, and second lining firmly fits within the array.<sup>265</sup> In her history of African and Irish influences on proto-tap dance forms, Constance Valis Hill names the shuffle as an African-derived step that involved brushing or scraping the ball or the full foot on the floor. This basic movement evolved into the ring shout, breakdown, pigeon wing, and other plantation dances.<sup>266</sup> Another related African American dance form whose influence can be seen in contemporary second lining is the jig. According to Hill, jigging was, by 1800, the general term for a new

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<sup>264</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*; W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Blassingame discusses blackface minstrel performances in New Orleans specifically. *Black New Orleans*, 142.

<sup>265</sup> African dance historian and theorist Kariamu Welsh Asante notes that the shuffle is “right out of the ‘tradition.’ It, too, sends the energy in to the earth and not away from it; the goal is for the feet to always maintain contact with the earth. It takes considerable skill to keep both feet on the ground as you shuffle, maintain the rhythm and travel, all at the same time.” “The Zimbabwean Dance Aesthetic: Senses, Canons, and Characteristics,” in *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. by Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 217.

<sup>266</sup> Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

American percussive hybrid of African American style and Irish American style step dancing, recognized as “black dance” when dancers bent at the waist and concentrated their movement from the waist down.<sup>267</sup> Jigging was characterized by high energy and velocity, and prioritized a controlled torso riding on top of rapidly working legs. Jigging competitions, in which contestants danced while balancing a glass of water on their heads, emphasized the physical feat of executing energetic footwork without disturbing the torso.<sup>268</sup> Percussive, syncopated stepping atop a controlled torso still characterizes second lining today, and jigs may have influenced this aesthetic.<sup>269</sup>

Given that second line dancing is often called “buck jumping,” it is tempting to trace at least part of its origins to buck dancing, a dance form that emphasized percussive, syncopated, flat-footed footwork with lots of weight down into the foot.<sup>270</sup> After all, buck dancing’s emphasis on syncopated footwork makes it a likely antecedent. However, while buck jumping may have early physical roots in buck dancing, the more likely semantic reference is probably to bucking contests, essentially brass band battles, which were popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In his autobiography,

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<sup>267</sup> Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 6.

<sup>268</sup> Emery, *Black Dance*, 91; Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 6; Thomas DeFrantz, “Duke University Professor Thomas F. DeFrantz: Buck, Wing and Jig,” YouTube, March 26, 2012, accessed March 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A34OD4eA17o>.

<sup>269</sup> As Hill has shown, nineteenth-century dance forms like buck dancing, which emphasized percussive, foot-heavy movement, were actually a product of mutual influence between Irish and African dance forms. In fact, very similar heel-and-toe descriptions in the nineteenth century are ascribed to Irish jigging, as opposed to the more weighted, flat-footed African-derived shuffle. Thus, second lining’s history might also contain European influences such as those in tap, and thus embody a history of racialization wherein, at one time, neither Irish nor black laborers were considered “white.” *Tap Dancing America*, 7.

<sup>270</sup> DeFrantz, “Buck, Wing and Jig”; Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 22.



legendary jazz musician Sidney Bechet describes a kind of bucking contest that involved a second line parade. Two or three clubs would parade on the same day, each with a different band. Each club would start at different locations across down, and meet at a pre-determined location, such as an intersection on the wide, grassy neutral ground of Claiborne Avenue. “And then they’d get closer and you couldn’t make them out any more. And then they’d be right in together, one line between another, and then it was just noise, just everything at once. They’d be forty instruments all bucking at one another.” Eventually, the crowd would determine a winning band, and the second liners would begin “crowding around it, cheering the musicianers, waiting to give them drinks and food...”<sup>271</sup> Quite possibly, the dancing that occurred at these bucking contests—undoubtedly a variant of buck dancing—came to be known as buck jumping.

At Congo Square, dancers performed percussive footwork and undulating movements that drew from a variety of influences. The dances shared at least one thing in common: from shuffles to Congo dances, these bodily expressions were routinely policed. A fictional scene in Congo Square, which appears in a popular nineteenth-century novel, unites the place’s dual history with dance and violence. George Washington Cable, a white bookkeeper and writer in New Orleans, published *The Grandissimes* in 1880.<sup>272</sup> The plot is held together by the activities of a fugitive slave,

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<sup>271</sup> Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 67-68.

<sup>272</sup> Cable also published an article in *Century Magazine* in 1886, “Dance in Place Congo.” Since Cable was not yet born when Congo Square was closed down in the 1850s, his essay contains “questionable reliability” at best, but nonetheless influenced historiography on Congo Square for years to come. Evans notes that Cable’s article does contain some facts, and his collection and publication of Creole songs are noteworthy. Still, she says, Cable’s accounts must be crosschecked with other accounts to sift myth and mystique from observation. *Congo Square*, 3.

Bras-Coupé.<sup>273</sup> Cable had undoubtedly heard and read the legend of Bras-Coupé, who came to epitomize threats from the slave population in the city's public controversy over police power when the city guard was first armed in 1805. Bras-Coupé took on grandiose symbolism in ensuing oral and written legends about his militant opposition to white slaveholders and city authorities. Legend has it that he was eventually captured and killed. His corpse was then displayed in the Place d'Armes, a public square in front of the cathedral, as a warning against further slave revolts. In his novel, Cable shifts the climactic scene from the Place d'Armes to Congo Square, where Bras-Coupé emerges from the swamp after evading would-be captors and planning his revolt. He commands attention amongst the drumming, singing, and dancing throngs with a series of dazzling leaps. Just when he is about to soar into a "more astounding leap than his last," ascending high above the crowd in dancier prowess, the police throw a lasso around him, containing his bodily mobility and bringing him "crashing like a burnt tree, face upward upon the turf."<sup>274</sup> When he is leaping, Cable's Bras-Coupé epitomizes the black man's astounding physical prowess and exceptional mobility. Yet, since Bras-Coupé's performance threatens to exceed the safe parameters of cultural expression (will his dance incite the revolt that he has been planning?), he must be curtailed. In one short scene, Cable portrays Bras-Coupé as a dancing black man whose mobility is violently contained

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<sup>273</sup> Bras-Coupé is the name that the man accrued once he was outlawed and turned into legend; in police records, he is also recorded under his legal slave name, Squire. Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 69. Bras-Coupé translates from French as "cut arm," and as an archetype, Bras-Coupé is defined by his severed limb. Wagner argues that the missing arm connects him to other disfigured maroon rebels, but it also "literally instantiates the legal doctrine that makes him into an enemy of the city, given that forfeiture of a limb [...] was the typical manner in which outlaws were branded before they were banished into the wastelands" (73). For more on the Bras-Coupé legend, including an insightful reading of Cable's re-telling, see Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 58-115.

<sup>274</sup> Cable, *The Grandissimes*, 172.

and converted into another spectacle of the black man on the move: a threatening force of potential violence who must be contained by police power.<sup>275</sup>

Cable's portrayal of Bras-Coupé echoes his (mis-)readings of dance in Congo Square, as published elsewhere, both of which reveal the ambivalent erotic economies motivating colonial and plantation logics. The "Negro" was created by Europeans and Euro-Americans as a "dumb beast" befitted for (and benefitted by) slavery, and his dancing was offered up as proof of his beastliness, arousing awe, desire, and ultimately, panic.<sup>276</sup> White panic merged fears of revolt through armed uprising and fears that black male sexuality posed a threat to white women and thus to the purity of the race. As literature scholar Riché Richardson demonstrates, the myth of the black rapist emerged in the South following the Civil War, merging fears of black self-governance and miscegenation into one pernicious stereotype.<sup>277</sup> While Cable does not explicitly portray Bras-Coupé as sexually threatening, his characterization of the marooned slave as strong, powerful, and potentially dangerous bears the spectre of sexual conquest.

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<sup>275</sup> Writing about New Orleans two centuries after Bras-Coupé, Brian Greening explains how two poles of the spectacle of blackness converged at the Superdome during portrayals of Hurricane Katrina. He chooses the Superdome as a contested visual space, and an oddly appropriate place for the images of black degradation to play out. Before the storm, it housed a sport spectacle of black achievement palatable to white audiences: the return of this palatable spectacle in 2006 heralded the city's rebirth. During the disaster, the Superdome became a spectacle of misery whose visual images portray black identities offensive to white viewers. His analysis of the Superdome and football informs my reading of Congo Square and dance a century and a half earlier. "Spectacular Disaster. The Louisiana Superdome and subsumed blackness in Post-Katrina," *(In)visible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* 16 (2011).

<sup>276</sup> Lott, *Love & Theft*, 6; Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 6-7; Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>277</sup> Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 19.

Due to fears of moral and social disorder that dancing and drumming could evoke, Congo Square was assiduously attended by police. These officers would have been ready to apprehend Bras-Coupé as emerged from hiding in the swamp. Even though Cable tell the tale as an ambivalent, mythical fantasy, he evokes some of the debates about the extent of police power in nineteenth-century New Orleans. As Bryan Wagner argues, the threat of Bras-Coupé stirred panic about what might be hiding in the swamp. Therefore, the city's longtime interdependence on the swamp was replaced with an ideological binary, in which the swamp equaled the natural state from which society emerged and which continued to threaten civilization (because of the black and Native American maroons hiding out there). Without an expanded police force, then-mayor Prieur argued in the early 1830s, it would be impossible to fight back against the forces of nature.<sup>278</sup> Cable's fictional account of Bras-Coupé contains a trope popular in racial melodramas of the time, in which the black trickster's "[f]ancy footwork, sexual flourishes, and deceit were accompanied by the blows that grounded the body and returned the trespasser/dissembler to his place."<sup>279</sup> Bras-Coupé's story, re-imagined as a racial melodrama, spotlights his fancy footwork, dramatically curtailed by blows that ground his body. The novel dramatizes the fact that second lines are not only connected to Congo Square by the genealogies of its fancy footwork, but also by that footwork's policed circumscription in geographies of containment.

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<sup>278</sup> Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 69-74.

<sup>279</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 28.

Cable's tale suggests that the contained performance space of Congo Square belongs to a collection of "several scenes of subjection," to use Saidiya Hartman's phrase, wherein white populations used dance as a quotidian form of discipline to control black bodies in slave regimes.<sup>280</sup> A brief survey of danced scenes of subjection in New Orleans will help to clarify the second lining's historical relationship with racist violence. Dance was utilized as a quotidian form of domination on the ship, where slave traders required Africans to dance on the deck to maintain their health and salability, and on the plantation, where slaves were commanded to dance for their masters' amusement. Two implements of subjection particularly important to New Orleans's slave economy include the coffle and the auction block. In the procession of the coffle, bondspeople were shackled together with chains and paraded, in a sort of domestic middle-passage, to market. The coffle utilized the shuffle as a flat-footed, rhythmic, bodily movement, accompanied by songs sang by the slaves in transit, as a way to choreograph the spatial movement of captive bodies.<sup>281</sup> As commanded by slave traders, enslaved persons sang songs in time to chained steps, advertising themselves to potential customers as not only instruments of labor but also "docile, happy, submissive bodies."<sup>282</sup> Upon arrival at the market, bodily movement was again deployed, this time to display bondspeople's vitality

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<sup>280</sup> Hartman illuminates the mundane and quotidian sites of domination, rather than exploiting violent spectacles, that were commonly used to discipline and punish enslaved persons in the U.S. *Scenes of Subjection*, 2-4.

<sup>281</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 36-42; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 69-70.

<sup>282</sup> Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About*, 143. For more on the coffle as spectacle, see especially chapter five of Thompson's book, "Advertisement: 'Dancing through the Streets and Act Lively,'" 129-158.

and thus their exchange value.<sup>283</sup> Joseph Roach highlights the most spectacular scene of slave auctions in New Orleans, the rotunda of the St. Louis Hotel, where a stage band accompanied men and women presented for sale. These “persons with a price”<sup>284</sup> were costumed in “their Sunday best” until they were stripped to permit close examination, and sometimes expected to dance a lively jig in order to show at once their liveliness and docility.<sup>285</sup> Particularly popular was the “fancy-girl” auction, in which quadroons and octoroons were sold into sexual bondage.<sup>286</sup>

Perhaps some of the dancers at Congo Square had themselves witnessed, heard tales of, or even performed upon the auction block at the St. Louis Hotel, just a few short blocks away. Certainly many of the male onlookers and police officers ringing the fence had witnessed the spectacle there, and perhaps even made purchases. They had likely also viewed shuffling, jigging, and buck dancing performed by blackface minstrels at the St. Charles Theatre.<sup>287</sup> As Hartman argues, representations of black expressive culture on the minstrel stage formed yet another scene of subjection, wedding “suffering and shuffling” together as complimentary performances of the happy yet pathetic slave.<sup>288</sup> When considered in context with nearby performances on the auction block, in the coffle procession, and on the minstrel stage, Cable’s version of the Bras-Coupé’s legend makes

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<sup>283</sup> Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 130; Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About*,

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>285</sup> Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 211-214.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>287</sup> Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 142.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

plain the inseparability of pleasure and subjection at Congo Square. For white (male) onlookers, black mobility was at once something to be enjoyed, feared, and always contained.

And yet, inside of fenced and policed circles, we can imagine that the dancers at Congo Square managed to subvert their oppression, even under the noses of their oppressors. There was always much more going on than onlookers realized.<sup>289</sup> Through rhythmic drumming and dancing, the people gathered in Congo Square could (re)create a psycho-spiritual space within a policed space, wherein “blacks were no longer ‘slave’ or ‘subaltern,’ but where they in fact called into being prior and new meanings of themselves,” even when under surveillance.<sup>290</sup> Stephanie Camp’s reading of enslaved people’s dance expressions is instructive here, for it offers a more recuperative reading of dance performances by enslaved persons than does Saidiya Hartman’s. Camp contends that, for those who encounter oppression through the body, dancing can transform that body into a source of pleasure, pride, and self-expression.<sup>291</sup> Bodily enjoyment opposes slavery’s symbolic systems and economic order. Put simply, a body enjoyed by the self contradicts its flesh as simply an implement of agricultural production and (sexual) possession.<sup>292</sup> Joseph Roach forwards a similar reading of black street processions in New Orleans when he suggests paraders “danced to resist their reduction to the status of

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<sup>289</sup> Walker, *No More, No More*, 18.

<sup>290</sup> Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, xv-xvi.

<sup>291</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 62.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68, 91.

commodities. In other words, they danced—and they still dance—to possess again a heritage that some people would rather see buried alive.”<sup>293</sup>

Pleasure-as-resistance could be danced under surveillance at Congo Square due in part to the choreographic structure of the circle.<sup>294</sup> The circle embodied African-derived performance imperatives, such as improvisatory performance, collective participation, a blending of sacred and secular, and an interdependence upon dance and music.<sup>295</sup> These cultural values, which contradicted white power structures, could still be performed under

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<sup>293</sup> Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 210-211. In this section, Roach is speaking of Mardi Gras Indian processions, but I find his conclusions applicable to SAPCs’ second lines as well.

<sup>294</sup> Beyond weekly Sunday gatherings, ring dances were also observed during ceremonies performed at a burial ground within the area. Evans, *Congo Square*, 19. At Congo Square and beyond, the ring was an essential part of African-derived dances, social/secular and religious/sacred. In descriptions of dance at Congo Square, those on the edge of the circle are said to participate by singing, clapping, patting their bodies in rhythm, and stepping in place. Evans, *Congo Square*, 89. Samuel Floyd places second lines in a historical lineage with ring dances of the African diaspora. “Ring Shout!” Matt Sakakeeny refers to circle-formation dances practiced in Congo Square as ring shouts. *Roll With It*, 18. Sterling Stuckey famously named the Ring Shout as the main context in which Africans from different ethnic groups recognized values common to them, and subsequently, where music and dance from several African ethnic groups commingled, merged, and fused to become a single, distinctive, cultural ritual out of which all defining elements of African American music and dance emerged: a “pivot” from which “black dance radiated outward in American to become a formidable presence.” *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Stuckey, “Christian Conversion and the Challenge of Dance,” in *Choreographing History*, ed. by Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 52. See also Floyd’s reading of Stuckey in “Ring Shout!” For a movement analysis of the Ring Shout, see Gottschild, *Black Dancing Body*, 144, 273-277. For an examination of the ring shout’s contribution to both the social and theatrical dance traditions of the U.S., see Katrina Hazzard-Donald, “Hoodoo Religion and American Dance Traditions: Rethinking the Ring Shout,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no.6 (2011): 194-212.

<sup>295</sup> According to dance theorist Kariamu Welsh Asante, the circle embodies “holism,” a core value of African dance forms, in which the parts are not emphasized beyond the whole, and neither is the individual emphasized beyond the collective. Asante, “Commonalities in African Dance,” in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, ed. by Molefi Kete Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 76-77. Gottschild adds that the circle formation has been frequently utilized in ritual dances on the African continent and in the diaspora as a form for “catching the spirit.” *Black Dancing Body*, 262.



surveillance.<sup>296</sup> It is possible to consider the rings of musicians and singers encircling the dancers in Congo Square as a shield, or a protective layer, cushioning the dancers from the violent control exerted outside the fence. Congo Square provided an arena for white consumption and constriction of black expressive culture; at the same time, however, we can imagine that the musicians, dancers, and artisans at Congo Square used this space to perform collectivities, find spiritual experiences, and experience joy in a body otherwise marked for possession and labor.<sup>297</sup> The ring gave dancers the space to maneuver within *and* against the geographies of containment that encircled their performances.

The amalgam of second lining's early dance influences, from the Congo dance to the jig, attests to the incredible range of black mobility, across continents, borders, and social barriers, telling the lie of black bodily containment in which slave regimes were so heavily invested. Black bodies' dance performances both facilitated and resisted New Orleans's slave system, sometimes doing both within the same performance. Negotiating New Orleans's violent terrain required tectonic footwork. Dancing at Congo Square, on the levee, and in the streets offered up performance to the erotics of white consumption and surveillance; but these public performances also inscribed rival geographies into traditional geographies of enslaved containment.

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<sup>296</sup> Stuckey argues that collective, circular dances performed by slaves—especially when dancers were harnessing their bodily effort to access spiritual and/or ecstatic states—performed values “at war with the values of the master class.” “Christian Conversion,” 44.

<sup>297</sup> *Closer to Freedom*, 66-68, 91. On the psychological and emotional effects of Congo Square performances for the participants, see Walker, *No More, No More*, 57.

## **The Golden Age: Mutual Assistance and Embodied Exchanges at the Second Line (1890-1910)**

Second line parades as we know them today—brass band processions funded and organized by black benevolent societies—emerged at the turn of the century, in the context of two concurrent “golden ages.” The years between 1890 and 1910 are known as the “golden age of Negro secret societies,” when groups that had formed before the Civil War blossomed, and many new groups were started.<sup>298</sup> The brass bands that they employed for their parades, dances, and other functions supported the golden age of the brass band: an epoch cited by music historians as the time when a musical revolution—not yet called “jazz”—emerged on the streets and in the clubs, dance halls, brothels, parks, public squares and living rooms of New Orleans.<sup>299</sup>

Both golden ages marked cultural and social responses to the political turbulence of the post-Reconstruction era. In New Orleans, more than elsewhere in the American South, post-Civil War Reconstruction governments were led by a large population of black citizens, most of whom were Creoles of color, who were highly educated, well connected, and had enjoyed free status since the eighteenth century.<sup>300</sup> Groups such as the

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<sup>298</sup> Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*, 168, 174-175.

<sup>299</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 77; Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*, 2. Barker and Buerkle detail the role of Storyville’s famed brothels in the development of jazz. “Jazz was, in a real sense, born of the street bands of New Orleans, and partially reared in the brothels of Storyville, the Crescent City’s legendary red-light district.” *Bourbon Street Black*, 17.

<sup>300</sup> As Gwendolyn Midlo Hall writes, the term Creole derives from the Portuguese *crioulo*, meaning a slave of African descent born in the New World. The word means, quite literally, “born here;” native; local. Over time the designations “black” and “Creole” in New Orleans have become not interchangeable, nor historically bound, but “irreconcilable.” *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 157-158. In the face of Louisiana’s seventeenth-century Americanization, the term distinguished that which was native to Louisiana – a mixture of West African, American Indian, French, Spanish, and Italian influence – from that which was

Fourth Ward Republicans and black leaders such as P.B.S. Pinchback provided well-organized black involvement in New Orleans's civic affairs, if only for a brief time.<sup>301</sup> They encouraged citizens to form benevolent societies in order to engage in regular political debate and action.<sup>302</sup> In 1892, the Creole-run organization, Comité des Citoyens (Citizens' Committee) staged one such coordinated political action, in which Homer Plessy, a light-skinned Creole, was arrested for sitting in the white car of a segregated train. Plessy's arrest led to a landmark Supreme Court decision in 1896 that enshrined the principle of separate but equal and set the course for Jim Crow. It also led to the passing of Louisiana Legislative Code No. 11, which "designated that anyone of any African ancestry was Negro," legally classifying Creoles and black Americans into one inferior

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Anglo-American. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both black and white Louisianans identified as either Creole or American. New Orleans's century-long process of becoming American, precipitated by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, eventually eroded the distinction for white New Orleanians. However, the term "Creole" endured in reference to people of color. During Reconstruction, those who had been classified as "free people of color" in Louisiana before the Civil War used the distinction "Creoles of color" to discern families whose ancestors were free – often (but not always) light-skinned, educated, Catholic, French speaking and politically active – from the recently freed slaves who flocked to the city – often (but not always) darker-skinned, less educated, Protestant, English speaking and historically barred from participation in politics. Creoles of color and freedmen and women transcended cultural and religious differences to unite in political struggles of suffrage during Reconstruction and to combat segregation after Reconstruction; alliances were also formed in benevolent societies and in social life and entertainment. Although Creoles of color and African Americans transcended cultural and ethnic differences to unite in political struggle, the cultural difference between the populations persisted well into the twentieth century and, although diminished and subdued, is still evident in New Orleans today. Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, especially "Part III: Franco-Africans and African Americans," 189-319; see also Mary Gehman, *Free People of Color in New Orleans: An Introduction* (New Orleans: Margaret Media, Inc., 1994).

<sup>301</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 247.

<sup>302</sup> Jacobs, "Benevolent Societies"; and Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. by Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

category.<sup>303</sup> As noted musician and historian Michael White surmises, “[b]y the 1890s, life for many local blacks [in New Orleans] had become more difficult than before the Civil War.”<sup>304</sup>

While laws that regulated black mobility and citizenship were being fought in the courts, residents waged similar battles on the streets. By the 1890s, an “age of reaction” against the gains of Reconstruction had emerged, marked by an upsurge in lynchings.<sup>305</sup> One particularly bloody encounter occurred in July of 1900, when Robert Charles—a forty-four-year-old African American man who had left rural Mississippi in search of work in New Orleans—was provoked by the police. While sitting with a friend on a stoop on Dryades Street in the Central City neighborhood, Charles was physically harassed by three white police officers. He exchanged gunfire with them, shooting one officer in the hip, and after a short chase, fatally shooting another. Charles fled, wounded, and found refuge in an apartment at 1208 Saratoga Street. For two days, police and “citizens’ posses” leveraged the excuse of searching for Charles to beat and kill black men and women wherever they could be found.<sup>306</sup> Eventually, a shootout erupted between Charles and a crowd gathered outside of 1208 Saratoga, which left seven white people dead (including four police officers) and approximately twenty wounded. Charles withstood the continual barrage of bullets aimed at the wooden house, until he was forced outside

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<sup>303</sup> Barker and Beuerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*, 9; see also Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 248; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 17-18; and Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 179-237.

<sup>304</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Bands,” 74.

<sup>305</sup> Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 24.

<sup>306</sup> Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 46.

when authorities set the home ablaze. Once he emerged, Charles was immediately shot and killed. But the mob's retribution did not end there. According to the *Times-Democrat's* report, his corpse was "dragged to the pavement and made the target of a score of pistols. It was shot, kicked and beaten almost out of semblance to humanity...." The article continues, "The limp dead body was dropped at the edge of the sidewalk and from there dragged to the muddy roadway by half a hundred hands. There in the road more shots were fired into the body. [...] With each shot there was a cheer." Cries of "'Burn him! Burn him!'" were heard from Clio Street all the way to Erato Street, and it was with difficulty that the crowd was restrained from totally destroying the wretched dead body." Charles's corpse was not paraded through the streets at the hands of the mob, but in the back of the patrol wagon, "chucked into the space on the floor between the seats. The head hung over the end of the wagon. Some followed, demanding that the corpse be further mutilated. The dark blood dripped on the [wagon's] steps."<sup>307</sup> Even after Charles's death, white mobs continued to lash out against black residents, attacking individuals and destroying much property, including a prominent black school funded by philanthropists.<sup>308</sup>

One can imagine the cheering crowd following Charles's mutilated corpse as a sick inversion of a second line parade. During this short procession, the city's white

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<sup>307</sup> *Times-Democrat*, July 25, 1900, qtd. in 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, Other Lynching Statistics* [1900], ed. by Will Johnson (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 31.

<sup>308</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 287-288.

population, backed by police power, violently declared the streets as theirs.<sup>309</sup> Charles did not have the right to occupy public space except as a mutilated corpse, and he could never have claimed self-defense against the police officers' unjust eviction of his body from the street, for his blackness and statelessness (as a migrant worker and suspected vagrant) exempted him from citizenship, and thus from the "protections that would otherwise obtain in law."<sup>310</sup> Charles's story reflects turn-of-the-century tensions over black mobility in New Orleans, which not only included the promise/threat of social mobility afforded by Reconstruction, but also the spatial mobility of people migrating from plantations into the city. By 1900, New Orleans had been criminalizing and policing black bodily presence in public streets through vagrancy laws for decades. Beginning in the 1860s, African American men were arrested in public spaces and placed on plantations, where they signed annual contracts with planters to work the land for pay. Of course, the system was constructed to benefit the planters, and anti-vagrancy laws surfaced as a new articulation of racial capitalism in plantation labor.<sup>311</sup> In the span of

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<sup>309</sup> It is important to note that white riots on New Orleans streets also targeted Italians, whose ethnicity prohibited them from the full privileges of whiteness at the time. In 1891, during an event known as the "Who Killa Da Chief" episode, rioting whites lynched eleven Italian Americans when the suspected murderer of the New Orleans Police Department chief was not convicted. Germany, *After the Promises*, 129. In fact, Ida B. Wells-Barnett estimated that Robert Charles incident provoked the "bloodiest week in which New Orleans has known since the massacre of the Italians" (9). During the Robert Charles riots, Italians were reported to have joined the attacks on African Americans. *Mob Rule in New Orleans*, 34. These two instances of public violence, separated by only nine years, serve to remind twenty-first century readers that categories of race in turn-of-the-century New Orleans were in flux. Furthermore, one's potential position as victim or perpetrator during these riots was not simply pre-determined by one's racial and ethnic identity. Depending on time and circumstance, "black" may or may not have included Creoles of color, and "white" may or may not have included Italians. The very categories of "white" and "black" were constructed during public performances of violent control over ethnicized and racialized bodies.

<sup>310</sup> Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 48.

<sup>311</sup> Blasingame, *Black New Orleans*, 51-58.

two decades, forty thousand freed slaves (and those born free, including Robert Charles) migrated to New Orleans, fleeing the slave-like conditions of sharecropping, and many of them were captured and sent right back to the fields.<sup>312</sup> As Charles's story makes painfully clear, their bodily mobilities were severely policed by both law enforcement and vigilante violence.

Amidst this culture of public intimidation, retaliation, police violence, and rioting on the New Orleans's streets, which forcefully delimited the terms of citizenship and physical safety for African Americans, the second line tradition was born. Black New Orleanians asserted their bodily mobility and mutual reliance by dancing and playing music through the urban environment, dancing across segregated spaces enforced by both law and deadly force.<sup>313</sup> With a bodily discourse of dissent, second liners challenged the logic of containment that circumscribed the movements of Robert Charles and others like him. As such, it is not surprising that their performances attracted violent opposition from white citizens. An 1890 *New Orleans Picayune* article reported that a "Negro procession" was disrupted around 3:30 on a Sunday afternoon by "young white hoodlums" who "pelted them with rocks." Some paraders apparently ran, but others "took a hand in the row." The journalist leaves the altercation's conclusion to the imagination of the reader: "The greatest excitement prevailed and several people made their appearance armed with shotguns."<sup>314</sup> Were these "several people" an armed militia, sent to contain the "small-sized riot," as the journalist calls it? Did this racist act of violence against black dancers

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<sup>312</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 4.

<sup>313</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 35.

<sup>314</sup> *New Orleans Picayune*, January 12, 1890, qtd. in Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*, 26-28.

end like Bras-Coupé's insurrection at Congo Square (as told by Cable), in which he was grounded by police forces while mid-leap? Or were the "several people" with shotguns simply better armed additions to the angry white mob? Is it possible that the shotgun toting arrivals were defending the black paraders? Inconclusive as it is, this story illustrates that second lines have their origins in struggles over black mobility in public space, and have served to coalesce bodily, spatial, and social mobility, as dancers process through the streets and, when challenged, assert their right to move.

The fact that second lines and other brass band processions were performed outdoors made them simultaneously very accessible to black New Orleanians and risky to attend. As Thomas Brothers has argued, second lines accommodated an unlimited capacity of dancers and provided free entertainment for the city's poor, especially the African Americans recently arrived from nearby rural areas who brought with them demand for affordable, accessible, "ratty" music and a blues-based musical influence. But second lining also required people to accept the risk of bodily harm for the sake of enjoying the music. Accounts of musicians' physical injury and fatigue incurred while parading, combined with the threat of violence, suggest that putting one's body on/in the line was a precarious endeavor. Especially when second lines traversed areas known to be hostile, musicians and second liners were known to carry homemade weapons.<sup>315</sup> Since second liners had to negotiate the pull of bodily pleasure with the push of bodily injury, second lines incited more than a symbolic victory over geographies of containment; the parades move people through the actual battlegrounds of class and race conflict. Like

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<sup>315</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 17.



second lines today, Jim Crow-era parades not only asserted black mobility in the face of containment, but performed a dissenting mobility by offering “disenfranchised Negroes a chance to assertively move their culture through the city’s public spaces.”<sup>316</sup>

Many golden-age second line parades were planned and sponsored by black secret societies and voluntary associations. People of African descent across the United States, in the Caribbean, and in Latin America formed many types of exclusive organizations during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries. Such organizations included lodges, craftsmen’s unions, religious fraternities, mutual aid societies, benevolent associations, burial associations, social and aid clubs, and later, social aid and pleasure clubs.<sup>317</sup> Such organizations have long offered an alternative world for people of African descent in the Americas, in response to the structural and physical violence that has consistently denied their rights to citizenship, barred their access to mainstream economies, and denied them positions of governmental influence.<sup>318</sup> The first of these societies to appear in the present-day the U.S. occurred in New Orleans, in the 1780s, and New Orleanians’ participation in voluntary associations has outlasted all other U.S. cities

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 17-22, 36.

<sup>317</sup> For example, in Cuba, African religious and cultural groups formed nominally Catholic associations, or *cabildos*. In Brazil, people of African descent formed brotherhoods and sisterhoods called *irmandades* and work-affiliated groups called *cantos*. Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 133. On Afro-Cuban *cabildos*, see Phillip A. Howard, “Creolization and Integration: The Development of a Political Culture among the Pan-Afro-Cuban Benevolent Societies, 1878-1895,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*, ed. by Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); on *irmandades* and *cantos* in Brazil, see Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 107-125.

<sup>318</sup> Jacobs claims that a major role of early black benevolent societies was to enable “blacks to acquire skills in running organizations—writing constitutions, keeping minutes, and learning bookkeeping.” “Benevolent Societies,” 32.

<sup>319</sup> Initially, people of all races and ethnicities in New Orleans belonged to mutual aid societies—approximately four-fifths of the population by the late-nineteenth century—but black New Orleanians continued to form these associations when they lost popularity with ethnic white residents (as they gained access to mainstream corridors of power with the granting of white privilege), and even when membership declined within black communities in the rest of the U.S.<sup>320</sup>

There are several reasons for the tenacity of the membership in black mutual aid societies in New Orleans. By the 1920s, the increasing availability of institutional health care for black people across the country and the consolidation of group insurance within the workplace reduced the need for benevolent societies to act as medical safety nets.<sup>321</sup> By the late 1930s, sociologist Harry J. Walker observed that mutual aid societies had almost disappeared in most sections of the country, but in New Orleans, they had persisted in numbers and in importance in the life of the black community.<sup>322</sup> Walker attributes this persistence to the fact that the death rate amongst black New Orleanians remained much higher than African Americans elsewhere, and higher than white New

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<sup>319</sup> Walker, “Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans”; Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies of New Orleans.” In his 1937 study of Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans, Walker claims that the first one, Persévérance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association, was founded in 1783. Jacobs comments that, if Walker is correct, then it would have been in operation four years before the Free African Society of Philadelphia, commonly cited as the starting point for a history of black voluntary association in the U.S (22 note 1).

<sup>320</sup> Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies,” 22. On the decline of society membership elsewhere in the U.S., see David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 204-206.

<sup>321</sup> Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies,” 28; Beito, *Mutual Aid to Welfare State*, 213-214.

<sup>322</sup> Walker, “Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans,” 42.

Orleanians, due to conditions of poverty and a lack of access to medical care. He also, however, attributes the persistence of benevolent societies to the fact that they had become deeply ingrained in the habits and customs of the people. During the golden age, an estimated eighty percent of blacks in New Orleans belonged to at least one such group.<sup>323</sup> While the major functions of benevolent and mutual aid societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were to provide medical aid, burial costs, and small loans for members and their families, they also provided social gatherings for members, such as dances, picnics, anniversary parades, and funerals for members.<sup>324</sup> Blassingame surmises that voluntary associations furnished every aspect of late-nineteenth century entertainment that occurred outside of commercial venues.<sup>325</sup>

These groups—along with social clubs and church groups—provided a multitude of opportunities for black New Orleanians to rhythmically move through the streets.<sup>326</sup> As their constant social activities created a large demand for brass band music, black benevolent societies perhaps the principal customers for black brass band musicians—but they were not alone.<sup>327</sup> Society parades were joined by (and competed with) militia

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<sup>323</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Bands,” 79.

<sup>324</sup> Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 143-146; Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*, 12.

<sup>325</sup> Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 147.

<sup>326</sup> While many black churches and church-goers were (and still are) opposed to second lines, White claims that the parades’ spiritual function is what eventually attracted Protestants to hold their own parades (and to join second lines and jazz funerals), for the same “emotionalism that caused them to shout, cry, and dance with the ‘spirit’ could be expressed in parades.” White, “The New Orleans Brass Band,” 80-81. The same could not be said for Catholics. Brothers explains that three types of people were never buried with music, or honored with a jazz funeral: women, preachers, and Catholics. *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 211.

<sup>327</sup> Barker and Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*, 10.

processions, advertising wagons (with bands riding and playing in the rear), ambulatory vendor chants, and free curbside concerts, which brass bands would give in order to compete for business or drum it up.<sup>328</sup> Such a demand for dancing and marching music not only kept brass band musicians employed, but also facilitated the exchange of musical knowledge amongst oft-segregated populations of New Orleans: European immigrants; the uptown, American, “freedmen” population; and the downtown, Creole, free people of color.<sup>329</sup> These musical interactions caused, as ethnomusicologist Matt Sakakeeny puts it, “an efflorescence akin to a chemical reaction brought about by the synthesis of multiple elements: jazz.”<sup>330</sup>

Second line music and dance during this period articulated dissenting discourses that could not easily be spoken. The difficulty of speaking histories of black resistance can be found in an anecdote about a song dedicated to Robert Charles. According to jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton, a song about Charles’s showdown with the police became popular in the Storyville brothels and honky tonks. However, when folklorist Alan Lomax asked Morton to play and/or sing the song in 1950, Morton claimed to have forgotten it. He explained to Lomax, “This song was squashed [*sic*] very easily not only by the [police] department but by anyone else who heard it, due to the fact that it was a trouble breeder. So that song never did get very far. I once knew the Robert Charles song, but I found out it was best for me to forget it and that I did in order to go along with the

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<sup>328</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 1, 204.

<sup>329</sup> Barker and Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*, 10.

<sup>330</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 18.

world on the peaceful side.”<sup>331</sup> Even when Robert Charles’s revolutionary story could not be sung or played, and was thus scrubbed from history, second liners’ sonic and bodily discourses kept the spirit of his resistance alive. When crowds of African Americans, joined by a small number of Creoles of color, danced to brass band music through segregated streets, they dissented against geographies of black containment and the physical violence used to enforce it.<sup>332</sup>

Jazz scholars argue that early black brass band music was an extension of a political consciousness of black solidarity. Brass band musicians extended a collective consciousness of mutual reliance among black people by playing a new form of music that required players to rely on each other in brand new ways. The improvised form of the new brass band music erupting on the streets of New Orleans starting in the 1890s required group cooperation and an in-the-moment presence in order to riff off of a set musical structure and respond to fellow musicians.<sup>333</sup> Improvised dialogue also characterizes the “jazz-spirited dance forms” that, according to dance scholar Jacqui

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<sup>331</sup> Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and ‘Inventor of Jazz’* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), 57. For a reading of this ethnographic encounter between Lomax and Morton, see Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 50-51.

<sup>332</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 18. Benevolent societies and social life enabled black New Orleanians to form cross-class, cross-cultural alliances, but quite often, segregated club memberships accentuated the differences that divided “Negroes” and Creoles. Logsdon and Bell, “Americanization of Black New Orleans,” 243-244; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 139. Brothers writes that many Creoles were forbidden by family pressures and social decorum from attending second lines in the early-twentieth century, but over time, Creole musicians became more and more involved, and the numbers of Creole paraders increased. *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 173. According to restaurateur Leah Chase, notions of propriety kept her Seventh Ward Creole family from attending second lines in the neighboring Sixth Ward during her childhood in the 1920s and 1930s. Leah Chase, interview by Cheryl Kramer, June 14, 1994, Tremé Oral History Collection, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>333</sup> As opposed to “reading” bands that specialized in ballroom dances or military marches, black brass bands in New Orleans developed an early tradition of “ragtime” music: “performance of *improvised* syncopated music by small brass bands, what older musicians called ‘head music’ or ‘ratty’ playing.” Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans*, 21.

