

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Textures of Black sound and affect: Life and death in New Orleans

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Abstract

In a traditional New Orleans jazz funeral, the characteristic shift from mourning to joy is propelled by brass band musicians weaving melodies and rhythms together. This article is about how these thickly layered textures of sound elicit shared sentiments of lament and of joy. More than an accumulation of individual layers, the textures and emotions compose an *atmosphere*, in both the physical and metaphorical sense, of mutual aid. The relative openness of the sound—the fact that it cannot be reduced to its communicative content—means that it can also be heard as a political act of refusal, rebellion, or something else altogether. An underrecognized keyword in sound studies, *texture* is placed here in a web of relations with other keywords: affect, assembly, atmosphere, care, fugitivity, joy/lament, life/death, mutual aid, rebellion, refusal, religiosity, voice/instrument. Textures of sound do not explicitly call for an end to anti-Black violence, and I am hesitant to even characterize the jazz funeral as an act of resistance. But I suggest that the assemblies of Black sounds and bodies “speak” to the possibility of liberation and generate an atmosphere of mutual aid.

KEYWORDS

espacio urbano, lamento, negritud, New Orleans, sonido

Resumen

En un funeral tradicional de jazz en New Orleans, el cambio característico de duelo a alegría es impulsado por los músicos de la banda de viento tejiendo melodías y ritmos juntos. Este artículo trata sobre cómo estas texturas en capas densas de sonido provocan sentimientos de lamento o alegría. Más que una acumulación de capas individuales, las texturas y las emociones componen una atmósfera, tanto en sentido físico como metafórico, de ayuda mutua. La relativa apertura del sonido —el hecho que no puede ser reducido a su contenido comunicativo— significa que puede también ser oído como un acto político de rechazo, rebelión, o algo totalmente diferente. Una palabra clave no reconocida en estudios de sonido, *textura* es colocada aquí en una red de relaciones con otras palabras claves: afecto, ensamble, atmósfera, cuidado, fugitividad, alegría/lamento, vida/muerte, ayuda mutua, rebelión, rechazo, religiosidad, voz/instrumento. Las texturas de sonido no llaman explícitamente por un final a la violencia anti-negra, y dudo incluso en caracterizar el funeral del jazz como un acto de

resistencia. Sin embargo, sugiero que los ensamblajes de sonidos y cuerpos negros “hablan” de la posibilidad de liberación y generan una atmósfera de ayuda mutua.

The text of the hymn is printed in the program for the funeral service. *Just a closer walk with thee...* Pastor Brandon Boutin gives the sermon, envoicing the word of God to the family and friends of Alfred Carter, who passed away at age 80. *Grant it, Jesus, is my plea...* The hymn is then sung by a soloist, the congregation clapping along to the organ accompaniment as the rhythm builds. *Daily walking close to Thee...* Soon after, trumpeter Gregg Stafford plays the very same song as an instrumental, first stating the melody and then taking improvisatory flights over the repeats. *Let it be, dear Lord, let it be...*

Following the service, the procession begins with yet another arrangement of the hymn, again without words, played by a brass band that slowly leads us to the gravesite. *I am weak, but Thou art strong...* Trumpets, trombones, saxophone, tuba, and drums mesh with each other and with the sounds of running engines, people greeting one another, footsteps on asphalt, echoes off of buildings. *Jesus, keep me from all wrong...* It is still spring, but the temperature is 82 degrees and the air makes the sound and everything else feel thicker and heavier. *I'll be satisfied as long...* More layers are added when the dirges end and the up-tempo spirituals begin. *As I walk...* This is the “second line,” when people sing, clap, and dance to the cemetery, where the band switches back to a dirge. *Let me walk close to Thee...* After the burial service, the band strikes up another fast song, the dancing resumes, and the celebration of life continues.¹

In a traditional New Orleans jazz funeral, words, voices, and instruments come and go, but sound is always present, and the texture is one of collective coalescence. Imagine an axis: horizontally, there is a continuum that extends from spoken word to instrumental sound; vertically, the sounds are suffused with a density of layers from the opening sermon to the closing second line. It is this braided embroidery, this ever-present texture, that musicians and others have drawn my attention to, how that richness brings individuals into fellowship together, and why these forms of assembly have a political resonance specific to Black New Orleanians.²

This article is about textures of sound that elicit shared affects of lament and of joy. More than an accumulation of individual layers, the textures and affects compose a whole atmosphere that is a force in itself. Gregg tells me, “The music on the street dictates the mood and the atmosphere of what goes on in the street.”³ There exists a kind of textural economy of richness, which is more affective than monetary. New Orleans poet, teacher, and activist Kalamu ya Salaam (2010) writes, “At a second line you will not likely hear anything that is memorable as a musical composition per se, and at the same time the whole atmosphere is unforgettable.” The richness is not simply an outcome of the event but the objective.

The songs have words but their fundamental role in the funeral cannot be conveyed in the semantic layer alone. The jazz funeral is deeply symbolic but the representational layer is only one source of its power. The prominence of the instruments draws attention to the materiality of sound and the ways it moves people physically and affectively, individually and collectively. Sound elicits joy and lament, generating the atmosphere of mutual aid.⁴ The relative openness or ambivalence of the sound—the fact that it does not explicitly “say” what it is about; it cannot be reduced to its communicative content—means that it can also be heard as a political act of refusal, rebellion, or something else altogether (Figure 1).⁵

THE TEXTURE

“Texture” can describe the feel or consistency of a surface, like the difference between rough cement and polished stone. This meaning carries over to visual art, as in the application of paint to create a coarse or smooth appearance on the canvas. But texture goes beyond the surface to describe the quality of any whole composed of distinct parts. *Textura*, in Latin, means “a weaving.” This original usage is retained in descriptions, for example, of eating. Independent from taste is the way ingredients cohere: the mouthfeel of crispy toast versus soggy bread.

Musical textures are classified in terms of their complexity, progressing from monophony (solo or unison) to homophony (together in synchrony), antiphony (alternation), heterophony (simultaneous variations of a melody), and polyphony (multiple voicings, independent yet interdependent). In the analytical hierarchies of Western art music, texture is a secondary musical parameter to the primacy of melody, harmony, and rhythm (Dunsby, 1989). But composers and musicologists in Black studies have upheld texture as a “master trope” that indexes social ideals of collaboration and improvisation (Floyd, 1995, 95). The complex interweaving of melodies heard in the jazz funeral procession—sometimes antiphonal, sometimes heterophonic, sometimes polyphonic, never in strict unison or synchrony—is called simply “the New Orleans style.” The blend of trumpet, trombone, and clarinet was the signature sound of early jazz as it emerged at the turn of the twentieth century (Brothers, 2006, 31–54; Hobson, 2014, 47–58). The dominant texture of the New Orleans style is heterophony, what Kwami Coleman (2021, 279) defines as “multiple autonomous improvising musical voices, each occupying the role of soloist and accompanist simultaneously.” Most significant is the “shared goal of synergetic cohesion” (279).

