

## Diasporic Kings and Queens: Lafayette's Black Mardi Gras Performances in Historical and Hemispheric Contexts

JODI SKIPPER and DAVID WHARTON

In 2012, David Wharton, director of documentary studies at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and I began to consider a documentary photography project on historically black Mardi Gras celebrations in Louisiana's Acadiana region. Wharton had been photographing rural celebrations (more specifically white Cajun) in the region for several years. As a Lafayette native, I grew up participating in Mardi Gras events in both Lafayette and St. Martin parishes. We both realized the potential of examining the festival practices of seldom documented black populations.

After making several contacts, in 2013 we documented Lafayette Mardi Gras Festival (LMGF) Inc.'s ball, pageant, and parade through still photography and oral interviews. Based on that work, this article explores the development and function of this Carnival institution established to meet the needs of Lafayette's local black community. It presents the historical and social contexts of the organization's development in a segregated South, and then frames the current functions of its pageant/ball and parade traditions as performance.

Public performance studies are rooted in dramaturgical perspectives, which evidence Shakespeare's metaphor of the whole world as a stage. These studies emphasize how people negotiate everyday interactions through carefully managed social performances. Public performances "are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences" (MacAloon 1). They tell us about how people identify themselves.

Like the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club and the black Indian Tribes of New Orleans, LMGF members created spaces for themselves in Carnival activities where there were none and, divergently, protested white racial frames. The Zulus, established in 1909, “took their inspiration from a staged minstrel number,” using “a burlesque African stereotype...[to] play upon the white physical stereotype of the Negro and mental stereotype of his African savagery” (Roach 19, de Caro and Ireland 35). The existence of the appropriated “stereotype is acknowledged but also parodied and made ridiculous, the Carnival occasion allowing for a mocking repudiation of the social position associated with the damning stereotype” (de Caro and Ireland 35). Comparably, “neighborhood based Mardi Gras Indian tribes protest white domination and entitlement” through cultural performance (de Caro and Ireland 35).

Several years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, LMGF’s charter members protested in similar terms through the symbolism of Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century Saint Domingue slave revolt. This focus can be seen as an act of nonviolent civil rights era protest against the white South’s general refusal to shift the new law into fact. As Wharton and I planned this project, we had not given enough consideration to the more universal themes and motivating factors, which could explain much of what we might see, yet what we observed helped me to more fully comprehend the social significances of these cultural performances.

The LMGF, a historically African American social organization organized in Lafayette, Louisiana, was organized during the mid to late 1950s. Through a series of events that define Carnival season, organization members and event participants span several modes of public performance including ethnic festivals and celebrations (Ray 15). Through class and ethnic boundary lines, as well as explicit and nuanced hemispheric and transnational connections to a broader African diaspora, I examine how members of LMGF define themselves, dramatize their collective myths and history, present themselves with alternatives, and change and/or remain the same (MacAloon 1).

Lafayette is the hub, or center, of the Acadiana region, also known as Cajun country. Located along the Vermilion Bayou, it is the fourth largest city in the state of Louisiana and boasts the second largest Mardi Gras celebration in the state, with a total attendance at the city’s Tuesday festivities averaging around 250,000 persons (Simon). Lafayette’s first recorded celebration of Mardi Gras took place in 1869. The city held its first formal Mardi Gras ball and parade nearly thirty years later. Several other celebrations followed, but an annual citywide celebration was not organized until 1934, under the guise of the Greater Southwest Louisiana Mardi Gras Association (GSWLMGA).

This organization consisted of several civic leaders met with the task of officially promoting and coordinating Lafayette's Mardi Gras celebration (Yongue). Under the GSWLMGA, King Gabriel and Queen Evangeline, both allusions to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous Acadian poem, became the official names for Lafayette's white Mardi Gras royalty.

Although there have been informal Carnival groups in Lafayette's black community, since at least the 1920s (Gaudet), LMGF was the first formally organized African American krewe in the city (Boswell Broussard). In 1956, a "Negro Carnival Association" organized a Mardi Gras parade held on the same day as King Gabriel's and Queen Evangeline's parades. The latter parades began at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. respectively, while the "Negro Carnival group's" parade began at 2 p.m. on a segregated route ("Lafayette Prepares" 1). There is a gap in newspaper reporting on the Negro Carnival group in 1957 and 1958. It seems that no parades were held those years until LMGF became officially organized. For that reason, I refer to the 1956 parade as the pilot parade and the 1959 parade as the first official parade under the group's formal structure.