Malone, “influenced and was influenced by the music.”<sup>334</sup> The physical proximity between musicians and dancers on the street was necessary in order for people to dance to the music being played, and for the musicians to accompany the dance steps being invented. In this proximate exchange, a bodily discourse of aesthetics, politics, and cultural values took shape, quite literally. Musicians and dancers performing on the streets of New Orleans in the 1890s enabled a coherent political consciousness of solidarity and mutual reliance to emerge. They danced through the very streets where Robert Charles’ mutilated corpse was paraded as a warning against black mobility. The way in which they moved—with improvised, blues-based music and dance—traded in a capitalistic ethos of individualism and market exchange for a philosophy of collaboration and mutual assistance.

Undoubtedly, second liners’ bodily discourse took a very particular shape, which responded to the political climate of the time. Voluntary associations were shaped by post-Civil War black social thought, which upheld the ideals of cooperation, sobriety, racial uplift, right living, hard work, and self-reliance.<sup>335</sup> Frederick Douglass outlined the virtues of uplift philosophy for a New Orleans audience in 1872, when he delivered a lecture entitled, “Self-Made Men.”<sup>336</sup> The notions of uplift, sobriety, and masculinity evoke the statuesque posture required of militia marches and Masonic rituals. It stands to

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<sup>334</sup> Malone, *Steppin’ On the Blues*, 168. On the role of benevolent associations in facilitating dance and music development amongst African Americans, see also Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 68-70, 135.

<sup>335</sup> Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies,” 22; see also Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 56-68.

<sup>336</sup> Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 146.

reason that second line dancing during this time embodied such ideals in an upright stance and graceful step, much like the stepping showcased by members of the Independent Aid and Social Club in Jules Cahn's 1963 footage: spines upright or even slightly leaned backward, elbows akimbo, and buoyant steps zigzagging on a side-to-side or lateral plane. As we shall see, second liners' bodily discourses shifted after the civil rights movement, when ideals of racial uplift and progress no longer held sway in black political thought and popular consciousness.

### **The New Jim Crow: A Second Lining Renaissance in the Post-Civil Rights City (1977-1997)**

Late on a Monday night, sometime in the late 1970s, thirteen-year-old Phillip Frazier sat in the back seat of his stepfather's car, parked on the corner of South Saratoga and Second Streets in the Central City neighborhood. He sat just one mile from the scene of Robert Charles' violent standoff with a white mob seventy years earlier. With the windows rolled down, Phil leaned over the car door and listened intently to the strains of trumpet, snare drum, and especially tuba, streaming through the closed door of the Glass House.<sup>337</sup> Phil was most certainly tapping his fingers in time with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band's innovative fusion of traditional brass music with modern jazz and funk; maybe he could also hear the rhythmic pounding of a new footwork style taking shape on the dance floor. This tiny neighborhood bar was launching a cultural movement, and Phil was a part

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<sup>337</sup> Frazier tells the story of listening to the Dirty Dozen on Monday nights from his stepfather's car—because he was too young to enter the Glass House—in Burns, *Keeping the Beat*, 109, and in Charlie Brown, *Never a Dull Moment: 20 Years of the Rebirth Brass Band*, dir. by Charlie Brown (New Orleans: Mojotooth Productions, 2005), DVD. My narration of this moment takes some artistic liberty to imagine the scene based on these two sources.

of it. In about six years, Phil's band, the Rebirth Brass Band, would begin to play a Thursday night set at the Glass House, walking in the path forged by the Dirty Dozen Brass Band.<sup>338</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, Rebirth became an unparalleled musical force in New Orleans's brass band scene, spurred on by thousands of dancers who changed the way that footwork is done while dancing to Rebirth's groundbreaking musical styles. Second lining through New Orleans's streets together, the musicians and dancers gave sound and shape to the experiences of a new generation of black youth in New Orleans as they maneuvered through increasingly pernicious articulations of racial capitalism and its attendant violence.

In 1979, New Orleans was experiencing the early phases of what legal scholar Michelle Alexander has dubbed the New Jim Crow: the United States' post-civil rights racial caste system, perpetuated under the colorblind guise of law and order. Under the New Jim Crow, neoliberal economic policies support economic disinvestment in black urban communities, which undermines residents' chance at social mobility, while the prison industrial complex incarcerates black and brown people at astonishing rates.<sup>339</sup> In 1979, the process of urban disinvestment was well underway in New Orleans. Mass incarceration would come later. Thousands of white residents had already fled the city in favor of the drained-swamps-turned-suburbs, and the city's population approached an African American majority for the first time in history.<sup>340</sup> As the voting base shifted, so

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<sup>338</sup> The Glass House was located at 2519 South Saratoga Street. This address is now an empty lot. For more on the Dirty Dozen, see Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 63-104, and Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 118-120, 129-131.

<sup>339</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

<sup>340</sup> Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 5-6.



did political leadership. In 1977, Ernest “Dutch” Morial was elected as New Orleans’s first black mayor. The federal government’s commitment to cities was waning, and white residents were taking their tax base to the suburbs, so New Orleans’s politicians looked to market solutions to bring money back into the city.<sup>341</sup> The Central Business District’s skyline gleamed with new skyscrapers. The oil boom fueled their construction and the businesses that they housed.<sup>342</sup> Two urban renewal projects, Louis Armstrong Park and the Louisiana Superdome, were completed in that decade (1973 and 1975, respectively) as part of the city’s plans to attract funds through tourism and outside investment. Both developments required black residents’ displacement, either by clearing land or making it valuable through eminent domain (which is why some sardonically call “urban renewal” projects “Negro removal” projects).<sup>343</sup> In 1970—the same year that the Louisiana legislature passed a law designating anyone with one-thirty-second “Negro blood” as

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>343</sup> Louis Armstrong Park was possibly the most controversial of New Orleans’s Urban Renewal projects. It replaced fourteen blocks of the historically black neighborhood, Tremé, which featured the traditional architecture of homes and neighborhood businesses, with “landscaped lagoons, office buildings, the Municipal Auditorium, and a new performing arts center that was later named after the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. The development ostensibly preserved Congo Square and served as a memorial. It opened in 1973 and housed the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra, but concerns about crime and parking caused many affluent patrons to avoid it.” Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 194. Building the Superdome entailed less direct displacement because of its location near railway yards, and because earlier construction of the New Orleans civic center—the new city hall and other government buildings—in the 1940s through the early 1950s had already displaced residents in the area. The removal of black New Orleanians from the site for the civic center helped to create conditions that enabled the construction of the Superdome nearby twenty years later. Paul A. Passavant, “Mega-Events, the Superdome, and the Return of the Repressed in New Orleans,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, ed. by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 105-106.

“black”—the Black Panther party arrived in New Orleans.<sup>344</sup> Before being forced out of the city after a few short years, the party staged two violent and large-scale confrontations with the New Orleans police department (NOPD) in an effort to demand an end to the department’s notorious brutality against black residents.<sup>345</sup> In 1979, when a young Phil Frazier leaned out of his stepfather’s car to drink in the Dirty Dozen’s revolutionary sound, New Orleanians had seen a decade marked by the rise of black majority populace, increased black political and community leadership, and visible activism by the Black Panthers and other Black Nationalist organizations. The city had also experienced the slow dismantling of some successful antipoverty programs established during the 1960s and modest amounts of economic expansion in the oil and tourism trades.<sup>346</sup> Overall, the 1970s heralded the rise of (and fights against) neoliberal capitalism—including the effects of white flight, de-industrialization, and the withdrawal of social welfare—and its disastrous impacts on African American communities.

As the promises and fervor of the civil rights movement faded, so did New Orleanians’ enthusiasm for brass band music. In the civil rights climate, many African Americans associated traditional jazz with a subservient past that they would rather leave

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<sup>344</sup> Louisiana’s continual obsession with histories of racial encounter lasted late into the twentieth century, as this 1970 statute attempted to assign racial categories to people with indistinguishable racialized features. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 9-10; Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” 1757-1758, note 220.

<sup>345</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 276-284; Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans*, 70-95.

<sup>346</sup> On the relative success and struggles of New Orleans’s antipoverty programs from 1964-1974, see Germany, *After the Promises*.

behind.<sup>347</sup> Moreover, African Americans' increased access to insurance companies made membership in benevolent associations less imperative, which decreased the number of second line parades hosted by these organizations.<sup>348</sup> In the early 1970s, the second line season only lasted from September until November. Disco had taken over Bourbon Street, replacing live performances with recorded music. Without steady work, several bands broke up, and as older members died fewer and fewer young people picked up a horn. "In just a few short years," writes Michael White, "many bands and musicians who had been highly visible in community parades and funerals rapidly disappeared from the scene." He cites several reasons for this occurrence, such as the less physically strenuous and more lucrative commercial arena; the rise of "Sunday Jazz Brunches" that pulled musicians away from Sunday second lines; and increasing touring opportunities that drew musicians away on weekends.<sup>349</sup> When bands did take to the streets, the music they played had lost some of its luster for the keen ears and rhythmic feet of seasoned second liners. New Orleans's increasing tourism economy prompted musicians to narrow their repertoire to a short list of recognizable standards versus pushing new sounds forward in dialogue with second line dancers on the street, as had occurred during the golden age.<sup>350</sup> According to music historian Mick Burns, by the mid-1970s, "The whole neighborhood

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<sup>347</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Bands," 87-89; Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 5. Jazz historian and critic Jerry Brock recalls that the NAACP tried to stop the second lines: "they felt like it was a bit of a throwback, and it was time to move on. Harold Dejan and Danny Barker stood up to them and said, 'This is valuable. This is a part of the history of our people.'" Jerry Brock, qtd. in Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 102.

<sup>348</sup> Gregory Stafford, qtd. in Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 46.

<sup>349</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Bands," 89.

<sup>350</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 87-88.

parade scene was more or less moribund, and most people saw it as increasingly old fashioned and irrelevant.”<sup>351</sup> In response to two related crises—the dying brass band tradition and the lack of opportunity for youth—jazz guitarist Danny Barker started a youth brass band in 1972. The Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band, and other youth bands spearheaded by Barker in ensuing years, “made brass band music ‘cool’ for a generation of young people and made it commercially viable to have a band consisting mostly of teenagers.”<sup>352</sup> Several members of the Dirty Dozen came through Fairview. Along with the other black male musicians trained by Barker, and the dancers they accompanied, the Dirty Dozen went on to ignite a movement that Burns has called the “brass band renaissance.”<sup>353</sup>

The 1970s “moribund” parade scene did not happen overnight. Between the golden age and the renaissance, brass band-led parades had been slowly diminishing, although never into obsolence. “Despite decades of change and ‘modernization,’” writes Michael White, “brass bands continued to ignite the streets in community parades and funerals.”<sup>354</sup> As White observes, vernacular practices like second lining experience a

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<sup>351</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 5. A major exception to the trend was Harold Dejan, who founded the Olympia Brass Band in 1960 and updated brass arrangements with the rhythm and blues sounds of the civil rights movement. Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 19.

<sup>352</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 6.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid. Burns points out that the concurrent emergence of several institutions—all spearheaded by white music fans—also supported, and even generated, a renewed interest in brass band music. Tipitina’s music venue opened; the local, listener-supported radio station WWOZ was founded; and the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival gained status as a worldwide event. New publications, like *Offbeat* magazine (and I would add *Wavelengths*, which morese targeted an interracial readership), gave rise to comment and features on New Orleans music locally, whereas it attracted virtually no media coverage prior to 1980s. These outlets allowed musicians to attain local celebrity status. Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 8, 97-98.

<sup>354</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 85-86.

slow rate of change, due to their localized functions. However, economic and social upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century did impact the second line tradition in various ways. In the 1920s, many New Orleans musicians (including Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet) relocated to northern cities, where they brought New Orleans jazz to eager dancing crowds. It was in places like Chicago and New York City, not in the South, where Dixieland and ragtime sounds gained traction.<sup>355</sup> While a national obsession with ragtime replaced Americans' mania for marching bands, black brass bands remained integral to culture and life in black New Orleans.<sup>356</sup> The second generation of brass band musicians, born during the golden age, continued to play street parades and, due to legalized segregation, African Americans and Creoles of color played together more often, blending their styles to further develop brass band music.<sup>357</sup>

Nevertheless, while demands for black brass bands persisted, benevolent societies' social functions could not always compete with dance halls' demand for small orchestral ensembles. Therefore, many players gradually spent more time in the dance hall and less time on the street. The Great Depression further depleted the volume of brass band parades, due to a decline in club membership and activities.<sup>358</sup> During the 1940s, the popularity of the radio led black and white New Orleanians to cultivate musical tastes in swing-era big band sounds. The radio's stationary position and aural

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<sup>355</sup> Bruce Boyd Raeburn, "Dancing Hot and Sweet: New Orleans Jazz in the 1920s," *The Jazz Archivist* VII, no. 1-2 (1992): 10-13; Charles Suhor, "New Orleans Jazz in the 1960s," *The Jazz Archivist* X, no 1-2 (1995): 2; and White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 69-86.

<sup>356</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 77.

<sup>357</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 18; White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 76.

<sup>358</sup> Walker, *Negro Benevolent Societies*, 82-94; White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 86.

function, combined with advent of bebop and progressive jazz in the 1940s and 1950s, meant that jazz became more of a listening than a dancing art, even in New Orleans.<sup>359</sup> According to White, in the 1950s, “only about six regularly organized brass bands and occasional ‘pick-up groups’” were visible in community activities, such as the Eureka, the Young Tuxedo, and the Onward Brass Bands.<sup>360</sup> It was undoubtedly one of these bands that led a second lining crowd down North Claiborne Avenue in 1958, when choreographer Roland Wingfield stumbled upon the parade and wrote about it for *Dance Magazine*, penning one of the first movement descriptions of second line dancing.<sup>361</sup> The vibrancy described by Wingfield attests to the fact that, despite decades of social and economic threats to the practice, a second line parade winding through back-of-town streets could still occasion the full-bodied participation of hundreds of black New Orleanians in 1958. Similarly, Jules Cahn’s video footage of multiple second line parades and funerals during the 1960s and 70s displays frame after frame of densely populated streets, filled with colorful regalia and sweaty, full-throttle dancing. When the Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band convened in 1972, it may have revived a dying tradition, but New Orleanians’ passion for dancing to a second line beat had never died.

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<sup>359</sup> Raeburn, “Dancing Hot and Sweet,” 13; White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 86. Two documented jazz revivals occurred in the 1940s, but, according to jazz historians, neither demonstrated much impact on the second line tradition. The first was spearheaded by producer William Russell in 1942, which generated outside interest in New Orleans black brass band music and led to the first recordings, namely with Bunk Johnson’s brass band. White, “New Orleans Brass Band,” 86; Suhor, “Jazz in New Orleans in the 1960s,” 7. The second revival, which occurred in the late-1940s and early-1950s, involved an increase in the local popularity of mostly white Dixieland bands at clubs, hotels, and in radio play. Suhor, “Jazz in New Orleans in the 1960s,” 7.

<sup>360</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Bands,” 87.

<sup>361</sup> Wingfield, “New Orleans Marching Bands,” 34.

I prefer to refer to years between approximately 1977 to 1997 as the “second lining renaissance” versus the “brass band renaissance” for two reasons. First, I want to emphasize the mutual development of dance and music. Just as during the golden age, the music flourished in large part because dancers demanded its evolution and shaped the directions that it took. Second, the emphasis on bodily action implied by the term, “second lining renaissance,” foregrounds the physical precarity required by musicians and dancers alike. The movement did not flourish (at least not primarily) in recording studios, but on the very streets where a loss of affordable housing, drug trade expansion, increased prevalence of automatic weapons, and police brutality were creating a deepening crisis for many poor and working-class African Americans in New Orleans.<sup>362</sup> As such, second liners’ spatial movement through public streets in the 1980s links their activity to previous periods, when dancers and musicians maneuvered through structures of violence with intricate footwork. During the second lining renaissance, however, paraders dramatically transformed *how* their bodies moved through the streets by reshaping danced movement. Their gestures not only matched the updated sounds of youthful brass band music, but also responded to an updated version of racial capitalism, which was ushered in by the rise in neoliberalism and rationalized by ideologies of colorblindness.

When the members of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band and Rebirth Brass Band reflect on their early days, they frequently credit the dancers with pushing them to innovate their

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<sup>362</sup> Tricia Rose summarizes “five causes of destruction of black community” as such: “chronic joblessness, loss of affordable housing, drug-trade expansion, automatic weapons used in the drug economy, and incarceration instead of rehabilitation.” *The Hip Hop Wars*, 52.

sound. For example, Dirty Dozen trumpeter Efrem Townes recalls a group of dancers who “used to do some dances with the music, and whoooo, their knees were parallel to their chin! It was a very physical form of dancing, but it was beautiful to watch because they coincided the dancing with everything we played. You were actually relating to someone, speaking to them, and they would respond to it by persuading their body to do different things.”<sup>363</sup> His band mate, trumpeter and bandleader Gregory “Blodie” Davis, saw that the dancers were “speaking” to him too, in the form of a physical dare. “But these young dancers were coming out to the gigs in groups. They would challenge us with their dancing, they’d do some steps, and we’d have to say, ‘OK, now you top this. We’ll play something.’ The next week, we’d have something new for them to try and top what we were doing. It was a competitive kind of thing. So not only did the music change, but the style of second lining and buck jumping changed also, along with what we were doing. Now that I look back on it, I can see the development, whereas when I was in it, I wasn’t really paying attention to what was happening.”<sup>364</sup> Like their predecessors in the early-twentieth century, the Dirty Dozen conversed with dancers to develop new modes of expression that built on their local histories to give sound and shape to their present, collective experiences.

So how did buck jumping, footwork, and second lining overall change during this period? For one thing, the tempo increased dramatically, which coincided with a fundamental shift in basic footwork. “What made the difference was the beat was slightly

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<sup>363</sup> Alex Rawls, “The Early Dirty Dozen Brass Band,” *Offbeat*, October 1, 2010, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.offbeat.com/2010/10/01/the-early-dirty-dozen-brass-band/>.

<sup>364</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 72.



faster,” recalls Dirty Dozen saxophonist Roger Lewis. “Slightly faster” might be an understatement. In fact, the Dirty Dozen was known for playing second lines faster than people could walk—they could jog or skip perhaps, but there was no strolling to a second line played by the Dirty Dozen.<sup>365</sup> Rebirth slowed down their tempo slightly, so that it still pushed dancers but never rushed them.<sup>366</sup> The music’s accelerated tempo required a new basic pattern of footwork in order for dancers to move forward in time with the beat. Previous generations’ basic footwork was characterized as “stepping,” which allowed dancers to playfully yet gracefully move to the tempo of the brass band songs popular in the first half of the twentieth century. Speaking of second lining in the 1940s and 1950s, Jolly Bunch SAPC member Joe Glasper proclaims, “‘We weren’t ‘buckers,’ we were ‘steppers’ then. We could dance to any tunes they (the brass bands) would play without getting all sweaty.’”<sup>367</sup> Another older stepper concurs: “Back then, the movement of the people was more flowing. They had a suavey type of style to the dance.”<sup>368</sup> Flowing, suavey stepping allowed dancers to incorporate innumerable social dances as they changed with the times, for they could almost always be executed on top of a step-touch. But if one tried to follow the Dirty Dozen with a lateral step-touch, she would fall far behind the band. To match—and challenge—the music’s increased tempo, second liners changed their basic footwork from a lateral step-touch to a sagittal, or front-and-

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<sup>365</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 118-119.

<sup>366</sup> Jerry Brock, “Rebirth: Born-Again Teenage Horns,” *Wavelengths* (July 1984): 21.

<sup>367</sup> Geraldine Wyckoff, “Jolly Bunch: A Venerable Social Aid and Pleasure Club Ready to Parade Again,” *Gambit*, September 11, 2001. Accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/jolly-good-time/Content?oid=1239447>.

<sup>368</sup> Ronald W. Lewis, qtd. in Bruenlin and Lewis, *House of Dance and Feathers*, 154.

back, heel-to-toe step. In other words, dancers' footwork took on the directionality of walking so that dancers could process forward more efficiently, with feet moving forward and back instead of side to side. The step-touch shifted to a heel-to-toe, wherein the front foot shoots forward, kicking the heel, while the back foot scoots back, balancing on the ball of the foot. The forward moving heel-to-toe, like skipping, allows for more velocity by giving dancers a split second of airtime as they hover above the ground with each step. Needless to say, it is nearly impossible to execute this footwork for very long without getting sweaty. Dirty Dozen saxophonist Roger Lewis sums it up: "You had to be in good physical condition—we had guys dancing to us that was doing incredible things with their bodies."<sup>369</sup> The more athletic, vigorous, up-tempo footwork style of the post-civil rights period no doubt appealed to the younger generation of dancers being recruited (back) into second lining by the Dirty Dozen's new sound.

In accordance with a change in footwork styles, second liners of this period developed three more notable innovations. One was the position of the torso. The pre-1970s steppers would usually "stay on the ground and stand up straight,"<sup>370</sup> but the new, vigorous footwork styles required dancers to bend their knees and lean forward, allowing greater access to the sagittal (or forward and back) movement of the legs. Thus, the silhouette of a second line dancer shifted. He once displayed tall spine, pelvis thrust forward, chest pointing toward the sky, and legs open in a wide, lateral step, or knees pumping toward his chest in a military-style march. By the mid-1980s, the second liner

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<sup>369</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 80.

<sup>370</sup> Wycoff, "Jolly Bunch."

pitched his spine forward, thrust his pelvis backward, aimed his chest toward the ground, and pointed his knees straight ahead as one foot shot forward and the other behind him.

The second and perhaps most perceptible change in second lining of this period included the emergence, or, more likely, the increased popularity of buck jumping. “Buck jumping” is a term used somewhat loosely by second liners to refer to an energetic quality of dancing rather than to a particular step. When one begins to buck jump, he dismisses footwork in favor of dramatic level changes and selective pauses. The buck jumper will leap high in the air, drop to the ground, and rebound to a standing position, freezing with his legs as wide apart as possible, balancing on his heels. She will crawl under another’s legs, roll down the street, do the worm, spin up to standing, and finish with a high-knee hitch-kick. Buck jumping responded to the sheer energy, speed, and driving rhythms prevalent in music of the brass band renaissance; in turn, the musicians improvised with tempo, syncopation, and dynamics to respond to the innovations displayed by second liners. In the opinions of two second liners, before Rebirth came on the scene, “second lining was a little slower, a little laid back with the, you know, with the handkerchief and you might do the umbrella. But you know since Rebirth done picked it up, you got to put that handkerchief down, you got to put that umbrella down. You got to use all your body parts.” “You got to get fuuuunky! You got to sweat!”<sup>371</sup> One way that Rebirth made sure that the dancers were sweating was by featuring a persistent percussion section that refused to give them a break. Bass drummer (and Phil’s brother)

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<sup>371</sup> These quotes are taken from the documentary film, *Never a Dull Moment* (dir. by Charlie Brown). The first quote is credited to Joe Blakk, hip hop artist, and the second is spoken by a woman standing next to him, unnamed in the film.

Keith Frazier explains that he plays a continuous bass drum line, which, unlike traditional bass drumming, does not include pauses in the rhythm. “What I was trying to do was not have any spaces, like a heartbeat that doesn’t stop. If you keep that going, the feel for the dancers dancing off the bass drum will always be going. It’s kind of like the Rebirth style—it’s always moving.”<sup>372</sup>

Finally, a distinctive shift in 1980s second lining aesthetics included the incorporation of b-boying (widely known as “break dancing”). The Rebirth’s incorporation of hip hop music into their brass arrangements marks a well-documented innovation in the musical tradition, which dialogued with the city’s own burgeoning rap music industry in the early 1990s.<sup>373</sup> It is quite possible that, along with hip hop music, b-boying influenced the second line dance scene as well. The two dance forms share structural similarities, including a focus on footwork punctuated with level-changing stunts. B-boying certainly influenced second lining for Wellington “Skelly” Ratcliff, Jr. and Gerald Plattenburg, both of whom competed in breaking contests in New Orleans and, for Plattenburg, in New York City in the 1980s.<sup>374</sup> Still today, Plattenburg’s history

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<sup>372</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 113.

<sup>373</sup> On Rebirth’s use of hip hop, see Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 115; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 109-117; and White, ““The New Orleans Brass Band,” 90. New Orleans has competed with East and West Coast productions of hip hop and rap music since the early 1990s, with two major record labels distributing the city’s distinctive bounce style to listeners nation-wide. The major forces in promoting New Orleans rap music have been Master P’s No Limit Records, established in 1993 in California and quickly relocated to New Orleans, and brother team Brian “Baby” Williams and Ronald “Slim” Williams’ Cash Money Records, founded in 1992. Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 203-207. While New Orleans’s distinctive rap genre, “bounce,” emerged somewhat later than b-boying, and inspires its own form of dance, the proliferation of hip hop artists in New Orleans suggests that the cultural phenomenon of hip hop, locally rooted but plugged in to a national discourse, influenced second line dance styles on the street.

<sup>374</sup> Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014; Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club, *Coming Out the Door for the Ninth Ward*, ed. by Rachel Bruenlin (New Orleans, LA: Neighborhood Story Project, 2006), 76-77.

as a b-boy is evident in his second lining, for he intersperses lightening-fast footwork with spins on the floor and freezes on his head. Ratcliff's incorporation of b-boy aesthetics into his dancing is harder to perceive, for he has been wheelchair bound since 1986. Ratcliff, who began breaking with a neighborhood group in the Magnolia Housing Projects, was not immune to the symptoms of structural violence, including gun violence related to the drug economy, present there. He was paralyzed by a gunshot wound at age nineteen. This personal hardship has not stopped Ratcliff from dancing—he just had to get more creative, inventing his own version of footwork on wheels. For both Plattenburg and Ratcliff, their teenage b-boy experiences formed an influential repertoire in their second liner bodily archives.

B-boying and second lining both emerged as marginalized bodily discourses that expressed the realities of living in the New Jim Crow. Like b-boying, heel-to-toe footwork and buck jumping require a tremendous expenditure of energy, a willingness to risk one's bodily safety, and a one-ups-man-ship that challenges fellow dancers and musicians to push their limits. They are both carnivalesque, issuing a social critique embedded in pleasure. They are aggressive and playful. They harnesses a hunkered-down stance, ready for anything, including a (dance) battle.<sup>375</sup> They embody a shift in black social consciousness, trading in the upright stance, which aligned with racial uplift discourses and politics of respectability that characterized black political and social thought during the early-twentieth century and the civil rights movement, for the

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<sup>375</sup> Dance scholar Yvonne Daniel describes a “ready for anything” posture as prevalent in many African diaspora dance forms: the body is “generally low, with loosely bent knees, feet firmly planted, and chest leaning slightly forward.” *Dancing Wisdom*, 160.

aggressive, no-holds-barred, risk-taking attitude modeled by the Black Panthers and other militants. Hip hop and second line dancing of the 1970s and 1980s also embodied a particular performance of masculinity, aligning physical tension, or hardness, with politicized blackness unique to the post-civil rights era.<sup>376</sup> In second lining, this masculine hardness manifests as an aggressive, percussive attack with the feet and minimal use of hips, shoulders, and torso. Even as female dancers were becoming more socially accepted as dancers in the second line parades during this period (they were previously relegated to roles as polite marchers or decorative riders in the cars), male dancers continued to be the most visible and celebrated. As one veteran footwork fanatic told me, the women who are the best second liners are those who “dance like a dude,” which means, he explained, “straight up going hard.”<sup>377</sup> The masculine imperative of dancing during the second lining renaissance, alongside the birth of b-boying, reflects the gendered hierarchies in mainly male-led, and often misogynist, freedom movements of the post-civil rights period, such as the Black Panthers and other Black Nationalist movements.<sup>378</sup> However, as we shall see, if forceful dancing was coded as masculine

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<sup>376</sup> DeFrantz, “Black Beat,” 74.

<sup>377</sup> Don Robertson, interview with the author, April 10 2014. All quotes from Robertson are taken from this interview.

<sup>378</sup> Black and Chicana feminists, such as Patricia Hill Collins and Cherríe Moraga, have discussed the misogyny endemic to minoritarian liberation movements in the U.S. Collins notes that developing analyses of sexuality that implicate the homophobia and misogyny of Black men are often seen as violating the norms of racial solidarity. Therefore, in struggles of African Americans and Chicanos, racial progress is often equated with the acquisition of an ill-defined manhood. *Black Feminist Thought*, 9, 134. As Moraga explains, male-led nationalism movements unwittingly demand, not equality, but to share the white man’s position of dominance over women. *The Last Generation* (Boston: South End, 2004), 161. At the same time, Black power was heavily invested in a rhetoric that construed strong black women as emasculating and capable of sabotaging the movement through sexual betrayal. Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 49. However, second liners’ embodiment of a Black power masculinity cannot be read as simple misogyny. Dancing in this period can be perceived as somewhat radical, given the Black power movement’s rhetorical

movement, and most visibly showcased by male dancers, it nonetheless embodied the aggressive tactics necessary for all aggrieved peoples, regardless of gender or sexuality, to survive in the New Jim Crow.

The economic, political, and social crises of the 1980s disproportionately impacted urban black populations, and New Orleans was no exception. Ghettoization through economic disinvestment, and mass incarceration, went hand in hand to contain black mobility. By the mid-1980s, New Orleans's economy was decimated. The oil bust devastated its oil and gas industries, and the attendant departure of jobs further removed the middle-class tax base that had supported essential municipal services. To make matters worse, the federal government began to dramatically withdraw funds previously earmarked for cities.<sup>379</sup> Like many other cities, New Orleans turned to the production of entertainment as a more significant aspect of its urban economy. Unlike other cities, however, New Orleans cultivated tourism at the expense of other economic and commercial development, proclaiming that it would create jobs and bolster the city's struggling economy.<sup>380</sup> By and large, the low-wage service jobs that it generated for the city's working-class and poor residents did little to lift them out of poverty, given the lack

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castration of southern black masculinity. Riché Richardson writes that Malcolm X's hierarchical discourse on black masculinity portrayed the southern (and especially rural) black man as a counterrevolutionary Uncle Tom figure who was sometimes cast as homosexual (21). In conflating southernness with submission, Malcolm X's rhetoric castrates the southern black male, reifying configurations of the south as feminine (traditional, passive, fertile), and femininity as anathema to liberation movements. Therefore, male second liners who embodied the Black power movement's hard, upright embodiment through dance—a historically feminized expression—enacted a very complex performance of race, sexuality, and politics.

<sup>379</sup> Thomas, *Desire & Disaster*, 19, 32. In 1985, U.S. Conference of Mayors (whose president at the time was Dutch Morial) reported that the Reagan administration had cut grants to cities by fifty percent. Germany, *After the Promises*, 300.

<sup>380</sup> Passavant, "Mega-Events," 99; Thomas, *Desire & Disaster*, 5, 44, 100.

of an adequate public school system and sufficient training for employees.<sup>381</sup> As a result, residents suffered “astounding rates of poverty, high unemployment, and meteoric rises in homicides and violent crimes.”<sup>382</sup> In the mid-1980s, crack cocaine swept through America’s poor black neighborhoods, a few years *after* President Ronald Reagan announced his “War on Drugs,” which is better characterized as a war on the communities most impacted by drug addiction and the drug trade.<sup>383</sup> The age of mass incarceration, mostly of young black men, had come. Budget cuts to the NOPD in the mid-1980s precipitated a lack of protection in the city’s ten housing projects, which housed ten percent of the city’s population and, by this point, were solely inhabited by black residents.<sup>384</sup> According to New Orleans historian Leonard Moore, “Because of the persistent lack of police protection, crime flourished in the projects.”<sup>385</sup> Residents were not only terrorized by the violence erupting from the drug trade, but also from their own police department, which had become, in Moore’s estimation, “arguably the most corrupt in the United States.”<sup>386</sup> During these years, New Orleans was experiencing increasing racial polarization, brought into high relief by the political career of Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke. Duke was elected to the Louisiana state senate in 1989, and ran competitive campaigns for the U.S. Senate and governor in the early 1990s. His success

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<sup>381</sup> Thomas, *Desire & Disaster*, 95, 101.

<sup>382</sup> Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans*, 202-203.

<sup>383</sup> Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 51; Rose, *Hip Hop Wars*, 48.

<sup>384</sup> New Orleans did have three historically white housing projects, but by 1980, they had become solely inhabited by black residents. Germany, *After the Promises*, 201.

<sup>385</sup> Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans*, 206, 207.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-203.



as a politician signaled a deep state of distress for racial minorities in Louisiana at the time.

To survive these new articulations of racial capitalism and state violence, poor and working-class black New Orleanians sought solace and pleasurable escape by dancing through the streets. The second lining renaissance led to an explosion of new SAPCs that began to extend the three-month parading season. In the mid-1980s, clubs were formed that are still renowned for their dancing prowess today—namely, the Lady Buckjumpers and a division of the Young Men Olympian, Jr. Benevolent Association, the Furious Five. The Lady Buckjumpers and the Furious Five both recruited Rebirth as their parading band, and continued their exclusive patronage of the band for decades.

Tragically, the growing number of Sunday second lines during the 1980s was outpaced by a rapidly increasing number of jazz funerals. As a young band, Rebirth received much of their initial training by playing funerals, often for their fallen friends. Their former manager remembers that “they were doing a lot of second lines, specifically they were doing of their friends’ funerals, because of the drug scene at the time, they were dying at very young ages. Their songs, like ‘Leave that pipe alone,’ came out of the second line, following the band, a spontaneous chant.”<sup>387</sup> Rebirth starting playing together just as crack cocaine hit U.S. city streets, and accordingly, these funerals came to be known as “crack funerals.” Phil Frazier estimated that Rebirth played more than one hundred crack funerals between 1987 and 1989.<sup>388</sup> His brother and bass drummer Keith

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<sup>387</sup> Brown, *Never a Dull Moment*.

<sup>388</sup> White, “New Orleans Brass Bands,” 92.

Frazier recalls that the sound coming from brass bands at the time reflected a harsh reality. “The music was different, it was angrier, back in the late eighties. When you’re dealing with synthetic drugs, you’re dealing with a different kind of musician, and everything’s just different.”<sup>389</sup> The “angrier” music matched second liners’ aggressive, athletic, masculine form of buck jumping, which allowed dancers—men and women—to sweat out and give shape to their frustrations, fears, and sorrows.

Rebirths’ heavy funeral circuit reflected the reality for many black New Orleanians during the most tragic years of the War on Drugs. In the 1990s, approximately 3,000 New Orleans residents were murdered, most of them young and black. Reports of young black men killing young black men were so commonplace on the evening news “that they became almost like macabre sports reporting, unless a toddler or a white person were caught in the crossfire.”<sup>390</sup> The NOPD received highest number of citizen complaints of police brutality in the country, and a 1992 Justice Department study reported that New Orleans citizens had lodged more complaints with federal officials about police abuse than residents in any other city between 1984 and 1990. According to Moore, “Low pay, ineffective training, outdated equipment, incompetent leadership, and poor benefits all contributed to the lure of corruption, which went unchecked throughout the first half of the 1990s.”<sup>391</sup> A low point occurred in 1994, when African American officer Len Davis ordered the execution-style killing of Kim Groves, an African American single parent living in the Desire Housing Projects (the same place where

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<sup>389</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 114.

<sup>390</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 309.

<sup>391</sup> Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans*, 5, 15.

Panther show-down with the NOPD happened 20 years earlier), who had filed a police brutality complaint against him.<sup>392</sup> For many years after Groves' death, the Double Nine Steppers featured a car devoted to her memory in their annual second line parade. Helen Regis concludes that, "[b]y keeping the memory of Kim Groves alive during the course of their annual parade, the Double Nine are claiming responsibility for keeping police brutality, gangsterism, and corruption in the public eye, as well as saluting the bravery of a concerned mother who would not bow down in the face of police violence."<sup>393</sup> The frequent funerals, and memorials staged within Sunday second lines, allowed a generation struggling with escalating violence to mourn and maneuver through it by dancing behind a brass band through the very streets where drug dealers and police officers alike terrorized the urban poor.

As the second lining renaissance was taking shape on the streets, the synergistic development of new music and dance forms was happening on a weekly basis inside of night clubs, such as the Glass House. Small neighborhood clubs were an important site for the development of jazz music and dancing, from the brothels of Storyville to nightclubs popular today, and starting in the late 1970s and continuing for more than a decade, the Glass House was the place where the "real rollers" showcased and developed their emerging second line dance moves. During the civil rights movement, Central City hosted powerful organizing efforts, including the successful movement to stop the

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 15; Regis, "Politics of Memory," 764.

<sup>393</sup> Regis, "Politics of Memory," 764.

construction of a new Mississippi River bridge through the neighborhood.<sup>394</sup> In the mid-1980s, when Rebirth began their Thursday night gig at the Glass House, Central City residents were fighting against the post-civil rights backlash of neoliberal capitalism, and they embodied this fight in their footwork.

The Glass House became a hotbed of rhythmic innovation in body and sound. According to one music producer, this tiny neighborhood bar was “a pivotal place for the whole new brass band sound”—and, I would add, second lining dance style—“to form, to come together.”<sup>395</sup> The scene at the Glass House was recorded one night in 1982 by folklorist Alan Lomax and his film crew.<sup>396</sup> In the b-roll footage, we can see crepe paper decorations, a mixture of Christmas and Mardi Gras colors, hanging from the low, textured ceiling: streamers of yellow, green and purple hang in u-shaped formations, criss-crossed by ropes of gold tinsel and red bells dangling so low that some of the taller men graze the bells with their hair. As Dirty Dozen trumpeter Efreem Townes recalls, “at the Glass House, it was always Christmas time. Christmas year ’round, 365, seven days a week. The Christmas ornaments never came down.”<sup>397</sup> As the crowd gathers and waits for the Dirty Dozen to take the stage, Lomax’s camera pans the room—the size of a large living room—to reveal wood-paneled walls covered with photographs, paintings and

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<sup>394</sup> Germany, *After the Promises*, 255-256. As Germany explains, this effort was led by a group called BOLD (Black Organization for Leadership Development), a Central City-based organization whose leaders included Oretha Castle Haley, Dorothy Mae Taylor, and Jim Singleton. The section of Dryades Street that passes through Central City has been named after Oretha Castle Haley in honor of her activism.

