

5-18-2012

Casa Samba: Identity, Authenticity, and Tourism in New Orleans

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Casa Samba: Identity, Authenticity, and Tourism in New Orleans

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies

by

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May, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would have been impossible without Curtis, Carol, and Bomani Pierre, and Jorge Alabê. These are smart and highly critical thinkers who gave selflessly of their time, who engaged in thoughtful collaboration, and who are terrific narrators of their life stories. There is nothing I could say in words that expresses how much I have learned from the Pierre family in the course of this project. In the hundreds of pages that follow, I hope some elements of their lessons make it onto the page. I am indebted to Dr. Jeffery Ehrenreich who not only chaired my dissertation committee, but also willingly and enthusiastically lent his photographic expertise to this endeavor. If not for him, I would have a poorer product now. He helped to frame this project and then offered photographic evidence of everything I was seeing. I am grateful to Dr. Renia Ehrenfeucht who went above and beyond her role as a member of the committee to talk this document into shape face-to-face. She is sharp, and she tried to make me sharper. Dr. Connie Atkinson offered reality checks when I thought I discovered something new under the sun, and Dr. David Gladstone usually suggested that I would be fine no matter what. They round out an excellent committee. The sum of parts may be greater than the whole.

There are other people that I owe big time. Dr. Benjamin Morris, friend and fellow arbiter, helped me in many ways, but most importantly, he never failed to talk me off of the ledge. Brent Tranchina, roommate, friend, and chef, knew I could do it. So did my mom, Angelique LaCour, and my dad, John Lastrapes—though he would still like to know what I'm going to do now. Casey Knottgen and Kelly Owens shared their work with me and let me share mine with them during the crucial writing period; that is invaluable. Rachael Wissing and Christy Beshears remembered the thesis that led to this dissertation and knew how to support changing the former into the latter. Jeremy Walton caught the end of this process and listened, patiently, while I explained convoluted thoughts that he then helped me unravel.

I am grateful to Tulane University's New Orleans Gulf South Center for giving me a 2011 Research Fellowship for the Study of the Global South. I am also grateful to UNO's Latin American Studies program, especially to Dr. Steve Striffler, who gave me a summer research grant. Their financial support made a huge difference at a key moment in research time.

Two people reminded me throughout this process that the most important thing on earth, more important than any dissertation, is making the most of life while we have it. I dedicate this work to my brother Mark Lastrapes, and my friend Rafael Delgadillo.

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ABSTRACT

Casa Samba is a cultural organization and samba school that has been operating in the New Orleans performance scene since 1986. The group has been run by an American couple, Curtis and Carol Pierre, since its inception. Their son, Bomani Pierre, has been raised in the Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance practices that Casa Samba teaches and performs. Life histories of the group's founding family are the basis of this qualitative case study. Using the details of individual lives and the context that these details provide, this dissertation seeks answers to two key questions: How and why does an American couple run a samba school? How does Casa Samba's presence in New Orleans shape its practices?

As Carol and Curtis described their early lives and young adulthoods, it became apparent that each of them was seeking a way to remake their identities. The terrain for analyzing this search became personal authenticity, and I examine how each of the adult Pierres is on a quest for personal authenticity that begins early in their lives and continues through their creation and maintenance of Casa Samba. But the sense of personal authenticity that underwrites the Pierres' construction of Casa Samba comes into contact with another form of authenticity, one that is external, evaluative, and also the root of New Orleans' tourism economy. Thus, further questions arose regarding Casa Samba's location in New Orleans and its cultural landscape. How does the tourist industry shape what is "authentic"? How is Casa Samba an "authentic" New Orleans cultural organization? In what ways is it an "authentic" representative of Brazilian carnival?

In the end, authenticity may be too narrow a concept from which to understand the totality of who the Pierre family is and what Casa Samba is. For this reason, this research examines Casa Samba as a utopian project, a site of cultural belonging, and an Afrocentric venture. I propose

that Curtis and Carol Pierre have drawn on their knowledge of what is valuable, meaningful, and important—that is, authentic—to produce a cultural organization that reflects their sensibilities to the fullest extent possible.

Chapter One: Lives, Cultures, Context

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT



Fig. 1, L-R: Curtis, Bomani, and Carol Pierre. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

This dissertation is a long time in the making. It is not because I got delayed by other things and spent years dithering over a proposal. The research and writing of this document occurred in less than two years. I am not behind schedule. But because this document is an expansion on a thesis I wrote about Casa Samba's recovery following Hurricane Katrina, and because I tread old ground and try to break new, I believe the work on this material began in 2007. But even before that, I wrote an undergraduate thesis about tropes of resistance within *capoeira angola*, the Afro-Brazilian martial art form I had been practicing for about a year by that time. That was in 2001.

To sit here now, at this desk, and try to write an introduction for what follows feels like too big a task because it is 2012 and I have been doing this for a third of my life.

I guess it could seem as though I decided to pursue this research because I have written about Afro-Brazilian culture in the past. But what I think I am really doing in producing an inadvertently coherent body of work over more than a decade is demonstrating an interest in the ways things change over time and the ways things adapt to different places. Capoeira angola is what brought me and Curtis together in the first place. I learned to play in Washington, D.C. and in different places in Brazil. He learned to play in New Orleans and in Brazil. We share a teacher, a lineage, and a philosophy about how capoeira angola works that is rooted in the form's history. Capoeira angola is a form of highly stylized combat that, according to legend and to some historical records, emerged on the plantations of northeastern Brazil. Enslaved black people (mainly men and a few infamous women) taught themselves to fight and then disguised the whole thing as dancing so that capoeira's utility was obscured from the slave master.

The capoeira Curtis and I learned, him beginning in the early 1990s and me beginning in the early 2000s, in the United States, is not the same capoeira that people played in nineteenth-century Brazil on the plantations or in twentieth-century Brazil in the streets in Salvador, Bahia. Capoeira has changed over time and changed in reaction to the new spaces it occupies all over the world. But Curtis and I do play capoeira angola like that which is played currently in urban Brazil. While some elements of our practice and our knowledge of new songs and new stories suffers due to our distance from the source, both of us could appear at a *roda* in Salvador and belong there.

Capoeira's place in a larger complex of African cultural expressions in Brazil raises questions about the changes affecting that complex over time and in different places. Capoeira is

something that changes somewhat as it moves around the world, but can simultaneously allow the adopters entry to many communities of practitioners in Brazil and elsewhere. What are the implications of this for the larger complex of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions? What happens when someone decides that they want to belong to multiple forms—to samba, to capoeira, to *candomblé*—at the same time? What happens when a whole family does that and arranges their lives *and* their livelihoods around it? What happens when that family lives and works in a place with both a vibrant complex of African cultures and a hegemonic tourism industry? What happens if that place is New Orleans and not Rio de Janeiro? Curtis and Carol Pierre, along with their son Bomani, and several founding members of Casa Samba with whom I was lucky enough to spend time talking over the past few years, offer answers to these questions.

Using life history ethnographic methods, this dissertation examines Casa Samba, an *escola de samba* that has been performing Brazilian carnival in New Orleans since 1986. This samba school has been run by an American couple, Curtis and Carol Pierre, since its inception, and now includes the couple's teenage son, Bomani, as an emerging leader of the group. My research examines the ways the Pierre family members interpret their adoption of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and the process through which they made this choice in the context of their life stories.

I examine Curtis' and Carol's life histories leading up to their arrival in New Orleans and argue that each of them found ways to change their inherited identities to better suit their conceptions of themselves. In this way, each of them developed over time a sense of what it would mean to lead an authentic life. This sense of an authentic life is the foundation for what Curtis and Carol embarked upon together. Their individual sensibilities arise from different places, but they are similar in that they include a rejection of negative or deleterious lifeways as they embrace particular values, including—but not limited to—*independent thinking, community*

membership, antimaterialism, and freedom in its most palpable form. In tracing their histories prior to the formation of Casa Samba, I found that the first step towards personal authenticity for both Curtis and Carol occurred in the context of their work lives. From early on, both of them determined what they accepted and what they rejected about their future in earning a living. And from there, each of them started down a path of (re)making themselves with real political economic ideals in mind. Both Pierres have, at least in their retelling of their earlier lives, a clear idea of the costs and benefits of the class positions into which they were born. These positions framed what each of them imagined their future might look like, and seeing that the total picture did not look like something they wanted, they each began to choose an alternative way forward. The process through which Curtis and Carol developed definitions of personal authenticity by using analyses of their class identities is explored in chapter three.

Casa Samba is partly a product of the Pierres' desire to remake their work lives and offer others the chance to limit their contact with unfulfilling work. It is Curtis' way of earning a living, it provides income for others who perform with the group, so in the simplest sense, it is clear how Casa Samba contains the early visions of one of its founders. But Casa Samba is neither a workplace nor a job. Casa Samba is a samba school and performance organization. Members of the group begin as students and learn to drum or dance samba, the form of music and dance that is Brazil's most recognizable cultural product. While performing generates income for many people, it does so only if they adhere to certain standards of professionalism that Curtis and Carol have developed over years of working with people such as Jorge Alabê, the master drummer who would help them shape the group for most of its early history.

Becoming professional, as Curtis, Carol, and Jorge did, means approaching samba as a subject of study, an object of performance, and a means of embodying practices so deeply that

samba becomes a way of life. Because the group functions as a school *and* a performance organization, and because it also operates as a family, adopting samba in this way—becoming a samba professional—happens differently depending on a member’s abilities, strengths, and longevity. Curtis and Carol value dedication above all, because to them, dedication to their senses of themselves and their capacity to give new life to others is the root of their commitment to preserving and presenting samba in New Orleans. Professionalism, as the framework for becoming an authentic person through membership in Casa Samba, is the subject of chapter four.

In chapter five, I explore the ways in which the narratives of Carol and Curtis suggest that Casa Samba pluralizes, or perhaps collectivizes, the quests for personal authenticity they pursued as individuals. In examining Casa Samba as a “culture of belonging” and as a “utopian project,” I suggest that the professionalization explored in chapter four is only one element of a larger process of collective identity construction that Casa Samba represents. Dreaming, envisioning an uncommon future that differs radically from the present, and consciously valuing those dreams and visions allow the Pierres to *enact* personal authenticity as they have constructed it. But, of course, they are enacting their version of authenticity in a place that has its own.

This dissertation also establishes a relationship between Casa Samba’s Brazilian carnival practices, its self-definition as a traditional samba school, and local Mardi Gras traditions that operate in a tourism economy. This economy relies on the construction of authentic New Orleans experiences to create specific expectations in potential visitors. Visitors’ notions of an authentic New Orleans impact Casa Samba in many ways. I interrogate the multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings of Casa Samba as an organization attempting to preserve Brazilian cultural practices in the tourism economy of New Orleans. In answering questions about the group’s multiple meanings, I can examine the various ways that authenticity is negotiated. The

constantly negotiated relationship between Casa Samba and the city of New Orleans is the subject of chapter six.

One key finding of this research is that personal quests for a meaningful life are directly but dialectically tied to political economic circumstances in unexpected ways. Individual choices made in pursuit of identities the Pierre family considers meaningful reveal the ways in which inherited race, class, and gender identities are reshaped to produce a new cultural form that is rooted in the Afro-Brazilian traditions and practices that Curtis and Carol adopted. The reshaping occurs through choices they make about where to live, how to earn money, and what kind of person they want to be. Curtis' and Carol's paths to New Orleans and each other, and their roles in Casa Samba, are very different. But samba has transformed them both over time. In this way, I examine their quest as one for personal authenticity through an embodiment of Afro-Brazilian¹ cultural practices that changes how they feel about themselves in the context of their life histories and their present lives.

Another key finding emerges in a second layer of analysis: the political and social situation of Casa Samba in a tourism economy can be viewed as both an opportunity and a constraint. The adopted identities of Casa Samba's founders find expression in a group that has had the opportunity to grow and develop over more than two decades because Casa Samba earns income. This is a decidedly positive impact of being located in New Orleans that has more to do with the city's tourism industry and the access to its performance venues than it has to do with shared African cultural or carnival roots between New Orleans and urban Brazil. On the other hand, Casa Samba also faces difficulty fitting in directly in a city that actively markets authentic elements of its particular culture through the same tourism industry mechanisms that Casa Samba relies on. That New Orleans and urban Brazil are both shaped by African cultural

traditions is something that can make a case for Casa Samba's success in securing performance opportunities. Sometimes, however, this connection will not matter in the least. The tension between Casa Samba as an authoritative representative of Brazilian Carnaval and Casa Samba as a genuine representative of New Orleans Mardi Gras is explored through discussion of the group's participation in the tourism economy. In this way, I examine the uses of authenticity in its external, evaluative, sense in relation to definitions of personal authenticity manufactured by Curtis, Carol, and Bomani.

Another finding, perhaps the most important finding, of this research is that the relationship between personal authenticity and authenticity in its external form produces something else, something that goes beyond either form of. As Curtis, Carol, and Bomani continue to navigate their lives and Casa Samba, they build on the original senses of personal authenticity from which Curtis and Carol started. But at the same time, as they maintain contact with the changing authenticities of samba, of Brazilian culture, of New Orleans culture, and of tourism in New Orleans, the meeting between personal and external authenticity encourages the Pierre family both to narrow their field and to think bigger. Casa Samba is the mechanism for doing this. Turning inward, Casa Samba becomes a family for its members, it becomes an organization that gives its members a place to belong, a place to pursue identity alteration themselves alongside others doing the same. Facing outward, Casa Samba becomes a vehicle for a utopian vision of the world in which peoples' recreated selves are made real. In this way, the values that define individual ideas of personal authenticity cohere to support a project of self-actualization that happens not in private, but in public, and with a group. The public nature of this self-actualization means that those involved engage with critical social issues that impinge on them and on others, and in so doing, suggest that living a better life is possible for anyone. The

processes of creating family, a culture of belonging, and nurturing utopian ideals emerge from Casa Samba's particular identity.

Moreover, Casa Samba thrives as it does because it engages with an industry and economic structure that is often viewed as dangerous to local cultures and organizations that present them. In this dissertation, I suggest that tourism need not be presupposed to have a wholly negative impact on culture producers. Some approaches to examining tourism's impacts on cultural production begin with an assumption that tourism destroys local cultures. My work is consonant with literature that takes a different approach and discusses tourism as a complex system of its own that can have positive impacts on local cultural producers even as it has negative ones (see Gotham 2007 and Scott and Selwyn 2010). The Pierre family's capacity to find fulfillment that produces a sense of personal authenticity through creating a cultural organization that contradicts and complements local authenticities shows this. As growing numbers of people in cities all over the world seek the type of meaningful work and meaningful life that Curtis, Carol, and Bomani pursue through their work with Casa Samba, explorations of individuals' relationships to structures and systems (such as tourism economies) that can support the reconstruction of identities are increasingly relevant. This is especially true for those who adopt beliefs and practices that may reasonably belong in a larger cultural landscape, but nonetheless must confront elements of that landscape to fight for a place within it. Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance belong in New Orleans, but exactly how these practices and the people preserving, presenting, and promoting them, belong is what this dissertation explores.

SAMBA HISTORY

Samba has developed over a long enough time and in disputed enough ways that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of scholarly treatments of the subject. Since my research is not concerned with the contested origins of samba per se, I chose to limit my analysis of samba's history to two species of interpretation that may aid in understanding some of the issues Casa Samba faces as a representative of samba outside of Brazil. These issues are discussed throughout the chapters that follow as they arise from the fact that authenticity, in its personal or externally evaluated forms, is contested. Permission to be an authentic *sambista* depends partly on how one sees oneself and how one sees other sambistas, and these perceptions are based partly on the history of the form. I believe it is important to preface my discussion of the role samba plays in people's lives with a brief presentation of this history.²

According to Hermano Vianna, “Samba is Brazil’s ‘national rhythm,’ its prime symbol of cultural nationalism” (1999:xiii). As with most historians of the genre, Vianna locates samba’s origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but his focus becomes samba’s place in Brazilian national life during the period known as the *Estado Novo* (New State) of 1930–1945, the era of dictator Getulio Vargas and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, whose divergent views of *mestiçagem* (racial mixture), for Vianna, underwrite samba’s historical path. Samba music grew out of styles of African drumming that were associated with the *candomblé* religious tradition. Until the early 1930s, samba was a very local phenomenon in which black people were the dominant participants. Beginning in the late 1920s, however, nonblack Brazilians, especially academics and artists, became interested in samba. What had transitioned from a religious form of drumming into a secular and African neighborhood tradition would ultimately become a much greater entity.

The Vargas government endorsed a particular idea of mestiçagem that would whiten Brazil and dilute the influence and evidence of blackness in the country's people, politics, and culture (Vianna 1999). For Gilberto Freyre, however, one of several white Brazilian academics who consorted with black samba musicians in Rio's cafes in the 1930s, racial mixing was not a slow slouch towards whiteness, but a means of emphasizing the positive contributions of blackness to the national culture (Vianna 1999:51). Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala (The Masters and the Slaves)*, which explored complicated understandings of race in colonial and postcolonial Brazil, was published in 1933, the same year that Getulio Vargas declared samba the national music of Brazil. The simultaneity of Vargas' and Freyre's popular ideologies supports the claim that there is no single definition of "mixture" in Brazil. Furthermore, to acknowledge, as Vianna does, this multiplicity of definitions, complicates a racialized or essentialized view of samba music. Samba, in Vianna's view, is complex and constantly changing—it is neither black nor white, nor is it "mixed" in such a way that the contributions of one group of contributors to the genre's development is privileged over another's.

Relating Vianna's view of the primacy of *mestiçagem* in the creation of samba to Casa Samba's presence in New Orleans does not require a leap of the imagination or an abundance of theoretical constructs. Casa Samba's members are black and white, male and female, Brazilian and New Orleanian. Their repertoire includes songs from less race-conscious composers such as Ary Barroso, who is white and decidedly middle-class, and from Ile Aiye, a group whose lyrics explicitly reflect black power and working-class politics, and whose official policy is that no white person may march in their Carnaval parade. Most importantly, Casa Samba represents a moment in the ongoing overall development of samba. Its continued success in the musical

landscape of New Orleans is an example of how samba is, as Vianna argues, never finished changing.

One of the most obvious changes that samba has undergone in its history is a transition from a local, black, neighborhood musical genre, into a commodified, national genre in which Brazilians of all races invest and to which people from all countries are attracted. Social and political ideology under Vargas explains part of samba's expanded audience and participation base. The appearance of the radio and recorded music during that time offers an additional piece of the explanation (Raphael 1990:75). Allison Raphael argues that once radio created a new, broader audience for it, the samba tradition in Rio de Janeiro lost its authenticity (1990). In an article that offers a great deal of information about the development of samba in Brazil, and in Rio in particular, Raphael "attempts to describe the destruction of a genuine manifestation of popular culture" (1990:73).

The need for more, and newer, music led established musicians, many of them white, to seek out the sambistas (samba practitioners) living in downtown slums or nascent *favelas* and to purchase samba pieces from them for painfully low prices. Music in Brazil changed forever as a result of these exchanges, which were rarely fair to sambistas. As samba gained popularity through radio play during the late 1920s and 1930s—both in the poor, black, urban areas and in wealthier, whiter, urban areas—and as carnival culture in Rio reached a point where the city's white elite completely dominated it, black people living on the city's outskirts (re)appropriated samba to put an end to their exclusion from Carnaval (Raphael 1990:75–76). This is one of several points about which Vianna and Raphael appear to agree. But for Vianna, the story is about mixture, and for Raphael, the story is about separation, exclusion, and domination.

The positions of these two conveyors of the tale of samba's evolution require one another if a deeper understanding of the genre is to emerge. Raphael's stark black-and-white presentation of samba's position in black Carnaval highlights a connection between Rio and New Orleans that Vianna's position leaves aside and addresses the matter of black participation in Carnaval directly. As with Mardi Gras, Carnaval was, and in some ways continues to be, a highly segregated occasion. Samba gave the black residents of Brazil's carnival mecca a ticket to the dance in much the same way that the formation of social aid and pleasure clubs, Mardi Gras Indian tribes, and other black Mardi Gras traditions created participants out of black New Orleansians who were not interested in being mere spectators to white New Orleans' pomp and circumstance. Raphael emphasizes two factors that further link black Rio with black New Orleans: the violent history of the competing *blocos* (in English, “blocs,” an early version of today’s samba schools) in the *favelas* and the social club nature of these samba schools (1990:76–78). Raphael describes black Carnaval in the early days, and the social organizations behind it, in such a way that if the reader were to substitute “Zulu” for “Portela,” she would be talking about New Orleans and not Rio.

For Raphael, all white participation in *escolas de samba* is a sign of cooptation. Vianna, however, uses Gilberto Freyre as an example of a white person whose influence on samba's historical trajectory is positive. The interest of Freyre's friend Blaise Cendrars in Rio's samba practitioners, along with some time Freyre spent studying with Franz Boas in the United States, influenced his interest in black, Brazilian music, his ability to deconstruct race in his own work, and his ability to describe in the positive impacts of racial mixing and express a view that ran contrary to a dictator's (Vianna 1999). While Raphael is correct in pointing out that samba came to be a part of carnival because black Rio residents made it one themselves, she simultaneously

expresses a position that there existed a golden age in which samba was an all-black, and therefore, authentic, endeavor.

Raphael's view that there is one, solitary, perfect, authentic samba pervades her discussion of the negative impacts of globalization on samba in the 1980s (1990:80–83). While Vargas-era regulations that applied to samba schools changed the ways in which these schools participated in Carnaval and opened the door for middle-class Brazilians to take them over, it is equally true that the construction of Brasilia along with the shift of the national capital from Rio decreased the older, colonial city's importance in the political sphere and increased its dependence on tourism for its economic viability. This increased dependence on tourism has, not surprisingly, had a profound effect on Carnaval, and on *escolas de samba* in particular. One anecdotal example of the impact of the primacy of the tourism economy is the fact that the schools no longer prepare all year long for an interactive experience with their neighbors and visitors as they parade through the city. They prepare instead for the last leg of their big Carnaval day parade that will take them through Rio's *Sambódromo*, a huge stadium in which audience and paraders are separate and that is only open to those who purchase tickets.

While it could be argued that tourism has collapsed samba into a rationalized, visitor-oriented version of its more complex self, it seems likely that the changes tourism wrought have had some positive impacts on samba schools. This research examines Casa Samba's participation in New Orleans' tourism economy as something that has costs and benefits. I argue that the group's ability to thrive in New Orleans is partly due to the existence of this economy. Tourism, in a separate sense, is what provides a channel through which Curtis and other American musicians can learn about samba and access people in Brazil who can teach them how to bring samba to the wider world in ways that distinctly do *not* rationalize the complexity of samba practice.

It is true that North American cultural influences have altered carnival traditions in Rio and in other parts of Brazil and have affected some of the *escola de samba* traditions (Raphael 1990:80–83). But Raphael does not account fully for the nature of the exchange that has always been there. No human group operates in a vacuum, and Brazil's sambistas are no exception. As many ethnographers and historians have pointed out, Brazilian popular music has always interacted with the influences and ideas of other countries (see Armstrong 2001, DaMatta 2003, Moura 2001, Perrone and Dunn 2001).

Perrone and Dunn, in particular, argue that samba has always been international and that Brazilian popular music has always commented upon relationships between Brazil and other nations (2001:1–38). They argue that artists in Brazil absorbed what they thought was useful and rejected what was not from regional musical forms within Brazil and from international forms (2001). What samba music did, and what other forms of Brazilian popular music also did throughout their development, is take local and nonlocal issues, positions, beliefs, ideas, et cetera, and “reconfigure them to the local context” (Perrone and Dunn 2001:26). It seems logical, then, that samba would move out of Brazil and influence the way the rest of the world reconfigures things to a local context. Samba groups exist in Japan and in Wales. They exist all over the United States. Any insistence that globalization is only degrading samba seems limited in consideration of some of the more affirmative impacts globalization has had on samba's popularity both in Brazil and worldwide. North American values may have infiltrated Rio's samba schools in a negative way, but that is not the whole story.

While the impact of North America on Brazil is more extensive than Brazil's on North America, there is an ambivalence many of Rio's samba school participants have with regard to this impact. Increased reliance on funding from promoters of Rio's tourist industry, increased

reliance on the participation of white middle-class soap opera stars to have a winning parade, and increased costume costs do negatively affect samba school members. But, what is the effect of sharing the samba tradition with North Americans who dedicate themselves to preserving it outside of Brazil? Can this kind of sharing create a positive relationship between Brazilian sambistas and practitioners outside of Brazil? In the case of Casa Samba, such a relationship exists. Casa Samba has long-term relationships with some of Rio's samba schools. Curtis and other Casa Samba members travel to Rio regularly to buy instruments and to study with the schools. The people with whom they shop and study support the idea of Casa Samba carrying on their tradition in North America. This positive relationship is as much the result of globalization as are the negative changes that Raphael argues impact the authentic samba schools.

SAMBA STYLES

The repertoire of Casa Samba reflects a wide range of samba styles. The main styles performed by the group are: samba *enredo*, samba reggae, *pagode*, and *orixá* drumming and dancing (which are directly connected to the candomblé tradition). In addition to the various samba styles that most samba groups make use of, Curtis is one of only three *pandeiro* jugglers in the United States.

“Pandeiro” is the Portuguese word for a large tambourine, an instrument that is fundamental to samba and to capoeira. When Curtis juggles, he uses as many as three pandeiros and does things such as passing the spinning discs through his legs, turning a cartwheel while tossing a pandeiro from one hand to another, leaning back and rolling the pandeiro from one hand to another across his chest, and spinning two pandeiros on his fingers while spinning another one on a stick held between his teeth, sometimes while dancing samba simultaneously. This part of a

Casa Samba show elicits more reaction from American audiences than any other. People will dance, and, if they are familiar enough with Portuguese, sing along during the performance of samba music and dancing. Often they are active in applauding, cheering, and otherwise supporting the performers. But the virtuosity involved in the “Pandeiro Man” portion of any show is astounding to audience members regardless of the level of their knowledge of samba music. It is difficult not to be dumbstruck by tricks such as the ones Curtis does during this part of a show, and often there is a collective gasp in response to the initial juggling tricks, followed by an odd silence, which is then followed by much clapping and whooping.



**Fig. 2: Curtis effecting a backbend while spinning pandeiros on both hands, 2009.
Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.**

Other instruments that are used in the samba *bateria* are *surdos*³; the large drums that produce a very deep bass tone; *caixas*, the smaller snare drums that play variations on the base

provided by the surdo; and *tambourims*, instruments that looks like pandeiros, but which are about half the size, covered by hard plastic (rather than flexible plastic or leather), and are hit with a flexible, many-pronged stick to produce a sound that closely resembles a bullet being shot. The *cuíca*, a high-pitched, squeaky sounding friction drum, is also played occasionally. All of these instruments are used in different ways depending on the style of samba the group is playing. When pagode is being played an electric bass, a guitar, a *cavoquinho* (small ukulele-like instrument), and other percussion instruments like shakers are often employed. For orixá drumming, traditional African djembes, or other hand drums, are used. Different styles of musical performance have been highlighted at different stages of the group's development, but for the most part, Casa Samba consistently makes use of as many styles as possible.

Samba enredo is the kind of “theme samba” that most commonly gets produced by *escolas de samba*. In Rio, this is the song on which a school works year round in preparation for a contest that will take place during Carnaval in which a winner is chosen (Guillermoprieto 1990, Galinsky 1996). Each *escola de samba* in Rio performs its samba enredo song as they march into the Sambódromo for the televised portion of Rio’s carnival. Samba enredo songs get significant radio airplay, and the better ones are remembered from year to year. Some have become classics to such a degree that they have become the subject of academic deciphering (see Da Matta 1993). Much of the commercialization that is said to have taken place with regard to samba, and with regard to Carnaval, is evident in the importance many *escolas de samba* place on winning or being competitive in the contest for the best samba enredo. With winning in mind, many schools hire professional arrangers and lyricists, sometimes replacing musicians from within the *escolas de samba* with outsiders (Guillermoprieto 1990, Raphael 1990). Other styles of samba have developed in response to the limited nature of modern samba enredo

(Galinsky 1996). Also noteworthy is the fact that many samba enredo songs themselves comment satirically on the commercialization of Carnaval (Guillermoprieto 1990, Da Matta 1993). As it is with New Orleans' Mardi Gras, Carnaval in Brazil is the time of year during which satire is not only tolerated, but encouraged.

Not being in a position to compete for a new original composition or for a favored place in the Sambódromo parade, Casa Samba uses samba enredo to showcase its best dancers during onstage performances. The band plays a medley of several popular samba songs and each of the top dancers, the number of whom ranges from about four to nine depending on the show and the venue, performs a solo. These solos are performed wearing the elaborate headdresses and minimal (yet often intricately beaded or embroidered) bikini costumes that are associated with Carnaval in Rio. The dancers who perform these solos and the costumes they wear are referred to as "*passistas*."

Samba reggae is Casa Samba's other primary musical form. Sometimes referred to as *bloco Afro*, samba reggae is a style of samba that is influenced by Jamaican and other Caribbean musical styles. This musical style is most often associated with the groups Ile Aiye (formed in 1974) and Olodum (formed in 1979). Samba reggae employs the same 2/4 meter as other samba music, but it is often less focused on rapid-fire syncopation and, as a result, seems slower and provides dancers with an opportunity to make use of different choreographic styles, which Casa Samba does in its longer form shows.⁴ Many of Casa Samba's samba reggae numbers feature the dancers performing what Carol refers to in interviews as "folkloric dances." The costumes for these dances go beyond the headdress and bikini combination. In one samba reggae-accompanied dance called "Cafezão," for example, the dancers are dressed like coffee pickers with long skirts, wide-brimmed hats, and no shoes. In another, the dancers wear straw hats and

overalls and perform a dance whose theme is Afro-Brazilian rural life. The “folkloric dances” are Carol’s, Curtis,’ and the dancers’ own creations. The choreography for these dances is based in both samba dance tradition and a larger African dance tradition. The use of dances of this type in its larger performances takes Casa Samba out of the realm of many samba bands in countries outside of Brazil—for these bands, original choreography is not a key element—and puts the group in the realm of groups for whom one multivalent tradition (samba) is the catalyst for the creation of a new expressive culture.

While Casa Samba’s fundamental bases are samba enredo, samba reggae, and Curtis’ pandeiro tricks, pagode had become more prevalent in the repertoire following Hurricane Katrina. The increased prevalence of pagode in Casa Samba can be seen as a reflection of a general shift in both the popularity of pagode in Brazil and the existence of a new audience in New Orleans in 2006 and for several years after that: Brazilian people. Pagode appeals most readily to Brazilian audiences and can be accommodated by smaller performance venues, such as Rotolo’s Pizzeria (now Coco Bamboo) in suburban Old Jefferson just outside of New Orleans. The audience who attended shows I went to was comprised mainly of Brazilian people who knew the songs, who requested their favorites, and who performed specific dances associated with certain songs. The existence of a venue such as this one, a place that is effectively a clubhouse for recently arrived Brazilian immigrants of all classes and longer-term Brazilian residents of the New Orleans area alike, offered Casa Samba an opportunity to use pagode more regularly than it did prior to Hurricane Katrina.⁵

BEYOND PERFORMANCE

While Casa Samba is a performance organization, it is also a school and a cultural organization through which many of its members find work in the broader educational economy of New Orleans. The group performs at neighborhood festivals and at major festivals such as the annual French Quarter Festival and the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. The group performs at Mardi Gras balls, at Southport Hall for an annual Jazz Fest show at which it is the featured act, at events at universities aimed at teaching people about other cultures, at conventions, and in a variety of tourist-oriented venues. Although it occurs less regularly than it did immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Casa Samba does perform sometimes at Coco Bamboo.