Since its founding, LMGF has continued to sponsor an annual pageant/ball and parade featuring the historic figures, François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture and his second wife Suzanne Simone (LMGF spells Simonné) Baptiste L'Ouverture. The group's 1956 parade (Figure 1) theme was "Great Lovers of the Past," likely an homage to the February 14<sup>th</sup> Mardi Gras day that year, and probably one incentive for choosing Toussaint and Suzanne, famous lovers, as headliners for their parade ("Mardi Gras to Be Most Colorful Yet"). This emphasis shifted to the 1959 parade when Dr. R.B. Jones served as King Toussaint L'Ouverture I (Figure 2), and Betty Ann Siler as Queen Simonné (Figure 3).

The organization's charter members chose to define themselves through the narrative of a historical figure, a practice not uncommon in folk festival traditions. What stands out is that they chose to distinguish themselves through L'Ouverture, an African diasporic hero who helped to liberate Saint Domingue's population of color from colonial rule. For nineteenth-century white Southern slaveholders, Haiti "was a symbol of the most dangerous kind of revolution" (Guterl 33), and nothing frightened them more than the ultimately successful slave revolt there. "Toussaint L'Ouverture, an aging ex-slave, emerged as the Cincinnatus, or George Washington, of the revolution, turning away from his retirement to become the leader of the ragtag revolutionary army and a skilled statesman, parlaying the competing desires of England, France, and Spain into some measure of independence for the island's majority [black] population" (Guterl 39).



Figure 1

Nathalie Malveaux Alsandor, Queen. February 14, 1956. Photographer Unknown. Image courtesy of Lafayette Parish Clerk of Court Louis J. Perret.



Figure 2

King Toussaint L'Ouverture float at the Lafayette Negro Mardi Gras Parade, Dr. R.B. Jones, King. February 10, 1959. Photographed by Wallace Mouton. Image courtesy of Lyle Mouton, Sr.



Figure 3

Queen Suzanne Simonné at the Lafayette Negro Mardi Gras Parade, Betty Ann Siler. February 10, 1959. Photographed by Wallace Mouton. Image courtesy of Lyle Mouton, Sr.

Guterl's work also shows that nineteenth-century enslaved and free Africans, even in the South, claimed L'Ouverture as a hero for racial uplift. LMGF charter members' claim to L'Ouverture as the hero of their historical moment, even if as a social construct, and transposing him to civil rights era Louisiana, seems like a comparable act of symbolic resistance to segregationist practices in the South. I consider this an innocuous, yet intriguing power play. L'Ouverture's status as a man of African descent who helped to overthrow a white-run colony and Haiti's historical connection to French Louisiana were probably inspirations for such choices. This choice also affirms the significance of considering the development of LMGF within the contexts of hybrid and transnational processes.

Creolization processes used to describe multicultural interactions and exchanges that produce new cultural forms have traditionally been "most closely associated with the New World cultures of Caribbean and Latin American Creole societies" (Baron and Cara 3). Southern Louisiana, historically colonized by the Spanish and French, and often cited as the northernmost extension of the Caribbean, thus is included. More specifically, cultural exchange and interaction between Native Americans, African or African-descendant slaves, and European colonists and settlers in the southeastern United States and the Caribbean have been conceptualized as a process of creolization, with researchers proposing various definitions (Joseph and

Zierden 6-7). Ray generally describes Southern cultural identity as hybrid, while Baron and Cara investigate creolization as a process associated with most societies, rather than a racial or ethnic identity, as perceived by many of hybrid descent in Louisiana's Acadiana region.