<sup>395</sup> Scott Billington, producer, Rounder Records, qtd. in Brown, *Never a Dull Moment*.

<sup>396</sup> This description is culled from a viewing of Alan Lomax’s footage, filmed at the Glass House in 1982. Lomax, “Glass House 2” and “Glass House 9-15,” *Alan Lomax Video Collection*, DVDs 9-10, Tapes 44, 48-52, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>397</sup> Rawls, “Early Dirty Dozen Brass Band.”

prints (many feature Mardi Gras Indians). A little window air conditioning unit struggles to introduce some cool air into the cramped, sweaty quarters. A marching band bass drum sits onstage with the words, “Original 6<sup>th</sup> Ward Dirty Dozen,” painted on it in block letters. Across from the stage, a white marble bar stretches the length of the room, holding short glass bottles of 7-Up and full ashtrays. Neat stacks of liquor bottles line the wall behind the bar, where three women—Margaret, Rosa Mary and Cookie—leisurely serve drinks in plastic cups and dish out Miss T’s red beans in Styrofoam sectional plates.<sup>398</sup> A jukebox stands against the wall, left of the stage. Interior concrete poles hold up the structure. Nearly everyone is smoking cigarettes. People stand around the bar, sit at the few small tables, or perch on the lip of the stage, just six inches higher than the linoleum floor, eating red beans. Most everyone appears to be African American, save the film crew and one white woman with long blond braid hanging down her back. The plate glass door pushes into the dense crowd to let more people in. Neon lights glint off the glass as the door swings open and shut.

While panning the crowd, the camera catches its first glimpse of Sugar Slim, whose baby blue polo shirt boasts his name and club affiliation in iron-on letters across: “Mellow Fellows” (a division of the Young Men Olympian, Jr. Benevolent Society) on the front, and “Sugar Slim” on the back. Sugar Slim is a legendary dancer. Musicians and second liners today still speak his name when they list the canon of great second line dancers. The Mellow Fellows only paraded for one or two seasons, because, after that,

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<sup>398</sup> The bartenders and cook introduce themselves as Lomax interviews them on camera.

everyone in the group was either killed or incarcerated.<sup>399</sup> Sugar Slim, according to one former Mellow Fellow's recollection, was sent to prison for killing a man after a footwork competition dispute. Many have told me that he started a second lining organization, the Golden Nuggets, inside of the Louisiana State Penitentiary (commonly referred to as Angola), and still second lines with them today.<sup>400</sup> But in 1982, Sugar Slim was still on the dance floor at the Glass House, inventing second lining styles that heavily impacted the future of footwork. His danced innovations, now seen in the bodies of nearly every second liner today, have long outlasted his own bodily presence on second lining streets.

In Lomax's footage, Sugar Slim is among the several dancers shown in full-tilt. He shows off some one-foot hopping, constantly bouncing up and down versus side-to-side, in a near-heel-to-toe. He jumps up and drops to the floor, rebounds to standing, criss-crosses his feet back and forth multiple times, knocks his knees together in double time. Sugar Slim is buck jumping. When he returns to focus on footwork, he keeps his torso straight up and down; other guys pitch their spines forward. When the Dirty Dozen plays "Lickey D Split," we see several women stepping on the downbeat, swinging their hips, fanning themselves, clutching terry cloth sweat towels, and waving a hand in the air – sometimes with a sweaty towel in it. The women, by and large, do not punch out rapid-fire footwork like Sugar Slim, but there are exceptions. A short young woman dances next to him, wearing a yellow polo shirt, shorts, scrunched-up socks and white tennis

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<sup>399</sup> Kenneth Washington, interview with the author, May 22, 2014.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.; Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014; and Linda Porter, interview with the author, August 12, 2014.

shoes. The camera zooms into her feet. She scoots them percussively, on the quarter notes, without lifting them of the ground, in a heel-to-toe and criss-cross hybrid step. She scoots her heel out to the side and back to the front on the eighth notes, and finishes with a one-footed move that is still popular today: hopping on the weight-bearing foot and swinging the free leg back and forth, hinging from the knee.

African American playwright and activist Tom Dent captures the spirit of the Glass House during this period in a screenplay, “Second-Line,” that he penned in 1983 but (to the best of my knowledge) never produced. The following scene occurs the Saturday before Mardi Gras inside the Glass House. It could have been the very scene captured by Lomax and his crew. Notice that the gendered hierarchies on the dance floor are not lost on Dent.

The Glass House is the size of a large living room, and it’s exploding with music and shouting DANCERS!

It’s got a bar, a jukebox, a Ms. Pac-Man machine, four or five tables—and a tiny dance floor at the front of the club where DANCERS and MUSICIANS compete for space. There are women at the tables and the bar, but the crush on the dance floor is mostly young, black, male—exuberant, traditional Crescent City dance called the Second-Line. The Pac-Man is beeping and wailing. Three bartenders are pouring drinks.

An OLD MAN in a railroad cap is dancing on top of the bar—and he’s so hot people are fanning his feet! A CRIPPLE in a wheelchair is rolling around near the jukebox, gyrating wildly from the waist up. All around him, young men (and an occasional young woman) are whirling, dropping into sudden knee-bends, spinning other dancers at random, falling flat on their faces, flipping over and over in time to the music, imitating animals, letting their bodies respond to whatever old and powerful spirit moves them. [...] LEROY [*main character, Leroy Washington*] is an exuberant dancer. He [...] brings one of his feet around, seeming to knock his knees out from under himself, and sinks to his knees as lightly as a feather!<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Dent and Goodwin, “Second-Line,” third draft, 7.

The Glass House was a haven. In the 1970s and 1980s, when second line parades were increasing in regularity but still sporadic, dancers found weekly physical, mental, and spiritual release at the Glass House. One anonymous dancer, when interviewed by Lomax, expresses this point of view. “The Glass House is the place where we meet on Monday nights to let all our anguish, all of the things that we may have conquered that week before, and on Monday nights we like to start off a brand new week in the Glass House with the Dirty Dozen, make the rest of the week through.”<sup>402</sup> Because of its social importance, dancers and musicians were willing to press on at the Glass House, even under less-than-ideal circumstances. One legendary example includes the night that the lights went out – some say that it was first time it ever happened, but others say it happened all the time. The Dirty Dozen played “The Butt.” A guy drove his car (or motorcycle) up to the windows (or door), put on his high beams and everyone continued on. One dancer reflected on the situation as such: “The electricity come from the brass band. You can either dance in the light or you can dance in the dark. If you can dance you can dance.”<sup>403</sup> And they could dance. The passionate, electric, dedicated energy of the buck jumpers who religiously flocked to the Glass House on Monday nights—and, later, on Thursday nights for Rebirth’s weekly set—were fed, renewed, and bonded by the experience. It is not much of stretch to suggest that dancing at the Glass House during years of acute struggle might have saved some of their lives.

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<sup>402</sup> Lomax, “Glass House 2” and “Glass House 9-15.”

<sup>403</sup> Brown, *Never a Dull Moment*.



## Conclusion

While a noticeable shift in second line dance styles certainly occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, it is important not to overstate the novelty of renaissance-era footwork. As masterful improvisers, second liners are always incorporating past repertoires into emergent expressions. One such repertoire includes early-twentieth-century “ratty dancing.” In 1960, brass band musician Punch Miller compared the ratty dancing of the ragtime era—“guys squatting to the floor and coming up shaking”—to what they do at parades “now.”<sup>404</sup> Miller’s recollection troubles a neat history of second line dancing that would trace it from the dignity of nineteenth-century racial uplift to wild buck jumping of the post-civil rights era. Miller’s reflection reminds us that, long before buck jumpers joined the brass band renaissance, New Orleanians were already dropping and shaking to blues-based music. Even in second lining’s early years, a range of movements—and thus a range of cultural values—was on display.

A linear history of stepping-to-jumping is further complicated by the fact that the emergence of heel-to-toe footwork styles and a bent-down stance bears a strong resemblance to descriptions of footwork executed by male dancers in Congo Square, and harkens back to shuffling, jigging, and buck dancing of the nineteenth century. Therefore, the shift in dancing evident during the 1970s and 1980s renaissance signals less of a rupture with previous traditions than the return of what W.T. Lhamon calls “lore:” persistent and recurrent gestures of expressive behavior that, somewhat mysteriously,

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<sup>404</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 142.

resurface through time—often when they are politically pertinent.<sup>405</sup> The shape of the post-civil rights second lining body—knees bent, spine pitched forward, movement concentrated in nonstop footwork and athletic, gymnastic feats—blends images of the Congo dancing, shuffling, jigging, and buck dancing with militant rebellions against white supremacy of those eras, such as Nat Turner’s slave revolt and Robert Charles’ insurrection. Perhaps this shift in second lining embodiment signaled a rejection of racial uplift and assimilationist politics of previous decades. Some elder, dedicated second liners saw a loss of “a certain kind of grace and dignity” in the renaissance-era second line footwork.<sup>406</sup> Perhaps what they were seeing was a return to minstrel-era shuffling, and thus as an embodiment of the loss of the hard-fought gains of their civil rights generation. However, the New Jim Crow *required* an embodiment different from previous eras; it required a stance that would allow second liners to maneuver through mutating manifestations of racial capitalism.

In order to understand second lining as a bodily discourse of dissent, we must comprehend its history with structural and interpersonal violence. Taken together, Bras-Coupé’s mythical arrest while dancing at Congo Square, the macabre parade that followed Robert Charles’ corpse through segregated streets, and the hundreds of “crack funerals” that memorialized black lives lost in the 1990s all demonstrate second lining’s intertwined history with violence. Footwork has long served as a tactic for maneuvering within and against ever-changing articulations of racial capitalism, from antebellum

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<sup>405</sup> Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 69-73, 218-226.

<sup>406</sup> Jerome Smith, qtd. in Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 127.

slavery to Jim Crow to the New Jim Crow. In the antebellum years, a rich amalgam of African-derived dance forms in New Orleans attests to the incredible range of black mobility—across continents, borders, and social barriers—and tells the lie of black bodily containment, in which slave regimes were so heavily invested. After emancipation, turn-of-the-century second liners traversed the very city spaces where lynchings and mob violence intended to keep black subjects immobilized and inferior. They high-stepped through the streets with an upright, dignified demeanor that embodied racial uplift. In the 1970s, second liners took to the streets just as policies and economies rolled back the gains of the civil rights movements and antipoverty programs; their crouched, up-tempo, and vigorous footwork responded to the harsh realities of being black and poor in the New Jim Crow. As discussed in chapter one, by the time that Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, disaster had been occurring for New Orleans's poor and working-class communities for a long time. Through shifting terrains of violence, crisis, and disaster, New Orleanians possess the tactical mobilities and tectonic footsteps necessary to not only survive injustice, but to find pleasure, salvation, ecstasy, and community within it. The ecstatic and communal aspects of second line dancing are the focus of chapter three.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Grounded Yet Lifted: Collectivity and Ecstasy at the Second Line**

In 1984, dancer and dance historian Lenwood Sloan was hired as the resident grand marshal, or second line parade leader, for New Orleans's brand-new Riverwalk Marketplace shopping mall.<sup>407</sup> At the time, Sloan's personal research project focused on historical reconstructions of the cakewalk, which he staged at dance festivals around the country.<sup>408</sup> To Sloan, the high-knee stepping of a grand marshal very closely resembled the exaggerated steps of the cakewalk, so he performed his role as such. "I set out to strutting around like I was a cakewalker every day, and the crowd would kind of look at me. It was slightly entertaining, but it wasn't right." The difference between cakewalking and second lining hinged on each dance form's relationship to gravity. This subtle but crucial distinction in bodily posture is more than an aesthetic detail; it contains each form's history as a divergent cultural response to racial capitalism.<sup>409</sup>

The cakewalk, a dance initially performed by enslaved persons on U.S. plantations, is believed to have begun as a dance of mockery, in which slaves exaggerated the ballroom dances of their white masters. Slave masters held cakewalk contests, in which they would judge which dancers demonstrated the most stiff, erect, or elegant

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<sup>407</sup> Lenwood Sloan, interview with the author, October 31, 2013. All information about and quotes from Sloan are taken from this interview, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>408</sup> For example, see Lenwood Sloan, "Cakewalk (circa 1900)," *Black Dance America*, video cassette, reconstruction chor. by Lenwood Sloan, perf. by Halifu Osumare and Leon Jackson, recorded 1984 at the Brooklyn Academy for the Arts, Brooklyn, NY (Pennebaker Associates, Pennington, N.J.; distributed by Dance Horizons Video, 1990), Jerome Robbins Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>409</sup> Thanks to Kate Kokontis for drawing my attention to this point.

walks, and award the winners with a corncake. Apparently, the judges did not understand that their pompous mannerisms were being ridiculed. After the Civil War, African American minstrel performers added cakewalk competitions to minstrel show repertoires, where it was called the “walkabout” or the “strut.” By 1892, cakewalk competitions gained national popularity, performed by black dancers for white audiences at private parties and on theatrical stages.<sup>410</sup> The upright, vertical, and stiff torso of the cakewalk retained, if exaggerated, the aesthetic principals of the European ballroom and country dances that it mocked. By the turn of the century, the popular cakewalk couple George Walker and Ada (Aida) Overton Walker no longer presented the dance as derision, but framed its grace and eloquence as a genuine presentation of African Americans who were “as capable as white people.”<sup>411</sup> The Walkers leveraged the physical uplift of the cakewalk as a vehicle for upward mobility in the “racial uplift” movement of middle-class blacks at the turn of the century.<sup>412</sup> Dressed in silky formalwear, instead of the plantation dungarees characteristic of minstrel performers, the Walkers advertised their performance as a “class act.”<sup>413</sup> The Walkers embodied an aspirational and assimilationist liftedness that differed tremendously from the lift needed to second line in the 1980s, and Lenwood Sloan discovered this differentiation the hard way.

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<sup>410</sup> Gottschild, *Digging*, 114-120; Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 34.

<sup>411</sup> Aida Overton Walker, “Colored Men and Women on the American Stage,” *Colored American Magazine* (October 1905): 573, qtd. in Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 41.

<sup>412</sup> Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 39.

<sup>413</sup> Gottschild, *Digging*, 119; Hill, *Tap Dancing America*, 41-43.

One night, Sloan was onstage with New Orleans soul legend Irma Thomas. As the band played and Thomas sang, Sloan strutted around the stage in a grand marshal uniform until Thomas stopped him. “‘*What are you doing?*’ She says, ‘Stop!’ In front of the whole crowd, she says, ‘Stop! What are you doing? [...] I don’t know what you’re doing. It’s cute, but it ain’t it.’” The distinction between cakewalking and second lining, Sloan later realized, is that the cakewalk requires the dancer to pull away from the earth, while second lining requires one to fall into it. The second lining body constantly negotiates a tension between succumbing to gravity and resisting it, simultaneously dropping weight into the ground and pulling away from it. Unlike the cakewalk, second lining’s groundedness requires dancers to embrace gravity, and to accept the ground as a dance partner. However, second lining footwork does not ask one to actually fall—unless individual dancers choose to momentarily drop for dramatic effect. The basic footwork obliges second liners to constantly catch themselves before they fall, lifting themselves to nearly hover above the pavement. It embodies the second line’s carnivalesque performance, refusing to exchange high for low but revealing an ambivalent interdependence between them.<sup>414</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that second lining’s kinesthetic tension, which I call “grounded-yet-lifted,” is not only a matter of physical form, but also a theoretical framework that emanates from second liners’ bodily discourse. Grounded-yet-lifted enacts a particular relationship to the state and other structural apparatuses of power. When bodies are contained and policed, weighed down by hardship and struggle, second

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<sup>414</sup> Hall, “For Allon White,” 8-9.

lining suggests the political possibility of ambivalence: simultaneously resisting the downward pull of oppression even while signifyin(g) on it.<sup>415</sup> Grounded-yet-lifted is one way that second liners embody a dissenting mobility in order to maneuver within *and* against structures of power, thereby rewriting master narratives of “immobile ‘blackness.’”<sup>416</sup> Unlike cakewalking, second lining footwork signifies on tropes of subservience and apathy associated with downward directionality in African American history. But second lining also signifies on liftedness as a symbol of moral virtue and upward class mobility. Dancers’ constant negotiation between two opposing poles of a vertical axis can be said to choreograph blackness itself, in Jason King’s definition of it. “Blackness,” he writes, “is ambivalent direction, finding the fall in the ascent, and the ascent in the fall. This is survival.”<sup>417</sup> Second liners’ grounded-yet-lifted dissenting mobility is such a strategy of survival.

In what follows, I discuss grounded-yet-lifted’s precise physicality before moving on to its metaphysical and political resonances. I consider second lining’s groundedness as an embodiment of rootedness, and consider how forming collectivities through dancing together enables people to survive in the face of economic marginalization and

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<sup>415</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. famously developed his theory of signifyin(g) to discuss the African American tradition of repetition with revision, which takes many rhetorical forms, most notably, “playing the dozens.” *The Signifying Monkey*, xxiv, 63-65. To “signify” is to repeat a received “text”—be it word, musical phrase, or gesture—with an intentional, critical difference. Signifyin(g) revises the text’s received meaning of a thereby alters the way the text is read by foregrounding one’s relationship to it.

<sup>416</sup> As discussed in the introduction, my idea of “dissenting mobility” is inspired by Daphne Brooks. Speaking of nineteenth century performers, she claims that they used their “bodies in dissent” to “signify on the social, cultural, and ideological machinery that circumscribes African Americans.” *Bodies in Dissent*, 5-6.

<sup>417</sup> Jason King, “Which Way Is Down? Improvisations on Black Mobility.” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 14, no. 1 (2008): 42.

social crisis. Next, I discuss second lining's liftedness as an index of ecstatic experiences, which, in their excess, refuse recuperation into institutionalized religion or political activism. In other words, this chapter begins with a movement analysis of a subtle, postural physicality, as choreographed by second liners; next, it focuses on the mobilities that one cannot necessarily see at the second line: social movements (forming collectivities in resistance to oppression) and spiritual mobility (being "moved" by the spirit). New Orleanian (and now New York-based professional dancer) Francine Ott made this distinction when she compared the liftedness in second lining to "certain types of dancing" where "people might say, the Holy Spirit is present, [...] or just letting the spirit move. But at the same time, I think the groundedness of it is staying connected to the people around you."<sup>418</sup> The collective that gathers at a second line parade can generate an experience in which individuals ground themselves so that they may find the support required to take ecstatic flight.

I argue that both motivations to dance, forming collectivities and catching the spirit, reveal how second liners use dancing as a tactic to maneuver through layers of historical, structural, and interpersonal violence.<sup>419</sup> Beyond its utility as a mode of survival, second lining also choreographs a particular relationship to the power structures responsible for oppression. In King's words, "dance always already implies movement,

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<sup>418</sup> Francine Ott, interview with the author, December 6, 2013. All quotes from Ott are taken from this interview.

<sup>419</sup> As throughout the dissertation, I am using "tactics" in Michel de Certeau's sense, to describe actions employed by those in less powerful positions to maneuver within and against the disciplinary laws of the place. *Practice of Everyday Life*, 29-30.



rather than immobility, as a political possibility.”<sup>420</sup> Second lining’s grounded-yet-lifted posture choreographs power as moment-to-moment oscillations between resistance and subversion, refusing to stay put in any static position.

### **Rolling: Grounded-yet-Lifted as a Bodily Posture**

When a second liner sees some footwork that she admires, she will often say that the dancer is “rolling,” and encourage the dancer to “roll with it.” The too-grounded dancer does not roll; she bounces.<sup>421</sup> If one is too grounded, then the feet cannot rebound quickly enough to hit the brass band music’s eighth-note or sixteenth note, and the dancer winds up walking simply on the even quarter notes, dumping her weight into the pavement with each step. If the too-grounded dancer tries to dance quickly, her movement becomes jerky and labored. Quite possibly, she will fail to keep up with the rhythm, stuttering and sputtering erratically in between the beats. This was how my footwork looked and felt when I first started second lining. Mobilizing my pelvis required me to fight against years of childhood ballet training, which taught me to tuck my tailbone under, squeeze my hips together, and minimize any pelvic thrusts or circles. Instinctively, I employed the hip movements cultivated during years of salsa dancing, a side-to-side, circular motion in which one or both feet are always firmly in contact with the ground. I quickly learned that, to walk forward (which is necessary in a parade) with

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<sup>420</sup> King, “Which Way is Down?,” 42. Danielle Goldman builds on King’s analysis to chart complimentary political projects in nonviolent protests and contact improvisation in the 1960s U.S. She states that, while each bodily practice emerged out of a distinct tradition, and while postmodern dancers were more likely to be white and therefore more socially “free to fall” than African American protestors, each group reclaimed a power in the act of falling. *I Want to Be Ready*, 100-101.

<sup>421</sup> Many second liners and second line dance teachers describe “the bounce” as a crucial element of second line dancing: a subtle, constant, buoyant pulse. I am talking about something quite different here: bouncing as the belabored, too-slow, too-dramatic transition between grounded and lifted.

lateral hip-sways limited my footwork to a step-touch, with an occasional rock-step thrown in for variety. When I tried to layer a liftedness on top of this, in an attempt to imitate the nearly levitating footwork artists that I saw on the street, I began slamming myself into the ground and hoisting myself back up again with every step.

In order to roll, I had to lean forward and find the lift in my center so that my rib cage almost disconnected from my pelvis. That freed up my thighbones to swing from my hip sockets, and my legs were loose enough to move deftly over uneven pavement; my feet felt light and they could rhythmically touch the ground instead of sink into it. Furthermore, this lift allowed my torso to ride on top of rapidly working legs and feet, so that my upper body did not shift up and down with every step, but remained at a constant distance from the ground. The pelvis works like a set of shocks, minimizing the impact of the footwork on the upper body, so that the dancer can remain cool on top while working fiercely on the bottom. Once I found the lift, I had to save my salsa-inspired, side-to-side hip sways for choice moments when the forward movement of the parade paused. To master the paradoxical directionality of second lining footwork—moving forward while one foot is always sliding behind—I had to allow my pelvis to liberally swing forward and backward, not right to left.

Second lining requires a lift—but one must be careful to ground it with a downward drive. As Lenwood Sloan's story indicates, the ground is very important in second lining. Brass band musician Gerald French noted that second line dancing's focus on the lower half of the body (namely the feet) is mirrored by brass bands' musical focus on the low end of the scale: the bass. In French's words, "We approach playing music

from the bottom up,” meaning that New Orleans musicians emphasize the syncopations of the bass drum and tuba (bass horn) in brass band arrangements.<sup>422</sup> The “Bass Brothers” and Rebirth Brass Band founders, Phil and Keith Frazier, agree with French: an emphasis on the low end of things is what connects brass band music to the dancing that it accompanies. As Phil explains, “We put the bass line down first,” which establishes the rhythm, “and everything else [including the melody] goes on top. [...] If you can dance off it, we can work with it. We want people to be dancing all the time.”<sup>423</sup> In both dance and music, second lining’s downward focus gives it soul, in Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s terms. Soul, she says, is “about going in deep, gettin’ down: Soul is the digger,” and rhythm is the conduit for soul. Notably, in second lining, that rhythm is found on the bottom: in the feet and in the bass. “Rhythm-as-soul” in second lining performs a “sensual, visceral connotation of connectedness with the earth [...] and, concomitantly, a reaching for the spirit.”<sup>424</sup> Pushing down to reach up is classically carnivalesque: it embraces and elevates the lower regions in all the ways that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies them: the genitals, the gutter, and the lowest rung of social hierarchies.<sup>425</sup> These all become fodder for soulful performance in second lining.

A grounded-yet-lifted posture has characterized second liners’ dancing for more than thirty years, but this stance has not always been so fundamental to the second line

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<sup>422</sup> Benjamin Doleac, “Second Lining in New Orleans: On the Floor and On the Streets,” *Ethnomusicology Review*, September 29, 2013, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/second-lining-new-orleans-floor-and-streets>.

<sup>423</sup> Burns, *Beat on the Street*, 111.

<sup>424</sup> Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 223, 234.

<sup>425</sup> Bakhtin, *Rebelais and His World*, 18-28.

aesthetic. Second lining is a living social practice; it changes over time, incorporating popular culture aesthetics and absorbing other dance styles. As outlined in chapter two, the bodily play between grounded and lifted has been perhaps most crucial for footwork performed since the mid-1970s second lining renaissance. Before this period, footwork was popularly characterized as “stepping,” a buoyant, upright, zigzagging step that allowed dancers to playfully yet gracefully move to the medium tempo of brass band music that was popular in the first half of the twentieth century. In response to (and demand for) an increased tempo, second liners in recent decades adopted a forward moving, heel-to-toe step, which allows for more velocity by giving dancers a split second of airtime to hover above the ground with each step.

Besides increasing the tempo, 1980s second line culture also began to incorporate hip hop aesthetics, which, in the dance, meant trading in an upright posture for a bent-kneed, forward-pitched one that embraced rather than transcended the downward pull of gravity. This posture is emblematic of what King calls the “cool walk” or the “black walk,” a casual stride perfected during the height of bebop style in the 1940s and 1950s and immortalized in the physical work of rap artists. “It’s the rhythmic, almost percussive, casual stride that incorporates a bobbing or falling motion, followed by a quick, stylish pull upward.”<sup>426</sup> In his essay, “Which Way Is Down? Improvisations on Black Mobility,” King charts the multiple ways in which African American discourses have associated verticality with activism and social mobility, and horizontality with apathy, degradation, and/or subservience. These directionalities appear in discourse as

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<sup>426</sup> King, “Which Way is Down?,” 36-37.

metaphors, most prominently as the “ladder” of socioeconomic hierarchies. The proverbial social ladder has directed the upward focus of black activism, from Booker T. Washington’s rhetoric of racial uplift in the late-nineteenth century (during the birth of modern-day second lining and the heyday of Walker and Walker’s cakewalk fame), through the black power movement’s urge (articulated by Bob Marley) to “stand up for your rights.”

Stepping, characteristic of second lining in the first half of the twentieth century, demonstrates how preferences for verticality have also taken shape in *bodily* discourses. Contrary to the verticality of stepping, contemporary second line rolling eschews the shame associated with succumbing to gravity by falling prostrate or lying in the gutter. Rolling, like the cool walk, is, in King’s words, “choreographed falling.” If you *choose* to dip with your stride, “then you have not so much fallen as you’ve made a decisive action to go down.” The cool walker finds pride and power in the act of falling by essentially signifying on its shameful associations. It is “a part of the way one practices being (a) black (man), on the margins, an outsider.”<sup>427</sup> The second liner’s grounded-yet-lifted posture can be seen as another articulation of a dissenting bodily discourse, along with the cool walk, prevalent amongst black urban communities in the post-civil rights era. As choreographed falling, second lining’s play with gravity embraces and parodies, or signifies on, assumptions about the virtues of climbing the social ladder.

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid. King’s analysis resonates with DeFrantz’s discussion of hip hop dance, in which virtuosity requires an alignment of physical tension (hardness) with politicized blackness unique to the post-civil rights era. “Black Beat,” 74.

However, second lining's grounded-yet-lifted posture resonates with embodied philosophies far beyond the cool walk, for it can be found in many sacred and festival dances of the African diaspora, from Bahian Candomblé to North American buck dancing.<sup>428</sup> African diaspora dances often utilize a “get-down” posture, as art historian Robert Farris Thompson calls it, or what dance scholar Yvonne Daniel describes as a “ready for anything” posture: “generally low, with loosely bent knees, feet firmly planted, and chest leaning slightly forward.”<sup>429</sup> Daniel explains how a grounded posture is useful for dancers, for it allows them to execute many different movement possibilities while improvising. She also notes that a grounded posture enables dancers to divide the upper and lower torso, a necessity in many Afro-Caribbean ritual dance forms, which require spinal undulations and rib cage and pelvic contractions.<sup>430</sup> Gottschild names this grounded orientation in space as a key aesthetic element in Africanist dances, for it enables movement to emanate from any place in the body, including the pelvis, which distinguishes Africanist dance aesthetics from European-influenced sensibilities.<sup>431</sup> She adds that a grounded posture reflects a reverence for the earth as a source of spiritual strength, which distinguishes the danced religions of West and Central African

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<sup>428</sup> See chapter two for a historical genealogy of second lining.

<sup>429</sup> Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 160; Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), xii, 44, 47, 112. Daniel also calls upon her embodied knowledge as a dancer to legitimate the get-down stance as a constant in African diaspora dance. She notes that, since Katherine Dunham's teaching in the 1930s and 1940s, dance teachers in African-derived communities have passed down this dance aesthetic. *Dancing Wisdom*, 288 note 3.

<sup>430</sup> Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 160.

<sup>431</sup> Gottschild contrasts the Africanist aesthetic imperative for groundedness with a Europeanist aesthetic, epitomized in ballet, in which the ideal is to initiate movement from one locus – “the nobly lifted, upper center of an aligned torso, well above the pelvis.” *Digging*, 14.

cultures.<sup>432</sup> Like these dance forms, second lining's get-down stance is both utilitarian and symbolic. It allows dancers to divide the upper and lower torso and thus to lift the rib cage off of the pelvis so that the legs can scissor quickly enough to keep up with a fast-moving band. It provides the dancer a platform for endless improvisations as she goes, since movement can initiate from any place in the body. Symbolically, it evokes the hardened detachment characteristic of the cool walk; but it also suggests a reverence for the earth, or at least the low end of things, embodied by many African diaspora dances.

The pre-1970s upright step-touch survives in second lining today, most potently and clearly in the dirge performed during funeral processions. The jazz funeral is the performance *par excellence* in which second liners embody the opposites of grounded and lifted. During our interview, Francine Ott aligned the two seemingly opposite experiences of mourning and celebration to the physicality of grounded and lifted. The jazz funeral tradition, she said, honors the fact that death can be “weighted for some people,” even while it creates a space that is also “celebratory, which is the lift, the lightness.”

The first half of the funeral procession, from the church to the cemetery, is heavy, weighted, and mournful, as the “second line” of joiners follows the “first line” of the family and casket with measured steps, while the brass band plays slow dirges. While stepping to the dirges, second liners move low and heavy on the half notes. I have seen two versions of the dirge step, both in contemporary funerals and in footage from the

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<sup>432</sup> Gottschild, *Black Dancing Body*, 223.

early 1960s.<sup>433</sup> In one version, the dancer steps forward on the one-count and lingers in a wide-legged stance, rocking back slightly on the two-count, until stepping the back foot forward on three. Some exaggerate the rock so much that it takes on a triplet quality. In another version, dancers step-touch instead of rocking, digging one toe next to the weight bearing foot on the two-count. Hands are clasped behind the back or dangling at the sides. The knees bend with each step, which accentuates the body's release toward the ground, and the torso remains upright or even slightly leaned back. The dirge step embodies the experience of death as dignified yet mournful. However, after the pallbearers place the casket in the tomb, or after the body is "cut loose," the band kicks into a series of up-tempo tunes, the signal for second liners to cut loose, lifting up off of the ground, and up out of weighty mourning, to dance vigorously from the cemetery to a hall or home where the "repast" party will continue.<sup>434</sup>

The two halves of the funeral reflect two different philosophical approaches to directionality. The dirge stepper is weighed down by mourning; death, despair, and suffering pull his feet and gaze forcefully toward the street. At the same time, his regally upright spine and open chest reflect a certain dignity in the sober, honorable commemoration of a respectable man's life. (It is usually, but not exclusively, black men who are honored by a jazz funeral, and often do the official honoring as members of a benevolent society or as a grand marshal.<sup>435</sup>) When the band shifts to a second-line beat,

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<sup>433</sup> Various videos, Jules Cahn Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>434</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 84-85.

<sup>435</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 488; Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 211. Brothers adds that the upright, sober, militaristic display portrayed a symbol of respectable masculine pride, while the



and the dancers begin to “cut up,” they signify on the dirge’s relationship to gravity. They soulfully dig into the bass drum’s rhythms and play the ground with their feet. They jump, dip, and climb under and over any obstacles in their way. They reach down to lift off into ecstatic performance. It is when engrossed in lightening-fast footwork, when locked in with the tuba’s complex rhythm, or when sweating through some energetic buck jumping—second liners’ term for exuberant, athletic dancing—that paraders most often access the spirit. Lenwood Sloan characterizes the second line as a “baptism by music,” wherein the initiate produces his own baptismal waters through sweat.

New Orleans poet and music critic Kalamu ya Salaam eloquently described the experience of dancing during the second half of a jazz funeral in 1982:

Nowhere else in this country were people dancing in the streets after someone had died. [...] I should say we felt it was important because there is so much we don’t really know. We don’t really know or understand how all of this hooks up, it’s [*sic*] meaning. But we feel its importance and smile at it and go with it ‘cause it’s good. Dancing is good. Music is good. Shaking in the sun is good. Shouting and second lining together is good. So we go with it and are never disappointed by being together like this.<sup>436</sup>

What Salaam finds so “good” could be what Robert Farris Thompson calls the “ecstatic unions of sensuous pleasure and moral responsibility” present in many dances of the African diaspora, a phenomenon that Thompson famously dubbed the “aesthetic of the cool.”<sup>437</sup> The aesthetic of the cool names a union of opposites on full display in the jazz

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irreverent second line dancing that happened after the body was “cut loose” portrayed men as mischievous, probably womanizing, carousers (“Oh, Didn’t He Ramble,” a popular song played after the body is cut loose, suggests as much). Thus, two aspects of masculinity were/are on display during each half of the funeral: the respectable family provider and the lovable roamer (211).

<sup>436</sup> Kalamu ya Salaam, “Second Line: Cutting the Body Loose,” *Wavelengths* 21 (1982): 28-31.

<sup>437</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, “An Aesthetic of the Cool,” *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (1973): 41-42.

funeral: a deeply complexly motivated, consciously artistic interweaving of elements serious and pleasurable, of responsibility and play,<sup>438</sup> mournful and celebratory, serious and playful, grounded and lifted.

Individuals' vertical connections with a spiritual realm are supported by horizontal connections formed between people on the street. Second lining is performed individually; that is, it does not require a partner or a group of partners, as does salsa or square dancing. However, second lining is definitely a *collective* experience. Salaam hints at this when he describes second lining as "being together." Individual performers enact different yet complementary roles in an ensemble setting.<sup>439</sup> Although second lining steps are executed individually, the dancing is grounded in connection with other people. In his 1983 (unproduced) screenplay, "Second Line," New Orleans writer and activist Tom Dent describes the powerful collective energy generated during a second line as his main character, Leroy, jumps into one. "The beat, the jump, the swift movement of rhythm, the entire crowd of his people carried away into unity of motion, singleness of purpose, individuality of motion. The second line is everybody's thing together and everybody's thing for themselves."<sup>440</sup> As Dent indicates, the horizontal connections formed between people on the street supports individuals' vertical connection with a spiritual realm.

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid..

<sup>439</sup> Robert Farris Thompson formulated the concept of "apart playing" to describe the ways in which individual musicians work together in an ensemble to create polymeter in African diaspora music performances. "West African Dance," 93-94. Second lining, like many other African diaspora dance forms, can be thought of as "apart dancing."

<sup>440</sup> Dent and Goodwin, "Second-Line," front matter. Notably, Salaam and Dent worked closely together as members of the artist-activist collective, the Free Southern Theatre, in New Orleans during the 1960s and 1970s.

The choreographic structure of the second line—participatory, circular, and horizontal—reflects a value placed on collective experience. The procession organizes the dancing collective as an imagined, yet narrowed, circle that orbits around the band. Small circles constantly form when the procession pauses: a small group of dancers, either behind the band or stationed peripherally in a parking lot or driveway, will often widen into a circle and encourage/challenge one or two dancers in the center by clapping, shouting, or even playing cowbells and tambourines. This is often the domain in which children’s footwork skills are honed, as they step into the center of the temporary ring and perform their best moves to the supportive yet demanding comments of onlookers, often family members and friends of the family. Once the procession starts moving again, the ring dissolves back into the line, and the collective of many mini-collectives moves forward once again, all dancers orbiting around the band and moving in close proximity to one another. The band organizes the crowd to move in relation to the music, unified by the beat. Even though each person is dancing their own combination of specific and unique movements, the beat coheres the crowd, so that it is possible to stand on a porch, overpass, or other elevated structure and see thousands of heads bobbing up and down together, not in perfect unison, but overwhelmingly unified. The effect is breathtaking, like the rippling of a vast ocean wave. The procession constantly overflows its boundaries, spilling out into parking lots, onto roofs, and into surrounding streets; but these peripheral dancers are always moving in relation to the first line and the second liners closest to it in the middle of the street. The forward-moving procession periodically pauses during pre-planned stops at bars, houses, or other establishments along the route,

when the crowd disperses to cover streets and sidewalks for several city blocks. But once the band starts up again, the club members come out of the door pumping feathered fans overhead and the collective column of individuals resumes its forward motion. Dancers find their chosen spot in the procession, and many dance fervently, sharing energy, dance steps and rhythms with other dancers and with the musicians, forming a collectivity, and, for some, finding ecstasy.

### **Grounded: Rooted and/or Captive**

Second lining's focus on lower regions—the feet, the bent-kneed posture, the bass instruments' rhythms, and the crowd's horizontal formation—can be read as a bodily discourse of rootedness. Paraders perform a rootedness on the move, forging ties to people and place through a mobile, danced procession. As they dance through city streets, they refashion histories of oppression and displacement, and its effect on neighborhood and family structures, into a performance of rootedness in a particular community. As collective, grassroots, neighborhood-based, and intergenerational rituals, second lines are rooted *and* routed, to use Paul Gilroy's terms, in New Orleans's black neighborhoods. Gilroy suggests that the effects of exile, relocation, and displacement on black populations produce a characteristic restlessness in expressive cultures of the black Atlantic: the curse of forced migrations is repurposed and affirmed as journeying.<sup>441</sup> As decades of second lines have journeyed through New Orleans's streets, their performances have accumulated (and continue to accumulate) into a collective history and memory that is rooted in a particular place and people.

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<sup>441</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 18, 111, 133.