The dancers and drummers who perform on these stages have been cultivated through biweekly rehearsals. The group meets for about two and a half hours on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and some members run an introductory class for children and beginners on Saturday mornings that can be utilized as an extra rehearsal if the need arises. These rehearsals take place in a large room in a building managed by the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC). NORDC is undergoing a transition at this time that may affect Casa Samba, and certainly any impacts of this transition on the group may be worth exploring in the future. For the time being, Casa Samba's rehearsal space is not threatened by NORDC's internal politics. However, Casa Samba has been a mobile organization in the past. The group has rehearsed at the now-defunct Café Brasil, at Tulane University, and at the Pierres' house (among other places) in the past. Casa Samba's relationship with NORDC may not be easy to predict in the future, and there are benefits to Casa Samba's being independent of any city agency that are

discussed in the chapters that follow, but Casa Samba will not fall apart if they cannot continue to use NORDC's space.

Rehearsal is a key component of Casa Samba's persistence in the New Orleans cultural economy for the years that it has operated. Rehearsal is where people learn the techniques of samba drumming and dance and responsibilities of membership and it is where they create bonds that enable them to perform as a collective. Rehearsal is where members demonstrate progress in their technical development, and it is where they work with each other to construct the identity of the group. In gathering three times a week for these purposes, Casa Samba gives its members regular occasions to develop their own identities within the atmosphere of the group.

WRITING HISTORY

This project's primary collaborators were born in the middle of the twentieth century. They have a son who was born in the middle of the last decade of that century. They form a family that is rooted, like any other, in bidirectional history as it is ordinarily conceived by Eurocentric thinkers. Parents look back on their own experiences of becoming adults in hope of offering their child a future that will befit and benefit him. In exploring life history narratives constructed by individual members of this family, I hope to locate them in linear time and examine the ways in which their narratives also suggest location in cyclical histories of black identity. In choosing to view these narratives through a lens that connects the Pierre family to a historical black American identity *and* to a broader Afrocentric cultural identity of their own creation, I am aware that I risk making them into ahistorical characters. I hope that I am not doing this, and I have tried mightily to model my thinking after that of scholars who avoid this fate.

There are times in writing this document that I find myself grasping for language that will not essentialize the experiences of Curtis, Carol, Bomani and Jorge—the four people whose words represent their ideas about their lives to me in formal interviews. Is there language that could avoid essentialism? I am not sure. Have I allowed their voices and mine to come together to produce a story in which we contribute equally to the overall narrative? I do not know. I do not wish to typify the experiences of my collaborators on this project, nor do I wish to generalize from their experiences, though I believe that readers will recognize that these experiences are relevant to a variety of life choices that human beings make.

In explaining what she means by “writing against culture,” Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that all anthropologists can and should look to the histories of the people about whom we write and recognize in all humans the “capacity for movement, travel, and geographical interaction that Westerners take for granted” (2008:11). She goes on to suggest that “the fluidity of group boundaries, languages, and practices … has been masked by the concept of culture” (Abu-Lughod 2008:11). In what follows, I hope that the stories of the Pierre family elucidate exactly how motile culture is. Writing *against* culture is not something that I have as a goal. But my work with people who constantly examine the “cultures” into which they were born and who continue to adjust those cultures into something that makes their lives meaningful demonstrates the power of global interconnectedness. Curtis, Carol, and Bomani have, as individuals and as a family, bundled elements that could belong to American culture, black culture, New Orleans culture, Brazilian culture, Afro-Brazilian culture, and African culture into their own culture. The mechanism through which they do this is experience, and the process by which they guarantee that their culture remains a living, breathing, experiential way of being is Casa Samba’s construction and ongoing existence as a group that invites others to join them.

Chapter Two: Methods and Methodology

WHY LIFE HISTORY?

This dissertation is the product of more than five years of ethnographic research with Casa Samba. In the beginning, there was a thesis which was not a life history project and used more typical approaches to ethnographic interviewing to understand the group's recovery following Hurricane Katrina. When that research was completed in 2008, I believed that Casa Samba's story needed to be contextualized in the stories of its founding members. The choices Curtis and Carol made to adopt samba as a tradition they would then pass on to others, including their son, are worthy of analysis in the context of the Pierres' individual pasts and collective present. Not only have they shaped the lives of thousands of students and audience members, the decisions they have made with respect to the adoption of a foreign cultural tradition relate to those made by people in a variety of circumstances.

It also occurred to me in 2008 that Casa Samba is a cultural organization that has existed in New Orleans for more than two decades and no one has written about it. I believe the group is interesting in its complexity and in the ways that it both fits and does not fit logically into the larger music and dance scene of New Orleans. While the group operates both as a samba school and as a performance organization, its success as a performance organization has been the key to the group's continued presence as an educational entity. Casa Samba's contributions to the city's cultural landscape have not been validated consistently throughout their tenure on the scene. As is the case for any organization that depends on an inherently cyclical tourism industry for performance opportunities, some periods of the year are more successful for Casa Samba, while others are marked by less lucrative bookings and therefore perhaps not as successful in monetary terms. Sometimes Casa Samba is not booked for key performances it has

done in previous years. In this way, periods of the year which are ordinarily busy for the group may not be busy if other performance groups are being booked in Casa Samba's stead. Because life history can be used to tell the story of a particular era (Marshall and Rossman 2006:115), Casa Samba can help us explore the most recent epoch of New Orleans' tourist economy. This epoch has been explored by many researchers (see Atkinson 2004, Gotham 2007, Regis 1999, Souther 2006), but never from the perspective of whole lives or of a group that exists in New Orleans without fitting securely into its cultural landscape.

I like the idea of deepening an understanding of a specific period in New Orleans history with the stories of people who have shaped and been shaped by the place in which they live. Life histories enable us to view present conditions as always changing and as products of culture change. The life histories of Curtis and Carol Pierre—along with their son's emerging life story—allow us to think about how culture is more than the sum of all the forms of expression, practices, and behaviors that happen to endure in a specific landscape. Carol and Curtis run a cultural organization and raise their son according to their values that place them partly in the broader African American culture of the United States and partly in the Afro-Brazilian culture whose practices they have adopted throughout their adult lives. The space they occupy in the New Orleans cultural landscape changes depending on decisions the Pierre family makes and depending on larger changes that are beyond the control of any single organization. Tracking the development of a family's ideals and values and the expression of these values in an enduring cultural organization, Casa Samba, offers a sense of how individual lives shape and are shaped by structural factors, in this case a tourism economy.

In one of the introductory chapters to his revealing life history of Alejandro Tsakimp, a Shuar healer, Steve Rubenstein discusses the validity of documenting culture through the medium of

one person's story (2002:11–13). His discussion of his use of life history supports my use of this method. Because, traditionally, many anthropological accounts of other people and other cultures rely heavily on the ethnographic present—a technique of writing exclusively in the present tense so that the subjects of the writing are distanced from both history and from the future—the capacity for these writings to account for the ways culture changes is limited. In these accounts, change becomes something that happens to culture rather than something that is embedded in it and “culture” itself thus becomes essentialized. Rubenstein believes that life history “invokes an old tradition in anthropology that calls attention to the dynamic and changing role of the individual in his or her culture” (2002:60) and offers understandings of culture that are not simplified.

Life history is a collaborative approach to research that reduces the traditional barriers between researcher and subject that tend to harden some anthropological research into a structure that does not present the contested and complicated relationships that make in-depth, detailed work possible. Life history gives a researcher “a sense of how people understand their own identities and their place in the world” (Angrosino 2007:35). More specifically, life histories are often used to “depict and make theoretical sense of the socialization of a person into a cultural milieu” (Marshall and Rossman 2006:115). In telling their stories to an outsider who is still connected to them, life history interviewees have an opportunity to rethink their lives and interpret them in the context of society as a whole and to think about their lives in terms of a larger flow of experiences that is still ongoing (Angrosino 2007:35–36).

Life history cannot be done without a significant amount of trust between collaborators. I felt lucky to have the kind of entrée that would permit me to interview three people repeatedly for more than a year and to ask questions about their whole lives. Often, the questions I asked

could elicit answers that were not automatically becoming or that could be interpreted negatively. I believe that the dialogues that I shared with Curtis, Carol, Bomani, and briefly with Jorge, were honest conversations about complex lives. I believe that this was possible because the interviews built upon previous conversations and were controlled as much by the “interviewees” as they were by me. It also helped that nothing about the process of collecting data through interviews was secret. In the beginning, I sent Carol transcripts and sent Curtis audio files of every interview after it happened so that they could read/hear what had transpired in our conversation.⁶ Towards the end of the process, sending documentation of the previous meeting seemed less necessary as the conversations began to retread territory and the life narratives began to take shape more clearly in the minds of everyone involved.

I chose life history as a strategy for conducting this research partly because I thought the information it would offer would be the best kind for examining individual processes of identity construction, situating Casa Samba in New Orleans, and explaining the relationship between the two. I chose it because I had continuous access to people who indicated that they were willing to tell me their life stories. And I chose life history because it has the capacity to surprise the people collaborating in its production, and eventual readers, with new answers to questions about cultural change. Building on Rubenstein’s argument that a single individual’s life can tell us a great deal about how, exactly, culture changes over a lifetime, this dissertation expands the field of histories to include a family rather than just one person. My role in this life history is to interpret the narratives of three individuals who, while they live in the same home and share the responsibilities for leading Casa Samba, have distinct reasons for doing what they do. I believe I am responsible for putting their stories together and for interpreting the total narrative so that the

narrators recognize the thoughts and positions as they expressed them, but that they might also see these familiar elements in a new light.

LIFE HISTORY IN THIS PROJECT

Life history projects cannot be used to draw generalized comparisons between one cultural group and another. For the most part, because of the smallness of the sample size and the focus on individual lives that this method relies upon, efforts at making my collaborators into stand-ins for “a culture” in the typical use of the term would be foolish. For example, life history cannot teach us about all the ways of being a *sambista*, a New Orleans resident, a black man, an American, a person born after World War II, a father, a leader of a cultural organization, an educator, a performer, an *angoleiro*, or a person with an outsized love for reruns of *Gunsmoke*. But Curtis Pierre, who is but one collaborator on this project, is all of these things and more. The goal of life history is, as Rubenstein argues, to suggest a way of understanding how culture changes as that culture is interpreted throughout a single person’s process of living his life. Curtis’ path towards becoming all of those things at once is instructive for thinking about how our humanity is multiple and complex. Carol’s path to a similarly complex and still-evolving identity, and Bomani’s thoughts on his place at an earlier point in the journey, all combine to produce a narrative that is complex, probably a little unwieldy, and reflective of the condition in which most people find ourselves.

We belong in different ways and to different degrees to many social locations, in many cultural positions, and we have more control over some of these locations and positions than others. The control we have changes throughout our lives. Sometimes, change comes from above, sometimes change occurs gradually and through the efforts of individuals who insist on it.

Life history methods help to tell the story of the confluence of structurally organized and individually motivated culture change. This life history tells the story of a family, of three people whose stories of their relationships to each other and to the wider world in turn tell a story into which we can all enter.

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

In some ways, life histories produced by ethnographers with a variety of goals in mind are the primary methodological guides for this project. Some who write about life history as a methodology emphasize the idea that the participants in the interviews are “collaborators” rather than interviewer and subject, teacher and student, leader and follower (Cole and Knowles 2001:29). Others emphasize the way in which participating in a life history interview gives all participants a chance to give voice to their conceptions of the larger world as they discuss the specifics of their lives (Angrosino 2007). In reading life histories that were consciously produced as such by ethnographers who argue that the method extends beyond the simple collection of relevant dates and events in a person’s life, one senses the depth of the relationship that exists between what would typically be classed as the “ethnographer” and the “subject” (see Myerhoff 1968, Radin 1963, and Shostak 1981). In other cases, the close relationship between the collaborators clearly exists, but the construction of the life history has political implications that are intentionally highlighted by the author of the resulting text as well (see Behar 1993, Burgos-Debray 1993, Mintz 1960, and Rubenstein 2002). Life history, as a methodology, makes a range of things possible, from promoting real teamwork on the part of the participants to capturing the attention of a wide audience because of the seemingly innate appeal of biography.

But there are other methodological frameworks in which life history's ideals and goals are useful. I am guided in my approach by arguments made with respect to methodology by three theorists who are perhaps not often grouped together to support decisions like those I have made. Without delving into their larger contributions to the social science enterprise, I would like to briefly emphasize here how Bent Flyvbjerg's (2001), Loic Wacquant's (2005, 2009), and Molefi Kete Asante's (2007) thoughts on methodology have influenced my own.

As part of a larger argument that social scientists can and should see themselves as asking different questions and pursuing answers differently from natural scientists, Flyvbjerg develops a set of "methodological guidelines for phronetic social science" (2001:129)—that is, for social science that is rooted in "practical wisdom" (2001:2). Because it is practical at its root, phronetic social science focuses on interpreting values in their context and does not make an effort to generalize from this interpretation. New, better, more valid interpretations of the same values in the same contexts can be produced, and they should be. There is no winner in a race to conclusively define the values by which, for example, Curtis and Carol shape their lives. But their decisions, and their discussions in life history interviews of the factors that produced their choices and helped construct a value system according to which they live now, are recognizable to others because they are practical decisions that arise from everyday experience.

Understanding the context for their choices is one of the primary goals of this project. Another important goal is to present clearly the voices and experiences of all of us who collaborate on producing the life history. Throughout the planning and production of this dissertation—which may be only one product of many that could emerge from the years of conversation that have already occurred between myself, the Pierre family, and other members of

the Casa Samba community—I have tried to remain conscious of the fact that there are no ultimate answers to the questions I am asking.

Part of developing good phronetic research according to Flyvbjerg's is emphasizing "the little things," or doing what Clifford Geertz called, borrowing a term from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description" (Flyvbjerg 2001:133). While I had every intention of focusing on the minutiae, on the connections between the details of daily life and the eventual development of a new way of being for a small number of people, I am not sure that I have done this. Though I believe I have made a decent effort at documenting the little things, I also believe that I have perhaps made too great an effort at situating Curtis', Carol's, and Bomani's decisions into larger interpretive frameworks. Part of the reason this happened is because I share with this family some elements of the identity construction through cultural adoption that they have been pursuing. While I think our situations and our overall goals in adopting Afro-Brazilian cultural practices differ (as do the kinds of cultural practices adopted), our experiences are linked. I frame what the Pierres are doing in various larger systems because I have done this with respect to my own practice in capoeira for over a decade. In a sense, this endless framing and reframing of an embodied practice is what I bring to this project as an observant participant. I am a person who is an adopter/practitioner of cultural practices that have shaped my identity and a person who is observing this process in others from her position in a social science graduate program. Suffice it to say that it is difficult to let anything stand on its own.

There is strength in my position as a person who shares the experience of a particular cultural practice with some of the people on whom this life history depends. As I noted in the introductory chapter, Curtis and I have separate and shared experiences playing capoeira. Since I have returned to New Orleans, I have been a student in Curtis' group, one that is related to but

separate from Casa Samba. In this capoeira group, I am a student when Curtis is teaching and, because of my previous training in a group in Washington D.C., a teacher when he is not available. I thus engage in the physical and social maintenance of my own practice of capoeira while simultaneously enabling others, including Curtis (and Bomani, when he available to train), to do the same. This is my initial and primary relationship to the Pierre family and to Casa Samba. It will be the relationship that survives when this project and any others are over. This relationship is not, however, unrelated to the research at hand.

In the discussion of his entry into the Woodlawn Boys Club (which would become the site of his unconventional 2004 sociological study, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*) Loic Wacquant places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that he arrived as a boxing trainee, not as a sociologist. For Wacquant, the methods that he would use when he began his study of the gym and its regular users would be rooted in a “carnal connection” he had already established in that context and with the people who would become partners in his project (2005:450). This connection arises, for Wacquant, “in the course of years of daily training and suffering side-by-side, and especially sparring together—which implies entrusting one’s body to the other, and an other increasingly like oneself” (2005:450). In part because he came to the gym as an apprentice, Wacquant decided to avoid the pitfalls of viewing the body as an obstacle to knowledge—and thereby failing to recognize the practical knowledge that comes from physical experience. He decided to make “apprenticeship both the object and means of inquiry” (2005:465). While I did not pursue this specific methodology myself, my parallel understanding of the meaning of physically embodying a foreign cultural practice did serve as a “methodological springboard” (Wacquant 2005:466) for the overall project of understanding the relationship between individual life decisions and larger structures of authenticity.

The benefit of being a student of and participant in activities shared by people whose life stories form the core of this analysis of how personal authenticity interacts with other forms of authenticity cannot be overstated. Having the capacity to understand participation fully, without the mediation that would occur had I picked up capoeira or samba in an effort to understand Casa Samba from a research perspective, makes “observant participation” possible (Wacquant 2009:145). To a large extent, Curtis, Carol, Bomani and I are engaged in related processes as we collaborate on this life history. We are learning about and adopting physical and musical forms that do not belong to us. We have to learn the histories and philosophies that underwrite these forms and make them meaningful in our own lives while also presenting the form authentically for observers. The Pierres do this with samba and other Afro-Brazilian dance and drumming forms (and capoeira in Curtis’ and Bomani’s cases). I do this with capoeira alone. Relating to each other first on this level of shared experience reframes how I interpret what they tell me and what I observe of their practices. It makes Wacquant’s distinction meaningful, and makes me an observant participant and not only a participant observer.

Of course, nothing is perfect. We may be traveling partway down the same road together, but political and historical circumstances—manifesting in differences of race, age, class, and gender in various combinations—conspire to separate my experiences from those of Curtis, Carol, or Bomani. The social reality of difference that guarantees divergent experiences of shared adopted traditions is formidable, but in approaching this project I have tried to retain some sense of how we share a perspective in spite of our differences. In his explanation for the ways in which Afrocentricity has implications for methods, Molefi Kete Asante offers a mechanism for doing that.

Asante shares a perspective with other humanistic social scientists interested in the condition of black culture and life when he emphasizes the importance of understanding the location of one's subject in time and space (2007:25–27). Where Asante diverges from the majority of other social scientists is in his focus on the ways that African culture has been marginalized by thoroughly European approaches to the study of all culture (2007:25–26). If researchers are to understand their African-rooted subjects in historical time and space, if they are to “know what time it is,” they must dig beneath layers of marginalizing language and Europeanizing factors (Asante 2007:27). This location of a subject in time and space is the fundamental element of an Afrocentric methodology.

In seeking to study, understand, and adopt Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, I think the members of the Pierre family and I are working within a similar Afrocentric framework. None of us is seeking some type of essentialized African ideal in this study, but each of us is working toward understanding the essence of cultural forms that are African. Learning to dance samba or play capoeira well requires an understanding of the damage done by colonialism to the people who were responsible for the construction of these forms. In developing an understanding of the histories of colonialism that produce these forms and a clear sense of the philosophies that maintain them, we have all figured out what time it is. Approaching this life history project from a common but rarely articulated Afrocentric perspective has, in my opinion, provided a way for us to respect the differences between us and acknowledge the power of what we do share.

MORE THAN COLLABORATION

For anthropologists, particularly those with an interpretivist bent, the fact that this dissertation project produced a genuine collaboration among four individuals—three family members and one partial outsider—may be enough to render the preceding methodological explanations meaningful. For non-anthropologists, however, the value of this methodology may not be clear. What is the benefit to Curtis, Carol, and Bomani of participating in years of interviews? What did this project produce that one guided by a different method would not?

The simple answer is one that I have stated above. The interviews allow the Pierres to tell their stories and rethink their own histories in the presence of an interested outsider. Participating in these interviews produces a new relevance for stories that had not, perhaps, been told in the way they were through this process. But a more complex view of the meaning of this overall project gives a different answer to the question of benefits. Curtis and Carol have their voices heard in the chapters that follow, but what also appears is my framing voice interpreting their collected narratives and shaping them into a story that explains larger human conditions while still refusing to generalize directly from the specific cases of the Pierres. To have someone else identify the same meaningfulness with which my interlocutors clearly imbue their choices validates these decisions. This is not to say that either Curtis or Carol require validation. Casa Samba's continued existence in New Orleans and their continuous relationships with Brazilian samba practitioners is validation enough. It is to say that this project provides additional validation, and that that is valuable.

This project is the beginning of our work together. There will be future documents—ranging from essays to articles to (possibly) a book—that build on this project. Those eventual materials should be readable and useful to students and professionals, to anthropologists and urban

planners, to anyone who seeks to understand how cultural production in urban contexts operates—at least for one family. This method, one rooted in collaboration and conversation, allows for future projects that are diverse in their audiences and in their impacts. Many future analyses and reinterpretations can emerge from data that consists of in-depth interviews with a small group of people. What I present here are interpretations of the data that have to do with authenticity, identity, and tourism. Interpretations of the relationship between urban and rural areas, of life in a number of cities, of the importance of leaving home, of storytelling as a form could emerge from the interviews on which this dissertation is based. And therein lies the truest benefit of life history methods: this stuff can last forever.

WHAT I DID, WHEN, AND HOW

My aim in this project is to offer a thick a description of the details from the life stories that make up the bulk of my data. In an effort to situate the narratives that emerge from formal interviews, I also rely on information gathered from informal interviews, participating in Casa Samba’s activities, and from being around the Pierre family in general. What follows is a complete accounting of the steps I took to put Curtis’, Carol’s, and Bomani’s life histories and the contemporary context for them together.

The nucleus of my interviews is the Pierre family. This is a logical focus as Curtis and Carol are co-directors of Casa Samba and Bomani was raised in the tradition. I had begun to interview Curtis in May of 2010, when we agreed that doing life history interviews with him was something in which we were both interested. At that time, I was not certain what direction my research would take, but Curtis and I operated under the informed consent and transparency ideals that guide any project I would undertake.

Curtis, Carol, Bomani, and I met and discussed doing a life history project in October of 2010 before I began doing interviews with Carol or Bomani. Curtis and Bomani were most enthusiastic about the idea of the project, and initially Carol appeared to be more thoughtful about it than anything—though she agreed to participate and knew that she could quit at any time and that she would have as much control over the process and final product as she desired. At that meeting, we agreed that I would share with them the transcripts or audio files of the interviews when they wanted to review them. In this way, we could build on previous conversations as we went, though, as I noted above, this became less necessary as time went on. Having discerned that everyone thought a family life history would be a good idea and that everyone agreed that I could write a dissertation from this process, I requested Institutional Review Board review in November of 2010 and was exempted from it.

I conducted eleven formal life history interviews with Curtis, seven with Carol, and four with Bomani. The formal interviews lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to more than two hours, with Curtis' being longer and Bomani's being shorter in general. In addition to the formal interviews, which were recorded on a digital voice recorder and transcribed within one week of being conducted, I also have handwritten and typed notes on informal interviews with each member of the Pierre family. I have detailed notes on two informal interviews with Curtis, one with Carol, and five with Bomani. Formal and informal interviews were coded. I also coded 257 pages of typed field notes and four sixty-page notebooks full of handwritten field notes. The codes that I used emerged over time as themes arose from the interviews and from my observations. At two points, I developed finite lists of codes: in February of 2011 and in June of 2011. The final list was the one that I used to code (and, in some cases, recode) all interviews and notes once I had stopped doing formal interviews in October of 2011.

These texts, those that document formal and informal interviews, and those that document my understandings of the Pierres and/or Casa Samba in action, are the basis of my analysis. The transcripts were analyzed as single interviews and across interviews to determine which themes are most saliently presented through all interviews. The field notes supplied valuable contextualizing information that sometimes guided interviews and sometimes served to clarify some of the more complicated discussions that I captured on my recorder. While much of my interaction with Casa Samba as an organization occurs through my participation in the capoeira classes as a student and a teacher, I also attended a weekly drumming class Curtis began offering in December of 2010 and a variety of Casa Samba performances. I will spend some time here discussing some of the more significant moments that appear in my field notes so that their impact on my overall project is clearer.

I have been teaching capoeira at Tulane University on Curtis' behalf since 2007. These classes occur on nights when Curtis has Casa Samba rehearsals, so at them I am always a teacher and nothing about my role there ever changes. This is not the case in other capoeira circumstances. Capoeira classes also happen in Casa Samba's space at a city-run community center on Wednesday and Friday evenings. Additional classes happen at the Pierres' house on Sunday mornings. For the most part, I am a student at these classes and Curtis is the teacher. Bomani and Carol are intermittent students. This changed significantly at two points during the period in which I was actively conducting research (from May of 2010 to October of 2011). In October of 2010, Curtis began a recovery from knee surgery that would take him away from teaching until January of 2011. Then, in March of 2011, Curtis ruptured his Achilles tendon and was required to stop teaching until it healed in February of 2012. During this time, I shared the teaching responsibilities with two other dedicated capoeira students, but I did do most of it. As a

result, Curtis and I have been colleagues more than we have been teacher and student (in terms of capoeira) for much of the time that we have been working on this project.

During this time, Curtis maintained control of the Sunday class at his house. It was canceled in the earliest stages of his physical recovery from the Achilles rupture, but as his condition improved, he began teaching music classes on Sunday mornings. In this way, the other capoeira students and I once again became part of the Pierre family's weekend. This was a useful time for this project as it enabled me to touch base with Carol and Bomani, neither of whom I see regularly during the week. The fundamental utility of being in the Pierre house once per week is that I was able see how central samba and capoeira are to the family's daily existence.

During heightened performance seasons surrounding Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest, there is increased evidence of costume production all over the front areas of the house. Even in times of relative calm in performance terms, though, the house reflects its function as a workshop, design studio, practice space, recording studio (with a full range of equipment in the back room), classroom, and business center . The house and its multiplicity of uses is representative of how the Pierres operate as a family and as the core unit of a culturally oriented business. But more than that, different people using the house simultaneously for completely divergent purposes shows how integral the Afro-Brazilian traditions that shape this family's life together are in their day-to-day existences. Sometimes, everything going on in the house is about Casa Samba. Curtis will lead a capoeira class in the back yard while Carol teaches an individual samba lesson in the front room. At other times, however, Curtis will lead a deafening capoeira music class in the front room while Carol sits at the adjacent dining room table reading the newspaper or working on her computer, apparently oblivious to the cacophony. Bomani's place in this varies. Sometimes, he does capoeira class on Sundays (sometimes Carol does, too). At other times, he

can be spotted doing homework, pretending to do homework, or negotiating with one parent or the other for permission to do something later in the day.

As Curtis' condition improves further, it seems likely we will have capoeira *rodas* at his house or other locations again. The only roda Curtis hosted during the research period for this project occurred on New Year's Day of 2011, but I have attended several rodas at the house over the years and I have traveled with other group members to rodas in Jackson, MS where there is a group of students for whom Curtis is a guiding force. Rodas are events to which all manner of participants from the Gulf Coast capoeira community are invited and are always rich sources of information regarding how people relate to capoeira culture and to each other in an intensified context. Rodas depend on cooperation, and on a certain level of skilled music and game playing from seasoned players that should teach new students how to become capoeiristas, but they also produce in some players a desire to show off. The conflict between divergent goals at a roda can be minimized or maximized depending on whether cooperation or egotism dominate. Being in a position to watch Curtis manage rodas has helped me understand his role as a manager of the people with whom he works in samba contexts. Without this understanding, my interpretation of Curtis' leadership of Casa Samba would be less nuanced.

In December of 2010, Curtis began offering a "women's drumming class" on Monday evenings. His idea was that having a single-gender class would encourage women to participate in drumming, something that he believed women felt excluded from due to the fact that men predominate drumming in Casa Samba and elsewhere. I attended this class as regularly as possible until June of 2011, when Jorge Alabê took over the class to teach *orixá* drumming. These classes were open to people of all genders and were initially better attended than the women's drumming classes. This was partly due to the fact that Jorge's being here for the

summer was a special event, and partly due to the fact that a class focusing on orixá drumming appealed to people from outside of Casa Samba. The special drumming classes culminated in an orixá dance workshop in July. After this, Curtis continued to teach drumming on Monday evenings, but he opened it up to everyone. I attended these drumming classes in all their forms from December of 2010 through August of 2011.

My decision to join the drumming classes was the only one I made in an effort to include participant observation as it is traditionally defined as a data source for this project. I am a terrible drummer and my interest in becoming a better one is limited. That is, this class was the only instance of my participation in any version of Casa Samba's or the Pierre family's activities that was motivated more by a research interest than by personal interest. But when Curtis said he was starting this class, I thought I might benefit from experiencing Curtis as a teacher of music (as opposed to a teacher of capoeira). In these weekly classes, I did learn a lot about Curtis' approaches to teaching. While he is known for being an instructor with high expectations and limited patience, and while by his own account he has not always been easy to learn from, his approach in these small classes was relatively laissez-faire. None of us revealed any particular talent for drumming and none of us learned quickly. But Curtis was patient and helpful throughout the months that he offered these classes. Overall, participating in the drumming classes provided me with a sensibility about Curtis' teaching that I could not have gained otherwise. This sense supported much of what Curtis told me about himself and his evolving approaches to teaching music over the years, and also suggested that different class settings and different goals for those classes impact his teaching strategies.

When Jorge took over the Monday night slot to teach orixá drumming and songs, I got a chance to see Curtis as a student. Jorge is his teacher, and Jorge is a very famous and well-

respected master drummer. His approaches to teaching are similar to Curtis' (which makes sense because Jorge likely taught Curtis a lot about teaching), and his interactions with Curtis and Bomani in these classes reiterated how close Jorge is to the Pierre family. Jorge treated Curtis like the brother to whom he has already given all the relevant information about drumming. He expected Curtis to know, better than anyone else, what was happening in the class, and for the most part Curtis did. His interactions with Curtis were distinctly not dramatic. When Bomani came to class, Jorge shouted and gestured at this protégé, this child of his, urging him to demonstrate for everyone his considerable talent. And he did. Jorge's view of Bomani as his child, and himself as one of Bomani's parents, became clearer when I interviewed Jorge in July of 2011, but watching them in action together made plain the depth of their fictive kinship before Jorge explained it in words.

After a few weeks of orixá drumming, Curtis and Jorge hosted a party for Ogum at the Pierre house. This party was a ritual occasion for Curtis to honor the orixá to whom he is dedicated under Jorge's sponsorship in *candomblé*. Everyone gathered and sang songs for Ogum, many of which we had learned recently from Jorge, and afterwards we ate foods that Ogum preferred. Carol's role in this event demonstrated the multiple roles she juggles in her everyday life. Because she had to work from ten until four, which is when the party would begin, she had gotten up at four o'clock that morning to do much of the cooking and prep work for the event. Jorge would finish some of the cooking, but even with his help, Carol still did most of the cooking follow-through when she arrived home from work. Being invited to participate in this ritual gave me a view of the place of *candomblé* in the Pierre family's life. Curtis and Bomani accompanied Jorge in drumming for Ogum, demonstrating their rightful position as initiates in a religious practice that is difficult for American people to access. None of the Pierres'

connections to candomblé are superficial; they are not observers of the practice, but practitioners themselves who have been guided in their development by Jorge, whose candomblé training began in childhood. Witnessing this event, before Jorge explained in words his role in bringing candomblé into the Pierre family's life or the religion's role in—in his opinion—changing Curtis for the better, gave me a deeper understanding of their commitment to an Afro-Brazilian way of life.

In addition to capoeira classes and rodas, drumming classes and rituals, I also attended a number of Casa Samba's public performances during the research period. I have attended scores of Casa Samba performances over the past five years, and have notes about nearly all of them. The notes I took during the time that I felt more actively engaged in this project, however, were more detailed and are better data sources than those taken otherwise. Many of Casa Samba's performances are not public as they are at private events such as conventions. I attended ten public performances between May 2010 and October 2011. I have notes on, and pictures of, shows ranging from Casa Samba's coronation performance at the Zulu Ball to the pagode band's performances at a party for another capoeira school in town and a birthday party/São João party at Coco Bamboo.⁷ Much of what I discuss in chapter five comes from combining discussion of Casa Samba performances in interviews with my own interpretations of the same shows we discussed. I hope that my analysis is richer as a result of having multiple sources of information about certain events.

