American Cultures as
Transnational Performance
Commons, Skills, Traces

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On November 30, 1847, the steamer Monmouth docked near the barracks below the city of New Orleans. It carried an illustrious passenger whose arrival had long been anticipated by the residents of the Crescent City (Daily Picayune 1847b; 1847c). General Zachary Taylor or Old Rough and Ready, as he was affectionately known, was an experienced military man with local connections, who had just won four important battles in his country’s war against Mexico. His victories at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterrey, and Buena Vista had turned Taylor into a national hero and made him an instant celebrity. Although the outcome of the war was still undecided when Taylor arrived in New Orleans, he received a triumphant welcome (Daily Delta 1847; Daily Picayune 1847d; 1847e; 1847f).

The US government had declared war on Mexico in May 1846, after a Mexican cavalry attacked a US regiment in the contested border zone on the Rio Grande. In the months that followed, New Orleans’s geographic location on the mouth of the Mississippi River and its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico made the city an important strategic center for the United States’ war effort. Soldiers and equipment moved through the Crescent City to the battle areas, and the news from the frontlines was first processed in the offices of the local papers. The local press called on all residents to perform their patriotic duties, and the city’s residents responded with enthusiasm. Men enlisted in volunteer regiments by the hundreds, and women contributed by embroidering banners or providing lint for the ambulances. The theaters, too, joined in the patriotic frenzy. Amateur playwrights dramatized the reports from the battlefields, and the city’s three major playhouses staged productions that celebrated the American victories at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterrey, and Buena Vista (Braun 2019, 135-136; Roppolo 1950, 743, 836). The local press called on all residents to perform their patriotic duties, and the city’s residents responded with enthusiasm. Men enlisted in volunteer regiments by the hundreds, and women contributed by embroidering banners or providing lint for the ambulances. The theaters, too, joined in the patriotic frenzy. Amateur playwrights dramatized the reports from the battlefields, and the city’s three major playhouses staged productions that celebrated the American victories at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterrey, and Buena Vista (Braun 2019, 135-136; Roppolo 1950, 743, 836). The city, it seemed, was united in its support for the war.

New Orleans’s complicated racial, social, and ethnic makeup, however, made any kind of unity precarious. Throughout the antebellum period, the city’s francophone and anglophone residents in particular were engaged in a fierce competition for political, economic, and cultural sway. They fought over the state’s official language (French or English), its legal system (civil law vs. common law), and religious practices (French Catholicism vs. 

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 Anglo-American Protestantism). The cultural and linguistic differences between both groups ran deep, eventually leading to the division of the city into three semiautonomous municipalities. The first municipality, which encompassed the old French Quarter and the suburb of Tremé was mostly populated by francophone residents, white and black. The second municipality, located up the river from the French Quarter, largely housed Anglo-Americans, and the third municipality, bordering on the French Quarter on the other side, was the home of less wealthy francophone New Orleanians, free people of color, and a sizable group of new immigrants from France, Ireland, and Germany. Each municipality had its own council, taxing power, recorder, police force, and school system. The first and third municipalities carried out official business in French, while the second municipality conducted all business in English (Braun 2019, 42–71; Campanella 2008, 162–163, 267; Tregle ’92, 153–160).

Over the years, New Orleans’s division into three municipalities produced a city that was economically, linguistically, and ethnically segregated. The first municipality, according to one visitor, was “narrow, dark, and dirty,” the second “new” with “a little of Boston” and “a trifle of New York,” and the third resembled “a species of half village, half city, (unmistakable in its French Faubourg look)” (Hall 1851, 85–86). “Had the Legislature sought, by the most careful efforts, to create a war of races, to make distinction between Creole and American,” one newspaper commented, “they could not have chosen a better means for these objects than the present division” (quoted in Campanella 2008, 163). In those days, moving between the municipalities created a series of uneasy transnational encounters. At the same time, as soldiers from all corners of the United States began to filter through New Orleans on their way to the Mexican battlefront, the city as a whole emerged as a site of heightened national interest and catalyst for American patriotic sentiment.