While chapter four examines the second lining's processional form as spatial practice of place making, this chapter focuses on the human relationships that also comprise second lining's performance of rootedness. Second lining is a participatory, collective performance in which dancing together enables (some) second liners to enact a community with (some) others. Before I proceed, a note on the word "community" is warranted. The term has become simultaneously indistinct and over-determined through rampant, unexamined use. In most deployments, community implies a given and monolithic entity; it carries overwhelmingly positive connotations and is positioned as an altruistic other to capitalism.<sup>442</sup> In actuality, communities are not things but processes, requiring constant performance in order to exist. Many communities of people are occasioned by decidedly negative circumstances, and communal practices are not an alternative to but generative for capitalist exchange.<sup>443</sup> Despite intellectual critiques of the *concept* of community, pervasive and celebratory claims to community robustly persist.<sup>444</sup> Many people in New Orleans positively identify as a member of "the second line community." So, how does the ethnographer talk about people's expressions of community in a way that employs a responsibly skeptical analysis, but remains sensitive to the experiences that her collaborators describe? What terms to use? Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy uses the "graceless expression" of being-with to emphasize the neutral action

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<sup>442</sup> Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport. *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Confronted Community," *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 1; Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>443</sup> Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, xxx-xxxiii.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

of sharing space and to avoid the assumption of shared identity.<sup>445</sup> In the context of the second line, I am interested in how participants' experiences of "dancing-with," to riff on Nancy's term, can reflect or resist patterns of relationality mapped out by institutional (family, church, nation) and transactional (commerce, service) encounters. Following Miranda Joseph's Marxist critique of the "romance of community," I choose to use the word "collectivity" more often than not, for it avoids some of community's over-celebratory baggage. The concept of collectivity is also useful to a dance analysis, for it suggests the proximity of bodies *collected* together at the second line, and this physical proximity is a condition of possibility for the performance of community through dancing-with.

As detailed in chapter two, second line parades as we know them today can be traced back to (at least) the late-nineteenth century as social and ritual functions of black voluntary associations. As such, second lining's origins are rooted in an ethos of communal solidarity and mutual assistance developed in response to racist exclusion from mainstream economic and social resources. Second lining's history is also rooted in concerns over the body and spirit, as the primary roles of early mutual aid organizations were to provide health care for the living and to ritually bury the dead.<sup>446</sup> Although the missions, makeup, and structures of black voluntary associations have changed dramatically since the 1890s, a sense of neighborhood pride, mutual assistance, and

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<sup>445</sup> Nancy, "Confronted Community," 31-32.

<sup>446</sup> Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*, 173.

community service has remained constant.<sup>447</sup> The choreographic structure of second lining eliminates divides between performer and audience, eschews pair dancing (and therefore resists heteronormative relations), and, similar to the circle, arranges bodies in such a way that no one dancer is spatially privileged over another (any dancer can define and claim a choice dancing location, such as behind the band or atop a roof). In its participatory structure, then, second line choreography reinforces and reflects social aid and pleasure clubs' efforts to build collectivities, grounding the participants in a communal rootedness. By dancing-with, second liners articulate a bodily discourse of political and cultural values that privilege collectivity and mutual assistance over market-based solutions to problems. The nature of the problems facing New Orleans's black and poor residents has changed over second lining's one-hundred-plus year history, but in each epoch, second liners' feet articulate a response to ever-changing manifestations of structural and interpersonal violence.

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<sup>447</sup> Social aid and pleasure clubs today are sometimes referred to as "second line organizations," which connotes the groups' shift in focus from providing mutual aid to producing parades as their primary missions; many have refashioned mutual aid into community service. As David T. Beito notes, many fraternal societies in the U.S. shifted from mutual aid to a model of service after the Great Depression. He gives several reasons for this. Prohibitive legislation and the increased consolidation of benefits in the workplace in the 1910s and 1920s dealt a blow to the ability and need for fraternal societies to provide health and life insurance. *Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 206-207, 213. Additionally, the rise of the welfare state during the Great Depression rendered almost obsolete the roles of fraternal societies as providers of life insurance, and medical associations' organized resistance against fraternal societies' cooperative health plans hamstrung the societies' efficacy in giving health care access to their poorer members (228-231). Beito's description of nationwide trends does accurately describe some of the changes in black benevolent societies in New Orleans throughout the twentieth century—namely, the organizations' mission shift from mutually beneficial self-help to a model of community service. However, the model fails to account for black people's exclusion from the private and public sector access to medical and economic insurance that supplanted the roles of fraternal societies in white America. Nor does it account for what Jacqui Malone calls a cultural predisposition amongst African Americans to form secret societies and fraternal organizations, based on similar traditions in West and Central African cultures that were replicated amongst enslaved Africans and freedmen in the U.S. *Steppin' on the Blues*, 167-186.

To learn more about the connections between dancing-with, mutual aid, and violence, I met with Tamara Jackson, for she sits at the intersection of these domains. Tamara is president of the VIP Ladies and Kids Social Aid and Pleasure Club; director of the advocacy group, the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force; and executive director of the nonprofit organization, Silence Is Violence. I met Tamara for an interview at her office: a two-story building on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard in the Central City neighborhood, shared between Silence Is Violence and the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana. As I walked down the hallway, I spotted brightly colored, fluffy plumes erupting from steely grey office tables. The feathers adorned small stacks of fans, a common prop held by social aid and pleasure club (SAPC) members during their second lines. When I reached Tamara's office, I spotted a commemorative photograph of Dinneral Shavers, a high school band teacher and member of the Hot 8 Brass Band who was murdered in 2006. When Shavers was killed by a bullet meant for his teenage stepson, his death incited Silence Is Violence's first march against violence.<sup>448</sup> Alongside Shavers' photograph hung picture collages of VIP Ladies on parade day plaques commemorating the exemplary service provided by Silence Is Violence.

Unlike early benevolent societies, today's clubs are not needed to address nineteenth-century threats such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, or other illnesses.<sup>449</sup> Now, clubs like Tamara's address needs that stem from current threats, such as chronic

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<sup>448</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 159-163; on the Silence Is Violence march following Shavers' death, see pages 168-172.

<sup>449</sup> Claude Jacobs notes that, in 1902, members of the Louisiana Medical Society were told that pneumonia and tuberculosis would undoubtedly "solve the negro [*sic*] problem in the state" by killing off the black population. Louisiana State Medical Society, *Transactions of Louisiana State Medical Society* (1902), 130-131, qtd in Jacobs, "Benevolent Societies," 21.



violence. Both threats to black life reveal the physical impacts of systemic racism; they just take different forms. Whereas early benevolent societies addressed ills of racism by confronting structural violence directly (i.e., providing access to health care when medical institutions refused to treat black patients), today's clubs confront structural violence in a more diffused manner. Silence Is Violence is a rare exception of an SAPC's "aid portion," since it is a full-fledged 501(c)3 organization with a dedicated office and staff on payroll.<sup>450</sup> Most clubs find less institutionalized ways to address the pressing needs of their members, families, and neighbors. For example, some sponsor drives to collect school supplies and children's coats. Others visit nursing homes, host Easter egg hunts, or simply lend money to members who need to pay their bills.<sup>451</sup>

I sat in a chair, across from Tamara, who sat behind her desk. Tamara wore a black T-shirt with the "Silence Is Violence" logo printed on the left side of her shirt and her name and position as director printed on the right. An employee came in to retrieve several horns stacked inside a metal cabinet labeled "Instruments." Tamara rushed another employee to print a check so she could sign it and not be interrupted during the

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<sup>450</sup> Silence Is Violence is the social aid arm of VIP Ladies and of another club, the Bayou Steppers, co-founded by Tamara and Baty Landis.

<sup>451</sup> While many newer clubs have updated the what mutual aid means for their members, three of the earliest benevolent associations are still active: the Young Men Olympian Social and Benevolent Society (established in 1884); the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club (established 1909); and Original Men's Prince of Wales (formed in 1928). Of the three, Young Men Olympian is most dedicated to the traditional style of a benevolent society. Their membership numbers are much higher than other clubs (over 100, compared to under ten for many clubs); their oldest divisions still parade in traditional dress of black and white suits and hire bands to play traditional brass band music; their members still receive medical and burial assistance. Olsen, "Gift of the Second Line"; Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014; Don Roberston, interview with the author, April 10, 2014; Kenneth Washington, interview with the author, May 22, 2014.

interview. She turned the music off that streamed from her computer, and turned off her cell phone. She was ready.

I asked Tamara how her two roles, as a leader among the city's SAPCs and the director of Silence Is Violence, intersect. Tamara explained that addressing the effects of gun violence is SAPCs' major service effort because the violence epidemic constitutes the most vital social need amongst the clubs, musicians, and their families.

When the clubs were initially started, it started as benevolent societies [...] and then we started with the social aid and pleasure clubs, the idea was to help your community, help your membership, who couldn't afford funerals and other expenses. You'd form these clubs that were actually aiding each other and the neighborhoods in which they parade. Now the aiding portion has changed, just because the needs of the community has changed.<sup>452</sup>

Tamara made it clear that two things shared by members of the second line community are a commitment to practicing the culture and a history of being affected by gun violence. Therefore, the "aiding" portion of SAPCs has shifted over time to address the clubs' changing needs.

Unfortunately, it's a commonality that we all share. Prince of Wales [SAPC's] member was murdered last year. One of they members. Then you have Brandon Franklin, [who] was killed with TBC Brass Band. You know, the Hot 8 done lost three or four of their members due to violence. It's a commonality. [...] I mean, I could just continue to call names of victims. And it's just senseless acts of violence. The connection is, we're attached to the community, and this is the real side of what happens. It exists. Violence exists. We're in the inner-city communities, we're in the back streets; there's crime. And sometimes those crimes come home and attack our families. So then we share that commonality of losing. [...] It's not *one club* that haven't lost a member, almost, or the member in the club done lost a family member due to violence. And then sometimes it's on multiple levels. It could be two or three people. Or a brass band. That's common.

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<sup>452</sup> Tamara Jackson, interview with the author, April 21, 2014. All quotes from Jackson are taken from this interview.

Tamara's use of the word "community" contradicts its ubiquitously celebratory use.<sup>453</sup> Tamara uses the term to describe "inner-city communities," which she defines, in part, as places where "violence happens." Interpersonal gun violence fragments family structures and communal fabrics in these neighborhoods, not just by eliminating lives, but also by causing further displacement and isolation amongst survivors, such as mass incarceration and neighbors' fear-induced isolation inside of their homes. Tamara describes interpersonal violence as "the real side of what happens" in "the community." Her observation that violence is one of the unifying threads that connects the community resonates with Stuart Hall's assertion that a shared experience of violence and displacement, even more than a shared culture, unifies people of the African diaspora.<sup>454</sup> In Hall's formulation, black culture can only be understood as something that connects people across geography and time because it is a shared response to common experiences of violence. When seen in this way, second lining as a performance of collective rootedness becomes all the more potent as a mechanism for survival.

While the physical violence that touches second liners' lives does not often happen at the parades, sometimes it does. Out of approximately 360 second lines that have rolled since Hurricane Katrina, only a handful of parades have been marred by acts of violence that escalated beyond a fistfight. The crime is usually attributed to gang-related activity and characterized as a crime of opportunity, in which one person has a

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<sup>453</sup> Miranda Joseph laments and cautions against overly celebratory usages of the concept of community, *Against the Romance of Community*, vii-ix.

<sup>454</sup> In particular, Hall claims that the uprooting of slavery and insertion into the plantation economy in the Western world is what "unified" people of the African diaspora across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wilshart 1990), 227.

score to settle and chooses to do it when their target is out in public, dancing at the second line. The second line itself is incidental to the violence; it simply provides the mechanism that gathers people together, friends and enemies, and creates a somewhat chaotic environment that can be conducive to shooting one's target and fleeing the scene. SAPCs, aided by Tamara's leadership, have worked hard in recent years to spread the message that second lines are an antidote to the violence epidemic, not a cause of it.<sup>455</sup>

Many people with whom I have spoken perceive that violence at the second lines has waned over the years. Others sense that it spiked after Katrina, due to vast displacement, which forced former territorial enemies to live next door to one another. Undoubtedly, the frequency of physical violence erupting in the vicinity of a second lining crowd has escalated and declined over the decades, but it is not a new phenomenon. Whether people perceive violence at second lines as currently waxing or waning, almost everyone, myself included, has a story about surviving a second line shooting. Walter Kimble, age twenty, recalls experiencing his first second-line shooting at age five or six. His mother used to take him to the parades regularly, for his entire family was involved in the culture, either as club members or musicians. I asked if his mother grabbed him when she heard the shots, and he explained that she was nowhere

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<sup>455</sup> Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, the city of New Orleans raised second line permit fees up to 300 percent, citing a need to provide more security in the wake of shootings during two separate second line parades. In partnership with Tamara and the New Orleans SAPC Task Force, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Louisiana filed a lawsuit against the city. By charging such unreasonable fees, the lawsuit said, the NOPD violates club members' constitutional rights to free speech, expressed through second lining. The Task Force reached an agreement with the city: a standard permit fee of \$1985 for five hours of police presence, a rate slightly more than half that proposed by the city. In recent years, the Task Force's organizing with the NOPD, and a steady presence of familiar cops at every second line parade, has improved relations between SAPCs and the NOPD. Gary Sheets, "Permit Fees Raining on Second-Line Parades," *Times-Picayune*, March 27, 2007, accessed March 14, 2015, [http://blog.nola.com/topnews/2007/03/permit\\_fees\\_raining\\_on\\_secondl.html](http://blog.nola.com/topnews/2007/03/permit_fees_raining_on_secondl.html); NOPD Second Line Coordinator Michael Hamilton, interview with the author, April 12, 2014.

nearby. “What did you do?” I asked. “I hit the ground,” he replied.<sup>456</sup> In that moment, I was struck by our differences. When I experienced my first second-line shooting a year prior, it was my first shooting, period. I was in my mid-thirties, and had not developed an instinct to hit the ground when I heard gunshots; I had not even learned to identify the sound. At age five, Walter knew what to do. He laid on the ground in response to violence. In my imagined re-telling of Walter’s story, he is leaping into the air one moment—elevated in a childhood moment of danced abandon—and grounded the next, his body contained by forces of structural and interpersonal violence. Second liners are still held captive by the threat of violence that plagues so many who live in what Tamara calls “the inner-city community.”

I was reminded how groundedness can signify captivity when I taught a group of first-graders in New Orleans. We discussed how adjectives can describe dance qualities, and when I suggested that we use the word “grounded” to describe jumping in a puddle, they all thought I meant, “punished.” I laughed at the miscommunication at first; I had completely forgotten that a child’s primary, if not only, connotation with being grounded would be an experience of bodily containment. When a child is grounded, she cannot leave the house or her room. Her freedoms and privileges are revoked. She is captive; immobilized. As I listened to Walter’s story, my first-graders’ voices continued to seep back into my mind. Our miscommunication was more than a humorous result of a generation gap; it revealed to me the murky history of groundedness as a tactic of bodily immobility that can wield violence or be a mode of survival in the face of violence.

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<sup>456</sup> Walter Kimble, interview with the author, May 27, 2014. All quotes from Kimble are taken from this interview.

Walter's story—or, more accurately, my re-telling of Walter's story—reminded me of Bras-Coupé's lifted dancing and grounded containment in George Washington Cable's re-telling of the legend. As described in chapter two, Cable's 1880 novel features a climactic scene of a fugitive slave being captured while he is dancing at Congo Square. Just when Bras-Coupé is about to soar into a “more astounding leap than his last,” ascending high above the crowd in dancierly prowess, the police throw a lasso around him, grounding his bodily mobility by bringing him “crashing like a burnt tree, face upward upon the turf.”<sup>457</sup> Taken together, (my re-telling of) Walter's story and (Cable's re-telling of) Bras-Coupé's story reveal another valence of groundedness in the second line context: bodily captivity.

Walter's embodied performance of groundedness connects to King's concepts of oppression and horizontality in black discourse, as discussed in above in relation to the cool walk. A horizontal position on the ground evokes submission, repression, and downward mobility. The groundedness embodied by second liners when dancing, however, counteracts a groundedness with physical lift, and in its play with upward and downward forces, it embraces and parodies assumptions about the degradation of the gutter and the virtues of climbing the social ladder. Second liners' get-down posture and focus on their feet reclaim the ground as a place of power and pride. Furthermore, the second line's choreographic structure encourages a horizontal relatedness amongst dancers, which recuperates a horizontal position as a counter-hegemonic critique of vertical hierarchies.

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<sup>457</sup> Cable, *The Grandissimes*, 172.

From his point of view as a New Orleans poet and music critic, Salaam refers to the collectivity forged through second lining as a “spirit family of the streets,” defined as an “activity-centered sharing of common cultural values.” He names the SAPC as the primary folk expression of the spirit family, due to the members’ pledge to each other to make *collective* dreams become reality.<sup>458</sup> If SAPCs provide an exemplary manifestation of spirit families, they are not singular. SAPCs exist within a contemporary and historical constellation of “alternative alliances” amongst black New Orleanians, such as nineteenth-century mutual aid societies, benevolent associations, and pleasure clubs based in trade unions, neighborhood groups, churches, or ethnic alliances (or some combination thereof).<sup>459</sup> Today, the constellation includes, but is by no means limited to, Mardi Gras processional groups, such as Mardi Gras Indian tribes, Skull and Bones gangs, and Baby Doll marching groups; community and cultural centers; churches; youth development organizations; dance and drum companies; brass and marching bands; sports teams; and work-based, school-based, and neighborhood alliances. These networks frequently overlap and coalesce weekly at the second lines, which many refer to as “family reunions.” As people gather together on the streets each Sunday, they are seen and accounted for: “Haven’t seen you in awhile, how you doing?” And, as I have experienced first-hand, if a regular second liner arrives late or skips a Sunday (or a month of Sundays), people who do not even know her name will inquire after her, to make sure that everything is alright. Second line collectivities comprise many collectivities:

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<sup>458</sup> Salaam, “Spirit Family of the Streets,” n.p.

<sup>459</sup> My analysis here is inspired by Rachel Harding’s identification of the constellation of voluntary associations amongst Afro-Brazilians in Bahia. *A Refuge in Thunder*, 107-108.

extended families, classmates, co-workers, neighbors, and club members. But as a whole, the only thing uniting the spirit family of the streets is the experience of parading together, or dancing-with.

Salaam's spirit family provides an example of the horizontal relatedness that black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers names as a way that African Americans maneuver(ed) through disrupted familial relations under (and under the lasting effects of) slavery.<sup>460</sup> The vertical transfer of bloodline (and wealth) that comprises dominant western definitions of "family" were unavailable to black people under the conditions of captivity; support systems and webs of connectedness tied enslaved people together across wide distances. Even if we call these structures of horizontal relatedness another kind of family, they do not serve the same function as the western family, which is primarily designed to preserve white patriarchy.<sup>461</sup> The second line spirit family, created by dancing-with each other on public streets, evidences how familial relations can only remain a private domain under conditions of social and economic privilege.<sup>462</sup> When state and institutional forces, such as mass incarceration, split apart the homes of poor and working-class families, their expressions of family no longer align solely with the domestic sphere nor with the vertical hierarchy of lineage. Evoking the voice of Spillers and other black feminists, Salaam suggests that the spirit family makes sense when considered historically: nuclear families were rendered almost meaningless under the sale

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<sup>460</sup> Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 75.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," 53-54.



and breeding conditions of slavery, and maintaining the family as a symbolic model reflects white male supremacy under capitalism.<sup>463</sup>

By reforming patriarchal family structures into a horizontal relatedness on the streets, second lines remobilize the concept of directionality through choreographic structure.<sup>464</sup> The second line reaffirms horizontal relatedness as an alternative to the vertical hierarchies of white patriarchy, and eschews notions of horizontalism as the apathetic, static, or captive other to the verticality of social mobility.<sup>465</sup> Through horizontal relatedness, second lining spirit families propose dancing-with as a method of survival in the face of structural and interpersonal violence. Although collectivities are productively understood as acts of resistance, Salaam warns us against totalizing black cultural expressions as such: “We are more than just twisted responses to slavery, more than a limited range of make-do solutions to inhuman social conditions. [...] Our insistence on constantly creating family is ideological, not pathological. We bond with each other because we believe in the beauty of community.”<sup>466</sup> As a critique of patriarchy, white supremacy, and the vertical ascension of social mobility, second lining’s focus on the ground—the crouch, the feet, the bass, the horizontal spirit family—

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<sup>463</sup> Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe;” Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle,” 64-71.

<sup>464</sup> King, “Which Way is Down?,” 43.

<sup>465</sup> King suggest that, “If ascension is required for insurgency,” or the only desirable direction is up, then “horizontalism becomes inertia, apathy, couch potato-ism, stasis, sittin’ on the dock of the bay.” “Which Way Is Down?,” 34.

<sup>466</sup> Salaam, “Spirit Family of New Orleans Streets,” n.p.

performs rootedness on the move. In Salaam's estimation, "the family that dances together stays together."<sup>467</sup>

Almost all of the second liners with whom I have spoken discussed their second lining experiences as rooted in a collective power. Their reflections are supported by scholars' analyses of the tradition as one that reaffirms residents' connectedness to community, collective memory, and place.<sup>468</sup> For example, dance historian Jacqui Malone writes, "The music's spirit transcends the kind of things that normally divide people; it expresses a cultural bond and makes participants feel that they are part of an extended family." And yet, because no community is monolithic, there are limits to the transcendent power of second lining, and one of these limits is drawn around race. Malone, quoting an interview that she conducted with clarinetist and historian Michael White, locates second lining's cultural bond as a reaction, in part, to "what the white folks are doing to you." As such, she and White define the transcendent potential of second lining within limits of blackness. She quotes White as saying, "It transcends your social condition, whether you think you're a Creole or a Negro or whatever you want to call yourself, whether you come from educated, uneducated, literate, illiterate, or what have you. You're all on an equal plane."<sup>469</sup> While the collectives formed by brass band parades may be able to transcend boundaries of geography, class, education, and culture

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes"; Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans"; Olsen, "Gift of the Second Line," 176; Dinerstein, "Learning Community."

<sup>469</sup> Malone, *Steppin on the Blues*, 184.

within New Orleans's black populations, the boundary holds firmer once the "extended family" of second liners includes non-black participants.

And yet, as more and more non-black residents, tourists, and new New Orleanians attend second line parades, these participants are not exempt from being moved by the parades' communal and transcendent power. Dawn Kaiser, a white woman who moved to New Orleans in 2012 and works as a nurse practitioner, cited the interpersonal bonds of second lining as a reason that she attends:

It's a place that I go to share the things I love, that are dance and music; and just being around a lot of people that don't necessarily look all alike, think the same way, or may not even be able to have a conversation on any level, but can dance together like that and listen to music like that, and just smile, and just feel good to be part of a shared experience. You see some people crying, and sharing in each other's tragedy. That feels good. We don't—I don't know. Coming from someplace else to New Orleans, that's not an experience that I've had in public very much.<sup>470</sup>

Dawn references dancing-with others at the second line as a way to cross racial and ethnic boundaries ("people that don't necessarily all look alike") as well as boundaries of education and class ("may not even be able to have a conversation on any level"), for she experiences dancing as an equalizing activity. Furthermore, she is able to be with others in ways not easily allowed by the institutional or transactional relationships that often determine human interactions in urban environments.

Second lines are defined by inclusion—the second line's choreography capaciously incorporates anyone who wants to jump in and dance along. Yet, a collective experience such as Dawn's—one defined by pleasant social interactions with

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<sup>470</sup> Dawn Kaiser, interview with the author, February 24, 2014. All quotes from Kaiser are taken from this interview.

recognizable faces—is not the same thing as the kind of being-with offered by SAPCs in the face of racist exclusion. The multicultural, inclusionary experience of dancing-with enabled by the second line’s participatory choreographic structure performs one kind of collectivity at the second line. The “cultural community” as described by Tamara performs another form of collectivity, one that serves as a source of healing and mutual support for those affected by gun violence, and the structural violence that sustains it. In short, all second liners, regardless of race, class, or number of years in the city, might feel connected to a collectivity while dancing-with other second liners; but as white, middle-class, non-locals, our experiences of collectivity are not grounded in a historic, structural, and physical relationship to racist violence, and thus the relationships formed while dancing-with others do not eliminate, even temporarily, social hierarchies.

Time and again, when I asked African American New Orleanians, who had been long dedicated to the second line culture, what they thought about the increased presence of white people at parades, they responded enthusiastically. This surprised me, but perhaps it should not have. Anyone who had already agreed to talk to me—a white, middle-class non-local who was attempting to become an expert on second lines—was already pre-disposed to embrace whiteness in their second line community. Yet, their responses also indicated a tactic—something beyond simply extending the communal ethos of the second line to new participants under the banner of multicultural inclusion. A reflection offered by Tyree Smith, secretary of Family Ties Social and Pleasure Club, encapsulates a point of view offered by many others.

You know, people will be more leery about, ‘Well, I ain’t going to shoot in the crowd if they’ve got white folks over there.’ Yeah, well, I’d rather you be like that

there. Because if they got just blacks there you'll just shoot, you don't really care. So, it's got these little young kids thinking, you know. Prior to the storm [Hurricane Katrina], they never really did have white folks out there. They really didn't.<sup>471</sup>

We white folks are welcome, at least in part, because we live in a world where white, middle-class lives are valued more than black, poor lives. We are welcome because we live in a world where the poor, and especially people of color, are considered disposable; they are expected to fend for themselves in the face of life's tragedies, but are also supposed to do it without being seen by the dominant society.<sup>472</sup> White people at the second line bring the dominant society with them, so that the black-on-black violence that might occur is less likely to become an unsolved crime that fades into the back pages of a local crime report. Our presence might help second lines continue by lessening the likelihood of physical violence, but we cannot do so without reifying the historical, structural violence that nurtures it.

The second line's choreography structures dancing-with as a collective experience that grounds participants in a particular people, place, and history, and performs a rootedness on the move. It privileges a horizontal relatedness amongst dancers, forming a spirit family in the place of patriarchal nuclear family. As a critique of patriarchy, white supremacy, and the vertical ascension of social mobility, second lining's grounded-yet-

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<sup>471</sup> Tyree Smith, interview with the author, February 18, 2014. All quotes from Smith are taken from this interview.

<sup>472</sup> In his reflection on Hurricane Katrina, Henry Grioux argues that the disaster signaled an era of the "new biopolitics of disposability," in which hyper-neoliberal states are organized around "the best way to either remove or make invisible those individuals and groups who are either seen as a drain or stand in the way of market freedoms, free trade, consumerism and the neoconservative dream of an American empire." Entire populations must be rendered invisible because they allegedly no longer exist in color-blind America. "Reading Hurricane Katrina," 174-175.

lifted choreography performs a dissenting bodily discourse in its negotiations with overlapping forces of power. Second lining's bodily focus on the ground, in utilizing a get-down stance to free up the feet, rejects "down" as the shameful direction of captivity and downward mobility and recuperates the ground as a place of power, pride, and personal connections. The groundedness embodied by second liners when dancing, however, also counteracts a fall with a physical lift. In its play with upward and downward forces, it embraces and parodies assumptions about the degradation of the gutter *and* the virtues of climbing the social ladder.

**Lifted: Ecstasy and/or Excess**

Second lining's required bodily lift—pulling the rib cage off of the pelvis and hovering the feet above the pavement—can be read as a dissenting bodily discourse of ecstasy and excess. In chapter four, I consider dancers' spatial uses of vertical space when dancing atop buildings during the parade. In this chapter, I am concerned with vertical movements that are difficult or impossible to see. First, I examine the internal lift of the torso required to execute precise, up-tempo, rhythmic footwork; and second, I meditate on the lift that sometimes happens during bouts of footwork: the spirit takes flight. The body's upward pull gestures toward the dance's capacity to transport participants into ecstatic experiences.

Music historian Thomas Brothers traces second lining's spiritual dimensions back to the plantation and to Congo Square, suggesting that second lining brought the ecstatic behavior of the ring shout into the streets.<sup>473</sup> According to Brothers, the Sanctified church

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<sup>473</sup> *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 21.

wielded tremendous influence on the development of jazz in New Orleans, including second line dancing, as its worship structure retained the aesthetic values of the blues: collective bodily movement, polyrhythm, percussive feet, improvised singing and dancing, harmonic dissonance, all in service of a direct experience with the Holy Spirit.<sup>474</sup> Richard Brent Turner and Kara F.C. Holloway expand the second line's sacred roots to include past and present spiritual practices in Haiti, and in West and Central Africa.<sup>475</sup> Mindful of these diverse influences, my observations about ecstasy and excess focus on second liners hitting the streets today who utilize ecstatic dancing as a tactic for maneuvering through the late-twentieth and twenty-first century U.S. social order of colorblind racism and neoliberal capitalism.

Wellington Ratcliff Jr., better known as "Skelly," made the connection between verticality and ecstasy when he described his most joyous second lining moments as out-of-body experiences: moments in which his spirit literally lifts high above the crowd.

I tell people, I could be out in a crowd of 1500 people, but I don't see them people. All I hear and see is that band, and that's where I want to be: behind that band listening feeling that beat. [...] It's like that experience, some people say, 'I had an out-of-body experience.' My body could be right here but my spirit...you know what I'm saying? I'm flying above the whole second line. That's my spirit right there. And you see the expression on my face and say, 'Boy, he going HAM [Hard As a Motherfucker].' People like, 'Skelly, man, boy, he be cutting up!' And

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 38-44; see also Claude F. Jacobs and Andrew J. Kaslow, *Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Turner, *Jazz Religion*, 97-104; and White, "New Orleans Brass Band," 82.

<sup>475</sup> *Jazz Religion*, 5. Karla FC Holloway sees jazz funerals as sites of African retentions in the U.S. She notes that mourning and dancing traditions of West Africa have "perhaps found their strongest corollary in twentieth-century black America in the jazz funerals of New Orleans." She goes on to cite the funerary practices of Kongolese slaves in Louisiana as precursors the drumming, tambourine playing, and dancing that characterize jazz funerals. She does not draw simple continuous lines through such practices, but she admits that the "cultural continuity of these rituals is difficult to ignore." *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 174-175.

that's not just to be for show. That's how I be feeling. When I'm feeling the music, you're going to see me dance.<sup>476</sup>

Skelly's out-of-body experience would be significant for anyone, but as a paralyzed man bound to a wheelchair, his dancing allows him to transcend the limitations of his physical body. His spirit flying epitomizes the freedom of mobility that his physical body does not readily allow. Skelly's elevated spirit, "flying above the whole second line," contrasts sharply with his physical body, contained by the limited mobility of his chair.

However, the fact that Skelly cannot walk does not relegate him to a status as a second-rate dancer. On the contrary, he is widely recognized amongst second liners as a legend. Before he was paralyzed by a gunshot wound in 1986 at age nineteen, Skelly competed as a break-dancer with his neighborhood team, Footloose Breakers, in amateur circuits around New Orleans. They also busked on sidewalks in the French Quarter for cash. Simultaneously, Skelly danced as an avid second liner who paraded with the Young Men Olympian, Jr. Benevolent Association when he was twelve. After he "got paralyzed," to use his phrase, Skelly's rudimentary, iron chair could not keep him from the parades. Today, he nimbly uses his slim chair, compactly designed for wheelchair basketball (his other passion), to push for miles through the city streets in order to merely *arrive* at a parade. Once he begins to follow the band, he does not simply push himself for four hours. When he is moved, he dances hard, or, in his words, "cuts up" in the process. A journalist once commented in response to Skelly's dancing: "He's one of several brothers in New Orleans confined to a wheelchair that rolls at all the second lines

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<sup>476</sup> Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014. All quotes from Ratcliff are taken from this interview.



and even parades with a few clubs. Don't tell me he ain't got footwork!"<sup>477</sup> Skelly transferred his footwork to dexterous maneuvers with his wheels and pulsing rhythms in his upper body. When he is really feeling the spirit, he will even lift himself out of the wheelchair and hang onto a pole or crawl on his hands. What the journalist could not see in Skelly's dancing—what none of us can see but perhaps can sense—is that his intensely executed footwork signals the moment in which his spirit had led him to fly high above us all.

The physical lift employed by second liners who, in Skelly's words, "go HAM," is not necessarily uprightness, but more like a constantly renewed insurance policy against falling. Lifting oneself up repeatedly "requires vigilance, an continual push against gravity; one must work hard to keep a certain distance from the ground, to keep from slipping into the filthy gutter."<sup>478</sup> When today's second liners are rolling, they do not usually puff their chests, straighten their spines, and gaze into the horizon while stepping gracefully out of the gutter (although, as an improvised dance form, they could—almost anything goes). They lift their rib cages off of their pelvises, bend their chests, and gaze toward the ground; they bend their knees and move their feet so fast that they nearly levitate above the pavement. This kind of lift, the lift required to roll, is not the upright stance of racial uplift or respectability. It is the bodily position that allows

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<sup>477</sup> Deborah Cotton, "Videos from Old & Nu Style Fellas Second Line," *New Orleans Good Good*, April 22, 2013, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.neworleansgoodgood.com>. Notably, Deborah Cotton is the same journalist and second line advocate who was most critically injured when hit with bullets during the Mother's Day shooting.

<sup>478</sup> King, "Which Way is Down?," 35.

second liners to get sweaty, rip their clothes and, in their excessive dancing labor, propel themselves above the crowd.

As an ecstatic experience, second lining's upward direction cannot easily be recuperated into a discourse of upward social mobility. Second lines do not exactly rehearse socioeconomic aspirations; SAPCs mock capital accumulation even as they participate in it. Thus, while second lining enacts an alternative social order, one in which ecstasy is the norm, it exceeds most institutionalized efforts at organizing for social change. As King suggests, communities struggling for footing on the lowest rungs of the ladder of social mobility do not have very far to fall, and as such, have the least to lose by "shaking the ladder vigorously until it topples." He adds that black people have historically shaken the ladder by "mobilizing music and performance to comment on the 'problem' of social mobility."<sup>479</sup> As one such example of ladder shaking, second lining choreography comments on both directions of social mobility. Even though second lining's ground-driven focus reconfigures the stigma of downward mobility, its lift also refuses to affirm the righteousness of upward mobility. Instead, it signifies on the aspirational (and assimilationist) climb. If climbing the ladder requires increased capital accumulation, or fighting for social equality through practical political activism, then second lining exceeds the boundaries of both. Second lining's upward directionality is not easily channeled into worldly aspirations. Second liners' ecstatic experiences enable them to access a different kind of mobility, one best described as "letting the spirit move."

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<sup>479</sup> King, "Which Way is Down?," 27-28.

Second lining may not be best categorized as an intentionally sacred dance practice, and yet, many dancers describe experiences of transcendence that regularly occur while second lining.<sup>480</sup> Dedicated second liners refer to their weekly parading practice as “church.” During interviews, several dancers and musicians compared their second lining euphoria to using drugs or having an orgasm. Others talked about the potential for the dancing to transport them to another realm of consciousness, to another physical location, or even into another body, what Stephanie Camp might call a “third body.”<sup>481</sup> Regardless of which analogy they choose to express the ineffable, when second liners reach ecstatic heights, they feel as if they temporarily leave the earth and the community that they are grounded in; the music *takes* them somewhere else. As Salaam puts it, in New Orleans, the streets remain a natural venue of spiritual expression.<sup>482</sup> Even when dancers dismiss second lining as spiritual, they still talk about extraordinary dance experiences as “getting in the zone,” “letting go,” and even just “gettin’ it,” nodding to a transformative charge that they access through rhythmic, energetic, grounded-yet-lifted footwork.

Skelly’s description of flying high provides one example of a phenomenon that Yvonne Daniel calls a “suprahuman performance.” This happens when dancers “reach for the extraordinary, [and] the overwhelming sensation of awe attains and their bodies [...]

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<sup>480</sup> Turner writes, “For some participants, a second line was ‘nothin’ but a party goin’ on’ (also the title of a famous second-line brass band song); for others, however, it was a profound expression of New Orleans’ African diaspora past, an experience of communal meditation or even trance...” *Jazz Religion*, 3.

<sup>481</sup> As noted in chapter two, Camp offers the notion of “the third body” to explain how bodily enjoyment was oppositional to slavery’s symbolic systems and economic order. Put simply, a body enjoyed contradicts its flesh as simply an implement of agricultural production. *Closer to Freedom*, 66-68, 91.

<sup>482</sup> Salaam, “The Spirit Family,” n.p.

experience transcendence—even for a few moments.”<sup>483</sup> I find this concept very useful for discussing second liners’ transcendent experiences, for it describes the experience without explicitly referencing organized or folk religious concepts.<sup>484</sup> Like the sacred Caribbean dances researched by Daniel, second liners access suprahuman performances by tapping into the energy of the collective to improvise movements within a choreographed structure. African diaspora peoples have long harnessed transcendent experiences as a source of healing and strength. Second liners’ suprahuman performances are more than idiosyncratic episodes because they are connected to a geographical and historical constellation of danced rituals in which divisions between earth and spirit-world—between grounded and lifted—remain playfully fluid.<sup>485</sup>

New Orleanians usually have little problem discussing the second line as a profane (earthly, or grounded) practice with sacred (heavenly, or lifted) dimensions. Second liners often describe suprahuman experiences that occur while they are simultaneously engaged in activities that some would consider irreverent or at least outside of the spiritual domain: drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, eating sandwiches, catching up with friends and family, flirting with a romantic interest, or showing off a new motorcycle. When finding analogies to describe suprahuman experiences, second liners are just as likely to reference drugs, alcohol, or sex as to invoke church or spirit.

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<sup>483</sup> Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*, 190.

<sup>484</sup> Turner also uses Daniel’s concept of the suprahuman to analyze second line dancing, although he limits his application to ecstatic dancing performed during a funeral procession. *Jazz Religion*, 96-97. I expand my application of the term to describe ecstatic experiences that occur in seemingly secular parades.

<sup>485</sup> Turner argues that second lines re-create flashes of memories, rhythms, and rituals that evoke the spirit world of the African diaspora and that periodically move New Orleans’s black community members into the sacred realms. *Jazz Religion*, 6.

The sacred and the secular do not maintain neat divisions at the second line, and this links second line to other African diaspora performance traditions.<sup>486</sup> Central to my discussion here, music and dancing are the vehicles that usher in the spirit amidst the so-called secular activities of the second line. Significantly, the second liners that I interviewed did not describe ecstatic experiences when merely listening to the band or walking with the second line. Dancing (or, for musicians, playing music) creates the vehicle through which they attain exceptional, metaphysical, and otherworldly experiences.