In December of 2011, I was planning to travel to Brazil with Curtis and his family on their annual pilgrimage to Rio de Janeiro to work with samba schools there. We would have been in Rio for about three weeks. The purpose of this trip would have been to observe the ways in which Curtis, his family, and other group members who can make the trip interact with samba

schools in the imagined homeland of the art they practice and preserve in New Orleans. This trip did not happen because the Pierre family decided to postpone their trip until a later time. I hope to go with them to Brazil at some point in the future and if that trip resulted in an expansion of this research, that would be wonderful.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

In the end, I hope that I have information coming from enough sources that the interpretations I make of the Pierre family's life and Casa Samba's place in it are based in truths that others can discern. I hope my interpretations are traceable in the sense that readers understand why I write what I write. It should be clear that I am not attempting to extrapolate directly from any of the Pierres' or my own experiences to draw conclusions that should pertain to humankind. My only hope is that their life stories, and the contexts of those stories, suggest that there are many ways of negotiating the human desire to feel real in, and right about, our individual and collective identities. While we all make different choices about how to get there, most people seem to be seeking authenticity in ways that I hope this research helps us all to understand.

Chapter Three: Personal Authenticity and Meaningful Work: Beginning the Pursuit of a New Identity

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe the ways that Curtis and Carol Pierre have developed a sense of personal authenticity and pursued it in distinct ways prior to coming together to create Casa Samba. They have constructed their adult identities through the adoption of an Afro-Brazilian culture that reflects their core values. They express these values not only in their personal choices to adopt samba drumming and dance as practices that define them, but in judgments they each made about the problems of living an ordinary life prior to encountering samba. I interpret the Pierres' separate and individual quests for a way of life that is not ordinary, a way of life that is satisfying in all its elements, as seeking personal authenticity through the control of their identities.

Personal authenticity is best defined by Lionel Trilling as a type of “autonomousness” and a capacity to be “self-defining,” primarily through the production of art (1972:93). The potential for autonomy and self-definition are the major components of Curtis’ and Carol’s individual and collective decisions to adopt Afro-Brazilian dance and drumming. I argue that it is through these cultural practices that the Pierres have the greatest sense of control over their identities and that it is through these practices that the Pierres find expression for their opposition to and rejection of the dominance of consumerism, superficiality, and meaninglessness that they identify in contemporary American culture.

Curtis and Carol made (and continue making) their decisions to experience, learn, and teach Afro-Brazilian drumming, dance, and religious culture in reaction to the dissatisfaction they describe in relation to the identities into which they were born. The class identities within which

Curtis and Carol grew up are strikingly distinct, and will be examined in detail in this chapter so that we can understand the full meaning of their intentional choices of another, more suitable, identity in a broader political economic context. Bomani's inherited identity is, in fact, the one that his parents chose for themselves, and the ramifications of class are not the same for Bomani as they are for either of his parents. His thoughts on Afro-Brazilian identity in the context of his being American, and being a young musician in New Orleans at a time when he is increasingly absorbing musical techniques and cultural practices unique to the city, are examined in their own right in a separate chapter.

As we will see below, Curtis and Carol have different positions on what constitutes meaningful work and different relationships to the organization they run together. Curtis' observations of the lives of black working-class, men around him taught him that regular work, even if the pay is good, creates in people a potential for unhappiness and dissatisfaction that he finds unacceptable for himself. In his own experiences with work, Curtis confirmed that the impressions he had as a younger person were correct. Satisfaction, meaning, and pride in his work were difficult to find in the military and wage-labor positions that Curtis had before committing himself to Casa Samba. In fact, as I will further explain below, samba as an art form appealed to Curtis as *the* thing that would enable him to build a life around satisfying work and an authentic way of being his true self.

Carol, unlike Curtis, grew up in a middle-class household. Her upbringing impacts her desired work life as Curtis' impacts his, but because they come from different class experiences, the decisions they make are fundamentally different. Carol does not reject "regular" work. For her, it is possible to derive satisfaction and meaning from a position in which she is an employee, in which she has less-than-total creative control, and through which she earns a wage. This says

something about the nature of middle-class work experience—which is often related to the achievement of higher levels of education and an ability to demand more autonomy at one’s job than is possible in working-class positions. Carol’s observations of her elders are similar to Curtis’ in that she, too, identifies a fundamental dissatisfaction in her father’s experience of pursuing the middle-class American Dream. But partly because of his striving, Carol had access to a lifetime of education that would position her to pursue satisfying, meaningful, work as an adult. Indeed, Carol expresses a great deal of satisfaction with her overall work history and is grateful for the opportunities that she has had in this regard. Carol is both a full-time employee outside of Casa Samba and also a dedicated and nearly full-time co-leader of Casa Samba. She enjoys her “regular” work in many ways, and she also values it because her family requires the income from that job.

Both Curtis and Carol view meaningful work as a primary mechanism for establishing an identity that operates in opposition to some of the values held by their elders while accepting others of those values to create a definition of personal authenticity that suits them. In this sense, they begin their overall identity construction by addressing work identities first. In the chapters that follow, I examine the subsequent steps the Pierres took to remodel themselves as individuals and to offer this option to others. In these steps, the Pierres move beyond personal authenticity, but here, in an examination of their narratives about childhood and young adulthood, the beginnings of assembling a true self reflect a class-inflected sense of how to be autonomous, that is, true to oneself. The Pierres’ definitions of personal authenticity diverge along the class lines that shape their ideas about what it means to be happy with the work that earns a living. The class statuses to which the Pierres react are the product of the historic development of capitalism to its mid-twentieth century and twenty-first century form. Their reactions to these statuses are

examined here because global capitalism is the system that positions Carol as a breadwinner for her family and Curtis as a person devoted full-time to cultural production in rejection, mainly, of the impossibility of being a secure breadwinner through ordinary employment.

Curtis and Carol independently developed two kinds of personal authenticity that nonetheless share some characteristics. They each value autonomousness that expands into a use of creativity and cultural production to assemble their individual identities. They each root the origins of their ongoing identity reconstruction in their class positions. But as we will see below, Curtis essentially escapes from his working-class position to achieve his sense of what is personally authentic, while Carol alters her position in the middle class to suit her sense of the same.

DEFINING, REJECTING, CREATING AGAINST SIX-PACK-JOE

I have experienced some difficulty explaining in conversation how remarkable Curtis' and Carol's decisions to define themselves as authentic *sambistas* are. I usually begin with an explanation that these are American people, and that gives the person who has just asked what I am working on some sense of why their choices are so impressive, or at least unusual enough. I go on to tell them that they started a samba school in New Orleans in 1986, and they recognize the cultural overlap that makes a samba school work in New Orleans. Carnival is carnival, right? I tell them that they have raised their son to take control of the group one day, and they smile at the idea that one generation's decision to control their lives and manufacture a different destiny will be passed down. But the significance of the fact that Curtis and Carol ended up marching down the path toward the same adopted cultural practice, and therefore the same chosen identity was still escaping people. The details of each of their narratives suggest that the Pierres have

done something extraordinary in reconstructing their identities to suit their sense of what his valuable, authentic, and important. These details also show, however, that what both Curtis and Carol have done is something many people are capable of doing. Here, I offer the details the narratives followed by a conceptual framework through which I interpret the Pierres' reflections on their early lives in terms of what they were seeking as individuals constructing identities and in terms of their positions in a global, gendered division of labor that shapes their individual quests.

Curtis Pierre was born in 1955 in Killona, Louisiana. Killona is a small town on the Mississippi River's west bank. Killona is an independent town that, for most of Curtis' life, was sandwiched between two functional plantations. Curtis' older brother Lionel worked in the sugarcane fields owned by the Waterford Plantation and, until the 1970s when they were torn down, lived in the plantation's original buildings, which is to say, its slave quarters. After the quarters were demolished, Curtis' brother and the other cane field workers moved into different housing and continued to pick cane under different management until the whole plantation itself was replaced by a power plant. According to Curtis, many of the former cane workers found employment at the Avondale Shipyard, which had been a major source of decent employment for Killona and other semi-rural communities since it opened in 1938. During the 1970s, Avondale employed as many as 19,000 workers and was known as a source of well-remunerated jobs for workers having only a high school education. By the 1980s, Avondale employed 5,000 workers, but its presence in the city's economy remained meaningful in light of the overall decline in manufacturing jobs in the area.⁸

While work at Avondale was and is (at least for now) decent, and while access to shipbuilding or related work would provide a viable means of earning a living for Curtis, he

assessed the situation more negatively not because of the work itself but because of its social byproduct. The people Curtis knew who worked at Avondale or in other working-class jobs in Killona did not seem happy to him. Curtis' brothers and uncles worked at Avondale at different points in their lives. Curtis himself worked there briefly before 1973 when he joined the Navy in an effort to avoid the fate of the working-class black men whose present existences predicted, in his mind, Curtis' future.

Eventually, joining the Navy would be Curtis' first avenue out of Louisiana and away from a life he viewed with deep skepticism, even as a teenager. Before he did that, he learned to play drums, first by watching a "Top Forty"-style group in which one of his older brothers played the guitar and later by playing in a band of his own. Curtis views this period of his life critically and discusses it in the context of a distaste for "Top Forty" music that he cannot separate from his feelings about playing pop music as a teenager. This dislike of pop music forms did not emerge, however, until Curtis was an adult and had interpreted American pop music as a negative factor in his divorce from his first wife—a woman he married when he was about nineteen years-old and who, he insists, he still loves today.

One goal of his learning to play drums in the bands, in Curtis' interpretation of this time in his life, is avoiding becoming an archetype he labels "Six-Pack Joe," an amalgamation of several manifestations of working-class downtime. In our conversations, Curtis uses the phrase on six occasions to describe the adult men who were "just like on the corner, doing nothing, not really accomplishing much. But some people, they had jobs, they weren't really bums. They'd go to work and then after, they'd turn into Six-Pack-Joe." Reading the dissatisfaction experienced by a Six-Pack-Joe, Curtis began to spend more time with relatives in New Orleans to see if, perhaps, a more satisfying existence could be located in the city. But while he played congas a little more

regularly in New Orleans, he still did not feel at home yet. He said he “just didn’t want to be like the people that [he] saw.” New Orleans was “limited” in terms of what Curtis was looking for just as much as Killona was. “I was looking for a new adventure and so I got an opportunity to join the Navy, which was, I think, the best move in my whole life that I made.”

Curtis’ interpretation of his time in the Navy is complex. He is ambivalent about the decision to join at all to such a degree that, immediately after characterizing it as the “best move” he made, he said, “I hated it.” His explanation of why he hated the Navy reveals a lot about how this period of his life was formative. In his reflections on the Navy period, Curtis proposes an analysis of the contrast between enslavement and freedom that would shape his later decisions to leave Louisiana and look elsewhere for a satisfying and meaningful life. The specter of becoming a “Six-Pack-Joe” may have sent Curtis running toward the military, but developing an understanding of how servitude operates and of what he viewed (then and now) as dishonest day-to-day operations of the United States military pushed Curtis away from the idea that being an upstanding American in the military manner would be enough to prevent him from ending up on the corner. Here is how it happened.

When Curtis characterized joining the Navy as the best decision he had ever made, I asked skeptically, “the Navy?” He laughed a little and explained the apparent contradiction between his current personality, which is marked by an occasionally ornery independence, and an acceptance of military rules. He replied,

Yes. I hated it. But I think it was the best thing. What I hated was the ownership. When you go into the service, you’re in jail. A lot of people don’t know that. You’re basically incarcerated when you to the service. You have freedom. It’s like being under house arrest. You can do anything. You can go ... [but] you have to be back at this time or they’re going to get your ass.

Curtis enjoyed travelling in the Navy. He is grateful to have been to the Spain, the Middle East, and Africa, and seen some of the world's diversity, but even at the time, he "still couldn't get rid of that ownership thing."

So, Curtis went AWOL. Not caring whether he was discharged honorably or dishonorably, Curtis went to a town near Killona, Taft, and got a job cleaning acid tanks. Considering that Curtis had been a boiler technician in the Navy—a job whose details are presented below—cleaning giant chemical tanks may have actually been easier work. But in any event, the Navy tracked him down in Taft and put him in the brig where Curtis learned that getting out was significantly more difficult than getting in, and that being owned by the Navy could take various forms. A conversation with a fellow inmate in the brig captures this revelation well.

I got back. They put me in the brig and, lo and behold, the first guy I talk to is like 'Man, how long you been gone?' I says, 'Thirty days.' He says, 'What? You trying to get a discharge?' I said, 'Yeah.' He says, 'Ha ha ha!' [laughs] He laughs at me! I'm like, 'Man, what are you laughing at?' He says, 'Dude. I been gone for over six months. Twice. And I ain't got out yet. Homeboy down here? He went out for a year. They ain't letting him out. [laughs] They gonna keep you in here!' Yeah! And I was like, 'Holy shit! Man, I can't believe this!' I mean, I was free before, you know? But now, I was locked up in jail.

Ultimately, Curtis was discharged honorably from the Navy with the help of a chaplain. His hardship discharge was granted because his mother had died not long before he asked for it, his father was ill, and he could not support his wife and father with his Navy pay. Eventually, his Veterans Administration benefits, which come with an honorable discharge but are revoked with a dishonorable discharge, helped him to buy the house in which he and Carol and Bomani live today. Bringing his discussion of the Navy to a gradual close, Curtis says that the benefits made the nearly two years of indentured servitude to the government worth it. After all, he completed less than half of the four-year term for which he had signed up and he received complete access to VA home financing.

Monetary benefits aside, Curtis values his experience in the Navy because “it got [him] to meet other people, it got [him] to see other walks of life, how other cultures and how other people really were.” He moved his discussion of revelations in a different direction:

It showed me a lot about the government, how it worked. Taught me about friendly fire ... You know, we would see these things happen, and then we'd see what was written about them in the paper when we got in port. It wouldn't be exactly the same. It'd be kind of diminished.

This introduction to what he interpreted as the hypocrisy of the United States government was, in addition to his chafing against the feeling of being owned by the military, a driving factor in Curtis’ decision to leave the Navy by any means necessary. But his disillusionment with armed service to his country also found support in the kind of work Curtis was assigned upon entering the armed services.

Curtis joined the Navy not necessarily “to see the world. [He] actually joined to be in the band.” That did not happen, however. As Curtis explained,

I was screwed. They told me my scores weren’t high enough and that I could make that up after I went through boot camp. So when I went to boot camp, [I] never went to school or whatever, or did anything, never took any classes. And next thing I knew, I was a boiler technician, which was the second horrible-est job in the Navy.

Curtis described this job as dirty and exhausting, not unlike the job he took when he went AWOL, and not unlike the jobs he might have had if he had followed the ordinary route through life that the Six-Pack-Joes who occupied Killona’s street corners at the end of their shifts had followed. Boiler technicians “had to spend like sixteen hours and eighteen hours in the boiler room which was a hundred and ten, hundred and fifteen degrees in the cooler spots ... I had to change a valve that was twice as big as that conga [points to a nearby drum] and I had a wrench that was about as big as your leg that I had to turn with a maul. That was one of the things that I think ...” Curtis stopped himself here to transition to the lesson that this kind of work offered him. He continued:

People wonder why I train so hard and do the other stuff that I do. And that was a commitment. I was there and I felt like I was a slave. I mean, and I did. I did it and all the time I was hitting that damn maul with that big wrench, I was like, ‘I’m never going to work like this for anybody but myself again in my life.’

His voice took on a clear twang of emotion as he continued:

‘If I can do this for them, I can do this for myself.’ That’s how I got to be, to push myself. I was like, ‘I went through all of this stuff for them? For nothing? For regular pay?’ There was no overtime! I spent sixteen hours and I was only getting paid for eight … and [in] hazardous conditions. And I was like, ‘Man, if I could do all of this shit …’ I’m serious, Lauren. It was like slave driving.

Having begun his narrative about the Navy with a rejection of the military’s ownership of soldiers in a general sense, Curtis specifies his experience of that ownership to enslavement.

While he did not tie this comparison to his race, I interpret his understanding of his enslavement as an extension of his experience of being a black American who rejects the limits of black identity in a white supremacist country. Curtis’ educational attainment prior to enlisting in the Navy was low enough that his test scores placed him in a dangerous, dirty job for which he was never fully compensated. His life prior to enlisting in the Navy was heavily marked by segregation and the limited access to education, decent work, and upward mobility that is reflected in the persistence of data showing higher educational attainment, lower incarceration rates, higher compensation, and, indeed, greater upward mobility for white Americans than black Americans.⁹

As discussed above, Killona is an independent town that, until the 1990s, was sandwiched between two active plantations on which black men and women worked like slaves. The New Orleans neighborhoods in which Curtis spent time (Hollygrove, Gert Town, Pension Town/Pigeon Town, and Nigger Town—which is now known as the Black Pearl) have long been sites of disenfranchisement and oppression.¹⁰ They have always been black neighborhoods. For Curtis to understand his relegation to the boiler room as a form of enslavement is not a general

statement about the difficulty of the work or the lack of full pay for that work. It is, rather, a particular statement about the condition of black Americans based on his lifetime of experiences up until his induction into the Navy. It is an expression of his sense that the United States military is a condensation of the country's larger racial framework in which a white power structure oppresses its citizenry. Of all the citizens getting a bad deal, it appears that black citizens get the worst.

Curtis still dreams about being sworn into the Navy. In the dreams, he is about to step over the line and raise his hand to signal allegiance, but he does not do it. In the dreams, he folds his arms across his chest, purses his lips, and shakes his head. He does not comment further on the dreams, but goes on instead to express, again, his ambivalence about the time he spent in the service. He explained that he never counsels young people to join the military now, but that this is because the country has been at war and that they "will be expendable." He tells people, "It's good to go in the service, but go in peacetime." But reflecting on whether he would do it again, Curtis said, "I would never enlist to go to the service because of what I know now."

Switching again to a decidedly less negative position on his experience, Curtis described his decision to enlist as

the best choice of my whole life ... It opened up all the opportunities that led up to where I'm at right now. If I hadn't gone in the service, I wouldn't have a military background and I wouldn't have been able to get the security jobs that I got. Those were the jobs that led me to finding the things that I needed to find in life. If not, I was going to be a welder. I was going to be a welder because everybody in my family, basically all of my brothers had been working at Avondale. I had spent my few months at Avondale and gotten fired, but everybody gets fired at Avondale and comes back.

After explaining the process of becoming a certified welder and pointing to the place on his chest where he has a scar from an overhead welding mishap, Curtis talked about how music would have fit into that version of his life:

My music career would have been part-time. I don't think it would have been anything. I think I would have just become ... Six-Pack-Joe. I would ... have been married and not having time to do music and, you know, cutting the grass in the afternoon and probably playing football or basketball or something with my spare time.

Curtis interprets the next phase in his life in two distinct ways. In our conversations, he described his decision to join an older brother in Detroit as a necessary one; a decision made to shape his own destiny and to gain control over his life as his first marriage fell apart and his post-Navy prospects seemed dim. In most of our discussions about his life outside of Louisiana, Curtis focused on the musical and cultural development he experienced in Detroit and explained his later move to Los Angeles as one more instance in which he pursued a meaningful existence through that development. But in one of our interviews, Curtis offered an alternative narrative of his time in Detroit in Los Angeles that examines the social and economic conditions of the time period in which he lived in these places and ties his decisions to move—first from Detroit to Los Angeles and later back to Louisiana—to those conditions. I think that interpreting the distinct versions of this period in Curtis' life history together will give a clearer sense of all the factors impacting the choices that would set him up to be the musician, cultural producer, group leader, husband, and father that he is now.

In our first interview, which occurred in 2007—three years before we would begin the year-long series of interviews that are the basis for this research, Curtis offered a definition of destiny that both contradicts an earlier definition and reveals his particular perception of his life's path. We were nearing the end of that day's conversation and Curtis was summarizing what has become his key for confronting the inevitable suffering that comes with being alive. He said:

Capitalism, purchasing this and this and that, this is something ... [But] I use the things I buy to make something that's priceless ... So you know, it's just that for me it's like Stevie Wonder. It's the key of life. Bad days, things like that, don't exist for me anymore. Every day is cool. I don't have bad days anymore.

He tries to impart this ideal to people, from his students in Casa Samba to his son to family members, who come to him for advice. And where, earlier in the interview, he had referred to his current path as the one he was meant to be on, he explained at this point that,

It's going to be what it is, no matter what you do. This is the way it's going to be. People say you make your own destiny. You do in a way. But from the things that I've experienced to try and make my own destiny, it didn't work. It didn't work. I loved my wife. I was like, 'I would be the happiest person in the world if she would have took me back and made me the pacifier husband. The six-pack of beer husband. You know, just be satisfied that she's there and make some babies. And that's it, but that wasn't me. And I tried hard as hell to make that shit happen.

Curtis' earlier definition of destiny was rooted in the fact that he had pursued the path he was meant to take out of Louisiana and into a satisfying career, marriage, and life as the leader of Casa Samba, husband of his partner in that, and father of a child who will represent him long into the future. The definition of the same concept he offers above is rooted in something else. Destiny in this instance is what Curtis tried, but ultimately failed, to effect. Destiny would have been to stay with his first wife and live a life that he knows he would have hated. In overcoming destiny in spite of having actively tried to court it by wishing that his wife would take him back, Curtis offers a lesson in the complexity of the ways our lives are fixed into place. By his own account, Curtis both followed his destiny and overcame his destiny. Either way, he is telling the truth. And either way, Curtis had managed to get honorably discharged from the Navy, his wife had left him, and it was time to hit the road and see what the world could offer him.

Curtis left Louisiana for Detroit in 1975 and moved in with his oldest brother. After the first year, Curtis' brother put him out of his house in Detroit and Curtis moved to Pontiac. At first, Curtis was hurt, believing that he had been treated unfairly by his brother. After two and half years in Pontiac, however, Curtis was grateful to his brother for asking him to leave because moving out gave him an opportunity to develop an independence he had not sought in Detroit. While living in Detroit, Curtis' activities included going to work and mourning the end of his

relationship with his former wife. His brother wisely believed that Curtis could have a better life if he dated and cultivated a social life that Curtis admits he was loath to seek out because he shared living space with his brother. As Curtis recalled it, with “all of this fun I was having [in Pontiac], I realized what my brother wanted me to do. He wanted me to be on my own and he knew this was going to happen. So that’s why I needed to have my own place. I couldn’t figure that out. I was just thinking so negatively about it.” Eventually, Curtis called his brother, to whom he had not spoken since he had left Detroit, and thanked him for teaching what turned out to be a lesson that took time to learn.

In addition to having fun and beginning to get over the loss of his wife, Curtis also began to get back into physical shape and push his life in the direction he now believes it was meant to take. Curtis frames his analysis of this in terms of looking back on his life from an imagined future. “You know, I had a lot of fun,” he explained. “It goes back, for me, to why my elders used to tell me why older folks are so grouchy, always mad. I couldn’t figure that out. … Most people who are old and grumpy and grouchy, most of the opportunities that they wanted to do in life, they never really did them. They just let them pass by. … So that’s why they’re so grumpy and, you know, feeble-like.” It seems right that Curtis connects regret over missed opportunity to physical feebleness because he values bodily health and vigor so deeply. He went on to contrast grumpy old people and old folks who are lively and fun. He said, “All old people are not like that. Some of them are just like, ‘Yeah! You do what you want to do!’ And that’s the kind of way I want to grow old.” Curtis believes he has lived a rich enough life that he is there already. He does not regret any of the choices he made because he was “really experimenting with life. And I was doing things, sometimes crazy things. I was doing a little light drugs and things like that.”

Curtis went on to tell a genuinely funny story of what happened when he took some bad acid. The story is funny because of how it was told. Curtis was laughing at the circumstances he described as he gestured and made faces in support of a distilled, madcap version of what was, in reality, a potentially dangerous encounter with drugs. As Curtis explained, the acid he took had increased his heart rate and he began to panic. He considered going running to see if he could eliminate the drugs from his system, but ended up choosing to knock on an upstairs neighbor's door and ask for help. After banging on the door loudly enough to be heard over the high volume on the television, he succeeded in freaking out his neighbors but ultimately gaining entry to their apartment where he tried eating apples and drinking milk (thinking that these things would settle him down, somehow). Ultimately, Curtis credits deep meditation, a skill he had been developing through his Eastern martial arts practice, with saving his life. He explained that, through meditation, he "could control [his] mind" and reduce the immediate and lingering effects of the acid. Curtis heard that someone else who had taken the same acid had died, and this made him more certain that his quick resort to meditation, to his adopted practice, saved him.

A few weeks after telling me this story, Curtis pulled me aside briefly after a music class at his house. He wanted to be sure that I understood the intended meaning of this story. Though I had not drawn a different one, the conclusion Curtis wanted the story to produce was that martial arts had positively shaped his life. He had clearly been analyzing, for weeks, the risk he took in telling me a story that could be interpreted as a humorous celebration of drug use—something he would not want now and would likely never have wanted. But the moral of Curtis' story was clear in his initial telling.

As he wrapped up the narrative, he asserted the confidence in himself that he frequently invoked in our conversations. It is likely that his current sense of self-reliance and self-

determination grew out of this incident, and perhaps others like it that he does not recount. “For the next year,” he explained, “I dealt with [the effects of the drugs]. I credit meditation with being the thing that really helped me with that because I didn’t go to any psychiatrist or drug therapy or anything. I just went into the mind over matter that was my motto for the rest of the time that I was dealing with that.” If it was not clear enough that his position against drug use was firmly established, when I asked Curtis if he ever did acid again, his response was: “Oh, *hell no.*” Curtis values autonomy in all areas of life, and though his experiment with drugs turned out negatively, he views other experiments with blazing his own trail positively. In another interview, Curtis described his position metaphorically, saying, “I don’t believe everybody’s in a herd of cattle. I’m a big advocate of being a single cow, you know, off to the side. I’m big on that. It’s not to say I don’t like the cattle. But sometimes I like going on my own trail.” For Curtis, choosing samba, choosing “traditional” music, choosing an Afrocentric lifestyle to reshape his identity, are all indicators of his capacity to be a single cow.

Detroit was not just a place Curtis escaped to in order to redevelop his sense of social wellbeing and to recommit to physical fitness. It was in Detroit that Curtis reaffirmed his identity as a percussionist and it was there that he learned the important role that becoming a musician would have for his identity overall. The first person to offer this lesson, Curtis’ first “long-term” conga teacher was not always friendly and patient with his student, and Curtis, as a student, had what he calls an “ego problem.” This led to a fair amount of discord between the two men, but Curtis took seriously a lesson that Harold Lott offered, and he expects his students to learn it as well. Curtis explained:

One of the things I’ll never forget that he taught me is ‘Look, remember when you go learn from somebody, you don’t go to learn their attitude. You go to learn their craft. You don’t go there for them to tell you your hair looks good, or you look cute. You go there to learn the craft. You want to learn from the best? You go to the best. But you don’t go there to teach him how to teach you. … You go there and accept, you get the knowledge. You have to understand how to

get the knowledge.’ You can’t open a book and expect shit just to jump into your head. You have to read it!

Another teacher, one who appears to be more influential and who was directly instrumental in setting Curtis on a path that would lead him to samba, is Roy Brooks. In Detroit, Curtis met a djembe player named Sundiata who brought him to the Aborigine Percussion Choir and introduced him to Brooks. Curtis described Brooks as “a famous drummer. He was on the level of Miles Davis.” This man invented a tuneable drum that Curtis greatly admires and the admirable invention likely played a role in Curtis’ decision to trust Brooks’ advice. Curtis presents himself, and is seen by others, as a very self-confident and self-directed person. As discussed above, this element of his personality emerged clearly throughout our interviews, regardless of whether he was focusing on his independence or not.

Roy Brooks told Curtis, when Curtis’ skills were still in their infancy: “Look, if you’re really serious about doing percussion, first thing you need to find is a teacher.” Curtis was surprised. He wondered “‘Teacher? What? Where do you find a teacher for something like that? I thought you just do it.’ He says, ‘Yeah, you got to find a teacher. But in order to get a teacher, you have to find a music that moves your soul. Something that you really like and makes you feel good inside.’”

Finding a musical form that moved his soul proved to be a touchstone on which Curtis could draw over the following three decades as the mundane matters of running Casa Samba might have challenged his commitment to the project. Because “the Brazilian thing seemed to click with [him] a little better than the traditional African stuff, you know rumba and stuff like that,” Curtis could return to his original connection, a connection rooted in a desire to live a different life than the one he seemed destined to live, to revive his commitment to making that connection available to other people. Curtis references this story of Roy Brooks’ advice frequently, and in

so doing, establishes samba drumming, *capoeira angola*, and *candomblé*—three elements of an Afro-Brazilian cultural complex that Curtis gradually adopted—as integral to his life, as constituting an essential part of his identity.

Curtis' independence from his brother and the advice from Roy Brooks coincided happily. Around that time, a friend brought over an Airto Moreira record and Curtis decided that Moreira's music fit the criteria Brooks had laid out. Moreira did not directly become Curtis' teacher, but he was Curtis' inspiration. Curtis began teaching himself Afro-Brazilian percussion of the style in which Moreira worked at the time, and simultaneously began going to his shows whenever he performed in the Detroit area. At one of the shows, Curtis arranged to get backstage and meet Moreira, and at a subsequent show, he invited Curtis to perform with him in a concert that was praised by a reviewer for its talented percussion section. This performance was especially meaningful to Curtis because it occurred just after his father had died and offered a contrast in extremes: the low of loss with the high of being part of a great show. As Curtis described it: "It was just totally amazing that that happened. At one of the downest points in my life, I get something to take me up to the ceiling! So that's when I made up my mind. I needed to be around this guy more. ... And I got myself together, I came back home [to Louisiana], and then I drove to California from there."

Curtis moved to Los Angeles in 1979, just as the crack era was beginning. He was following Moreira and following his sense that opportunities for finding a teacher of this Afro-Brazilian percussion that moved his soul would be greater. In Los Angeles, Curtis' experiences immersing himself in percussion and martial arts on the one hand, and avoiding the depredations of the crack economy on the other overlap significantly. But he was also pursuing his interest in and talent for visual arts at the same time. After losing his job as a security guard at a department

store—the same job he had done in Detroit and Pontiac, one for which he was uniquely qualified due to his military background—Curtis decided to sell his drawings on Venice Beach. He was doing this, and at the same time, meeting people who would help him develop his identity as a percussionist.

Early on in his time in Los Angeles, Curtis met his “first crew of Brazilians,” and in that group, the man who would become his first Brazilian fictive brother, Lazaro. In addition to Lazaro, Curtis also met the other musicians in a group called Imbra Samba, who were more down home type people who were not necessarily world famous like [Airto] was. But, you know, doing samba I also met one of the most popular American Brazilian percussionists, Ron Powell. He spent like ten or twelve years playing with Sergio Mendes and now he’s with Kenny G, Diana Ross, Quincy Jones, all of those. So I just hung out with them and after a while I was in the samba group with them and Bill Summers, who … actually got me started in percussion.

Bill Summers figures prominently into Curtis’ early desire to pursue percussion and his departure from Los Angeles, but it was in Los Angeles that Curtis committed himself to Afro-Brazilian percussion as a meaningful practice and, importantly, as a form of public performance. However, Curtis’ development as a musician was situated in the precariousness of his economic life.

Though Curtis was successfully selling drawings, he was behind on his rent after several months of not working an ordinary job. Through a convoluted series of connections, Curtis acquired a patron who supported his artwork. It turned out that this guy was in charge of spreading crack into new territories and wanted Curtis to act as a strong arm or a body guard for his dealers. Though it took some time, Curtis eventually deduced his patron’s true motivations and cut ties with him. In one version of his narrative about his decision to leave Los Angeles, Curtis explained that he had

just turned this crack guy loose, [and] that’s when I thought it was time to jump ship because he had invested about three or four thousand dollars into me. He was buying my canvasses, paying

my rent, and, you know, I told him before, I said, ‘Look.’ (And he knew I wasn’t no bullshitter.) I said, ‘Look. Don’t expect nothing for this.’