What I’ve tried to do in this article is describe and analyze sonic textures using layerings of text that are just as capacious. Jazz funeral music played on wind instruments is related to vocal lament traditions of the sort referenced in Hindu Vedas and Egyptian tomb paintings, the *Iliad* and



FIGURE 1 Alfred “Bucket” Carter dancing at the annual Young Men Olympian Jr. second line parade, September 23, 2011. (Photo by Judy Cooper) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

the *Odyssey*, the Old Testament and the Torah. Lament has created a repository for anthropological study, and I have put this body of literature in conversation with another, about the relation of music and sound to structures of anti-Blackness. As the point of intersection for conjoining these two theoretical strands, I offer up texture as an underrecognized keyword in sound studies, placed here in the center of a web of relations with other keywords: affect, assembly, atmosphere, benevolence, care, fellowship, fugitivity, joy/lament, life/death, memorializing, mutual aid, rebellion, refusal, religiosity, voice/instrument, wake work, and weather.

Steven Feld and Aaron Fox (1994, 39) conclude their now-classic article “Music and Language” with a section on vocal lament as “the most prominent and widespread discourse genre where one can comparatively study stylized progressions moving back and forth on all continua relating the speaking and singing voice.” The anthropological study of lament helped dislodge the primacy of *music* and *language* toward more expansive concepts of *sound* and *voice*, plotting communication on a horizontal continuum ranging from poesis and verbal art to untexted weeps and wails, cries and moans (Tolbert, 1990; Urban, 1988). Attention, too, was given to simultaneous layerings of sound, vertically, in the “thick” textures of lament (Seremetakis, 1991). Charles Briggs (1993, 949) interpreted multigroup voicing in terms of social power, as “a sort of inflation in the economy of agency such that agency becomes highly diffuse and can no longer be attributed to a single individual.”

Feld’s study of women’s funerary weeping in Papua New Guinea unraveled how Kaluli voicings (weeping, poetics, song, etc.) are modeled on the ecosystem of the Bosavi rainforest (waterfalls, birdcalls, etc.). Because the categories of musical texture derived from Western art music failed to fully explain the relation between human and ecological sounds, Feld (1988) drew upon the Kaluli theory of *dulugu ganalan*, or “lift-up-over-sounding.” A spatial-acoustic metaphor for describing the desired texture of “part relations that are *simultaneously in-synchrony while out-of-phase*” (81; emphasis in original), lift-up-over-sounding provides the basis for a sound structure that replicates Kaluli social structure, a cooperative egalitarianism as well as a profound multinaturalism.⁶ But if Feld was frustrated by given taxonomies of texture, I found that the method of relating sound structure to social structure could not explain why laments in New Orleans are played rather than sung, why they yield to joyful dance, and

why the assemblies of sound, affect, and movement are so overtly public, so “loud and proud” (Lipsitz, this section). The New Orleans example calls for scaffolding sound structures and social structures with political structures of anti-Blackness.

Alfred Carter was born into Jim Crow and lived through the entire civil rights era, and his passing in 2015 came 10 years after the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina destroyed his home. In the neighborhood known as Central City, where he was born in 1936, several bombs had been set at Black businesses and residences bordering white neighborhoods. One study details how racially restrictive covenants and segregated public housing “drained Central City of stability and wealth” (Devalcourt, 2011, 18). Education and job discrimination maintained poverty for Black people at rates three to four times that of whites. Desegregation of public schools in the 1960s expedited white flight out of the neighborhood. Surveying Central City in 1999, geographer Richard Campanella (1999, 335) described it as “decaying,” “in shambles,” with “treeless blocks” and an “inventory of old buildings . . . reduced by half.” In the aftermath of Katrina, the housing projects were bulldozed and rebuilt on a much smaller scale (Arena, 2012). An influx of whiter and wealthier newcomers has raised the cost of living, displacing Black residents. Contextualizing the sound of Carter’s jazz funeral means going beyond the methods of sonic, linguistic, and cultural analysis that have made lament a pivotal lever in the disciplinary shifts from music studies to sound studies and from language to voice.⁷

In the book *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, Clyde Woods (2017, xxiv) situates the response to Hurricane Katrina within an unbroken history of “planned abandonment.” The conditions of possibility for Black life have been determined by a shifting set of political elites who have maintained “control over resources and over the ideological and distributive institutions governing their action” (xxiv). After the fall of Reconstruction, city and state leaders unveiled the nation’s first Confederate monument, in honor of General Robert E. Lee, which reigned over the Central City neighborhood where Alfred Carter lived until it was taken down in 2017. Such symbols of white supremacy are physical representations of more insidious policies that determine life and death. In 1902, members of the Louisiana Medical Society weighed whether pneumonia and tuberculosis, or “galloping consumption,” could “solve the negro problem in the state” (quoted in Jacobs, 1988, 21). A century later, census data from 2010 showed the life expectancy for residents of Bucket’s neighborhood is 62 years, 13 years below the national average for Black Americans and 17 years below whites (Habans et al., 2020). The funeral processions, protest marches, and other events discussed in this article each occurred in Central City but at different historical moments, from Reconstruction to Jim Crow, from the civil rights era through the storm and its aftermath, into a moment defined by the Black Lives Matter movement, increasing visibility of racist violence, and a return to overt support of white nationalism. What has remained constant is the curtailment of Black life, creating an overriding atmosphere that Christina Sharpe terms “the weather.”

Sharpe’s metaphor of the weather is totalizing and yet brings specificity to general social science terms like “context” or “structure.” It names the impermeability and inescapability of a hold that begins with enslavement and does not end with emancipation. “To explicate Fanon, it is not the specifics of any one event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the machines in which we live” (Sharpe, 2016, 124). Struggles over integration, human rights, and liberation have brought change to political structures in different historical contexts, but anti-Blackness undergirds them all like a suspension bridge that flexes under duress while remaining sturdily in place. As I discuss in the article’s conclusion, this includes contemporary liberal forms of local governance. Moving across different orderings of subjection, Sharpe’s book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is an excavation of “wake work,” the simultaneous inhabitation of and disruption of the weather: “just as the weather is always ripe for Black death, the singularity also produces Black resistances and refusals” (124).

Many Americans only encounter the state-sponsored devaluation of Black life through deaths and funerals that become media spectacles, including those of Emmett Till, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., or the nine victims of a mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. Rebecca Louise Carter’s (2019) *Prayers for the People: Homicide and Humanity in the Crescent City* focuses instead on the routine violence that takes the lives of young Black New Orleanians. Her study is based in the same Central City neighborhood where Alfred Carter (no relation) lived and where women have formed communities of faith to memorialize the loss of their sons. Rebecca Carter unpacks how mothers “raise” the dead by communing with them, with each other, and with God: “Their ultimate objective, which remained closely aligned with the mission of the church, was to lay the foundation for a beloved community based on the recognition and cultivation of a sacred Black humanity and the restoration of Black personhood, value, and connectivity that requires” (179). They make social life in the midst of death, valuing individual and communal worth according to their own metrics.

