

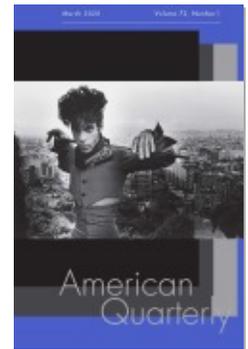


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Memory, History, and Anxiety

John K. Bardes

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The Notorious Bras Coupé: A Slave Rebellion Replayed in Memory, History, and Anxiety

John K. Bardes

Bras Coupé is one of the most influential, yet most understudied, American folk characters. In around 1834, a one-armed enslaved man named Squire escaped into New Orleans's outlying swamps, captivating the city's attention by repeatedly eluding recapture. Rumor had it that he led a large band of fugitive slaves and had murdered countless whites. Locals nicknamed him Bras Coupé, French for severed arm.

Following Squire's 1837 murder, slaves and enslavers circulated dynamic accounts of this disfigured man, murderous and magical, haunting a marshy lair. By the late nineteenth century, Squire's legendary counterpart had leapt from contested memory into literature, and renowned novelists, including George Washington Cable, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Neil Gaiman, incorporated the character into their work. Bras Coupé's career has been astonishingly diverse. He has appeared in abolitionist treatises, tourist guidebooks, and even an opera.¹ Yet Bras Coupé's appearances are striking less for their diversity than for their subtle consistencies.

For close to two centuries, artists, abolitionists, and storytellers have used the character to engage, recalibrate, and perpetuate American anxieties of black empowerment, masculinity, and rebellion. Bras Coupé is an evolving symbolic system that has transmitted the public memory of slave revolt, and that memory's complex acculturative meanings, to new generations of black and white Americans. Consistently, Bras Coupé's invocations have corresponded to national events—mounting opposition to slavery in the 1830s, the Reconstruction era, the civil rights movement, the rise of Black Power—that triggered renewed debates and anxieties over the meaning of black autonomy and resistance. By analyzing Bras Coupé's appearances in written descriptions of oral narratives, abolitionist essays, novels, poems, and film, this essay considers how storytellers have reconfigured this dense vehicle of racial meanings toward competing claims to power.²

Bras Coupé remains eerily relevant in the twenty-first century. As the world wonders why contemporary American culture often seems preternaturally perturbed by resistant black masculinity, as Black Lives Matter revives older debates over the historical and psychological subtexts undergirding conflicts between armed police officers and (often unarmed) African Americans, and as #SayHerName questions the invisibility of black women in media coverage of racialized violence, we would do well to note Bras Coupé, and other enduring symbolic systems, that encode and update the values and anxieties that make up the cultural construction of race and transfer it from generation to generation. White supremacy is a system of law. It is also a way of seeing. Unpack Bras Coupé, and one unpacks key strategies of white supremacy's cultural maintenance.

After reconstructing Squire's flight and death as historical events, this essay explores Bras Coupé's representations within three traditions: the oral narratives of nineteenth-century enslaved Louisianans, the oral narratives of nineteenth-century white Louisianans, and the artistic representations of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century antiracist novelists, composers, and filmmakers. Following Squire's death, the enslaved of New Orleans incorporated Bras Coupé into an oral tradition and religious system, informed by both local and Haitian materials, which packed his story with subtle political and nationalist meanings. Concurrently, white storytellers demonized Bras Coupé as black rage unleashed, a bogeyman used to scare recalcitrant children, thus perpetuating anxieties of slave resistance. Later, white artists of the Southern gothic tradition—beginning with Cable, the celebrated novelist and collector of black folklore, whose widely popular 1880 novel *The Granddissimes* included "The Story of Bras-Coupé"—transformed Bras Coupé into a tragic figure, simultaneously sympathetic and grotesque, a conflicted template for both antiracist thought and their own anxieties of racial upheaval.

Bras Coupé reveals how representations of maroonage—the act of a fugitive enslaved person living autonomously, often by hiding in swamps, mountains, or other marginal land—provided enslaved and free peoples in nineteenth-century America with a rare discursive space for considering the taboo topic of black self-determination. For enslaved people, maroonage offered one of the few potent and immediately tangible representations of black freedom.³ For enslavers, the maroon settlement represented an oppositional black chaos on which their own ideas of white civilization and racial order often relied.⁴ In portraying Bras Coupé's swampy domain, both white and black Louisianans thus constructed, in microcosm, visions of the liberated black kingdom.

The legitimacy of black resistance, the meaning of white civilization, and the maintenance of white supremacy were at stake in these representations.

Bras Coupé's nineteenth-century circulation in the religious and oral traditions of enslaved communities warns scholars against underreading the intellectual history of resistance and separatism—often codified in reconfigured memories of maroons—in Black Atlantic vernacular thought. Representations have tended to render Bras Coupé an amusing attraction, emblematic of New Orleans's entertainingly eccentric blackness. Yet for much of the nineteenth century Bras Coupé was not a folktale, emerging from a place historically rendered charming, but a valued figure in a resistant black vernacular tradition that repeatedly reconfigured the memories of historic maroons into dynamic touchstones of defiance, power, and autonomy.⁵

Bras Coupé further illuminates the ways that representations of black masculinity have served to legitimate, and sometimes to contest, rationalizations of racial domination. His figure has provided both white supremacist politics and black oppositional politics—seemingly incompatible intellectual traditions—with a vehicle for projecting competing visions of black manhood. Yet regardless of where on the political spectrum portrayals of Bras Coupé fall, iterations have consistently equated black masculine power with black political power, and suggested that the maroon's manhood encodes the essence of black political action. This gendering of resistance as masculine can be used to counter representations of black effete-ness, traditionally used to affirm black dependency. Yet by collapsing manhood and resistance, portrayals of Bras Coupé have tended to sustain the reduction of black masculinity to two essentialist antipodes—effete submission versus unhinged (but masculine) independence.⁶ This gendering of resistance has also tended to rationalize violent suppression, by caricaturing black political action as ferociously violent. It further excludes black women from political action, even in ridiculed form. Conspicuously, depictions of Bras Coupé that agree on little else do agree that Bras Coupé's reaction to the sexual victimization of black women helps define his archetypal black manliness. Black women appear as muted dependents, employed only insofar as their sexual exploitation affirms or discredits Bras Coupé's black masculine rule.⁷

Portrayals of Bras Coupé have often reproduced familiar stereotypes of black men as revengeful, crazed, bloodthirsty brutes—yet Bras Coupé cannot be altogether dismissed as merely a racist caricature. Even as white storytellers have invoked Bras Coupé's savage masculinity to delegitimize black resistance, black storytellers have repeatedly reconfigured the rebel's ferocious strength

into an affirmation of black self-determination and heroic resistance.⁸ Unpack the genealogy of any *Bras Coupé* text, and one finds evidence of both traditions—elucidating the ways that struggles between white hegemony and black oppositional politics have shaped contemporary constructions of black masculinity, and reminding us that power and resistance are always mutually constitutive.⁹

The Search for Squire

In 1834 an enslaved man named Squire ran away. William Debuys, a prominent sugar planter and state legislator, claimed Squire as property. Nothing else about the maroon survives: his name was fairly common among local enslaved peoples, while his age, birthplace, family, and motivations are all lost.¹⁰