This chapter explores how New Orleans’s anglophone and francophone populations navigated the tension between national and transnational affiliation through performance. It builds on Marvin Carlson’s assumption that performance describes “all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself,” regardless of whether this activity takes place in public or in private, in a theater building, on the streets, or within the confines of one’s home (2004, 4). The chapter also draws on Milton Singer’s notion of cultural performance as an organized program of activity whose features help us to better understand a culture (Landis and Macaulay 2017, 11). By integrating various potential performance spaces, Singer’s and Carlson’s definitions allow me to investigate two kinds of performances without privileging one or the other: those that occur inside the city’s theater buildings and those that emerge beyond the playhouse.

For my analysis, I rely on two case studies. The first examines the performance of Félix de Courmont’s Mexican-American War opera Le Capitaine May et Le Général de la Vega sur le bord de la Rio Grande (Captain May and General de la Vega on the Rio Grande, 1847), a piece that premiered at the Théâtre d’Orléans, New Orleans’s most important francophone theater, on May 27, 1847. Next, I examine the rituals, patriotic displays, and political performances that structured General Taylor’s visit to New Orleans only a few months later, in the fall of 1847. By juxtaposing two different kinds of performances, I seek to uncover how the theatrical production of Captain May and the carefully curated activities surrounding General Taylor’s visit produce trajectories of inclusion and exclusion, and the ways in which these trajectories impact the transnational encounter between New Orleans’s anglophone and the francophone populations. Such an analysis, I want to suggest, further illuminates the complicated relationship between both groups by revealing not only what remains from a performance, but also by recovering what may get lost in our endeavors to reconstruct performance and its residue.

In Absence and Memory in Colonial American Theatre, theater historian Odai Johnson excavates the “ghosted materiality of performance” by reading lacunae, gaps, and omissions in the documentary record (2006, 2). He warns that “all surviving evidence” of performance, “even absent evidence and decomposed artifacts … has a peculiar and sometimes pernicious way of surviving largely on its ability to conform to and endorse certain existing hegemonies and narratives” (2006, 3). As I examine the cultural and theatrical performances that emerged in New Orleans in 1847, I want to take Johnson’s warning seriously and explore how we can engage the traces a performance left in the archives without confirming existing hegemonies.

Challenging the dominance of the material record, performance theorist Diana Taylor has created an influential dichotomy between the archive, that is “enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bone)” and the repertoire, which consists of “embodied practice/ knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (2003, 19). Rebecca Schneider complicated that binary by insisting on the performativity of the archive itself, arguing that through its performative character, the archive induces disappearance, leaving only “object remains as indices” of what used to be there (2011, 104).

José Esteban Muñoz’s term “hermeneutics of residue” describes and analyzes “the wake of performance” in a similar vein. Rather than focusing on object indices, however, Muñoz introduces the concept of ephemera as the most important form of performance residue (2009, 71). Critically, Muñoz’s definition of ephemera only includes fleeting and transitory matters (gestures, acts, language) which, by being documented in writing, help “summon up” the memory of a person or performance (2009, 71–72).

I want to build on Muñoz’s insights by considering both the material and the immaterial dimension of ephemera. Indeed, for library scientists and archivists, the term ephemera describes a group of printed items that are “created for a specific, limited purpose, … generally designed to be discarded after use” (Dictionary of Archive: Terminology, n.d.; See also Organ 1987, 105–118). Many of my sources for this piece fulfill these criteria, most notably the
newspaper articles I draw on for my analysis of Taylor’s visit, and the program of Captain May, sold on the day of the opera’s only performance. For the purposes of this study, then, I define material ephemera as physical objects, artifacts, and archival records. The immaterial dimension of ephemera, by contrast, only emerges when meaning is created through reading, analyzing and interpreting these records. By considering both the material and the immaterial aspects of performance residue, I am able to bridge the conceptual gap between a performance’s presence and its disappearance, enduring materials and embodied practice, archive and repertoire. In doing so, I am also able to recover the traces of past performances and their afterlife today, while shedding light on the complexity of transnational relations in the city beyond the period of the Mexican-American War.