Rebecca Carter’s research on memorialization has shaped my own study of life and death in Central City, even as I focus on men who belong to a burial society and the musical funerals they organize for fallen members of their brotherhood. Alfred Carter was a lifelong member of the Young Men Olympian Junior Benevolent Association, one of hundreds of mutual aid societies founded by Black men and women before and after Emancipation. Young Men Olympian’s articles of incorporation from 1884 state their mission:

To promote and cultivate morality, and to practice charity among its members and those who may come within the influences of the organization and its members; to care for the sick, alleviate the distress of the destitute members, to assist the dead, and do other acts of charity and benevolence.⁸

Today, Young Men Olympian is the last Black burial society in New Orleans to which members pay dues in exchange for health care and burial services, including a procession to the cemetery they have maintained since their founding. But there are dozens of societies known as Social Aid

and Pleasure Clubs that continue to organize jazz funerals for their members, host annual parades, and schedule regular meetings and fundraisers (Celestan and Waters, 2018). The unbroken history of these social institutions, with vestiges in West and Central Africa as well as Europe, is part of a broader ethics of care and politics of refusal:

The neighborhood and ward complex of large extended families, social aid and pleasure clubs, churches, healers, businesses, schools, other organizations and clubs, brass bands, musicians, artisans, workers, labor leaders, Mardi Gras Indians and second lines provided an endless supply of community-centered leadership, development initiatives, and institutionalized planning. (Woods 2017, 77)

These acts of care, fellowship, and public intimacy are propelled by sound. In the book *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Ashon Crawley (2017, 202–3) theorizes the sonic affect of Pentecostal church services as “happiness that is against reason and rationality,” an “ethical demand on the world that would have such richness, such complexity, discarded.” This is a related but qualitatively different argument about Black culture as resistance that defines much scholarly and popular discourse on music. Crawley, with Sharpe, Woods, Fred Moten, and others, is attending above all to sonic resonances among Black people and sociability within Black spaces. “Blackpentecostal aesthetic practice is a critique of Western law, grounded as it is in the liberal subject with all the attendant rights that accrue to such as ‘landed’ man” (Crawley, 2017, 144–45). Textures of sound offer a speculative proposition—what Crawley terms an “aesthetics of possibility”—for creating qualitatively different atmospheres. The sonic and affective registers of assembly work centrifugally in making Blackness audible and centripetally in fostering a shared sense of belonging and refusal of abandonment (Figure 2).⁹

THE SERVICE

Alfred Carter was born in 1936 and lived his whole life in Central City. When he was a child, his parents ran a beauty parlor and barbershop across the street from Greater St. Stephen Baptist Church. “He was raised in that church,” his daughter Belva told me when I visited her in their home after his passing. “He went every Sunday.” Carter was also a regular at Sportsman’s Corner bar down the block, and Belva sometimes stops by after working a catering job. “I’ll be going by the bar and they say, ‘Girl, we really miss your daddy.’” Known to all as “Bucket,” he was a raconteur who loved to tell jokes and dole out advice while rolling a toothpick or cigar in the corner of his mouth. He’d cheerfully explain to anyone who asked that his nickname came from the shape of his head.

Bucket worked as a warehouse manager at the K&B drugstore chain for 34 years, but his life was organized around time away from work, spent with family, in church, at Black-owned businesses like Sportsman’s, and with friends in Young Men Olympian. I was not close to Bucket and cannot speculate how he assessed these times and spaces, but his family and friends describe him as someone dedicated to enjoying himself and taking every opportunity to commune with others. “He was loved by everybody, Uptown, Downtown, it does not matter,” Norman Dixon Jr. tells me. Norman is the current president of Young Men Olympian, and his father grew up with Bucket in Central City. They both joined the club as children, marched in the annual parade, attended regular meetings, dances, and fundraisers, and participated in funerals for fellow members. “Our motto is: we take care of the sick and we bury the dead,” says Norman. “When African Americans didn’t have insurance policies, the communities took care of each other.”

The service begins at the Israelites Baptist Church on the morning of Saturday, March 21, 2015. Bucket’s casket is open in a half-couch display, surrounded by framed portraits and a towering arrangement of daisies spelling out “B-U-C-K-E-T.” He is laid out in a black suit and tie, white shirt and corsage, black-and-white handkerchief, and a fez cap with “Y.M.O. Jr.” printed in white above the symbol of a handshake. It matches the patch on his pocket and medallion around his neck. The clothes, the open casket, and the displays are all testimonials to Bucket’s stature, and so are the crowds filling up the pews. Arriving last are dozens of Young Men Olympian members, dressed exactly like Bucket, marching in precise order, with two positioning themselves astride the casket and the rest seated in the front rows, across the aisle from the family.¹⁰

Pastor Boutin was trained in homiletics at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Reading aloud the familiar Psalm 23, he regularly varies his intonation, timbre, and phrasing. *The Lord is my shepherd...* He invites the congregants to echo each line, while organist Joseph “Joe Cool” Davis backs them up. In call-and-response fashion, the pastor and the organist call upon the congregants in sound and they respond by piling on more sound. *And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever...* A young man rises from the first pew, steps to the lectern, and begins the opening lines to the hymn “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.” Joe Cool takes a moment to find the key, setting a foundation of chords to support the voice. As the song progresses, the singer tries to alter the given melody, adding pitch bends and melismatic runs, but the reaction is relatively muted, and he finishes to polite applause before returning to his seat.

Trumpeter Gregg Stafford is up next, and after a moment’s hesitation, he nods to the pianist and they begin to play the same song. Gregg is faithfully voicing the melody, gradually adding the slight ornaments associated most with gospel singing: vibrato at the end of long notes, bluesy pitch bends, flourishes of added notes, and so on (Boyer, 1979). The words are not distant—they were just sung moments before—but the sacred text is rendered more phantasmal when the voice is surrogated by a pipe forged from copper and zinc. By swinging the rhythm of the spiritual and improvising in the jazz tradition, Gregg gets the congregation to clap along, and appreciative noises fill up the space when he breathes.