Squire fled for the massive swamps north of city limits, settling along Bayou Cochon, an extinct waterway meandering through the city's undeveloped backcountry.¹¹ A contemporary map labels this region the "Reed Jungle": desolate, foreign, threatening, inhospitable.¹² For local whites, the "impure" and "noxious" swamp was the land of chaos and comingling racial inferiors, home to mischievous Indians, slaves performing barbaric religious rituals, and, on occasion, terrifying maroon communities.¹³

For the enslaved, few actions more meaningfully affirmed one's own humanity than running away. For slaveholders, little was more critical to slavery's maintenance than the policing of those who ran away.¹⁴ Indeed, New Orleans's first police force had been founded in 1805 in direct response to a perceived spike in runaway rates. As the city council recognized during that crisis, maroons raised profound economic, ideological, and criminal anxieties. They survived by "robbing and plundering," spreading "disorders," and sowing social upheaval. They often attacked enslavers, sometimes (it was rumored) with the tacit support of indigenous Americans and neighboring poor whites—a terrifying breakdown of social order that hinted at the possibility of broader transracial resistance.¹⁵ Throughout plantation societies, the maroon encampment represented a frighteningly disorderly alternative to planter patriarchy—a possible source of inspiration for slaves held still in bondage, and a symbol illustrating the possibility of black autonomy.

In January 1836 a civilian patrol exchanged gunfire with Squire, grievously injuring him. Taken to the Third Municipality slave prison, Squire's injured arm grew infected, necessitating its amputation. Presuming that the hospitalized fugitive would die, police left him unguarded. Remarkably, Squire fled the hospital, returning to the swamps.¹⁶

White fishermen, loggers, and hunters began reporting startling run-ins with an alarming, one-armed maroon. He would appear suddenly, like an “apparition.” Perhaps he was unusually large or strong, as later accounts affirmed. Witnesses began calling him “Bras Coupé,” French for severed arm.¹⁷

Since Nat Turner’s rebellion, New Orleans’s newspapers had colluded to suppress coverage of slave resistance, for fear of inspiring copycat crimes.¹⁸ Yet in 1836 Squire so thoroughly captivated public attention that this gentlemen’s agreement unraveled.¹⁹ In April, the Third Municipality Council proposed a bounty for the capture of “diabolical” Squire, an accomplice identified as James, and any other “maroon negroes” found in the swamps.²⁰ In May, the *Louisiana Advertiser* acknowledged that a maroon band had raided an outlying residence, injuring a “negro girl” and exchanging gunfire with nearby canal diggers.²¹ When in June a white fisherman at Bayou Cochon shot dead a slave named Jim, another outlet assumed that Squire’s local presence had inspired insolence in the slave.²² When later that month authorities plucked the mangled corpses of three loggers from Bayou Cochon—each the victim of deep stab wounds, with metal weights tied around their torsos—gossip indicted Squire and his presumed band.²³ In intentionally vague terms, the press began cautioning “white men” against entering the swamp, for fear of “dangerous . . . negroes.”²⁴

A year later, numerous local and national newspapers would casually assert that Squire had killed, raped, and pillaged with abandon. Reporters hypothesized that he led a large posse. He had slaughtered countless victims, attested one newspaper; another alleged that he had captured an anonymous white woman, torturing her chained body for several days. The papers called him “notorious,” the “Brigand of the Swamp,” a “Demi-devil,” “a terror to the community,” “a fiend in human shape,” leading “a nest of desperados.”²⁵

Whether Squire committed these depredations is unrecoverable—although the three loggers’ corpses, and a hunter’s discovery of skeletal remains in 1841, indicate that *someone* was committing murder along Bayou Cochon. Despite accusations that Squire led a large band, only one specific accomplice, James, was ever named. Despite apocryphal tales of rapes, murders, and kidnappings, only the “negro girl,” injured while protecting her mistresses’ belongings from foragers, was unambiguously linked to maroons. “Diabolical” Squire may well have been more of a peaceable nuisance than a mass murderer, more interested in hiding, surviving, and foraging than in leading genocidal revolt. Squire also became “well known to the negroes of the city”—one imagines that they interpreted his criminal reputation more critically.²⁶

This transformation of two swamp runaways into a band of murderous insurrectionists reflected the decade’s deep anxieties and transformations.

Opposition to slavery was on the rise. In March 1830 David Walker's *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* reached New Orleans, with its fiery denunciations of whites as "our natural enemies" sparking widespread panic and crackdown.²⁷ In addition to Turner's revolt, 1831 marked the release of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, and with it the emergence of a national abolitionist movement. The decade was also a period of explosive economic growth and demographic change in the Deep South, as the cotton boom and the annexation of American Indian lands ignited a fury of migrants and capital into the region. By 1835, relations between New Orleans's new Anglophone, old Francophone, and foreign-born residents were so strained that the city was formally divided into three distinct self-governing municipalities.²⁸ In early 1837, anxieties were particularly pronounced in the Deep South's largest city, as collapsing cotton prices and early portents of the fiscal Panic of 1837 prompted widespread unease, perceptions of moral collapse, and a rash of suicides.²⁹ Waves of slave revolt hysteria often swept the state and the South during such periods of heightened anxiety—as one Louisiana planter reminisced, "I have known times here, when there was not a single planter who had a calm night's rest; they then never lay down to sleep without a brace of loaded pistols at their sides."³⁰

Yet Squire's similarities to the revolutionary maroons of pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue, whose coordinated 1791 revolt had triggered that colony's civil war, doubtless elicited particularly potent anxieties by conjuring painfully raw memories among New Orleans's large Saint-Domingue émigré community. As many as twenty thousand white and black refugees had fled Saint-Domingue for Louisiana a generation earlier, more than doubling New Orleans's population. Memories of the island's revolution and its powerful self-emancipated leaders were deeply woven into local society.³¹ The noted pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk, grandson of a refugee, recalled the "grievous recollections" and "somber memories" forever associated with the lost homeland: "our dwellings burned, our properties devastated, our fortunes annihilated"; the massacre of his great-uncles and the "most horrible outrages" committed upon his female relatives.³² Squire would have conjured recollections of these maroon rebels, who had also hidden in swamps, terrorized the white community, defied capture for years, and—in the case of the infamous pre-revolutionary maroon leader François Makandal, whose memory haunted white Saint-Domingue for decades and whose return the latter Saint-Domingue revolutionaries prophesized—iconically lacked one hand.³³

In April 1837, two hunters reported that they had shot and killed Squire, but had been unable to find his corpse.³⁴ Some doubted the pair's story. Then

in July, a fisherman, Francisco Garcia, stumbled into the city and reported that he had just beaten an injured Squire to death. Garcia claimed that Squire had emerged from the woods suddenly and attacked, but that Garcia had counteracted with a blunt instrument until the stranger's "brains were literally beat out."³⁵ Some whispered that the two were old friends, and that Garcia had betrayed Squire as he recuperated in the Spaniard's hut.³⁶ Authorities recovered Squire's corpse, noting partially healed bullet wounds and shattered skull. For the second time in three months, newspapers across the country reported Squire's death.³⁷ Garcia received Squire's bounty.³⁸ Police detachments scoured the swamps for the remnants of Squire's band, but found only one additional runaway.³⁹

On July 18, 1837, city authorities forced a reported two thousand to three thousand slaves to view Squire's corpse, in Jackson Square, "for the sake of example" and in the hope that "it would have a salutary effect [upon the slaves] to let them gaze upon the outlaw and murderer as he lay bleeding and weltering in his gore." A *Picayune* reporter testified that the spectacle had profound effect on the enslaved spectators, who visibly "shuddered."⁴⁰ The claim, perhaps invented by the reporter, is enigmatic. Perhaps they "shuddered" to publicly dramatize their disapproval of Squire's actions and symbolically enact their loyalty to the white power structure (a safe reaction to a black rebel, at a moment of heightened white anxiety).⁴¹ More likely, these slaves "shuddered" because they were forced to witness the mangled corpse of one of their own.