In this region, the essentialist black/white binary (sometimes understood as Cajun/Creole) often masks the complicated histories of several ethnic and sub-ethnic groups spanning across historic Native American, enslaved African, charter French Creole and other European ethnicities, as well as Asians more recently. Some persons of color choose to define themselves as black, others as African American, some as Creole (or more specifically black Creole), or some combination of the above. Although some African Americans recognize Cajun ancestry, many more overtly identify themselves as non-Cajun, preferring Creole as the alternative in that ethnic binary. In addition, the cultural effects of many landowners fleeing the Haitian revolution during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, often bringing their creole-speaking enslaved persons with them, cannot be underestimated. This further corroborates LMGF's Saint Domingue symbolism, as members of the organizing committee operated within the context of a French Creole community, with Haitian influences.

Whether such Caribbean connections were intended or not, they are longstanding. According to Gaudet, "particularly during the 1930s and 1940s, the streets of Creole neighborhoods [in Lafayette] . . . were filled with hundreds of revelers, all wearing the colors and costumes specific to their neighborhoods or groups" (154). The earlier celebration did not have an elaborate float parade. "Its roots seem much closer to the street parading and masking of Caribbean carnival and other Caribbean festivals" (Gaudet 154). Richard Dorson describes this activity "as street masquerade, the folk community's counterpart to the masquerade balls held in the mansions of the wealthy," as on the island of Trinidad (38). This connection indicates trans-hemispheric influences of Carnival celebrations in Caribbean nations with African descendant populations. Both Creole as an ethnic identity and as what Baron and Cara define as "cultural creativity in process" are pertinent to discussions of LMGF (3). Most specific to this analysis is Baron and Cara's notion of "carnivalization" as one of the "diverse repertoire of strategies put into play that characterize(s) Creole intercourse" (Baron and Cara 5).

In the summer of 2012, I contacted several LMGF members. I wanted to know more about how this community of African descent participates in diasporic forms of cultural expression, like Mardi Gras, while Wharton was enthusiastic about the potential for expanding his already extensive photographic documentation of Southern folk traditions. My first contact was Jamasie Marzell, a cousin and organization member, and the second

was Donald Stiner, my parents' neighbor, and the organization's senior vice president. These contacts were meant to assess the feasibility of a documentary photography project during the 2013 Mardi Gras season. Early indications from them were that such a project would be well received by other association members, but that this could not be confirmed without a formal proposal to the sixteen member group. Subsequently, Wharton and I proposed to document the preparations for, and other events encompassing, the LMGF pageant/ball and parade. We met with the group in the fall of 2012, after planning for the 2013 Mardi Gras season had already begun. We were not only given permission to photograph, but to interview several members and one costume seamstress. Through this process we began to uncover fragments of a very remarkable tradition.

We began to document the pageant/ball with the pageant practice on January 24, 2013, at the Heymann Performing Arts Center ballroom in Lafayette. All participants were present except for the king and queen, who remain anonymous until the pageant/ball day. Wharton and I watched as over sixty-five children strolled along a runway, with help from guardians and a pageant coordinator (Figure 4). Some, obviously veterans, went through the routine of entering, bowing, and retreating as a narrator read their names, guardians, schools, and hobbies. Most of the children needed little encouragement. Wharton photographed them, while they performed (Figure 5), as well as while they awaited their turns (Figure 6). Some shyly smiled as Wharton took direct shots of them, while others seemed unaware of the cameraman in the distance. This was the first time that the enormous amount of effort, patience, and passion required to pull off such an event settled on us.

January 26, 2013, was the actual pageant and ball day. For this activity, association members sponsor tables, for which guests purchased \$25.00 tickets, one of the organization's main sources of fundraising. Each sponsored table corresponds to a Mardi Gras float, organized by the table sponsor. Table decorations are generally Mardi Gras themed, in color and content, but can extend to themes more relevant to the larger emphasis for that year. Each year association members chose a different land, real or imaginary, for King Toussaint and Queen Suzanne to visit. For example, in 2012 Toussaint and Suzanne visited Candyland, based on the classic board game. In 2013, the year of our visit, the festival theme was "King Toussaint Visits the African Safari."