Going Beyond the Script: Captain May and the Reconstruction of Immaterial Performance Residue

My first study of performance residue focuses on the French-language production of Félix de Courmont’s opera Le Capitaine May et Le Général de la Vega sur le bord de la Rio Grande (Captain May and General de la Vega on the Rio Grande). Born in Martinique, de Courmont came to New Orleans between 1835 and 1841 by way of France. On his arrival, he began to practice as a lawyer, but soon abandoned this profession to become a writer and a publicist. In the spring of 1847, de Courmont collaborated with the musician Fourmestreaux to write an opera about the ongoing war (Tinker 1932, 92–99; Viatte 1974, 21–22). The opera’s only performance on May 27 left few material traces. While a number of English- and French-speaking newspapers in New Orleans carried announcements of its upcoming production, we know little about the opera’s performance, and even less about its reception. Today, the bilingual program, available for purchase on the night of the opera’s premiere, is the only source that yields information. It contains, in French and in English, de Courmont’s libretto, and a list of the cast. The score has not survived.

The role distribution suggests that the opera’s leading parts were sung by the French company’s most accomplished artists, and the newspaper writers expected that the opera’s “most patriotic intentions” would likely draw a full house (L’Abeille 1847a; my translation). Everything seemed primed for success. After its premiere, however, Captain May disappeared from the annals of the New Orleans stage, never to be mentioned again. Analyzing the performance residue of Captain May, I want to reconstruct the circumstances that led to the piece’s expulsion. In doing so, I will tease out the production’s immaterial traces by conducting a close reading of the performance’s material remains. Through this process an alternative meaning emerges, namely, that Captain May was not, as announced in the newspapers, an opera with “most patriotic intentions,” but indeed a satire that mocked the supposed heroism of American soldiers while critiquing the US government’s expansionist course.

The plot of the opera, as outlined in the program, unfolded as follows: A group of American soldiers gets hopelessly drunk on the eve of the battle of Resaca de la Palma. Elmira, a woman disguised as a soldier, tries to prevent her lover Edgard, a lieutenant in the army, from going into battle. Not knowing what to do to protect Elmira while Edgard is gone, the pair open up to another soldier, Smith, who is supposedly well acquainted with the Mexican character. He proposes Elmira hide out with the enemy, suggesting that she, if discovered, “work on their feelings” or pay them off. No such measures become necessary, however, for the Mexicans, rather than fighting, play a game of cards over which they attack each other. The Americans, then, do not meet with much resistance and easily take Resaca de la Palma. In the end, it is the Mexican Merida who persuades General Taylor to honorably discharge Edgard and Elmira so the two can get married in their home country, far away from the battlefield.

Throughout the entire opera, no duels, battle scenes or other displays of heroism take place on stage. Instead, the action of the first five scenes focuses on Elmira’s attempts to actively dissuade Edgard from fighting, while the three subsequent (and last) scenes dramatize Edgard and Elmira’s encounter with a group of Mexicans. Though willing and eager to go to battle, Edgard is not portrayed as a brave American soldier, but rather as an overly confident lieutenant who is more consumed to his whiskey glass than to the woman who gave everything up to follow him to the front (De Courmont 1847, 3–4, 7–8). Believing the United States’ past military accomplishments will seamlessly translate into the future, Edgard prompts his soldiers to drink even more (1847, 3–4). “[D]ays of untold glory” will arrive, he proclaims, regardless of whether or not his regiment is sober enough to still engage in battle (1847, 3). His partner Elmira, by contrast, is plagued by a constant sense of foreboding and uses that feeling to persuade Edgard to stay away from the frontline. Combining melodramatic pleas with an emotional appeal to the sense of duty a man must feel toward his beloved, she eventually succeeds in preventing his departure to the front (1847, 7–10). Critically, in the midst of a war in the nineteenth century, it would have been unthinkable that a healthy, young man at the rank of lieutenant refused to go to battle at the request of a woman he was romantically involved with, but not married to. In de Courmont’s opera, however, Elmira’s perspective wins over Edgard’s, and Edgard’s place in the world will not be “marked on the field of honor,” but “close to [Elmira’s] heart” (1847, 9).