This ceremony—perhaps the final slave corpse publicly displayed in Jackson Square—left deep impressions. Rumors and speculation swirled. One childhood witness later remembered the atmosphere of "excitement": in "workshops, markets, and even among families was the subject discussed. A stranger to our city and customs, judging from the general commotion, would have believed that some extraordinary event had just occurred."⁴² By the 1850s, the event had so metamorphosed into folklore that when the visiting French essayist Armand Garreau recorded the story of Bras Coupé, he was unaware of its factual origins.⁴³ In the 1870s, when Cable began recording local folktales, he encountered several distinctive accounts, including versions shared among white and black residents that bore little resemblance to one another.

Resistance as Leadership: Bras Coupé in African American Oral History

Fragmentary evidence strongly indicates that Louisiana enslaved people incorporated Bras Coupé into a broader black Caribbean tradition, within which

memories of historic maroons were reworked into focused affirmations of black self-determination. Analyses of slave oral history have traditionally hinged on debates over the existence of politically rebellious meanings and whether such political symbolism fostered and incubated a revolutionary or nationalistic consciousness. Famously, Eugene Genovese rejected the revolutionary slave folk hero as an anachronistic invention of twentieth-century revisionism—American slaves, he asserted, could not “act like political men.”⁴⁴ Studies of Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, and the Stono Rebellion have found evidence of laudatory oral histories within local enslaved populations, but scant source material has prohibited analysis of these narratives’ contents, political or otherwise.⁴⁵ Studies of the oral traditions among the living descendants of maroon communities in Jamaica and Suriname have concluded that memories of maroons today serve a variety of political functions—though in most cases scholars can only speculate, and cautiously project backward, as to what these maroons meant to pre-emancipation enslaved communities.⁴⁶

Yet Louisiana enslaved people sowed explicit revolutionary and nationalistic meanings into their Bras Coupé oral histories. They rearranged the events of Squire’s life while inserting political themes—empowerment, heroism, leadership, and opposition to state power—thus creating in Bras Coupé a vehicle not for fostering fears of black criminality but for celebrating black autonomy. None of these enslaved storytellers recorded these narratives, but the existence of politically charged Bras Coupé narratives is revealed by consistent white criticisms about the ways that enslaved peoples and later freedpeople told Bras Coupé’s story *incorrectly*. These accusations offer fragmentary, but tantalizing, windows into the features of the nineteenth-century Bras Coupé oral narrative, as circulated among black audiences.⁴⁷

White storytellers accused slaves of slanderously misrepresenting Bras Coupé as a heroic “Robin Hood of the swamp” figure, rather “than a natural criminal.”⁴⁸ Whites noted that enslaved storytellers erroneously ascribed empowering motivations—“pride” or the urge to “resist,” rather than innate savagery and criminality—to Bras Coupé’s maroonage.⁴⁹ Cable recalled one black custodian who “spoke often of Bras-Coupé,” always insisting that the “real” maroon had been an African-born chief, captured into slavery and brought to New Orleans, who defiantly maintained “his tribal pride” and identity. This storyteller also insisted that Bras Coupé had amputated his own arm, voluntary relinquishing the limb as an act of defiance, a modification that diminished white control over Bras Coupé’s body while emphasizing the maroon’s courage and willpower.⁵⁰ Enslaved storytellers also transformed Bras Coupé’s death scene, from a private

betrayal in the secluded swamps to a state execution in the French Quarter—an inherently political shift from private to public sphere.⁵¹

For enslaved storytellers, the attribution of magical, potion-making powers to Bras Coupé would have conveyed particularly deep political import. Gottschalk noted that slaves told that the maroon rubbed “certain herbs” on his skin, rendering himself “invulnerable” to bullets. Gottschalk’s black nursemaid considered Bras Coupé so sacred that she sometimes “interrupted the narrative . . . to exorcise a ‘zombi’” conjured by the story’s invocation.⁵² By weaving Bras Coupé into Louisiana Voodoo, enslaved storytellers incorporated the maroon into a religious system with a deep history of providing the enslaved with vital psychological liberation, collective consciousness, and opportunity for autonomous cultural activity.⁵³ In particular the production of potions that grant invulnerability to bullets is a recurrent motif within several slave oral traditions regarding revolutionary Haitian and Caribbean maroons. Among those versed in the oral traditions of Saint-Domingue slaves and their descendants, Bras Coupé’s potion-generated imperviousness would have referenced not only black cultural autonomy but more specifically the particular religious strategies employed by historic maroons engaged in revolutionary guerrilla warfare.⁵⁴

These transformations of laziness into leadership, villainy into heroism, dismemberment into self-amputation, madness into religious power, private betrayal into state execution, thug into king, suggest clear patterns. Slaves, in coded form, represented the story as a leader’s assertion of political autonomy—a reorientation that would have maintained a degree of political consciousness, counteracted white portrayals of innate black dependency, and resisted pressures for self-loathing and dehumanization.

That many of these narrative reconfigurations bear striking similarity to older maroon narratives, circulated in Saint-Domingue and Jamaica, suggest that the enslaved of New Orleans incorporated Bras Coupé into preexisting black Caribbean oral narratives. Folklore documented in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue represented historic maroon leaders such as Dutty Boukman, Jean-François Papillon, Georges Biassou, and Jeannot Bullet as larger-than-life supermen with magical powers, swamp hideaways, mythic attributes, and fearsome brutality. Louisiana narratives seem in particular to build atop the story of François Makandal, the most infamous and popular maroon figure among Saint-Domingue slaves, said to be a one-handed, African-born Voodoo priest, engaged in guerrilla warfare and intent on murdering all the islands’ whites, feared and renowned for his use of poisons and his magical resurrection after

his 1758 execution by French authorities in Cap-Français's public square. That a generation following the arrival of free and enslaved Saint-Domingue émigrés, New Orleans slaves also believed their maroon icon to be African-born, expert in potions, heroic, invulnerable to bullets, and politically radical suggests that Bras Coupé surrogated for the potent memory of these rebel leaders—and, perhaps, Makandal in particular. Parallels such as the missing arm, the resurrection after the reported death, and the fearsome denunciations among whites facilitated this reconfiguration of the Haitian narrative traditions in the New Orleans setting.⁵⁵ The story of Bras Coupé also bears striking similarity to that of Three-Fingered Jack, a revolutionary Jamaican maroon leader with a mutilated limb, versed in magical potions and bent on the overthrow of the Jamaican colonial government, based on a historic maroon killed in 1781.