But the benefactor did expect Curtis to work for his crack interests in exchange for financial support. When Curtis learned that the guy wanted him to work as a bodyguard for drug dealers, he decided he had had enough of the crack economy and began to make preparations to return to Louisiana.

The other version of Curtis’ departure narrative focuses on the promising future New Orleans would offer an aspiring samba school director rather than on the feeling of being pushed out by an aggressive drug economy. To understand the significance of the conversation with Bill Summers that Curtis recounts, we have to understand Curtis’ idolization of Summers from an earlier period in his life. In a discussion about early percussion role models, Curtis mentioned a conga player who lived around Killona and a percussionist named Afro who played with the locally famous funk band Chocolate Milk in New Orleans. But the greatest influence in his teenage years was Bill Summers, the internationally renowned percussionist who, at the time, played with The Headhunters.

Before he went into the Navy, got married, got divorced, moved to Detroit, or moved to Los Angeles, Curtis saw The Headhunters after Chocolate Milk opened for them. As Curtis explained,

Actually, Bill Summers is the one who kind of really inspired me to want to really do that [percussion]. I saw him do this thing with the shakeree,¹¹ and I was like, ‘Man! I want to be able to do that!’ And it wasn’t just doing the thing with the shakeree. What I saw was him up there by himself, with his own solo, and all these people were just in awe of the things that he was doing and that’s what I liked. I mean, the solo was nice and everything. But I liked the way he captivated the audience, you know, with basically a hard vegetable and a bunch of beads. Here’s like maybe fifteen thousand people watching somebody shake a dried out vegetable with some beads on it and they’re thinking it’s great!

Bill Summers’ technical skill with the shakeree impressed Curtis, but in an earlier conversation about him, Curtis also recognized that if he viewed Summers as an inspiration, then

one day Curtis himself might be able to fill that role for others. This is an important element of the authentic identity that Curtis is pursuing through percussion. Aligning himself with the ideal of being a role model in the manner that Summers was for him, Curtis explained that he is not interested in owning knowledge of Afro-Brazilian music and culture. His interest is sharing it. His interpretation of Summers' ability to do that, early on, shaped the manner in which Curtis pursued percussion in his time in Detroit and Los Angeles. Having reflected on this, Curtis wrapped up his thoughts by saying:

It's been real, you know, life inspirational to me to want to be involved in this. And being around kids and having them see what I do ... Because I saw somebody, Bill Summers, when I was young and I said, 'I want to be like that.' And I went after that. ... And I'm basically doing the same thing I was doing maybe thirty-five years ago, just in a different way.

In our very first conversation about Casa Samba, the primacy of Bill Summers' place in Curtis' pantheon of role models was affirmed. Curtis explained his return to Louisiana not as a result of his economic circumstances in California, but as the result of a well-timed conversation with his percussion hero Bill Summers. According to Curtis, he and Bill were in a samba rehearsal in Los Angeles, playing *cuicas* alongside one another, "and [Bill] says, 'Curtis, why don't you go to New Orleans and start something in the carnival there?' And do you know, Lauren, I did not ever put the two things together! Never! Until he said it and a light just went off in my head and I was like 'ha! That's right!'" When I asked why the relationship between Brazilian samba and New Orleans carnival music may not have been obvious, Curtis, presenting a framework that would shape my analysis of Casa Samba's place in the New Orleans cultural landscape for the next five years, replied: "I think the reason is the culture I came into. It wasn't a lot of, you know, it wasn't percussion oriented, it was always about the jazz band."

Having established the connection between Carnaval and Mardi Gras and positively assessed his prospects for having a viable, professional, samba organization modeled after the *escolas de samba* in Brazil, Curtis returned home.

DECIDING AGAINST KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

Carolyn Barber Pierre was born when her parents lived in Queens, New York, having made the move there from Spanish Harlem. When she was five years-old, her family moved to Long Island. Carol's explanation of this move includes her analysis of her parents' individual histories. This is the best way to begin thinking about where Carol came from in her path to personal authenticity.

Carol explained, in the context of a discussion about her aspirations of being a track star and going to college, that her father had "never finished school, so he never saw the value [in going to college]. It was like, 'Get a job and work.' I still don't know what was in my dad's head, he was just crazy." I asked Carol if he was hard on her, and this question really opens a door to her analysis of her father's life history and its impact on Carol and her siblings. She replied,

Oh yeah, he was hard on everybody. He was not from a good family, so he just kind of took it out on us. You know, life's frustrations, being a black man, going through Jim Crow, going through Civil Rights, the whole movement. It was just [frustrating]. Especially without being educated. He may have had a sixth or seventh grade education. He ran away from home and started working for the railroad. And he worked for I don't know how many years, but he never really made any money. It's amazing when you think of what people were able to do with so little money.

Carol went on to explain that her father was always a provider for his family, that he raised seven children, and did not allow her mother to work to support the family. This prompted me to ask what her mother's education was like, and Carol explained that her mother had gone to college for two years but dropped out to take care of her younger sisters and put them through school when her own mother got sick.

Both of Carol's parents were from the South, and both of them had ended up in New York during World War II—as did millions of other black participants in the second major migration of Southerners to the urban North. But Carol's mother detoured first to Virginia where she and her two stepsisters, who were “country nurses,” took care of her grandmother there. During the war, Carol's mother enlisted in the military—in one of the first Women's Army Corps units—and upon leaving the service went to work in New York.¹²

Carol thinks about her childhood and adolescence as a relatively happy time. Throughout our conversations, she interpreted herself as part of a generation in which the struggles of the previous generation factored in to interracial and intercultural relationships differently. But Carol and other “children of the sixties” (as she refers to herself) also negotiated their identities as members of households. Their parents’ relationship with each other and with their children at home impacted how the children behaved outside of the house. Carol’s father worked on the railroad and so he was gone a lot. She remembered that

the best times were when [laughs] he wasn’t there. He was hard on us. He had a hard life and he gave us a hard life. I mean, we had a lot of opportunities and stuff, but he had difficulty showing people love, let’s put it that way. He might have loved us. He did. But he didn’t know how to show it and he was just abused and he tried to abuse other people.

Carol characterizes her father as a representative of a generation of people who focused on providing for their families by pushing toward the middle-class ideal of homeownership. They also idealized the potential for their children to do better in life than they were able to do. Carol appreciates her father’s efforts and recognizes his striving as something he did on her behalf, but she is equally capable of seeing that striving in a negative manner that extends beyond its impact on her childhood. “He was always trying to keep up with the Joneses and he was a hustler. It was amazing what he did,” she exclaims. And she continued:

They lived in Spanish Harlem, then we moved to Queens … and then he bought a house during all this expansion. All those times when they were giving people incentives and stuff. For

twenty thousand dollars, he bought that four-bedroom house on Long Island ... When we moved out there in 1960, I was five years old and it was really just small towns, not mega-suburbs like they are now.

Carol's ambivalent feelings about her father's pursuit of the American Dream give shape to her own pursuit of a satisfying life and a meaningful identity as an adult. While she recognizes the value of the sacrifices her father must have made to provide a suburban lifestyle for seven children and a nonworking wife, Carol is equally conscious of the restrictive nature of these choices for her, her siblings, and her mother. As with many who hope that the acquisition of the markers of success (particularly the house in the suburbs) will make them happy, it appears that Carol's father experienced a high level of dissatisfaction with his life and the choices he had made. Rather than change directions and abandon the middle-class road to happiness, Carol's father pushed onward. He dedicated himself to keeping up with the Joneses, that is, maintaining the outward appearances of middle-class success and achievement, whatever the cost.

Carol situates herself as part of a generation that could examine their parents' choices and accept what was good about those choices while rejecting what was bad. She characterized her place in history as "the tail end of the Civil Rights Movement. [I was] born during the craziness of Civil Rights and busing and all that other stuff, but being in the North, it wasn't the kind of insidious racism that you saw in the South." Carol idealizes the experiences she had as a resident of a diverse community and student at a high school attended by people from a variety of backgrounds—experiences she recognizes that her father's striving made possible. She explained that:

People were a lot more open to integration, and there were knuckleheads everywhere, sure, but in my community—even though it was segregated in the communities—the schools were all integrated. I had to get bused five or six times before high school to make sure that all of us, by the time we got to high school, knew everybody. Because the Italians and the Jews and the blacks and the West Indians and Puerto Ricans, even though we all lived in different parts of town, at some point we all went to the same junior high school.

By the time she was in high school, Carol's primary identity had become that of an athlete. But in addition to being an athlete, she participated in student government and in a choir that sang at the World's Fair in Quebec. Through these activities, her experience of integration and diversity—practices and concepts that she values in her adult life—was enhanced. Students arranged themselves along racial lines in terms of primary friendships. “There was a black group and a black table [in the cafeteria],” Carol remembered. But through extracurricular activities, sharing a common interest, students from different racial and ethnic groups got to know each other.

At one point, I asked Carol what she wanted to be when she grew up. I was trying to get her to compare her life now to her ideas about what she wanted her life to be when she was younger. Carol wanted to be a Tiger Belle, that is, a member of the famous Tennessee State University track team that produced Olympic athletes such as Wilma Rudolph. Carol was accepted for admission to Tennessee State, but ended up not going because she had injured her leg and was not sure she would recover well enough to be in “track shape.” The extent to which Carol’s dreams of being a track star shaped her future is evident, to me, in her references to her identity as a “jock” in many of our conversations. Carol is athletic, and she was an athlete in college—though she played volleyball and basketball instead of running track. She still runs regularly today and has an understanding of the value of physical health that many athletes retain through their lives, even if they do not pursue their goals professionally.

Carol’s sense that her recovery would not full enough for her to be competitive on the Tennessee track team is her primary reason for it, but she suggested another reason why she did not pursue track in college. Though running was important to her and shaped her sense of herself (she notes that Tennessee track was a big deal for women of the pre-Title IX generation

because of how many remarkable women athletes the school produced in a time when women were not valued as such), she would have needed a coach as a younger runner. Her father “had no appreciation for those things. He just didn’t have the time, and he wasn’t interested.” Carol’s admiration for the women who superseded the boundaries imposed on them within the collegiate athletics universe magnifies a similar admiration for her mother and all women who defy elements of their circumstances to construct meaningful identities. Carol’s mother appears to have been a tough lady who devoted her life not only to raising her own children, but acting as a foster mother to many other children as well. Carol’s sense of the kinds of balancing in which women engage comes from her understanding of her mother’s decisions to create a busy, active household that offered security to all its members. Throughout her life, Carol has done this as well. But as her compromise about attending Tennessee State suggests, Carol’s ideal visions can be modified when circumstances combine to demand it. Carol ultimately attended college in Ohio in part because of a physical limitation (a tenacious injury) and a more personal one (her father’s lack of direct support for her training).

Even with attending Tennessee State off her list of options, Carol retained a sense of the different directions her life could have taken. One that she mentioned only briefly is the course she predicted she would have followed had she gone to Lincoln University—or any other Historically Black College or University (HBCU)—as two of her siblings had before her. Having visited Lincoln with her brother on a few occasions, Carol developed a sense of what the school was like. When she applied to college herself, she did not choose the HBCU route, in part, because she “would have been in so much trouble hanging out with them people. [laughs] All they did was party, smoke marijuana, drink. I’d have been pregnant and home, probably, after the first six months.” This life direction did not appeal to Carol and so she blazed a trail

that no one in her family had followed. She pursued, first, a bachelor's degree in Physical Education at the University of Findlay and then an M.A. in Education at Bowling Green State University—both in Ohio.

Reflecting on her time in the Midwest, Carol concluded that she enjoyed her college and graduate school experiences there, but she notes that she never fully fit in. Fellow students and colleagues appeared not to have a frame of reference for a black New Yorker who was not from Harlem and who did not adhere to their idea of what an urban black person should be. Nor did Carol ever grow to appreciate the isolation of small town life in the area around Bowling Green University. When she finally decided that it was time to get out of Ohio, she and a boyfriend headed to New Orleans. For Carol this was an opportunity to reconnect with some of her mother's family who lived in the city (her mother was born there). For Carol and her companion, it was also an opportunity to look for work in their shared field of higher education administration.

Carol found a job right away at the now defunct Dominican College. She was a resident assistant and coordinator of student life in the college's dormitories, and she lived in the "fishbowl" environment of the dorm throughout her tenure at Dominican. When the college announced that it was closing, Carol plied connections she had established at Loyola and Tulane Universities to see what kind of work might be available. She ended up at Tulane as a Director of Special Services and then became the Assistant Dean for Multicultural Affairs. She has advanced her career at Tulane since the mid-1980s. As of this writing, Carol is the Associate Dean of Students and the Director of Multicultural Affairs.

Carol's affiliation with Tulane put her in a position to devote herself to the mission of diversity in the educational experiences of college students, and connected her to Palmares, the

group of Brazilian samba and *Carnaval* enthusiasts from which Casa Samba's earliest members were drawn. Palmares was a registered Mardi Gras carnival krewe that initially had its own parade in 1985 and ultimately marched in the Tucks parade when the group could no longer manage to retain its independence as a krewe. The members of Palmares were what Curtis and Carol both call "Brazilian enthusiasts" who identified a connection between Brazil's Carnaval and Mardi Gras. They physically enacted this connection by inserting samba music and dance into the formal structure of Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans. For Carol, joining Palmares was a logical extension of her enthusiasm for Mardi Gras and her love for the freedom and ease of living she believed New Orleans offered to its citizens. Joining Palmares, meeting Curtis, and learning to dance samba—all links in a chain of adopting Afro-Brazilian culture as her primary identity—changed Carol's view of herself.

In a conversation about her experiences traveling to Brazil on a regular basis, Carol described a shift in the early Casa Samba dance routines that reflected the group's overall professionalization. The shift occurred after she and Curtis went to Brazil for the first time and after Jorge Alabê had moved to New Orleans to help develop Casa Samba. But moving beyond the newly developed professionalism, she described the more fundamental nature of what made her invest in making samba happen in New Orleans. She made a connection between Brazilian cities and New Orleans that is less about carnival or specific overlaps in African identities and more about her feeling a sense of freedom in these places. She described the connections she sees:

But once you love the music, and once you've been to the culture ... It's like, when I went down there and I saw Carnival or when I went down there and saw those dancers, I was like, 'Yeah. I want to do this. I want to be like this. I want to learn how to dance and move like this!' Brazil was so free. I felt like I was stymied my whole life because [in the] Western world you don't ...

Carol paused and restarted, explaining that New Orleans was (and is) a sort of midway point between the United States and Brazil because the public culture of New Orleans is “free” in a manner that Carol believes Brazil’s urban public cultures are.

It was a good thing coming to New Orleans because even in New Orleans it was so much better than it was in other places, where people would sing and dance in a heartbeat. People would have a parade [snaps fingers] or a festival [again] just like that. You know, you grow up, you hear soul music or you hear R&B or whatever you grew up with, but it was, you know, you sang a song with the music on the radio. But it wasn’t like you could go out and you could just freely dance in the street. People would think you were crazy. But down here it was okay. But then I went to Brazil and I saw how free people were. It’s just like, ‘Wow. This is the way people should live, you know? Life’s short. So why not enjoy who you are and what you have and not really sweat and stress about everything else?’

ARRIVING FROM DIFFERENT PLACES, BUT STILL GETTING THERE

In talking self-consciously about the elements of her overall identity, Carol reveals an approach to reflecting on her life that differs from Curtis’. While they share a vision of what Casa Samba is and can do, they have arrived at this shared perspective from different life paths and have pursued its implementation in vastly different ways. Curtis is professionally devoted exclusively to Casa Samba. Carol has a full time career that she values on many levels, and as such, devotes her energy to Casa Samba in the hours that are not occupied by her work at Tulane.

But Carol also differs from Curtis in the actual form of cultural adoption that she has pursued. Curtis’ decision to become a percussionist had roots in his early childhood experiences. Becoming a samba drummer and *pandeiro* juggler and *capoeirista* extended Curtis’ knowledge about drumming, performance, and martial arts that he had developed in different ways prior to understanding that Afro-Brazilian percussion was the form for which he felt the strongest affinity. Carol’s experiences as a runner, basketball player, and volleyball player did not translate as directly into her chosen identity as a samba dancer. Where Curtis sees samba drumming as an expression of a fundamental identity that was already there, waiting to emerge,

Carol talks about performing samba as something separate from who she thought she was. This compartmentalization of identities is related, in part, to the balancing act that she performs each day as a mother, as a high-ranking professional in an academic environment, and as co-director of a performance organization and samba school.

The more important difference between Curtis' and Carol's approaches to embodying their chosen identities comes from the fact that Carol's is an identity she prefers, but that, in some ways, contradicts what she views as her fundamental nature. Carol reflected on the ways in which she is "stable" in contrast with her siblings. Characterizing her older brother (the one who would eventually come to New Orleans and help her and Curtis get Casa Samba off the ground) as a "Peter Pan," Carol contrasted him with herself. "I'm probably more stable than anybody else in my family [laughs]. Not that I'm stable!" she said. "I'm just saying, I mean, I'm married and things have gone well for me, more so than they have for the rest of my family. I think it's just choices. My choices and their choices. Even though most of them are more outgoing and more popular and more ... you know?" Carol reframed her characterization a little to explain that while she is outgoing, she is not "extroverted." She recognizes the contradiction between her view of herself as shy and being a performer who regularly appears in front of audiences in revealing costumes. After thinking about it, she laughed and said, "But then, I dance in dental floss."

An analysis of Carol's interpretation of hers and other Casa Samba dancers' use of samba to reshape their identities is developed in the next chapter. My point here is that Curtis and Carol, as leaders of the organization and the primary framers of what Casa Samba offers to its members, have arrived from different points at a similar definition of personal authenticity that nonetheless serves divergent purposes for them as performers and as people. This arises from

both their different experiences observing dissatisfaction in their archetypal class characters, but also from different experiences as adults trying to find their ways toward satisfying experiences at work.

A PLACE WITH AN IDENTITY

“The best time in my life has been in New Orleans,” Carol said after a very long pause. I had asked her to pick a period in her life that is the most transformative. “Married and with Casa Samba,” she laughed and went on:

It’s reshaping me, getting me out of that ‘keeping-up-with-the-Joneses, got-to-fit-a-certain image, you know, if I have a career, I’ve got to live a certain way, act a certain way, do certain things, with a certain group of friends, dress a certain way, for what? Who was I trying to impress? Who was I? Were these my real values? Or was I trying to be like everybody else? [Being in Casa Samba,] I feel more myself, not having to fit certain stereotypes. But maybe that’s age and a little wisdom. But the lifestyle is much more meaningful here than it ever was in New York.

In this quote, Carol encapsulated and summarized her position on how her past experiences shape her current situation. Her choice to live in New Orleans, run a samba school with her family, raise her son here in a manner in which few children are raised, all of these choices, are a rejection of her father’s middle class assimilationism. Her rejection of this ethos is not mean-spirited or a reflection of a lack of gratitude on Carol’s part. In fact, she is highly aware of the benefits provided by her middle-class upbringing, and she appreciates her father’s capacity and willingness to hustle enough to provide these benefits to his children. But his values are not her values. She negotiates a position in the middle class differently than did her father. Most simply, Carol is, for many reasons (including the era in which she lives, her gender, her decisions about where to live and raise a family), able to make a middle class positionality work for her in ways that her father was, perhaps, not.

Carol said, after a little more conversation about New Orleans in comparison to New York, that her “development in [Afrocentric ideas] didn’t happen until she came [to New Orleans].” While that may be true, and is something she credits equally to her job at Tulane as to her participation in the creation and development of Casa Samba, it seems likely that Carol’s experiences with cultural diversity prepared her to be the “adaptable” and curious individual she became in New Orleans. Her adaptability and curiosity are what have made her successful in her “nine-to-five” at Tulane and in running Casa Samba, and she encourages these traits in others through her work in both careers.

Carol returned to her conception of New Orleans as a place, in fact, an ideal place for a person with her values to live. She explicitly described the city as having an “identity,” and in turn, implies that people here have an opportunity to build on the city’s sense of itself to create their own sense of themselves. She said,

New Orleans just had this pull … To me, it’s the quality of life, you know? You can make all the money and still be unhappy as hell. Money isn’t everything. It’s about, you know, I like the familiarity, even people who don’t know you will still make you feel like you’re welcome in New Orleans. People will at least be respectful, say hello, or find out a little bit more about you. It’s the energy here! I don’t find that other places … You know, I always wanted to go somewhere that had an identity, a city that had an identity.

PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY: THE CONCEPT

The conceptual focus of this research is the intersection of two forms of authenticity. The first form, the subject of this chapter, is personal authenticity: a conception of the self that satisfies an individual’s search for meaning, truth, and something “real.” This form of authenticity challenges the inauthenticity that an increasing number of human beings believe they confront and live with, especially in First World nations where material and resource consumption levels have reached a nearly palpable zenith and the meaningfulness of individual lives seems difficult to locate (see Gilmore and Pine 2007, Vannini and Williams 2009).

Authenticity of all forms is often discussed in the context of the art and cultural spheres of social life. Here, I examine personal authenticity in the context of art and culture, but I am also concerned with the ways that identities forged through a struggle for personal authenticity extend beyond the realm of artistic production.

Culture—that amorphous label for the complex of behaviors and ideas that define human groups in contrast to other animals and, of course, different groups—extends beyond art. To examine ways that a family engaged in artistic production in the cultural landscape of New Orleans carved out their particular path is to examine the individual and collective choices they made throughout their lives. These choices, about art and about life, led Curtis and Carol to where they are now. I argue that these choices have been in the context of a search for personal authenticity that produces individual, consciously constructed identities for Curtis and Carol. What ultimately emerges is a cultural organization that offers Curtis' and Carol's ideals, methods, and resources for identity construction to others. Casa Samba, because it is a collective, goes beyond personal authenticity in some ways even as the choices Curtis and Carol made in the context of this personal pursuit of agency and autonomy remain at the heart of the group's overall identity. In terms of the decisions Curtis and Carol made regarding their work lives, personal authenticity is the most useful framework for interpretation. As decisions about work and cultural production become part of Casa Samba's operation, the personal authenticity frame can be backgrounded as other frameworks become more salient. Other concepts bloom in future chapters, but personal authenticity is, I suggest, the seed from which they grow.

Lionel Trilling's (1972) examination of sincerity and authenticity as these concepts occur and recur in philosophy and literature establishes each of them as things that human beings have sought throughout history. The fact that sincerity and authenticity are always the objects of

pursuit suggests that their attainment is at times impossible, at times ephemeral, and—as Trilling more concretely demonstrates—variously interpreted depending on the social and political circumstances of the epoch of one’s pursuit (1972:99–123). Trilling’s discussion of the concept of “personal authenticity” as it pertains to nineteenth-century artists most clearly shows how art signals for audiences the artist’s unique sense of his own identity. In the consumption of artistic products, the quest for authenticity in the personal sense is enlivened for both artist and audience. Through the consumption of artistic production, Trilling argues, a relationship is formed that either sustains or contradicts the sense of personal authenticity that artist and audience have prior to contact with one another. He explains:

The artist seeks his personal authenticity in his entire autonomousness—his goal is to be as self-defining as the art object he creates. As for the audience, its expectation is that through its communication with the work of art, which may be resistant, unpleasant, even hostile, it acquires the authenticity of which the object itself is a model and the artist the personal example ... The authentic work of art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it (Trilling 1972:93).

Trilling’s understanding that art is a primary form of human communication is fundamental to his formulation of the concept of personal authenticity. It is through this communication—between artist and audience and presumably among members of the audience—that people make the choices about identity that Trilling frames with the pursuit of a personal authenticity. He suggests that all people enter into this pursuit through art and cultural production and consumption. What differs across time and among populations is the kind of art and culture that forms the basis of the human exchange that produces individual identities (Trilling 1972:91–94, 99–123).

In their narratives, Curtis and Carol clearly delimit those elements of their inherited social identities that did not reflect their senses of who they truly are. Their judgments in this regard are rooted in an analysis of race and gender identities that have specific class valences. Their

different class orientations give each of them a different sense of what it means to be authentic in the personal sense. For Curtis and Carol, it does not matter what *is* authentic. What matters is that they *feel* that they are being authentic, true to themselves, and true to what might be called a metaphysical identity that supersedes the grounded experiences of racial and gendered identities over which each of them has limited control. I would argue, however, that neither Curtis nor Carol is dealing solely with a detached and metaphysical definition of their ideal selves. Their narratives demonstrate, to me, that the construction of personally authentic identities is, in fact, grounded, empirical, and experiential. Their experience of authenticity is situational and contextual, and most importantly, rooted in their adoption of a form of artistic expression through which they can expand opportunities for satisfaction in life and at work. The experiential basis of their definition of personal authenticity is evidenced by the fact that both of them define their pursuit of meaningful life through changes in location, social relationships, and, ultimately, cultural life.

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES IN THE GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

What I have laid out above are the narratives of Curtis' and Carol's lives as they have presented them from their childhoods up until their arrivals in New Orleans where they would begin a shared life. In these narratives, they examine the choices they made that led them to a point at which they began to articulate a shared vision of what life should be. The narratives reveal how they believe their reconstructed identities aid in achieving this vision. Carol and Curtis come, however, from different backgrounds and different political economic circumstances. These differences shape the manner in which each of them pursues the vision on which they agree.

It appears to me that Curtis and Carol are on the same quest. They both reform themselves into the people that they want to be by accepting those elements of their inherited and circumstantial identities that they value and rejecting those that they do not. This combination of acceptance and rejection can be compressed into an archetypal image that each identifies as an example of what they did not want to be. For Curtis, the traits of Six-Pack-Joe merit wholesale rejection. For Carol, the traits of the striving denizen of postwar suburbia—one who keeps up with the Joneses—merits the same. But in identifying these archetypes, both Curtis and Carol also identify the elements of their inherited racial, class, and gender identities that are worth retaining. In so doing, they reveal a shared idea of what it means to pursue an identity that is meaningful, one that both reflects an ideal sense of one's individual self and is also rooted in the adoption of specific embodied practices—Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance—that create the potential for a collective identity that is as authentic as the individual one.

In their analysis of authenticity in punk subcultural life, sociologists Lewin and Williams define authenticity as “something that one earns and subsequently works to maintain—something that is ephemeral, negotiated and processual” (2009:67). This builds on Trilling’s definition of personal authenticity as a sensibility that changes meaning depending on the time period and context in which it is pursued. Lewin and Williams go on, however, to frame the construction of authenticity for their punk informants in terms of their subcultural participation and argue that the punks see their participation as part of a larger life project that is “independent of external influence” (Lewin and Williams 2009:68). Like Curtis and Carol, the punk informants presented in Lewin and Williams’ study viewed their pursuit of authenticity as a demonstration of their commitment to certain values, specifically (as the authors label them): rejection, reflexivity, and self-actualization (2009:69–79). In their analysis of the punks’ ideals,

Lewis and Williams show that the subculture they joined offered a guide for realizing these ideals and expressing that realization in a social context. Lewis and Williams' punk informants are most authentic in the company of fellow citizens who reject elements of their upbringings while accepting others, who dedicate themselves to being accountable to their values, and who express a sense of "self-worth that feels uniquely individualistic despite its social foundations" (2009:78). Through their creation of Casa Samba, Curtis and Carol create a "social foundation" for the transformative potential of samba. As they encourage others to reshape their identities through the adoption of Afro-Brazilian culture, the Pierres reaffirm their faith in the power of their individual decisions to recreate themselves and their life paths through this adoption.

In a case study that relates most directly to my analysis of Curtis' situation but has implications for a broader interpretation of personal authenticity, sociologist Michael Schwalbe examines the lives of two Southern, black men whose "masks of subordination" provided a means for them to struggle "against the constraints of racism and class oppression [and] live authentically as men" (2009:140). As Schwalbe explains, Mason and Atwater, the subjects of his study, adopted different personas in the context of the similar experiences of prescribed race and class circumstances that affected many men in their geographic and social locations. They adopted these personas as a mechanism for being as true as possible to their ideal selves in the context of a system that imposed severe limits on their capacity to do so. Schwalbe identifies the crux of the issue:

As working-class men living under a legally sanctioned racist regime, Mason and Atwater were denied the material and symbolic resources necessary to enact the hegemonic ideal. They were thus constrained to enact a subordinated masculinity. Yet the hegemonic ideal was the standard against which they were judged and against which they judged themselves (2009:146).

Mason and Atwater were trapped by the personas they adopted to insulate themselves from failure to succeed in a place and time in which their race and class identities prevented full

success. Schwalbe shows that the personas gave each man a sense of personal authenticity even as that same “mask” acknowledged acceptance of the dominant society’s condemnation of them (2009:149–152).

What both of these case studies demonstrate is that examinations of personal authenticity must be rooted in empirical evidence. A basic definition of “personal authenticity” can exist, but its manifestations depend on the context in which it is pursued. These studies give analytical weight to the experiences of the participants and suggest a strong framework for exploring Curtis’ and Carol’s life experiences in the same manner, and Schwalbe’s, in particular, sheds light on Curtis’ analysis of the limits of his overlapping race and class identities.

Curtis rejects the idea that he would become a “Six-Pack-Joe.” Within this archetype, he bundles together elements of working-class masculinity that are tied most immediately to particular jobs. Reflecting on the dissatisfaction he sensed in the dispositions of older men in both Killona and New Orleans, Curtis decided at an early age that becoming like them, especially having the jobs they had, was not an option. Unsure how he would avoid this fate, he saw an opportunity in the Navy that turned out to be a source of oppression even as it offered him a chance to physically leave the rural and urban locations of Six-Pack-Joe. Curtis could not, however, escape the fact that he had been raised in a working-class household, following Schwalbe’s phrasing, “under a legally sanctioned racist regime” (Schwalbe 2009:146). His level of education upon entering the Navy was similar to that of many men of his race, generation, and location and it limited his access to the benefits of armed service. As mentioned earlier, Curtis takes an analysis of the overlapping race and class identities he carried into the Navy to a logical extension and interprets his time in the service as a form of enslavement. Military service, therefore, would not be his avenue for escaping Six-Pack-Joe.

Demonstrating his belief that a change in location is necessary to effect a change in identity, and in Curtis' case either the avoidance of or eventual collision with his destiny, he left Louisiana entirely after being discharged from the Navy. His economic situation in Detroit, and later in Los Angeles, was not necessarily better than it would have been in Louisiana. However, by escaping the physical site in which the most available work options for him were in cutting sugar cane, shipbuilding, or welding, Curtis escaped these specific jobs and altered his work identity enough to open a path for altering his larger personal identity. In Detroit, Curtis worked as a security guard. In this job, he earned a living wage, made friends (especially with women), and bought himself time to return his focus to percussion.

Curtis moved to Los Angeles to further his goal of developing his percussion skills in the Afro-Brazilian form that, as he puts it, "moved his soul." Initially, he worked in department store security there. But he lost that job and decided that the artistic skills he had honed since childhood may be good enough to produce a profit and support him, so he began selling drawings in Venice Beach. It is at this moment that Curtis appears to break free of traditional jobs. When selling artwork proved to be less than a stable source of income, Curtis did not find a job. He found a benefactor. When that benefactor's ties to the crack economy became apparent, and Curtis could not justify a risky work identity as that man's strong arm, he moved. This time, he would return home with a capacity to avoid the kinds of jobs that, prior to his relocation to Detroit and Los Angeles, he could not have avoided. In leaving Louisiana, Curtis bought himself time to develop far enough as an Afro-Brazilian percussionist and to develop a sense of confidence in his ability to earn a living by running an organization of people who performed samba professionally. In returning to Louisiana, he capitalized on his reformed class identity and rounded up the right people to help him launch Casa Samba.

