

## **‘The Realm of Maiden Beauty’: Spectres of Slavery, Rebellion, and Creolization in the Landscape of Cable’s Louisiana**

### **Abstract**

Using a creative interdisciplinary method of enquiry, this article seeks to exorcize the spectres of revolutionary creolization embedded in George Washington Cable’s 1880 novel *The Grandissimes*. It probes, in particular, the secreted traces of the Creole diaspora triggered by the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, and attempts to peel back the manifold layers of ideological occlusion embedded in the (ostensibly white, Anglo-American) narrative frame of Cable’s omniscient narrator and his protagonist Joseph Frowenfeld, which suppress the connections between inter-American identities across diverse, revolutionary, creolistic worlds in Louisiana and the Gulf South. Unlike other studies examining traces of the Haitian Revolution in *The Grandissimes*, which tend to focus on the parallels between fictional and historical figures in Cable’s southern romance, this article dissects the subtle allusions to the revolution and the attendant diaspora found in the plantation infrastructures and the urban landscape of Cable’s Louisiana. In so doing, it demonstrates how Saint-Domingan migrants affirmed and reinvigorated the cultural landscape of the ‘Creole’ South and ‘circumvented’ the ideological spread of ‘Americanness’ at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, and during successive moments thereafter.

### **Keywords**

*Cable, Grandissimes, Saint-Domingue, Haitian Revolution, landscape, plantation, Creole, creolization*

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What took place in the Caribbean, which could only be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock [...], a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry.

— Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (1997)

Set in New Orleans at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes* narrates the fictional history of the extended Grandissime family, a noble 'Creole' family who can trace their lineage back to the earliest colonial settlers of Louisiana. It follows the journey of the immigrant Joseph Frowenfeld, a northern '*Américain*' of German-Protestant ancestry. The reader learns that Joseph has traveled South with his family, who invested in New Orleans hopes of a 'New Jerusalem'. What greets them on their arrival, however, is far removed from their utopian vision. Instead of a 'city upon a hill' they find '[a] land hung in mourning, darkened by gigantic cypresses, submerged; a land of reptiles, silence, shadow, and decay' (Cable 9). The climate and ecology of this foreign landscape are hostile and putrescent, and, shortly after their arrival, each member of the Frowenfeld clan succumbs to yellow fever—a disease that proves fatal to all but Joseph. Although he recovers from this affliction, his vulnerability is accentuated by Louisiana's native Creoles who are immune to such regional epidemics. Proving himself to be acutely susceptible to the hostilities of this new and forbidding environment, his alienism is compounded by his Protestant sensibilities, his firm commitment to the supposedly 'American' virtues of reason, justice, and self-improvement, and his scorn for the peculiarly 'Creole' vices of superstition, prejudice, pride, and conservatism. Early in the narrative, therefore, Cable establishes a clear dichotomy between a robust (and assuredly white) 'American' *virtù* and a southern, Creole degeneracy.

The space between these poles inevitably, however, creates room for slippage, and the reader is often invited to challenge Joseph's exceptionalism as he adapts to the Creole way of life. Redemptive American *virtù* thus acts as an ideological foil for the pervasive and continuing creolization that forms the kernel of the inter-American psyche. While Frowenfeld's 'mission' is given historical validation by the presence of real American emissaries such as William C. C. Claiborne, the republican governor who was tasked with the responsibility of uniting the disparate Creole and American factions within the Louisiana territory, this verisimilitude is undercut by the phantoms of America's own intersectional Creole history. These phantoms point to a resurgent, rebellious Creole heritage that challenges the white, exceptionalist narrative that personalities such as Claiborne sought to propagate. This rebellion is enacted most forcefully through acts of telling and retelling, which preserve the histories of the Grandissimes, the Fusiliers and the De Grapions, along with those of the rebel slave Bras-Coupé, the Vodou sorceress Palmyre, and the Indian Queen Lufki-Humma in collective memory. In this redemptive

odyssey of Americanization, history of the distant—and indeed more recent—Creole past is not so easily effaced.

Of course, as Cable well knew, the ‘rebellious’ threat of ‘Creole’ identity was magnified in the Purchase-era South by the spectre of the Haitian Revolution. In 1791, the French colony of Saint-Domingue bore witness to the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the colonial Americas, and resulted in 1804 in the formation of the first independent black republic, renamed ‘Haiti’ by its victors as a tribute to the name given to the island claimed as ‘Hispaniola’ by its Native Taino inhabitants (Dayan 3; Dubois 13). The conflict was protracted and convoluted, reflecting the complex and conflicting desires of a diverse Creole population. This population was subject to what Martin Munro has called an ‘apocalyptic’ creolization. Deconstructing the Creole contours of a Saint-Domingue whose cultural and political climate was ripe for revolution, Munro argues against the idea that Creole societies represented ‘a harmonious fusion of their constituent parts’, and instead posits that ‘Creole subjects and communities may be fatally riven by their contradiction’. The idea that creolization could present apocalyptic consequences for societies in the colonial Americas was borne out in the physical manifestation of revolution in Saint-Domingue. Cultural perceptions of Creole ‘degeneracy’ were infused by contemporary commentary on the pervasive culture of racial ‘mixing’ and *mésalliance* that existed in Saint-Domingan society, which manifested itself in print culture in the works of Alexandre Stanislas, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and Leonara Sansay, who all drew attention to the unremitting cultural assault mounted by free persons of colour in the colony. Probing the excesses depicted in these popular accounts, C. L. R. James noted that urban life in the colony ‘bore the imprint of a savagery which seemed inseparable from everything connected with San Domingo’ (25).