Bras Coupé may also have incorporated older Louisiana sources, particularly stories of St. Malo, the most famous local maroon of the colonial period, executed in 1784. Again, superficial similarities would have facilitated the transference: Malo also led a large rebel community, defied multiple capture attempts, and was rumored to be invincible. Malo's corpse, like Squire's, was publicly displayed in Jackson Square following his capture.⁵⁶ Like Squire, Malo also developed a lasting folk following among the local enslaved community: Cable himself recorded a dirge, sung nearly a century after the maroon's death, that mourned him as a persecuted martyr.⁵⁷

Malo, and perhaps Bras Coupé, remains encoded within contemporary Louisiana Voodoo. In New Deal-era Federal Writers' Project interviews, three former members of famed Voodoo priestess Marie Laveau's congregation recalled the veneration of "Saint Marron," patron of runaway slaves—"a colored saint white people don't know anything about . . . 'cause he's a real hoodoo saint."⁵⁸ Modern practitioners still venerate Saint Marron, and some of the initiated explicitly consider him the spiritual representation of Bras Coupé, Malo, or an amalgamation of the two figures—although it is unclear whether this association is of recent or antebellum origins.⁵⁹

Resistance as Satanic: Bras Coupé in White Oral History

While slaves reconfigured historical event into vernacular tradition, antebellum white storytellers constructed versions of the legend that rationalized white racial domination and suppressed the character's potentially revolutionary implications. In these versions, geography and gender were central to the story's substantiation of black dependency. The maroon's swamp—a nightmarish, submerged netherworld controlled by black bodies—provided a standpoint

from which to project the opposite of wholesome, landed white civilization. In Bras Coupé himself, storytellers constructed a savage black masculine trope that underscored the persistent threat of black rebellion and that acculturated children to the violent suppression of black noncompliance. Yet these versions also suggest indirect engagement with enslaved people's veneration of the maroon, through strategic narrative choices that seem designed to neuter the revolutionary political ramifications suggested by enslaved storytellers.

Late nineteenth-century white Louisianans' own concerns about which story components they considered most vital, and most maligned by misrepresentations, highlight the story's acculturative significance. After Cable published his own creative reimagining of the Bras Coupé legend in *The Granddissimes*, several white residents accused the celebrated author of misrepresenting the maroon and thereby mangling a beloved childhood story. They described Bras Coupé as a central figure of their childhoods—a major character within their imaginative play, and a fearsome bogeyman used by parents to “scare refractory small children into the most abject submission.” They endeavored to reconstruct the “authentic” folktale, purged of the creative falsehoods inserted by Cable and by black storytellers. That these stories contained key details absent from both Cable's version and newspaper accounts of Squire's life suggest the survival of independent Bras Coupé oral traditions, not reliant on Cable's portrayal.⁶⁰

Whites recalled Bras Coupé as a demonic figure, “under the special care of the Evil One.”⁶¹ Recurrent animalizing language transformed him from rational actor into supernatural beast: he “prowled,” had to “eke out the life of a hunted animal,” wriggled into the swamp in a snakelike “trail of blood, soon lost in the slimy waters of the marsh,” and vanished into the wild. The setting underscored Bras Coupé's carnal inhumanity: an “impenetrable morass,” a “Golgotha, where the carcasses of men and animals had been heaped together, as in a charnel house,” the scene “of foul deeds and midnight murders.”⁶²

Various narrative motifs stripped away the dangerously resistant meanings that Bras Coupé's story provided the enslaved.⁶³ Cannibalism and Satanism supplanted the wielding of Voodoo religious powers. Rather than ascribing heroic motivations, these versions emphasized Bras Coupé's selfishness, laziness, and irrational anger. In some versions Bras Coupé raped several black women, an alteration that devastated potential interpretations of a racial-political agenda and employed the mistreatment of black women to suggest the illegitimacy of black masculine dominion. These renditions depoliticized Bras Coupé's death: rejecting the act of self-defense described in the original press coverage, and rejecting public execution—an act charged with political meanings—for a lowly, private betrayal at the backstabbing hands of the “treacherous” Spaniard.⁶⁴

The loss of Bras Coupé's arm—wholly absent in *The Grandissimes* and viewed as a particularly glaring alteration by Cable's critics—was essential to the saga, increasing the brigand's fearsomeness while adding a further element to his emasculating defeats.⁶⁵ One account, recorded by the journalist Lafcadio Hearn, further emphasized Bras Coupé's emasculation by showcasing his submission prior to his death: just as the historian William Cowan notes the trope of revealing an authentic "Sambo" hidden within the ostensible "Nat" prior to the rebel's destruction, Hearn closes with the crowd's revelation that the "great robber and outlaw" was "only poor old 'Squire,' the unhappy slave."⁶⁶

As white storytellers circulated Bras Coupé narratives, they incorporated the character into a deepening cultural trend—national in scope, though often imaginatively positioned within New Orleans's swamps—that reaffirmed white hegemony by depicting black autonomy as pagan, savage, sexualized, violently hypermasculine, supernatural, and antithetical to civilization. The era witnessed growing American fascination with Voodoo, projected into New Orleans's swamps and imagined as an intriguingly barbaric black antithesis to white Christian civilization. Increasingly, national press outlets swapped lurid accounts of barbaric Voodoo rituals and orgies, held in New Orleans's swamps and facilitating black devolution into violent African primitivism. In these representations, the swamp possessed an almost magical ability to transform "tranquil and well-behaved" African Americans into "heartless miscreants."⁶⁷ The gleaming white city on a levee served as stark contrast to the mucky, submerged, African hideaway in the swamp; white domination of black bodies is affirmed. Yet even as this mythos reified the superiority of white civilization, it encoded a deep fascination with the unchained swamp slave and his descent into anticivilization.

Resistance as Tragedy: Bras Coupé in Antiracist Literature, Opera, and Film

Across Bras Coupé's storied career, national and international white artists have episodically redeployed the maroon's story as an antiracist critique of white violence. The French abolitionist Louis-Armand Garreau imagined that the mass murderer had once been an idyllically submissive servant, transformed into a swamp monster after a cruel slaveholder forced the suicide of his pregnant wife, in his 1856 version of the folktale, published in Paris after an extended residency in New Orleans.⁶⁸ A quarter century later Cable again saw in Bras Coupé a critique of Southern white violence, including his own reimagining of the legend—constructed from several conflicting versions of

the tale, recorded by the nascent folklorist throughout the 1870s—as a story-within-a-story. Cable’s reimagining inspired several subsequent representations of New Orleans’s mutilated maroon. The English composer Frederick Delius renamed the character Koanga in his 1897 blackface opera of the same name. William Faulkner called him only “The Negro” in his 1930 short story “Red Leaves.” Robert Penn Warren renamed him Rau-Ru in his 1955 novel *Band of Angels*; Sidney Poitier portrayed Rau-Ru in that novel’s 1957 film adaptation, directed by Raoul Walsh.⁶⁹ More recently, Neil Gaiman includes a one-armed and magical African-born rebel, named Agasu but renamed “Big One-Arm,” murdered in Saint-Domingue but reincarnated in New Orleans, in his 2001 bestseller *American Gods*.