Carol rejects the idea that she would spend her life keeping up with the Joneses. Her model for the archetypal striver who equates the accumulation of material goods and capital with success and happiness is her own father. Carol does not, however, reject her father or his success. She, as Curtis did with the older men around him, identified dissatisfaction in her father's disposition and decided that she would not replicate that in her own life. In this way, both Carol and Curtis reject problematic elements of their class identities, but Carol's is a middle-class one. Unlike Curtis, whose reflections on his childhood and adolescence revolve around himself alone or in relation to one or the other of his parents or siblings alone, Carol reflects on her position in social groups. This difference may be accounted for in their different class positions. Carol's memories of going to school, in particular, emphasize the power of a different class identity. She situates herself as part of a generation of students who were bused to integrated schools with good results. She fondly recalls participating in extracurricular activities. When she left Long Island for the first time, it was to enter college, not the military.

Despite having a more positive memory of childhood and a longer educational history with better work prospects, Carol's decision to move to Ohio and leave the East Coast indicated her desire to make an individual path away from her family's expectations. While pursuing bachelor and master's degrees suggests an adherence to a middle-class expectation that she might eventually keep up with the Joneses, Carol's actual goal was freedom from that ideal. Her relocation to New Orleans in search of a job that validated the time she spent getting an education simultaneously exposed Carol to a way of life that represented a departure from her father's. He was concerned with continuous accumulation that would demonstrate his cultural and social superiority to his neighbors as much as it provided for his family. In New Orleans,

Carol determined that she could have a family, provide for them, and do it in pursuit of beauty, fun, and freedom. Most of all, she did not feel any pressure to compete with her neighbors.

Carol's work at Tulane contributes positively to her construction of her sense of personal authenticity. She enjoys her work, feels challenged by it, and believes that she has benefited from her experiences working with students who are from other countries or who are interested in studying other cultures. In addition to providing Carol with a satisfying professional experience, her job provides the primary income for the Pierre household. In this breadwinner position, Carol is different from her father and from her husband. Carol's father was, by her account, never happy with his work. He seemed satisfied that it allowed him to provide for his family, but he was not fulfilled by his job. Pursuing higher education and the professional path that emerged from education, offered her well-paid work and a secure career path. She could pursue these things with the goal of earning money to support her family and compete with suburban neighbors in unarticulated contests of consumption and accumulation. Or, she could have a job and a career that meant something to her and not concern herself with middle-class competition. Carol chose the latter path.

Curtis' experiences with the work available to him—in Louisiana, Detroit, and Los Angeles—convinced him that ordinary jobs would never be satisfying. By the time he returned to Louisiana, he was set on supporting himself through selling his artwork. Curtis' search for personal authenticity would not be fulfilled through any route that would have made him the breadwinner for his family. Given the limits of his education and work history, Curtis recognized that he would have been working hard at jobs he did not want in order to support a family through full-time employment. For Carol, this is not true. While she derives greater satisfaction from and feels most authentically herself through her participation in Casa Samba,

she is *also* satisfied with her professional identity and integrates that identity into assembling her authentic self.

To avoid the negative elements of the class identities into which they were born, both Curtis and Carol traveled away from their homes and, ultimately, to New Orleans in search of a place in which they could be their authentic selves. In confronting political economic realities that extend from their early lives, each of them develops an individual sense of personal authenticity that begins in class-based analysis of meaningful work. From this classed analysis emerges for Curtis a sense that cultural production, specifically the production Afro-Brazilian culture, can provide meaningful work. As Curtis' narratives suggest, the rejection of the Six-Pack-Joe model is a rejection of ordinary work and of the social life that he views as accompanying unfulfilling, difficult, work. In his travels from Louisiana to Detroit and Los Angeles and back, Curtis begins a process of dedicating himself to the avoidance of ordinary work that has, by the time of this research, reached its apotheosis. His job is running Casa Samba.

For Carol, the rejection of the idea of keeping up with the Joneses is not a rejection of a particular form of work. Carol rejects a focus on competitive accumulation practices that she embeds in her archetype without rejecting either the benefits of her middle-class upbringing or the positive impacts her father's focus on the same had on her life chances. Carol's authentic self, the constructed identity in which she believes she is achieving an ideal of personal authenticity, is one who works in a professional position that is the product of her class status to support a vision that she and Curtis share. Carol's autonomousness is not predicated on opting out of ordinary work. Curtis' is. Simply put, Curtis exits the working class to pursue his authentic self while Carol remains in the middle class in the manner that suits her while relieving herself of its primary cultural demand.

But neither Curtis' nor Carol's authentic self is separate from who they have always been. Their authentic selves are assembled using Afro-Brazilian culture as a resource. Viewing authenticity as a feeling, a sensibility, and as a perception, makes it possible for the personal form to be explored in terms of an ongoing process of building and rebuilding—assembling—that is rooted in original identities that began to form before either Carol or Curtis was conscious of identity construction as an active project in which they could engage. Rejecting elements of their “old” identities that came in part from their class positions, Curtis and Carol each build upon the other elements that have a positive meaning for them and improve their overall image of themselves accordingly. This improved self is evolving, is never perfected, but that is because perfection is not the goal. Personal authenticity relates to an individual’s vision for her ideal self, but it is not detached from the imperfect and changing social realities in which we live. “Assembling” an authentic self, to use sociologist Joseph Kotarba’s (2009) language, gives the best sense of what Curtis and Carol have been doing throughout their lives: building on the good and rejecting the bad.

MEANINGFUL WORK: PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CAPITAL

I think it is important to briefly situate the Pierres’ decisions to seek meaningful work in an international division of labor. In so doing, the Pierres’ choices can be tied to the global economy and my analysis of their choices can be broadened so that it might apply to those in a similar position in the world economic system. Because this research is not focused solely on the relationship between global capitalism and individual decisions regarding work or identity, I intend here to produce a simplified framework for understanding my interpretations of Curtis’ and Carol’s lives in this and subsequent chapters. I hope, however, that even in simplified form,

this framework gives a sense of the ways in which individual decisions are never divorced from the larger political economic situation in which we find ourselves. This situation is historic and nonlinear to such a degree that one might conclude that decisions we make about our lives are, in fact, not unrelated to those made generations before under similar pressures from the violent and exploitative form of modern capitalism that emerged in the sixteenth century. This system has been reconfigured in ways that might be labeled postmodern, or especially neoliberal, but has nonetheless shaped human experience ever since (see Engels in Tucker 1978:734-759, Marx 1990, Mies 1998, Wolf 1997).

German sociologist Maria Mies generated, in the mid-1980s, a theory of the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism that makes clear the connection between colonial expansion, the African slave trade, and the development of modern capitalism (1998). For Mies, the process of colonization and what she calls “housewifization” are parallel and “double-faced” processes (1998:97). Housewifization, as a particular concept, offers a means for describing women’s role in the international division of labor, and for this reason Mies’ theory is viewed as a major intervention in feminist theory (1998:74–111). Here, I use Mies’ foundational concept to make a connection between the larger economic situations facing Curtis and Carol in the mid-twentieth century and the history of the development of capitalism that produced those situations.

Mies sets up her definition of housewifization with an analysis of the way in which European men established control over and invented specific forms for the oppression of European women—especially in the context of the witch hunts that lasted from the eleventh through the seventeenth century (1998:77–88). In developing a sense for the efficacy of violence in separating themselves from women in their home territories, European men applied the same logic in their colonies in Africa and the Caribbean to exploit the human and natural “resources”

so that European men alone profited from colonization (Mies 1998:88–98). Mies points out that this violent logic is the root logic of capitalism. She says that “wealth for some means poverty for others. The reason why there cannot be unilinear progress is the fact that … the predatory patriarchal mode of production constitutes a non-reciprocal, exploitative relationship” (1998:76).

Regarding women and colonization in particular, Mies ties the construction of the ““decent’ bourgeois marriage and family” to the disruption of African and Caribbean families (1998:98). In ensuring that “native” women do not bear children when an increase in population would not benefit the colonizer and forcing native women to bear children when it would, European men controlled the familial structure of colonial subjects and marshaled the labor of these subjects into the production of luxury goods. Using these goods, men objectified their wives and mistresses in Europe by turning them into consumers of silk, sugar, coffee and whatever else was coming in increasing quantities from the colonies (Mies 1998:100–103).

Mies does not argue that men masterminded some sort of zombification of unthinking women. Women and men consumed luxury items in nearly the same quantity and for the same reasons: to impress their increasingly bourgeois peers. But European women were made responsible for the maintenance of a home in which luxury items occupied a central position. By the mid-eighteenth century, European women had thus become domesticated, privatized, and objectified as “good women” if they followed the fashions of consumption—fashions which were possible only because of the exploitation of men and women in the colonies (Mies 1998:102–103). The domesticated bourgeois women became central to an idea of family defined by women’s consumption and in the private sphere of the family, women are set apart from men, who are eternally associated with production in the capitalist scheme. As Mies concludes, the

role of the housewife emerged, thus, as a role of consumption, “excluded and sheltered from the arena of production and accumulation, where men reign” (1998:103).

Housewives emerged among the bourgeoisie first, and they emerged in opposition to male “breadwinners” who are responsible for supporting nonwage-earning women and children. Aristocratic families historically failed to adhere to the middle-class rule of co-residence, as did the propertyless working class (Mies 1998:104). Arguing against Marx’s and Engels’ idea that capitalism destroyed the family, Mies argues “on the contrary, with the help of the state and its police, it *created* the family first among the propertied classes, later in the working class, and with it the housewife as a social category” (1998:105). Eventually, what Mies calls a “proletarian anti-feminism” emerged even among the most progressive anticapitalists of the mid-nineteenth century (1998:106–110). Housewifization in this antifeminist vein demanded that women not destroy their bodies and souls with work and that they devote themselves to the reproduction of the working class. Men, it was argued, needed higher wages to support a nonworking wife and family. The “bourgeois concept of women’s role as wife and mother” thus came to dominate working-class thought on the role of women (Mies 1998:109). “Proletarian men,” Mies goes on to argue, “do have a material interest in the domestication of their female class companions” (1998:109). If men are the breadwinners, then they are in control of their household’s money. This makes them more powerful than women within the confines of a capitalist system. Housewifization means that women’s unpaid and unrecognized home-based labor is viewed not as work, but as an expression of her natural state as a homemaker. Modern capitalism, it turns out, gives men—whether they are middle-class or working-class—personal colonies in their homes (Mies 1998:110). Marginalization of women as housewives, as unwaged

laborers, happens using the ideologies of earlier phases of colonialism and also happens because of the tangible products, luxury items meant for female consumption, of colonization.

So what does this have to do with Curtis' or Carol's life histories? I think that Curtis and Carol perceived the negative outcomes of housewifization and based key choices on that perception. The rejection of the Six-Pack-Joe and of Keeping-Up-With-The-Joneses models are both rejections of capitalist patriarchy. Curtis recognized that being a breadwinner and maintaining a household according to the proletarian ideal that working at Avondale or in any other regular wage labor would have provided was not what he wanted, so he walked away from it. Curtis was not interested in being a patriarch, he was not interested in dominating a wife or children economically, and he was not interested in living only to earn enough money to do so. He focused instead on adopting a work identity and cultural identity that satisfied him in ways that money would not. To do that fully meant finding a partner for whom earning a steady income would not come at the physical and social cost that Curtis' earning a breadwinner's living would have. Carol is ideal. She shares Curtis' love for Afro-Brazilian culture and she and Curtis met at a time when Carol was, as Curtis says, "already somebody" and working a job that she valued and at which she felt valued. And she does not view Curtis' rejection of ordinary work as a problem.

In fact, through Curtis and his drive to create Casa Samba, Carol found her place in a system of adopting a music and dance culture that enlivened and enhanced her experiences engaging students in multicultural programming at work. Carol, too, began her journey to New Orleans in search of a full sense of her own complexity and had, like Curtis, begun finding some of it before meeting the person who would become her partner. Carol was not going to be a housewife. This is what she rejects when she rejects her father's acquisitive competitiveness. She would prefer to

subvert the patriarchal paradigm and become the breadwinner, supporting a husband and a family through regular work so that he can earn less money. He is thus able to devote his energies full-time to the organization around which their real lives are based.

In working together to manage Casa Samba, Curtis and Carol have found one way of limiting the dehumanizing impacts of both middle- and working-class life in New Orleans. They have found a way to focus their attention and energy on meaningful work and therefore on leading lives that are shaped less by the violence of global capitalism and patriarchal dominance and more by the peace that comes from a sense of autonomy over the directions their lives and their family take.

CONCLUSION

Curtis' and Carol's reshaping of their class identities in pursuit of personal authenticity tells only part of their stories. Race and gender identities also require recalibration to satisfy an individual's search for meaning, truth, and something "real." All facets of individual identity are, of course, overlapping and interrelated. In the following chapters, I extend my analysis of the Pierres' narratives in terms of how race and gender identities impact their constructions of an authentic self. I go on to examine how the Pierres' collaboration to create Casa Samba reflects their ability to give form to their idealized and utopian visions for a better future in which one's chosen identity is the most relevant.

Chapter Four: **Embodying Samba: Professionalism, Gender, and Authenticity**

INTRODUCTION

For Curtis and Carol, the mechanism for having real autonomy in defining their cultural identity as distinct from limited race or class identities is Casa Samba. Throughout our conversations, they each impress upon me the importance of dedication to the practice of learning and teaching samba and other elements of Afro-Brazilian culture. Dedication, in themselves and in the students and performers who join Casa Samba in its mission of presenting samba in New Orleans, is the key ingredient for putting their shared sense of personal authenticity into action.

In order for the Pierres and the members of Casa Samba to represent their own authentic selves, their organization must authentically present samba and Afro-Brazilian culture in accordance with an ideal vision. The organization must be taken seriously, and in order for that to be true, the organization must operate at a high level of professionalism. This professionalism, as Carol will explain below, is both embodied and heavily gendered. Thus, in addition to offering members a means for negotiating racial identities, Casa Samba suggests ways of redefining one's gendered self. In exploring how the personal authenticities Curtis and Carol began to develop before they met in New Orleans in 1986 lead to their vision for Casa Samba, I interpret their quest both for decent, meaningful work and for control over their identities as occurring in the context of professionalization. That is, their quest occurs as a process of becoming accepted as authentic samba drummers and dancers and, in this way, expanding personal authenticity into a performative authenticity that is only one element of adopting an embodied samba practice.

ENDURING EMBODIMENT: THE KEY TO PROFESSIONALISM

Curtis returned to New Orleans in 1986 and met Carol, who was one of the participants in Palmares—an official Mardi Gras krewe comprised of amateur Brazilian samba enthusiasts who had their own parade in 1985. Heeding Bill Summers' advice that he connect with this group in an effort to make a place for samba drumming and dance in New Orleans, Curtis assessed Palmares' membership and decided he could work with their enthusiasm if they would transform their appreciation of Brazilian music and dance into learning to be genuine professionals.

As Curtis explained it: "When I came back here, the group here [Palmares], they were all Brazilian enthusiasts, but on a more tourist level. It wasn't the professional level I was seeking so I had to reform all the reformattees, which means all the people who wanted to be reformed." He says that when he first arrived, he was grateful to have a group of people who shared his interest in Afro-Brazilian culture, and in samba in particular. After a brief period during which he began to form a plan to make the group a more professional, money-earning entity, Curtis proposed steps to accomplish this. This proposal split the group, and Curtis defines the situation as one in which a Brazilian national identity became valorized as the one representing an authority to authentically present samba in New Orleans. Curtis explained:

It was a mixed group of people, so half of the people went with this Brazilian guy because they didn't feel like they needed to learn any more about their culture because they were from Brazil. Or he was from Brazil and he knew everything that there was to know. ... After that, most of the people who came with me I wound up having to teach them how to play, how to dance, how to perform. You know, we would do a lot of stuff! Our group was maybe sixty or seventy people, but I was just letting anybody come in the group.

This quotation offers a sense of one crisis of externally evaluated authenticity to which Casa Samba is subject. How can an American come in and propose to teach people about samba? By what right is he the professionalizer, the leader, of a samba school in the United States? Claims

of a personally authentic relationship to samba, indeed, to Afro-Brazilian culture in general, would not be sufficient to respond to questions such as these. Curtis, Carol, and anyone who participated in Casa Samba (then and now) would need a performative authenticity that Curtis and Carol identify in their discussions of their professionalization and that of the drummers and dancers in the group. The answers to the preceding questions became even more relevant when a rival samba group formed in New Orleans and began to compete with Casa Samba.

In a later interview, Curtis narrated again his experience of arriving in New Orleans and meeting the members of Palmares. He explained that the split he generated in Palmares led directly to this other group's formation, but characterized the division in terms of professional ideas clashing with amateur goals. In Palmares, there were a significant number of people who wanted to continue to be amateur samba enthusiasts "because they didn't want to continue to perform for money ... and they wanted to pick and choose what they wanted to do. I was like, 'Well, I need to get paid.'" Curtis' insistence on earning money from samba performance did not resonate with those who favored flexibility in their commitments to samba music and dance. But it did make sense to those who were willing to commit to a more organized process that Curtis was developing to professionalize the musicians and dancers, and Palmares split in two.

Ironically, from this split, a competing "professional" group populated by some of those who left Palmares/Casa Samba in reaction to Curtis' demands about rehearsing regularly and seeking paid performances emerged under the leadership of a different Brazilian leader who had not been part of Palmares. Between 1990 and 1993, the competing group—Samba Rio—and Casa Samba coexisted in New Orleans. Samba Rio had ties to samba schools in Rio de Janeiro that provided costumes and they advertised themselves using a video produced in New York that featured performers who were not part of the New Orleans group. Samba Rio also undercut Casa

Samba's prices and got offered shows on the basis of their video advertisement. Many of the shows Samba Rio was offered were shows that Curtis believes Casa Samba would have been offered. But he highlights his sense of professionalism in his reaction to Samba Rio. He says he let New Orleans clubs and producers hire Samba Rio because he was a professional, he knew his was the better organization, and was therefore not willing to engage in a conflict that would undermine that.

Curtis acknowledges an irony of the situation that also relates to professionalism: though Samba Rio had a professionally produced video that served as its calling card/audition tape, the group of people who performed in New Orleans were not the people on the tape. They were a group of performers who arrived late and "not knowing how to dance and running into each other. Little things." The video was a fake. Nonetheless, Samba Rio presented itself as an authentic representation of Brazilian culture, and because this presentation was initiated by an actual Brazilian person, club owners and others who decide about booking shows could perhaps be forgiven for casting aside the American-run, New Orleans-based, Casa Samba. Curtis seems to accept this because he is a professional. He explained that "I never let it bother me because I knew what they were doing was fake. Eventually people would find out and they were going to be exposed."

He remembered that Endymion, a Mardi Gras superkrewe¹³ famous for its elaborate post-parade ball, did book both Casa Samba and Samba Rio for one of its balls. I asked whether that was awkward. Curtis said,

It wasn't for me because I knew we were the better group. For him [the Brazilian leader of Samba Rio], it was like a challenge to show me that he could run me out of town or something. I think it was more that kind of influence for him [that mattered], that he could run us out of business.

If that was the leader of Samba Rio's goal, he did not meet it. And in any case, Curtis sums up that part of Casa Samba's history with a definition of professionalism that he learned early on and which was reinforced by his experience with this unprofessional organization. I asked how he maintains Casa Samba over time in the face of challenges such as Samba Rio's. He replied,

Just being professional and not doing any shady business. If somebody calls me for a gig, I'll ask them for less money or more money [depending on his assessment of what they can offer] and communicate with the people that I work with. If somebody's booking me for the same gig, I'll tell them 'Look, I already got booked for this.' And I don't ask them how much they want if this group doesn't pay this. And I've always done that and I think that's the thing that's kept me in good working order with everybody.

In this way, Curtis encapsulates his definition of professionalism. But this sense of being honest and being a reliable participant in the world of professional cultural production extends beyond the political economic situation that Curtis describes. His desire to run a samba school in New Orleans came from his desire to create his own path in the world and to be judged on the basis of his achievements and his level of skill, not on the basis of other external identifiers such as race. For Curtis, being a consummate professional is the key to self-defined personal authenticity that he began to develop before he returned home to Louisiana and before he confronted the idea that, to some observers, he and other Americans may not have a legitimate claim to presenting Afro-Brazilian culture. Holding himself to a high standard of professionalism makes it possible for Curtis to confront any challenges to his authenticity. He can point to the quality of his work and the validity of his word as a cultural professional in the New Orleans scene and argue for his authority to be respected.

Carol articulates a slightly different motivation for professionalism in her reflections on Casa Samba's emergence from Palmares. Carol enjoyed her time with Palmares. She loved the freedom she found in New Orleans, she was thrilled to be involved in the parades during Mardi Gras, and was really beginning to grow in her professional life at Tulane University. When

Curtis met Carol, he explains, “she was already somebody. And actually, I wasn’t. I didn’t know who I was at the time, and I was somebody as well, but I wasn’t as sure as she was.” This is one key for understanding how Curtis and Carol have made the life together that they have, wherein they have their separate lives and they have the shared one that revolves around Casa Samba and their family.

Carol’s participation in Casa Samba might be considered “part-time” and thus less integral to her self-conception because she has a full-time career and works on an eight-to-five, five-day-a-week schedule at Tulane. But for Carol, being a founder and leader of an Afro-Brazilian cultural organization that has been around for more than two decades is a major element of her identity. Like Curtis, she interprets the transition from Palmares to Casa Samba as one of professionalization. For Carol, though, professionalism means embodying the Afro-Brazilian practices that she learned and teaching others herself how to embody and express samba as a complex form of performance that has meanings beyond those suggested by a superficial interpretation of dance moves or costuming decisions.

In her examinations of how she came to identify with Afro-Brazilian culture through her adoption of samba dance as a primary practice, Carol offers a theory of embodiment that derives from her experience. While her experience begins with learning samba, it eventually includes teaching others to perform samba in a manner that Carol theorizes is authentic. It is authentic because it represents all the meanings samba has rather than some of the more superficial ones that define samba only as shaking one’s butt.¹⁴ Carol defines as “professional” those dancers who, like her, develop a nuanced understanding of samba’s aesthetic that celebrates women’s bodies and allows them to control how their bodies are understood by audiences. She describes performances that demonstrate this professionalism and maintains that these performances are

the direct product of hours of rehearsal and years of committing to learning technique, choreography, and stage presence. Her assessment of her students' performances comes from her own experience of learning to value the control she could have over the presentation of a sexy, lively, and animated dance that is often performed in limited clothing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the person who taught Carol her first samba steps was Curtis. Curtis had learned the steps of samba in California, but he had naturally learned the “male” version of samba that is less intricate and less reliant on the precise articulation of one’s hips. After learning the basic step from Curtis, Carol began watching videotapes of samba dancers to figure out how the women did it. Within a short period of time, she and Curtis had established contact with the international touring revue of Brazilian music and dance, Oba Oba, and were able to bring some of the professional samba dancers from that group to New Orleans to give master classes for Carol and the other dancers in the nascent Casa Samba.¹⁵

In addition to learning to dance samba from Curtis, from videos, and from Oba Oba’s dancers, Carol also learned to dance in the *escolas de samba* in Rio de Janeiro, beginning with her first visit there in 1990. Carol explains that after spending time in Brazil and learning to dance samba in the schools there, and after doing well in those contexts, she felt more confident embodying the practice in New Orleans. In this way, Casa Samba becomes a medium of cultural transmission (as the means through which she learns to dance samba and travel to Brazil to encounter the practice there) that Carol uses to change her life. She changes it through absorbing samba dance, a form that requires active embodiment to fully understand it. In absorbing samba this way, Carol develops a theory of the uses of such embodiment.

But this adoption of culture through embodiment is not an easy or even linear process. As was the case with Curtis asserting his authority to professionalize Casa Samba and make it into a

performing organization, Carol has faced criticism from some, but by no means all, Brazilian dancers for being inauthentic. Some have complained, according to Carol, that Casa Samba dancers do not “really dance samba.” She habitually replies to this charge by saying,

It’s not like we’ve been dancing samba since we were two or three years old. So that comes and goes with the criticism, but you know how that goes. For the most part, we have pretty good success, I think. We have the kind of folks who are really laid back and down to earth, [and] try not to flash anything in anybody’s faces or make people feel like ... That’s not our intention. We take pride in the group and as long as we’ve been in the group and working on this thing, it’s sometimes disheartening when people don’t give us respect.

Here, Carol theorizes some of the elements of adopting culture. First, she recognizes that Americans are adopting a tradition that they have not been performing since they were young. She emphasizes this to explain to Brazilian critics why Casa Samba’s style may not conform to their idea of what samba should look like. Second, she explains that duration counts. People in Casa Samba dedicate themselves for long periods of time to learning, embodying, and otherwise adopting traditions that they treat with genuine respect. For Carol, it is unfair to be treated with disrespect after having devoted a great deal of time and energy to developing—to the fullest possible extent—a solid sense of the history, philosophy, ideals, and physical mechanisms of a complex cultural practice. In Carol’s view, members of Casa Samba are laid back and going with the flow of a long-term investment in broadening their own cultural horizons to include deep knowledge of Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance. They are also interested in helping others do the same. To be condemned as not “really” dancing samba after undergoing this process of cultural adoption can thus be perceived as insulting.

This is especially true because Carol and the other dancers who achieve a high level of embodied knowledge of samba have done so, in part, by spending time in Brazil and learning from top professionals there and in the United States. There is a human connection that is necessary to really adopt samba and feel confident that one can bring it back to New Orleans and

teach it to others. Their adoption is human, embodied, and practical. It takes place over a long period of time. It requires breaking down boundaries in Brazil that exist between tourist and local, visitor/amateur and respectful, interested, professional.

Carol tells a story that affirms the necessity of breaking down national and personal boundaries and bravely taking a chance at public failure in order to feel like a genuine samba dancer. Dancing in the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro takes a particular shape. Visitors remain on the edges of the dance floor while the locals dance in the middle. It is not a hard rule, but in general, actual *cariocas* are better dancers than the visiting *gringas* who form an uncertain ring around the edge of the action. On one visit to Rio, Carol and some of the Casa Samba dancers went with Jorge's son to one of the samba schools and danced with the "real *passistas*." They did not remain on the outer edge as visitors are supposed to do. At one point, some of the local dancers asked Carol and the other Casa Samba ladies what part of Brazil they were from. This validated their success in adopting samba, but thinking back, Carol sees that validation as earned over time and earned because the dancers in Casa Samba have achieved a convincing embodiment of samba. She said:

It's just been an evolution and a process of learning and appreciating and really feeling the music. And [when] you really feel the music and you connect with the rhythm, you actually get that whole, where just now it's like, 'Boom! The music is there. Dum! My foot starts automatically. My hips start automatically. It's just a part of me now.'

This is the work of embodiment and it is the work of being and becoming authentically one's self through cultural adoption at a very deep level. Carol describes the process as a long one, a physical one, and an emotional one. Over time, a person can reinscribe herself with a meaningful, authentic, identity that is shared by people who live in another country and speak another language, but who feel the same way Carol does about samba.

SOME PROBLEMS OF EMBODIMENT



Fig. 3: Carol performing in a *passista* costume in 2009. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

Being able to go to Rio and dance like a local is the product of a desire to physically and emotionally embody samba as a personally authentic practice. But this process is, of course, embedded in the professional identity that both Curtis and Carol demand from their performers. Carol expects dancers to be transformed by their experience of learning samba. This transformation must occur not only on a personal level, but also in a public form that can be witnessed in a dancer's stage performance. The public aspect of Casa Samba's work is, in fact, the source of another challenge that many of the dancers must face: their costume.¹⁶

In response a question about how she works up the nerve to wear the revealing *passista* outfit, Carol addresses the kinds of body issues most women would face in putting on a two-

piece outfit produced from less than a yard of fabric, but she also localizes the issue. She explained that sometimes she would imagine what her older family members or colleagues at Tulane might say about her performing in an outfit that makes an American bikini look like full coverage. Carol said she wondered, ““What are people at my work going to think? What are people in the church going to think? What are my older relatives going to say?”” Then she answered for them: ““Ooh! That girl done gone out there and got wild and doing that Bourbon Street stuff!” or whatever,” she continues, “not really understanding.”

This leads to one element of the issue of translating this Afro-Brazilian practice to the United States. It is not that everyone in Brazil celebrates the scantily clad samba dancer as a representation of their nation to the world. But, in Brazil, a passista outfit would not automatically be linked to the kind of nudity that is exhibited on New Orleans’ Bourbon Street. There are two primary groups of people who appear in non-standard street attire on Bourbon Street: the strippers who perform on stages in exchange for money, and the (usually drunk) female tourists who remove their tops either because it is Mardi Gras and an equally inebriated man is promising plastic beads in exchange for that behavior, or because they believe that this is what one is *supposed* to do on Bourbon Street. Carol is not specific in her comment regarding which group she may have been negatively compared to in her imaginary conversation with church elders and coworkers. But her reference to Bourbon Street as a site of New Orleans’ flesh economy (whether a woman’s nudity is rewarded by dollar bills or Mardi Gras beads) indicates that Casa Samba’s display of women’s bodies is not meant to be understood in the same category as a similar display on Bourbon Street. As Carol argued, “you have to see the whole thing to appreciate it.” By this, she means, ideally, that someone seeing a Casa Samba passista would have also watched what she and Curtis refer to as their “theatrical” or “cultural

show” that presents a variety of dances performed in a range of costumes before the passista-oriented finale. But at the very least, a viewer would have seen the dancers performing with each other and accompanied by a live band—even if the group was parading down a street. This would indicate that Casa Samba’s use of a revealing costume has a cultural context, one that an entire South American nation would readily comprehend.

Carol explains that dancing samba gave her an opportunity become a performer and to build her life around becoming an authentic representative of samba’s broader cultural context. But it also helped Carol to locate what she calls her alterego, the part of herself that confronts misconceptions of samba’s sensuality and beauty by refusing to yield to them. She explained her process clearly:

No matter what I do, I mean I have a career at Tulane, but what I’m passionate about is this [Casa Samba]. Even though this drives me crazy sometimes, [laughs] Curtis drives me crazy sometimes. But it’s a total different expression of who I am. It allows me to step outside myself. I mean, to perform in those costumes, in front of all those people, you’ve got to be able to separate and not let it bother you that you’re out there dancing. And dancing the way we do. But I thought it was beautiful and I thought it was sexy and it was something that, maybe it was just my alterego. I don’t know. Because I was really shy, and quiet, and people were really surprised at me dancing. Me? The jock! Oh no! And it’s like, ‘Yeah, I like this! I like it!’ I just fell in love with Brazil. I swear. I fell in love with the people. I fell in love with the music.

Ultimately, Carol found a point of crystallization for a discussion of the difficulties of performing risqué dance movements in minimal clothing that emerged in many of our conversations. She settled on describing performing samba as playing a role:

When you put whatever costume on, you’ve got to get your mind in a mode that you’re performing. You’re taking on the Sasha Fierce kind of personality where you’re the Samba Dancer. You know? You’re doing capoeira. You need to, it’s like a role you’re playing, okay? So you need to step out of yourself and take on that role. And if you do, you’ll relax more and you also have to realize why it is you’re dancing. You dance for you. You don’t dance for no one else. You make other people blush. You don’t get embarrassed. You know? ... I could never look at people in the eyes, but I look through them, which allows me to do what I do. I don’t let people intimidate me. I’ll make them blush!

The role Carol says she and the other dancers are playing is one in which they are in control of how they are perceived by others. This is a tricky space for women to occupy. Without the

stage presence, charisma, self-focused role play, and a deep sense of confidence in their ability to control the audience's perception of them, the samba dancers would be more like pole dancers. They would be absolutely subject to the male gaze, to the ideas that their audience has about them. The way that samba dancers, in Brazil and anywhere, subvert this gaze is by doing exactly what Carol describes. Women take control of their bodies by wearing sexy costumes and not allowing anyone else to dictate what that means.