Of course, such cultural perceptions were also shaped by the border crossings, exchanges, and adaptations that defined Saint-Domingan Creole culture more generally, expressed in such cultural products as food, language, dress, commerce, architecture, music, dance, religion, and sociability. The hybrid, metamorphic, and uncontrollable Creole culture borne out in revolutionary Saint-Domingue therefore left an indelible mark on the American imaginary, and fused with emergent anxieties about the revolution, its Creole ‘roots’ and its potential to contaminate the ‘redemptive’ values of the emergent American republic, particularly in the ‘Creole’ South.

These anxieties were compounded by the diasporic ‘revolutions’ which occurred in the wake of the conflict, which were perhaps most forcefully felt in the Purchase-era New Orleans of Cable’s *The Grandissimes*. As a former French (and sometime Spanish) colony, the Louisiana of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was often regarded in the popular U.S. imaginary as having more in common with the diverse cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean than with the Anglo-Protestant culture of North America (Hunt 7). Early French settlers had established strong links between Louisiana (and New Orleans in particular) and Saint-Domingue, and these links were strengthened as Creole inhabitants migrated between the colonies for the purposes of business, trade, and colonial administration (Dubé 44-67; Vidal 126). The colonies also shared certain social and cultural affinities. Laura Foner, amongst others, has drawn attention to the parallels between the open practice of *mésalliance* within the colonies and their mixed racial demographics. These connections, affinities, and overlaps were inevitably etched in the minds of the many thousands of Saint-Domingan migrants who chose Louisiana as a site of refuge and permanent settlement in the wake of the Haitian Revolution.

The Saint-Domingan diaspora contributed to what Nathalie Dessens has termed a ‘re-creoliz[ation]’ of culture in Louisiana (167). This cultural resurgence was shaped by a diverse mix of ‘Creole’ migrants—including African and Afro-Creole slaves, plantation-owning whites, and a large number of free persons of colour who contributed to the doubling of New Orleans’s existing free-coloured population (Hunt 49). Redefining patterns of settlement, these groups contributed to the city’s urban growth, and created distinct ethnic sub-districts within the Faubourgs Trémé and Marigny (Campanella 705; Evans 27), which owed their development to the labour of free black tradesmen and the expansion of ‘shotgun’ style Creole cottages that had evolved from urban housing styles in Saint-Domingue (Hunt 51).

Combined with the existing Creole populace, they represented a redoubtable cultural force, pushing back (or rather ‘rising up’) against the sweeping tide of Americanization that occurred in the lower South after the Louisiana Purchase. The invincibility of their Creole identities was reinforced by the fact that they had shared the experience of diasporic removal. As Alfred Hunt notes, the migrants ‘were bound together in a strange land by their Creole culture and by the harrowing violence in St. Domingue’ (41). While the migrants harboured inter-cultural enmities borne of historic colonial prejudice, their cumulative saturation of Louisianian

culture occurred at a time when America was attempting to strengthen its literal and ideological borders, and thus threatened to counteract the nascent project of Americanization.

The migrants brought to Louisiana innovations such as opera, schools for people of colour, and freemasonry, but they also reaffirmed and refined existing Creole institutions, including print media (and thus, by extension, the French language), the Catholic faith, and the theatre (Ibid. 54). Louis Tabary, a refugee who, like many Saint-Domingan Creoles, suffered financial ruin after he fled the conflict-riven colony, turned his fortunes to theatrical management upon his arrival in New Orleans, and became the manager of the Théâtre Saint Philippe in 1807—the same theatre that Cable anachronously sites as the location for the Grandissimes's *bal masqué* in 1803 (69). He also initiated plans to build a separate 'salle de spectacle' which would eventually assume the form of the Théâtre d'Orleans. In a letter written to the mayor of New Orleans (another Saint-Domingan émigré named James Pitot) in 1805, Tabary made an appeal for funding and an official licence for the commencement of the project. In this letter, he expounded the benefits of the endeavour by speaking of it as an '*embellissement*' to the city.<sup>1</sup> That migrants saw their contributions as a form of 'embellishment' to the existing Creole culture is significant, and serves as an apt motif for the 're-creolization' to which the diaspora gave rise. While the theatre that was built would have numerous incarnations over the course of its history, its Saint-Domingan roots remain firmly entrenched, bound up with the historic and existing Creole landscape of New Orleans. A city plan drawn up in 1817 demonstrates the force of the connections between the city and its Saint-Domingan landmarks (Figure 1).