De Courmont’s portrayal of the victory of melodramatic sentiment over heroism is just one of the ways in which he satirizes the American war effort. His second jab emerges from his depiction of the Mexican enemy. Using language that echoes the anti-Mexican bias in the war reports printed by the New Orleans press, he characterizes the Mexicans as "raiders," that is “men and women, a mongrel compound, partly soldiers and partly traders, half gipsy and half christian [sic]” (De Courmont 1847, 10). They are dressed in "cloaks, some with Hoods, others with torn and tattered garments" (1847, 10).
10), all reminiscent of a group of bandits. One of them, Pedrito, even looks like “Robert Macaire” (1847, 10), a visual reference to the archetypal villain of the French stage that most of the spectators in attendance would have easily recognized. Although dangerous-looking, little danger emerges from this group of Mexicans. They are not engaged in battle, but play the confidence game Monte, apparently defrauding each other (1847, 11–12). As they approach the American enemy, they sing to their country, humorously listing every stereotype war-minded Americans of the 1840s would have commonly associated with Mexico. “Hail, Glorious Monte and sweet Tortilla!,” their song begins, also praising, across various stanzas, “generous mescal,” the “full effulgent sun,” “golden ore,” and a “dark-eyed beauty’s fond embrace” (1847, 11).

Only one of the Mexican characters appears to be serious, the old and wise Merida. He chastises his countrymen for their behavior, accusing them of failing to recognize how precarious not only their own situation, but that of their country really is (De Courmont 1847, 13). He offers a stinging critique of the recent demise of Mexico, blaming it on his countrymen’s renunciation of the Catholic Church, their greed, and their passion for Monte. “[W]e are unmindful of our country’s dire necessities,” he charges, “whilst discord holds the sway” (1847, 13). His interference, however, comes too late, and before the Mexican soldiers can begin to resist their enemies, they are already defeated. Seen in this light, the following triumphant finale seems utterly out of place. The American soldier Edgard appears at the center of the stage, bearing the “crimsoned remnant of our tattered standards” (1847, 15). He is flanked by General Taylor and Captain May, who bring in the defeated Mexican general La Vega “in full uniform” (1847, 15). On the other side, “the Mexican banditti” watch the victory celebration (1847, 15). In alternating choir and recitative pieces, General Taylor, Captain May, the diseased Major Ringgold, and the defeated La Vega receive praise for their bravery and endurance. Taylor, for example, is lauded for his “manly care” in “[g]uiding the bold impulse of our fearful progress,” May “for his keen and trusty blade,” La Vega for his refusal to surrender, and Ringgold for: the sacrifice he made for his country (1847, 15). All of these commendations are followed by the phrase “Honor to him! Honor to general Taylor!” (1847, 15). By pairing this phrase with everyone’s accomplishments, de Courmont creates an ironic gap between Ringgold’s, May’s, and de la Vega’s heroic actions and Taylor’s “manly care.” While Ringgold, May, and La Vega distinguished themselves by acting like true patriots and heroes, it is the passive General Taylor who receives most of the credit and military honors. After de Courmont’s description of Ringgold’s death in action the praise bestowed on Taylor and his “manly care” seems particularly inappropriate.