Each of these works sympathizes with Bras Coupé, using the abuses heaped on the maroon to suggest a hidden violence lurking under white civilization’s thin veneer. Conspicuously, many of these portrayals have coincided with transformative epochs in African American history, suggesting timely efforts to grapple with the meaning of black resistance and self-determination: Cable invoked the maroon amid Louisiana’s Reconstruction, Delius after residencies in Florida and Virginia and amid the rise of Jim Crow, Warren wrote *Band of Angels* in the months between the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling and his own public declaration of support for the civil rights movement.⁷⁰

Yet these works are notable less for the ways that they rework Bras Coupé for new political climates than for the strikingly consistent ways that each repeatedly undercuts its own antiracist potential. Each work binds black masculine power to black political power and constructs in Bras Coupé’s swamp kingdom a revealing antithesis to white civilization—patterns also visible in antebellum white Louisianans’ versions of the tale. Yet having equated black manhood and maroonage with black political action, these works construct Bras Coupé’s manliness as chaotically unstable and represent his swamp kingdom as a harbinger of destruction, perpetually threatening white civilization with inundation. In Bras Coupé, each artist fabricates a tragic contradiction that both critiques and condones white hegemony: the black rebel is a victim of white misrule, yet he cannot rule himself.

Cable’s portrayal of Louisiana’s planter class juxtaposed aristocratic refinement against recurrent violence. Indeed, within five years the author’s opposition to Jim Crow would force his move to the North. Cable reimagined Bras Coupé as an enslaved African prince with magical Voodoo powers, too proud to work: giant, violent, hypermasculine, unyielding, “an animal that could not be whipped,” who dreams of returning to Africa.⁷¹ Bras Coupé submits to white rule on the condition that he receive an enslaved beauty, Palmyre, as his

wife, but flees into the swamps during the wedding after drunkenly striking his master. A mob captures Bras Coupé drunkenly dancing in Congo Square and severs his ears and hamstrings, after which he expires.

Cable explicitly linked maroonage to black self-determinism—he portrayed Bras Coupé, dressed in a general’s uniform, “declaring his independence” from the swamp—yet here, maroonage serves to ridicule black autonomy. Cable lampooned Bras Coupé’s declaration atop a “slight rise of ground . . . lifted scarce above the water.” Here he proclaims himself king, but “Amid what surroundings!”⁷² Bras Coupé’s ridiculous Napoleonic garb references the dress of Haiti’s early rulers and the satirical motif of African kings in ill-fitting hodgepodes of nineteenth-century European military uniforms. Bras Coupé’s efforts to live independently from whites are infantile, wild, self-destructive, and irrationally violent. He is again an “animal”: also called a “tiger,” “untamable,” “that accursed alligator,” living in his swamp “den.”⁷³ His autonomy disturbs white geography: under the maroon’s Voodoo magic, “wild beasts of the forest” enter plantations, swamp odors communicate plague, and “a frenzied mob of weeds and thorns” consumes plantation land.⁷⁴

In Delius’s *Koanga* (1897) the titular character, clad in zebra skins and wielding Voodoo magic, establishes an independent maroon kingdom after a despotic overseer abducts his love. He blights plantations with his Voodoo magic, before a white mob brutally murders him. Again, the tragedy lies in the maroon’s resistance to white supremacy, justified yet fated for doom: *Koanga* can neither rule nor be ruled.⁷⁵

Faulkner’s reimagining of the one-armed maroon in “Red Leaves” explored familiar themes—a criticism of white power, alongside a degradation of black self-rule—even as Faulkner inverted the story’s racial tropes. Here Choctaw Indians are proxies for white civilization, expressing repeated desires to emulate the white planter class in this critique of the white South’s hidden barbarisms. Yet this African-born rebel is feeble, weak, and cowardly. His maroonage neither poses any threat nor maintains any hope of success: he eats vermin, flounders in a muddy slough, weeps for deliverance. He passively lets a cottonmouth moccasin inject its poison into his arm, which magically shrinks the limb into a worthless stub: supernatural potions and self-amputation again appear, although Bras Coupé lacks agency over either. Ultimately *The Negro* acquiesces to being buried alive.⁷⁶

Fierce black manliness reappeared in Warren’s *Band of Angels*. Warren sets the story during the Civil War, transforming narrative elements that previously referenced the Saint-Domingue Revolution into Lost Cause mythologies of racial upheaval during slave emancipation.⁷⁷ Here Rau-Ru is an African-born

rebel cradling an injured arm, with knowledge of medicinal potions and magical ability to disappear into Louisiana's swamps. Once again, the white sexual assault of a black woman triggers his savage insurrection.⁷⁸ From the swamp he joins the Union army and assumes the despotic alias "Oliver Cromwell Jones," channeling racist mythologies of tyrannical black misrule under Reconstruction.⁷⁹ The swamp again serves as synecdoche for black anarchy, flooding its banks and inundating Louisiana's roads upon the ascension of black domination. Once again, the black rebel's total emasculation and symbolic castration provide essential narrative closure: the heroine achieves catharsis only after hallucinating a strange vision of Rau-Ru transformed into a crawling, begging amputee.⁸⁰

The 1957 film adaptation, starring Clark Gable, Yvonne De Carlo, and Sidney Poitier, incongruously mixes imagery and tone borrowed from *Gone with the Wind* with Rau-Ru's black nationalist rage. Here preferential treatment inspires resistance (Rau-Ru exclaims: "I hate him [master] for his kindness. That's worse than the rawhide!") while again, racialized sexual violence triggers revolt. The filmmaker inserts a happy ending—Rau-Ru forgives his former master and renounces his former violence—although here, too, closure depends on the wild man's submission.

Certain motifs regularly resurface in these renditions, albeit often rearranged: damaged arm, magical potions, the animalization of Bras Coupé, racialized sexual assault, swamps hospitable to blacks but impenetrable to whites. Some motifs become vestigial: the name of Cable's *two*-armed rebel no longer makes sense; Rau-Ru's knowledge of swamp potions serves no narrative purpose. Others are adjusted for new contexts: what referenced the Saint-Domingue Revolution for nineteenth-century readers (Bras Coupé's donning of Napoleonic uniforms) is repurposed to reference myths of Reconstruction-era black misrule for twentieth-century readers (Rau-Ru's commission in the Union army).

Yet consistencies in structure underlie these rearrangements. Each artist constructs Bras Coupé's hypermasculinity as a synecdoche for blackness. Cable emphasizes "that magnificent, half-nude form of Bras-Coupé," manly African king.⁸¹ Warren describes a "face of preternatural blackness, like enameled steel": a man "looming with all the blackness of the blackness . . . looming with the blackness of faces, of deep earth, of thicket, of fear, of night."⁸² Repeatedly, black female sexual victimization underscored this relation between revolt and racialized manliness. Each artist configures maroonage into an assertion of black sovereignty: the maroon dons military uniforms, declares for liberty, and battles domestication.

Yet each author, while sympathizing with *Bras Coupé*, frames his manhood and maroonage as sources of chaotic destruction that directly threaten whiteness yet are inevitably fated for failure. The maroon's rule is consistently savage, irrationally violent. His swamp—wild, pagan, neither land nor water—continually threatens white geographies with inundation while establishing an oppositional chaos that affirms white civilization's landed orderliness. In each iteration, it is only through the maroon's submission and bodily mutilation—the severing of his hamstrings, the amputation of his legs, submission to his master, acquiescence to his premature burial—that stability is reestablished and narrative closure reached.