To this day, the physical landscape of New Orleans reflects the 'embellishments' of Saint-Domingan migrants, which are reflected in the distinct character of the Faubourgs and the historic houses built within their limits, the endurance of institutions such as Perseverance Lodge (see Figures 2 and 3), and the remains of the old Orleans Ballroom (designed as an extension to the Orleans Theatre by the Saint-Domingan émigré John Davis) which now form part of the Bourbon Orleans Hotel. Creolization was, in itself, a revolution, and this 'revolution' was continuous and irrepressible. It was, as Édouard Glissant might suggest, a process of 'diffraction', creating new layers while preserving the old (*Poetics of Relation* 34). The migrants

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<sup>1</sup> Tabary wrote: 'Comme magistrat immédiat de cette ville vous applaudirez sans doute à un projet qui peut contribuer à son embellissement et lui être utile sous tous les rapports.' (Translation: As magistrate of this city, I'm sure you will applaud a project which can contribute to its embellishment and be beneficial to it in every respect.)

left a deep impression which would live on long after they had died out, for which there is perhaps no better metaphor than the obtrusive tombs of New Orleans's much lauded cemeteries, where a number of the émigrés and their descendants have been laid to rest. The bodies buried beneath these tombs have long since decayed, but their tombs have largely held fast, and their names remain etched immortally in the stone (Figure 4).

As Thompson highlights, New Orleans is 'haunted' by '[m]emories of the Haitian Revolution and imitations of an irrepressible Haitian influence' (103-104). Phantoms of Creole revolution(s) thus recall the 'trauma' of Creole pasts and signal enduring anxieties about continuing creolizing 'diffractions'. These phantoms pervade the fictional history of Cable's New Orleans, and, in this way, highlight the fears of Redemption era Americans struggling, once again, to reconcile difficult histories. While scholars such as Barbara Ladd and Jerah Johnson have identified echoes of Saint-Domingue in Cable's Creole romance, especially in the mythical construction of the rebel slave Bras-Coupé, this article endeavours to penetrate the more subtle traces of 'revolutionary' creolization in Cable's text, which are located in the encrypted secrets of plantation infrastructures and the urban landscape. It is in these traces, I will seek to show, that the force of Saint-Domingan culture and its rich, complicated, and intersectional contours are most enduringly felt. This culture helped to reinforce the existing Creole infrastructures at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, immortalizing the historical roots of a continually creolizing nation, and thereby working to counteract, or rather 'circumvent', as Jay D. Edwards would argue ('Shotgun' 85), the waves of Americanization that swept across the nineteenth-century South, and continue to haunt the United States in the present.

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George Washington Cable was keen to emphasize the intersections of a rich, creolistic past as he mapped a geography of New Orleans and its outlying areas inhabited by the illustrious (if imagined) Creole families of *The Grandissimes*. As Stephanie Foote notes, 'this book is haunted by the many national histories that produced the territory of Louisiana' (99). His 'Greater' New Orleans encompasses a remembrance of—and persisting links to—the expansive region formerly

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Louis Tabary, 'directeur du spectacle de la Nouvelle Orleans a Monsieur le Maire, et mes-[ieurs] les aldermen ...', MSS 909., Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

inhabited by the Natchez and Chapitoulas Indians, along with the plantations lining the River Road at Fausse Rivière (False River) and Cannes Brulées (which, by the time Cable was writing, had become absorbed into the district of Kenner). The wilderness that is seen through the eyes of Cable's Joseph Frowenfeld as he enters New Orleans by way of the Mississippi is therefore an apt metaphor for Louisiana's cultural ambivalence and unruliness, entangled and embedded as it is with other Creole histories, geographies, and ecologies. Although the Frowenfelds are disappointed by the absence of 'high land' on their approach to New Orleans, they quickly learn that it is composed of multiple 'layers' when the riverboat pilot transporting them informs them that the city is 'higher than the swamp, but not higher than the river' (Cable 9). This evokes not only a sense of depth, but also a sense of sedimentation. This sedimentation is of course both literal and metaphorical in New Orleans. Connecting the ecology with the creative energies it has given rise to, the New Orleanian funk musician, George Porter Jr, describes it in the following terms:

You know, you've got solid, and then you've got solid, and then you got moisture. Then up under there, it's solid—you got the rock. But it's like a cushion. I believe it's a floating cushion that can allow the other things to happen (120).