The opera ends with this set of uneasy juxtapositions, creating a sense of ambivalence that not only destabilizes General Taylor’s supposed heroism, but also calls into question the war effort as a whole.4 By depicting the Mexicans as harmless opponents and American soldiers as sentimental puppets controlled by women, de Courmont diminished American war efforts, ridiculing the sacrifices many men, women, and families had made for their country. Even though the opera had been announced in the local newspapers as a piece that was conceived “with the most patriotic intentions,” the audience sensed that de Courmont was not in favor of the war and its goals. A few months later, de Courmont made his views known in a treatise titled Des Etats-Unis, de la Guerre du Mexique et de L’ile de Cuba (On the United States, the Mexican War and Cuba), published in Paris in 1847. In this treatise, de Courmont defended Mexico and critiqued US foreign policy, warning that Cuba could be the next target of the US government’s aggressive expansionist policies.

In New Orleans in 1847, de Courmont’s antiwar stance was unpopular, especially among the members of his own community. His work seemed to confirm that French-speaking New Orleanians lacked patriotism and an overall commitment to the founding principles of the United States. This allegation had consistently been levelled by skeptical Anglo-Americans who believed that French Louisianians were sympathizing with the Mexican enemy because they shared a religion and Latin heritage.5 By satirizing the American war effort, de Courmont had added substance to these claims. Through his opera, he had created, perhaps inadvertently, a transnational alliance between New Orleans’s francophone population and the Mexican people. In the eyes of the Anglo-Americans, then, this alliance, as tenuous as it may have been, betrayed the American war effort and deepened the rift between the Anglophone and the francophone populations.

In an attempt to salvage the situation, the members of the francophone community quickly distanced themselves from de Courmont and his views. Shortly after the premiere of Captain May, de Courmont left New Orleans. His name disappeared from the French-language newspapers of the Crescent City, and his piece quickly fell into oblivion, never to be performed again. It seems that de Courmont’s fellow French Louisianians had engaged in an act of deliberate erasure, expelling the author and effacing as much as possible, any material traces of the author and his work. Only the opera’s program remains, a piece of material ephemera whose immaterial satirical dimension emerges only after we look beyond the literal meaning of the words contained in the libretto. Taken together, the material and immaterial dimensions of the ephemera associated with the production of Captain May help us to reconstruct the complicated relationship between New Orleans’s anglophone and francophone populations during the Mexican-American War. Though seemingly in agreement about the war effort and the US government’s expansionist course, de Courmont’s opera and its hidden satirical dimension reveal the precarious unity between New Orleans’s most important ethnic and linguistic groups. Transnational affiliations, it seems, could change quickly, at times even transcending enemy lines.
Reading Gaps and Absences: Material and Immaterial Performance Residue of General Taylor's Parade

Only six months after the premiere of Captain May, however, support for the war dwindled among the members of both the anglophone and the francophone populations. Negotiations with Mexico were stalled, and the US government feared that the costly war would not yield the territories south of the Rio Grande that it so desired. In New Orleans and elsewhere, the press became increasingly impatient with the situation, denouncing not only Mexican obstinacy but also the negotiating tactics of the American administration (Gilley 1979, 5–23; Greenberg 2013, 210–213; Hahn 2016, 141).

General Zachary Taylor's visit to New Orleans in December 1847 took place in the midst of this mounting dissatisfaction. Despite, or perhaps because of the difficult situation, the city authorities were determined to give the General a hero's welcome. In less than a week, an organizing committee, formed specifically for the occasion, prepared an impressive display of hospitality and patriotism. The program for Taylor's two-day visit included a mayoral reception, a mass at St. Louis Cathedral, an elaborate dinner at the St. Charles Hotel, a citizen reception, the presentation of a ceremonial sword, various displays of fireworks, and a night at the theater. The highlight of Taylor's visit would be a parade through the streets of New Orleans, led by the General on his famous equine companion “Old Whity.”