The morning and afternoon of the pageant and ball day, table hosts meticulously decorate their particular tables (Figure 7). When Wharton and I arrived, several of the tables had been decorated, while others were in progress. The space that we saw two days prior had been completely transformed. A decorated runway covered the center aisle, which ran perpendicular to a



Figure 4

Participants at pageant rehearsal. January 24, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 5

Participants at pageant rehearsal. January 24, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 6

Participants at pageant rehearsal. January 24, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 7

Ball hosts decorate their tables. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

painted background of a safari sunset, depicting giraffes, indistinguishable birds, and a dark silhouette of acacia trees. Wharton spent much of the time photographing, as I talked to table hosts/hostesses and association members, as they set up. After decorating, they return home to prepare food for their forthcoming guests, as well as put final touches on costumes for the children participating in the pageant.

Later that evening, Wharton and I put on our semi-formal clothes, as required by the festival dress code, and drove back to the Heymann Performing Arts Center. We were given tickets at no charge, in addition to priority seating at my cousin's table. This was a real privilege for us. We were told that we would also have an opportunity to photograph the king and queen, as they prepared for the ball. This was another honor as the queen and king are required to maintain some anonymity before being introduced to the general public.

The king is a prominent community-minded citizen, chosen through a rigorous application process. Adam F. Chevalier, a Lafayette Mardi Gras Festival member who reigned as King Toussaint in the year 2000, described the exceptional amount of effort put into the application process. Criminal background checks are conducted on each applicant and qualified applicants must have a strong record of community service. Like Chevalier, the king is generally a more mature male, while his chosen queen is a younger debutante, just coming out in society. She is often a close relative of the king, and Chevalier's niece, Jawania Q. Chevalier, reigned as his queen that year.

For nearly sixty years, association board members have continued to perpetuate the organization's goals, through the pageant/ball and parade. This is a strictly volunteer effort on the part of all association members; participants who serve as ball/pageant and parade actors; and audience members, who attend and enjoy these events year after year. How, and why, is such commitment and participation reinforced? A more detailed look at LMGF through the frame of cultural performance offers some insight.

LMGF's traditions characterize cultural performances, as they deviate from everyday behavior through scripted action. Singer argues that cultural performances always incorporate "an organized program of activity" and that is evident in preparations for and presentations at the annual pageant and ball (qtd. in MacAloon 9). In addition, LMGF's customs embody performance as "the particular class or subset of behavior in which one or more persons assume responsibility to an audience and to tradition as they understand it" (MacAloon 8). Organization members are not only accountable to members who predate them, but to the Lafayette community as a whole. In addition, LMGF's development was an essential option for African Americans in segregated Lafayette. It gave them the opportunities to participate in Mardi Gras

activities through an officially recognized institution and, in many ways, it still does. LMGF was established as a youth-oriented organization, which seemed to respond to black community needs for supplementary youth education and cultural programs, at a time when racial segregation and disempowerment might have limited such options. Its first official parade event showcased costumed children through titles of hit tunes like *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* (Figure 8) and *Deep in the Heart of Texas* (Figure 9).



Figure 8

The Lafayette Negro Mardi Gras Parade, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” Float. February 10, 1959. Photographed by Wallace Mouton. Image courtesy of Lyle Mouton, Sr.

As an educator, Nelda Boswell Broussard was impressed by the strength, passion, and dedication of the members when she joined, yet after her first year, she vowed to never participate again. “Think of what it looks like when you have sixty-five to eighty-five little kids, trying to keep them all together, and corralled in order” she said. She was overwhelmed, but her mother insisted that she participate. Boswell Broussard inquired, “why would I want to do this again?” Her mother responded, “because when do our kids get to be little princes and princesses and little kings and queens.” Even as recently as the early 1990s, Boswell Broussard’s mother understood the significance of such alternative outlets for black children. Boswell Broussard’s mention of her mother’s response indicates how significant LMGF’s traditions were and are to presenting alternatives to African Americans, historically met with limited opportunities, even if such performances are staged. Participation



Figure 9

The Lafayette Negro Mardi Gras Parade, “Deep in the Heart of Texas” Float. February 10, 1959. Photographed by Wallace Mouton. Image courtesy of Lyle Mouton, Sr.

in the Mardi Gras cultural performances are not simply entertainment, but have the ability to feed back into and transform social life for participants, at least for a brief moment.