In order for second liners to experience transcendence, the dance form must be grounded within a specific vocabulary of movement and, at the same time, allow for flights of improvisation and individual expression. While trying to simultaneously perfect my footwork and gather details on technique, I would occasionally approach second liners who showcased remarkable dancing and ask them for tips. Many would simply respond, “Just do watcha wanna,” “Just feel the music,” or “Just do you.” I came to understand such responses as part of a discourse that privileges the dancing’s function over its form.<sup>487</sup> Do watcha wanna indicates practitioners’ valuation of dancing as a

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<sup>486</sup> Sacred elements often permeate secular dance practices in the African diaspora, and neglecting the spiritual dimensions of social/secular dance practices can seriously limit our understanding of them. Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 54. In fact, many scholars of African diaspora dance name the distinction between sacred and secular as a Western-imposed separation that has long precluded basic comprehension, much less deep analysis, of it. Samuel Floyd notes the “near-inseparability” of the sacred and secular, and of music and dance, in black culture. Floyd, “Ring Shout!”, 52; see also Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 225, 235. Sterling Stuckey writes that, throughout chattel slavery in the Americas, “slaveholders never understood that a form of spirituality almost indistinguishable from art was central to the cultures from which blacks came,” in which distinctions between sacred and secular were rarely made. He goes on to explain that dance has long been a central vehicle for weaving sacred into seemingly secular realms: “Threads of spirituality—of art itself—were woven into the fabric of everyday life [for enslaved Africans in the Americas]. In fact, dance was the principal means by which slaves, using its symbolism to evoke their spiritual view of the world, extended sacred observance throughout the week.” “Christian Conversion,” 41; see also Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 134-135.

<sup>487</sup> I discuss this more fully in the section on “opacity” in chapter one.

vehicle for communing with others and for catching the spirit, versus a storehouse of aesthetic technique.<sup>488</sup> Second lining shares this value system with singing in the blues and in Sanctified worship. In both of these realms, singing the wrong note with feeling is vastly valued over singing the right note for aesthetic effect. Additionally, the blues aesthetic values the qualities of performance expected from interacting with the group over a faithful rendition of a received text.<sup>489</sup> The values are placed on the *process* of creating, and one's approach to it, versus a finished art object, such as a *piece* of music or a choreographed step.<sup>490</sup> A value placed on *willingness* can accommodate whatever musical phrase comes into your head, or whatever movements you make when doing watcha wanna.<sup>491</sup>

Even while second line values *how* you dance over *which steps* you do, specificity is not incidental to the form. Second liners emphasize that “*that music*” (brass band music) is specifically what animates their spirits—along with dancers’ reactions to specific steps and rhythms—and this indicates that do watcha wanna is only one part of second lining’s spiritual story. Two seemingly contradictory elements are equally necessary for second line dancing as a vehicle for spiritual transcendence: specificity and openness of form. While nobody can tell you how to second line, nor judge you when you do it, this does not mean that everything done at a second line parade falls under the

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<sup>488</sup> As described in the introduction, my formative dance experiences in a studio setting (learning the holy trinity of ballet, tap, and jazz as storehouses of technique) predisposed me to initially approach second lining by considering its technique as a thing, “an object that dancers have and deploy,” to use Judith Hamera’s term. *Dancing Communities*, 20.

<sup>489</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 46.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-158.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

rubric of the dance form of second lining, which is rooted in specific choreographies passed down through generations. In fact, fully understanding second lining's spiritual dimensions requires the uncoupling of specificity and restriction. Much like the brass band music that accompanies it, second lining is specific, but its full realization— aesthetically, socially, and spiritually—relies on individual improvisation *within* that specific vocabulary.<sup>492</sup>

As Anthea Kraut explains, the solo-group dynamic of improvisation both encourages innovation and embellishment *and simultaneously* guarantees aesthetic continuity of a performed tradition.<sup>493</sup> Improvisation also facilitates suprahuman performances. In nearly all African-derived dances in the circum-Atlantic world, transcendence is achieved through the repetition of codified steps within a determined dance vocabulary, and an individual's embellishments or unique expressions within that vocabulary signals the transition to a newly heightened spiritual state.<sup>494</sup> Viewing second lining in this way, one can see that specific choreographies do not necessarily restrict dancers' expression, nor prevent them from doing what they want. In fact, it is almost the opposite. The specific steps are designed as a vehicle for the dancer to access the suprahuman—to fully let go. Second lining footwork is tailored to get inside the rhythms, ride them, inhale them, become them, get in the zone, roll with it, get it, and ultimately let go. If one does not know the rhythms, or does not feel comfortable with the

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<sup>492</sup> Thanks to Stephanie McKee for elucidating this point. Interview with the author, February 5, 2014.

<sup>493</sup> Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk*, 131-132.

<sup>494</sup> Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*, 132-133. Hamera suggests that all dance techniques, from ballet to butoh, are meant to be mastered and transcended in the service of sublime experience. *Dancing Communities*, 4.

choreographies, then she might not be able to invent her own personal movements in response to *that music*, and both are required to fully experience the ecstasy of second lining.

Many second liners, maybe even most, do *not* experience a second line as a spiritual boost, but more like a party, where they partake in earthly delights of alcohol, drugs, flirting, and listening to funky music.<sup>495</sup> However, the entire crowd's presence contributes to the second line's ecstatic charge. Not every parader dances, but most everyone walks (or pushes a wheelchair), and more often than not, they do it in time with the beat. The processional nature of second lining means that most people's foot patterns are, by and large, aligned with the rhythm, and walking becomes a way of dancing-with. Many people will sing or chant along with lyrics, or clap along with the beat as they walk. Each person's movement, synced up with the collective, facilitates individuals' potential to reach ecstatic levels in dancing, even if those who are walking have their attention directed elsewhere. Thus, second liners can participate in the social event in whatever way pleases them and simultaneously, even unwittingly, facilitate the spiritual experience of some dancers. This process resonates with Daniel's explanation of collective participation and individual transcendence in sacred dance rituals in the Caribbean. She writes, "When the congregation's foot patterns and arm gestures connect with exciting rhythms, dynamic, energy floods the entire group, and individual transcendence can generate collective transformations." While not everyone experiences moments of transcendence, those who do can affect the experiences of those around

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<sup>495</sup> White, "New Orleans Brass Bands," 83.



them. As Daniel explains, performers *and* observers feel glimpses of the human/spirit connection, as “interested observers become enthralled participants; the dance becomes music as the music becomes dance; and a dance community comes into being.”<sup>496</sup> Second liners’ upward soars simultaneously disconnect them from *and* ground them in the collective that surrounds and supports their suprahuman performances.

Queer studies and performance studies scholar José Muñoz uses the phrase, “ecstatic time,” to capture the political potency of suprahuman performances.<sup>497</sup> Living in ecstatic time, Muñoz writes, can be liberating for “people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes and ‘rational’ expectations.”<sup>498</sup> Ecstatic time steps out of the stranglehold of “straight time,” which might also be called white patriarchal time: the temporality that claims that there is no future beyond the naturalized futurity of heteronormative, patriarchal reproduction within the nuclear family. As discussed above, second liners’ horizontal relatedness on the street, and in the “spirit family” structure of SAPCs, operate outside of the linear, patriarchal family structure. Through dancing, second liners also step out of the nuclear family’s assumptions about temporality and futurity by facilitating and privileging experiences of ecstatic time.

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<sup>496</sup> Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*, 142, 190. Here Daniel is referencing sacred dances in Trinidad, Haiti, and Cuba. Brothers makes a similar observation about collective dancing in New Orleans’s Sanctified churches. *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 40-41. While the dances described by Daniel and Brothers are intentionally danced to facilitate spirit possession, the process of dancing to facilitate transcendence applies to the second line setting as described by those I have interviewed, including the interviewees quoted in this chapter.

<sup>497</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

According to Muñoz, when one enters ecstatic time, an affective excess overflows the here and now and allows one to glimpse something beyond the everyday transactions of heteronormative capitalism. By approaching freedom as unboundedness (but not ungroundedness), ecstasy rescues and emboldens concepts of freedom that have been withered by neoliberal thought and assimilationist politics.<sup>499</sup> Ecstatic time is crucial for black people living under white supremacy, whose futurity is often limited by expectations of too-early death, a death foretold by situational and/or environmental hazards.<sup>500</sup> Moments of ecstasy, such as those accessed while second lining, dare to imagine a past, present, and future unbounded by physical, environmental, and social limitations. Skelly's entrance into ecstatic time leads him to fly above the crowd, radically unbounded by his wheelchair or by gravity. Moments of ecstasy such as this exceed a freedom defined by upward mobility and political inclusion in a neoliberal capitalist order; during moments of danced ecstasy, dancers free themselves to fly far above the highest rung of the social ladder.

In her analysis of second lines, Latin American studies scholar Margaret Olsen notes that second liners' engagement with material abundance both affirms and a parodies capital.<sup>501</sup> In other words, second lines signify on capital accumulation and upward mobility. Second liners not only spend time, money, and effort, but they do so in excess. The clubs' significant outlay and conspicuous display of cash during the second line—epitomized by one of the older clubs, called the “Money Wasters”—mocks

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 22-32.

<sup>500</sup> King, “Which Way is Down?,” 28.

<sup>501</sup> Olsen, “Gift of the Second Line,” 187.

accumulation as it celebrates it. Each club spends thousands—usually tens of thousands—of dollars to host a second line parade. Some clubs spend more than \$1,000 per person on custom-made shoes alone. Other expenses include each member’s suit and matching accessories, the royal court’s regalia, hand-held decorations (e.g., umbrellas and fans), floats to carry the royalty, a city permit, police escorts, and the band’s fee. And, as the Money Wasters’ name implies, the durable goods purchased for the parade are meant to be “wasted.” Furious second lining for four hours in swampy heat easily rips the soles off of main liners’ shoes and soaks through silk pants to the point of ruin. One club member (known as Charlie Brown, a member of the Sidewalk Steppers SAPC) has developed a certain level of local stardom through his annual post-parade performance of additional waste. He stands above the crowd on a balcony and rips apart his suit and shoes with an ax and hammer. Those second liners who dance, even periodically, throughout the course of a four-hour parade (and I would even include those who simply walk it) also sacrifice time, energy, calories, hydration, and joint health—in sum, they expend a great deal of effort that is irrecoverable into any further accumulation or application.

While Olsen conceives of the second line in terms of a gift economy, the parades can also be conceived as “waste,” as theorized by George Bataille. In *Visions of Excess*, Bataille rewrites the history of capitalism to replace its major logic of accumulation with that of waste. Whereas Olsen defines second liners’ gift giving as an altruistic alternative to an exchange economy of capitalism, Bataille would place their expenditures at very center of capitalist exchange. The clubs waste money, and second liners expend energy,

to produce objects and experiences that cannot be accumulated or used for any form of productive utility. Second line performances both offer a contrary logic to capital exchange and celebrate black, marginalized subjects operating in the very center of capital exchange, in Bataille's terms.<sup>502</sup> As a celebration and parody of capital, second lines can be read as a form of minoritarian resistance, in which dominant logics are flooded with "excluded and as yet unimagined possibilities."<sup>503</sup> The excessive money, energy, sweat, and time "wasted" during one second line (not to mention the months of preparation) creates a zone of ecstatic time, which enables dancers to feed on the parade's energetic excess and lift off into suprahuman performances.

Critics of second lines fault the gatherings for channeling their tremendous resources into the wrong places, which is, back into the parades themselves.<sup>504</sup> For better or for worse (Muñoz and Bataille would argue for better), the second line refuses recuperation into any further application. Dancers' suprahuman performances cannot be

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<sup>502</sup> Bataille states that, while humanity recognizes the right to acquire, conserve, and consume, we exclude the right to unproductive expenditure; however, expenditure is in fact a necessary social function. Unproductive expenditure, such as spectacles, display of finery, and creation of art must remain reduced to "permissible debauchery," an amount regrettably necessary for productive social activity. But Bataille reveals how personal experience "gives the lie to this miserable conception" of expenditure in service of productive utility. "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 117, 123. Second lines not only give the lie to expenditure in service of productive utility, but also parody the lie with conspicuous, spectacular expenditure.

<sup>503</sup> Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel, "Performing Excess," in *Women in Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 15, no. 2 (2005): 9.

<sup>504</sup> Sometimes the second line structure is used to stage political protests. For example, there was a second line to protest the closing of Charity Hospital after Hurricane Katrina. I am more interested in the regular performance of Sunday second lines, and the political valences that exist even when not explicitly used for political protests. For a reflection on Silence Is Violence's use of a second line to protest violence in the city, explicitly without music for the first half of the procession, see Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 169-172. For one reflection on activists' ambivalent attitudes toward New Orleanians' penchant for pleasure-seeking, see Sunni Patterson's comment in Flaherty, *Floodlines*: "At some point all of our efforts just can't be a barbeque" (28).

easily directed into institutionalized churches; the excessive numbers of people present in the collective resist formation as organized political protest; the clubs' massive material expenses reject individual wealth accumulation. The second line's expenditures of time, energy, money, and sweat present a radical logic wildly contrary to capital accumulation, on which the rungs of the social ladder are hung. Therein lies the second lines' radical political potential for freedom. Muñoz argues that practical activist agendas define "freedom" as mere inclusion in a corrupt and bankrupt social order. This kind of freedom never dares to imagine anything beyond the hollow nature of the present. Second lining as a whole, and especially moments of danced ecstasy, does dare to imagine an existence beyond the present as dancers transport themselves into the "horizon of being."<sup>505</sup>

When Skelly is flying high above the whole second line, his ecstatic lift exceeds any rational, logical, or aspirational definition of upward mobility; instead, it embraces ecstasy and lets the spirit move; it enacts a counter-hegemonic social order but refuses to make political demands. The relationship to power choreographed by contemporary second lining's lift is not exactly aspirational nor insurgent, although individual second liners might self-fashion their own second line performances to meet these goals for themselves. As a choreographic structure, second lining does not aspire toward a higher rung on the ladder of social mobility, nor does it threaten to shake the ladder down with a political overthrow. The lift represents an oscillation between these two things, a state of constant motion that never stays in either position.

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<sup>505</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 20-22.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I end with my interview of Tyree Smith, a story that aims to pull together the threads spun throughout this chapter: groundedness—read as a collective response to violence that rejects the aspirations of uplift and the vertical structure of the nuclear family—and liftedness—read as an ecstatic experience that exceeds the upward mobility of capital accumulation. Tyree is a dedicated second liner who claims that dancing through the streets on Sunday afternoons provides him with a form of mental, physical, and spiritual healing. He relies on second lines as a weekly “stress reliever,” and he sees it as therapy: “It’s therapy for a lot of people, and I know I’m one of the people that it’s therapy for.”<sup>506</sup> His perception of second lining as therapy connects him not only with many other second liners, but also with practitioners of African diaspora dance across the Caribbean and Atlantic diaspora. Daniel developed the notion of “social medicine” to describe the therapeutic effects of ritual performance. Power, authority, and community relations are affected, rearranged, or affirmed as dancers grow in individual esteem and dignity; dancers experience physical benefits of extended periods of exercise; social wounds are healed; each community member is accounted for; and the community continues with strong bonds. The spiritual dimension of performance is connected to the social well being of individuals and to the solidarity of a social community.<sup>507</sup> In other words, after dancing-with others and achieving

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<sup>506</sup> Tyree’s characterization of second lining as therapeutic resonates with the efforts of Darryl Young, better known as Dancing Man 504. He centers his business model on the notion of second lining as therapy. His youth project is called “Heal 2 Toe,” a play on words that locates a healing function in the very choreography of heel-to-toe footwork.

<sup>507</sup> Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 5, 55.

extraordinary physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual states while doing so, dancers leave feeling more grounded.

Tyree explained his perception of second lining as therapy during a one-hour interview on a Tuesday evening shortly before Mardi Gras in 2014. He arranged to meet me at his night job at Ochsner Baptist Hospital (an apt place to talk about social medicine), where he works as a floor technician in the evenings, after days spent managing a senior care facility. Between working two jobs, commitments to his family and children, and responsibilities as the secretary of Family Ties Social and Pleasure Club, Tyree did not have much free time in which to schedule an interview. He explained to me, when I saw him at a second line one Sunday, that he could “make time for me” during his night job. I drove to the hospital and parked across from the Emergency Room, as he instructed. I sent him a text message at 7:00 PM to let him know that I was there, and waited for a reply. I had brought a copy of Daniel’s *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*, so I propped it against my steering wheel and read under the streetlight. Thirty minutes later, I sent another text, and kept reading. At 8:00, I called his phone, intending to leave a voice message, letting him know that I was going home, as I assumed that he was too busy at work to duck out for an hour. To my surprise, he answered my call, and said that he would be right down. The text messages only went through as we greeted each other in the parking lot; sometimes his phone does not work inside the hospital. I was glad that I had called. He took me into the hospital through back door, which led to a large storage room, and we settled into a vacant corner of a dimly lit lobby. We sat in the

corner, on benches built against floor-to-ceiling windows that look onto the street. He told me that he comes here when he needs to get away and get a moment of peace.

Before I could remove a release form from my bag, Tyree explained to me that D2, a new division of Family Ties, had disbanded. D2 was the reason that I initially wanted to interview Tyree, for the young club had quickly established an identity on the street as a collection of serious dancers. Tyree founded D2, which stands for “Division 2” of Family Ties, to provide an opportunity for younger men to experience the exhilaration of parading inside the ropes even if they could not afford the costs required by more established clubs. D2 paraded with Family Ties for the first time on October 6, 2013. Long before that, they had established themselves as a presence on the sidelines, as each Sunday, club members and supporters sported a new D2 T-shirt. “We had a movement going on,” Tyree said. “We called it the D2 movement.” The D2 movement came to an end not long after their debut parade, due to a growing public perception that the club was involved with illegal activities, and not just dedicated to parading. A D2 member was, Tyree told me, the target of the shooting that occurred during the Original Big 7’s second line on Mother’s Day in 2013. As described in the introduction to this dissertation, I was present during this shooting, standing just yards from the gunmen when they fired their weapons, and so Tyree’s story held personal interest and emotion for me. The Mother’s Day incident, he explained, was perpetrated as retaliation for a shooting that occurred during the Black Men of Labor SAPC’s second line in 2010.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Tyree was referring a quintuple shooting in 2010 in the Seventh Ward neighborhood, which occurred not long after the Black Men of Labor SAPC’s second line parade had rolled through that very spot. Although the parade had passed, crowds lingered. The shooting left one woman dead. Maya Rodriguez, “NOPD: Dead Woman Was Apparent Target at Second Line Shooting,” WWLTV, September 5, 2010,



Tyree emphasized that the D2 member was not a perpetrator, but had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bystanders remembered his presence during the 2010 incident, and Mothers' Day was their revenge. Tyree told me that a local paper, *The Advocate*, had distorted the story, and painted D2 as a gang, claiming that it stood for Deslonde Boys.<sup>509</sup> The police got involved. Tyree tried to pull all the strings he could to reach the paper and correct the mistakes, but to no avail. He eventually decided that the best thing to do was to disband the club. "We're just about having fun, making people laugh. We're about the tradition. It's something that we try to keep going. I want everybody to know that D2 is a social aid and pleasure club." He concluded wistfully, "It was great while it lasted, it was. It was great while it lasted."

I did not know any of this before Tyree told me the story, sitting on a bench in an empty corner of the hospital. I had come to interview him about dance, but the first story he had to tell me was about violence. Suddenly, the comments that another D2 member had made to me about "clearing their name" and telling "their side of the story" made sense. I realized why Tyree was so willing, even eager, to do this interview with me: to tell his side of the story. I explained that I am not a journalist, and I do not know anyone in the media, but if telling his story in this interview could be helpful in any way, I was

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accessed March 15, 2014, <http://www.wvlv.com/news/crime/Four-shot-one-dead-on-St-Bernard-and-St-Claude-102270154.html>.

<sup>509</sup> In his coverage of the Mother's Day incident, reporter Jon Simerman wrote, "Prosecutors claim that Aekin and Shawn Scott [perpetrators of the Mother's Day shooting] were gunning for a PCB [Priour and Columbus Boys] splinter group called D-2 when they rained bullets into the Mother's Day crowd." "Accused Mother's Day Shooters Charged in Federal Drug and Gun Indictment," *The Advocate: New Orleans Edition*, March 12, 2014, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://theadvocate.com/news/neworleans/neworleansnews/8602502-123/mothers-day-shooters-charged-in>.

happy to do what I could. I hit record on my audio recorder, and asked Tyree how he began second lining, which is when he began to describe his therapy.<sup>510</sup>

Forty minutes into the interview, a man's voice boomed from the top of the staircase above. "Tyree!" "I'm coming!" he shouted back. The man yelled down again, his voice bouncing off of the tile and linoleum. He instructed Tyree to empty the trash on five, and Tyree responded, "Gotcha!" I was struck by incongruence of this moment. Here was a man who had founded his own social aid and pleasure club, narrating the realms of his life in which he has control and authority, prestige and power, a creative outlet, a space for therapy, and the ability to redistribute resources and give back to those less fortunate. He was sharing the strength and comfort of belonging to a collective, the joy of attaining extraordinary states while dancing, and the pain of having those privileges spoiled by gang-related violence. In the midst of his reflections, his boss screamed from above, out of sight yet sonically filling Tyree's space of respite, demanding that he empty the trash. I was reminded of the literature on benevolent societies, which describes them as institutions, like churches, where African Americans have historically been able to create a life with more responsibility, power, and authority than is typically available in their outside lives. African American members of benevolent societies have long created an alternative world, in response to the institutional racism and structural violence that has consistently barred black Americans from positions of influence within mainstream

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<sup>510</sup> Not long after this interview, the editor of a local African American newspaper, *New Orleans Data News Weekly*, invited me to write a series of articles that profile individual second liners. I agreed, and asked Tyree if he would like to be the first person featured. I published a short article about Tyree's biography as a second liner in the paper on April 25, 2014, in which I included his denouncements of the accusations against D2. Rachel Carrico, "Footwork Therapy," *New Orleans Data News Weekly*, April 25 2014, <http://ladatanews.com/news/2014/apr/25/footwork-therapy>.

politics and economics.<sup>511</sup> It seemed like this rationale could still be a relevant explanation for why Tyree and many others to sacrifice so much time, money, and energy in order to participate in second line organizations. Second lining's social medicine is not limited to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits of dancing collectively in the street once a week, but extends to include the more private activities of club members who exercise power and authority in leading the group, and who enjoy esteem and dignity in their roles as community leaders. If, as Daniel claims, the spiritual dimension of performance is connected to the social well being of individuals and to the solidarity of a social community, then the spiritual dimension of second lining extends well beyond the parade to include the much more mundane, logistical, and even bureaucratic scenes of club business.<sup>512</sup>

I suddenly felt nervous that Tyree's job might be in jeopardy if we continued. I still wanted to show him video of footage of various footwork styles and ask for his descriptions, so I suggested that we reschedule for another time. He waved his hand as if to dismiss my concern. "Oh I have time." He switched his position on the bench to sit next to me so he that could see my computer screen. And with that simple gesture, I watched Tyree as he carried a grounded-yet-lifted posture with him into his daily life, maneuvering through structures of power with multiple tactics, too flexible to remain in one static or captive position, but always oscillating between many. The dissenting bodily mobilities of second liners, which embrace gravity even while resisting it, choreograph a

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<sup>511</sup> Claude Jacobs claims that a major role of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century benevolent societies was to enable "blacks to acquire skills in running organizations—writing constitutions, keeping minutes, and learning bookkeeping." "Benevolent Societies of New Orleans," 32.

<sup>512</sup> Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 5, 55.

mobile relationship to power for those who find themselves, even temporarily, in disempowered positions. King urges that, “In the midst of constant worries about the political (in)direction of black people, we might pay more attention to the way blackness already remobilizes the concept of directionality. Black music [and dance, I would add], in particular, suggests new ways to move, (as) new ways to think, to live, to be.”<sup>513</sup> Grounded-yet-lifted suggests that a powerful way to think, live, and be is to embrace opposite directions and live in the tension between them.

This chapter has focused on *why* New Orleanians second line, looking to the dancer’s bodily posture in order to glean some answers. I argue that the second lining body’s grounded-yet-lifted posture embodies a philosophical and political stance. The weight placement necessary to “roll with it” negotiates a tension between succumbing to gravity and resisting it, and in so doing, articulates a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility. I suggest that the dancer’s bodily groundedness indicates her grounding in a collective response to structural violence that rejects the vertical aspirations of racial uplift and of the nuclear family structure. At the same time, her bodily liftedness gestures towards spiritual experiences of ecstasy that exceed the aspirational, upward mobility of capital accumulation. A grounded-yet-lifted stance enables second liners to maneuver within and against structures of violence with tactical mobility, not only surviving but also critiquing racial capitalism, and especially the disastrous impacts of colorblind racism and neoliberalism characteristic of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>513</sup> King, “Which Way Is Down?,” 43.

Second liners not only subvert hegemonic forces in their postural discourse, but also in their movements through the cityscape. Second lines' urban choreographies form the subject of the next chapter.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**If You Ain't Gonna Roll, Then Get Out the Way:**  
**Mobility, Citizenship, and Urban Space in Second Line Choreographies**

As visitors arrive to New Orleans's Louis Armstrong International Airport, they are greeted with many images of the city, printed on T-shirts and postcards sold in the gift shops, emblazoned on advertisements for restaurants and hotels, and displayed in public art installations. For example, while gliding down an escalator, heading toward baggage claim, they glimpse a large painting displayed on the wall above (fig. 2). The painting depicts a second line parade with iconic imagery: several horn players, grand marshals, and paraders in full-stride, knees up, pumping umbrellas into the air. The figures, who are almost all dark-skinned, parade past Creole cottages, an emblem of New Orleans's signature architecture. The female paraders' blouses and shin-length skirts place the scene in the recent past, perhaps in the 1960s. The painting, like a popular tourism board slogan ("We're Jazzed You're Here!"), promises tourists the environment that they have been sold—a pleasurable, perhaps debaucherous, buffet of food, music, and dancing—collapsing New Orleans's cultural exceptionalism into the two-dimensional representation of the black second lining body.<sup>514</sup>

This painting is one of many visual representations of New Orleans culture that reinforce the city's identity as geographically and temporally distant from the rest of the country. The artwork is admittedly not renowned; probably few people notice it, and fewer comment upon it. But nor is it singular; it belongs to a proliferation of

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<sup>514</sup> Sakakeeny notes that music is pervasively used to sell New Orleans to tourists as an exceptional place. And yet, the musicians who create the music that tourists come to hear are simultaneously "celebrated as culture bearers and marginalized as potential criminals," and as such, "they are living proof of both New Orleans exceptionalism and the global neoliberal order." "New Orleans Exceptionalism," 726.

representations of New Orleans's black cultural practices—including professional photographs, business logos, and website visuals—that promotes a nostalgic view of a dying tradition kept alive only by documentation and commodification.<sup>515</sup> It presents the musicians and members of the social aid and pleasure club (SAPC) in the most traditional of dress (black suits), instead of the T-shirts and jeans worn by most brass bands today and the Technicolor suits showcased by most clubs. Furthermore, the painting's second liners carry umbrellas and handkerchiefs as prop. In actuality, today's second liners usually open perfunctory umbrellas to shield themselves from rain or sun, and use terry cloth towels to wipe away their sweat. We know that the procession is a funeral due to the white dove placed on the grand marshal's shoulder.<sup>516</sup> However, in many contemporary funerals, second liners wear commemorative T-shirts to honor deceased members of the community, who are often lost to the violence that plagues the city. The houses in the background do not reflect the range of architecture found in the working-class neighborhoods where most second lines roll. To honestly depict a contemporary second line would be to recognize it as a real response to contemporary urban struggles, and to highlight the terrain of structural racism through which second liners strut.

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<sup>515</sup> My analysis is informed by Regis's notion of *antiquification* – the process of presenting, curating, and consuming representations of African American heritage that appear to be already in the past. "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 767-770. See also Thomas, *Desire and Disaster*, especially "'Life the Way It Used to Be in the Old South: The Construction of Black Desire in New Orleans's Post-Civil Rights Tourism Narrative," 27-52.

<sup>516</sup> According to oral tradition, the dove is often said to symbolize the flight of the deceased person's soul. Some claim that real doves were once released during funerals, but the plastic doves, worn on the shoulder, are a simpler and cheaper alternative. Others claim that the white handkerchiefs once waved during funerals were also stand-ins for flying white doves. Lenwood Sloan, interview with the author, October 31, 2013.

Such notions do not sell plane tickets to New Orleans, a city where tourism comprises a cornerstone of the local economy.<sup>517</sup> As anthropologist Helen Regis has argued, representations such as this painting deny coevalness, or the co-existence in time, to contemporary black culture makers. By presenting cultural practices such as second lines as “already in the past,” images like this one can erase second liners’ agency as social actors, and furthermore, can paint over a critique of capitalism and white supremacy at the root of the second line tradition in order to sell culture to tourists arriving from Concourse D.<sup>518</sup>

What I wish to highlight here are the multiple types of mobility that collide as the tourist glides down the escalator and gazes up at the painting. First, the visitor’s smooth descent represents the freely chosen, unencumbered, and rapid geographical movement available to the privileged in a globalized world.<sup>519</sup> The people in the painting represent a different kind of freedom-as-mobility: the freedom found in moving one’s body in an

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<sup>517</sup> A study commissioned in the year prior to Katrina by then Lieutenant Governor, now New Orleans mayor, Mitch Landrieu, states, “Tourism is one of Louisiana’s largest industries,” and add that few would dispute that it is the state’s cultural environment that is the greatest draw.” Mt. Auburn Associates, *Louisiana: Where Culture Means Business* (Baton Rouge: State of Louisiana, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Office of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Louisiana Division of the Arts, 2007), 35-36.

<sup>518</sup> Regis, 768; also see Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

<sup>519</sup> Urban theorist Saskia Sassen claims that new information and communication technologies have heightened the movement of people, ideas, and capital through cities around the globe—contributing to the “time-space compression” that is often associated with experiences of globalization—but these technologies “have not reduced hierarchy nor spatial inequalities even as they restructure space.” “Locating Cities on Global Circuits,” in *Global Networks, Linked Cities*, ed. by Saskia Sassen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15. Tourism is one domain where globalization’s contributions to inequality can be seen, especially in New Orleans. Tourism theorists Adrian Franklin and Mike Crang contend that, while leaving one’s home is now a necessary part of life for many, mobility *free of obstacles* remains a relative privilege, but one that is becoming more widespread. While we cannot claim that global mobility is the sole domain of the powerful and wealthy, we can neither equate the tourist’s mobility with that of the migrant, refugee, or





**Figure 2.** Contrasting Mobilities in the Local/Global City of New Orleans. *Two Way Pokey-Way – The Parade of Life*, created by Richard Cornelius Thomas in 2001, hangs in New Orleans’s Louis Armstrong International Airport. Photograph by the author.

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even the commuter. “The Trouble with Tourism and Travel Theory?,” *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 10-11.

uninhibited and unencumbered dance. It is no coincidence that this kind of free movement is found in the black dance idiom of second lining.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, it is no coincidence that the second lining body, in this instance, is fixed in the immobile picture frame. As cultural studies scholar Doreen Massey observes, there are many people who live in impoverished inner city ghettos around the world that contribute massively to globally circulating music and dance styles, yet have never, or hardly ever, left the borders of their neighborhoods.<sup>521</sup> Those anonymous black New Orleanians pictured here, who create the music and dance styles that attract global visitors, are often the ones least likely to benefit from globalization's increased access to geographical, social, and temporal mobility. While many members of the second line community, especially musicians, certainly do have the means and motivations to travel in and out of the city on a regular basis, many others do not. Second liners, then, do not often move through the Louis Armstrong International Airport; they are frozen as a fixed representation of danced mobility that stays in one place and remains perpetually stuck in the past.

Stepping through the *whoosh!* of sliding glass doors, the visitor leaves behind the airport's crisp, cool air conditioning and collides with a physical wall of heat and humidity, slowing down the clip of luggage wheels while encountering, for the first time, New Orleans's city streets. Taxicabs, rental cars, and hotel shuttles await, ready to whisk people from the airport, some twenty miles from the city center, to homes and hotels across the metropolitan area. Little reliable public transportation services the airport,

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<sup>520</sup> DeFrantz, "Unchecked Popularity."

<sup>521</sup> Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 25-26.

which means that travelers are presented with just one budget option: a local bus, which departs infrequently and takes over an hour to reach the Central Business District.

Transportation options to and from the airport reveal New Orleans's priorities for moving bodies in and out of the city. The swift, smooth movement of tourists, conventioners, and other visitors, whose presence pumps dollars into the economy, is facilitated by multiple market solutions. These are practically the only transportation solutions, so residents' urban movement depends heavily on their individual purchasing powers. On the sidewalk, then, the visitor encounters again New Orleans's disparity in mobilities. The ease of visitors' movement into and through the city contrasts sharply with the more limited and obstacle-ridden movement of the city's working-class and impoverished residents represented in the painting. Depictions of black culture as always already in the past sell a palatable past-ness to visitors, which facilitates an influx of tourism dollars on which the city's economy depends, and therefore directs the flow of capital to privilege tourism-facilitating infrastructure. The dollars pumped in by tourism, however, barely benefit the black working-class residents whose culture attracts tourists in the first place. Thus residents' access to social, geographical, and temporal mobility (functioning as coeval members of society) is severely limited (though not nonexistent).

This chapter investigates the tensions between multiple mobilities—geographical, social, temporal, and danced mobilities—in order to analyze the ways in which second liners move through the urban space of New Orleans. I argue that the quotidian laws and norms that govern bodily movement through New Orleans on a daily basis are partially rooted in racist paradigms and guided by the needs of capital, but norms for traversing the

city space are largely overturned when second lines take to the streets. With multiple bodily tactics,<sup>522</sup> second liners introduce alternative directives for traversing the urban landscape to challenge (and occasionally re-inscribe) patriarchal, white supremacist, and neoliberal ideologies. I conclude that second lining is a choreographic act that reflects, resists, and remaps the city's economic, racialized, gendered, and cultural geographies. In Stephanie Camp's terms, second lines carve rival geographies into geographies of containment.<sup>523</sup> I add onto previous chapters to build the overall argument of this dissertation: that second lining is a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility that has enabled African American New Orleanians to maneuver through structural and physical violence for more than one hundred years. While previous chapters highlighted spiritual mobility (being "moved" in a metaphysical sense), social movements (forming collectivities in resistance to oppression), and bodily mobility (the practice of learning, perfecting, and executing second lining technique), this chapter highlights geographical movement in the urban landscape to continue examining the relationships between dance, race, and capital on the streets of New Orleans.

Anthropologists and historians of the second line frequently describe it as a participatory, neighborhood-based practice in which marginalized residents stage democratic, public ownership of place.<sup>524</sup> Helen Regis argues that second lines transform

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<sup>522</sup> As throughout the dissertation, I am using "tactics" in Michel de Certeau's sense, to describe actions employed by those in less powerful positions to maneuver within and against the disciplinary laws of the place. *Practice of Everyday Life*, 29-30. See also note 13 below.

<sup>523</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6-7.

<sup>524</sup> Sakeeny demonstrates how second line soundscapes produce a resistant locality in tune with black, marginalized residents' negotiations with public space. "'Under the Bridge:' An Orientation to

urban space from the quotidian order of spatial apartheid by musically altering the atmosphere to create an alternative social, moral, and aesthetic order of conviviality and solidarity.<sup>525</sup> While many SAPC members may not own homes or businesses, they collectively own the streets for four hours a week. In a city where being black in public is often criminalized, policed by both law enforcement's mandate to stop and frisk and by middle-class oppositions to public congregation in gentrifying neighborhoods, second lines comment on hegemonic uses of public urban space.<sup>526</sup> Regis and Rachel Breunlin argue that second lines claim a space in public discourse for alternative notions of place value and land ownership rooted in cultural citizenship versus private property.<sup>527</sup> Such claims took on particular potency in a post-Katrina context, when the parades challenged privatized claims to the recovering city, contesting exclusionary policies that have

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Soundscapes in New Orleans." *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 1-27. As discussed in chapter two, several scholars have noted that second lines performed during the Jim Crow era defied segregation by parading through the same streets where lynchings and race riots occurred, and remapped these places as sites of celebration versus racist violence. Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 18; Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*, 21-22. Writing about Mardi Gras Indians, a related but distinct black parading tradition in New Orleans, Joseph Roach argues that the tribes "claim the space through which they move," performing "a rite of territory repossessed, not to assert permanent ownership but temporary use." "Mardi Gras Indians and Others," 476. Catherine Michna also focuses on the spatial aspect of second lines as central to their resistant capacities, claiming that the parades "produce spatial modes of resistance, memorialize counter-histories in public spaces, and theorize counter-hegemonic spatial possibilities." "Hearing the Hurricane Coming," 3-4. See also Olsen, "The Gift of the New Orleans Second Line."

<sup>525</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes"; and "Blackness and the Politics of Memory." Regis builds on anthropologist Eric Hirsch's definition of "landscape" as a "cultural process" to urge that landscape is produced through local practices of both quotidian spatial apartheid and the transformative practices of the second line. "Contested Landscapes," 475-476. She also draws upon Arjun Appadarai's notion of "produced locality" to argue that second lines produce neighborhoods through choosing neighborhood routes with ceremonial stops that inscribe the memory of local individuals into the landscape. "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 756. Finally, Regis considers second lines in the context of de Certeau's strategies and tactics, wherein the dominant social order deploys strategies of racial apartheid, and second liners employ tactics to move through someone else's territory. "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 763.

<sup>526</sup> Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 756-758.

<sup>527</sup> "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 14.

prevented African American residents from returning.<sup>528</sup> This chapter builds upon previous scholarship on the second line's spatial practices to examine how bodily movement through urban space works to transform the landscape during, and even after, the parade.