As Cable attempted to demonstrate through his own exercise in literary mapping, the geological sediments of New Orleans echoed its Creole historicity. The manifold 'layers' formed by *The Grandissimes's* Creole communities thus represent a resilient foundation that is not so easily effaced by interloping *Américains*.

The concentrated dispersal of Saint-Domingan migrants across Francophone Louisiana would reaffirm the resilience of these Creole sediments, which threatened to undermine the nationalistic vision of 'enlightened' republicans such as Joseph. Louisiana bore witness to a steady stream of migrations from the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution in 1791, but, as Hunt notes, these migrations occurred in a succession of waves, several of which 'coincided with key events'—the first with the slave insurrection of 1791-92, the second with the conclusion of the revolution in 1803-1804, and, the third with Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1809, when around 10,000 Saint-Domingan refugees were ejected from the Spanish colony of Cuba and settled in New Orleans, virtually doubling the population of the city (38-43; Parham 62). Although the majority of migrants settled in the vicinity of the urban centre, others settled on the rural fringes,

or even further afield, dispersing themselves across the broader Creole plantation community, reinforcing the connections between the city, the plantation, the Mississippi Valley, and the wider Atlantic. William Scarborough's index of major slaveholders in the U.S. South, shows, for example, that Pierre M. Lapice, born in Saint-Domingue in 1798, owned a substantial plantation in Concordia Parish in 1850 (430). This reflects the dispersal of migrants whose interests centred around plantation capital across the Louisiana territory. With each new wave of migrants, Louisiana adapted to accommodate Creole interests, thus succumbing to a Creole counterrevolution *against* Americanization. Far from 'manifest', America's destiny was increasingly unsettled by a succession of Creole confrontations during this early Purchase period.

In Edwards's terms, the migrations effected by the Saint-Domingan diaspora were 'circumventional' ('Shotgun' 85). This circumvention features only spectrally within Cable's narrative, but its spectral presence has a corrosive effect on the republican idealism of Joseph Frowenfeld, reinforcing his inextricable link to the Creole world of the slaveholding Americas. In Joseph, Cable presents a character who remains naively assured of his own sense of right; he perceives himself, in other words, as the 'good American' who promises to 'redeem' the 'degenerate' Creole heart of New Orleans. Blinded by his own purported liberalism, Joseph fails to account for the revolutionary Creole circulations taking place in early nineteenth-century Louisiana to which he, and republican America at large, are indisputably connected. As a result, he locks the pervasive spectres of revolutionary creolization away in a psychic crypt, admonishing the Creoles that define the city's culture and heritage as harbingers of conservatism and degeneracy and establishing himself as a pillar of enlightened modernity. However, despite his moral devotion to the American *patrie*, his inevitable entanglement with 'other' Creole worlds demonstrates the impervious force of revolutionary Creole culture.

*The Grandissimes* dramatizes the nuanced and complex reality of Louisiana's 'Americanization' during the transitional Purchase period. Harnessing verisimilitude to his advantage, Cable places a number of stumbling blocks in Joseph's path, encrypting the connections between the national psyche and the Creole past, and demonstrating the circumventional force of the Saint-Domingan diaspora. His vision of Purchase-era New Orleans is pervaded, for example, by allusions to real Creole personalities, including a number of Saint-Domingan émigrés such as the Delachaises, the Lafittes, the Davezacs, and James Pitot (Cable 80). The name of Jean-Étienne De Boré is also singled out within this list of eminent Creoles for



being, as the reader learns in a parenthetical aside, ‘the father to all such as handle the sugar kettle’ (Ibid.). While operating outside of the émigré community, his shadowy presence is nevertheless significant for his deep connections with it. Indeed, in addition to being the first mayor of New Orleans, inaugurated at the beginning of the Purchase period, De Boré was also central to the pioneering transformation of the sugar industry in Louisiana (as Cable’s parenthetical aside about his being ‘father of the sugar kettle’ reminds us). However, his innovations were facilitated largely by Antoine Morin, a refugee from Saint-Domingue who De Boré employed to build sugar works on his failed indigo plantation. Morin was the mastermind behind the process of sugar granulation, and De Boré, in turn, was able to commercialize this success, transforming sugar into a viable export commodity in Louisiana (De Grummond 29-30). As a result of Morin’s innovations, an increasing number of planters in the region turned their fortunes to sugar production, to great success. This success was fuelled by the complete destruction of the plantation infrastructure wrought by revolution in Saint-Domingue, which, up until the first slave insurrections of 1791, had been the primary world exporter of sugar (Dubois 20). By centring the reader’s attention on De Boré’s connection to the sugar industry, the reader is therefore forced to confront his wider connection with the plantation economy of the lower South more generally, to the brutal, exploitative labour-intensive slaveocracy that supported it, and to the creolistic exchanges that made it possible.