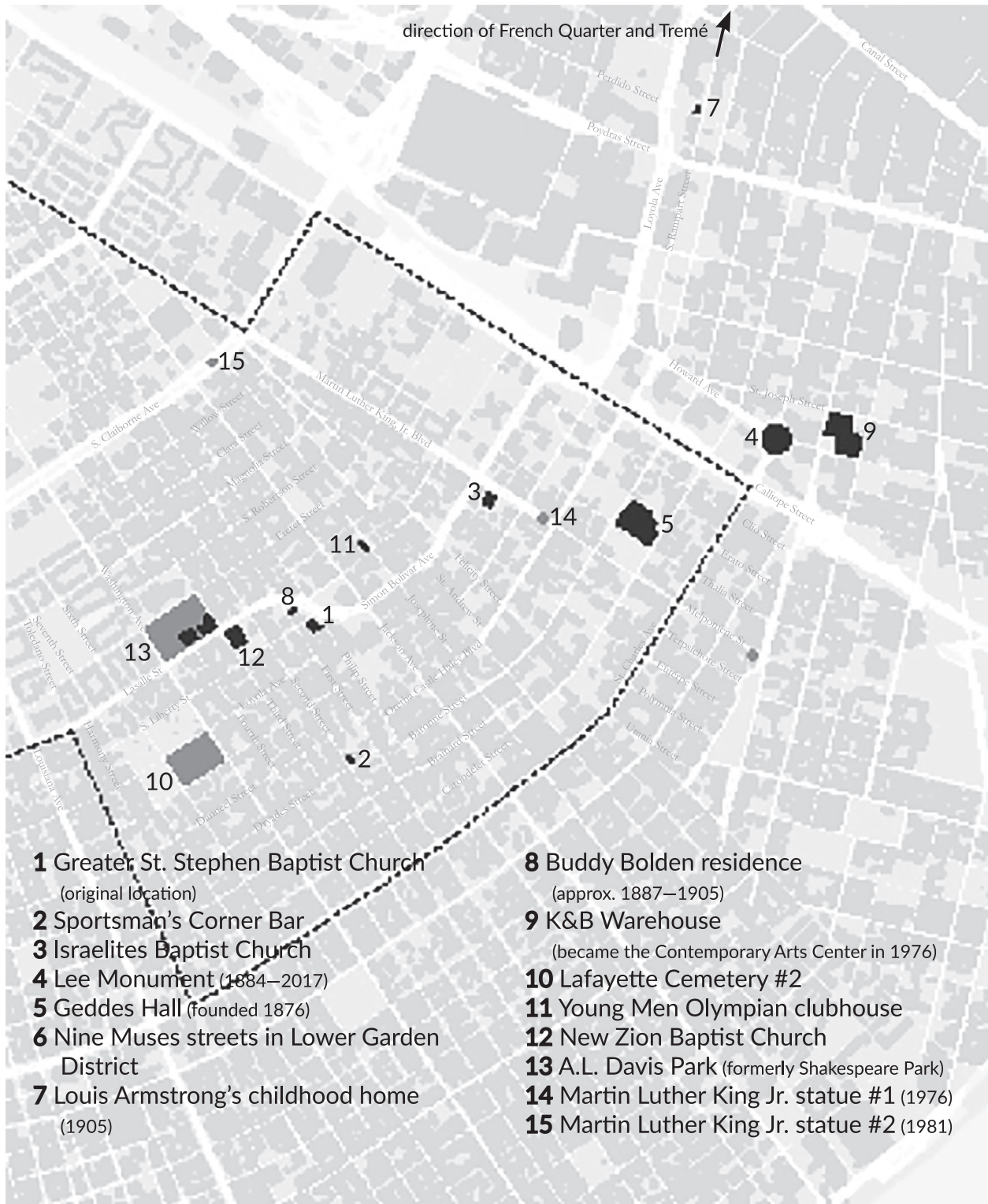


FIGURE 2 Map by Jacob Rosenzweig.

Boutin maintains the intensity in his eulogy, extemporizing, adding excess vocables to words, whooping. His inhaled breaths and cadential pauses are filled with interjections of *Alright!* and *Preach!* and wordless *Mmm-hmms*.

In the midst of it all Father, we understand that God is good all the time-ah.

(All the time.)

And all the time God is good so we thank you today, mmm.



FIGURE 3 Gregg Stafford performing the funeral service for Alfred “Bucket” Carter at the Israelites Baptist Church, March 21, 2015. (Photo by Judy Cooper) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

(Thank you Lord...)

Amen.

(Amen.)

Months later, I asked Gregg what he thought about the difference between the congregants’ response to the preacher and his own performance of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” compared to the singer who went before him. “The way he sung it was so, so stiff and formal,” he told me. The tone too reserved; the words overenunciated. “It was like he was singing in a Catholic church as opposed to a real, devout Baptist church.” Bucket had asked Gregg to play at his funeral, and Gregg knew “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” was “what Bucket really would have wanted.” The two had been close since the 1970s, when Gregg was just starting a career as both a jazz musician and a schoolteacher and Bucket was recruiting him to join Young Men Olympian. Sitting at his friend’s funeral, faced with the dilemma of repeating the selection or going against Bucket’s intentions, Gregg decided, “I’m going to play the same song that he just sung but I’m going to play it in a different way. The way we do it on the streets, you know?” Gregg smiles at the memory, “After the funeral, a lot of people came to Sportsman’s to compliment me. ‘Boy, you sure sent your boy home right. I know that he was just glad when you played that solo!’”

The sacredness of any service is dependent on religious text, but in the Black church, religious feeling is set in motion by musical sound, beginning with the sermon. “The sound of the sermon is not simply something added to the substance,” writes Evans E. Crawford (1995, 71), a preacher and professor of homiletics, “but rather is inseparable from the experience of participant proclamation, which is a communal event in the life of the congregation.” For Gregg, it was the singer’s lack of ornamentation, his thinning of excess, which rendered his performance more compatible with a Catholic church than a devout Baptist church. Gregg’s performance was qualitatively different because he invited participation through clapping and hollering, and his improvised ornamentations of the given melody added layers to the overall texture (Figure 3).

The testimonials that Crawley (2017, 161) describes in his book about Pentecostal services resonate with the funeral for Bucket: “the entire performance is to create a mood, to create an atmosphere, to create an environment where interruption is desired, where sporadic, spirited encounter happens.” The congregation breathing the air, sustaining life, enhances the atmosphere through sonic and bodily participation, ballooning the texture. “The fundamental quality of such aesthetic sociality is not that it can be shared, but that it must be common and used by all, for vitality, for life” (45). Crawley connects the sociality and aesthetics of Blackpentecostal sound to Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) undoing of European man, what she terms “unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom.” The sounds and feelings “perform an intervention into the object, the theme, and the transcendental subject of History” (Crawley, 2017, 151; see also McKittrick, 2016).

In the next section, I follow Crawley, Wynter, and Sharpe’s practice of unsettling historical narratives of progress to reconsider the decades after the Civil War. The dismantling of the slave system allowed the possibility of assembling together, and Black benevolent societies and churches established the traditions that continue today. But the transition was marked by continuities in unfreedom, as “slave law transformed into lynch law, into Jim and Jane Crow, and other administrative logics that remember the brutal conditions of enslavement after the event of slavery has supposedly come to an end” (Sharpe 2016, 106). Gregg sums it up by saying simply, “New Orleans is a racist city.”

THE WEATHER

In 1884, just after the brief period of Reconstruction was foreclosed by Southern Redemption, a group of doctors, deacons, and other professionals started the Young Men Olympian Junior Benevolent Association. Black societies like Young Men Olympian, Prince Hall Masons, and Original Illinois Club operated parallel to white associations like the Pickwick and Boston clubs. Members of those secret societies were among the Democrats who led violent attacks against the multiracial Republican Party, first at the Louisiana Constitutional Convention in 1866 and again at the Battle of Liberty Place in 1874. The Redeemers installed the Crescent City White League as the state militia and proclaimed, “just and legitimate superiority in the administration of our State affairs to which we are entitled by superior responsibility, superior numbers, and superior intelligence” (quoted in Roach, 1996, 63). They erected statues, they named streets for Confederate officers and schools for slaveholders, and they cut ribbons while marching bands played patriotic marches.

Saidiya Hartman (1997, 117) has written of the “perpetuation of the plantation system and the refiguration of subjection” following emancipation, into what she terms the “afterlife of slavery” (see also Hartman, 2007). In New Orleans, city leaders unveiled a towering monument to General Lee the same year that Young Men Olympian first met just two blocks away at Geddes Hall. Lee Circle was strategically positioned on St. Charles Avenue, the thoroughfare that divides Central City from the Lower Garden District neighborhood, renowned for its enormous antebellum homes. Connecting the two neighborhoods is a row of nine streets named after the Muses: Calliope, Clio, Erato, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Euterpe, Polymnia, and Urania. At this time, Mardi Gras traditions were also reimagined as part of a civilizational history of the white race rooted in ancient Greece. The members of the secret Pickwick and Boston clubs paraded down St. Charles in the Carnival “krewes” of Comus and Rex, cloaking their identities in masks and hoods. Comus’s 1873 parade was called “The Missing Links to Darwin’s Origins of Species,” with costumes parodying Republican politicians, Union soldiers, and Black subjects as animals (Roach, 1996, 261–69). The parade also included the band of the Army’s 19th Infantry, which had occupied the city on the side of the Union during the Civil War but now symbolized how sectional differences between the “boys in blue” and the “boys in gray” would be resolved.