Carol explains that people have different issues with learning to perform in the passista costume. For Carol, the impediment to easy adoption of samba performance into her total life is primarily the conflict between her professional identity at Tulane and the one that is in Casa Samba. But, for other women in the group, "husbands and boyfriends who were tripping," religious beliefs, or a general resistance to being nearly naked in public, are more likely to stand in the way. Carol's advice for resolving the conflict is the same regardless of the source: "It's getting over that more than anything else: what other people think, not necessarily what you think about yourself." Carol encourages women who encounter resistance to their identities as professional performers with Casa Samba to evaluate *their* feelings about what they do. If the women themselves are comfortable with the costumes and with dance moves that can be perceived as suggestive, then they should keep dancing samba and keep performing. If they cannot find a way to be comfortable, then they may not be able to perform samba.

Brazilian dancers offer an example in this. The dancers who perform in Carnaval parades and in other public venues in passista costumes are comfortable with it not only because they are from a country where there is general knowledge that wearing a revealing outfit does not indicate that one is a stripper. In Carol's mind, they are comfortable with their identities as performers because they practice. Reflecting on the dedication of Rio's samba dancers who rehearse for

long hours and for a period of months leading up to Carnaval, Carol explained that she tries to instill a similar sense of purpose in Casa Samba's dancers. Even though the dancers in Brazil rehearsed the same songs and dances for weeks, they still made their performances look fresh. Carol admires this and brought home the ideal to her students. She explained:

There wouldn't be no slackers! There were no people who just [said] 'Oh, well.' No! Everybody was 'Boom!' Just singing and dancing and all of this smiling and energy! You know? That's what I try to relate to the dancers. You can't just practice one way and expect to perform another way. You got to be able to rehearse like you're going to perform. And it's not going to be until they actually see that that they get it. It's like a parent preaching that you need to do something this way, but it's not until they see their peers, or see other people doing it that they really *get* it. And that happened. It was transformative for the dancers that we took [to Brazil in the past].

Carol went on to explain that the dancers and drummers who have seen the Brazilian samba schools in action are able to come back and communicate the experience to their peers in Casa Samba, but she still insists that going to see the schools in action has the most deeply transformative impact. In this sense, Casa Samba offers an opportunity for a variety of levels of cultural adoption through direct and indirect experience. On all levels, this adoption occurs through the construction of a sense of oneself as a professional performer.

Having a sense of stage presence is, for Carol, probably the key outward indicator of a dancer's commitment to professionalism. However, dancers indicate their professionalism in other ways as well. Another primary manifestation of professionalism is participating in the full range of activities in which Casa Samba members are expected to engage. A related element of the overall definition of the idea is engaging in the performance and production activities with a sense of humility.

Describing the dancers' performance at Southport Hall in May of 2011, Carol said: "We had some minor faux pas, but for the most part everything went well. They really stepped up the professionalism. The charisma on stage was amazing." The link between professional

performance and charisma occurs specifically because of the potential misperceptions of Casa Samba's performances. Carol argues that dancers should not be overly lascivious, but should instead only punctuate their performances with overt sexuality. The method for doing this comes with experience. Ideally, all Casa Samba dancers would travel to Brazil and see how the dancers there produce what Carol calls charisma. If she cannot take everyone to Brazil, or if those dancers who have had the transformative experience of going to Brazil and seeing samba danced there are not adequately passing their experience on to new members, Carol shows Casa Samba dancers videos of Brazilian women dancing samba in *passista* outfits. This helps the Americans understand how sexuality operates in the Brazilian context. That is, it actually reduces the sexual explicitness of the costume for dancers who are not familiar with the ways Brazilian *sambistas* use sexuality.

Carol offers specific details of how to integrate sexuality appropriately into dancing samba. She distinguishes between good samba and bad samba using the same contrast between Bourbon Street behaviors and properly performed samba that she used to convince imagined interlocutors that she had not lost her mind and become a stripper. Getting out of her seat to demonstrate, Carol explained:

[The dancers] got to understand that there's a big difference. This is not Bourbon Street with a stripper pole. All of the movements have meaning and even though they can be a little bit brash and sexual, I don't try to teach that part. And when you watch [Brazilian sambistas] dance, they can go down or they can roll or whatever. They get back up and they're [claps a rhythm and puts a friendly open smile on to indicate that the sexuality is mitigated]. It's not like you're trying to arouse somebody, you know what I'm saying? That's the difference. You're dancing!

In this way, Carol and Casa Samba teach a specific version of samba—of Afro-Brazilian culture in general—that includes a sense of wholesomeness Carol believes is integral to presenting the totality of samba rather than just its more graspable, sexualized parts.

But teaching the dancers to perform in accordance with Carol's ideal of professionalism, so that their charisma overshadows cruder versions of sexuality, can only happen if the dancers are willing to hear what Carol is saying. She explained that "the hardest role there's ever been for me in running this group is dealing with the women. They're so petty, and they're so sensitive, and they have so much mess with them. All of them want to be divas, and, well, you can't be a diva if, first of all, you don't have the body to be a diva to wear the costume and you don't humble out." Being a diva—that is, being petty and sensitive and expecting your needs to supersede those of the group—works against you in Casa Samba because diva behavior is unprofessional. Carol emphasized this when she said, "Curtis has put so many people, so many women, out of the group it's [laughs] ridiculous! So many women he's put out of the group just for silliness. Or for not showing up, or for trying to show up for the gig and not show up for practice. Or coming late to a gig and not coming prepared, coming with your stuff ragged."

Carol goes on to expand the definition of professionalism to include the production work that is necessary for the group to perform at the high level the Pierres overall definition of "professional" requires. She says, "Well, you know, we make sure everybody, particularly every dancer knows how to bead by the time they finish. They know how to bead. We try not to buy costumes. Like we went to Brazil and bought costumes, but you find the costume you make lasts better than the one you buy from Brazil because they glue." This is interesting because, in a sense, the costume purchased in the homeland of samba might be viewed as more authentic than one produced in the United States and modeled after those in Brazil. The latter is seemingly a replica, an impersonation, of the former. But an ideal of embodied practice element changes this. The handmade costume, one produced using the difficult technique of beading, is more authentic for a sambista to *use* in the performance of the art form than the more cheaply

produced, glued together, costume that is made in Brazil. The site of production thus becomes less relevant. More significant is the process of production that authenticates Casa Samba's costume in accordance with the Pierres' vision of what professional performers look like and what they do to contribute to the group's overall performance.

In our discussions of costume production, Carol highlights one dancer in particular who showed a great deal of professionalism and enthusiasm for her role as a total Casa Samba member. She did this by showing up and staying late to work on what became a remarkable costume. She did not wait for Curtis to come to her to begin making her costume. She was highly motivated and able to take action on her own. The characterization of this particular dancer and of the traits of professionalism in general came after I asked directly how Carol and Curtis decide who gets paid for performances. Receiving money in exchange for one's work with Casa Samba would be, perhaps, the basic dividing line between those who can consider themselves professional performers and those who are involved with Casa Samba as students of drumming or dance. Carol replied to my question using a metaphor that is either apt or ironic given her emphasis earlier in the interview on desexualizing samba dance and costumes. She said:

Who puts out. Who rehearses. Who has that commitment. There's women who come here and during carnival people would be here until two or three o'clock in the morning sewing. Really working. Like C.¹⁷ C's costume was *gorgeous!* That girl did most of her work. She didn't wait for, 'Curtis, when you gonna do this? Carol, when you gonna do that?' N, same thing. That costume *showed* because she put that work in it!

Carol offers counterexamples to the positive ones she describes above. The two dancers she describes here are among the best performers in Casa Samba, and they are both long-term members of the group. Carol uses both of these women, in fact, as examples of ideal stage presence and charisma in performance. But, for Carol, being a professional member of Casa Samba is about stage presence *and* participation in the behind-the-scenes production. The two

women Carol mentions in the following quotation do the bare minimum where costume production is concerned. In one woman's case, it is because

she thinks she's a prima donna. She's learned how you have to come and she'll come. She can't make nothing, but she'll come and help cut out stuff or at least be here. X? She always wants other people to do stuff for her. She's just a baby. She's been with us since she was twelve, so she thinks of us as her other family, but you know ... And then there's other people. Some will come and some won't, and it shows in their costumes.

One thing that is interesting about this is that X, the person who is the closest of all these women to being "family" to Curtis and Carol is the farthest from adopting their ideal. Family association appears to give her license to behave like a "baby" and not be penalized for it. The closeness of the bond X has with Curtis and Carol as fictive parents means they can scold her or be angry with her, but they cannot remove her from Casa Samba permanently. In the end, both of the women Carol criticizes here are invested in the group in the other ways that counterbalance her critiques. They are both remarkable performers who practice regularly to maintain a high level of skill.

Carol's use of two of her best performers and oldest group members as negative examples of complete professionals raises the issue of how Casa Samba's utopian vision can clash with its ideal of authenticity through professionalism. Casa Samba does function like a family, and as such, there is an expectation that one's flaws may be tolerated despite the limitations they place on one's ability to achieve the complex ideal of the "professional" Casa Samba member. In being a family, Casa Samba ideally makes it possible for people to be members throughout their lives—lives that are ever changing and occasionally difficult. The complications of trying to be open to everyone, accepting of members' issues and problems, and still demanding a high level of commitment to a professional ideal are myriad. As Carol said:

We have to make it fun. We have to create that family atmosphere. We have to keep them interested in the culture. ... It's just like ... there's been a couple of dancers who come in, who tried it, but they feel like they can't get this, or they can't get past this, and they just drop out. Or

you've got attitude from other dancers if they have an inkling of talent. So I spend a lot of time, especially with some of my seasoned dancers, pulling them back and making sure they're welcoming. Because it can be vicious. It can be cat-like.

Continuing this description of the situation, Carol emphasizes that viciousness and attitude from long-term dancers contradicts the ideal of Casa Samba's being a group in which anyone can transform themselves by embodying a cultural form that they enjoy or admire. She explained:

They're competitive and it can be cutthroat, but that's not what we're about. We have to be a collective. We only get better if we have one mind. One vision. And that's why I always have to check people for why they're in the group. And when their agenda becomes larger than the group, they need to go because we need to have cooperation and consensus and compromise to make things work. And commitment.

From here Carol returns to the root issue: professionalism. She says that the hard part of her role is dealing with dancers who are "undisciplined," and who behave like "kids who are not mature."

The opposite of being undisciplined, in Carol's mind, is being committed. Commitment has a specific meaning for Carol: "Commitment to something is, if you're going to do something, if this is going to be job-like, then you need to treat it like that. I mean this is business. If you're not going to come, give people the courtesy of a phone call or an email, a text, in ample time, saying 'I'm not coming to practice,' or 'I'm running late for a gig.'"

Carol offers a last element of professionalism that more or less summarizes the other elements described above. Professional behavior from Casa Samba members shows that they take their roles as seriously as the Pierre family does. Carol said, "This is our lives. So for you to not be taking it as seriously as we're taking it? Then you need to go." But she recognizes that most members of Casa Samba have many other important things happening in their lives that interfere with their being constantly able to participate at the highest level in the group.

Acknowledging that Casa Samba is a "part-time group," Carol nonetheless goes on to say that when Oba Oba's dancers are preparing for a tour, they rehearse every day for six months to a year. There has never been a time when this would be possible for Casa Samba. This level of

professional commitment cannot emerge when the primary dance instructor has a full-time occupation and the dancers in the company are similarly overburdened. In a sense, there is a contrast between a professional ideal and the realities of participating in Casa Samba part time—for everyone except for Curtis.

STUDYING SAMBA

Curtis and Carol view professionalization as the means through which Casa Samba has become and continues to be an authentic samba school. In shaping people into professional performers of samba drumming and dance, the Pierres validate their choices to adopt samba as a cultural practice that offers them meaningful work and a meaningful life. They offer to others the opportunities they found for themselves, and in so doing, also create a forum for their decisions to adopt Afro-Brazilian culture to evolve.

It is difficult to write about adopting culture without reifying or making static the choices that Curtis, Carol, and the other members of Casa Samba have made throughout the group's history. Part of the difficulty lies in conveying the power of the Pierres' continuing to choose to dedicate their lives to preserving and performing samba in New Orleans. It is remarkable to me that two individuals who were each seeking an authentic version of themselves would meet up and continue that search together by forming a cultural organization and a family that maintains the organization. But this language feels strained. In order to understand the totality of what the Pierres are doing, it might be helpful to understand Curtis, Carol, and the members of Casa Samba as researchers who have to develop a deep understanding of a complex subject over time. In Casa Samba, people practice the culture through which they reframe their identities, they

perform their practice in public, and they work in more private settings to develop their authentic selves through samba.

To achieve full membership in Casa Samba and to be recognized as a professional, and therefore authentic, representative of the group's range of Afro-Brazilian practices, members must do more than perform samba. The Pierres demand of Casa Samba members what they idealize for themselves: the full embodiment of an alternative identity that is borne out of the adoption of Afro-Brazilian music and dance traditions. Curtis and Carol demand that Casa Samba members study samba, interpret samba's relevance in their lives, and perform samba on stages large and small. In demanding professionalism of the form examined above the Pierres are demanding total embodiment.

In their discussion of performance studies epistemology, and of "practice as research" (PaR) in particular, Angela Piccini and Baz Kershaw pose questions about the relationship between studying performance and doing performance (2004). I believe that Carol, in particular, poses similar questions within the context of a lifetime of decisions about identity. Her questions are also framed by her view of Casa Samba as an outcome of and ongoing forum for those decisions. Piccini and Kershaw wonder "where are the differences between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualization and creativity located?" (2004:86). In other words, when is a person a researcher or scholar, and when is a person a performer? For scholars like Piccini and Kershaw, who occupy academic positions in performance studies and who also perform professionally, these questions have specific implications. They and other scholars recognize that the "booby-trapped" binary of performer versus scholar of performance is limited in itself and that this binary ramifies into others: a "division of labor between theory and practice [and] abstraction and embodiment" (Conquergood as quoted in Piccini and Kershaw 2004:86).

Piccini and Kershaw resolve the problem of the binary-based separation of ways of knowing and knowledge itself by suggesting that the creation of “embodied knowledge” is a primary objective for those who study and those who perform. Embodied knowledge is “knowing how,” and it is often placed in opposition to “knowing that” (Piccini and Kershaw 2004:88). That is, embodied knowledge comes from an experiential process of learning or adoption, rather than one mediated in some way. The Pierres’ ideal of professionalism, one which emerges from their adoption of foreign practices that affirmed their definitions of personal authenticity, is a form of embodied knowledge. In being professional, Casa Samba participants can combine “knowing that” samba is what it is with “knowing how” samba operates through their experience learning the history, context, and practice of samba. Curtis, Carol, and Bomani themselves, along with those who become members of Casa Samba, all have individual experiences adopting a tradition that they nevertheless practice and perform as a group. They must “know how” samba works in order to present it professionally. They cannot only “know that” it is what it is. The Pierre family, and all Casa Samba members who participate in the group over any significant period of time, are both performers and scholars of performance. Indeed, it is because they insist on occupying both positions that Casa Samba is the professional, and therefore “authentic,” samba school that it is.

The nature of embodiment is explored somewhat differently outside of the performance studies discipline. Folklorist Robert Cantwell’s exploration of the embodiment of culture and the invention of personal identity focuses specifically on “folklife” and on festivals celebrating “folk” culture. His focus is on representation, “the movement of cultural material from one order of signification to another,” and a concept he calls “ethnomimesis” that is central to the process of representation (Cantwell 1993:5). For Cantwell, ethnomimesis—a complex process of

imitation and impersonation through which groups of people are forged in common identity—is “the vital medium of social communication and hence ultimately of culture” (1993:5).

Ethnomimesis is, according to Cantwell, a “word for culture and for my conviction that, although it is embedded in social practices, manifested in art, and reproduced by power, culture is essentially imaginative” (1993:6).

In addition to resonating with bell hooks’ and Lionel Trilling’s emphases on communication as a tool for reshaping individual and collective identity, Cantwell’s argument that imitation is the key element of producing culture resonates with the process of cultural adoption and professionalization I describe in the preceding discussion of Curtis’ and Carol’s lifetime of choices. Clearly, the Pierres relied on (and, to some degree, continue to rely on) impersonating actual Brazilians who are purveyors of their nation’s samba traditions. In the contemporary context, they ask that Casa Samba members imitate them in the reproduction of a specific version of samba culture that is an interpretation of their original imitation of the Brazilian version. While Curtis and Carol travel regularly to Brazil and bring Bomani with them, and while, ideally, other members of Casa Samba go to Brazil to experience samba in person, this ideal encounters obstacles. Most drummers and dancers in Casa Samba do not see, hear, and learn samba in Brazil. They learn it in New Orleans from people who have embodied the practices to such a degree that they are, potentially, authentic representatives of that culture.

In her examination of women’s experiences dancing samba, anthropologist Natasha Pravaz (2003) offers a means of specifying ethnomimesis so that women adopting samba dance as a professional practice are having a different experience than men adopting samba drumming. While the rule that men drum and women dance is not necessarily firm, the usual order of things is gendered in this way. Because much of my interpretation of professionalism centers on

Carol's analysis of the process of developing charisma and stage presence for the dancers in Casa Samba, Pravaz's discussion of the figure of the samba-dancing *mulata* in the Brazilian imagination proves useful for understanding the complex relationship Carol and other women in Casa Samba have to their performing selves.

According to Pravaz,

the term '*mulata*' in the Brazilian context can refer to a 'woman of mixed racial descent,' but it also evokes images of voluptuous bodies, sensuality, and the ability to dance the samba. In its restricted sense, however, it names an occupation; that is, only women who engage in dancing the samba in a commodified spectacle and receive some form of remuneration for it can be called mulatas (2003:116).

Mulatas are fetishized as seductive and bewitching, and more importantly as "embodying the tropical ethos and national culture in her proficiency at samba" (Pravaz 2003:117). This is what Brazilians refer to as "*mulatice*," or mulata-ness. Samba ability, as a defining feature of mulatice, is often understood as inherited and as black, but white women enacting mulatice tend to emphasize the embodied elements of the gift that are developed through the lived experience of dancing samba and developing skills over time (Pravaz 2003:118–119).

Sociologist Loic Wacquant's examination of embodiment generalizes, in a sense, Pravaz's discussion of mulatice. In justifying his reliance on Bourdieu's habitus¹⁸ as "topic and tool" in his 2004 *Body and Soul*, Wacquant suggests that embodiment can be interpreted as a "problem and resource for social inquiry" (2009:137). Wacquant rooted his analysis of a boxing gym in Chicago in his own experience of becoming a boxer, that is, of adopting the pugilistic habitus within which boxers live and through which boxers signify their status. He argues that, in doing this, he shows that new approaches to examining culture from the ground up are valid. Wacquant's insistence that a combination of powerful "carnal knowledge and the imperative of epistemic reflexivity" produces the deepest and clearest sense of "social action as it is manufactured and lived" (2009:137) is developed in Carol's explanation of how Casa Samba

dancers do and do not achieve authentic mulata status as defined by the women whose narratives Pravaz examined. Wacquant, Pravaz, and Carol Pierre all emphasize that the way an individual *feels* as she produces her identity through cultural practices is as important as how an individual is perceived by others. And, of course, this feeling both emerges from and reinforces the collective sensibility that members of a cultural organization develop together. The reciprocal arrangement between individuals and the group is fundamentally what Carol examines in her discussion of the various forms professionalism takes in Casa Samba.

Using this barrage of concepts (embodied knowledge, ethnomimesis, mulatice, habitus) to form a palimpsest, we can understand better the theoretical contribution that the Pierres offer in their interpretation of the ways one's identity changes through the adoption of a new culture. Curtis and Carol individually began the (re)construction of themselves while developing an idea of how to live and work decently. Upon partnering with each other, in life and in work, the Pierres constructed a mechanism for others to adopt new identities in the same way they had learned to do so. In creating Casa Samba's professional ideal, I think we see in action the evolution of a specific habitus rooted in embodied knowledge and emergent from a type of ethnomimesis. This habitus is, to use Wacquant's phrase, "concretely fabricated" (2005:453) through the social interaction that is necessary for people in Casa Samba to become new people.

In the case of Carol and the dancers, they must somehow become comfortable with charisma—Carol's word for enchanting an audience with sexual innuendo and not allowing the implication of sexuality to become explicit. The women learn mimetically from Carol, from Brazilian teachers, from videos, and from each other how to perform this charisma, a concept that overlaps significantly with Pravaz's *mulatice*. Because most of the dancers throughout Casa Samba's history are American women, though there are and have been in the past some Brazilian

dancers, mulatice in the inherited sense is not always possible. However, mulatice in the experiential sense seems to be exactly what the dancers in Casa Samba hope to achieve in their embodiment of charisma, and therefore, of professionalism.

Curtis' theory of how members of Casa Samba embody the practice diverges from Carol's. Carol limits her analysis to the dancers and their degrees of professionalism to give a sense of how Casa Samba shapes people. Curtis' purview is the group as a whole and he sees himself as the force shaping people. Carol is community-driven, or at least collective-driven, in her analysis, in part, because of how she sees herself: part of a specific generation, child of parents whose history belongs to many other black Americans, daughter of a mother who took care of her own children and many other children. Curtis is more likely to see himself as the "single cow" (to return to his phrase) standing apart from the herd. He blames himself alone for any failings and acknowledges his successes as his own entirely. Curtis is not egotistical in the sense that he is incapable of recognizing the contributions of others in his or Casa Samba's success. He does recognize the value of other people's ideas, and he does it frequently. But unlike Carol, who attributes much of hers and the group's success in thriving over the past twenty-five years to Curtis or to the group as a whole, Curtis cites himself first. This is especially true in his discussion of how members of Casa Samba become professional and authentic performers of samba, that is, how they embody the habitus of the group over time.

In explaining his philosophy that all good things in life require work and that nothing comes readymade in a perfect form, Curtis ties this to his experience giving others the tools to change their lives in the manner he did. He said:

The people that are in Casa Samba? I *made* those people. Not made them as a person, but made them samba junkies. I made them like samba. I made the capoeira people that I have. They like capoeira because they're being around me. I made the environment around me as opposed to looking for people who were into capoeira or looking for people who were into samba.

Imagining potential negative reactions in people who came to the art forms with their own ideas, Curtis speaks for them, ““Well, I don’t like this kind of samba. Well, I don’t like this kind of capoeira. I like *this* kind of samba.”” Speaking for himself, he says, ““No, no, no. No, no, no! Let me show you how to do samba.”” He continues, “But I keep giving them things to make themselves interested and be a part [of it]. And then they start to see, ‘Well, this guy’s for real! I went to Brazil and they did the same thing! Wow! Amazing! He must be for real!’ People start to see that and that’s where I develop this relationship with people.”

This is authentication through professionalization on Curtis’ terms. He offers people not only his version of Afro-Brazilian culture, be it capoeira or samba, but also the tools to develop their own identities alongside his. When people can compare what they have learned in Casa Samba to what they see happening in Brazil if they go there, or what they understand about Brazil from their position in New Orleans, then Curtis believes he has educated them properly. In this sense, his transmission of culture is a transmission of ability. He gives people the ability to adopt a cultural practice with which they can shape their identities according to *their* conceptions of what constitutes authentic samba or authentic capoeira.

While it is logical to assume that some members and students of Casa Samba ultimately choose a path that does not continue to adhere to Curtis’ view of what authentic Afro-Brazilian culture is, it seems equally possible that he accepts certain forms of expansion on the basic ideas he has suggested. He does say that he values growth in directions he cannot foresee in his own son. He acknowledges that Bomani’s experiences will lead him to use his Casa Samba skills in ways Curtis himself is not able to do. This is also true of the members of the Casa Samba family that are not his blood. The primary requirement Curtis has for transmitting culture may be that people concur with the idea that he is offering an authentic path to them. The nature of the path

need not be determined. He expresses this sensibility near the end of one of our conversations.

Curtis said,

Making people believe in you and backing that up, being consistent just made my life! I'm grateful because I may have been lucky in the situation, but I don't think luck had a lot to do with it because people make a decision for themselves. So I can't say it was lucky that I found this person, it was lucky I found that person, because those people made themselves. They wanted to be involved in this and I have to be upfront with what I'm doing and they ... people aren't going to believe in anybody until they figure out what they're doing.

CONCLUSION

What began as an individual pursuit for personal authenticity—one rooted in class analysis in particular—grew to include, once Curtis and Carol met one another and joined forces to create Casa Samba, ideals that define what I call performative authenticity. The Pierres' values and sensibilities regarding building an authentic personal identity through the adoption of foreign cultural practices, honed through their individual experiences, became contestable once they suggested that others join them. Thus, they developed what I call performative authenticity, which—when combined with all of the essential elements of Casa Samba membership—can be more clearly understood in their own terms: as professionalism.

Though they take different routes to explaining it, Carol and Curtis agree that professionalism applies to Casa Samba's being viewed as a reliable performance organization in the New Orleans cultural economy as well as to members' behavior. Professional members not only practice regularly and perform with stage presence and charisma, they also understand how samba operates in Brazil and participate in the relevant production activities where costumes and instrument repair are concerned. Professional participation in Casa Samba is holistic and comprehensive. But it is also embodied.

Professional dancers in Casa Samba face different, gendered, rules of operating that Carol makes clear in her discussion of embodied practice. Though there are women who play drums in

the *bateria* and men who have, in the past, danced in Casa Samba, it is a fact that, for the most part, men drum and women dance. Perhaps more importantly, there are no men who perform in the equivalent of a *passista* costume. For Carol and the dancers she has trained over the years, part of being a professional performer of embodied practices with sexualized meanings is taking and retaining control over how these meanings are interpreted.

In this sense, years of developing a conception of herself as a person capable of this kind of control speaks to Carol's pursuit of personal authenticity. She values this capability and acts in ways to retain it in her life. But personal authenticity is too limited. It does not explain how Carol's values become something grander, bigger, and collective. Embodied practice, what it is Casa Samba offers its members in a specific Afro-Brazilian cultural form, works as a framework for understanding how personal authenticity is writ large. Embodiment produces authenticity for all of the individuals collectively pursuing the study and practice of culture that is changing all the time while nonetheless retaining its integrity as a form. This is true for men and for women, and it is as true for adults as it is for children. All members of Casa Samba who make the effort, over time, to embody samba and do it within the Pierres' structure of professionalism have an opportunity to become transformed by it. In the next chapter, I explore the connections between embodiment and Casa Samba's role as a site of cultural belonging—and indeed, its role as a culture of belonging within an Afrocentric paradigm. I also examine the ways in which Casa Samba is an example of a utopian project in action.

Chapter Five: The Importance of Belonging

INTRODUCTION

Let me very briefly reframe the analysis presented in chapter three more specifically in terms of race and race consciousness so that the relationship between the contours of race and class for each narrator may be clearer. Curtis could have been in line to assume a Six-Pack-Joe identity if he had been white. But the particular limits imposed on black working-class men in South Louisiana are those to which Curtis responded by escaping to the Navy. Upon enlisting and finishing boot camp, Curtis learned that being in the Navy was like being a slave—an identification that a white person could make, but one that has more specific meaning and weight considering the locations in which he was raised and spent time prior to enlisting. Curtis did not only witness the men in his life working as welders, carpenters, or in a shipyard—that is, in working-class jobs that white people also held. He also watched his older brother cut sugar cane on a plantation. He babysat for a young nephew in the company house in which his brother lived, a building that literally had been a slave quarters in its past and housed black American men and women through the early 1970s.

In his initial departure from Killona (as a teenager who left for summers and holidays and the occasional weekend), Curtis went to stay with relatives in New Orleans. The neighborhoods these relatives lived in were all-black areas that Curtis remembers as marginalized and fairly violent. While some of the neighborhoods sported potentially unraced names such as Gert Town or Pigeon Town (though these names are raced to any resident of New Orleans), Curtis also spent time in a neighborhood that is now known as the Black Pearl. When Curtis lived there, however, the Black Pearl was called Nigger Town. The trajectory of black working-class identity from Nigger Town was pretty bleak. Curtis did not see a satisfying life emerging for

anyone there. Having spent time there and having learned that being in New Orleans would not release him from the depredations of black working-class identity as expressed in Killona, Curtis joined the Navy, and ultimately began a thirteen-year journey away from home to figure out how to become who he wanted to be.

Carol's experience of black identity was also related to her experience of her class identity. Carol recognizes that the kind of racism Curtis experienced (but does not bother to describe) was not what she experienced as she grew up. Her experience of black identity was being one among a variety of racially and ethnically different people in the middle-class environment of Long Island. This, combined with her parents' approval of and participation in mainstream Civil Rights causes, provided for Carol a positive association with being black that Curtis may not have received. This is not to say that Curtis perceived being black negatively. It seems likely that he did not and he certainly does not today. But Carol received a form of support for a positive conception of blackness as it was tied to political empowerment within her family that Curtis seems more likely to have found outside of his own familial experience.

Carol's parents took her and her siblings to the March on Washington. Her father was also involved in A. Philip Randolph's Pullman Porter movement. This involvement is significant enough to Carol that she asked me if I knew what that movement was before she continued discussing it. Carol's mother was also a nurse who served in a black Women's Army Corps (WAC) unit during World War II. Carol understands her parents as participants in a struggle for dignity as black Americans. As discussed in chapter three, both of Carol's parents moved from the South to New York City during the second Great Migration of black people seeking work and better living conditions in the North. In this way, her mother and father are part of both political and physical movements of people seeking dignity and access to a middle-class lifestyle

that was viewed as more attainable in the North than in the South. The larger history of the development of the black middle class in the Northeast situates the history of her parents, and Carol is highly aware of this. Her rejection of the fundamental competitiveness of a middle class identity is tied to her sense that it limits the way in which an individual can be a black person, as a drive to be a middle class person can push one to conform to a singular type of black identity (Pattillo-McCoy 2000, Pattillo 2007).

Carol, in her adult life and in her reflections on her childhood and adolescence, prefers the idea that black identities are multiple in their definition. Curtis, too, invests in the multiplicity of black identity. Each of them, in rejecting specific class-based limits on blackness and seeing black identity as something to be celebrated as complex and multiple, decided to devote themselves to seeking that complexity. Before meeting each other and agreeing that creating a samba school in New Orleans would reflect some of the complexity of the world's black culture, both Curtis and Carol developed a frame of mind that could conceive of a utopian project. This capacity for conception comes from their class- and race-conscious pursuit of personal authenticity in specific ways. Their reflections on Casa Samba's early period give the best sense of how ideas of personal authenticity produce a new cultural form that gives both the Pierres and others control over their identities—a utopian vision if there ever was one. Neither Curtis nor Carol accepts the idea that being black should limit who they are or what they do. Indeed, their decisions to pursue an Afro-Brazilian cultural identity, an identity that is distinctly not American but is distinctly black, reveals that they conceive of blackness as an empowering characteristic.

In this chapter, I examine the ways that the decisions Curtis and Carol made to adopt Afro-Brazilian culture as their own are decisions to reject the limits of American blackness and to broaden definitions of blackness and black agency through the transmission of that culture to

others. Carol and Curtis reject the notion that we cannot change who we are, and more than that, they believe that personal transformation based in the adoption of Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance is available to anyone. In this way, they enact a utopian vision that is rooted in Afrocentric understandings. Casa Samba's Afrocentricity is based not in the race of an individual seeking membership in a culture of belonging, but in the intersections of race and culture that are valued and venerated by the group the individual of any race joins. In encouraging individual transformation through embodiment, as described in the preceding chapter, and through membership in a particular culture of belonging, Curtis and Carol return to their senses of personal authenticity but make them available for more general use.