Foundational theorists of urban space, such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, have been useful to dance scholars, and also inform my analysis.<sup>529</sup> In *The Production of Space* (1968), Lefebvre contends that place is co-produced by the built environment and bodily gesture. He posits that spaces are not empty containers occupied by bodies. Bodies do not occupy space, but bodies are, have, and produce space. In a reciprocal relationship, he says, bodily gestures produce social space; and physical spaces, with all their architectures, histories, and associations, produce bodies that are themselves components of social space. Michel de Certeau published similar ruminations on the bodily inhabitation of city space. In his now famous essay, "Walking the City" (1984), de Certeau privileges the bodily practice of walking through the city over the

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<sup>528</sup> For example, Zada Johnson builds upon literature on the production of social space and racial identities in social space to argue that second line parades "utilize the physical landscape to make claims on city space" (9). Focusing on the years immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Johnson concludes that the parades' spatial practices constituted and embodied argument for African Americans' right to return, and inscribed the post-disaster landscape with moral claims of belonging and civic entitlement. "Walking in the Post-Disaster City." See also Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans"; Raeburn, "They're Tryin' to Wash Us Away"; and Spitzer, "Rebuilding the 'Land of Dreams,'" 320-322.

<sup>529</sup> Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*; Hamera, *Dancing Communities*. More than a decade before these two monographs were published, *Dance in the City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), edited by Helen Thomas, provided a forum for multidisciplinary scholars to locate "Western concepts and practices of dance [...] within the spectrum of urban life in late modernity" (x). Although site-specific performance is of current concern to performance theorists (judging by a recent issue of *TDR: The Drama Review* 58, no. 3 [2014], which was dedicated to the topic of "Performing the City"), I do not include literature on site dance in this literature review. Site dance usually emerges from fundamentally different concerns than does second lining, namely, that of transporting the proscenium arts into public space. In contrast, second lining was developed on the street by subjects who were traditionally barred from proscenium stages and the privilege of self-representation.

visual tyranny of the *flanêur*, the nineteenth-century male Parisian stroller who casually observes urban life. De Certeau's focus on the political dimensions of bodily movement through city structures lends itself to a dance-focused analysis: he does not simply celebrate walking the city as a resistant practice, but, drawing on Foucault, sees power as constantly negotiated. When walkers take shortcuts, walk outside of designated spaces, privilege or avoid certain streets, they elude the disciplinary norms of the urbanistic system, which are designed to regulate and suppress the "microbe-like, singular and plural practices" of city-dwellers. But no action in the city, no matter how "multiform, resistance [*sic*], tricky and stubborn" can ever fully escape the disciplinary structures.<sup>530</sup> In one's daily negotiations with disciplinary structures, which often impose themselves violently, de Certeau finds a theory of lived existence.

More recent work on the production of public space takes into account, more directly than do Lefevbre and de Certeau, the manner and meanings of public resistance when performed by marginalized subjects. By taking over the streets and sidewalks of back-of-town neighborhoods, second liners create and contest the very notion of "public" space. Speaking of the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring protests, Judith Butler points out that public space is not given, but is rather created and contested in performance: "collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture." In other words, when marginalized people gather in collective actions, from protests to second lines, their bodily performances—on the pavement and around the architecture—highlight political struggles for mobility through those spaces and

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<sup>530</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 96.

access to the institutions enshrined in the architecture. Butler adds that, when crowds move outside the square, “to the side street or the back alley,” they bring attention to the ways in which politics is already in the home and on the street corner, far from the commercial and political shrines consolidated in downtown districts.<sup>531</sup> When second lines roll through side streets and back streets, paraders highlight political struggles, but this is no protest—second liners’ deliver sonic and kinesthetic discourses of dissent, but they do so with rhythm and sweat, not banners and slogans.<sup>532</sup> In her study of drum-and-dance circles performed by slaves in Bahia, Brazil, Rachel Harding argues that collective, rhythmic dancing “provides people with a means by which to reorient themselves and their environment to an alternative experience” within repressive systems.<sup>533</sup> Through music and dance, second liners (re)create pavement and architecture into “physical, socio-political, cultural, psychic, and ritual-religious locations” wherein black and back-of-town are no longer reducible to subaltern and substandard; rhythm allows the emergence of another reality.<sup>534</sup> As a carnivalesque ritual, second lining’s transgression lies less in a revolutionary impulse than in its ability to overturn the status quo for four hours a week.

I argue that second lines remake the quotidian laws and norms that govern urban bodily trajectories, and in so doing, they enact alternative notions of ownership,

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<sup>531</sup> Butler, “Bodies in Alliance,” n.p.

<sup>532</sup> Sakakeeny makes such a distinction between political marches and second line parades in ““Under the Bridge,”” 13.

<sup>533</sup> Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 133-135.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.



citizenship, and belonging. In the United States, land ownership has historically served as the legal basis for citizenship rights, and as a symbolic anchor of cultural citizenship.<sup>535</sup> By staging an embodied, ephemeral, and collective ownership of city space, second line choreographies challenge the neoliberal logics of private ownership as grounds for one's "right" to the city. White supremacist efforts to deny full citizenship to African Americans have not only entailed the denial of land ownership, but also the denial of free movement across the land.<sup>536</sup> By moving massive crowds of exuberantly dancing bodies through urban space, second line choreographies overturn assumptions about where and how black residents are allowed to move through racially and economically segregated urban environments. As a spatial practice, second lining offers a tactical mobility to dancers who not only maneuver through, but can also transform geographies of domination and oppression.

### **Traditional Geographies of New Orleans**

Colonial invasion, plantation economies, capitalist logics of privatization, and the tourism economy all contribute to the inequities of New Orleans's landscape. The French Quarter occupies the symbolic core of the city's imperialist history, where, in contrast with most city streets, one can find a rigidly geometrical street grid. Those roads that parallel the Mississippi River dip and curve with the river's path, and thoroughfares that

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<sup>535</sup> Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 745. I use legal citizenship to refer to an individual's formal right to access state resources; cultural citizenship refers to the ideological norms of national belonging. See Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle"; and Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire*.

<sup>536</sup> African American Studies scholars like Lawrence Levine, Michael P. Johnson, and Stephanie Camp have argued that enslavement was rooted in a spatial impulse to restrict physical and social mobility of enslaved people, and freedom for African Americans was and is rooted in independent mobility.

connect the river and the lake splinter out in diagonals (see fig. 3). Architect Malcolm Heard explains, “The French Quarter looks like what it is—the elaboration of a colonial outpost designed by military engineers.”<sup>537</sup> The French Quarter also boasts the only city streets that are meticulously cleaned by municipal trucks (see fig. 4). The imposition of colonial order can be felt in the French Quarter’s militaristic grid, and the city’s neoliberal economy glistens in the pavement polished for tourist foot traffic.

As a major port city on the border between the American South and the Caribbean, New Orleans has been shaped by complex combinations of American urbanisms and Southern plantation-based economic systems.<sup>538</sup> In many ways, the primacy of plantation-centered development stunted other types of urban growth in the Delta region, and limited economic development has allowed socioeconomic chasms to persist between New Orleans’s white elite and black poor.<sup>539</sup> Clyde Woods introduces the term “plantation bloc” to name a social-spatial construction rooted in the physical landscapes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Delta plantations, and enacted in the social landscapes of white supremacy and capitalism, which have long outlived institutionalized slavery.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Malcolm Heard, *French Quarter Manual: An Architectural Guide to New Orleans’ Vieux Carré* (New Orleans, 1997), 1, qtd in Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 123.

<sup>538</sup> Regis uses the term “racial/spatial order” to describe how race and space co-construct each other in New Orleans. “Blackness and the Politics of Memory,” 754. She borrows the term from Jean Rahier, “Blackness, the Racial/Spatial Order, Migrations, and Miss Ecuador, 1995-96.” *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 2 (June 1998).

<sup>539</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*, 76.

<sup>540</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*.



**Figure 3.** "New Orleans, Louisiana City Map," 2009, accessed May 17, 2015, <http://www.mappery.com/maps/New-Orleans-Louisiana-City-Map.jpg>.



**Figure 4.** Street Cleaning in the French Quarter. A truck bearing the label "Downtown Development District" tows street cleaning equipment on Canal Street. Photograph by the author.

The plantation bloc is still inscribed into the topography of New Orleans today, literally and figuratively. Former plantation boundaries explain why roads that connect the river to the lake do so in diagonal spokes. For example, Esplanade Avenue and Elysian Fields Avenue merge at the river and vector out to form a wide V heading toward the lake. This fan-like street pattern can be traced to a French colonial system of parceling out land to planters, wherein long narrow strips of land maximized access to the river and minimized the amount of unproductive swampland allotted to each plantation. As the city limits extended in the nineteenth century, plantation agriculture gave way to faubourgs (suburbs), and faubourgs became urban neighborhoods. The geometry of plantation boundaries survived as a street grid.<sup>541</sup> New Orleans's plantation-borders-turned-street-grid evidences Katherine McKittrick's claim that "some of the impressions of transatlantic slavery leak into the future, in essence recycling the displacement of difference" into present-day geographies.<sup>542</sup>

Historically, New Orleans has been described as a city with the most integrated racial neighborhoods in the United States, but its residential patterns have not typically reflected residents' political and legal equality. As the early city developed, resources were simply divided unequally on limited livable land. Residents huddled in crowded interracial neighborhoods where humble cottages and grand homes alike clung to the natural levees that stretched along the riverfront or to the ridges left by the Mississippi's

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<sup>541</sup> Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma*, 131-134.

<sup>542</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xvii.

ancient distributaries.<sup>543</sup> In antebellum New Orleans, one-third of the city's black population consisted of *gens de couleur libre* (free people of color), who clustered in downtown neighborhoods and in Tremé. In the back-of-town, where low-lying land remained highly susceptible to flooding, very poor manumitted slaves and others lived in squatter-like huts without basic amenities and services.<sup>544</sup> Not until the 1920s did technologies such as pumps and levees enable the city to expand. Like most American cities, New Orleans experienced a building boom during the height of Jim Crow. As such, "the redistribution of New Orleans' population was hardly random."<sup>545</sup> Slowly, over the course of the twentieth century, New Orleanians who stayed within the city limits (versus migrating to newly available suburbs) separated into areas more distinctly delineated by race and socioeconomic status.<sup>546</sup> As historians Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon assert, "The metropolitanization of New Orleans finally wrote into the city's spatial relationships the same uncompromising [black/white] racial dualism that had conditioned political and legal rights for the past century."<sup>547</sup> Thus, by the early 2000s,

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<sup>543</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 198; and Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 749.

<sup>544</sup> Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma*, 180.

<sup>545</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 198.

<sup>546</sup> Of course, the increased segregation of New Orleans's neighborhoods cannot be singularly attributed to draining and flood-prevention technologies. Public housing construction and policies, school desegregation, redlining, the loss of industry, and many other structural and infrastructural forces shaped patterns of race and socioeconomic settlement in New Orleans. See chapter two for a fuller discussion of these issues.

<sup>547</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans*, 199.

greater New Orleans's racial geography ironically formed more segregated patterns than it did in the early 1800s.<sup>548</sup>

Cultural geographer Richard Campanella describes the settlement pattern of white, wealthier residents in New Orleans as a “white teapot” (see fig. 5). The teapot's spout runs along the river, between Magazine Street and St. Charles Avenue, on higher ground. The teapot's “kettle” forms uptown, around Audubon Park, Tulane and Loyola Universities. Given its stark boundaries, the teapot's impact is “dramatic,” he writes.

Crossing streets like St. Claude in Bywater (tip of the spout) or St. Charles/Carondelet in the Lower Garden District (trunk of the spout) takes a pedestrian across distinct race and class lines, and into strikingly different cityscapes. Guidebooks routinely warn tourists exploring the French Quarter not to exit the demographic pattern (though never so bluntly and not in those terms), while many African-Americans feel equally unwelcome and suspect upon entering it. So distinct are the urban characteristics within and beyond the white teapot that the two areas almost seem like sub-cities, separate communities that happen to abut each other, but otherwise do not interact.<sup>549</sup>

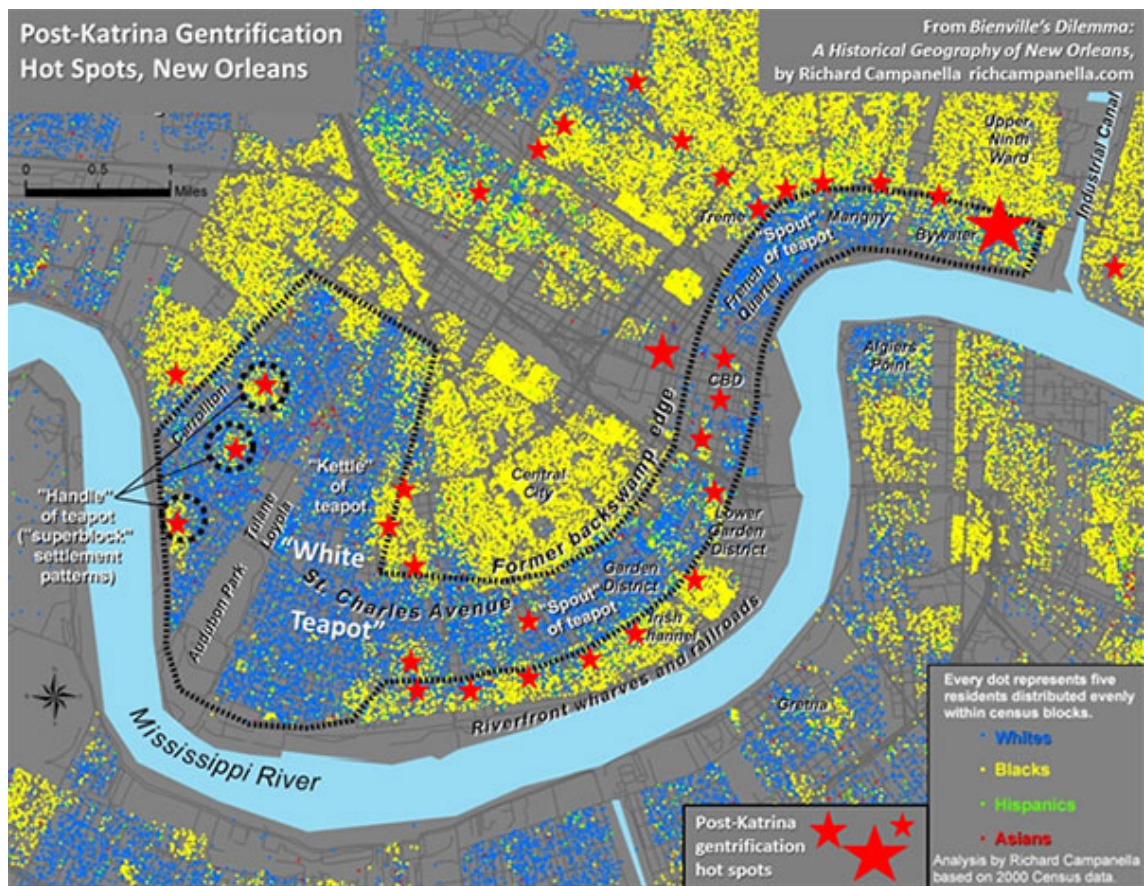
The white teapot provides a startling example of the fact that race and space co-produce each other. In *How Racism Takes Place*, African American studies scholar George Lipsitz argues, quite simply, that it takes places for racism to take place. In his formulation, urban spaces in the U.S. are often dominated by two competing ideologies: the white spatial imaginary and the black spatial imaginary. He argues that the white spatial imaginary, as dominant, does not have to name itself as white. It promotes space as primarily a locus for the generation of exchange value. It is marked by a preference for private dwellings, private development, and the privatization of municipal services. Such

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<sup>548</sup> Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma*, 183.

<sup>549</sup> Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma*, 186-187.

approaches to city space may appear like race-neutral market choices, but actually re-invest in whiteness and its accumulated privileges and immunities.<sup>550</sup> After the end of legalized segregation in New Orleans, supposedly colorblind market choices have enabled white residents and those with more resources to occupy the highest-lying and most valuable land and have enabled the destruction of poorer neighborhoods in the name of progress and renewal.



**Figure 5.** The White Teapot, as mapped by geographer Richard Campanella. "Gentrification and Its Discontents," *New Geography*, March 1 2013, accessed May 17 2015, <http://www.newgeography.com/content/003526-gentrification-and-its-discontents-notes-new-orleans>.

<sup>550</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 30-35.

Progress and renewal have marred New Orleans's landscape with shipping channels, wide boulevards, and elevated highways that carve rigid lines into the city's marshy topography. A major example includes the Interstate 10, an elevated highway that hovers above North Claiborne Avenue. It delivers commuters, travelers, and truck drivers across the city on a pathway that slices directly through Tremé, one of the U.S.'s oldest African American neighborhoods. The interstate's 1960s construction obliterated the avenue's wide neutral ground (or grassy median), the nerve center for black commerce and performance traditions. Spanning the width of one hundred feet, Claiborne's neutral ground once held forty-year-old leafy oak trees and a pedestrian walkway; it served as an extended front yard for many neighborhood residents and a familiar stomping ground for SAPCs. The elevated interstate, or the "bridge," as it is known locally, transformed Claiborne's extended front yard into a covered parking lot. The highway also destroyed twelve blocks of historic homes and diminished the thriving black-owned businesses on the street.<sup>551</sup> The destruction of the city's African American main street was the combined result of federal policies and the local elite's valuations of place. The 1956 Interstate Highway Act made the funds available, and the city justified the highway as necessary infrastructure for moving middle-class residents from jobs downtown to new suburbs. A group of preservationists called "freeway fighters" banned the highway from being built through its originally intended route, the French Quarter.<sup>552</sup> As New Orleans

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<sup>551</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 224; Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming," 32-33; Kalamu ya Salaam, "Guarding the Flame of Life: The Funeral of Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr.," *Offbeat* (January 1999): 50-51.

<sup>552</sup> Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming," 34. As Michna observes, the contrast between the "freeway fighters" and their namesake "freedom fighters" is stark. The white historic preservationists leveraged the



historian Catherine Michna reflects, “The destruction of Claiborne Avenue underscores how dominant historic narratives, collective memory, and the shape and texture of the material city mutually construct each other in New Orleans or any city.”<sup>553</sup>

The location of the I-10 strongly reflects the material impacts of the white spatial imaginary and the enduring power of the plantation bloc. Katherine McKittrick defines these impacts as “traditional geography,” a way of organizing the world “from a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point.”<sup>554</sup> Traditional geographic projects require that black women, men, and children be “placed and displaced”—in what Stephanie Camp calls “geographies of containment”—thereby limiting black people’s opportunities for owning private property and for self-directed mobility.<sup>555</sup> Segregated areas condense wealth and resources into the white teapot; pathways slice through black neighborhoods and displace residents; the poor overwhelming live on low-lying land; structural and infrastructural obstacles inhibit spatial and social mobility for the city’s poor and working class, but facilitate swift movement of tourists who bolster an inequitable local economy; and high-density areas often coincide with poverty and associated dangers.

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dominant warrant of hostile privatism to maintain the French Quarter as a protected area for expensive homes and a sanctioned zone for the sale of sanitized local culture to tourists; the freedom fighters came together across race and class boundaries to integrate interstate buses in the South during the civil rights movement.

<sup>553</sup> Michna, “Hearing the Hurricane Coming,” 3. On the significance of the Claiborne overpass as a soundscape, see also Sakakeeny, ““Under the Bridge.””

<sup>554</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiii.

<sup>555</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 12; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 62.

In the remainder of this chapter, I expand my attention on geography to include choreography. The movement of bodies, ideas, and capital through a city space can be productively considered as *choreographed* movement. Although the term “choreography” has never held a stable definition, if reduced to its most basic elements, it can be thought of as the structuring of movement through space and time.<sup>556</sup> SanSan Kwan uses the term to denote the conscious designing of bodily movement (from concert dance to protests) by human choreographers, and to explain how space can also be an agent that determines movement. “For example,” she writes, “in cities, bodies and other moveable objects, such as cars, can have choreography imposed on them—they can *be* choreographed—by both the predetermined and unpredictable shapings of space made by streets, buildings, and even other moving objects.”<sup>557</sup> I take her notion one step further to consider how non-spatial factors, such as racialized fears, economic access, and associations with a place can also choreograph people’s movement through a city by inciting (or requiring) individuals to move through particular areas and to avoid others.

Traditional geographies inform the quotidian laws for moving through New Orleans, but second lines govern movement differently. In what follows, I turn my attention to the second line to examine how it re-choreographs bodily movement through New Orleans’s traditional geographies, crafting “rival geographies” through the built

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<sup>556</sup> See Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 15-72.

<sup>557</sup> Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*, 4. As Kwan and Foster remind us, choreography’s oldest usage implies the documentation of movement, derived from the Greek roots, *choreia* (the synthesis of dance, rhythm, and vocal harmony manifest in the Greek chorus), and *graph*, the act of writing. As such, this dissertation itself is another form of choreography. Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 16-18; Kwan, *Kinesthetic City*, 5.

environment.<sup>558</sup> According to Lipsitz, second lines enact a black spatial imaginary, which understands land as shared social space versus disposable property, and is characterized by a radical solidarity that favors public cooperation in solving public problems.<sup>559</sup> The black spatial imaginary strongly resonates with what Woods calls the “blues epistemology:” the system of explanation that informs the daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements of working-class African Americans in the Delta and in the Black Belt South. As an expression of the blues, second lines convey African Americans’ tragedies; instill pride in people facing degradation; and channel folk wisdom and critiques of institutions and individuals.<sup>560</sup> The black spatial imaginary and a blues epistemology motivate second line choreographies in their use of horizontal and vertical space, pathways, time, and proximities. Under the regime of the white spatial imaginary and the plantation bloc, struggles for racial justice require more than inclusion; they require fundamentally different assumptions about space.<sup>561</sup> This is what the second line enacts.

In the next sections, I interweave sociopolitical histories of New Orleans’s geography with first-person accounts of moving through New Orleans as a second liner. The kinesthetic account below centers on one parade as a paradigmatic example of my

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<sup>558</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6-7.

<sup>559</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 52, 56.

<sup>560</sup> Woods, *Development Arrested*, 16-17. Michna situates second lining within Woods’ blues epistemology. “Hearing the Hurricane Coming,” 6.

<sup>561</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 54.

bodily second lining experiences: the 2014 anniversary parade hosted by the Original Big 7 SAPC.

### **Turning Segregation into Congregation and Density into Intensity**

At 12:30 on Sunday afternoon, May 11, 2014, I walked out of my New Orleans apartment and drove to Edward (Ed) Buckner's house. As president of the Original Big 7 SAPC, Ed chose his house as the starting point for the club's 2014 Mothers Day parade. As described in the introduction to this dissertation, the Big 7's 2013 parade was tragically halted by a violent shooting at the intersection of Frenchmen and Villere Streets, when two gunmen sprayed bullets into the crowd twenty minutes after the parade began. I was standing under a stop sign in the very intersection where the two gunmen fired their weapons. I survived (physically) unharmed, and attended the Big 7's "redo" parade a few weeks later, in which we retraced the steps of that tragically curtailed route and saw it through to its completion. The following year, I spent many hours at Ed's house, helping the club to assemble their fans and streamers in preparation for their 2014 parade. It seemed important to everyone in the Big 7 community, myself included, that this second line felt especially positive, celebratory, and life-affirming.

As I left my house, I double-checked to make sure that I had a route sheet, a single-page, photocopied flier distributed by SAPCs to advertise their itineraries. The sheet also lists other information, which might include the club's chosen parade theme and suit colors, and/or names of the officers, royal court, and those individuals who merit a "Special Thanks." Each Sunday, the hosts of upcoming parades distribute copies of their route sheets to second liners. They also make hard copies available at Celebration

Hall, a Seventh Ward night club where the popular brass band, To Be Continued, plays to a dense crowd of footwork fanatics every Wednesday night. Increasingly, route sheets are also available on the Internet, and therefore, one need not be physically present in the second line community in order to know where to find each parade.<sup>562</sup>

To reach Ed's house, I left the white teapot, where I lived, and traveled to the Seventh Ward, one of the city's historically black, back-of-town neighborhoods. Each time I attend a second line, I cross spatial and social borders, heading into Central City and Pigeon Town (for uptown parades) and into the Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Wards (for downtown parades).<sup>563</sup>

Neighborhood location is crucial to the impact and meaning of second lines, as the events seek to honor neighborhood histories, celebrate the people who live there, and thereby improve the quality of life (at least for four hours a week) in the areas where they roll. Most clubs parade in the members' home neighborhoods, and many club names reflect their neighborhood identities. For example, the Big 7 is based in the Seventh Ward, where most of the members live or *used to* live. The club was established in the St. Bernard Housing Project in the 1990s, but many members, including Ed, have moved to other areas of the neighborhood. Evacuations due to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath scattered many across the country. St. Bernard's post-Katrina demolition and

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<sup>562</sup> The Backstreet Cultural Museum emails a route sheet to its donors and subscribers each week. In recent years, the local public radio station, WWOZ New Orleans 90.7 FM, began including route sheets, along with audio interviews with SAPC members, on its website. "Takin' It to the Streets," accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.wooz.org/new-orleans-community/inthestreet>.

<sup>563</sup> The Westbank Steppers also bring a second line to the area across the river once a year, but I have never attended a parade there.

redevelopment into mixed-income housing prevented many of its residents from returning there after the storm.<sup>564</sup> Despite continued displacement, the club members express the importance of locating their annual second line in the Seventh Ward. Ed calls the Seventh Ward the “spiritual ground” of his upbringing.<sup>565</sup> His identification with the place as a spiritual and physical home suggests that second lines enact geography in imaginative *and* immanent ways.<sup>566</sup> Since second lines traverse the members’ spiritual grounds, the routes stay overwhelmingly within the boundaries of African American neighborhoods. In this way, parade choreographies might be said to reflect or even reinscribe New Orleans’s traditional segregation according to race and class. However, second lines completely transform quotidian experiences of and associations with these

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<sup>564</sup> Hurricane Katrina provided the “blank slate” needed to accelerate the eradication of public housing that had begun in New Orleans well before the storm. New Orleans, like many U.S. cities, began to experience an urban “revival” in the late-twentieth century, a combination of gentrification and so-called “slum clearance.” Federally funded initiatives to demolish New Orleans’s housing projects, and replace them with mixed-income developments, led to the bulldozing of the several well-built public housing developments in the early 2000s. For example, the St. Thomas Housing Development was replaced by River Garden in 2005, which included only a fraction of the number of affordable housing units that the St. Thomas offered. Flaherty, *Floodlines*, 196. The St. Thomas redevelopment was part of the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s HOPE (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) VI program, launched in 1992 to replace severely distressed public housing projects, occupied exclusively by poor families, with redesigned mixed-income housing. It provides housing vouchers to enable some—but certainly not all—of the original residents to rent apartments in the private market. Susan J. Popkin, et. al., *A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges*. The Urban Institute (2004), accessed December 20, 2013, <http://www.urban.org/publications/411002.html>. In the neoliberal environment of post-Katrina reconstruction, the public-private partnerships established before the storm were accelerated, and thousands of residents in New Orleans’s other housing projects were prevented from returning as their undamaged homes, including those in the St. Bernard Housing Project, were marked for demolition. For more information on the public housing struggle in post-Katrina New Orleans, see Luisa Dantas’ film, *Land of Opportunity*, dir. by Luisa Dantas (JoLu Productions, 2010), DVD; Breunlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map”; Barbara Eckstein, *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, Local Memory, and the Fate of a City* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 175-210; and John Arena, “Black and White, Unite and Fight? Identity Politics and New Orleans’s Post-Katrina Public Housing Movement,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, ed. by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>565</sup> Edward Buckner, interview with the author, January 24, 2014.

<sup>566</sup> McKittrick argues that imagined geographies are crucial to black subjects’ abilities to achieve the production of space across domination. *Demonic Grounds*, xiv-xv.

places. They bring people into areas that they might never otherwise traverse, and by inviting bodily performance, the parades transform impoverished, criminalized, and ghettoized areas into sites for spiritual transcendence, community-building, and joyful celebration. In the words of Lipsitz, second lines “turn segregation into congregation.”<sup>567</sup>

When club members plan their parades routes, they not only choose which areas are most important to visit; they also choose which areas to avoid. These include blocks that they know to be more impacted by drug-related violence than others; they steer away from streets that might pose a danger to people traversing them. In 2013, the Big 7 wanted to avoid parading down Villere Street because of the frequent gun violence that happens there, and chose instead to take Robertson Street one block away. Road construction on Robertson caused the police escorts to detour the parade down Villere Street, leading the second line directly into an area where gunshots were known to be common.<sup>568</sup> The notion that police officers could redirect a club’s chosen path reveals that club members must co-choreograph their parades with civic authorities. This process begins long before the parade rolls. In order to access state resources, in the form of parading permits, clubs must hire a minimum of eight New Orleans police department (NOPD) officers as security escorts, and negotiate with them to improvise with the intended route during the parade. The NOPD and city hall literally determine where dancing can happen by approving parade routes, using squad cars to circumscribe

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<sup>567</sup> Lipsitz, “Learning from New Orleans,” 463.

<sup>568</sup> Keith Spera, “Second-line Advocates, Musicians Worry about the Tradition after Mother's Day Shooting,” *Times-Picayune*, May 17, 2013, accessed March 16, 2015, [http://www.nola.com/music/index.ssf/2013/05/musicians\\_and\\_advocates\\_of\\_new.html](http://www.nola.com/music/index.ssf/2013/05/musicians_and_advocates_of_new.html).

parading boundaries, cancelling stops if the procession is taking too long, and, as was the case on Mother's Day 2013, re-routing parades when they deem necessary.<sup>569</sup>

Club members instruct anyone who wants to join their parade to do so peacefully by making explicit demands on their route sheets: "Leave your guns and troubles at home;" "Come out and celebrate our culture without violence;" or simply, "Stop the violence!" The first big parade of the 2013-2014 season, given by the Young Men Olympian, Jr. (YMO), was held in September, just a few months after the Mother's Day shooting. YMO included a strongly worded disclaimer on their route sheet, "YMO JUNIOR NOR RESPONSIBLE FOR SECOND LINERS," as if to publicly distance their club's ethos with the violent behavior that some attendees might exhibit during their parade. Some club members go one step further to reassure that neighborhood residents will respect their careful route selections by knocking on doors during the week before the parade. They ask that, if anyone has a score to settle, they refrain from doing it during the second line.<sup>570</sup> Because of the ebb in violence experienced at second lines in the years before 2013, the Big 7 suspended their practice of knocking on doors, assuming that it was no longer needed, perhaps due in part to their careful route planning.<sup>571</sup>

Areas delimited by competing drug traders and gangs cannot be read on a map of the city's urban layout, nor discerned from an aerial view, but children grow up in New

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<sup>569</sup> Michael Hamilton, NOPD Second Line Coordinator, interview with the author, April 12, 2014.

<sup>570</sup> Patterson and Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of Risk."

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.



Orleans thinking about neighborhoods in these terms.<sup>572</sup> Such knowledge belongs to localized geographies, known by those whose feet are on the ground, but they are still opaque to me, even when my nose was pressed against the grass on the corner of Frenchmen and Villere Streets. Perhaps the shooting would have occurred on Robertson. Maybe the location had nothing to do with the act of violence that occurred. But the incident revealed that SAPC members are wise choreographers who choose pathways according to street-level histories and realities, knowledges that one cannot gain from a distant, bird's-eye view.

Threats of violence comprise one non-spatial entity that influences who moves through which spaces in New Orleans's quotidian choreographies. By demanding that the streets be respected as a space for dancing instead of forcefully protected turf, second lines remap these quotidian choreographies, empowering participants to walk and dance through areas that they might otherwise perceive as hostile or threatening since (unfamiliar) drug dealers are in charge.<sup>573</sup> Second liners dance in spite of the risk. As the Mother's Day incident made painfully clear, second lines cannot completely suspend the existing social orders, economies, and relationships operating within their neighborhoods, and therefore cannot guarantee that violence will not occur. As Rebirth Brass Band drummer Derrick Tabb observed, "The second line brings everybody together; it brings your enemies too."<sup>574</sup> Subsequently, not everyone feels empowered to second line

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<sup>572</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 479.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Derrick Tabb, interview with the author, April 15, 2014.

through terrain that they perceive as threatening. As one veteran second liner told me, she will not follow the parade when it crosses into certain parts of town that she feels are especially dangerous. When second lines pass through those streets, she drives to a location where she can park her car, stand on the sidewalk to watch, and then advance to another location inside the relative safety of her vehicle. While second lining in areas perceived as hostile or even unfamiliar can be intimidating, even to those who have been involved in the tradition for decades, the parade's promise of music, dancing, and conviviality does often pull many New Orleanians out of their comfort zones. In time, these areas might become familiar and welcoming to more and more people.<sup>575</sup> Repeated practices of walking and dancing through unknown or feared landscapes can remap them as territories that "belong" to particular SAPCs instead of street gangs. By explicitly calling for an end to violence on the streets during the hours that *they* own the streets, SAPCs reclaim their neighborhoods. Dance is crucial to this process, as vividly captured by the lyrics to a song recorded by the Rebirth Brass Band and the late New Orleans rapper, Soulja Slim: "We don't want to see nobody get hurt today / All we really want to see is footwork today."<sup>576</sup>

Second lines not only bring African Americans together from different parts of the city, but they also gather residents together across race, class, occupation, and native/newcomer divides. In this aspect, they serve a similar function as other music events and festivals held across the city throughout the year. But the second line's ethic

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<sup>575</sup> Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 755.

<sup>576</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 112.

of inclusion means that paraders do not merely stand next to each other and view a performance; they walk, chant, and dance side by side, moving through the landscape together. The second line's participatory structure enables those who join to assume a different role than that which might be possible in the city's quotidian social order. Thus, the teenage mother and her child can dance next to the neighbor that she knows to be a drug dealer, the police officer (in civilian clothes), and the lawyer that she has seen in court.<sup>577</sup>

Second liners can partially transcend the social distance that separates them during the other six days of the week, even while simply walking together behind the band; but if they *dance* together, then their abilities to cross social distance, and to step into new roles, becomes heightened or stunted, depending in part on their dance technique. In other words, second lining technique provides a meaningful language for people to communicate (or misunderstand one another) across difference. The experience of simply watching or even walking with a second line might not be enough to spark a cross-race or cross-class exchange between two people; but if those same two people follow the band with footwork, then the dance technique provides them with a terrain on which to find common ground, or even to assert differences.

Scott Kolmar, known to some in the second line community as "White Chucky," has experienced footwork as a way to cross the terrains of social distance that separate him from most other second liners. Scott is a blond, fair-skinned, twenty-something man from Houston who moved to New Orleans around 2009 and set about developing his

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<sup>577</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 480.

footwork soon after. Scott told me a story that illustrates how second line dance technique can trouble stable notions of race by effectively rendering a white second liner as culturally black.

I get a lot of stuff about color, a lot of racial stuff like, ‘Color don’t mean shit,’ or, ‘Who says a white boy can’t jump?’ You know, which I find funny, because I can’t play basketball for shit. [*Laughs*] But you know it’s a lot of positivity. Actually, most recently, I had this lady come up and tell me—[...] and she was kind of drunk, but who isn’t right? She’s like, ‘Hey can I tell you something? No disrespect.’ And I thought she was going to say, ‘You need to chill out,’ I don’t know. And I was like, ‘Yeah, sure, what’s up?’ [...] And she’s like, ‘You’re rolling in front of the parade, but you need to get *in* the parade. [...] You’re a white boy and all that, but you’re a black boy.’ I said, ‘What?’ She said, ‘It’s a black folks’ thing, but you need to get out there. You need to do that for me. I want you to do that for me.’ I was like, ‘Wow, Ok. Damn. That’s some heavy shit.’ It was nice, I mean, it made me feel really good. I was at the pinnacle, I mean, that was yesterday.<sup>578</sup>

Bodily actions, such as Scott’s footwork, can transform the urban landscape into a “vernacular landscape of technique” during each second line. Judith Hamera suggests that dance technique is a relational language for communicating, versus an object that dancers have and deploy. Hamera’s definition is useful for thinking through the vexed question of technique in second lining by casting it as a tool for place making and relationship building.<sup>579</sup> For example, when non-black newcomers such as Scott are able to “speak” the language of second lining technique, their communicative performances can transport individuals across terrains of social distance (differences of race and class) to come

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<sup>578</sup> Scott Kolmar, interview with the author, January 6, 2014.

<sup>579</sup> As discussed throughout this dissertation, second liners often balk at the notion that second lining could be limited by a particular technical vocabulary, preferring to characterize second lining as “anything goes,” or more accurately, as “do watcha wanna,” wherein any movement done in response to brass band music counts as second lining. This view seems to resist a strict definition of second lining technique, because technique implies specialized skill, which may contradict second lining’s ethic of inclusiveness and accessibility. At the same time, second liners perform and read specific movement vocabularies as falling inside or outside of sub-categories of second lining, such as footwork and buck jumping.

together on a vernacular landscape of technique. Scott displayed more than simply his knowledge of the steps; the *way* he danced also communicated his willingness to adopt the social critique embedded in the physicality.<sup>580</sup> The woman who spoke to Scott did not only encourage him to continue second lining; she wanted him to dance in a place of authority, with the club inside the ropes. She did not see him as marginal to the second line's performance because of his whiteness; his technical skill rendered him as an important actor in transforming the streets. His experience demonstrates how, not just walking, but *dancing* at the second line plays a central role in the parade's ability to re-choreograph movement through New Orleans's traditional geographies.

Although my footwork technique is not as advanced as Scott's, my own experiences of second lining have allowed me to form vernacular landscapes of technique that remap other relationships that might not have been likely due to my status as a white, female post-Katrina transplant in New Orleans' racialized and gendered geographies. My attention to the details to footwork technique, and my willingness to "speak" its bodily discourse of dissent, have occasioned momentary interactions and lasting allegiances with people that daily circumstances in a racially divided geography would rarely allow. For example, while engrossed in a sweaty, exuberant bout of footwork alongside the ropes of the Ice Divas Social and Pleasure Club, the club president approached me: "I got a spot in here for you next year." And so I was encouraged to move inside the ropes, as was Scott, due to my dancing.<sup>581</sup> Second lining technique became, for me, a social,

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<sup>580</sup> DeFrantz, "Black Beat," 71.