The effect is empathy with black oppression, alongside insistence that black self-determinism is neither achievable nor tolerable. Under the guise of critiquing white violence, these depictions receive, repurpose, and reinvigorate *Bras Coupé*'s antebellum conscription as a white supremacist cultural system. Black opposition (even warranted) remains a time bomb of violence, chaos, irrationality, savagery. Black self-assertion devolves into tyrannous black domination. Black resistance lacks rational agenda and thus lacks political substance and legitimacy. The black kingdom is destructive, threatening racial and literal inundation. The black rebel must be violently neutered—a message ironically communicated by the very white artists professing to critique white violence. In *Bras Coupé*, slave revolt anxieties are reconfigured and reconstructed, ready for insertion into whatever national dialogue triggers that latent memory's relevance.

Bras Coupé in the Here and Now

On August 25, 2005, the swamps did indeed inundate New Orleans, activating savage stories of black gangs run amok and civilization unraveled. “On the dark streets, rampaging gangs take full advantage,” CNN reported.⁸³ Mayor Ray Nagin described citizens descending into “an almost animalistic state” and “hooligans killing people, raping people.”⁸⁴ As Maureen Dowd declared, the city had “plunged into a snake pit of anarchy, death, looting, raping, marauding thugs, suffering innocents.”⁸⁵ Lurid tales of marauding gangs and savage rapes were soon entirely discredited, but not before police and white vigilantes had shot dead multiple unarmed African American storm survivors. As one participant in these white militias later bragged, “It was great! It was like pheasant season in South Dakota. If it moved, you shot it.”⁸⁶

Bras Coupé—savage black rebel of white racial fantasy—is far from dead. Nor is this perseverant cultural invention unique to New Orleans's swamps.

In the 2014 grand jury hearings after the shooting death of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown, Officer Darren Wilson described his perception of Brown's unnatural transformation into an inhumanly giant, aggressive, animalistic assailant:

I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan. . . . [Brown] looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked. . . . He made like a grunting, like aggravated sound. . . . it looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I'm shooting at him.

Perceiving a monster magically impervious to bullets, charging forward like an enraged bull, Wilson shot to kill.⁸⁷ In Wilson's testimony, Bras Coupé reemerges.

Yet in recent years, Bras Coupé's career has come full circle, as local black artists again reinvent the brigand as a political symbol of revolutionary protest. At the height of the Black Power movement, New Orleans-based poets Marcus Christian and Tom Dent each penned poems favorably comparing the "one-armed . . . revolutionary" to the Black Panthers.⁸⁸ Two musical biographers, seeking to construct jazz's development from African, masculine, rebellious roots, framed the maroon as jazz's progenitor and invented ahistorical lineages connecting the rebel to their subject—including, remarkably, famed clarinetist Sidney Bechet's assertion that Bras Coupé was his grandfather.⁸⁹

In 2004 New Orleans-based author Kalamu ya Salaam invoked Bras Coupé to critique the cultural appropriation of black culture, depicting him as a one-armed ghost terrorizing David Squire, a caricature of white gentrification recently transplanted to the Tremé in pursuit of jazz and the sexual exploitation of fetishized black women. After Squire sexually assaults his creole girlfriend, Bras Coupé appears, dancing the Bamboula in Squire's living room, commanding him to "make your own music," and inducing in Squire a hallucination of his own sexual penetration. It is revealed that the ghost has murdered several of Squire's neighbors—although Squire's repeated queries as to the victims' racial identities pass ignored, defying Squire's efforts to easily typecast the racial-political meanings of Bras Coupé's violence.⁹⁰ Here Bras Coupé violently opposes the fetishizing of blackness. By naming the white northerner "Squire," Salaam suggests that *Bras Coupé* was the "truer" identity, *Squire* the superficial veneer—for the first time, the inner Nat Turner overpowers the superficial Sambo. Yet even Salaam's resistant portrayal contains ambiguous elements, shaped by the histories of both black resistance and efforts to discredit black resistance: an unstable hero, an equation of political action with savage mas-

culinity, and the inclusion of black female voices only insofar as their sexual victimization reflects on the legitimacy of white hegemony.

In 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville perceived that black rebellion “perpetually haunts the imagination of the Americans.”⁹¹ Today, masculinity scholarship often notes the striking consistency of certain black masculine tropes across time. Such observations, while apt, yet risk the inadvertent dehistoricization of contemporary constructs of black male criminality. Bras Coupé, conversely, reminds us that the trope of the violently masculine black rebel is a historical product, rooted in struggles between white hegemony and its opposition, and often managed through specific symbolic systems that persist only insofar as they remain politically useful—sometimes as a source of black empowerment, but often as a tool for rationalizing racial inequality. Consumers of American popular culture today often encounter violent and angry stock caricatures of black men, although white and black audiences extract differing meanings. Debates over black autonomy, the nature of black rage, and the meaning of black revolt remain unresolved yet deeply contested. In the twenty-first century, few Americans have heard the once-famous tale of the one-armed brigand. All Americans live its subtexts.

Notes

- I would like to thank Rosanne Adderley and Andy Horowitz for their astute comments on earlier drafts of this essay, and *American Quarterly's* editorial board and anonymous reviewers for their insightful criticisms and suggestions.
- In addition to his 1830s press appearances, numerous writers and artists have reimagined Bras Coupé: [William Lloyd Garrison], “Anti-Slavery Lecture IV: Contentment! Happiness! Kind Treatment!” *Liberator*, May 31, 1839; Louis-Armand Garreau, “Bras Coupé,” *Les cinq centimes illustrés*, February 2, 1856, 57–59; George Washington Cable, *The Granddissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880); Lafcadio Hearn, “The Original Bras-Coupe,” *New Orleans Item*, October 27, 1880; “Bras Coupe,” *Ouachita Telegraph*, November 19, 1880; Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist: During His Professional Tours in the United States, Canada, the Antilles, and South America*, ed. Clara Gottschalk (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1881); Marion Baker, ed., *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans and Environs, With Map* (New York: Will H. Coleman, 1885), 21–22; Henry Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was* (New Orleans: Graham & Sons: 1895), 209–15; Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and Its People* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), 80; Frederick Delius and Charles Keary, *Koanga, Opera in Three Acts* (1897); William Faulkner, “Red Leaves,” *Saturday Evening Post* 203 (October 25, 1930); Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1936), 244–47; Lyle Saxon, Edward Dryer, and Robert Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945), 253–54; Robert Penn Warren, *Band of Angels* (New York: Random House, 1955); *Band of Angels*, directed by Raoul Walsh (1957; Los Angeles: Warner Home Video, 2007); Vernon Loggins, *Where the World Ends: The Life of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 13–14, 27–28, 64, 71–72; Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle* (New York: Twayne and Cassell, 1960); “Folklore of America IV: Legendary Feats of the