However, while the narrative sub-textually encrypts this spectral link between Saint-Domingue and the Creole plantation revival that was in full force in Purchase-era Louisiana, the narrative surrounding Cable’s fictional Creole families antithetically presents Creole plantation society as a society in decline, negating the threat of Creole, and especially Saint-Domingan, ‘circumvention’. Perceived initially at one remove, through the tragicomic disguises they inhabit at the *bal masqué* and in the sensational and protracted narrative of Charlie Keene, the Grandissime family is shrouded in mysticism. Evoking a sense of nostalgia for a once resplendent Creole society, they are shown to be out of step with the modernizing and cosmopolitan city. The family name, which carries the memory of New Orleans’s Creole founding, is the only ‘asset’ with any remaining value—although the narrator is keen to assert that this, too, has been rendered ‘ubiquitous’ by the ‘compound’ fusions of ‘Brahmins, Mandarins and Fusiliers’ (80). While the magnanimous Honoré Grandissime (the legitimate, white younger brother of an *homme de couleur libre* of the same name) is represented as ‘the

flower of the family, and possibly the last one' (101), he is juxtaposed by distant relatives such as Raoul Innerarity, whose poor spoken English and gratuitous pride reflect the generational and interfamilial 'corruption' of the proud, noble, and 'pure' Grandissime line. Over the course of sixteen years, the reader learns, the 'greater' New Orleans that is occupied by the novel's noble Creole families is gradually reduced, and the plantation estates upon which their fortunes are built are laid to waste. The Nancanou estate at Fausse Rivière is lost in a duel to Agricola Fusilier; the paternal home of Aurore De Grapion-Nancanou at Cannes Brulées is liquidated to pay her father's debts (occasioned less by profligacy than by a stubborn commitment to an unprofitable crop); the plantation estate of Don José Martinez (ironically named 'La Renaissance') is brought to ruin by the scourge of infestation (which, according to Grandissime lore, was induced by a Vodou curse laid by the rebel slave Bras-Coupé); and the plantations of the Grandissimes are eventually sold off by Honoré to remunerate the Nancanous. The former inhabitants of these once grand estates are forced to retreat from the abundant and fertile environs of the Mississippi Valley to the city—the centre of mercantilism. The remnants of their Creole pride nevertheless preserve their legacy, which roots itself in a conservative salon culture that offers a forum for their collective discontent. However, this culture is characterized by dissipation and unruliness, which is brought to light in the scene at Maspero's coffee house in which the Creole Grandissimes give in to drunken excess (borne out in a violent confrontation with Joseph), which pathetically reinforces their loss of purpose within the shifting community. Unsympathetic and uncompromising, the reader is inevitably led to conclude that the 'great' and 'noble' houses connected to Louisiana's founding—and the plantation economy that undergirds them—are essentially doomed to die.

As the economy gives way to the kind of 'enlightened' commerce and urbanization endorsed by the likes of Joseph Frowenfeld and 'reformed' Creoles such as Honoré Grandissime, the redemptive force of Americanization appears, on the surface, to inhibit the circumventional waves of Creole revolution. The pharmacy that Joseph opens on the Rue Bienville grows so profitable that he expands into larger premises in the Rue Royale. Although Joseph arrives in New Orleans with nothing—a fact that is compounded by the loss of his family—he quickly establishes a small empire. Yet, beneath this façade of modernization lies the phantom of a persistent revolutionary creolization. The urban revolution in which Joseph participates was set in motion by Saint-Domingan migrants such as Joseph Pilié, the city surveyor who was

responsible for the subdivision of plantation land in New Orleans and the creation of the Faubourg Marigny (Toledano 21). The centrality of the migrants to this wave of modernization is subtly acknowledged in a conversation that the white Honoré has with his mortgager about the ‘development of a four-story brick building on the corner of Royale and St. Pierre’ (Cable 247). While these men are shown to doubt the feasibility of constructing such an edifice, they note that the project is endorsed by James Pitot, a Saint-Domingan migrant who, in actuality, came to play a prominent role in the public life of New Orleans as the third mayor of the post-Purchase city. In spite of the diminution of the Grandissime plantation empire, these subtle allusions to Creole innovators of Saint-Domingan origin betray a secreted narrative about a vast, interconnected Creole network that buttresses, rather than counteracts, Frowenfeld’s advancement.

Like the names of the Saint-Domingan luminaries that haunt the pages of Cable’s narrative, the wealth that Joseph accumulates harbours secrets, and its dubious origins point subtextually to a Creole network of exchange in which he too is implicated (if, perhaps, unwittingly). The narrator’s observation that Joseph appears to prosper ‘in a little city where wealth was daily pouring in’ appears to affirm this notion (Cable 140). The unspecified and ambiguous source of this ‘wealth’ invite speculation about its possible origins. By probing these origins, the reader is of course reminded of the ‘favorable wind and tide of fortune that the Cession had brought’ (247), which opened up the city to ‘*Américains*’ such as Joseph. At the same time, though, they are also reminded (through these subtle, yet repetitive narrative allusions) of the interventions being made by Creole migrants—such as Pitot—who were at this very moment ‘pouring in’ to the city. Though the Creole plantation and the families whose legacies depended upon it are gradually broken up and consolidated within the city, the wealth ‘pouring in’ to the newly-acquired territory was also a hallmark of the exchanges, migrations, and circulations at the foundation of a process of ‘re-creolization’. The circulations that occur in Frowenfeld’s New Orleans undoubtedly filter out to the rural fringes, whose growth, in turn, bolsters the growing city.