In this section, I will analyze the material and immaterial traces of this parade, reconstructing its meaning as a cultural performance in New Orleans at the end of 1847. Scholars such as David Waldstreicher, Susan Davis, and Mary P. Ryan have noted that parades are intensely political, not only in what they seek to express, but also in their organizational structures. Parades are governed by a complicated “process of inclusion, exclusion, influence, and planning” (Davis 1986, 5–6), and are typically geared toward broadcasting a collective identity and sense of citizenship (quoted in Waldstreicher 1997, 9). This was certainly the case in the procession honoring Taylor, where the material traces that remain of Taylor's visit testify to the city government's urgent need to consolidate its divided population. How this consolidation was supposed to happen, however, becomes evident only when we consider the procession's immaterial traces. These traces emerge when we compare and contrast the parade's material ephemera, that is newspaper reports in English and in French, notices detailing the procession lineup, and procession protocols. I will first retrace the parade route through information gleaned from newspaper reports. Then, I will juxtapose my findings with the information contained in procession lineup notices and marching protocols, teasing out who participated in the parade and in what way participation was governed by internal hierarchies. Reconstructing performance residue in this way reveals the city government's careful and deliberate planning process while simultaneously uncovering the practices of inclusion and exclusion that undergirded it.

The members of the city government's “Committee of Arrangements” devised, for example, a parade route that did not just cover the city center, but traversed all three municipalities. The parade began at Place d'Armes in front of St. Louis Cathedral in the center of the French-dominated first municipality. Then it went along what is today Chartres Street and into the suburb of Marigny. At the time, Marigny formed the heart of the third municipality, which housed less wealthy French-speaking Creoles, free people of color, and new immigrants from France, Ireland, and Germany. The procession wrapped around the third municipality's most important public square (Washington Square), before it made its way all the way back and through the first municipality on Royal Street. At Canal St., it crossed into the Anglo-American second municipality. Here the parade went along Canal St. for one block, then moved parallel to the river to go along Camp St. and past Lafayette Square, the most important public square in the second municipality. At Julia St. the route turned onto St. Charles, ending after exactly three miles, at the St. Charles Hotel. By passing by each municipality's public squares, main arteries, and most important landmarks, the procession connected not only rival boroughs but also their residents. Cutting across ethnic, racial, social, and linguistic differences, the spatial planning behind the parade route was meant to unify New Orleans's population, giving General Taylor a taste of the variety of people, places, and pleasures the Crescent City had to offer.

After consulting the procession's lineup notices and marching protocols, however, it becomes clear that the execution of the parade contrasted sharply with the inclusive vision the thoughtful planning of the parade route had promised. The marching orders followed a strict hierarchy where Taylor rode in the front, then came city officials; veterans and active military; the governor of Louisiana and other state representatives; high-ranking members of the legal, medical, and educational professions; foreign consuls and “distinguished strangers”; mid-level professionals such as the postmaster and notaries public; and members of various charitable societies, including those serving immigrants. Last marched the “captains of vessels and steamboats” as well as “strangers and citizens generally” (Daily Picayune 1847d). Participating groups that were perceived as particularly unpredictable, such as the firemen or the ordinary citizens marching at the end of the parade, were accompanied by marshals, who could interfere quickly when any unwanted behavior occurred. By enforcing a strict hierarchical marching order and by heavily policing the parade, the organizing committee and the city authorities ensured that no one would disturb this performance of cultural, social, and ethnic harmony (1847d).

According to the lineup notices, anglophone and francophone residents were allowed to participate in the parade in almost equal numbers. The most important immigrant communities, too, were represented in the procession. But the lineup notices say nothing about two important groups: Women and free people of color. Women and girls, it seems, were explicitly excluded from walking in the pageant, even though they supported the war effort every
day on the home front. Instead, we learn from various newspaper reports that they were supposed to grace the sidewalks and "every window, door, and balcony" with their presence, cheering as the procession went by (Daily Picayune 1847e). Free people of color also seem to have been prohibited from marching, even though many of them had actively defended the United States against the British in the Battle of New Orleans. None of the newspaper reports mention their participation or attendance, and the procession lineup did not list any black masonic lodges or benevolent societies in the lineup's respective categories. It is through these omissions and absences in the procession lineup notices, then, that we learn who was invited to participate in the city's grand display of harmony and patriotism, and who was left out.