Boswell Broussard’s dialogue with her mother reflects what seems to be the larger goals established by LMGF’s charter members, opportunity and accessibility. Charter members consisted of an array of people from the local black community, ranging from business persons and educators to those who could not comprehensibly read or write. Such variety in its class structure still exists. In addition, unlike some other Lafayette krewes, their “court and pageants are not limited to members of the Krewe” (Yongue). Involvement is not restricted, and anyone who meets the basic qualifications for participation in the ball and pageant and parade are welcomed to participate. Each chosen king is responsible for all expenses associated with ball and pageant activities, yet those unable to incur such expenses on their individual incomes, rely on donations and fundraising activities. Participation might seem like an unbearable load for someone of modest means, or an unreachable goal for many who would like to participate, yet the organization’s structure and function seem to intentionally make participation accessible.

Although the aristocratic symbolism is comparable to the structure of New Orleans Carnival activities, the unrestricted access to LMGF’s activities strongly contradicts that of the “upper class dominance” and “strict sense of

hierarchy” emphasized in historically white New Orleans Carnival balls (de Caro and Ireland 29-31). Rex, New Orleans’s King of Carnival,

shares power on his day of days with a queen selected annually from among society’s leading debutantes. The symbolic mating of a nubile young girl with a middle-aged man . . . sets the tone for the intensely endogamous fertility rites to follow. These include an eye-filling float parade with masked riders showering plastic beads on rapturous crowds of ‘subjects’ and an elegant private ball for the inner circle of worthies. (Roach 18)

As previously mentioned, LMGF’s activities indirectly mimic this performance, through Toussaint and Suzanne, yet there is no ball strictly for “the inner circle of worthies.” Pageant/ball attendance is not a reflection of social rank, as the invitation is open to anyone who can purchase a ticket.

Such efforts to transform black lives are not only reflected in larger social issues, but have personal value to individual participants. For example, LMGF’s symbolic roles in the Carnival hierarchy seem to shift into ordinary life. As royalty, Chevalier and other “ordinary” citizens are given opportunities to be extraordinary figures, even if for brief moments. When interviewed, Chevalier continued to see his role as King Toussaint as a relevant one. After his reign, he returned to his “normal” life, but continues to assume his role as a symbolic leader of the community. As a result, Chevalier’s life remained the same in some ways, but changed in others. He is not only Adam Chevalier, but fondly remembered as King Toussaint.

Such practices affirm Kathryn VanSpanckeren’s assertion that “Mardi Gras festival tradition allows participants to parody the authorities” and “invert the power structure” (57). LMGF events not only imitate Haiti’s revolutionary figures, but the historically white monarchies present in the city’s traditions since the late nineteenth century. Such compromises reflect organization members’ need to incorporate historically-white traditions, in order to fully participate in Lafayette’s Carnival activities, while upsetting that power structure through the amalgamation of black historic figures. I argue that this is also part of a strategy “designed to steal power away from ‘top-down’ monolithic impositions” that have historically devalued the nobility of black youth (Baron and Cara 5). We hoped to capture such dignity at LMGF’s fifty-fifth annual pageant and ball.

On Saturday, January 26, 2013, Wharton and I arrived early, were escorted back stage, chose a prime location near the entrance door, and then waited for pageant participants to arrive. We eagerly watched as children

and parents crowded in (Figure 10). A guard at the door asked for participant passes in order to minimize congestion backstage. Participants were organized as either members of the royal family or their attendants, based on a more traditional monarchy, or associated with “area” princes or princesses who led African safari themed floats. In came crocodiles, ostriches, tigers, and zebras (Figure 11), with periodic buglers, princes, princesses, a messenger, jester, duke, and other attendants. Anxiously awaiting any opportunities to photograph the king and queen, we could not get a clear sense of if or when they arrived. I made an inquiry a little too late. We were only able to get a few photographs of the queen (Danice Adrienne Paul) prior to line-up. We had



Figure 10  
Pageant participants arrive. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 11

Pageant participants: Zebra float. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 12

King Toussaint L'Ouverture LV: Morris Anthony St. Julien, III. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

more luck photographing the king, Morris Anthony St. Julien III (Figure 12). The pageant line-up soon formed, so Wharton and I went to our assigned seats.