As a merchant, and as the principal heir to the Grandissime estate, the white Honoré Grandissime vacillates between two worlds, reinforcing the necessity for transaction and reciprocity between the new ‘enlightened’ republican economy, and the historic Creole infrastructure of the former colony (namely, plantation slavery). Committed to a vision that is expansive and inclusive, he indicates early in the narrative that Joseph will have to compromise

his ideals if he wishes to prosper, insisting that ‘[i]t is not to condemn that you want; you want to *suc-ceed*’ (38). Certainly, Joseph does prosper, and prospers quickly. Although he continues to represent himself as a paragon of progress and exemplarity, his ‘fortune’ is generated off the back of unspecified Creole circulations occurring inside (and, most likely, outside) of the city. Like the real William Claiborne, who struggled to mediate the circumventational force of Creole culture in the wake of the diaspora, Frowenfeld embodies the complex nature of this transactional period, during which republican ideals often gave way to the motions of continuing, resurgent creolization.

This fact was made apparent in a letter that William Claiborne wrote to James Madison in 1804. In this letter, Claiborne attempts to defend his actions as governor of the new territory in the wake of certain criticisms levelled against him, taking pains to assure Madison that he has done all he can ‘[t]o conciliate public opinion and to promote harmony’ in Louisiana, stressing that ‘the seeds of discontent were Sown’ before his arrival (Claiborne 43). Claiborne’s letter refers to the contemporary controversy surrounding the importation of Saint-Domingan slaves by refugee migrants. The recent acquisition of the Louisiana territory had stimulated an unprecedented need for slave labour that many Louisianians believed could be satisfied by the ‘flood of humanity making its way to New Orleans’ via Saint-Domingue (Clark 42). This was seemingly at odds, however, with the larger republican sentiment, governed by changing tides on the issue of slavery (a number of states in the Union were moving towards gradual emancipation) and growing concerns about the threat of slave insurrection spreading throughout the southern states, especially after the Pointe Coupée uprising in Louisiana in 1795 and the Gabriel Prosser Conspiracy in Virginia in 1800. Anxieties about the expansion of the slave population were thus evidently at the forefront of Claiborne’s mind as he attempted to mandate migratory controls over Saint-Domingans and their slaves. Louisiana ‘locals’ were, it seems, piqued by this affront, and were quick to jump to the defence of their Creole comrades. As a result, Claiborne was forced to concede his attempts at regulation. As he made forcefully clear in a letter that he wrote ten days later, his agents were ill-equipped for dealing with such a powerful display of resistance from the combined Creole community. He notes that

Had an administration rigid, coercive and unjust been introduced into the Ceded Territory, under the authority of the United States, I am persuaded there would have been less murmuring, and a delusive appearance of Popular approbation: But under a mild and

just Government, which admits of freedom of Speech, and of opinion, the man indeed, must be little acquainted with human nature, who would expect to find in Louisiana union in expression and Sentiment (53).

Evidently exasperated with Louisiana's Creole residents, Claiborne embodies the impotence of the republican campaign to promote a cohesive 'American' community in the face of an unruly and circumventional Creole coalition. His suggestion that the Creoles might be more receptive to a coercive and totalitarian government (one that is neither 'mild', 'just', nor amenable to 'freedom of speech') reinforces the Creole connection to a perceived 'Old World' degeneracy. By concluding his letter with the assertion that his 'conduct throughout, has been directed by the purest motives of Honest Patriotism', he harnesses emotive republican rhetoric to reinforce his commitment to the American *patrie*. Yet despite this display of rhetorical certitude, his acquiescence to the demands of the Creole community reinforces his weakness within the territorial nexus of power. Conversely, the voice of the Creole community is preserved intact, and indeed amplified by the force of migrant numbers. Infusing Louisiana with both an advanced model of plantation society and the labour force and technology to recreate it, Saint-Domingan migrants reaffirmed the existing infrastructures of Creole society. And as Louisiana's governing authorities made an increasing number of concessions to conciliate the migrants, the social and political landscape of Louisiana became increasingly welded to the aspirations of that society. Far from in decline, the Creole plantation was very much at the vanguard of southern expansion in the post-Purchase United States.