The local newspapers did not comment on the uneven participation in the parade. Instead, they cast the activities surrounding Taylor's visit as an inclusive event, open to all New Orleans residents and even visitors regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. "All classes and both sexes participated in the ovation," the Daily Picayune claimed, calculating "that the Place d'Armes and the levee and streets contiguous contained at one time forty thousand spectators" (Daily Picayune 1847e). L'Abbe, one of the Picayune's French-language competitors, offered a similar assessment. Indeed, "[t]he entire population seemed to have rendered itself to the Place d'Armes or to the levee to watch the de-barkation," the paper noted (L'Abbe 1847b; my translation). Summarizing the visit, the Picayune emphasized the unanimous spirit of patriotism reigning in New Orleans on that day. "Tens of thousands were here congregated together, all breathing one spirit, all animated by a single desire to manifest to General Taylor their respect for his character and affectionate gratitude for his services" (Daily Picayune 1847e). Judging by these reports, the city authorities had achieved their goal of consolidating the city's divided population.

Conclusion

This analysis of the cultural performances surrounding General Taylor's visit and my study of the forgotten theatrical production of Captain May have shown that material ephemera, such as newspaper articles, libretti, and procession lineup notices, constitute an archive that only becomes meaningful when examined against a performance's immaterial traces. These traces become visible when we redirect our attention to the gaps and absences in the documentary record, taking seriously which is not mentioned, either because it was purposefully omitted or because its meaning has not been re-constructed yet. Once recovered, the immaterial traces of performance may lead us to evidence that has been erased, to people who have been marginalized, and to narratives that have been altered. The immaterial performance remains of General Taylor's visit, for example, helped us to understand that the city authorities were only able to stage a grand display of anglophone and francophone inclusion because they excluded free people of color and women. And the meaning we find between the lines of de Courmont's opera libretto and in the silence that surrounded the opera's reception allow us to see an alternative narrative of the Mexican-American War which, in turn, enabled us to grasp the piece's satirical dimension.

But the immaterial traces of performances do not exclusively register through silence, absence, and omission. At times, they emerge when considered in the context of a longer temporal trajectory. This is the case for my study of the transnational relations within New Orleans, specifically those between the anglophone and the francophone populations. I would suggest that the lasting rapprochement between the two communities ultimately resulted, at least in part, from the city authorities' strategic deployment of cultural performance. Since at least 1815, the city had organized patriotic displays and processions through the Crescent City on January 8 and July 4, commemorating the Battle of New Orleans and the Declaration of Independence respectively, as anglophone and francophone residents lined the streets. Ballrooms, too, were legally mandated to cater to both factions. They typically fulfilled this requirement by playing a set sequence of French quadrilles, American country dances, and neutral waltzes, taking care not to privilege one over the other. The parade held for General Taylor in 1847 continued this tradition of strategic, government-sponsored cultural performance. It allowed two opposing groups to join forces for a patriotic cause, albeit at the expense of other communities. In doing so, the cultural performance of the parade served as a catalyst for reconciliation, consolidating the precarious relations between the anglophone and francophone populations.

After the end of the Mexican-American War, the collaboration between both groups continued, culminating in the 1852 reunification of the city. After sixteen years, the formal division of New Orleans along ethnic lines was finally suspended, paving the way for a lasting rapprochement between the two factions. In each of these examples, then, performances, both inside and outside the theater, helped opposing groups to work through their differences, allowing them to overcome the tension between national and transnational affiliation without erasing one or the other. In order to understand New Orleans's complicated social, racial, and ethnic makeup, the two must be studied together, just like material performance residue only becomes fully legible against the backdrop of its immaterial counterpart.