With the air permeated by monuments to white supremacy, and ownership of the land asserted through official pageants, Black New Orleanians organized societies, pageantries, and bands of their own. Between 1865 and 1910, the Black population rose from approximately 25,000 to almost 100,000 as free people from rural Louisiana and throughout the South migrated to the city (Peretti, 1992, 25). Most settled in the Uptown district, upriver from the dividing line of Canal Street, with the highest concentration in Central City. For many urban migrants—“huddling for self-protection,” as W. E. B. Du Bois (1903, 153) wrote—church became the foundation for a Black civil society. A Catholic city that became an epicenter for Voodoo and Spiritualist worship, New Orleans also had the largest concentration of Black Protestants in the South. The city directory listed 20 Black Baptist churches in 1885 and nearly 50 by 1900 (Marquis, 1978, 31). In the first decade of the twentieth century, a young Louis Armstrong attended Mt. Zion Baptist Church on Howard Street, near Central City, where Rev. William Cosey would get “the whole church just rocking” (quoted in Brothers, 2006, 35). Mahalia Jackson lived five miles upriver, in the Black Pearl neighborhood, where she heard a charismatic Holiness preacher who “would preach in a cry, in a moan, would shout sort of like in a chant way, a groaning sound, which would penetrate to my heart” (quoted in Burford, 2018, 225).

There is a valuation of sonic surplus associated with Black sermonizing practices: variations in tone, pitch, stress, and pronunciation, along with rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Zora Neale Hurston (1934, 361) wrote that a successful preacher “adorns the prayer with every sparkle of earth, water and sky.” Hurston was studying anthropology with Franz Boas at Columbia University when she first came to New Orleans in 1928. Her research focused on religious worship in Voodoo ceremonies and Baptist and Sanctified churches. In her characteristic wit, Hurston wrote that the sermon “is in reality merely a framework upon which to hang more songs.” The congregational singing she heard was full of “jagged harmony” or “disharmony.” The sound was “not regular” and “not to be ironed out.” The spirituals “must be sung by a group” but never in unison. The goal was “every man for himself,” to create an overall effect of “a sort of liquefying of words” (360–61).

The impact of such aesthetics of possibility on the rise of gospel and jazz music in New Orleans is incalculable. When Mahalia peered through the open door of the Sanctified church, she said the congregants “sang with their whole bodies” (quoted in Brothers, 2006, 39). After moving to Chicago in 1931, she became a pioneering gospel singer, distilling the congregational sound into a single voice. When Armstrong first heard the dirge at a jazz funeral, he connected the musical techniques to the church services his mother and grandmother took him to: “as they go to the cemetery they play a funeral march, they play ‘Flee as a Bird,’ ‘Nearer My God to Thee,’ and they express themselves in those instruments, singing those notes the same as a singer would” (*Satchmo the Great*). Jazz historians believe the first musician to transpose the jagged vocal harmonies from church onto the wind instruments of jazz bands and brass bands was Charles “Buddy” Bolden.

Bolden was born in 1877 and baptized at St. John the Fourth Baptist Church in Central City (Marquis, 1978, 31). It was in the late 1890s that he began mobilizing the ecstatic emotionality of church into dance halls, honky tonks, public parks, lakefront resorts, and other secular spaces. In the streets, Bolden marched in funerals and parades sponsored by one of approximately 200 mutual aid societies formed in the decades after emancipation (Jacobs, 1988, 23). Along with churches and entertainment spaces, it was through these institutions that people of color took advantage of the freedom of association granted them with the Fourteenth Amendment. Newspaper accounts testify to the enormity of the processions that were conspicuous in their visibility and volume as they wound right by Lee Circle and other symbols of the rise of Jim Crow rule. A notice in the March 19,



FIGURE 4 Gregg Stafford leads the brass band in the funeral procession for Alfred “Bucket” Carter, March 21, 2015. (Photo by Judy Cooper) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

1887 issue of the *Weekly Pelican* lists the route for the annual Young Men Olympian parade, starting at Thalia and Rampart streets in Central City, through the business district to Canal Street, back uptown along St. Charles Avenue into the Lower Garden District, before returning to Central City.¹¹ Bolden would have been 10 years old when the parade passed near his house at First and Liberty streets, with the Excelsior and Pickwick bands dressed in Prussian-style military uniforms and playing arrangements of marches and rags.

In their original form, bands were featured between the royalty at Mardi Gras parades and behind dignitaries at civic events like the unveiling of the Lee monument in 1884. By design, they are meant to maintain a sonic and visual atmosphere of subservience in spectacles of power that fill public space. But after Bolden, the marching band developed into a Black music ensemble through collective improvisation, syncopated polyrhythm, and liberatory dance. When Woods writes of Bolden, we do not meet a subject defined by his immersion in African American cultural forms, as we do in canonical texts of jazz studies that begin with New Orleans as the “birthplace” of a musical style. Instead, we are presented with a renegade inciting a cultural revolution, a “Blues insurrection” led by “a growing New Orleans Black working class attempting to impose its social vision upon a regime organized around its brutal exploitation” (Woods, 2017, 77). To “assist the dead,” “care for the sick,” and “do other acts of charity and benevolence,” as the original charter for Young Men Olympian states, is to cultivate an ethics of care. From this orientation, textures of collective improvisation in a funeral procession like the one for Bucket resound a note of refusal that harkens back to Bolden and his contemporaries (Figure 4).

THE PROCESSIONAL

“He was a very social person,” says Norman of Bucket, who often paid a visit to the Dixon home before heading out on nights and weekends. Norman’s mother, Althea, worked beside Bucket at the K&B headquarters adjacent to Lee Circle, making ice cream while he stacked the tubs for delivery. He filed for social security three months before he turned 62, and then retired. “I’m getting it while I’m living,” he told Belva. “My children are grown. I’m getting ready to retire and enjoy myself.” Bucket’s wife, Evelyn, and sister, Lodellia, oversaw his finances and helped with his outfits for the annual



FIGURE 5 The Young Men Olympian Jr. march to the dirge “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” at the funeral for Alfred “Bucket” Carter, March 21, 2015. (Photo by Judy Cooper) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

parade. “My daddy didn’t even know how to write out a check,” says Belva with a laugh. “All he knew how to do was second line, and eat, and just go on.”

At funerals, Bucket often led the procession wearing a black sash with “Grand Marshal” written in gold lettering. He was also chairman of Young Men Olympian’s Sick Committee, “the ones who go out and visit the sick,” says Norman, “and when a member dies, they meet with the family and find out what the family wants done and what they want us to do.” Norman is explaining this from behind his desk at the office where he works as a housing manager. Remembering his mother’s death from Alzheimer’s, his eyes fill with tears at the thought of Bucket’s reaction. “He came over to the hospital when I told him it looked like she wasn’t going to make it.” Bucket was the first one there at Althea’s funeral, sitting alone in the pews of First Emanuel Baptist Church while the family and staff were setting up. “They were like brother and sister.” He paid his respects over the casket, walked outside to the sound of a dirge, and bid farewell when the band transitioned to joyful songs like he’d done hundreds of times before.

