

**PORT OF CALL: COSMOPOLITANISM OF A DIFFERENT SHADE IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ORLEANS**

In a bustling port city like nineteenth-century New Orleans, the “Capitol of the South,” where residents exchanged ideas, languages, and customs as regularly as they did commodities, it is not surprising that a dynamic and diverse culture and community developed among the enslaved. Indeed many historians, anthropologists, musicians, and cultural critics cite the rituals of Congo Square and Voodoo as evidence of New Orleans’ so-called exceptionalism, particularly in relation to other sites in the United States. This focus on distinctive rituals, however, neglects both the connections between New Orleans and other sites in the Atlantic World as well as the everyday lives of bondage that individuals held captive in New Orleans survived. A sustained examination of the migrations that brought enslaved people to New Orleans from other sites in the Americas, however, provides insight into both the ties binding the site to other regions as well as the enslaved everyday in the cityscape. The mass migration from Saint Domingue to New Orleans in 1809 proves particularly instructive, highlighting the processes by which living commodities, those whose bodies, labor, and offspring were the inalienable property of others, became cosmopolitan citizens of the Atlantic World.

So just who were the polyglot peoples enslaved in the Crescent City and what did they do outside Congo Square, on the days the drums stood silent? To answer this question, this essay views enslaved migrants to Louisiana not simply in terms of their juridical, social, or even racial distance from *gens de couleur* and Euro-Americans, but as a diverse population defined as much by internal cleavages as by shared bondage. This exploration is central to current scholarship on the construction of African diasporas through the movement, communication, and innovation of enslaved individuals; the social histories of enslaved communities, with an emphasis on the

internal fissures of space, gender, sexuality, race, and labor; and finally the complex boundaries of race and class among peoples of African descent.