Notes

Among the French-language periodicals, the *Revue Lousianaise* carried announcements in its April 11, May 3, and May 23, 1847 issues. *Le Courant de la Louisiane* advertised the opera on May 27, 1847, and *L'Abelle* carried announcements on May 26 and May 27, 1847. The English-language *Daily Delta* of May 26, 1847 announced the opera’s production for the next day.

“Nous sommes convaincus que poème et musique sont remplis des plus patrio-
tiques intentions,…”

4 Unfortunately, I have been unable to uncover how these juxtapositions were resolved musically or through performance. The opera’s score is lost, and none of the newspapers reviewed its only production.

5 For more on this preoccupation and the suggested alliance between people of French descent and Mexicans, see Braun (2019, 124–137).

6 Mayor A.D. Crossman had only sent out a formal invitation on November 27. Taylor arrived in the barracks below the city on November 30. See *Daily Picayune* (1847a).

7 General Taylor visited three theaters: two anglophone playhouses in the second municipality and the francophone Théâtre d’Orléans in the first municipality. In the course of the evening, Taylor saw a comic piece, a historical drama, a farce, a vaudeville, portions of an opera and two ballets, a fairy extravaganza, and three musical pieces that were composed in his honor. Analyzing these performances was beyond the scope of this chapter. For the specific listings, see *Daily Delta* (1847), *Daily Picayune* (1847d; 1847e; 1847f).

8 The published lineup notice mentions, for example, that only “male pupils of
public schools” were allowed to march in the parade even though public schools at the time were also open to girls. See *Daily Picayune* (1847d).

9 For the participation of free people of color in the Battle of New Orleans and their social life in lodges and benevolent societies, see Bel. (1997, chapters 2 and 5).

10 “Notre population entière semblait s’être transportée à côté de la place
d’armes et sur la levée pour assister au débarquement, et ce fut un tonnerre de
hourras et de cris d’enthousiasme, quand le digne général descendit du bateau.”

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12 Tracing, Erasing, and Recovering Spring Path

An Eighteenth-Century “Site of Memory” in Olaudah Equiano’s Jamaica

Linda Sturtz

African British abolitionist Olaudah Equiano (known in adulthood as Gustavus Vassa) published a narrative of his life that became an antislavery tract and subsequently a key if contested text for understanding the Atlantic world. When he landed in Jamaica in 1771, it impressed him as a “very fine large island” (Equiano 1789, 2:103), but the white people’s brutality shocked him. He cataloged the physical and psychological violence he encountered and delineated his own suffering as a man denied his fundamental legal rights. Just before his return voyage to England, he stopped briefly in Kingston, where one of the most evocative accounts in his narrative unfolds.

I was surprised to see the number of Africans who were assembled together on Sundays; particularly at a large commodious place, called Spring Path. Here each different Nation of Africa meet and dance after the manner of their own country. They still retain most of their native customs: they bury their dead, and put victuals, pipes and tobacco, and other things, in the grave with the corps, in the same manner as in Africa.

(Equiano 1789, 2:105–106)

Equiano’s account is unique as a printed source authored by an African-descended man describing mortuary rituals in eighteenth-century Jamaica. He carefully notes the meeting place for the dance—“a large commodious place, called Spring Path” (Equiano 1789, 2:106), which functioned as a burial ground. We do not know if Equiano joined in the dancing or encountered people he saw as sharing his own “nation of Africa” or even what he meant by “nation” because he uses the term in idiosyncratic ways in the Narrative (Byrd 2006, 139). He remains aloof from the gathering, though it is hard to imagine him escaping the seductive drum beats enough to avoid tapping a toe. As one with extensive experiences both as an enslaved and a free man, Equiano’s insights into Spring Path and the rituals performed there are particularly valuable.1

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