The pageant began with a call to order, followed by an invocation and the national anthem. Boswell Broussard announced the seating of the royals' families, as well as recognized past royalty, present local officials, and association members. The king's buglers sounded the arrival of his court, which included a prince and princess. The long awaited King Toussaint L'Ouverture LV arrived with his royal pages, shortly followed by Queen Suzanne Simonné LV (Figure 13). An African dance, aligned with the theme, was performed as a special tribute to the seated royals (Figure 14). Our memories of the pageant practice came to life as the messenger arrived, followed by the jester, who needed encouragement from her mother as she grappled with her duties. The area princesses (crocodile, ostrich, tiger, and zebra), dukes, and attendants concluded the promenade down the runway. (Figure 15 illustrates the ostrich area princess.)



Figure 13

Queen Suzanne Simonné LV: Danice Adrienne Paul. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

We were not quite sure what distinguished the pageant from the ball, but soon found out after the pageant events were finalized and an intermission was announced. The runway was disassembled and all guests under the age of twenty-one were shuttled home. This process took about an hour or so and then the fun began. Adult partygoers danced the night away to zydeco, and rhythm and blues (Figure 16). Wharton and I hung around for a couple



Figure 14

Members of the Royal Court: seated. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

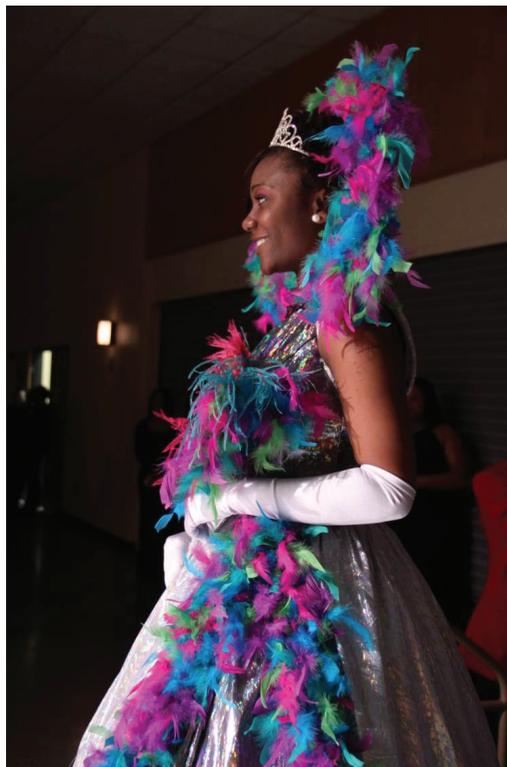


Figure 15

Ostrich Area Princess: Zoey Mouton. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 16

LMGF Member Jamasie Marzell at ball. January 26, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

of hours, but the party went on until the early hours of the morning. A little over two weeks later, we returned to Lafayette to photograph the events on Mardi Gras day.

That Tuesday morning, loading for the LMGF parade began at 11:00 a.m. We were told that members normally arrive earlier, so we also did in order to photograph the line-up before the parade began. Lafayette hosts several parades that day. King Gabriel's parade leads. When we arrived, several LMGF members were putting the finishing touches on their floats, mainly hanging throw beads in various locations. Their personal deejay had also arrived and was setting up his space on the three-level float. The music is family friendly, one of the strict regulations the association adheres to as a youth-oriented parade. At this time, Wharton and I were notified that we would be riding on this float, a privilege rarely bestowed on non-members. This was a unique opportunity for us to shift the photographic gaze from the actors to the audience.

As members and other participants started to trickle in, we turned our attentions to last minute float preparations (Figure 17), local school bands (Figure 18), and vehicles carrying local business owners and former parade dignitaries. Through the morning, we witnessed anxious parents, calmer children (some tired or hungry), and a wealth of beads, toys (e.g. hula hoops, stuffed animals, balls) and other goodies being strategically spaced on floats. The parade king and queen arrive relatively later, and are quietly placed in private vehicles, prior to being seated on their floats, so that as few people as possible can see them in advance. All the while, several association members coordinate the parade, as it prepares for its over three mile route.