The tension between the exceptionalist republican ideal and the administrative reality in post-Purchase Louisiana is echoed in Joseph's flawed reformist vision. After telling Joseph the tragic story of Bras-Coupé, the rebel slave brutalized and maimed by his masters for his act of rebellion, Honoré Grandissime upbraids him with the remark 'you are a great man for causes, Mr. Frowenfeld; but me, I am for results, ha, ha! You may ponder the philosophy of Bras-Coupé in your study, but *I* have got to get rid of his results, me' (198). While Joseph exhibits empathy for the plight of this tragic hero, and condemns the cruelty he was shown by his Creole masters, he is nevertheless shown to be a dreamer who offers more shadow than substance. Moreover, he fails to live by example and, despite his best efforts to 'improve' his Creole neighbours and incite the free black community to action (via Honoré Grandissime f.m.c.), his words merely paper

over the cracks of this contradiction. This is magnified by the incisive critique offered by the omniscient narrator, who observes that

Inexperience is apt to think that Truth will be knocked down and murdered unless she comes to the rescue. Somehow, Frowenfeld's really excellent arguments seemed to give out more heat than light. They were merciless; their principles were not only lofty to dizziness but precipitous, and their heights unoccupied, and—to the common sight—unattainable. In consequence, they provoked hostility and even resentment (46-47).

Joseph's efforts to 'enlighten' his compatriots are thus nothing short of a metaphorical whitewash; in other words, he attempts to supplant one form of hypocrisy with another. This idea is foregrounded in Honoré's initial impression of Joseph. Indeed, after their first encounter, Honoré remarks to himself '[h]e will make his mark', but qualifies this with the rejoinder 'it will probably be a white one' (35). Though Honoré is himself white, a fact that the omniscient narrator takes great pains to underscore, Joseph's 'whiteness' is prefigured here as distinct—at least ideologically—from his own Creole identity. The 'white mark' that Honoré anticipates Joseph will make is thus configured as a signifier for the sweeping tide of Americanization that he embodies. Ever sagacious, Honoré ironically holds up to scrutiny the fallibility of the Anglo-American endeavour.

Joseph's ideological objection to Creole plantation society also echoes the physical whitewash to which Creole plantation structures along the Louisiana River Road were subjected in the century after the purchase. From a design perspective, Creole plantation houses typical of the Louisiana River Road region presented a glaring contrast to the all-white neoclassical plantation styles that were becoming increasingly popular throughout the slaveholding United States. Stylistically, Creole plantation houses commonly incorporated bright colours such as ochre, red, and green—a fact brought evocatively to life in the description of the Aubigny plantation in Kate Chopin's 'Desiree's Baby' (220) and in the restoration of Laura Plantation, historic home of the Creole Duparc family (Figure 5). Creole plantation houses were also built predominantly from cypress wood (which was hardy and resistant to rot). These houses were supported by a raised platform that was undergirded by a brick foundation that went deep into the earth (Edwards, 'Origins' 158). Their design and construction reflected a deep understanding of the challenges posed by the natural environment of the Mississippi Valley region—

characterized by a tropical climate that often brought floods and an unruly river that could effect soil erosion and subsidence. This prospect is realized in the gothic climax to Cable's short story 'Belles Demoiselles Plantation' when the ancestral home of the De Charleus family dramatically sinks into the 'merciless, unfathomable flood of the Mississippi' (64). Echoing structural forms found in West Africa and elsewhere in the Francophone Caribbean (especially Saint-Domingue), Creole plantation structures also reflected the accumulations of knowledge acquired through intra-cultural exchange within Creole communities, and especially with members of the slave community (Edwards, 'Creole Architecture' 267). However, as an increasing number of Anglo-Americans moved into the region after the purchase, the edifices were adapted to more closely resemble favoured 'republican' architectural styles. Exteriors were painted white and sometimes subjected to a complete structural overhaul. More often than not, though, these structures would always maintain the skeletons of their Creole ancestry. The twin River Road plantation houses of Whitney (Figure 6) and Evergreen (Figure 7) thought to have been built between the 1780s and 1790s by Christophe and Jean Jacques Haydel (Wilson 399), were both subjected to this architectural process of 'Americanization', the latter to a more considerable degree. Although both houses were painted in the uniform 'republican' white, the exterior form of Evergreen was completely remodelled in the neoclassical taste. The Whitney house nevertheless retained its exterior form and both houses were, in the main, preserved with their classic Creole interiors—a fact that was revealed by restoration work undertaken at the various River Road plantations during the 1980s by the River Road Area Historical and Genealogical Society (Marmillon). While the Greek revival style advocated by Thomas Jefferson and made popular by Benjamin Latrobe eventually filtered through to Louisiana, the Creole plantation structure remained largely unaltered throughout much of the nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding the *cosmetic* preservation of the Creole plantation house, it remains indisputable that the exploitative model of labour that undergirded the Creole plantation economy was strengthened as slavery expanded throughout the lower Mississippi Valley in the nineteenth-century United States. While these houses are making efforts to confront their difficult histories, and offer some form of restitution by way of acknowledgement, the lines between past and present are still occasionally blurred. To this day, for example, Laura Plantation farms sugarcane, and the descendants of the former slaves originally employed to carry out this gruelling labour only left the estate in the 1970s (Marmillon). Unlike in revolutionary Saint-