A DIFFERENT FORM OF BLACKNESS

Cultural critic bell hooks' insists that there exists an "aesthetic of blackness," and that this aesthetic is various in its manifestations (2009). Her framework winnows Lionel Trilling's field and brings his analysis of personal authenticity into the twenty-first century by looking backward at the black aesthetic in her own lifetime (2009:121–134). Writing as a black, American, Southern woman with a firm grasp on the global context of black identity, hooks' analysis of the exchange between artists and audiences reorients the role of authenticity. Trilling's view of communication between artist and audience is that it is clear: "art instructs us in our inauthenticity and adjures us to overcome it" (1972:93). hooks sees aesthetic communication as limited by political forces to which artist and audiences are subject. From a philosophical perspective, Trilling is able to identify the quest for personal authenticity in artists and their audiences as (European) people sought to "recruit the primitive strength that a highly developed culture [had] diminished" (1972:92). Nineteenth-century artists and audiences sought their

essential selves through art. This seeking continues, Trilling argues, in the twentieth century and the conception of personal authenticity retains its validity even as twentieth-century circumstances present different challenges to the process of seeking an authentic self.

As with Trilling, hooks situates some of her analysis in an examination of communication through artistic production in the nineteenth century. But in beginning with this time period, hooks asserts the importance of a specific legacy of cultural suppression that shapes the pursuit of authenticity by black people in any epoch, then and now. The nineteenth century marked the height of the development of the white supremacist ideology, in both the United States and Europe, that claimed that black people did not have the capacity to feel, that they were more animal than human, and that they were inherently incapable of producing art or culture (hooks 2009:123–124; see also: Baker 1998, Gould 1996, Montagu 1997). Trilling’s concern is situating that period’s white art and white audiences, and as such, hooks’ analysis provides a bridge between his conceptual framework and my research on the quest for personal authenticity by black Americans. The connective tissue that Trilling identifies between centuries of white art and culture can be found in black art and culture, and hooks produces an analysis of the ways that black artists and their audiences shaped their identities in resistance to oppression (2009:124).

hooks’ strongest example of resisting oppression is environmental. She explains that she painted and wrote poetry while living in an “ugly” house that reflected her family’s position in the underclass (hooks 2009:124–125). She views herself as participating in a resistive tradition of black artistic production that will continue long into the future (hooks 2009:124). But lest we believe that all black art is rooted in a presentist struggle to resist racism, hooks reminds us that

“cultural production and artistic expressiveness were also ways for displaced African people to maintain their connections with the past” (2009:124).

Robin D. G. Kelley’s analysis of the black radical imagination, which will be examined in further detail below, suggests a way that hooks’ argument about connections to an African past applies to Curtis and Carol. Neither of the Pierres idealizes Africa in their discussions of their decisions to adopt Afro-Brazilian culture, but they recognize that there exists a tendency for such idealizations in the community of people and organizations to which Casa Samba belongs and they recognize the value in looking at Africa as a root source of cultural identity. According to Kelley, students of African history whose political ideals included a vision of black people being the center of their own narratives, of being powerful in the past and capable of great power in the present and future, idealize an imagined Africa to reassure themselves that an ideal future is possible. Of himself and his colleagues in black studies undergraduate programs, Kelley says:

We looked back in search of a better future. We wanted to find a refuge where ‘black people’ exercised power, possessed essential knowledge, educated the West, built monuments, slept under the stars on the banks of the Nile, and never had to worry about the police or poverty or arrogant white people questioning our intelligence. Of course, this meant conveniently ignoring slave labor, class hierarchies, and women’s oppression, and it meant projecting backwards in time a twentieth-century conception of race, but to simply criticize us for myth-making or essentialism misses the point of our reading. We dreamed the ancient world as a place of freedom, a picture to imagine what we desired and what was possible (2002:15).

Kelley’s insistence that an idealized or essentialist view of a better time in the past can permit a vision for a better future is partly what Curtis and Carol are responding to in their utopian vision for what Casa Samba can and should be.

Pursuing personal authenticity through a different form of blackness than the ones into which they were born, the Pierres struggle to turn racial identity into cultural identity. I explore the Pierres’ discussions of Casa Samba’s emergence as a professional organization in line with their shared ideal of what the group should be within the framework of several key concepts. Robin

D. G. Kelley's "utopian project" that is rooted in the "black radical imagination," bell hooks' "aesthetic of blackness" and "culture of belonging," and Molefi Kete Asante's "Afrocentricity," all expand Trilling's idea of personal authenticity while specifying it to a view of the world embedded in racialized experience. The Pierres, in their individual journeys, identify an ideal way of being an active agent in their lives that is rooted in choosing a personal identity that emphasizes the value of black culture. Through their mutual creation of Casa Samba—an organization that teaches, preserves, and performs Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance—they offer this possibility to other people, black and white alike. Simultaneously, they make an argument for Afrocentricity as a paradigm for overcoming the barriers to human cooperation and coexistence imposed by American racial identification and racism. This paradigm can be used to subvert biologically deterministic definitions of race that continue to shape human interaction. It can also be used to argue for a utopian, or at least ideal, vision of the future in which chosen cultural identities are the ones that define us no matter what our racial identities are.

CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING

In the next chapter, I examine the ways that Casa Samba operates as a cultural organization in New Orleans—a city with a distinct history that makes it both the perfect place for a samba school to exist and a difficult place for any group offering culture that falls outside that which belongs "authentically" to New Orleans culture. To begin working toward that discussion, I want to think here about why people are attracted to Casa Samba. Who becomes a member? What do they want from the group? Are all members' motivations for joining at least partly related to those motivations that led Curtis and Carol to start the organization in the first place?

The answer to the last question is too complex to answer in this research. I have interviewed only members of the Pierre family and a few long-term members of Casa Samba. Writing about member motivations specifically is impossible, but Carol's view of the situation is that people join Casa Samba for all kinds of reasons—some of which align with the mission of the organization, some of which do not. Those whose motivations distance them from the group's mission usually do not remain in the group. To be a successful Casa Samba member, one must understand and embrace the Pierres' comprehensive definition of professionalism that is described in the preceding section. But Casa Samba members also benefit from sharing the Pierres' perspective on what kind of collective the group is. In this section, I examine the ways in which Casa Samba offers its members a culture in which they belong, and in which they belong together. I argue that this ideal culture of belonging is part of a larger utopian vision that Curtis and Carol share regarding both the present and future of Casa Samba.

Broadly speaking, and based on what Curtis and Carol argue motivated them to start Casa Samba, the organization offers people a sense of belonging through a specific proposition of “cultural citizenship” (see Hayden 1995:8). For the urbanist Dolores Hayden, this kind of belonging is most often possible in urban areas where the complexity of life diversity of cultures permits people to choose membership in one or another community in a manner that would support their conception of themselves. Hayden defines cultural citizenship as “an identity that is formed not out of legal membership but out of a sense of cultural belonging” (1995:8). And indeed, this definition brings us back around to chapter three’s discussion of Curtis’ and Carol’s individual searches for personal authenticity. Neither was able to reframe their sense of themselves or immediately develop a “sense of cultural belonging” in the manner Hayden describes. But this is exactly what they offer to their members. In the previous chapter, I have

examined the process of authentication in Casa Samba through the lens of professionalism.

Going forward, I want to shift the mental frame to the concept of “cultural citizenship.” This returns us to bell hooks’ interpretations of seeking meaning in life and in work.

hooks’ articulation of a “culture of belonging” in her 2009 collection of essays suggests another way to connect Trilling’s idea of personal authenticity to an evolving black identity in the United States that the Pierre family’s experiences may document. hooks’ notion of a culture of belonging is derived from Carol Lee Flinders’ expansive definition that is rooted, above all, in a connection being reestablished between human beings and the natural world in which we live (2009:13). hooks agrees with Flinders that “an intimate connection with the land to which one belongs” is fundamental to the development of a culture in which other ideals (such as “generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative modes of knowing”) flourish (2009:13). She expands on Flinders’ thoughts to define her culture of belonging as one that emerges from a connection to the natural world, is formed in opposition to the hegemony of white supremacist patriarchal capitalism, and recalls the positive aspects of her childhood in rural Kentucky. To a certain extent, hooks’ culture of belonging evokes many of the qualities Trilling associates with the sense of personal authenticity that he identifies as one of the primary objects pursued by nineteenth-century European artists. However, where Trilling associates personal authenticity with individual seeking, hooks’ culture of belonging evokes the presence of more than one seeker. It evokes the existence of a community project.

hooks’ community is the American black community. From her memories of childhood she identifies one of the elemental features of the culture of belonging she seeks and suggests that she is not alone. According to hooks, oppositionality is one of the roots of a culture of belonging, and it ties people together (2009:121–134). Writing about her search to restore her own psyche

and mitigate the damage done by years of living in the deleterious climes of the United States, hooks explains that oppositionality has long been a part of black American culture and that oppositionality can be handed down through generations (2009:121–134). She learned the oppositional values from her grandparents, none of whom were political radicals in the strict sense of the term—especially in its post-Civil-Rights era form. Oppositional values are those that demonstrate a rejection of what hooks calls the “dominator culture” (2009:29). For her, these values are those that create a culture of belonging: connection to the land and connections to other human beings of all races and classes and genders. Oppositional values are those associated with the pursuit of a meaningful existence in the face of dominant values that suggest that we should live in ways that support our own oppression. hooks elaborates:

In dominator culture, the will to power stands as a direct challenge to the cultural belief that humans survive soulfully because of a will to meaning. When the will to meaning is paramount, human life retains dignity. The capacity of humans to create community, to make connections, to love, is nurtured and sustained (2009:29).

Going further, hooks expands on the role of mutuality within a culture of belonging in a way that challenges common assumptions that “equality” among people of different races, classes, and genders will upset the systems that oppress the nonwhite, the poor, and those who are not male. She aligns herself with scholars in sociology, philosophy, and urban planning who argue that a genuine understanding of and respect for difference is key to the creation of real liberty and justice for all (see Fainstein 2010, Harvey 2008, Young 1990). hooks suggests that to aim for “equality” in the creation of community among people whose differences are real is to settle for less than we deserve. She says:

If equality is evoked as the only standard by which it is deemed acceptable for people to meet across boundaries and create community, then there is little hope. Fortunately, mutuality is a more constructive and positive foundation for the building of ties that allow for differences in status, position, power, and privilege whether determined by race, class, sexuality, religion, or nationality (hooks 2009:87).

Her own search for a culture of belonging led hooks to return home to Kentucky. What she learned—between leaving her small-town segregated life for cities all over the United States and only then returning to Kentucky on her own terms—is that most American people struggle to find a place where they belong. For hooks, that place would be among people who shared her oppositional values of holism and mutuality. Specifically, difference would be valued while racism, classism, and sexism would be challenged with the understanding that relationships among human beings are impacted by relationships to the natural world.

The history of Casa Samba demonstrates the potential for a culture of belonging to exist according to overlapping but different tenets than those that hooks proposes. The nature of a connection with “the land to which one belongs” may not be physical. Casa Samba’s culture of belonging may not stem, as hooks’ does, from a memory of a sense of freedom in childhood. But Casa Samba, in its ideal form, shows that understanding difference is the key to dismantling the “dominator culture’s” grip on American sensibilities. In what follows, I attempt to demonstrate that Casa Samba offers a culture of belonging that is oriented toward offering New Orleans residents an opportunity to experience a tradition that is not native to the city in which the group operates. Rather, it is related in significant ways to the cultures that construct the city’s identity. The assertion of difference that Casa Samba insists upon by offering an alternative to ordinary New Orleans identities and ordinary African-American identities is oppositional in hooks’ construction of the term. Casa Samba offers its members opportunities to remake themselves, in interaction with others doing the same thing, in an environment that ideally values holism and mutuality above separation and individualism.

The histories of Curtis and Carol present the contours of their individual searches for a meaningful identity that led them eventually to Afro-Brazilian culture, New Orleans, and each

other. Both of them emphasize some elements of their personal ideologies—developed over time—that stand in opposition to the dominant culture of the United States and suggest that Casa Samba is the product of long-standing critiques of American materialism and racism.

It should be clear from what I have presented to this point that neither Curtis nor Carol has values that align them with even the most passive American capitalist. This is not to say that either of them rejects the benefits of capitalism. They do not. This is especially true with respect to Casa Samba where participation in tourist capitalism in New Orleans is concerned, as we will see in the chapter that follows. But both Curtis and Carol are critical of the economic system as such, in part, because of their experiences of being limited by the class positions in which they were raised.¹⁹ In forming a cultural organization that could offer people ways of relating that are more focused on cultural citizenship and a sense of belonging, the Pierres believe that they are correcting some of the wrongs visited upon American citizens by a capitalist system that does not encourage us to value the “right things.”

Both Curtis and Carol have what I think of as a “kids today” narrative. Curtis spent the first ten minutes of one of our interviews telling me that kids today have far less respect for their elders than did kids in his generation, that kids today are treated like adults capable of making their own decisions, and that part of the reason for this is that American children no longer pray in school. I was taken aback by the idea that Curtis, who replaced his Baptist religious upbringing with *candomblé* as part of his Afro-Brazilian transformation, would advocate the return of Christian prayer to the classroom. In fact, this was not what he was suggesting. He was noting, instead, that kids in his generation had a sense of right and wrong that was, perhaps, supported by public religion. Curtis’ sense of morality comes more from a personal sense of what is right than any external sense, and indeed, this is the sensibility that he wishes to cultivate

in his son and in any member of Casa Samba who wants to learn how to develop it. He describes his approach as the opposite of the American ethos of instant gratification that he sees as especially prevalent among children. He believes Casa Samba does present a different option, and he frames the difference specifically in terms of achieving a sense of happiness or wellbeing without the use of substances. As Curtis explained:

American life today is ‘Do what’s necessary, and you’re good.’ And nothing more. You don’t need anything more, just do what’s necessary and then sit down and have a drink, you know? And enjoy yourself, smoke a cigarette. That’s our picture. Something’s wrong? Have a drink. Something’s wrong? Have a pill. [But] you can do all of the same things within yourself. ... All of this stuff is already in your body if you know how to bring it out. The pills and the drugs and the alcohol, all these things that can change your state of mind, are actually in your body.

As is the case with his perspective on professionalization, Curtis’ view of how Casa Samba offers people a shot at a meaningful life overall is individualistic. This is how he experienced the transformation that samba offered, and so, he believes that others will experience it this way as well. Curtis said:

When you find that there’s something within your power to do that’s the best you can do without paying for it, without having to get it from someone else, that’s the most powerful thing you can have in your life. That you can actually have [something] and say that’s yours, ‘This makes me feel this way *all the time*, even when I’m sad, this is going to make me feel good. I don’t have to buy this. I don’t have to depend on another person to give it to me. This is something I can manifest within myself and when I’m at my downest point, when I do this? It’s going to change things. It’s going to change my mood, change my attitude.’ And when I started to discover all these things, it was like there was no down or up in this thing. It’s just straightforward in development.

Carol’s identification of the transformative power of membership in Casa Samba is informed by her experience of adopting samba in her life just as Curtis’ is. But, Carol, unlike Curtis, focuses on the collective identity that people can develop as members of Casa Samba. Carol expressed an ideal of what Casa Samba can do for its participants when she said that “something about samba is unifying.” Carol explained that African music is just fine and that she likes it very much. But she argued that the reason that Casa Samba draws “a very diverse group of people, from all walks of life, all socioeconomic classes, all races,” is because samba unites

people across the boundaries that often separate us based on elements of our identities. Most important to Carol, however, is Casa Samba's capacity to offer kids something that they do not have access to in their routine lives. Carol characterizes herself as "coming from a very, very mixed environment, not necessarily neighborhood, but environment." She continued:

When I think about kids today, all the things that I was exposed to that these kids, I mean, having music and art and theater and home ec[onomics] and shop. Being taken to the theater district in New York on school trips, and all the museums, or the beach or all these different places. My life was just different from what I see today. And that's why I start there because when I think about what I'm trying to do, or what we're trying to do, it's because of what I feel like I've been exposed to during my life.

In offering kids and adults experiences that they do not find elsewhere, experiences that contradict some of what the Pierres believe are the more deleterious elements of American culture, and experiences that give them a sense of belonging, Casa Samba is a project that emerges from black radical imaginations (Kelley 2002). It is a utopian project that addresses the limits of American black identity in particular.

UTOPIAN, BUT NOT POLITICAL

In the introduction to his collection of essays dealing with the black radical imagination, historian Robin D.G. Kelley begins with an explanation of how his mother wanted him and his siblings to view the world. Among other things, she wanted them to "see the poetic and prophetic in the richness of our daily lives. She wanted us to visualize a more expansive, fluid, 'cosmos-politan' definition of blackness, to teach us that we are not merely inheritors of a culture but its makers" (Kelley 2002:2). Considering Kelley's larger argument that it is important that scholars, activists, and perhaps all human beings take utopian political projects seriously, it appears that Curtis and Carol are engaged in a utopian project in the broadest sense. The Pierres' project is not overtly political in the manner of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement

Association, or any of the Maoist, Marxist-Leninist, Stalinist, or Black Arts Movement projects Kelley examines in much of his work. Their individual quests for a meaningful life took them away from home and moved them to reject elements of their inherited identities and elaborate on other elements that supported their vision for the future. This in itself is a utopian project as Kelley defines them. Going further, Casa Samba, viewed as a utopian project, a movement towards redefining blackness and the active construction of a culture that supplies self-defined meaning and value to the lives of its participants, can be understood as a product of the black radical imagination.²⁰ Curtis and Carol, as much as the surrealist thinker Aime Cesaire or poet/activist Amiri Baraka, were not satisfied with the identities into which they were born.

To reiterate, though the circumstances of their early lives are quite different, by the time Curtis and Carol met each other in New Orleans, each recognized that Afro-Brazilian culture and practices offered them an opportunity to redefine themselves. The Brazilian variant of Afrocentricity appealed to them more clearly than others, and so they adopted it as their own. Moreover, they identified the need for redefinition as bigger than their individual selves, and set about creating an organization that would expand this opportunity not just to their son—whose immersion in an alternative identity began with his birth—but to other children and adults who believed that the strictures of regular American identity were too limiting. Casa Samba not only offers members, students, and audiences a window into Afro-Brazilian culture; it “enables [a] community to envision what’s possible with collective action, personal self-transformation, and will” (Kelley 2002:7).

While it is not an explicit goal of the Pierres to challenge the biological determinism inherent in the United States’ system of racial categorization, Casa Samba does, in fact, contest the validity of this system.²¹ Casa Samba, indeed, emerged from a skepticism regarding the limits of

raced and classed identities that Curtis and Carol shared by the time they came together to collaborate on this project. But the Pierres skepticism was not limited to an interpretation of the dominator culture's production of racial categories. Neither one of them found what they view as the most common route of resisting these categories valid either, but Curtis' narrative on the subject is the most vivid and explanatory.

Curtis rejects the superficiality of the popular move among conscious black Americans to define themselves as Afrocentric through surface presentation alone. According to Curtis, adherents to the fad of learning "African drumming and dance ... wore the clothes, but this was something they were into. It wasn't something they were embracing." Curtis goes on to explain that, in Los Angeles, he learned that African drum or dance instructors who were coming to the United States for the first time in the late 1970s and early 1980s were fearful of teaching Americans their culture in its fullest form because they did not trust the Americans to respect the complexity of the traditions. In this way, he argues that it is not necessarily the fault of the fad follower that his interest could not be deepened to include a full embrace of "African" culture. Those with the power to share their culture in more complex forms were generally afraid to do so. Curtis identifies a pattern of superficiality in the adoption of African traditions by most black Americans based on his knowledge that African bearers of traditions were hesitant to render them for American consumption.

In essence, he believes that Americans seeking of African culture, seeking a return to African roots that the Transatlantic slave trade interrupted, or seeking a connection to a contemporary music and dance tradition in Africa have been trained to be lazy in their search. According to Curtis, Americans commodify elements of African culture and seek out only those that they think they want. This laziness is the result of a specific American ethos that values consumption

and materialism—Curtis’ rejection of which is emphasized above—combined with a wariness on the part of African practitioners to share the totality of their culture with the consumption-driven American population that would break it apart according to their own preferences anyway.

Curtis’ skepticism regarding the trendiness of the superficial adoption of African clothing or traditions suggests reasons that the Brazilian variant of African culture appealed to him. It relates to his sense of personal authenticity. The adoption of nonspecific African drumming or wearing a dashiki did not resonate with Curtis as a way to construct a meaningful life through a transformed identity. African drumming did not “move his soul.” Had Curtis not begun to consider this soul movement as an integral part of creating a new life for himself, he might have been content with the kinds of drumming that would have been easier for him to adopt with some authority. That a black American would adopt “African” drumming is not unusual. This adoption is, in fact, generally understood within the context of a search for roots and a lost identity that African-descended people can attempt authentically.

What Curtis and Carol are doing is more complicated. They are adopting an ethnic identity that is possible for them to claim because of a shared black identity that links the United States and Brazil. But they challenge the idea that Afro-Brazilian culture belongs only to Brazilians, who are another New World African population. Had the Pierres invested their energies in producing connections to Africa itself, the motherland for all formerly enslaved diasporic peoples, there would be, perhaps, less reason to challenge their authenticity. The Pierres have adopted and are teaching others New World black arts, however. This opens them up to critiques rooted in the national consciousness of Brazilian drummers and dancers who think that the Pierres’ claim to their practices is not legitimate because of their geographic location. I think that this nationalist criticism is possible because of the very biological determinism that the

Pierres reject in adopting new ethnic identities rather than adapting their racial identities.

Observers of black Americans adopting African drumming or dance practices see the logic in it.

It is a biological connection. The common, linear, wisdom tells us that black Americans were once Africans. So, a cultural return to one's biologized homeland makes sense. Observers of black Americans adopting Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance practices are more likely to wonder by what right these Americans are making a claim to authentically teach and perform another country's art forms. In rejecting biological determinism in this complex way, the Pierres accept the challenges that come with remaking oneself along ethnic lines.

Transformation through adopted ethnicity is, at the end of the day, what Casa Samba offers to its members. Due to the fact that the process of cultural adoption is framed within an Afrocentric paradigm, the opportunity to reject the limits of biological race and explore the complexities of ethnic group membership centered around African culture is open to people of all "races." In suggesting that all people are capable of a "self-conscious approach to the agency of African people within the context of their own history," Casa Samba localizes Molefi Kete Asante's core definition of Afrocentricity (2007:11).

AUTHENTIC AFROCENTRICITY

Praising Ama Mazama's rearticulation of Afrocentricity into a paradigm that must include, and even grow out of, the idea that the mental liberation of African people "must precede any other type of liberation," Asante goes on to describe Afrocentricity as revolutionary. If African people liberate themselves mentally, the stage is set for the most authentic challenge to white supremacy and European hegemony (2007:14). Asante continues:

Afrocentricity creates what the ancient Egyptians referred to as a *djed*, and the ancient Greeks as a *stasis*, meaning in both cases a strong place to stand. It is a paradigm in the Mazamian sense because it enthrones the centrality of African agency, thus creating an acceptance of African

values and ideals as expressed in the highest forms of culture while terminating always in a creative function bent toward mental liberation (2007:15).

But the key element of Mazama's enhanced Afrocentricity is that "there is something more than knowing from the Afrocentric perspective; there is also *doing*" (Asante 2007:15). This interpretation of Afrocentricity is most clearly the one that Curtis and Carol build on throughout their lives. Let me be clear about the nature of this enterprise as I see it, because in writing this it may seem as though I am applying Asante's framework to Curtis' and Carol's experience in a way that they would not. This is not the case. Both of the Pierres consciously articulate their vision in utopian and Afrocentric terms. They identify their choices as liberating ones and they claim that the possibility of liberation through reconstructed (ethnic) identity is the very thing that Casa Samba offers its members. That they each developed the vision for their future through individual quests for personal authenticity is what makes powerful the collective articulation of this vision through embodiment. When Mazama and Asante insist that that the Afrocentric paradigm "terminat[es] always in a creative function bent toward mental liberation," (2007:15) it is possible that they have in mind something like Casa Samba. Casa Samba is generative, it is futuristic in its orientation, and throughout its history and into its unknowable future, Casa Samba presents the argument that "African values and ideals [should be] expressed in the highest forms of culture" (Asante 2007:15).

In becoming professional, authentic samba drummers and dancers, members of Casa Samba embody—deeply absorb—new identities. These new identities are Afrocentric identities in the deep sense that both Curtis and Asante value because they are constructed in opposition to the simplistic racialized identities that dull our humanity and strip us of any cultural complexity. In *Freedom Dreams* and in his larger body of work,²² Kelley shows how this happens by focusing on the ways that black people defied the limits of biologically determined categorization to live

within more complex identities. Scholars of white identity have supported the idea that biological race inaccurately captures human identity when they have argued that the cost of adopting “white” as a marker of identity is one’s culture. White people can be written into a pseudobiological corner to the same extent that nonwhite people are. The difference between the corners is, of course, that the white corner contains people who benefit from the privilege their skin color offers.²³

Casa Samba gives nonwhite and white people an opportunity to develop an Afrocentric position on the world. Contrary to popular misinterpretations, Afrocentricity is not another way of describing black nationalism. As Asante argues, black nationalism does depend on its proponents having lived a black experience and Afrocentricity does not (2007). Curtis and Carol make the same argument that Asante makes. They, like any Afrocentrist, “will teach anyone how to become a scholar who begins the study of African people and African phenomena from the standpoint of Africans as subjects rather than objects of history” (Asante 2007:22). And they would know how. Curtis’ and Carol’s life experiences, individually and taken together, have centered around studying African people and phenomena as subjects. In fact, this is why they chose Afro-Brazilian culture as their own. It had the capacity to be embodied more practically, more fully than any other African-derived culture because both Curtis and Carol felt a deep affinity for samba upon encountering it. Afrocentricity is about this kind of deep feeling. As Asante says:

Of course, one should realize that it is not simply affecting African styles and manners, but something deeper, more conscious. In fact, it is necessary to separate Africanity from Afrocentricity. The idea of conscientization is at the center of Afrocentricity because this is what makes it different from Africanity. One can practice African customs and mores and not be Afrocentric because Afrocentricity is conscientization related to the agency of African people. One cannot be Afrocentric without being a conscious human being (Asante 2007:17).

This brings us back around to the Pierres' rejection of superficial connections to Africa, what Asante calls "Africanity." Neither Curtis nor Carol is interested in constructing a false black identity. They are interested in remaking themselves culturally. They do give this chance to anyone who is interested regardless of their race. But lest we assume that being black is irrelevant to either Curtis or Carol, I should note that both of them express a sense of connectedness to Africa that emerges from the experience of being black and living in the United States. Both Pierres approach this connectedness from a sort of intellectual distance, however, that further links them to Asante's project of encouraging Afrocentricity as a methodology. Curtis once explained his decision to replace Eastern martial arts with the Afro-Brazilian *capoeira angola* in relatively academic terms. He said:

[It] helped me to research more about Africa and the heritage of the game I was playing and the idea of the Africans that were brought here enslaved and ask: "How do I fit into that?" Because, you know, I was always fascinated by what part of Africa I was from and all of that. So I just started to put all of that into perspective and I said, 'If I'm going to do this, I think this would round it out and make it all complete, you know? ... I was curious about it and to me it just felt more about ... this is what I was about.

Viewing Casa Samba as a manifestation of an Afrocentric paradigm allows us to see it more clearly as utopian. To label the project utopian is not to call it unrealistic or to mischaracterize it as impossible. Casa Samba's mission is simple. The group preserves and presents Afro-Brazilian culture in New Orleans. But this mission is dependent on members of the group fully understanding and being capable of authentically presenting this culture. And so, the goal is to reform regular people suffering from the limits of their ordinary American race and class identities into extraordinary people who choose something else. Casa Samba has done this for twenty-five years and will continue doing it into the future. Of course, that future is the terrain of another element of the utopian project.

THE BUSINESS OF UTOPIA

Casa Samba is a family business in multiple ways, most of which will be explored in the following chapter. But the nature of the organization as a family business is part of what characterizes it as a utopian project. In their discussions of their son's personal and professional trajectory, Curtis and Carol both express a typically parental desire for their child to be better, more successful, and happier than they are. They go beyond the ordinary expressions of parental hopefulness, however. The vision the Pierres have for their son Bomani is integral to their hope that their legacy of empowering people through the adoption of Afro-Brazilian culture is affirmed in and carried on by him and by others who they have "raised" in Casa Samba. In this section, I will briefly explore the ways in which Casa Samba operates as a family, a business, and a family business within certain parameters of a utopian ideal.

The professionalism that Curtis and Carol developed as a goal for themselves and that they expect from members of Casa Samba is embodied in a particular form in Bomani.²⁴ In a way, he is Casa Samba's purest form, its test case. Having been imbued with his parents' expectations from the day they adopted him, Bomani is the most consistent member of Casa Samba and the member of the organization who has most directly absorbed his parents' sense of authenticity and meaningful work. Bomani's instruction in samba drumming and capoeira comes not only from his parents, but also from long-term relationships with those practitioners on whom Curtis and Carol have relied for their own instruction, especially master drummer Jorge Alabê who lived in the Pierre house for the better part of a decade. Jorge's residence with the Pierre family overlapped with Bomani's arrival and his daily life until he was nine or ten years old. Jorge and Bomani are very close, and they take seriously their relationship as godfather and godchild. Through this relationship, Jorge took responsibility for much of Bomani's instruction in samba

drumming and for raising him in more general senses as well. Jorge includes himself in the group “good spirit, good *energia* [energy] people” responsible for Bomani’s being a hardworking, good-natured, and talented percussionist. He contrasts Bomani’s life with those of other sixteen-year-olds he has seen “on the corners.” For Jorge, it is an indication of his and Curtis’ and Carol’s success in raising Bomani that he has a bright future. As Jorge explained: “I’m glad [to see Bomani doing well.] Because when he goes out in life, he’s going to look back and say, ‘Yeah man, I didn’t do nothing wrong so far, so why I have to do [wrong] now?’”

Curtis, Carol, and Jorge all believe deeply in Bomani’s talents as a drummer, and after all, he is the direct product of their individual efforts to be professional sambistas themselves. While Bomani’s talent is remarkable, it is his position within Casa Samba that best exemplifies the Pierres and Jorge’s professional ideals. Bomani is their heir. He will inherit Casa Samba and continue the legacy that these adults have constructed. Curtis is especially pointed in his discussion of Bomani’s future as a leader of Casa Samba and as a percussionist in general. He explained that he hopes that Bomani will take the group over someday: “I would like that to happen, you know, if that’s going to happen. All I keep telling him is, ‘This is a business, it’s not just something that we do. And whatever you decide to do, I’m good with that.’” But Curtis also understands that Bomani’s being raised within the group, with a rigorous sense of professionalism, will benefit him whether he continues his parents’ organization or not. He believes that Bomani will be great regardless of what form of music he pursues and, beyond being a talented and charismatic performer, that he can supersede his and Carol’s accomplishments. Curtis explained this to an imaginary Bomani in one of our interviews:

‘This is already a business that’s happening and you can do a lot more with it than I am because you’re younger and there are more things for you to be able to invest in and make things happen for you.’ I’m telling him about these other opportunities just being a young percussionist because somebody with his knowledge? They get gigs quick … You know, he’s going to think differently

than I do, but he's also going to think similarly to how I do because he's been around me and he's seen the way I run things.