Bucket was dealing with diabetes and hypertension but he’d decided against open heart surgery. “He was at peace with it,” says Norman. Bucket gave specific instructions about where and how he wanted to be buried, what music should be played during and after the service, and which clothes he would be dressed in for the viewing. “A week before he died, he called my brother back here,” Belva tells me, gesturing to Bucket’s room in the house she inherited from him. “Got his suit out, everything he wanted to be laid out in.” On his way to a doctor’s appointment, Bucket had a heart attack and fell to his death. “My daddy say, ‘I lived my life. I owe the world nothing.’”

After the funeral service, members of the Young Men Olympian carry the casket down the front steps of the church, swaying to an achingly slow dirge. The pallbearers yell *Open up!*, clearing a path to a horse-drawn carriage on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Holding his trumpet to his mouth with one hand, Gregg marches up the column to place his other hand on the casket. In the street, a dozen musicians are “turned out” in the traditional uniform of white shirt, black pants and shoes, and white visored cap. A crowd of spectators has been awaiting this public stage of the burial and police have blocked off traffic. After the body is loaded in the carriage, the grand marshal shouts, *Two-by-two, everybody line up!*, and the cortege proceeds down the street. The family, the club members, the band, and the mortuary staff make up what is known as the “first line,” while the crowd falling in step behind them is called the “second line” (Figure 5).

Gregg voices the melody through his trumpet while the other instrumentalists back him up. *What a friend we have in Jesus...* Christian themes of redemption and liberation have taken on specific meanings in the Black church. *All our sins and griefs to bear...* And the messages of traditional hymns remain a feature of any homegoing service. *And what a privilege to carry...* But instruments act as a surrogate for speech, and a jazz funeral ideally features multiple musicians on each instrument to create the desired intensity of the “New Orleans style.” *Everything in God to prayer...* The thick melodic textures are improvised and yet adhere to a relatively rigid formula.

“Usually, in the trumpet section, one guy is playing the melody, other guy is playing harmony, and the other guy is soloing,” explains Gregg. “When the other guy stops soloing, he takes the harmony [part]. You’re keeping the melody going, and you’re giving the horns some structure, some body.” There is a cooperative reliance among the trumpeters “basing” one another, rotating through the roles like runners in a relay race. Except no one

stops after they pass the baton; they keep going. “The trombones play around the melody: pedal tones, low notes, riffs.” They fill in the spaces between trumpet melodies. “The reeds play countermelody all the time, so that the trumpet or whoever is soloing could ride up on [top of] it.” Reed instruments—clarinet and saxophone—are renowned for their voice-like qualities of expression, but each wind instrument has a distinct voice. The way Gregg describes their blend, they do not stand on their own as independent melodies, harmonies, and countermelodies so much as they conjoin to form a composite.

This is the multilayered texture I earlier described as comparable to lament traditions studied by Steven Feld in the Bosavi rainforest of Papua New Guinea, Nadia Seremetakis in the Mani Peninsula of Greece, Charles Briggs in the Delta Amacuro of Venezuela, and others interpreting the untexted vocal sounds of weeping, wailing, and crying. With Black expression, participatory sound-making is central to an overall “heterogeneous sound ideal,” Olly Wilson’s (1992, 159) theorization of “the tendency to create a high density of musical events within a relatively short musical time frame—a tendency to fill up the musical space.”¹² Wilson understood the instrumental dirge, and the textures that extend to jazz and beyond in the New Orleans style, as emblematic examples of the “kaleidoscopic range” and “mosaic-like quality” of so much Black musicality (168). The opposite of unison, the texture is saturated with “participatory discrepancies,” what Charles Keil (1987, 277) calls the “out of time” and “out of tune” phenomena “that make music a peculiarly powerful vehicle for participatory consciousness and action.”

When religious vocal lament is rendered instrumentally, instruments perform a type of surrogacy that extends wordless falsettos, shouts, and moans from the body through a prosthetic object. Semantic meaning becomes a “ghostly presence” of the sort that Avery Gordon (2008, 6) finds whenever spectral phantoms of Blackness are “there and not there at the same time.” They constitute the dark sounds that Nathaniel Mackey (1987, 47) has called “telling inarticulacies,” expressing a “frustration with and questioning of given articulates, permissible ways of making sense.” Sounding without words is subversive in the sense that signification lies outside the “articulate order” of dominant repertoires. It is perhaps a practice of coding, but it is not hidden, and those in the second line are not “stealing away.” The sound is a thunderous proclamation, relying upon the function of wind instruments to amplify, to signal, to call, to invite participation. This is one aspect of the jazz funeral that appears to me to be distinct among the lament traditions that have fascinated anthropologists, while the other is the characteristic shift in the affective register from mourning to joy.

Leading the procession to the gravesite, Gregg signals the snare drummer to roll out a cadence. The grand marshal gives four short blasts of his whistle to announce the faster tempo. By the time the horns enter with the opening phrase of “Didn’t He Ramble,” some in the second line have already begun their spins, drops, and jumps. The musicians stop playing to sing a verse and others join in.

Didn’t he ramble?... Everyone is now moving with a syncopated lilt in their step. Stoic expressions give way to smiles, and a few second liners wave handkerchiefs or decorated umbrellas. *He rambled...* The carriage moves along the dotted centerline of the street, preceded by the band, with the members of Young Men Olympian out front, the tassels on their fezzes swinging in unison to the rhythm. *Rambled all around. In and out of town...* The embroidery of the melodic instruments in the “front line” is matched by those in the rhythm section, or “back row.” The bass drummer hits the drumhead with a mallet and the cymbal with a stick, the snare drummer plays with both sticks, while the tuba holds everything down with looping bass lines. *Didn’t he ramble?...* The polyrhythm radiates outward as people clap and strike cowbells or beer bottles. *Didn’t he ramble?...* We turn off M.L.K. and toward the cemetery. *He rambled ‘til the butcher cut him down...* The verse ends, the horns go up, and someone starts a call-and-response chant over the instrumental arrangement. *Y-M-O! (Bucket!)*

In the book *Talk That Music Talk: Passing on Brass Band Music in New Orleans the Traditional Way*, Gregg explained to authors Bruce Barnes and Rachel Breunlin that the responsibility of the bandleader is “to celebrate the life of the deceased.” With a change in the tempo and the mood, “You know he’s gone off to a better place. His reward is in heaven, and everybody now is joyful” (Barnes and Breunlin, 2014, 66) (Figure 6).

Mutual aid manifests in the tempos and textures heard at funerals, while these sounds work, in turn, to forge the very bonds of association. The sound is both a model for and an outcome of collectivity that “strains against” practices of fragmentation and enclosure, in Fred Moten’s incisive phrase. “How would you recognize the *antiphonal accompaniment* to gratuitous violence—the sound that can be heard as if in response to that violence, the *sound that must be heard* as that to which such violence responds?” he asks (Moten, 2013, 755; emphasis added). Throughout Moten’s extensive body of theory, the “burial ground” (739) of the Black subject is met with soundful practices of lament and joy. The wordless moaning associated with the blues aesthetic and the Black church, reaching peak intensification in funeral services, is part of a repertoire of sounds—falsetto, melisma, whooping—“that will prove to be nonneutralizable and irreducible” (Moten, 2003, 196). Joyful noises take on a resurrectionary character because “Celebration is the essence of Black thought, the animation of Black operations, which are, in the first instance, our under-common, underground, submarine sociality” (Moten 2013, 742).¹³ Memorializing, fellowshipping, joymaking—rambling—affirm social life through sound.