<sup>581</sup> I did decide to join the Ice Divas, and paraded with them for the first time on March 8, 2014. An account of that parade appears in the conclusion of this dissertation.

relational language for building relationships across class and culture. Vernacular landscapes of technique, such as second lining, have the power to create neighborhoods as sites of productive, diverse allegiances, and to keep me, like many others, returning to second lines as a ritual practice, coming together with others in labor and in difference to produce what Hamera calls “geographies of the heart.”<sup>582</sup>

If post-Katrina second lines include more white newcomer residents, like Scott and myself, then increasingly, it seems, tourists are also finding their way to back-of-town parades. By and large, tourists are most likely to encounter a second line when it is staged for an audience inside tourist districts, such as the French Quarter or at the Convention Center. However, a common perception amongst second liners today is that visitors who are interested in a more “authentic” experience find their way to SAPCs’ anniversary parades. Tyree Smith of Family Ties Social and Pleasure Club recalled that, especially pre-Katrina, second lines used to be attended almost exclusively by black residents. But now, he said, “We got different people out there. It’s not just black folk out there, they got white folk out there, they got Chinese folk out there, they got all kinds of people out there. [...] I ’m glad that they out there. I want to show off for them. Let them

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<sup>582</sup> Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, 60, 137. Of course, African American second liners do not always receive white/newcomers’ demonstration of technique as something to celebrate. For some, the fact that a white dancer could tread upon the vernacular landscape of second line technique is tantamount to colonial invasion. Comments made below videos of white second liners posted to social media sites reveal some of the anxiety undergirding white dancers who can “speak” footwork. Comments like, “WTH [what the hell] now they second lining too?” and “They trying to steal that now????” register a certain fear about yet another instance of white appropriation of black culture.

see what we can do, what we do. [...] Culture's good for everybody, not just for black people, it's for everybody."<sup>583</sup>

Regis wrote in 1999 that the tourist could not watch the second line moving through low-income neighborhoods because the racial/spatial order of fear prevents it.<sup>584</sup> In other words, the tourist avoids the areas where second lines roll due to fears of black violence stoked by guidebook warnings about unsafe spaces. While the tourism industry's designation of desirable and avoidable locations has changed little since the late 1990s,<sup>585</sup> the publicly available profile of neighborhood second lines has grown tremendously, especially in the post-Katrina years. First of all, the Internet has increased public access to route sheets, as described above. Online route sheets make it easier for visitors to cross geographical distance in order to reach a second line, but other online information about second line culture also collapses the social distance between a local, black, working-class cultural practice and tourists who wish to experience it. Colorful, professional photographs of each week's second line appear regularly on the websites of local news outlets. A local radio station features the entire second line calendar, along with audio interviews with SAPC leaders, on its website.<sup>586</sup> Those who want to find a Sunday second line can do so without much digging. Furthermore, second line parades

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<sup>583</sup> Tyree Smith, interview with the author, February 18, 2014.

<sup>584</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 496.

<sup>585</sup> Thomas, *Desire and Disaster*, 30, 44-45.

<sup>586</sup> Each week, the online periodical *NOLA Defender* features second line photographs, updates, and even Google mapped representations of parade routes on their website, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.noladefender.com/second-line-alert>.

featured in the HBO series, *Treme*—a four-season drama about post-Katrina New Orleans—have introduced viewers worldwide to the tradition through “televisual tourism.”<sup>587</sup> Finally, the profile of New Orleans tourists has shifted with the introduction of post-Katrina “voluntourism,” which attracted (and still attracts) people to the city who are more interested in interacting with local residents on their own turf, versus consuming a simulacrum of the city produced on Bourbon Street.<sup>588</sup> I have attended at least one second line that passed by a crew of Habitat for Humanity voluntourists who temporarily abandoned their construction work to follow the band. A widened awareness of and access to second line parades, combined with an increased number of visitors and newcomers interested in experiencing culture beyond the white teapot, has led to a more diverse crowd of second liners pounding the pavement each Sunday. As discussed in chapter three, many black New Orleanians welcome non-black second liners into the throng, since, as many perceive, their presence decreases the likelihood of interpersonal violence erupting during the festivities. No matter what color their skin, where they are from, why they are there, or how they fit into New Orleans’s traditional geographies, all second liners are directed to move through the city according to the parade’s choreographic rules, which ask all paraders to enact a black spatial imaginary. If attendees are unable, unwilling, or uncomfortable doing so, then a familiar chant tells them where to go: “If you ain’t gonna roll, get the fuck on out the way!”

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<sup>587</sup> Thomas, *Desire and Disaster*, 172-173.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*



Second lines bring people together across difference—but more than that, the parades bring people *close* together. Second liners pack into the limited space afforded by streets and sidewalks in an effort to get as close as possible to the band. Those who are less interested in dancing might walk far in front of or behind the crowd, where it is quiet enough to have a conversation and there is room to push a stroller or a bicycle. But those who have come to dance usually do so in close proximity to many other dancing bodies. Some dancers, myself included, prefer to position themselves behind the band, especially if they like to feel the vibrations of the bass drum thumping through their bodies. I can usually squeeze into the few feet between the cooler-pullers and the collective of self-styled percussionists, second liners who beat out polyrhythms on tambourines, cowbells, and glass bottles. If I do not assertively take space in between coolers and tambourines, then other dancers will nudge past me, slowly pushing me back to dance in between the vendors, where the heavy wheels of industrial dollies threaten to roll right over my toes.

Other times, I join the dancers who station themselves directly to the side of the band. Here, one can hear the music more forcefully, but risks getting hit in the head by the slide of a trombone. When I dance alongside the ropes on the right side (or “sidewalk side”) of the club, I constantly wrestle with the rope carriers for space, especially when negotiating narrow streets lined with parked cars. I swerve around protruding side-view mirrors and press against the rope, which sometimes cuts into my ribs. The close proximity of people and objects produces a pressure to keep up with the band’s tempo and to do so gracefully, without bumping into other dancers. Occasionally, small groups of us will bail out of our rope-side spots and bolt to the sidewalk so that we can jog ahead

to a dancing location with a bit more elbow room. However, to leave one tight space is often to enter another.<sup>589</sup> Once we leave the street, we must squeeze between parked cars, swerve around trash cans, and climb over bushes and protruding oak tree roots in order to reach the sidewalk, where yet another compressed space contains dancers moving in close quarters.

Those who dance on the sidewalk, known as “side-liners,” execute some of the most intricate, athletic, quickly moving footwork seen at the parade. (However, this standard may be shifting with a new generation of second liners who prefer to dance alongside the ropes, and refer the sidewalk as a space reserved for “senior citizens.” The “senior citizens” are mostly in their forties and fifties.) They dance in incredibly close quarters—and they never step on each other’s toes!<sup>590</sup> Even though the sidewalks are usually cracked and dramatically uneven, even though dancers must navigate physical obstacles such as fire hydrants and porch railings, even though dancers remain tightly packed near each other and must keep moving forward, and even though no two people are executing the exact same steps, the side-liners manage to dance inches from each other and barely touch. They come dangerously close, finding spaces in between each other’s feet and around the shoulders, stepping in a space that was occupied by another person’s foot just a millisecond before, crawling under each other’s legs, dropping and

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<sup>589</sup> Goldman notes that an improviser often “escapes confinement only to enter into or become aware of another set of strictures,” and understanding the mover’s ability to flexibly negotiate ever-changing constraints “is vital to understanding the political power of improvisation.” *I Want to Be Ready*, 4.

<sup>590</sup> Yvonne Daniel makes this same observation when watching ritual dancers in Haiti and Cuba: “Everyone inside was dancing and performing the identifying *oricha* gestures together, sensitively, above the changing but repetitive foot patterns. [In Cuba, just] like in Haiti, despite the densely crowded space, no one stepped on anyone’s toes!” *Dancing Wisdom*, 20-21.

spinning in front of a forward-moving dancer, swinging a leg over the head of a man on his knees—but they move sensitively and smoothly, and almost never disrupt another dancer’s footwork. As the side-liners demonstrate, the spatial constraints occasioned by second lining’s processional, urban environment have impacted the dance’s bodily form over time. In other words, dancers’ bodily shapes reveal that second lining was developed by people moving in close proximity to one another. The arms stay relatively still and close to the body, and footwork remains directly under the hips, so that a dancer’s body can take up as little space as possible on a crowded sidewalk, where the most stunning embodiment of second liners’ nimble dancing in close proximity can be witnessed or experienced.

As second liners nimbly negotiate the physically tight spaces of the street and sidewalk, they also traverse the figurative tight spaces of structural and interpersonal violence.<sup>591</sup> Structural violence, which materializes as racialized patterns of health care, housing, and criminal justice, limits the social mobility of the urban poor. Meanwhile, the interpersonal, physical violence propagated by the informal economy of the drug trade (which flourishes within economies weakened by structural violence), further threatens human agency.<sup>592</sup> Second liners nimbly negotiate these tight spaces of violence with articulate footwork, and refashion constraints on mobility and agency into conditions of

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<sup>591</sup> Second lining illustrates a notion forwarded by Goldman: that constraint is a condition of possibility for, not a deterrent to, improvised dance. Improvisers constantly negotiate constraint with flexibility and perpetual readiness. In fact, the political potential of improvisation lies in the skills required by the improviser to ably negotiate within what Goldman calls “tight places,” or the unsteady landscapes constrained by social factors such as one’s race or class. Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready*, 5-6. See also note 589.

<sup>592</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 150.

possibility for it. In particular, second liners convert density from a marker of poverty and precursor to violence into a positive attribute of ecstatic performance.

Since the early-twentieth century, high-density in New Orleans has historically coincided with poverty and precarity, while low-density has become a marker of affluence and security. Beginning in the 1920s, black and white New Orleanians moved out of the city center into the more spacious suburbs.<sup>593</sup> As Richard Campanella summarizes, “Suburban exodus coupled with urban sprawl *within* Orleans Parish meant that remaining residents were literally putting more distance among themselves.”<sup>594</sup> That is, of course, except within the city’s ten public housing developments. With the desegregation of public housing in the 1960s (initially, two developments were designated as white-only), white residents joined in the mass flight to working-class suburbs. Within a few years, tens of thousands of poor African American residents became “intensely consolidated” within the housing developments, all of which were isolated and cut off from the street grid.<sup>595</sup> As federal, state, and city governments subsequently disinvested in public housing during the late-twentieth century, the densely populated housing projects became increasingly more impoverished and dangerous for

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<sup>593</sup> As noted above, this horizontal migration into the suburbs was also a vertical migration, as New Orleanians moved off of the natural levee along the river and into low-lying areas created by drained swampland. See Campanella, “Vertical Migration,” in *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 188-190.

<sup>594</sup> Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 189.

<sup>595</sup> While New Orleans’s housing projects were densely populated as compared to the rest of the city, they were not nearly as densely populated as similar developments in other U.S. cities. They were only a few stories tall, built in modest scale, and featured airy verandas and shady courtyards. Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 183. I use the past tense here because, at the time of writing, all of New Orleans’s public housing developments either have been or are in the process of being demolished and redeveloped into mixed-income housing.

residents.<sup>596</sup> For example, epidemiological studies have linked the risk of homicide in New Orleans to the density of poverty as measured by crowded housing.<sup>597</sup>

If second lines turn segregation into congregation, they also turn density into intensity, converting close bodily proximity into a necessary element for transformative, emotionally engaged dancing. Regis's reflections on this topic resonate with my own parading experiences. She claims that an important aspect of second line performance results from the intensity created by parading through crowded streets in neighborhoods with dense housing patterns, like Tremé, Central City, and Gert Town.<sup>598</sup> Sakakeeny also notes the intensity achieved when the parade flows under the I-10 overpass. When parades crowd under "the bridge," it creates an acoustic shell that reflects and echoes the brass instruments' sonic output and contains the dancers' sweaty energy within a tight space. Under the bridge, the parade reaches an emotional peak as musicians and dancers tip the scale of the intensity.<sup>599</sup> Because of its structural capacity to contain performative fervor (and to shield large crowds from rain), the bridge has caused Claiborne Avenue to regain its status as the nerve center for second lines and African American Mardi Gras celebrations, and it has also become a popular site for events such as the Red Bull Street Kings battle of the brass bands.<sup>600</sup> Catherine Michna observes that the construction of the

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<sup>596</sup> See chapter two of this dissertation for a fuller treatment of governmental disinvestment in inner cities, including but not limited to public housing, in the latter half of the twentieth century.

<sup>597</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 476.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibidl*, 486.

<sup>599</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 25.

<sup>600</sup> *Red Bull*, "Red Bull Street Kings," accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.redbull.com/us/en/music/events/1331603323731/red-bull-street-kings>.

I-10 overpass initially decreased participation in parading practices on Claiborne Avenue, but the return of public performance to the site in subsequent decades illustrates how black cultural resistance in New Orleans has used sound, movement, and performance to re-spatialize the geographic structures of oppression constructed by capitalism.<sup>601</sup>

While intense performance fervor is a necessary element for any successful second line event, the emotions elicited by it can also vector into destructive behavior. For this reason, musicians will sometimes dial back up-tempo songs when playing in narrower streets in order to keep the crowd under control, and to give everyone enough time to pass through a narrow pathway in such close proximity.<sup>602</sup> Musicians, then, are also sensitive choreographers who can direct dancers' movements by adjusting the music's tempo and mood. They hope to channel intensity into insistent dancing versus destructive acts of aggression for those who might become triggered by spatial containment.

As choreographers, SAPC members and musicians, in conjunction with police escorts, move dancing bodies through areas of the city most impacted by structural and interpersonal violence in order to reclaim the streets from those forces. By enacting an alternative mode for moving through neighborhoods marked as worthless (in an exchange-value sense of "worth"), second liners challenge the structural violence of racialized capitalism, which values private property over black humanity and limits the

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<sup>601</sup> Michna, "Hearing the Hurricane Coming," 35.

<sup>602</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 486; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 25.

social mobility of the urban poor.<sup>603</sup> By assuming authoritative ownership over city streets that are feared as potentially dangerous, second liners challenge interpersonal violence as the only option for people living in these areas to establish power, authority, and credibility on the streets.<sup>604</sup> Second lines bring people together across difference to traverse neighborhoods impacted by structural and interpersonal violence, and when walkers begin to dance, they can create vernacular landscape of technique in the cityscape. Footwork enables residents (black and white, young and old, native and newcomer) to find common ground—or a new terrain for exploring their differences—in an urban landscape that frequently divides residents by income, education, and race. Technique has the potential to organize relationships “across culture and class to form affective environments, geographies of the heart.”<sup>605</sup> Because the second line brings people together in close proximity, it remaps traditional geographies of density from markers of poverty and danger to valuable assets for performative fervor.

Second line choreographies hold important political implications for building community in urban environments. Urban sociologists have defined a lack of physical and social proximity between individuals living in separate locations within the same city as an obstacle to building a civil society. While individuals may share interests, “their lack of physical and social proximity,” separated by neighborhood borders and social

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<sup>603</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 225, 234; Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 150.

<sup>604</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 146; see also Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*.

<sup>605</sup> Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, 60.

categories, “makes them think as strangers.”<sup>606</sup> The second line unites strangers in a common purpose, and together, they become collective owners of the streets for four hours a week. The Big 7, like other clubs, explicitly embraces their role in building a civil society. Following the 2013 Mother’s Day shooting, the club issued a statement, in which they asserted that second lines’ ability to gather people together across difference— “black, white, latino [*sic*], the young and the old, and lots of families”— enacts a powerful antidote against violence, not a precursor to it. Love, support, and connection, they said, “build real security. That’s crime prevention.”<sup>607</sup>

### **Obstacles and Memorials**

As I stood outside of Ed’s house, waiting for the Big 7 members to emerge, I crouched under an umbrella alongside a modestly growing crowd of the club’s family and friends, avid second liners, and photographers. I received multiple text messages: “They’re not coming out in this rain are they?” I wrote back: “They most definitely are.” A second line waits for no one and is stalled by very few things, least of all a rainstorm. The second line might be the only event in New Orleans to reliably start and finish on time, due to the strict enforcement of parading permits imposed by the city, which limit a parade’s duration to four hours. Since club members and their families pour vast amounts of money, energy, and time into planning a single second line parade, few clubs are

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<sup>606</sup> Mark Gottdiener, *Social Production of Urban Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 289, qtd in Regis, “Contested Landscapes,” 478.

<sup>607</sup> The Original Big 7 posted this response to the shooting on their Facebook page in the days following the May 12, 2013 shooting, accessed May 15, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/original.bigseven>. It was also reprinted in the local *Times-Picayune*. “Mother’s Day Second Line Helps Nourish Not Only the City’s Culture but the Younger Generation: Edward Buckner,” *Times-Picayune*, May 15, 2013, [http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2013/05/mothers\\_day\\_second\\_line\\_helps.html/](http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2013/05/mothers_day_second_line_helps.html/).



willing to cancel unless faced with dire circumstances. If they do cancel, then they will likely not find an open Sunday on the calendar to reschedule, and if they do not parade for more than two years in a row, they risk losing their spot in the annual line up.<sup>608</sup>

Therefore, I was not surprised to hear the tuba begin to thump at 1:00 sharp. The Big 7 members appeared on Ed's front porch, one by one, dancing so furiously in the rain that I feared they might slip. Ed appeared last, and he simply stood at the top of the stairs with his arms wide open. I imagined that he was holding the club, the crowd, and the day in his arms. He was receiving praise and recognition. He was giving thanks for the moment. He was embracing the rain as a cleansing ritual. He was doing all of it in one gesture.

Rain is one of many obstacles to New Orleans's daily choreography that second liners repurpose into a Bakhtinian device for play. If rain slows or stops movement on Monday, due to power outages and street flooding, then it will only encourage ludic, insistent movement on Sunday. Second line parades make planned stops frequently—as many as seven or eight in one parade—but when it starts moving, a second line will not be halted. When second liners chant, “If you ain't gonna roll, get the fuck on out the way!,” they warn the crowd that if anyone intends to stroll or pause, then they better shift to the side and make room for the buck jumpers and strutters, who will keep moving forward no matter what. Second line dancing is also called “rolling” (as in, “If you ain't gonna roll...”), and this verb accurately captures the effect of the parade's forward-moving choreography. The crowd of thousands rolls smoothly forward, gathering people, energy, and force as it carries forth. A second line does not stop until it is ready, which is

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<sup>608</sup> Tamara Jackson, interview with the author, April 21, 2014.

hopefully before the police decide that it is time to re-spool the ropes. Even then, dancers will carry on in someone's yard with a car stereo blasting a brass band's latest mixed tape. Second liners' refusal to stop is dramatically asserted by a common gesture found in second line choreography: at many an intersection, dancers leap up and slap a red, octagonal stop sign with a flat palm, sonically punctuating the space with a metallic twang that serves as the exclamation point on the end of the chant: "If you ain't gonna roll, get the fuck on out the way—*thwack!*"<sup>609</sup>

As Ed walked down his stairs and into the street, police escorts zipped to the front of the procession on motorcycles, blaring sirens that momentarily drowned out the band. I saw many police escorting this parade; I estimated about twenty, twice as many as normal. They blocked traffic as we all filed into the street. I strutted alongside the ropes, watching as club members crawled on the wet ground and stomped in puddles. I kept my little umbrella open, but the rain blew sideways, so it barely mattered. The small but dedicated crowd turned childlike, kicking up water, wringing out shirts and putting them back on. "This is one for the memory books," one club member said to me, leaning over the rope. "This is cleansing," said a fellow second liner.

The Big 7 second liners not only scoffed at the rain as an obstacle to dancing; they also improvised ways to travel over, under, and around other barriers to everyday movement. New Orleans's continuous fight to smooth its roads over a shifting water table and marshy soil means that road construction is a constant fixture of the urban landscape. Orange and white traffic barriers, such as plastic cones, sawhorses, and tape cordon off

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<sup>609</sup> Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 757.

ubiquitous construction zones. I watched the Big 7 second liners leapfrog over or limbo under these objects, refusing to obey their signals to detour, and turning them into props instead. Like the rainwater that regularly overwhelms city surfaces, the flood of second lining bodies engulfs the many obstacles that redirect and halt movement in everyday life. Dancers nimbly scale over the tops of parked cars, dumpsters, guardrails, and stoops in order to maintain a fluid forward movement. I was reminded of another second line that I had recently attended, in which the advertised route directed us down a large boulevard that was closed to all traffic due to a large-scale construction project. As the crowd approached the intersection, I stayed alert for an improvised detour, recalling the Mother's Day incident with a pang of apprehension. However, the club led us over the concrete barricades and directly through the construction zone, where dancers found footwork stages atop two-by-fours and backhoes. That parade proved that second liners will flow over every conceivable surface, impervious to the norms and laws that choreograph urban movement during the other six days and twenty hours of the week. Second liners' movement over, under, and through obstacles illustrates Lipsitz's observation: "In the Afro-diasporic tradition, what matters is not so much the path you take, but rather the path you make."<sup>610</sup>

In its imperviousness to obstacles and insistent onward movement, the second line's use of time resists the ways that the city's traditional economies privilege the tourist industry and marginalize working-class black residents. Part of the choreographic labor needed to facilitate New Orleans's tourist economy is the removal of obstacles that

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<sup>610</sup> Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 218.

might slow the movement of visitors, and their spending power, into and through (select parts of) the city. Taxis await those arriving at the airport; the I-10 ushers in motorists with increased speed; the streets and sidewalks in the French Quarter are maintained; generators keep the lights shining and the air conditioners running in hotels and restaurants when strong storms render thousands of residents without electricity on a regular basis. One can buy a more punctual and predictable experience of time in New Orleans, and relegate experiences of temporal slowness to touristic novelties. In other words, the tourist economy shelters visitors from the daily experiences of slowing down and waiting, which are tactics necessary to navigate structural and infrastructural obstacles. At the same time, the tourist trade manufactures experiences of slowing down and even reversing into the past as pleasurable escapes from the pressures of a fast-paced, fragmented life. Performance scholar Joseph Roach writes, “New Orleans, which announces itself as the ‘City that Care (Time) Forgot,’ has become today a ‘place of memory’ in Pierre Nora’s sense,” which is a place where memory is constantly performed.<sup>611</sup> “As a favorite tourist destination, it performs as a simulacrum of itself, apparently frozen in time, but in fact busily devoted to the ever-changing task of recreating the illusion that it is frozen in time.”<sup>612</sup> Visitors arriving at the airport encounter images of the city and its people as always already in the past (described above), and they continue to encounter this performance of nostalgic New Orleans through an array of tourist experiences.

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<sup>611</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. by Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>612</sup> Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 19.

Race and racism play central roles in New Orleans's temporal performance of itself for tourist consumption. In her recent book on New Orleans's tourism industry, Lynnell Thomas argues that, since the nineteenth century, New Orleans's predominant tourism narrative "has alternated between constructions of Old World and old South memories and identities at the expense of the city's African and African American history and legacy." Tourist brochures line the shelves of information kiosks, picturing the glory of the city's Old World, European heritage through photos of French Quarter architecture, and lauding the opulence of the antebellum South with advertised tours to nearby plantations.<sup>613</sup> Other images, like the painting hanging in the airport, employ depictions of black performers to evoke a palatable image of blackness that compliments the nostalgia of white supremacy, as epitomized by architectural symbols of European colonialism and institutionalized slavery. Sakakeeny notes, "Too often, southern blackness is equated with stasis or slowness, the counterpoint to migration from South to North, which is nearly always equated with upward social mobility."<sup>614</sup> As Riché Richardson argues, the South in general (and, I would add, New Orleans in particular) is frequently perceived as a place that blacks from other regions can visit or (return to) for ancestral nurturing and cultural replenishment, but not necessarily for economic opportunity or career advancement. Richardson warns that such a romantic narrative obscures the range of social crises faced by black southerners;<sup>615</sup> it also suppresses historical narratives of political, economic, and social progress in the region. Ethnic

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<sup>613</sup> Thomas, *Desire & Disaster*, 31.

<sup>614</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 203 note 16.

<sup>615</sup> Richardson, *Black Masculinity*, 219.

studies scholar Jayna Brown notes the critical investment of historical accounts that suppress the voluntary mobility of black people as world historical agents and tie them to a timeless past.<sup>616</sup> Narratives of blackness as stasis, including those told by New Orleans's tourism industry, simultaneously cast black subjects as lacking time *and* place, relegated to a timeless past and lacking control of their own geographic mobility.<sup>617</sup>

New Orleans's performance of itself as frozen in time re-inscribes structural limitations to African American residents' social, spatial, and temporal mobilities, even while it props up the tourist economy and rewards its investments in whiteness. Dance provides one tactic through which white people, and those who benefit from white privilege, participate in New Orleans's economy of racialized stasis. Music is often considered the principal performance mode through which visitors consume New Orleans's black culture. However, listening to music almost always incites some dancing, and dancing to New Orleans's black music often promotes imitations of New Orleans's black dance forms. For example, John Simmons, a trumpeter who used to play Sunday brunches in a French Quarter hotel, told me about the inevitable moment when guests would pick up a napkin, wave it in the air, and (attempt to) second line around the dining room. He and his band mates referred to this performance of racial mimicry as the

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<sup>616</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 9.

<sup>617</sup> McKittrick states that "black subjects are often unacknowledged as geographic beings who have a stake in the production of space" because they are vulnerable to being placed and displaced by structural forces. *Demonic Grounds*, xiv, 14.

“Honky Hop.”<sup>618</sup> The Honky Hop provides an updated example of an embodied process that, according to Jayna Brown, shaped modernity in the United States and Europe. Racialized gestural vocabularies, miscoded as timeless, were used by white bodies as “ritual correctives” for the “fragmented time imposed on the white body by industrial capital.”<sup>619</sup> The scene of the Honky Hop miscodes second lining as timeless and ignores it as a contemporary cultural practice that is ever evolving to incorporate new iterations of popular culture and to respond to the shifting struggles of inner city life. I imagine that an SAPC was hosting an anniversary parade in a back-of-town neighborhood at the very same time that every Honky Hop was danced; and yet, these simultaneous performances were separated by a gulf of coeval denial. In the dining room of this French Quarter hotel on Sunday afternoons, second lining was and is always already in the past, a timeless tradition available for white appropriation in tourists’ time-traveling journeys into the past, using black dance as their vehicle.<sup>620</sup>

As a forward-moving, hyper-mobile, unstoppable force, the second line re-choreographs New Orleans as a city where its black working class is on the forward move, not frozen in the past. Furthermore, the second line’s pathways often halt the daily movement of people and commerce, causing cars, buses, and streetcars to pause or re-route as thousands of people dance through heavily trafficked thoroughfares (see fig. 6).

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<sup>618</sup> John Simmons, interview with the author, November 8, 2013. For a fuller exposition of John’s story, see chapter one of this dissertation.

<sup>619</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 16-17; 159.

<sup>620</sup> White people’s imitations of second lining is not limited to the tourist trade. Regis provides numerous examples of New Orleanians, many of whom have never attended a Sunday second line, appropriating the practice for weddings, ground breakings, political events, and the like. “Contested Landscapes,” 474-475.



**Figure 6.** The Prince of Wales SAPC 2014 Second Line Halts a City Bus on Tchoupitoulas Street. Photograph by the author.



A look at the ways that second liners memorialize people and places, performing what Catherine Michna would call counter-histories and counter-geographies, can provide further insight into second lines' use of time to re-choreograph movement through the city's racial-spatial landscapes.

Once the Big 7's second line left Ed's house, the procession headed toward Lake Pontchartrain on Elysian Fields Avenue. It began in the exact opposite direction than did the 2013 parade, when we processed toward the Mississippi River on Elysian Fields and turned onto Villere Street. The reverse pathway that the Big 7 chose for 2014 revealed its significance (to me at least) as we neared the end of the parade. This time, we passed through intersection of Frenchmen and Villere during the parade's final hour instead of its first; and we entered the intersection from the opposite direction than the way we approached it in 2013. When we arrived, the first two divisions of the club proceeded without ceremony, but the governing division, led by Ed, paused, lay their feathered fans on the ground, and a few knelt down on one knee.

As I watched, I could not help but think about the crossroads as a potent symbol in African diaspora expressive culture, from Haitian Rara processions to Mississippi Delta blues.<sup>621</sup> In the 1930s, blues guitarist Robert Johnson sang about the ritual action of journeying to the crossroads and falling down on one's knees, channeling the spiritual forces that gather there.<sup>622</sup> Some scholars look to Kongo cosmology as the origin of

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<sup>621</sup> For an analysis of the crossroads as a unifying concept in Haitian Rara processions and New Orleans second lines, see Turner, *Jazz Religion*, 45-46.

<sup>622</sup> Legend has it that Robert Charles sold his soul to the devil, at the intersections of Highways 49 and 61 in Clarksdale, Mississippi, in exchange for his musical talent.

African diaspora legends about the crossroads.<sup>623</sup> According to Wyatt MacGaffey and Robert Farris Thompson, ritual space in Kongo-derived ceremonies is marked with a cross, wherein one line represents the boundary, and the other line represents both the path leading across the boundary and the vertical power linking above and below, the living and the dead, and the earth and the beyond. The initiate who kneels in the center of the cross situates himself “between life and death, and invokes the judgment of God and the dead upon himself.”<sup>624</sup> In Kongo cosmology, in the blues, and throughout the African diaspora, music and dance open up pathways to the spiritual world, and those openings accrue a certain potency when performed at the crossroads. By kneeling at the intersection of Frenchmen and Villere Streets, after entering the space from a reversed direction, the Big 7 members invited us to invest this crossroad with a memory of life versus death, to give gratitude to the gods, to honor those who have passed on, and to rejoice in the fact that we all lived to dance in another Mother’s Day parade. Their somber reflection only lasted a moment, as the band switched to the up-tempo funereal hymn, “I’ll Fly Away,” and escorted us out to Elysian Fields Avenue. We exited the space through the pathway that we used to enter it a year before, high-stepping and singing about precarious boundary between life and death: “I’ll fly away, oh glory, I’ll fly away. When I die, hallelujah by and by, I’ll fly away.”

The procession itself is a choreographic form, utilized in festivals and rituals throughout the African continent and the Americas, that mobilizes several Africanist

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<sup>623</sup> Brothers, *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans*, 138; Turner, *Jazz Religion*, 46.

<sup>624</sup> MacGaffey, work in progress, qtd. in Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 108-110.

aesthetics at once. Quite literally, the procession exceeds the proscenium boundaries of Western concert forms, and invites a whole host of alternative meanings and doings of dance. The procession enables masses of people to physicalize one rhythm with their feet and another with their upper bodies, reflecting the Africanist aesthetic values of polyrhythm and polycentrism.<sup>625</sup> Its inclusive structure eschews Western divides between performer and spectator.<sup>626</sup> Finally, and most pertinent to my discussion here, the procession enacts a ritual journey whose references can include local knowledge, such as one SAPC's annually repeated route, while at the same time evoking politically charged histories, such as the forced migrations required by Hurricane Katrina and even the middle passage.<sup>627</sup> Danced processions keep local memories alive through performance and connect local events to larger histories. Simultaneously, second liners lay a claim to space through sonic-kinetic presence. After the procession concludes—when music stops and the ropes are re-spooled—the experience of ritual journeying continues to impact the ways in which physical landscapes are lived. The second line re-animates spaces by

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<sup>625</sup> Rex Nettleford, "Implications for Caribbean Development," in *Caribbean Festival Arts*, ed. by John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 186, qtd. in Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*, 184. On polyrhythm and polycentrism as African(ist) aesthetics, see Gottschild, *Digging*, 14; and Asante, "Commonalities," 71-75.

<sup>626</sup> Drewal argues that the fundamental difference between Yoruba ritual dance and Western theatrical dance is the relationship between audience and performer: the two positions are collapsed in Yoruba ritual, while rigidly separated in Western theater. "Improvisation as Participatory Performance," in *Taken By Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, ed. by Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 119, 130.

<sup>627</sup> Ann Mazzocca, "Inscribing/Inscribed: Bodies and Landscape in the Ritual of Embodied Remembrance at Souvenance Mystique," paper presented at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Society of Dance History Scholars and the Congress of Research on Dance (Iowa City, IA, November 2014); Kalamu ya Salaam, "New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians and Tootie Montana." *Louisiana Folklife: Louisiana's Living Traditions*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Division of the Arts, 1997, accessed March 14, 2015, [http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Virtual\\_Books/Hes\\_Prettiest/hes\\_the\\_prettiest\\_tootie\\_montana.html](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Virtual_Books/Hes_Prettiest/hes_the_prettiest_tootie_montana.html), qtd. in Vaz, "Baby Dolls", 91; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 111, 133.

changing people's imaginative, social, and spiritual attachments to them. I consider the cumulative effect of second liners' re-spatializations as a "footwork footprint."

By walking and dancing through multiple locations that mark significant people and events in the club's and/or neighborhood's history, second line pathways perform an archive of local memories.<sup>628</sup> Speaking of second line funerals in particular, Helen Regis writes that individual lives of working-class men, whose names will never enter history books, are "forcefully inscribed into the landscape in massive celebrations that keep alive the memory of freedom, dignity, and community which these men embodied."<sup>629</sup> As memorializing rituals, second lines create a space for local, African American counter-histories to exist in an urban landscape that enshrines the city's Old World and old South past with statues, plaques, and preserved architecture. During funerals, or when a deceased member's life is honored as part of a weekly second line, participants often wear T-shirts emblazoned with a photographic image of the deceased and commemorative text. By honoring individual lives that are rarely celebrated in the city's monuments, second liners dance through their neighborhoods wearing cloth memorials, and their performances function as "moving monuments made of flesh and blood."<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, some clubs hold funerals for prominent global figures, such as Michael Jackson and Nelson Mandela, and in so doing, connect local histories to global cultural

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<sup>628</sup> Writing about British colonists' encounter with the Wampanoag American Indians, Foster notes that the Wampanoags preserved a memory of events by walking to the locations where each event occurred and telling the story. "Their archive was maintained through the physical labor of traveling to the place where history was made. Events deemed of historical worth could not be separated from the land on which they were enacted." *Choreographing Empathy*, 32-33. Second lines perform a similar function.

<sup>629</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 488.

<sup>630</sup> Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 765.

and political events. Second lines, then, enact both a collective local memory and a global present in ways that resist traditional narratives of southern blackness as slow moving or stuck in a romanticized past.<sup>631</sup>

Ceremonial stops at houses, work places, or hangouts significant to members (living or deceased) mark points on a map of relationships, experiences, and memories that re-spatialize a neighborhood according to one club's history. During each stop, the club might simply pause and reflect, as did the Big 7 when they reached the site of the 2013 shooting. When passing the home or business of a deceased community member, or the site of fatal violence, the club might ask the band to switch to a dirge so that they can move through the street with the slow, somber step typical of jazz funerals. Members might also pour libations or place a wreath of flowers at significant sites.<sup>632</sup> Even when a club's chosen stops are not intended to signify someone's past life, the locations often honor and solidify living social connections between the club and its community. Many clubs will "give a stop" for another club, located at someone's house, business, or even on a street corner. The club giving the stop will provide food and drink to the parading SAPC members and musicians. They frequently advertise their role in planning the parade by decorating the stop with banners and flags, and wearing T-shirts bearing their insignia. When the parade stops at local businesses, especially barrooms, the choice often

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<sup>631</sup> Riché Richardson reaches a similar conclusion about the work of New Orleans rap artists, who typically describe the South as "a place that is here and now." *Black Masculinity*, 261 note 22.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 763.

advertises long-term relationship between club members and friends, family, neighbors, or business owners in the community.<sup>633</sup>

Parade routes and ritual stops accrue layers of meaning when the same streets are traversed and locations visited during multiple second line routes throughout one season, and repeated year after year. A map of all thirty-nine second line routes in the 2011-2012 season, published in *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*, reveals that some streets, such as South Claiborne Avenue and Louisiana Avenue uptown, and Broad Avenue and St. Bernard Avenue downtown, are pounded with dancing feet many Sundays a year.<sup>634</sup> Since most clubs retain the basic pathways of their routes from year to year, one can imagine the grooves that might wear into the pavement after so much repeated dancing, were the streets and sidewalks not resurfaced periodically. These imprints would literally inscribe local memories into the landscape. Instead, repetition inscribes ritual pathways<sup>635</sup> into the memories and bodily archives of second liners, re-spatializing imaginary if not immanent landscapes through repeated ritual performance. Over time, second liners imprint footwork footprints, or footwork/prints, onto the social, cultural, and spiritual landscapes of their lives. Footwork/prints, in turn, re-spatialize New Orleans's African American neighborhoods as places worth remembering for their significance in people's lives today, not in an idealized past.

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<sup>633</sup> Bruenlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 755.

<sup>634</sup> Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker, *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 108-109.

<sup>635</sup> Mazocca, "Inscribing/Inscribed."

Wellington “Skelly” Ratcliff, Jr. maps the section of South Claiborne Avenue that stretches across the Central City neighborhood according to his footwork/print, naming the particular buildings and billboards that once served as his dance floors. Skelly has been wheelchair bound since 1986, and most of the surfaces that he once graced with his footwork no longer stand. Even so, as we drove down Claiborne one evening in 2014, he pointed to present-day strip malls and fast-food restaurants, narrating what structures used to be there according to his memories of dancing on this street, repeatedly, decades ago. By naming each location accordingly, he remapped Claiborne Avenue as his vernacular landscape of technique. The coordinates of his personal map of Central City extend beyond the locations where he lived, was robbed, or paralyzed by gunshot wounds—each of which he has experienced. The map of his vernacular landscape is plotted with points where he has second lined on sidewalks and on the tops of buildings. As he moves through the physical landscape, he re-spatializes the place by attaching particular meanings and associations to it.

Skelly took his footwork/print with him to prison. While incarcerated at Allen Correctional Center in rural southwest Louisiana in the 1990s, Skelly would second line “in the big yard” with a friend following behind his wheelchair. He found a marred cassette tape of the Rebirth Brass Band in the garbage can, fixed it up, and played it in a portable cassette player with earphones.

He [a fellow inmate] came on the yard one day, so he’s like, ‘What you listening to homie?’ I said, ‘Man, I’m listening to that Rebirth. I’m on Freret [Street] and Washington [Avenue] at the second line.’ He’s like, ‘Man, you ain’t listening to no Rebirth!’ So I gave him the earphones. He hear it, he like, ‘No!’ So he second lined behind my [wheel]chair. We go around the yard, and when I tell you, the people in the towers, everybody in the big yard wondering what we listening to.