Domingue, where the ruling elites were forced to forsake their gruesome brand of Creole slavery by slave rebels in 1794, the expanding American republic yielded increasingly to the economies of the Creole past, unable to make the complete ideological break with ‘Old World’ cultural values. Attempts at architectural overhaul thus reflected more of a cosmetic ‘renovation’ of Creole culture, which sought to create the illusion of exceptionalism while preserving its ultimate utilitarian and exploitative function. Although republican *Américains* had muted the colourful excesses of the Creole plantation, they were unable to exorcize the ghosts enclosed within, because they remained fundamentally wedded to a violent slaveholding Americas and to an undeniably Creole past of their own. Cable’s Joseph is seen to present a similar contradiction, as his republican ideals are gradually eroded by the embeddedness of the prevailing Creole infrastructure, giving way to a more pragmatic (if less altruistic and empathic) lived reality. As the archive demonstrates, the process of Americanization was fraught with contradiction, which, despite the gloss of exceptionalism, is accentuated by the secreted narratives of rebellious phantoms at America’s Creole core.

During his initial encounter with Joseph, Honoré calls attention to the conservatism of Creole culture, but also insinuates that Joseph is likely to succumb to this way of life. Recalling other idealists that have preceded Joseph, Honoré observes that ‘[t]hey hold out a little while—a very little; then they open their stores on Sunday, they import cargoes of Africans, they bribe the officials, they smuggle goods, they have colored housekeepers. My-de’seh, the water must expect to take the shape of the bucket; eh?’ (Cable 37). Despite Joseph’s emphatic retort that ‘[o]ne need not be water’, he gradually moulds his lifestyle around existing (and evolving) Creole infrastructures, taking up residence in the Rue Royale and entering into a business partnership (that leads to a ‘perpetual copartnership’) with Clotilde Nancanou, fulfilling Honoré’s initial prophecy that, like ‘all who come’ he is destined to become ‘acclimated’ (334). While the immortality of Creole culture is held up to scorn, the prevailing legacies of Creole culture continue to haunt, and thereby challenge, the exceptional ideas of republican ‘progress’. By the end of the novel, the dying pledges of Agricola Fusilier—the cantankerous Grandissime patriarch and relic of Creole conservatism—have effected the reconciliation of the community and safeguarded the future of the Creole endeavour. While Joseph has been forced to bury the bodies of his German Protestant family in unmarked graves outside the city’s limits, Agricola is consigned to his tomb in the Grandissime family crypt with the words ‘Louisiana forever’ (328).



His death and burial thus become a fitting emblem to the ineradicable legacies of the Creole past and to the enduring promise of a continuously revolutionary Creole circumvention that is amplified by other Creole worlds in the Americas.

For Cable's contemporaries, *The Grandissimes* presented a mystical vision of Creole life in an exotic and unfamiliar 'South' that extended beyond the parochial bounds of what Glissant called "the South," with a capital "S" (Faulkner 30). While it endeavors to challenge the exceptionalism of U.S. American identity, it also attempts to reconcile differences between disparate Creole communities and the expanding U.S. American population in the newly acquired Louisiana territory. This fictional reconciliation was in part a reflection of Cable's own moral crusade to unite the fractured communities that would become yet more fractured still in the Redemption era South. Indeed, at a lecture that he gave at the University of Mississippi in 1882, he challenged the idea of the 'New South' in literary culture by advancing his commitment to what he called the 'No South'. His own vision of Louisiana in the wake of the Civil War thus strove to erase the imaginary borders created by divisive, alternate, and displaced communities. However, Cable's optimistic vision for a harmonious cultural assimilation is undercut by the haunting traces of a (sometimes violent) collision. It is, in its own way, a 'whitewash' that mutes the subversive and 'apocalyptic' process of creolization (and re-creolization) that characterized the Louisiana of the early Purchase period, when the convulsive and circumventive force of a Creole diaspora sparked by revolution in Saint-Domingue made itself most forcefully felt. The phantoms of Creole circumvention in Cable's *The Grandissimes* point to the underlying force of revolutionary Creole connections and their spectral presence within the fissures of national America, upon which ideas of identity were successively constructed and *reconstructed* throughout the nineteenth century. While these connections would be ideologically contested by an increasingly fortified exceptionalism that denied the Creole historicity of inter-American identities, the indelibility of Louisiana's Creole landscape offers a firm foundation for continuous circumvention, forging an eternal link between Creole past, present, and future.

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