The procession stops at Lafayette #2 Cemetery, where Pastor Boutin administers the burial at the tombs the Young Men Olympian have maintained since 1884. Gregg, Norman Jr., and Belva stand among the crowd with their heads lowered and hands clasped. Then the music starts again, up-tempo and upbeat, and shirts untuck, collars unbutton, beer bottles pop open. This is a song with no words and no name, known colloquially as “Tuba Fats,” after the composer, Anthony “Tuba Fats” Lacen. The unfurling of each new melodic phrase is greeted with whoops of familiarity. When members of Young Men Olympian finally file into their clubhouse, they pass a man with a T-shirt emblazoned with Bucket’s picture and the caption “Mr. Bucket—2015—Though I’m Gone My Memory Shall Live On” (Figure 7).



FIGURE 6 The second line at the funeral for Alfred “Bucket” Carter, March 21, 2015. (Photo by Pableaux Johnson) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]



FIGURE 7 Pastor Brandon Boutin reads the last rites for Alfred “Bucket” Carter at the tombs of the Young Men Olympian Jr. inside Lafayette #2 Cemetery, March 21, 2015. (Photo by Judy Cooper) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

THE JOY

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Central City was the hub of Black political organizing in New Orleans. In 1957, Rev. Abraham Lincoln Davis hosted Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the inaugural Southern Christian Leadership Conference at New Zion Baptist Church. Oretha Castle and Jerome Smith helped form a local chapter of Congress of Racial Equity to organize lunch-counter sit-ins and freedom rides to neighboring Mississippi. A 1960 boycott of white-owned businesses was followed in 1963 by a “freedom march” of 15,000 people out of Central City’s Shakespeare Park and toward City Hall. A decade later, Gregg Stafford played trumpet in a march to Shakespeare Park organized in protest of the police killing of two Black students at Southern University. A. L. Davis became the first Black City Council member in 1975, and Shakespeare Park was renamed in his honor four years later. Melpomene Street was renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, and statues of King were placed at two prominent

intersections, including one on the newly named Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard.¹⁴ In 1992, council member and Central City resident Dorothy Mae Taylor spearheaded the desegregation of Mardi Gras societies, which the Mistick Krewe of Comus refused, never returning to the streets.

In the mid-2010s and early 2020s, I attended several “Black Lives Matter” protests that alerted me to similarities and contrasts with the ostensibly apolitical processions that have been my primary focus of study. On November 30, 2014, a crowd gathered at Lee Circle to protest the decision to free officer Darren Wilson in the police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. One of the speakers, teacher and poet Michael “Quess?” Moore, gestured toward the towering statue of Lee and called for the removal of all white supremacist monuments, street names, and school names throughout the city. In the following months, Quess? joined with fellow teacher Angela Kinlaw and activist Malcolm Suber to form Take ‘Em Down NOLA. In the spring of 2017, their demand to “take down all symbols of white supremacy” dovetailed with Mayor Mitch Landrieu’s decision to remove four of the most controversial monuments, honoring Lee, Confederate general P. G. T. Beauregard, Confederate president Jefferson Davis, and the Battle of Liberty Place. The move sparked a national debate about symbols of white supremacy, which came to a head that summer in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the planned removal of a statue of Lee initiated a violent “Unite the Right” rally. Dozens were injured and Heather Heyer was killed when a white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters. President Trump’s comment that there was “blame on both sides” fueled discord and ignited more rallies, including Take ‘Em Down NOLA’s “Solidarity with Charlottesville Protest” on August 19.

The sound of the event would be familiar to anyone who attended one of the many protest marches in the United States that expanded after Trump’s election in 2016 and the police killing of George Floyd in 2020. We begin in Louis Armstrong Park on the outskirts of the French Quarter, where I’ve set up a microphone, loudspeakers, and a generator with other volunteers. The most crucial aspect of creating the sense of unity that is key to a successful assembly is for speakers’ voices to be heard. As in any event where a monologue is addressed to an audience, the texture of the demonstration is relatively “thin” because attention is ideally focused on the speaker’s delivery. Participation is defined primarily by bodily presence and close listening, with audience interjections of clapping, snapping fingers, or shouting to “back up” the speaker. When organizers seek to further amplify the dynamics of participation, they turn to music.

As we march toward Jackson Square, Suber leads us in a series of chants. *The People, unITEd, will NEVER be deFEATed!* ... The invocation of “the people,” the symmetrical phrasing, the rhythmic accents, and the assonant sonorities all work to create unification through shared vocalization. We march at the same tempo, our footsteps coinciding with the stress of a syllable. *No TRUMP, no Kkk, no FASCist u.s.A.* ... The texture expands from unison to antiphony in call-and-response chants. *What do we WANT? (Take Em DOWN!) When do we WANT it? (NOW!)* ... As Noriko Manabe (2019) has observed, a successful protest is one where voices, bodies, and sentiments are synchronized in a collective through rhythmic enunciation of explicitly political messages. Specific sounds and sonic textures catalyze specific forms of participation and modes of assembly.

In a funeral procession or parade, the way sounds and bodies fill public spaces also articulates to some degree a message of refusal, enacted via different registers of sound, texture, and affect. What constitutes “the political” is more opaque and subjective when sounds are severed from language and densely layered, or when the goal of an assembly is collective joy and commemoration rather than explicit protest. Kalamu ya Salaam (2010) writes of second line parades, “It’s almost a given that someone will greet/touch you with a hug, a kiss, or at the very least an enthusiastic pound of fist atop fist.” He connects this “spirit family of the streets” to a politics of subjection and enclosure:

Plessy vs. Ferguson might ordain that we could not ride first class on public accommodations and that segregation was the way the American South defined equality, but when we strutted up and down our dusty streets, we declared our independence from American conceptions of who and what so-called “Colored people” were ... hard-line racism actually became a fiery funeral pyre from which our spirit families rose phoenix-like to parade through Black communities declaring that regardless of the strictures of segregation, we could and would take care of ourselves, and would do so with panache.

A politics of joy is heard in the textures of association and felt in the fellowship of assembly. “It was very rare that you’d see him down or in a bad mood,” Norman Jr. says of Bucket. “I think that’s one of the reasons why he lived so long, because he wasn’t a person who would get stressed out over little things.” Bucket was just five years old when he began parading with Young Men Olympian, and he came out to dance and socialize on Sundays for his entire life. “I’ve been parading a long time, and I still get excited,” Bucket explained in 2008, when he was interviewed about Sportsman’s Corner bar for the book *Cornerstones: Celebrating the Everyday Monuments & Gathering Places of New Orleans’ Neighborhoods*. “If you hear all that good music and everybody laughing and talking and having fun, you’re going to get with it and that’s for sure” (Himelstein, Breunlin, and Rogers, 2008, 22). Following Crawley, Hartman, Mackey, McKittrick, Moten, Sharpe, and others in Black studies, this musical enjoyment can be heard in terms of refusal, as a rejoinder to an atmosphere of social death.