Figure 17

Cheetah Float participants prepare for Mardi Gras parade. February 12, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.



Figure 18

Northside High School band members prepare for Mardi Gras parade. February 12, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

Along the route, we saw folks of all ages pleading for beads (Figure 19). Lafayette's parades are considered generally acceptable alternatives to those more raucous ones in New Orleans. The parade ended at the Lafayette Cajundome, the city's premier events center. (Figure 20 illustrates a LMGF member Albertha Martin delivering finals throws at the close of the parade route). Wharton and I were given a ride to my car and watched the crowd slowly gather for the parade after party, the Mardi Gras Indian costuming competition at Clark Field, a local park. As Wharton and I journeyed back to our homes, the following day, many Lafayette locals headed to their respective churches to begin the Lenten season. Soon after, LMGF festival members would begin planning for the 2014 Carnival season. Their year-round work reflects their enduring dedication to the Lafayette community.



Figure 19  
Mardi Gras parade-goers. February 12, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

This analysis went beyond the general public face of that work to show the importance of LMGF events as cultural performance on local and transnational levels. Historically, LMGF charter members honored their youth by publicly parading them as royalty, positions uncharacteristic of their more normal experiences as black youth in segregated Lafayette. Through this effort, came the ability for black residents of diverse class backgrounds to fully participate in LMGF activities, as “elite” or non-elite members of the population. The principle that all are equal on Mardi Gras day shifts into the real life experiences of participants whose status as royalty becomes acknowledged in their ordinary lives. In addition, this article brings to light

a disregarded arena of cultural resistance transnationally connecting the black Lafayette community to a broader African diaspora, evident in the development and continued existence of Toussaint L'Ouverture as LMGF's principal character.

*The University of Mississippi*



Figure 20

LMGF Member Albertha Martin throwing beads at parade. February 12, 2013. Image reproduced with permission of the photographer, David Wharton.

#### WORKS CITED

- Baron, Robert and Ana C. Cara. "Introduction." *Creolization as Cultural Creativity*. Eds. Robert Baron and Ana C. Cara. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2011. 3-19. Print.
- Boswell Broussard, Nelda. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2012.
- Chevalier, Adam F. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2012.
- de Caro, Frank and Tom Ireland. "Every Man a King: Worldview, Social Tension, and Carnival in New Orleans." *Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture*. Eds. Marcia Gaudet and James C. McDonald. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003. 26-41. Print.
- Dorson, Richard M. "Material Components in Celebration." *Celebration, Studies in Festivity and Ritual*. Ed. Victor Turner. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1982. 33-57. Print.
- Gaudet, Marcia "'Mardi Gras, Chic-a-la-Pie:' Reasserting Creole Identity through Festive Play." *The Journal of American Folklore* 114 (2001): 154-74. Print.

- Guterl, Matthew P. *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996. Print.
- Joseph, J.W. and Martha Zierden, "Cultural Diversity in the Southern Colonies." *Another's Country: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Cultural Interactions in the Southern Colonies*. Eds. J.W. Joseph and Martha Zierden. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2001. 6-7. Print.
- "Lafayette Prepares for Mardi Gras Fete." *The Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA) 13 Feb. 1956: 1. Print.
- MacAloon. John J. "Introduction: Cultural Performances Culture Theory." *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, Ed. John J. MacAloon. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984. 1-15. Print.
- "Mardi Gras to Be Most Colorful Yet." *The Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette LA) 10 Feb. 1965: 1. Print.
- Ray, Celeste, ed. "Introduction." *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2003. Print.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. Print.
- Simon, Fran. "Faces of Mardi Gras." *Tulane University News*, 20 Feb. 2009. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.
- VanSpanckeren, Kathryn. "The Mardi Gras Indian Song Cycle: a Heroic Tradition." *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism*. Ed. Celeste Ray. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2003. 57-78. Print.
- Yongue, Virginia. "History and Traditions." *The Greater Southwest Louisiana Mardi Gras Association*. GSLMGA, n.d. Web. 31 Dec. 2014.

Copyright of Southern Quarterly is the property of University of Southern Mississippi and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.