- Pioneers,” *Life Magazine*, April 11, 1960, 96; Marcus Christian, *I Am New Orleans and Other Poems*, ed. Rudolph Lewis (New Orleans: Xavier University Press, 1999); Tom Dent, “Secret Messages (for Danny Barker),” *The Maple Leaf Rag: An Anthology of New Orleans Poetry*, ed. Maxine Cassin and Everette Maddox (New Orleans: Poetry Journal Press, 1980), 32; Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 252–64; Kalamu ya Salaam, “Bras Coupe,” in *Dark Dreams: A Collection of Horror and Suspense by Black Writers*, ed. Brandon Massey (New York: Dafina Books, 2004), 37–65.
2. Historians have overlooked Bras Coupé. Literary scholars have long expressed interest Cable’s version of the character, though often unaware of the story’s historical basis or depictions in other media. Robert Stephens first uncovered many of the character’s depictions in his essay “Cable’s Bras-Coupé and Merimée’s Tamango: The Case of the Missing Arm,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 35 (1982): 387–405. Barbara Ladd reexamined the historical origins of Cable’s rendition in “‘An Atmosphere of Hints and Allusions’: Bras-Coupé and the Context of Black Insurrection in The Granddissimes,” *Southern Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1991): 63–76, later printed in her *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). William Cowan explores the maroon in *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 213–33. Bryan Wagner has conducted the most thorough and nuanced studies of the character, hypothesizing that antebellum police deployed fear of Bras Coupé to legitimate their militarization, artfully interrogating Bras Coupé’s latter role in Gilded Age tourism narratives, and editing in 2019 a collection of primary source materials related to the character. See Bryan Wagner, “Disarmed and Dangerous: The Strange Career of Bras-Coupé,” *Representations* 92.1 (2005): 117–51; Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 58–115; and Wagner, *The Life and Legend of Bras-Coupé: The Fugitive Slave Who Fought the Law, Ruled the Swamp, Danced at Congo Square, Invented Jazz, and Died for Love* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019).
 3. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
 4. On the construction of white “civilization” through the portrayal of black primitivism, see especially Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
 5. Karla Lewis Gottlieb, “*The Mother of Us All: A History of Queen Nanny, Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000); Frances R. Botkin, *Thieving Three-Fingered Jack: Transatlantic Tales of a Jamaican Outlaw, 1780–2015* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 51–57; Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 301–4.
 6. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1, 30; Timothy Buckner and Peter Caster, *Fathers, Preachers, Rebels, Men: Black Masculinity in U.S. History and Literature, 1820–1845* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 26.
 7. On silence and sexual violence within antiracist depictions of enslaved women, see Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (2008): 1–14; and Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), esp. 32–35, 49–51.
 8. On memory and resistant countermemory, see Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 88, 93–94.
 9. Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), esp. 95–96. Efforts to historicize black masculinity, which suggest the formative pressures of both white hegemony and black resistance, include Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Marlon Bryan Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). See also Botkin, *Thieving Three-Fingered Jack*, esp. 12–13, 17. On the intertwining of gender, race, and power in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture, see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.
 10. For enslaved Louisianans with the name Squire, see the *New-Orleans Bee*, November 11, 1834, Marcus Christian Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans; Register of Chained Slaves, vol. 3, pp. 131, 139, Police Jail Records, City Archives, New Orleans Public

- Library (hereafter cited as NOPL); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy," Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, accessed January 5, 2015, www.ibiblio.org/laslave/index.php; [Slave Auction Handbill] in "Our Free Country!," *Liberator*, April 19, 1834; Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 262n15.
11. *New-Orleans Bee*, June 20, 1836; entry of April 30, 1836, in Ordinances and Resolutions, vol. 1, Third Municipality Council, NOPL. Squire may have resided at the former site of a well-established maroon camp, on an island of firm soil and uncovered seven years earlier: see *New York Evening Post*, December 4, 1827.
 12. *Diagram Showing the Inundated District: Sauvé's Crevasse*, [map], 1849, Historic New Orleans Collection (hereafter cited as HNOC).
 13. "Life and Health," *Daily Picayune*, March 25, 1838 (quotations); "Necessity of Enforcing the Ordinances," *New-Orleans Bee*, October 9, 1839; Cowan, *Slave in the Swamp*; Ian Finseth, *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).
 14. On state responses to maroonage, and for a survey of recent literature, see especially *A Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism, 1600–1850*, ed. Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van Rossum (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).
 15. Meeting of June 30, 1804, bk. 1, vol. 1, Official Proceedings (translations), Conseil de Ville Records, NOPL (quotations); Dennis Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805–1889* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 16–17.
 16. Entry of January 21–22, 1836, Reports of the Captain of the Guard, vol. 6, City Guard Records, NOPL; "Death of Squier," *New-Orleans Bee*, July 20, 1837.
 17. "Death of Squier."
 18. Judith Kelleher Schafer, "The Immediate Impact of Nat Turner's Insurrection on New Orleans," *Louisiana History* 21 (1980): 361–76.
 19. The *Picayune* reasserted its devotion to the policy: "Murders, &c.," *Daily Picayune*, July 14, 1837.
 20. Entry of April 30, 1836, in Ordinances and Resolutions, NOPL.
 21. *Louisiana Advertiser*, May 8, 1836, in *New-York Spectator*, June 27, 1836.
 22. *New-Orleans Bee*, June 20, 1836.
 23. "Horrid Murder," *New-Orleans Bee*, June 25, 1836. That the public "strongly suspected" Squire and James of committing recent murders appears in "Counsel of the 3rd Municipality," *New-Orleans Bee*, July 1, 1836. A plantation manager also reported: "Several people have been murdered by Maroon negroes at Bayou Cochon" (Jean Boze to Henri de Ste-Gême, August 28–October 21, 1836, folder 271, Ste-Gême Family Papers, HNOC).
 24. Reprinted in *Salem Gazette*, July 1, 1836.
 25. "Squire—the Outlaw?," *Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1837 (quotations); *New Orleans Advertiser*, July 19, 1837; "Death of Squier."
 26. "Squire—the Outlaw?"; "Found Dead," *Daily Picayune*, December 9, 1841.
 27. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and The Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 195–97.
 28. Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), esp. chap. 2; Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Joseph George Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: A Clash of Cultures and Personalities* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).
 29. Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137–40.
 30. Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 190.
 31. Carl A. Brasseaux, Glenn R. Conrad, and David Cheramie, eds., *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees, 1792–1809* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992); Nathalie Dressens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Elizabeth Fussell, "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans," *Journal of American History* 94 (2007): 846–55.
 32. Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 105–6.

33. Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 59–73; Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, trans. A. Faulkner Watts (New York: Theo. Gaus, 1981), 317–21; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 51–52, 55, 56–57; Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line*, 66–69; Matt D. Childs, “A Black French General Arrived to Conquer the Island: Images of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba’s 1812 Aponte Rebellion,” in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 135–56; Marixa Lasso, “Haiti as an Image of Popular Republicanism in Caribbean Colombia,” in Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 176–90.
34. *New-Orleans Bee*, April 7, 1837.
35. “Squire—the Outlaw?”; “Death of Squier”; “Killed Again,” *New Orleans Advertiser*, July 19, 1837.
36. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 213–14; Hearn, “Original Bras-Coupe”; Garreau, “Bras Coupé,” 74–78.
37. “From the South,” *Albany Argus*, August 1, 1837; “Killed Again,” *Jamestown Journal*, August 2, 1837; *Liberator*, August 11, 1837.
38. Expenses Extraordinaires, Ledger, vol. 1, Financial Records, Third Municipality Comptroller’s Office, City Archives, NOPL.
39. “By the Express Mail,” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 12, 1837.
40. This sizable gathering, though preserved in oral narratives, is uncorroborated by existent municipal records (“Squire—the Outlaw?”).
41. On “rituals of subordination,” see Kathleen Hilliard, *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange: Power’s Purchase in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 132–53.
42. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 213 (quotations); “Another Squier!,” *Daily Picayune*, October 21, 1837.
43. Fabrice Leroy, introduction to *Bras Coupé, et Autres Récits Louisianais*, by Louis-Armand Garreau (Shreveport, LA: Éditions Tintamarre, 2007), 7–8.
44. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 34; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81–135; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 149 (quotation), 590, 596–97; Hilliard, *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange*, 5.
45. Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 139–43; Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800–1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 178; Kenneth S. Greenberg, “Name, Face, Body,” in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, ed. Kenneth Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17–18; Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles*, 301–4.
46. Robert Nelson Anderson, “The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (1996): 564–65; Paul Thompson and Elaine Bauer, “Recapturing Distant Caribbean Childhoods and Communities: The Shaping of the Memories of Jamaican Migrants in Britain and North America,” *Oral History* 30 (2002): 49–59; Kenneth M. Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).
47. These fragmentary descriptions require caution, as biases, agendas, and misunderstandings have likely influenced white accounts of slave and free black oral narratives. However, as is often noted, study of subaltern peoples often requires a degree of flexibility with extremely limited source materials. For a defense of scholarly flexibility when studying subalterns, see Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), xi, 1–3.
48. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 158 (quotations); George Washington Cable to Lucy Cable Biklé[?], February 12, 1899, George Washington Cable Collection, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University (hereafter cited as LARC); Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 105; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 131.
49. Cable to Biklé[?] (first quotation); Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 105 (second quotation).
50. Cable to Biklé[?].
51. Hanged, according to Gottschalk’s recollection, “captured and . . . executed” according to Cable’s recollection of the janitor’s story (Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 105; Cable to Biklé[?]).
52. Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 105.
53. Carolyn E. Fink, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 42–45.

54. David Geggus, "Saint-Domingue on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. David Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 6–7, 24; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 51–52, 55–56, 58, 140; Danielle N. Boaz, "'Instruments of Obeah': The Significance of Ritual Objects in the Jamaican Legal System, 1760 to Present," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Sanders (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 145–46; Melville Jean Herskovitz, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Octagon Books, 1964), 226–27.
55. On cultural transmission as continual "reinvention" rather than "retention," see Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2–3, 24.
56. Gwendolyn Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 213–20; Gilbert C. Din, "'Cimarrones' and the San Malo Band in Spanish Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 21 (1980): 237–62.
57. George Washington Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 31 (1886): 814–15.
58. Ina Johanna Fandrich, *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: A Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 201–2 (quotations); Carolyn Morrow Long, "Marie Laveau: A Nineteenth-Century Voodoo Priestess," *Louisiana History* 46 (2005): 284.
59. Erin Elizabeth Voisin, "Saint Maló Remembered" (MA thesis, Louisiana State University, 2008), 10, 32, 66–67; Kenaz Filan, *The New Orleans Voodoo Handbook* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books: 2011); Bryce Bentley Summers, "Zombies and Squire John, a.k.a. 'Bras Coupe,'" accessed December 16, 2016, www.brycebentleysummers.com/voodoo-world-red-magic-folklore-zombies/; Jessie Gaston Muliera, "The Case of Voodoo in New Orleans," in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
60. "Bras Coupe," *Ouachita Telegraph*, November 19, 1880 (quotation); Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 210–11; Hearn, "Original Bras-Coupe"; Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 104–5; Cable to Bikelé[?].
61. "Bras Coupe."
62. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 209, 212, 324, 323 (quotations); Hearn, "Original Bras-Coupe"; Saxon, Dryer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 253–54; Baker, *Historical Sketch Book*, 21.
63. Translation of a conquered people's deity into a monster is a frequent event in classical mythology and a major mode of symbolically reinforcing domination. Classics scholars have argued that many monsters of the Greeks—the Titans, Medusa, the witch Circe—originated as conquered tribes' deities.
64. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was*, 211, 213–14 (quotation); Hearn, "Original Bras-Coupe"; Garreau, "Bras Coupé," 74–78; Saxon, Dryer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 254.
65. Cable to Bikelé[?].
66. Cowan, *Slave in the Swamp*, 3; Hearn, "Original Bras-Coupe."
67. "Necessity of Enforcing the Ordinances," *New-Orleans Bee*, April 9, 1839 (quotations); Michelle Y. Gordon, "'Midnight Scenes and Orgies': Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy," *American Quarterly* 64 (2012): 767–86.
68. The submissive slave, radically and abruptly transformed into the menacing rebel, also appeared in contemporary depictions of Toussaint L'Ouverture: Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*, rev. ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 63–64.
69. Delius, Faulkner, and Warren identified Cable's Bras-Coupé as their inspiration: Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line*, 54; Wagner, "Disarmed and Dangerous," 142n1.
70. William Randel, "Frederick Delius in America," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 79 (1971): 349–66; Robert Penn Warren, "Divided South Searches Its Soul," *Life Magazine*, July 9, 1856.
71. Cable, *Grandissimes*, 223.
72. Cable, 236–37.
73. Cable, 223, 226, 228, 242, 238.
74. Cable, 244.
75. Randel, "Frederick Delius in America."
76. William Styron described the impossibility of a 1930s white Southern writer imagining a Nat Turner: "The black face, en masse, was that of compliance, subservience, docility" ("Interview with William Styron," in *Nat Turner*, 216).

77. Robert Penn Warren, "Divided South Searches Its Soul," *Life* magazine, July 9, 1956.
78. Warren, *Band of Angels*, 119, 126, 142, 143, 151, 153–55, 200, 331, 354.
79. Rau-Ru echoes Eugene O'Neill's 1920 play, *The Emperor Jones*, and its quasi-magical protagonist, a runaway black convict who declares himself king of a Caribbean island.
80. Warren, *Band of Angels*, 354–65.
81. Cable, *Grandissimes*, 242.
82. Warren, *Band of Angels*, 118, 261.
83. Anna Hartnell, *After Katrina: Race, Neoliberalism, and the End of the American Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 46.
84. Bernie Cook, *Flood of Images: Media, Memory, and Hurricane Katrina* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 8.
85. Maureen Dowd, "United States of Shame," *New York Times*, September 3, 2005.
86. A. C. Thompson, "Katrina's Hidden Race War," *Nation*, January 5, 2009.
87. "Transcript, State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson, Grand Jury, September 16, 2014, Volume V," 212, 223, 225, 227, 228, Documentcloud.org, accessed December 2, 2014.
88. Christian, "I Am New Orleans"; Dent, "Secret Messages (for Danny Barker)."
89. Loggins, *Where the World Ends*, 27, 14, 64; Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*; Matt Sakakeeny, "New Orleans Music as a Circulatory System," *Black Music Research Journal* 31 (2011): 301.
90. Salaam, "Bras Coupe," 37–65.
91. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), 381.