Sitting to finish this article eight years after Bucket’s passing, I found myself stuck on a revision requested by an anonymous reviewer to more clearly connect Wynter’s “critiques of Western epistemologies of life/death/mortality” to “the specific moments of escape, insurgency, or marronage that exist on the Black sonic register in New Orleans.” I remembered a video that Belva had given me of a tribute to her father upon his retirement as grand marshal in 2012 and sat to watch it again. At the head of the parade, Bucket is sitting on a flatbed trailer with raised seats so he can see and be seen. His division of Young Men Olympian appears in crisp white sport coats and black pants, dancing in front of a brass band playing strictly traditional songs. But some of the more modern bands and clubs come through in waves of sound and color: the Original Pigeontown Steppers,

West Bank Steppers, Nine Times, Big Nine, Lady Buckjumpers, Perfect Gentlemen, Sudan, Prince of Wales, Old and Nu Style Fellas. There must be 200 musicians and club members marching and another thousand or so following along. Police escorts arranged, parade permits secured, outfits planned, bands contracted, stops scheduled, all to honor one man.

It is not possible for a joyful tribute to the living, or a commemoration of the dead, to solve structural inequalities or act as a salve for the weather of anti-Blackness. I am hesitant to even characterize these events as acts of resistance. What Belva, Gregg, and Norman have described to me are manifestations of collective joy and testimonies to lives worth living within spaces of planned abandonment. That story is written, also, in the words the band is now singing. *Glory, glory. Hallelujah! Since I laid my burdens down. I feel better. So much better! Since I laid my burdens down.* You can hear it in the layered melodies of the horns and the hoots and hollers at parade's end, when one club member after another dances through the crowd to kiss or fist bump Bucket, who sits like royalty on a chair in the middle of Henriette Dellile Street in the Tremé neighborhood. "Over 70 some years he's been bringing joy to this culture," says community organizer Jerome Smith as he presents a plaque to Bucket. "This is our way to say thanks."

When Bucket passed away five years later, he left a very different New Orleans than the one he was born into. By 1970, when Maurice "Moon" Landrieu was elected mayor, City Hall was officially desegregated and Black New Orleanians were appointed to every level of government. A path was cleared for Ernest "Dutch" Morial to take office in 1978, and a string of Black mayors followed until Moon's son, Mitch, was elected in 2010 with pivotal Black support. Racial representation also became more visible in the cultural sector, where jazz, second line parades, Creole food, and other Black cultural forms became the cornerstone of the tourism industry. The annual New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival features dozens of brass bands onstage and contracts Young Men Olympian and other clubs to schedule "mock" parades through the festival grounds. The festival is the high point of the year for Gregg Stafford and other musicians who earn a living presenting local music to diverse audiences.

But retrofitting the weather system to accommodate Black cultural and political representation has not remedied the exploitation and abandonment of Black people. The Peoples' Assembly, a sister organization of Take 'Em Down NOLA, notes that a tiny fraction of the city's \$615 million annual budget is allocated to children, families, job development, or affordable housing. "This city could not function without us," they write. "Yet we reap none of the benefits of the billions brought into New Orleans by tourism."¹⁵ With all the change over the life arcs of Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, and Bucket Carter, there is continuity in abandonment. The New Orleans style has also remained ever-present, a sonic texture that has become iconic of race and of place. Also constant is the lament the musicians elicit during the dirge and the joyful dance stimulated by up-tempo songs upon the release of the dead from the world of the living, even as sounds and styles are under constant revision (Sakakeeny, 2013). Sounds, affects, and commemorations cannot end the weather of anti-Black violences, but they can be heard and felt as a type of refusal, rebellion, or any number of other possibilities. Rather than articulate an explicit political message, the sonic textures and bodily assemblies generate atmospheres of mutual aid that give participants a sense of what liberation might feel like.

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ENDNOTES

¹ This article arose out of witnessing jazz funeral processions since moving to New Orleans in 1997. After attending the funeral for Bucket in 2015, I reached out to his friends and fellow Young Men Olympian members Gregg Stafford and Norman Dixon Jr and his daughter Belva Carter to ask permission to feature Bucket in my study of the sound of jazz funerals. Their quotes come from interviews conducted in 2016. The ethnographic descriptions come from my field notes as well as a homemade video recording that Belva shared with me and the photographs of Judy Cooper and Pableaux Johnson.

² My work is in dialogue with Matthew Morrison's (2020) theory of "Blacksound," but the materials discussed in this article are qualitatively different from Morrison's focus on "the formation of race and property laws throughout the nineteenth century via aesthetics," so I have not adopted his neologism.

³ Quotes come from interviews with Belva Carter (June 14, 2016), Norman Dixon Jr. (June 9, 2016), and Gregg Stafford (June 7, 2016).

⁴ I'm using the term "affect" capaciously to describe social, performative, and public displays of emotion. On the conceptual distinctions between musical affect, emotion, and feeling, see Desai-Stephens and Reisnour (2020, 101–03).

⁵ My positionality as a white Arab American doing ethnography and other forms of collaboration with Black New Orleanians is discussed at length elsewhere (e.g., Sakakeeny, 2013, 2019; Feld and Sakakeeny, 2022).

⁶ The reference is to Feld's (1984) earlier article "Sound Structure as Social Structure."

- ⁷See Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) on how the culture concept developed by Franz Boas and other anthropologists in the early twentieth century largely invalidated the determinacy of race in their attempts to debunk the influence of biology on culture. In 2013, Deborah A. Thomas and M. Kamari Clarke (2013, 318) noted a shift toward studies of power and inequality but called for more analysis on “how structures and institutions still undergird particular racialist meanings and orders.” Following Donald Trump’s ascent to the presidency in 2016, studies of racism proliferated with the resurgence of the white power movement, but Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús and Jemima Pierre (2020, 67) warn: “While the current political climate allows for attempts to link ‘white supremacy’ primarily to ‘white nationalism,’ we contend that this move further hides the systematic deployment of white supremacy as a structuring logic that serves as the baseline for modernity and its cognates of liberalism, democracy, progress, and rationality.”
- ⁸The charter was printed in the program for “The Young Men Olympian Jr. Benevolent Association, Inc. Celebrating 125th Anniversary” (2009) (author copy).
- ⁹For an anthropological study of social abandonment, see Biehl (2005).
- ¹⁰On Black mourning practices at funerals see Holloway (2003) and Moten (2003, 192–210).
- ¹¹“Olympian Benevolent Association,” *New Orleans Weekly Pelican*, March 19, 1887: 3.
- ¹²Kwami Coleman (2021: 279–80) suggests that the heterophonic textures heard in Ornette Coleman’s 1961 LP *Free Jazz* “restored one of the canonical jazz tradition’s most primordial elements: ‘spontaneous group improvisation’” (quoting a contemporary review of the album).
- ¹³This section “The Processional” is indebted to Hartman’s (1997, 49–78) analysis of Black pain and pleasure and Moten’s (2003, 1–24) dialogue with her intervention, which he brings into conversation with Mackey’s poetics, all of which then inform Crawley’s (2017) work. I ascribe to what Moten (2013) hesitatingly terms “black optimism” as an antiphonal response to theories of social death associated with “afro-pessimism.”
- ¹⁴This paragraph draws from the previously cited works by Carter (2019), Devalcourt (2011), and Woods (2017).
- ¹⁵Quotes taken from the website of the New Orleans Peoples Assembly. Accessed at <http://peoplesassemblyneworleans.org/our-movementhttp://peoplesassemblyneworleans.org/our-movement>

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