Half of them probably thought that we done drunk some hooch and we was drunk or something because we was acting like we were really on the street, like it was Mardi Gras time.<sup>636</sup>

Skelly's imagined geographies, enacted when he begins to second line, provide a salient example of the alternative mapping practices that, according to Katherine McKittrick, have been used by black people for generations. McKittrick explains the importance of "saying" place in black geographical practices, through a variety of expressive acts, from poetry to dancing. She claims that saying place is one of the more crucial ways that geography can "work for" black people, since their geographies are bound up with spatial practices of domination, such as mass incarceration.<sup>637</sup> Skelly "says" or "claims" the intersection of Freret and Washington from inside the prison, many miles away. I imagine the grooves that his wheels must have pressed into the grass while he cut up in the yard, popping onto his back wheels, bouncing in his chair, and spinning in a circle. In my mind, these muddy tracks provide a powerful image of a footwork/print. They attest to the geographies of containment that limit many black men's mobilities in late capitalism—street-level violence and mass incarceration—even as they evidence Skelly's escape. I see them as traces of Skelly's spiritual, emotional, and mental flight—a rival geography inscribed into the earth.

### **Summitting: Race, Gender, and Dissenting Citizenship**

Throughout the Big 7's 2014 parade, I spotted men climbing atop city structures to dance high above the crowd. One dancer scaled a six-foot-high transformer box,

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<sup>636</sup> Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., interview with the author and Daniella Santoro, March 26, 2014. All quotes from Ratcliff are taken from this interview.

<sup>637</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxiii.



slipping and sliding on its metal surface, doing footwork in the rain. A few of the younger club members left their place of honor inside the ropes to dance with second liners on top of a porch. During other parades in this neighborhood, I have seen dancers atop the roof of a mechanic's garage, in front of a billboard, and even on the shoulder of the raised interstate. When I see dancers in the air—which happens several times during each second line—I often jump into ethnographer mode, fumbling for my phone to capture short clips. I trip over potholes and bump into people as I try to simultaneously film, move forward, and cheer with the crowd, “Footwork! Footwork!” By claiming vertical space, these second liners transcend the horizontal performance area on the ground and demand spectators within the parade's participatory structure.

I call these uses of vertical space “summiting,” and have floated this term by dozens of second liners to see if they have a word for dancing on top of city structures. As far as I know, no common term exists, and people I talk to seem to be unbothered (and equally unimpressed) by my use of “summit” as a verb to describe their actions. I like the term because it evokes the feeling of accomplishment that radiates from dancers, and is appreciated by gawking onlookers, each time a young man reaches the summit of a city space where his social and spatial mobility has been restricted.

Summiting is perhaps best understood within the context of New Orleans as a sinking city. About half of the city sits below sea level, and has been sitting lower and lower since the early-twentieth century.<sup>638</sup> The landscape is not entirely flat, but its slight

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<sup>638</sup> However, this current reality is an effect of human intervention into the landscape, which has prevented the river's flooding and sediment resettlement. Metropolitan effects of subsidence, or sinking land, include sunken cornerstones, buckled streets, cracked and leaning buildings. Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma*, 80, 327.

differences in elevation have deeply influenced urban development. According to Richard Campanella, “Meager topographic elevation thus forms a precarious and scarce resource in this water-logged environment, and, as such, has influenced New Orleans’s historical geography.”<sup>639</sup> High ground has always been the most valuable, and as such, has strongly determined the city’s segregation. Second lines traverse back-of-town neighborhoods, where low-lying land remains highly susceptible to flooding, even with the help of pumping and drainage technologies. Since the beginning of the city’s history, poor and working-class black New Orleanians have been forced to live on marginal land: flood-prone areas with low property values and limited job opportunities.<sup>640</sup> In this context, then, black male dancers who find the highest elevation as their chosen dance floor perform a satirical inversion of history by claiming the highest available city space as their own. In so doing, they embody the second line’s carnivalesque transgressions with gusto, literally inverting top and bottom, high and low.<sup>641</sup> Summiting has been a mainstay of second line choreography for a long time (at least since the mid-1970s), but takes on a renewed significance since Hurricane Katrina, when many flood victims begged for rescue from rooftops, bridges, and elevated interstates.<sup>642</sup> The stakes of

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<sup>639</sup> Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 83.

<sup>640</sup> Breunlin and Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map,” 746.

<sup>641</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

<sup>642</sup> Footage from a 1975 second line depicts a teenage boy who footworks on top of the wall that surrounds a cemetery while the crowd watches from below. Jules Cahn, “Sister Eustis Funeral,” 16mm, color, silent, recorded July 8 or 9, 1975, Jules Cahn Collection at the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA. Alan Lomax’s 1990 film, *Jazz Parades: Feet Don’t Fail Me Now* (New York: Association for Cultural Equity, 1990, 3/4 inch videotape: U-matic, Folkstreams, accessed May 17, 2015, <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,126>), features a second liner in the early 1980s who earned the moniker “Spiderman” for his frequent summiting feats.

vertical space were made poignantly and tragically clear in Katrina's aftermath, heightening the political resonance of second liners' summiting feats even today.<sup>643</sup>

While summiting provides a dramatic example, second lining on the whole might be seen as a carnivalesque comment on histories of colonialism and the mapping practices that facilitated them. Whiteness studies scholar Richard Dyer remarks upon the imperialist impulse underlying the urge to experience the sensation that a bird's eye view affords. From the disinterested, objective standpoint of the pioneer, standing atop a mountain and gazing onto the frontier, "the openness of space means that domination can take place virtually through the act of opening one's eyes."<sup>644</sup> As Dyer and others have argued, the summit provides a cartographic perspective, which, as an extension of the gaze, is a way of controlling the other.<sup>645</sup> The connections between dance and land domination can be found at the root of the discipline of choreography. Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster compares sixteenth-century modes of dance notation in France, which utilized a bird's eye view to map out a dancer's step through space, and European practices of mapping used to facilitate the movement of people and goods in imperialist projects. The very term "choreography" was derived during this period from a well-known sub-discipline of geography known as "chorography," which developed in

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<sup>643</sup> Thanks to Anusha Kedhar for pointing this out to me.

<sup>644</sup> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerners* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74, qtd. in Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 34.

<sup>645</sup> Valerie Briginshaw, "'Keep Your Great City Paris!' - The Lament of the Empress and other Women," in *Dance and the City*, ed. by Helen Thomas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 42.

England as a practice of mapping and analyzing a locale's terrain and inhabitants.<sup>646</sup> In both practices, seeing space from above operated as the privileged way of knowing it, and thus understanding how to move bodies into, through, and out of it.

Unlike the “intensely visual epistemology” historically employed by pioneers, cartographers, and choreographers to apprehend a landscape, second lining epistemology privileges a bodily knowing of the urban environment.<sup>647</sup> Summiting is no exception. The second liners who dance atop roofs and overpasses do not need to see the city from above in order to know it and possess it; they summit in order to state their ownership of the city by *being seen*. The power of their performance is not derived from surveying the landscape; they powerfully claim this place, at this moment, as rightfully theirs by saying place through intricate footwork executed on top of it. Their actions comment on imperialist attachments to aerial views by performing the bodily knowing of the “native” from the pioneer's elevated place of privilege.

Summiting may invert the racialized logics of imperialism, but it does perhaps less to challenge the patriarchal roots of imperialism. To begin with, summiting is performed almost exclusively by men. As young, black, male dancers literally rise above the masses, they make visible the gendered hierarchies that subtly persist in second line culture today, and are rooted its historical foundations. Summiters, the most visible second liners, remind us that the second line tradition developed inside of male-led fraternal organizations; even though women belonged to mutual aid societies since their

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<sup>646</sup> Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 17.

<sup>647</sup> Regis, “Contested Landscapes,” 480; see also Hirsch, “Landscape: Between Place and Space,” 2.

inception, only since the last decades of the twentieth century have women begun to buck jump on the street, versus politely marching with church groups or riding ceremonially in vehicles.<sup>648</sup> Today, a roughly equal number of women and men appear inside and outside the ropes during each second line season, but the dancing that they showcase is evaluated by the community according to gendered norms. Female second liners who wish to master the art of footwork are well aware that they must dance in ways coded as masculine, and avoid any movements that could be perceived as feminine, in order to gain respect as footwork artists on the streets.<sup>649</sup> Second liners align footwork and buck jumping excellence with masculinity when they associate the dancing with “hardness.” As one veteran footwork fanatic told me, the women who are the best second liners are those who “dance like a dude,” which means, he explained, “straight up going hard.”<sup>650</sup> The masculine attribute of “going hard”—demonstrating athletic, aggressive, nonstop energy—can be seen at its zenith when male dancers summit. Roderick “Scubble” Davis is seen summiting on a regular basis these days. As he put it, “When you climb on stuff, you can’t get up there and just be waving your hands. You got to cut up. Because you’ve

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<sup>648</sup> On women’s involvement in fraternal organizations, see Beito, *From Mutual aid to the Welfare State*, 2-3. Tamara Jackson recalls a time when women only rode in cars during second line parades. Interview with the author, April 21, 2014. When interviewing an unnamed woman about second lines in the late-1970s and early 1980s, Alan Lomax (*Jazz Parades*) asked, “What do the women come for?” The female interviewee replies, “A lot of reasons. The way they look, way they smile, way they dance, way they talk, way they shake...” This exchange indicates that, at the time, women were rarely performing inside the ropes and more often attending to observe the male club members’ parades.

<sup>649</sup> Terrinika Smith and Terrylynn Dorsey, interview with the author, August 8, 2014.

<sup>650</sup> Don Roberson, interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

got everybody's whole, undivided attention."<sup>651</sup> When he cuts up, he will probably not exclude movements coded as feminine and "soft," such as hip undulations and shoulder shimmies. Cutting up and going hard leave little space for feminized expressions of energy and athleticism.

In his essay, "Which Way Is Down? Improvisations on Black Mobility," Jason King expounds on the relationship between verticality, activism, and masculinity in African American history. "If ascension is required for insurgency," he writes, then "horizontalism becomes inertia, apathy. [...] Being up, getting, up, however, registers as potency. [...] The noble promise of the erection. Uplift, virility. The erotic pull of upward mobility. Black power, the ascension of the race, at some point becomes inseparable from masculinity..."<sup>652</sup> I discuss King's theories in relation to second liners' bodily postures in chapter three. Here, King's analysis of the intertwinements between verticality and masculinity also inform my reading of dancers' spatial choreographies. Male second liners, going hard atop city structures, in some ways embody the ascension of insurgency, the potency of male domination, and upward mobility in economies of social (if not financial) capital. And yet, the carnivalesque, excessive character of these performances also undercuts any simple read of summiting as the black man's effort to attain the white, male privilege to dominate (women). When a second liner summits, he performs a complex comment on patriarchy and white supremacy, at once challenging histories of colonialism and private property as requirements for citizenship (and as investments in

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<sup>651</sup> Roderick Davis, interview with the author, January 16, 2014. All quotes from Davis are taken from this interview.

<sup>652</sup> King, "Which Way is Down?," 34.

whiteness), and reinforcing male dominance in continued contests over the ownership of public space. And yet, summiters claim their land, and present a vision of virile, black masculinity, through the historically feminized act of dancing, thereby complicating any neat analysis of the racialized and gendered dimensions of their performances.

As a complex performance of race, gender, and citizenship, summiting provides a dramatic example of how bodily acts executed during the second line work to transform the urban landscape. As a way of saying place, or claiming ownership of it, summiters defy the neoliberal logics of private ownership as a prerequisite for and symbolic anchor of citizenship in the white spatial imaginary. As Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis argue, second liners' public performances articulate "alternative notions of value, land, and dwelling together in place."<sup>653</sup> Dancing on top of a building, transformer box, overpass, or other piece of the city's physical landscape effectively says, "I am from here. I am of this place. I belong here, this place belongs to me, and I can use it however I wish." According to Scubble, he summits more frequently when parades pass through his home neighborhood of the Sixth Ward (Tremé). "When I'm downtown, it just be happiness, joy, I'm home, I'm in my area. So everything I see I'm on. Everything I see I'm on." By assuming the role of neighborhood representative, Scubble's and other second liners' aerial performances articulate a form of ownership rooted in history, memory, and affective attachment to place. Such notions of place ownership and citizenship are, according to Breunlin and Regis, "routinely silenced in our naturalized understandings of

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<sup>653</sup> Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map," 745-746.

private property denoting a singular relation to the land.”<sup>654</sup> Scubble’s associations between summiting and place ownership suggest that he thinks of summiting as laying claim to or “saying” a place as his own.

Summiting not only forwards a notion of ownership outside of private property, but these climbing feats often buck regulations against trespassing on it. However, such laws seem to be temporarily suspended during the second line. Police officers escort every parade, and in permitting dancers to climb on any piece of private or commercial property that they choose, officers selectively withhold constraints on movement. Summiting represents another instance in which second liners and police officers rehearse the tensions between legal and cultural citizenship. These two forms of citizenship are interdependent and often contradict one another. During the parade, the role of police escorts pulsates between supportive and restrictive. They most often act like stage managers, assisting the parade’s flow by keeping time, blocking traffic, and refusing to enforce select laws.<sup>655</sup> Second liners are usually free to do things that are criminalized in other contexts, such as openly smoking marijuana, and selling beverages and food without vendor licenses.<sup>656</sup> Of course, second liners’ “freedom” to act outside the law is predicated on the authorities’ permission, for they hold the power to revoke this permission at any time. Indeed, the SAPCs’ history with city hall and the NOPD is

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>655</sup> Regis, “Contested Landscapes,” 486.

<sup>656</sup> There has been a recent effort by the city to require vendor licenses amongst the grassroots, entrepreneurial proprietors of food and drink at the second lines, but at the time of writing, the police who escort the second lines have not been routinely enforcing this. When I asked Officer Hamilton, Second Line Coordinator for the New Orleans Police Department, about vendor licensing, he replied, “*Big* no comment.” Michael Hamilton, interview with the author, April 12, 2014.



marked by constant negotiation and compromise.<sup>657</sup>

At other times, however, the police disrupt the parade, blaring sirens that drown out the band, pushing their cars through the crowds,<sup>658</sup> and, as was the case during the Big 7's 2013 parade, re-directing the route as they see fit. The ambiguity between the state and second liners highlights the tension between the state's power to discipline bodies and its complicity with expressions of difference, and even dissent.<sup>659</sup> But the state is not the only force determining where and when second lining happens; so do dancers. Summing, as a dramatic example of second lining in general, might be best described as a practice of dissenting citizenship, which is defined by Sunaina Maira as actions that critique the nation while still seeking inclusion in it.<sup>660</sup> When summing private property and city structures in the presence of police escorts, second liners challenge the connections between land ownership and citizenship, creating a space where collective use of the cityscape is privileged over the state's protection of private property. However, second liners simultaneously seek multicultural inclusion in the state by cooperating with police escorts and civic authorities to present a model of black respectability that the state can condone.<sup>661</sup> By successfully gaining the permission and protection of the dominant

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<sup>657</sup> A recent and intensified battle between second line organizations and the city occurred shortly after Hurricane Katrina, when the city raised second line permit fees up to 300 percent, citing a need to provide more security in the wake of shootings surrounding two separate second line parades. See chapter three, note 455.

<sup>658</sup> Regis, "Contested Landscapes," 486.

<sup>659</sup> Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire*, 248.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>661</sup> Regis notes that, for many SAPC members, their role in the second line community signifies "an active stance against the forces of disorder and lawlessness." For this reason, the city can appropriate the second

society, second liners “enhance their own space and participation” within the social order, but find a way to do so according to the counter-geographies, choreographies, and value systems that second lines perform.<sup>662</sup> By assuming the right to use the built environment in unusual and even illegal ways, dancers leverage the state’s complicity with celebrations of difference in order to pursue their own agendas.<sup>663</sup>

## Conclusion

While full citizenship has remained a struggle for African Americans since emancipation, poetic expressions and pursuits of freedom have been largely defined according to two phenomena: land ownership and spatial mobility. While these two notions may seem contradictory at first, each reflects a person’s capacity to choreograph their own geographical existence. As McKittrick argues, black subjects are often unacknowledged as geographic beings who have a stake in the production of space.<sup>664</sup> Second lines offer a mode of freedom from oppression by articulating a connection between these two domains; that is, second lines claim ownership over the land by moving bodies through it. As ritual journeys, the parades enact a collective, embodied, ephemeral, and performative ownership of the city space that remake traditional geographies. By establishing rules and norms for moving through the cityscape that

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line as a cultural icon of palatable, positive, and respectable black culture to market its own image. Meanwhile, the city taxes clubs, blacks out certain dates, and otherwise presents obstacles to staging second line parades. “Contested Landscapes,” 483, 496. On the politics of respectability and SAPCs’ differing approaches to self-representation, see Sakakeeny, “The Representational Power of New Orleans Brass Bands,” in *Brass Bands of the World: Militarism, Colonial Legacies, and Local Music Making*, ed. by Suzel Ana Reily and Katherine Brucher (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 123-138..

<sup>662</sup> Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 125.

<sup>663</sup> Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire*, 248.

<sup>664</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiv, 14.

challenge normative choreographies, second lines enact and celebrate unencumbered spatial mobility throughout the landscape (and under it, over it, and on top of it).

This chapter has investigated the tensions between multiple mobilities—geographical, social, temporal, and danced mobilities—in order to analyze the ways in which second liners move through the urban space of New Orleans. I have argued that the quotidian rules that govern bodily movement through New Orleans on a daily basis are partially rooted in histories of colonial invasion, plantation economies, capitalist logics of privatization, and the tourism economy. These phenomena choreograph people's movement through the city by inciting (or requiring) individuals to move through particular areas and to avoid others. However, the norms for traversing the city are largely overturned when second lines take to the streets. With carnivalesque inversion, second liners turn segregation into congregation, convert density into performative intensity, and repurpose obstacles as props. By repeatedly tracing ritual pathways, and marking locations with footwork/prints, second liners re-spatialize the city according to vernacular landscapes of technique. When their pathways include vertical spaces, dancers perform a complex commentary on imperialism and patriarchy that is always already enshrined in New Orleans' traditional geographies.

The question remains, do second lines' temporary transformations of the urban landscape produce lasting effects? In other words, are second lines efficacious as transformative spatial practices? The answer to that question depends on one's definitions of space and transformation. If we only judge efficacious re-spatializations by their ability to redistribute the acquisition of private property to more individuals, then,

according to McKittrick, we miss the point. Speaking of philosopher Edouard Glissant's "poetics of landscape," McKittrick notes that black diaspora naming of places "is not derived from the desire for socioeconomic possession," although we cannot dismiss the need for more equitable access to it. "Nor are they derived from a unitary vantage point," like the pioneer's bird's eye view. She continues:

Indeed, Glissant suggests that there are different sets of geographic tools available, which are anchored, primarily, in nonlinearity, contradictory histories, dispossession, and an 'infinite variety' of landscape. The claim to place should not be naturally followed by material ownership and black repossession but rather by a grammar of liberation, through which ethical human-geographies can be recognized and expressed.<sup>665</sup>

McKittrick's assertion that black diaspora naming of places such as second lining must be evaluated in terms of liberation versus repossession is instructive. In Lipsitz's terms, the efficacy of the second line's spatial acts cannot be measured by the market values of the white spatial imaginary, but must be viewed within the paradigm of the black spatial imaginary, in which the personal possession of private property is overturned as the dominant criterion for citizenship, and instead replaced with a collective, expressive, even imaginary and/or symbolic ownership of the land. The second line's rival geographies recreate more than physical space; they recreate the "physical, socio-political, cultural, psychic, and ritual-religious" attachments to place that, in Judith Butler's words, animate and organize the pavement.<sup>666</sup> This is not to dismiss struggles for economic justice as unnecessary, nor to romanticize the second line's ephemeral poetics over people's material needs for survival. But as long as we measure the second line's

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<sup>665</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxiii.

<sup>666</sup> Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, xvi; Butler, "Bodies in Alliance," n.p.

efficacy in transforming the landscape within the capitalist logics of private property, we deny its ability to enact radically different paradigms for citizenship, and thus we decline its invitation to imagine a more just world, or what McKittrick calls “more humanly workable geographies.”<sup>667</sup>

Second lines do not necessarily enable disenfranchised New Orleanians to own the city through repossession, nor do they permanently alter the physical structures of urban spaces. By occasioning repeated dancing in those spaces, second lines alter the ways in which spaces are lived. The effects of second liners’ performances linger in the bodies and memories of participants, and in their enduring relationships and collective attachments to place. By imprinting people’s place memories with footwork—creating a footwork/print—second lines overlay traditional geographies with rival geographies, or vernacular landscapes of technique. These lasting, affective footwork/prints can change the ways that people remember, feel about, and categorize those places, perhaps altering how urban dwellers move through them, and put demands on spatial arrangements, during the other six days of the week.

The shooting that occurred during the Original Big 7’s 2013 Mother’s Day second line serves as an all-too-painful reminder that, while powerful, the transformative effects of the second line are far from absolute. The alternative social order that the parades create cannot, and cannot be expected to, permanently ameliorate the structural violence incurred by racial capitalism, and the interpersonal violence that flourishes within it. In McKittrick’s words, “The world is not presently just, but geography discloses a workable

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<sup>667</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xv.

terrain through which respatialization can be and is achieved.”<sup>668</sup> As poetic sayings of place, second lines can provide a dissenting mobility for New Orleans’s aggrieved citizens to maneuver through and oppose oppressive spatial regimes, and can enact, for four hours every Sunday, the kind of world that inspires political action.

Second liners’ urban choreographies today link up with earlier assertions of mobility in the face of structural and interpersonal violence, starting with the antebellum drum-and-dance circles at Congo Square (chapter two). The terms of racial capitalism have changed since slavery, but are still rooted in the plantation bloc’s investments in limiting black spatial and social mobility. Second liners refuse to be contained to the still image presented to tourists in the airport, or re-enacted by those tourists in French Quarter hotels. However, although second liners resist hegemonic norms, they do not seek to supplant them. Much like the second liner’s grounded-yet-lifted posture (chapter three), his movement through space relies on an interdependence between disciplinary forces and subaltern resistance, resulting in a performance of dissenting citizenship that critiques the state even while seeking inclusion in it. By choreographing alternative ways of moving through the city, second lining enacts a dissenting mobility that has given shape to a bodily discourse of aesthetics, politics, and cultural values generated by New Orleans’s black populations for more than a century.

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<sup>668</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxxii.

## CONCLUSION

### Reflections from Inside the Ropes

On a Wednesday night in March of 2015, around 10:30 PM, I walked through the door of Celebration Hall. I greeted the security guard, paid my five-dollar admission, and extended my arm so that the cashier could fasten a paper bracelet around my wrist. I was familiar with the place and the routine, as I had been to this Seventh Ward night club dozens of times in the past two years to hear the To Be Continued (TBC) Brass Band play their weekly set. TBC's show functions as an important event in the second line's ritual calendar. Dedicated "footwork junkies," to use Roderick Davis's term, rely on this Wednesday night concert to tide them over until the next parade. Additionally, the event serves as an unofficial launch party for whichever social aid and pleasure club (SAPC) will be "coming out" or "rolling" next. On this Wednesday night, I was entering Celebration Hall for the first time as one of those SAPC members. In four days, I would have my "main liner" debut as a new member of the Ice Divas Social and Pleasure Club.

The Ice Divas has maintained an interracial membership roster since its inception four years ago, when a small group of black and white members splintered off from a larger, older SAPC to form their own club. When I interviewed Catina Braxton, the Ice Divas' founder and CEO (our interview occurred after she invited me to join her club), I asked about her choice to recruit white members into an historically black tradition. "People is people," she responded. "You don't look at people as color or what have you. People is people, we all human. Everybody can enjoy whatever culture they want to, and

I love it.”<sup>669</sup> She handpicks her members in a variety of ways. Some are family members or friends. Sometimes, as in my case, she invites a new member to join based on her second line performance. “When I see them dancing, having a real good time, I’m like, ‘I could use her! I’m going to ask her!’” Such interactions demonstrate the ways in which second line dance vocabularies can disrupt stable categories of race, culture, and belonging. When non-black and/or newcomers to the second line tradition are able to “speak” its bodily language, we reveal that dance cannot be reduced to a natural representation of a pre-existing identity. Some African American New Orleanians criticize the inclusion of white people and/or newcomers into the second line tradition in general, much less as SAPC members. One reason for such disapproval, I propose, is that, when a white body second lines, her performance can threaten the dissenting geographies, epistemologies, and histories that form the heart of second lining’s bodily discourses. But colorblind approaches such as Catina’s can also question assumptions about race and class differences and, furthermore, provide a means for relating that is distinct from those differences. Footwork can transport us across terrains of social distance to join each other on a vernacular landscape of dance technique.

No more than ten seconds after I entered Celebration Hall, Catina met me in front of the bar with a strong, lingering hug—the kind where you sway from foot to foot. She handed me a shirt, which matched hers and each of the six other Divas’: a burgundy, long-sleeve button-up with the Ice Divas’ logo embroidered on the back in white thread.

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<sup>669</sup> Catina Braxton, interview with the author, April 14, 2014.



My club-specific nickname, “Ice Ice Baby,” appeared on the front.<sup>670</sup> Since it was a warm night, I sweated through the shirt during bouts of footwork danced with the Divas on a crowded tile floor. I also danced with members of the all-male Keep-N-It Real SAPC, with whom the Ice Divas parade. Since the Ice Divas is a relatively new club, it does not yet have its own designated Sunday as a parade date. While we wait for a spot to open up on the city’s calendar (which requires a club to give up their existing date; this strikes me as a process not unlike waiting for someone to retire from a job so that a position becomes available), the Ice Divas join Keep-N-It Real on their Sunday in early March, creating a bigger parade with two divisions and two bands.

Throughout the evening, I encountered many familiar people, many of whom appear in this dissertation. I asked them questions about second lining, per usual. But this time, my questions were motivated by a practical need instead of (or, more accurately, in addition to) an intellectual curiosity. Most of all, I wanted to know how people survive four hours of parading in the heat and/or rain while wearing brand new dress shoes and layers of tailored clothing. After all, SAPC members are regular people, not endurance athletes. Nevertheless, the crowd demands that main liners constantly display footwork and buck jump to their fullest extent. I was worried about my physical readiness, so I asked many people at Celebration Hall that night: how do you do it? I received a variety of answers.

“Psych yourself up. It’s all mental.”

“Just forget about everybody else and enjoy. It’s your world. And drink lots of

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<sup>670</sup> I chose this nickname as one that could acknowledge my whiteness with humor. It refers to the title of a 1989 hit single by the white rapper, Vanilla Ice.

water.”

“Make sure you break in your shoes.”

“You get high on the adrenaline, but some people need a little alcohol to help them out.”

“Drink water. Don’t get dehydrated.”

“Just go for it—and sleep for two days after it’s over.”

Catina shared her own tried-and-true secret weapon for maintaining energy and avoiding cramps: a pack of multi-vitamins, pickle juice, and sunflower seeds. She assigned me the task of gathering these provisions for the group before Sunday morning, when all eight of the Ice Divas met at one member’s house to eat, dress, and take pictures before our parade. Along with the ingredients for Catina’s endurance cocktail, I also brought mimosa fixings to wash down the bacon, eggs, toast, and grits. Once everyone arrived—hair pinned, nails painted—we sat around the dining room table and prayed over our breakfast. Catina asked God to bless the food and gave thanks for the perfect weather (mostly sunny with a high of seventy degrees). Catina’s sister added, “And we ask Jesus that we have no incidents today!” “We’ll pray again before we parade,” Catina assured her. As much as I tried to focus on the thrill of main lining, the subject of violence was on my mind. I had examined our route sheet and noticed that we would mostly traverse wide, major streets. I found this comforting for two reasons: wide streets provide ample room to dance, and they seem to be less conducive to violent incidents. Density, after all, provokes intensity, and that intensity can vector into performance fervor *or* destructive eruptions. Even though I knew that the likelihood of another

shooting, like the one that occurred during the Big 7 SAPC's 2013 Mother's Day parade, was very low—and even though I had attended dozens of peaceful second line parades since that one—I could not refrain from wondering what I would do, from inside the ropes, if shots were fired. Perhaps it was on my mind because I had spent the weeks prior to our parade writing the introduction to this dissertation, which required me to scour news coverage of the Mother's Day event and its aftermath. Perhaps my fears of gunshots got mixed up with pre-performance jitters. Whatever the reasons, violence was already on my mind when Catina's sister pleaded to Jesus at the breakfast table that morning.

As we ate, one Diva hatched an idea for a choreographed routine that we could perform at various moments throughout the parade: a single-file line in which we showed off our shoes (two counts right, two counts left), jumped forward, back, then spun in a circle with the right leg raised at hip height. We practiced a little around the dining room table, but we did not have time to perfect our moves. Everybody quickly dispersed to dress, pinning embroidered patches on jacket sleeves, taping up toes, fastening necklaces, sharing eyeliner and lip gloss, fixing hair, and spraying shoes with hairspray so that the rhinestones would stick (and, when that didn't work, coating the stones in glue). One woman kept an eye on the clock and ushered us out the door to take group pictures when the photographer arrived.

At 12:55 PM, we walked up to the parade's start at Orleans Avenue and Bayou St. John. Catina carried a pile of cash for the band. A group of men gathered around her to vie for rope-carrier appointments. She looked at one: "You got your four?" Then she pointed and counted, "One two three four." The chosen men surrounded us on four

corners and unfurled two ropes to frame us in the center. The cameras converged, and we posed in a line as a throng of professionals, amateurs, and supporters snapped pictures, using everything from high-tech instruments to smart phones. I waved hello to and hung over the rope to hug many friends, including people that I met as a result of my research process. A few minutes after 1:00, the tuba's throaty riff catalyzed the scene into motion, and we were off.<sup>671</sup>

As I danced through the streets, I pulled from all the second line moves that I had witnessed, attempted, and described in writing for the past two years. I reached into my bodily archive to roll with it, staying grounded-yet-lifted while I stepped, footworked, buck jumped; I even threw in some salsa stylings in the spirit of do watcha wanna. I had taped up my feet but I still managed to rub massive blisters into my heels and toes within the first thirty minutes. My husband danced alongside the rope, and alternated between taking photos, giving me water, handing me a cocktail, re-taping my blisters, and doing some footwork himself. Catina's family members also cheered us on, wearing matching T-shirts that proclaimed the Ice Divas' name and featured a collage of family photos. Since Catina's sister and cousin had joined that year, the second line truly was a family reunion for them.

At each pre-planned stop (a barbershop, a barroom, and a street corner), fried chicken, cold cut sandwiches, and bottles of water awaited us. When we reached the

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<sup>671</sup> The four-note musical phrase that brass musicians play to gather the band and galvanize the crowd is unique to New Orleans musical culture. According to trumpeter Leroy Jones, "you can always tell somebody who lives here or has lived here or is from here, because when they hear that signal, they look." Eve Abrams, "Who Sang It First? Mockingbirds and Musicians Cover Each Other in New Orleans," *National Public Radio*, October 23, 2014, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/23/358317690>.

Avenue Barbershop, I found the food already laid out on countertops. Keep-N-It Real's Queen and her royal court lounged in the barbers' chairs, resting their feet after an hour of standing on a float in high heels. Meanwhile, the men changed suits in the back, preparing to wow the crowds by coming out the door with a costume change. When we reached Seal's Class Act, a popular barroom stop for downtown second lines, the Dumaine Street Gang SAPC hosted us. One of their members stood on the street corner, handing each Diva a Styrofoam container of food (a piece of fried chicken and two sandwich triangles) and a bottle of water as we headed inside. Two volunteers stood guard outside the door of each stop, prohibiting any non-affiliates from entering and thus protecting each place as a backstage area for the performers to recuperate. The stops never felt long enough to eat a bite, wipe off the sweat, pee, and drink some water before Officer Hamilton, the New Orleans police department (NOPD) second line coordinator, signaled that it was time to go. He acted like a stage manager, moving us along the six-mile route, and even cancelling one stop, to ensure that we would reach the disband location before our permit expired at 5:00. While his actions ultimately facilitated a smooth performance, they sometimes incited anger from disagreeing club members. Watching these sometimes amicable, sometimes heated negotiations between the NOPD and the SAPCs reminded me that the second line always oscillates between the state's power to discipline bodies and its complicity with expressions of difference, and even dissent.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire*, 248.

Catina did not designate specific line-up positions for each member, as some clubs do, but she periodically directed us throughout the parade: “Three on each rope, one in the middle;” “Spread out up here on the corner, we’re going to cut up;” and “Put the fans down and circle up.” At one point, we tried out the choreographed routine that we invented over breakfast, but no one was sure exactly when to start, so we gave up on it pretty quickly. One Diva reflected afterward, “Next year, we’ll have to practice.”

When we flowed under the I-10 overpass at Claiborne Avenue, or “the bridge,” the band leveraged the structure’s ability to contain and thus intensify the crowd’s energy. We all knew it was coming: the trumpet player wailed out the Joe Avery riff—“da da daaaaaaa DA!”—and I joined the crowd in throwing my hands in the air and screaming, “Hey!”<sup>673</sup> (see figure 7). Newly fortified by the excitement of parading under the bridge, all of us Divas found a new well of stamina and danced down Claiborne Avenue a little harder.

About halfway through the parade, the procession made a right-hand turn from the wide expanse of St. Claude Avenue and funneled into the lake-bound lane of Esplanade Avenue, a tree-canopied, residential street. This physical motion—turning right from a wide corridor onto a tighter pathway—triggered a sense memory from the Mother’s Day parade in 2013. Right before the shooting occurred, the parade had turned right from Elysian Fields Avenue onto the residential Villere Street. Suddenly, I wanted to leave the parade. I scanned the crowd for my husband, but could not find him. The

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<sup>673</sup> Sakakeeny writes that the Joe Avery riff is the most recognizable musical phrase in the brass band repertoire. It invites all listeners to participate in the experience by yelling “Hey!” after the fourth note. *Roll With It*, 15.

ropes now appeared as barriers that not only protected our performance space but also prohibited us from leaving it. I took a deep breath and reminded myself that this is what second lining is for: defying death, releasing frustrations, and cleansing wounds with the support of rhythm and a collective. So, instead of running, I drove my feet even harder into the rhythm, letting my joints articulate my fears, anger, and awe at the fragility of life. In this moment, more than any other, I glimpsed the power of second lining as a tactic for maneuvering within and against structures of violence.

Even though I felt somewhat trapped in that moment, I was actually free to choose whether or not to stay put, and this freedom of choice separates my second lining experience from many of those who have historically created and maintained the tradition. As this dissertation has argued, second lining has developed as a cultural response to structural and interpersonal violence. Certainly, the dance form has served me as a ritual practice that allowed me to reckon with my own mortality. But those reckonings are nevertheless shaped by particular privileges. I retain the freedom to choose when to put my body on and in the line, and can leave when I no longer feel comfortable or safe. Many of the people who have pounded New Orleans's streets with footwork for centuries—enslaved, incarcerated, and otherwise denied full citizenship—are/were not granted such freedoms. Second lining has enabled New Orleans's most aggrieved populations to maneuver within and against different regimes of containment, which have always conjoined with mutating modes of racial capitalism.

In this dissertation, I have argued that second lining choreographs a bodily discourse of dissenting mobility, and these chapters have provided a range of examples.

Dancers at antebellum Congo Square found pleasure and ecstasy, even under the surveillance of police power and the exoticizing tourist gaze. Turn-of-the-century second liners defied the rule of law and the threat of vigilante violence—on vivid display when a white mob paraded Robert Charles’ corpse through the streets—that circumscribed black mobility through a segregated city. Hundreds of “crack funerals” in the 1980s and 1990s insisted that black lives mattered, to borrow a phrase from contemporary activists, even as New Jim Crow policies stripped urban communities of resources and state protections. In 2006, the Big Nine SAPC’s second line, and others like it, proclaimed a right to return to post-Katrina New Orleans, contesting a recovery plan that hinged on the permanent exile of poor and working-class African American residents. Even when far removed from New Orleans’s streets, Wellington “Skelly” Ratcliff, Jr. inscribed rival geographies into the contained space of the prison by second lining through the yard in his wheelchair. When he buck jumps on the city’s streets today, his dancing catapults him into ecstatic times and places that radically transcend immanent limits on his mobility. As Roderick Davis climbs atop buildings every Sunday to work his feet high above the crowd, he declares his right to the city, challenging the neoliberal logics of private ownership as grounds for citizenship. These are just a few of the many ways in which second liners have, for nearly two hundred years, countered master narratives of black captivity and stasis while simultaneously critiquing the very power structures intended to keep people of color placed and displaced.



As a communicative system of meaning making and record keeping, second lining does not need me to translate it into language in order to do its work.<sup>674</sup> If anything, the words on these pages have struggled to approximate the densely theoretical, historical, and political discourses that second liners articulate every day with their spines and feet. My greatest hope for this dissertation is that it serves as a form of witnessing. Kalamu ya Salaam writes that, since the days of Congo Square, two kinds of audiences have converged on New Orleans's streets: "those of the culture who came to make ritual, to affirm and renew; and those who came to witness (a few to gawk) and to be entertained. Both audiences understood that something powerful was going on, which is why they both were there / are there."<sup>675</sup> Today, nearly ten years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, New Orleans's neoliberal rebuilding has altered its social fabric (and similarly altered the second line) by displacing thousands of African Americans and opening the city's doors to an influx of newcomers. Thus, Salaam's observations and questions remain as pertinent as ever. He asks, when does spectacle overtake ritual? When does the onlooker's consumption displace the thing she consumes? Does it happen when she crosses under the ropes, moving from the third line to the first line? Perhaps; but perhaps she is also coming to make ritual; to affirm and renew; to confront her mortality and others' by throwing herself into physical exertion and spiritual release. This is what second lining is designed to do, and it has served countless people, myself included, for generations as a tactic for survival and dissent.

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<sup>674</sup> Butler, "Bodies in Alliance," n.p.; Browning, *Samba*, xxii.

<sup>675</sup> Salaam, "Guarding the Flame," 50-51.



**Figure 7.** “Hey!” Buck jumping to the Joe Avery Riff Under the Bridge during the Ice Divas Social and Pleasure Club’s Second Line Parade, March 8, 2014. Photograph by Derek Burdette.

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