Beginning in September of 2009 when Curtis underwent surgery on both knees and continuing with renewed force in March of 2010—one week before Mardi Gras and one day before one of the biggest performances on Casa Samba's annual carnival calendar—when Curtis ruptured his Achilles tendon, Bomani got a crash course in being the leader of the band. While Curtis was physically present and able to do nearly all of the logistical work of running the group throughout his recoveries, Bomani was required to take on a more visible role as the bandleader during performances and to be more active in running the group's rehearsals due to his father's reduced physical capacity. In our conversation about the challenges of being injured and adapting to this reduced capacity in May of 2010, Curtis reflected on his reliance on his son. This led him to express his thoughts on what he really wants for Bomani. He said:

I want him to have his own experience. What I told him he needed to do, I mean for him to ensure his musical future, is to get a degree or a master's degree in music. If he got that with the talent that he has, he'll be teaching forever and he won't have to be in the high schools. He can do clinics and workshops for these colleges and teachers. That's what I want him to do. I don't want him to just be teaching regular students.

Curtis goes on to say that Bomani knows this is what he wants for him, but that he does not talk about this vision too much because he does not want to force Bomani to do anything. In this way, Curtis' utopian vision for his son is like that of many parents. He wants his son to have opportunities that he himself lacked. What is different is that Curtis has been directly involved in teaching Bomani the skills that he will need to be extraordinary as a musician, teacher, and leading figure in a larger cultural sense. Casa Samba is not something that most parents would be able to offer their children. This vehicle for identity construction through the practice of samba is a resource for Bomani as it is for anyone who joins, but by virtue of being the son of the

group's leaders and the potential heir to the group, Bomani has developed, over a lifetime, a sense of professional musicianship and cultural identity that is unique.

Carol also reflected on the uniqueness of her family's life and the benefits of that life for Bomani. She referred to a "commitment," that the family makes daily and as a unit, to a lifestyle that is centered around samba. This shared focus, commitment to a vision that is not like those that may unite the members of other families, is part of what evokes Kelley's "black radical imagination" (2002). The adult Pierres envisioned their individual paths to new and more satisfying identities and lives, and this motivated them to construct their family life in a manner that differs greatly from the ordinary form. Carol theorizes that this utopian visioning which allows the Pierre family to operate as a team on stage and in running the group behind the scenes produces a different kind of relationship among its members. As she explained:

You definitely bond, like before I got married, my whole lifestyle was totally different. But to live, to do what we do, we have to be a lot closer and we are constantly working together on ... an issue. We brought Bomani up in a tradition very different from those of his friends, you know, so he has that appreciation so that he has that knowledge and can thus continue what we've been trying to do. Whether he does it or not, he has been *trained* to do that. For us to be able to present Brazilian performance, it's like you have to live it.

Carol's description of her family's "living" Brazilian performance reveals the extent to which they, as a family, embody their practice. She went on to explain that the ways in which the Pierre family lives Casa Samba is reflected in their physical surroundings:

But the commitment that we've made, you know, this has become, this is what we eat, sleep, and [laughs], you know? If you think about it, my whole house has been totally changed and influenced by samba. I have costumes everywhere and drums everywhere and I rehearse five, six, seven times a week! This is what we do!

Bomani, too, offers his opinion of his family's operation on a different plane. He understands his parents' hope that he will pursue music academically and professionally, and that he will continue their legacy through leading Casa Samba. Bomani views his relationship with his parents as shaped by both personal matters and business matters. His immediate answer to a

question about these relationships emphasized the idea that the Pierre family as a unit is the basis of Casa Samba. Bomani said: “We’re in it together. Yeah. Three musketeers.” He went on to describe a scene in which he and Curtis had argued aggressively from their house to the center where Casa Samba holds rehearsals, but when they walked in the door to the center, the argument abruptly stopped and they began to collaborate on leading that evening’s rehearsal. Bomani summarized the situation by saying: “We always work together. The surprising thing is, when Casa Samba comes, we always work together.”

Another thing that sets the Pierre family apart from other families is the fact that the Pierre household has always been open to long-term members who become fictive kin. This is what happened with Jorge—and this process is further elaborated upon in the following chapter—but the Pierre household has also included Ile Aiye drummer Marcio Pires, a young man who Bomani refers to as his brother. Marcio, like Jorge, moved to New Orleans to work with Casa Samba and to teach Curtis and the other drummers, including Bomani, his specific set of samba drumming skills. But by virtue of his living in the Pierre house, Marcio occupies the role of brother for Bomani, though Curtis and Carol both treat Marcio as a peer rather than as another son. This is partly due to the fact that Marcio is twice Bomani’s age and thus perhaps too old to be viewed by the elder Pierres as a child, and partly because Marcio acts as a teacher to the adult Pierres as well.

Marcio and Jorge offer examples of how the Pierre family directly incorporates Casa Samba members into their own family unit. But the ethos of the organization that Carol and Curtis both describe makes the group itself a large, flexible family. Members of Casa Samba who do not literally live in the Pierres’ house are also viewed as family. As Carol explained it, the

transmission of culture within the group happens through a passing down of elements that is often described in families. She said:

You know, it's generational, you have to keep transcending the knowledge from one generation to another. Look at our performers. Some of them have grown up [in the group]. We now have children of the ones we originally [had] who are performing. And it's always an amazing experience when you see your life's work being carried on.

I asked Carol if one thing she is trying to do is guarantee that Casa Samba outlives her and Curtis. Because Bomani was sitting next to her on the couch, she looked at him and said, "Yes. Hopefully." Literal generational transmission is not guaranteed. Should it not occur, the group would likely continue because there are people apart from Bomani who were raised in it and are committed to its continued existence. But, of course, Bomani is different from the other children who grew up in Casa Samba. The expectations on him are higher, his talent is greater, and his ability to authoritatively run the group is less likely to be challenged.

Curtis also commented on the generational reproduction that Casa Samba thrives on. He thinks that as people invest in becoming integral members of Casa Samba, they

start to believe in that and they start to become part of a family. It's like a little village. I'd say about five thousand people have passed through Casa Samba [over] the past twenty-five years and I would say about at least ... [exhales] maybe about twelve or fifteen marriages [have come] from Casa Samba directly. About twelve or fifteen marriages and I don't know how many kids, but there's got to be more kids than marriages. [Laughs.] You never know.

In this way, Casa Samba builds on its own past to produce its future throughout the lifetimes of individuals who maintain familial bonds to the group and to each other. Members come and go as changes occur in the course of their lives. Some leave forever. Others have been in Casa Samba since it started. The knowledge that the Pierre family has, as the nucleus of the organization, is supported by that which is shared by their oldest members and imparted to new ones as the generations change in the group. But in the end, Curtis and Carol are the fictive parents of all the members of the group. Where some members do not require active parenting to

enforce the rules of professionalism and authentic Casa Samba membership, others do. Carol explained this phenomenon clearly: “you put them out [of the group] and then they have time to think about it. And it’s like, ‘Oh yeah, here we go. Disciplining the child again.’” When the recalcitrant group member has made the required adjustment to adhere to the rules of engagement in Casa Samba, they are welcomed back into the family.

CONCLUSION (TOWARDS THE MARVELOUS)

I have characterized Casa Samba as a utopian project in part because of it reflects the ideals of transformation in the face of the dominant, racist, capitalist culture that Curtis and Carol began to develop early on. Casa Samba builds on their ideals and through the organization and through raising their son in a manner that is different from how his peers are raised, the Pierres have remained true to a sense of their authentic selves. But another element of Casa Samba’s utopianism is that Curtis and Carol both have dreams for its future that are bigger and broader than what the group is currently. These dreams are rooted in Curtis’ and Carol’s interpretation of what authentic samba schools are and in their shared value of Afrocentricity. In this way, utopian visioning for Casa Samba is rooted in an existing material and cultural reality so that it reflects a desire for Casa Samba to continue evolving in the direction of an authenticity.

Carol began working on Casa Samba’s nonprofit status paperwork during what she refers to as the “Katrina break.” While she was exiled from New Orleans, she finally found time to do this work so that Casa Samba could start investigating how to “really be able to have the school part of it [like] every samba school in Rio [which is] a cultural center.” In Carol’s vision, Casa Samba would have a permanent location in which to hold classes, rehearsals, performances, and

also host after-school and summer programs in Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance. The group would also make its space available to other Afrocentric or like-visioned organizations.

This idea of owning a space and using it in a way that is not contingent on the whims of an external organization is a material one for Carol, but having a genuine cultural center would also enable her to achieve a personal goal: to “work towards making [Casa Samba] full-time.” Currently, Curtis is the only member of the family for whom Casa Samba is a full-time occupation. While Carol recognizes that her income keeps the family afloat and does not dislike her professional job, in an ideal future world, she would get to devote her full energy to the organization that she has been integral in building. In fact, Carol’s work at Tulane is part of what inspires her to dream of a Casa Samba cultural center. She said:

Tulane has given me a lot over the years. And if I could take half of what I’ve learned and be able to give back to young people, to reach them earlier, so that they *then* have the opportunity to go to school, they *then* have some career direction, they *then* have the self-confidence and assurance that they can do whatever they put their minds to, then yeah. If I had the resources and the time, that’s what I would do.

Going beyond taking the group in the direction Carol feels it deserves to go, her discussion of the future of the group reveals that having a single occupation would relieve her of the burden of an overly fragmented existence and allow her to develop some of her ideas of what Casa Samba can offer, especially to children. But finding time to develop a concrete plan to purchase a building to liberate Casa Samba from its dependence on a city-owned facility and liberate Carol from her job at Tulane is not easy. Because Casa Samba is a functioning organization with members and obligations, it is difficult to pursue people with the connections or the money to help Casa Samba buy a building and really get the community center off the ground. As Carol explained: “We spend so much time doing, that we don’t spend enough time visioning. It’s just me. I feel overwhelmed sometimes trying to do it all.” She went on to characterize her life as “crazy” and to list the roles she occupies simultaneously that produce the craziness. Carol said, “It’s just

crazy. Trying to be a professional woman and then trying to run part of the group and be a mom and run this house. It's a lot. It's overwhelming at times." The roles Carol lists are gendered ones and, moreover, they are all potentially full time occupations. Carol does juggle her identities all day and all night to live up to her own expectations of herself and those of others. At the time of this interview, Carol was also providing extra support for Curtis—at home and at Casa Samba rehearsals and shows—because he was in the earliest stages of recovering from his ruptured Achilles tendon. During this period, Curtis was dependent on Carol (and Bomani) for everything and was completely housebound. The intensification of her wifely, motherly, and samba-ly duties caused Carol to fantasize about getting a hotel room for a day and doing nothing but reading books in bed. This was her idea of a vacation—one that is highly practical (local, short) and nearly impossible all the same due to her multitude of responsibilities.

As we were wrapping up an interview and I said that I "hope there comes a time when y'all have a building and you can do the cultural ..." I was about to say "center," when Carol cut me off. "Oh, I'm going to! It's going to happen. It's going to happen. It's going to happen in the next seven years. It has to because Bomani will be out of school and I just want to be away from that. That's one kind of stress. If I'm going to be stressed for something, it's going to be me, something I can control, and not about somebody else's business." Carol thought about it for a minute and then said, "The good thing about our lives is at least one of us has been happy doing what they want to do!" She laughed, and I asked if she has been bothered by the fact that while Curtis has been living his dream, she has been working a full-time job and dedicating a full-time effort to Casa Samba on the side. I said, "For twenty-five years, you've done a triple job." Carol replied:

You're right, but I don't know. I come from, and this is another thing we've talked about, this whole thing where women sacrifice. How women take on the role of the savior, of the keeper of the, you know, whatever. And that's the way my mom was. I guess that's the way I am. And it

doesn't bother me the way like some women, 'Oh? You do what? Oh? You make more money than your husband does?

Carol has thought about these criticisms of hers and Curtis' relationship with each other and with Casa Samba. She says that she does not see their relationship as one in which she suffers and he does not, where she sacrifices and he does not. She believes that she and Curtis contribute differently to both their household and to Casa Samba and she says she does not feel badly about how they have run their lives and the organization together for nearly thirty years. Carol values the work she does at Tulane and feels valued for her work there. She feels fortunate to have had meaningful employment that also pays well enough that she can be the family's breadwinner when necessary, and more than that, she believes she gains a great deal from her experiences with students at Tulane and that this has contributed positively to her life with Casa Samba. Reflecting on this sparked a thought about the specifics of the utopian project in which Carol would like to engage. She said:

I would love to take a group of kids to Brazil and do a cross-cultural exchange so they would see how people live in other places, but that there's so much commonality in their experiences. I don't know, [it's] wishful thinking. It's like 'Let me hit the lottery, I know exactly what I'd do with the money. Exactly.

The motivation behind getting a building and having a cultural center is not merely utopian dreaming. Being located in one of NORDC's centers reduces Casa Samba's autonomy. At one point, the organization announced that it would be suspending Casa Samba's right to use their center because they wanted to use the room in which the group rehearses and holds capoeira angola classes for storage. The Pierres are not allowed to have keys to the building and a NORDC staff member must be present in the building with them at all times. If there is a scheduling conflict or if a staff member gets sick and cannot be replaced, Casa Samba is forced to cancel its rehearsal or class at the last minute. NORDC's general control over Casa Samba's activities in their building is a significant motivation for the Pierres to think about finding their

own space. NORDC has total control over Casa Samba's space and can negatively impact the group. Carol explained that, unlike NORDC, Casa Samba would offer its community center building to other groups in town and do so without impinging on them the way she believes NORDC impinges on Casa Samba. She also suggested that

If we got a building, we'd also offer it up. You know, rent out space to other groups that don't have space or open a health clinic, or nutrition [class], or after-school programs. I mean that's where we would take it to the next level, just like they do in Brazil. Just like the samba schools. We want to replicate the whole thing.

While Carol's visions of Casa Samba's future are specific (she wants to secure a building for Casa Samba so that the group has more autonomy and so that she might have a chance to develop Casa Samba into a full-time occupation), they emerge from something nonspecific. Carol's and Curtis' ideals for Casa Samba come from their experiences in social and economic reality, but these ideals encompass a field of vision that is not limited to experience alone. Carol, Curtis, and Bomani are, as a family, dreamers whose shared vision is future-oriented and shaped by what Kelley calls "the Marvelous" (2002).

Kelley's idea of "the Marvelous" comes from his examination of surrealism and the way that black surrealists shaped that movement. He describes the surrealist movement as more than an artistic one. He argues that surrealist thinkers of all stripes were involved in a larger project to reconsider how life should be lived. The surrealists believed in the value of utopian, idealistic plans and they headed in the direction of utopia without any certainty that they would arrive. According to Kelley, they did this with purpose. "By plunging into the depths of the unconscious and lessening 'the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams,'" Kelley argues, "we can enter or realize the domain of the Marvelous" (2002:158). Surrealism in general, and utopian projects in particular, are "about making a new life" (Kelley 2002:158).²⁵

Utopian visions can take many forms, but what I hope this discussion shows is that they are both unreal dreams unrelated to the world itself *and* ideas that are subject to the material and cultural realities in which these visions occur. The visions that Curtis and Carol have for the future of Casa Samba is shaped by both the exigencies of their situation with NORDC, their location in New Orleans, and by an idealized vision of how samba schools and other performers of Afro-Brazilian culture operate. Curtis' and Carol's utopian dreaming applies to their son's trajectory and to other members of the broader Casa Samba family. But their visions for the future do come from their experiences in the past. Carol and Curtis began formulating their visions separately, and when they came together, they drew on knowledge and experiences of living in New Orleans, living with Brazilians, and traveling to Brazil to operationalize a joint vision. In the chapter that follows, I will examine the ways in which the utopian project of Casa Samba is impacted by being in New Orleans, more specifically, by its location within the cultural landscape of a city whose dominant economic engine is tourism.

Chapter Six: External Authenticity, Tourism, and Performance in New Orleans

PROLOGUE: AUTHENTICITY AND AUTHORITY

The concept of authenticity is useful for interpreting both Casa Samba as an entity and examining its place in the New Orleans cultural landscape. Members of Casa Samba use the term themselves in discussing the nature of the group, and the debate surrounding the term in the social science literature endures with limited resolution. This is especially true in social science that deals with tourism (see Lau 2010). Anthropologists and other researchers in early waves of tourism studies have devoted particular attention to interpreting Daniel Boorstin's (1972) and Dean MacCannell's (1976) foundational definitions of authenticity as something desired by visitors to exotic places. Some concluded that the concept was either meaningless or had too many meanings and therefore should be abandoned in favor of different questions about the tourist experience (Gladstone 2005, Linnekin 1991). Researchers who eschewed discussions of authenticity often assumed that to use the label is to make a judgment regarding the nature of one individual, place, or group of people or places over another (Kenna in Scott and Selwyn 2010). Others argued that applying the label “authentic” to a particular culture or place tells us more about ourselves as researchers and less about the cultures we encounter (Handler 1986). Some theorists note that tourists are not the only authenticity seekers; ethnographers are often on a similar quest (see Trouillot 2003). What many interpreters of authenticity miss is the fact that the concept has real meaning and utility for ordinary people and that there is a particular kind of power that can be wielded in applying the label.

Edward Bruner expands on Handler's assessment of the use of the label “authentic” and agrees with Trouillot that tourism and anthropological excursions often share a common purpose (1989). But Bruner goes beyond examining authenticity at a theoretical level and offers four

distinct definitions of the concept in his examination of New Salem, Illinois—the “authentic” home of Abraham Lincoln (Bruner 1994). His fourth definition is the one that matters most for my interpretation of Casa Samba. In this definition, authenticity “merges into a notion of authority” (Bruner 1994:400), and identifiable agents of authenticity emerge. Authenticity becomes more than “a property inherent in an object, forever fixed in time” (Bruner 1994:408). It becomes “a struggle, a social process in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history” (Bruner 1994:408).

Actual people make decisions about what is authentic. Whether or not they have the authority to convince others that their definition is correct depends on the specific context of the cultural contest. In New Orleans, individual cultural organizations develop ways to perform their identities to themselves and audiences, but the organization’s performance of identity is influenced or partially constructed by the limits of the tourism economy. The tourism economy determines whether and how culture bearers present themselves to paying customers. Agents of this economy have authority over what authentically represents New Orleans to visitors, and the authority of individuals and cultural organizations to assert their own definitions of authenticity confronts that of the tourist industry (see Gotham 2007 and Souther 2006 for complementary analyses of the emergence of the contemporary tourism economy in New Orleans).

The confrontation between the authority and authenticity Casa Samba has and that of the New Orleans tourist industry is not necessarily a violent one. Nor will there ever be a clear winner or loser. As sociologist Kevin Gotham argues, dismissing tourism as corrupting or commodification as uniformly deleterious for culture workers is to ignore the agency of those who work within tourism economies (2007). It is more interesting, and in fact more useful for a fuller interpretation of how tourism operates, to “investigate the process of authentication

through which different groups and interests make claims for local authenticity and attempt to legitimate their constructions of race and culture” (Gotham 2007:5). Gotham and I have similar goals in this respect. Casa Samba reveals the ways in which a tourism economy provides an opportunity for individual and collective identity reconstruction, transformation, and artistic expression. While the economy imposes limits on Casa Samba, and on every cultural organization working within it, it also is the very thing that permits the group to exist, and to exist as an authentic representation of Afro-Brazilian carnival culture. But of course, it is not the amorphous “economy” doing this. Curtis, Carol, Bomani, Jorge, and all the members of Casa Samba are the agents in their construction of an authenticity that puts them at odds, occasionally, with the definition of the term that has emerged as the tourism economy has become the dominant one in New Orleans.

Gotham, like most researchers who have done work on tourism in New Orleans, explains the dominance of that industry as inevitable once the oil and gas industries failed to continue as an economic engine of the city (2007:116; see also Atkinson 2004, Souther 2006). As the tourism became the dominant source of revenue for the city, a rationalization of the city’s culture began to occur and harden into place an idea—dialectically constructed by “major tourism organizations” and the expectations of visitors—of what is “authentic” New Orleans (Gotham 2007:95, 133-141). Gotham argues that a “touristic culture” dominates New Orleans now that “tourist modes of staging, visualization, and experience increasingly frame meanings and assertions of local culture, authenticity, and collective memory” (Gotham 2007:120-121). In working within the economy that propagates this approach to culture, Casa Samba shows that what is “authentic New Orleans” is mutable, and moreover, that it is inevitably “plural, conflictual, and contested” (Gotham 2007:164).

INTRODUCTION

If we trace his development as a person and as a musician, Bomani expresses the relationship between Casa Samba's ideal of being a professional and authentic samba organization and the larger culture of the city in which the group is situated. His parents embraced samba by choice, as adults, and as a mechanism for creating their identities according to definitions of personal authenticity that allowed them to transcend the limits of their inherited identities. Bomani, in contrast, was raised in his parents' adopted tradition and from a very young age was a working member of the family business that offered this tradition to others. By virtue of being the son of two people with strong senses of themselves, of the paths their lives would take, and of a commitment to their adopted tradition, Bomani knows well what it means to be involved in the utopian project his parents began before he was born. He is a willing participant in it as much as he is subject to it, in fact, and he is capable of articulating the value he perceives in how he was raised in contrast to how other children his age grow up.

Through his narrative and through his parents' discussions of him, this chapter will examine Bomani as an embodied conjuncture of the Afro-Brazilian traditions in which his parents are raising him and the local New Orleans cultural practices among which he has spent his life. Here, I also discuss the relationships that Curtis and Carol have to New Orleans culture and the ways these relationships inform their leadership of Casa Samba. This examination of personal sensibilities and opinions broadens to an interpretation of Curtis' and Carol's ideas about how they continue to ensure Casa Samba's place in the local cultural landscape. Their challenge is to do this as the group evolves to situate itself in the context of an authenticity produced by agents of the city's tourism economy. I also analyze Jorge Alabê's relationship to the Pierre family and to Casa Samba because it is integral to understanding how Casa Samba's identity as an authentic

representative of Afro-Brazilian culture shapes the group's place in the city's tourism economy. My examination then narrows to focus on the types of performances that Jorge, Curtis, and Carol have developed together over the years. These performance types are a direct product of Jorge's involvement in the group, and indeed Casa Samba's authority to negotiate a place in the tourism economy comes partly from Jorge's authorization of Casa Samba as an authentic representative of Afro-Brazilian culture.

In the sections that follow, I present biographical narratives of both Jorge and Bomani and examine them in ways that reiterate some of the conclusions already drawn about professionalization. I include these narratives here, and do not embed them in the preceding discussion for two reasons. First, Jorge's contribution to Casa Samba's professionalism is clear, but it goes beyond ideas and suggestions. Jorge has shaped Casa Samba's physical presence in the cultural landscape, and thus in the tourism economy, of New Orleans. The types of shows the group performs are products of Jorge's influence, ideas, and his literal physical presentation of how to move, behave, and perform in public as an authentic representation of Afro-Brazilian traditions.

Second, Jorge's story reveals that the person who supplied Casa Samba's initial burst of authenticity by authorizing the group as a genuine, professional presenter of Afro-Brazilian culture is a conflicted person. While Jorge gave Curtis and Carol the tools to really build their professional performance organization, and while he believed then and believes now that they accurately capture Brazilian drumming and dance culture, Jorge also experienced life and work in New Orleans with some ambivalence. That Curtis' and Carol's certainty regarding their own and Casa Samba's authenticity emerges from ambivalence and conflict in Jorge's personal story is instructive. The details Jorge supplies about his relationship to the Pierre family and to Casa

Samba offer empirical evidence of the idea that authenticity is contested, relational, and processual in nature.

Casa Samba is an authentic samba school because it adheres to certain principles that match an interpretation of what the schools in Brazil do, what a Brazilian repertory dance company does, and because this external definition of authenticity falls within the boundaries of the personal authenticity the Pierre family seeks for itself. The group's identity, actions, and ongoing employment are rooted in the Pierre family's power to define Casa Samba using the authority Jorge offered and that they now bear on their own. The Pierres rely on this authority to build their own ideas of producing authenticity through professionalism, as chapter four shows. Casa Samba's livelihood and capacity to thrive is also rooted, however, in the tourist industry's recognition of the group as a representative of nonnative carnival. This chapter examines the interaction between Casa Samba's authenticity—one rooted in Curtis' and Carol's personal senses of authenticity and in their utopian vision of how the future is supposed to look—and New Orleans' authenticity as it is constructed by the tourism economy.

For Curtis, distinguishing between Casa Samba and New Orleans carnival practices and explicitly separating them is a means of asserting his organization's essential role as an authentic representative of Brazilian carnival. For Bomani, authenticity is not (yet) a primary concern and his examination of Casa Samba's place in the local performance context is different from his father's as a result. Bomani, whose ideas about his cultural positionality are central to understanding Casa Samba as an evolving organization, will inherit both the necessity of being concerned with authenticity and the right to define it for Casa Samba. His story is that of a person who knows he is at the beginning of a fantastic journey through musical cultures, and he spends a lot more time talking about the present and the future than about the past. Bomani's

story, like Jorge's, offers good empirical data on how the ideas that the Pierre family has about professionalism, performance, and tourism in New Orleans operate in a physical sense.

BOMANI PIERRE NEVER GETS A DAY OFF



Fig. 4: Bomani parading with Casa Samba at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, a short-form show, in 2008. Photo by author.

When I met Bomani in 2006, he was eleven years-old and one of the most talented percussionists I had ever seen. Upon seeing him perform, I thought, “Well, it must not matter that he is American.” In my mind, I was comparing him to the scions of the capoeira masters and samba drummers I had met, in the United States and Brazil, who are uniformly remarkable. Children who are raised in a specific tradition, and who do not reject it in favor of a more

ordinary childhood, become great. This was my position before I began doing life history interviews with Bomani, and it remains my position today.

Bomani was very pleased, in 2008, when I asked if I could interview him for a class project. He told everyone with whom he came into contact about the interview. I was glad he had agreed to be interviewed. The idea for this dissertation was beginning to take shape, and I wanted to see if it would be possible to do a life history of the Pierre family as a whole and not limit the history to its adult members. From that first interview, conducted on the front porch of their home, I learned that Bomani's earliest childhood memories included performing on a main stage at the Jazz and Heritage Festival, that he loved growing up in a household that included many people besides his parents, that he absorbed a great deal of information on trips to visit friends and samba schools in Brazil, and that he worked nearly every day in some capacity for Casa Samba.

Reflecting on his schedule and his commitments to Casa Samba in 2008, Bomani compared himself to other children. Stating simply that "a lot of kids get time off. I don't," Bomani seemed to wish for time off for a moment, but then went on to talk about balancing his schedule as it was. When he played sports on playground teams, the coaches would drop him off at samba rehearsal when practice ended. If he had a conflict between a Casa Samba performance and a game, he knew that the Casa Samba show took precedence most of the time. Bomani, at thirteen years-old, understood himself as a professional percussionist who was employed by Casa Samba. As his father explained the situation to an imaginary Bomani one afternoon, Casa Samba is his responsibility. Curtis related Bomani's responsibilities to those ordinary children have:

'Some kids have to cut grass. Some kids have to wash dishes. You have to read this music. You have to do this, you have to do that. This is your job outside of Casa Samba [rehearsal].' Then we go to Casa Samba [rehearsal and] 'Okay, these are your duties, you have to do this and this and this. This is part of the family work. It's a business and your chores. Some kids have to cut the grass. You have to go to practice and lead the band and do these things.'

Part of the reason Bomani was (and is) a willing professional is that his father and mother offered him no choice in the matter. But another part of the reason is that Bomani shares his parents' enthusiasm for Afro-Brazilian culture, especially drumming.

While there exists a somewhat usual parent/child divide with Bomani on one side and Curtis and Carol on the other, this dynamic was affected by the continuous presence of fictive kin in the Pierre household. A number of Brazilian and American percussionists, dancers, and capoeiristas have lived with the Pierre family over the past three decades, but two non-permanent residents of the household have had a particular impact on the family. Jorge Alabê was the longest-term resident of the house, living with the family for nearly ten years in all (with breaks during which he lived elsewhere). Jorge is Bomani's actual godfather and acts in many ways as a second father to him. Marcio Pires has been a resident of the Pierre house on several occasions, and though he did not stay as long as Jorge, his close relationship as Bomani's fictive brother means that Bomani is deeply influenced by a young, dynamic drummer who is older than him, but to whom he relates as more of a peer than he does to Jorge. What equalizes Bomani and his parents in their familial relationships with Jorge and Marcio is that all of the Pierres are students of these two men. While they are students to different degrees, and while their individual relationships to Jorge and Marcio are distinct, the presence of respected Brazilian teachers in their daily lives unites the Pierre family as a unit of Americans in constant exchange with authentic Brazilian representatives of the culture they have chosen to adopt.

JORGE ALABÊ: FRIEND, MENTOR, *PADRINHO*



Fig. 5: Jorge performing with Casa Samba in 2011. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

Curtis and Carol met Jorge when Oba Oba, the internationally recognized revue of Brazilian music and dance for which Jorge was the musical director for many years, performed in New Orleans. Curtis and Carol both tell a key story in Casa Samba's creation myth about how they established contact with Jorge and the Oba Oba performers who were staying in a hotel downtown. Curtis managed to sneak Jorge and a few others out of the hotel (they were not allowed, under order of Oba Oba's director, to leave) and bring them back to his and Carol's house for a party. From this point forward, in Curtis' and Carol's telling, their relationship with Jorge and other key performers from Oba Oba (especially a dancer named Paula who would return to New Orleans to teach master classes, and a capoeira *mestre* named Cobra Mansa who would teach Curtis capoeira angola), helped to authenticate Casa Samba. Casa Samba is not

only modeled after the *escolas de samba* with their community-oriented missions, their year-round carnivalizing practices, and their focus on performances during *Carnaval*. It is also modeled after Oba Oba itself in ways that will be elaborated upon in the discussion of performance types that follows. Here, I offer Jorge's interpretation of his early days in the Pierre household in order to interpret the complexity of his relationship to the Pierre family, to Casa Samba, and to the United States.²⁶ I combine Jorge's own analysis with Curtis' and Bomani's perspectives on living with and learning from Jorge so that we can situate Jorge's interventions as integral to understanding Casa Samba's development into the organization it is today.

Bomani's memory of Jorge's time living in his house is certainly a child's memory. He loved having Jorge around, and Jorge, who missed his own children in Brazil, loved Bomani instantly as a son. Bomani remembers being grateful that he and Jorge shared a room because he was afraid of sleeping in there alone at night. Jorge's companionship more than compensated for his belligerent snoring. Jorge was a welcome presence in the daytime too, always joking, willing to have fun, but also serious about sharing his lifetime of drumming knowledge with Curtis and Bomani.

Curtis frames his relationship with Jorge as both a medium of cultural exchange and as kinship. When Jorge arrived to stay in New Orleans in 1993, he did not speak a lot of English and Curtis' knowledge of Portuguese was similarly limited. The two men began what Curtis called a "word exchange" where he would speak English, Jorge would speak Portuguese, and off they would go in the direction of mutual understanding. Over time, Curtis' Portuguese language skills improved as Jorge's facility with English did. Through their language exchange and coresidence, Jorge and Curtis grew very close. In his reflections on this period of his and Jorge's relationship, Curtis blended fictive kinship into the means through which he fully adopted and

embodied—lived, rather than learned—Brazilian culture through his relationship with Jorge. Expressly labeling Jorge as kin, Curtis said, “I would always tell him, I said, ‘You know, I’m like your son. Whatever you do, I’m going to learn, [and] just what’s there for me to learn. I’m not going to take any more.’ And I learned so much like that.”

Curtis’ method of learning from Jorge involved being around and available to absorb whatever Jorge offered him. And whether the lessons were about music or culture, they were ultimately about life itself. He contrasted this embodied and experiential learning with other ways of learning from Jorge that occur in classes and workshops. His and Jorge’s relationship is a special one, and it is through this relationship that Curtis began to gain confidence in his process of manufacturing a new identity. Reflecting on the difference between learning music and culture in classes and workshops and adopting these things as components of a larger identity, Curtis compares the latter experience to the process of growing up. He said,

I just realized this is how I was learning. I was not learning it, I was living it. That was a big difference. Anything I just picked up would just kind of fly away just as fast, but something that I grew up with is going to stick with me. Growing with [Jorge], it was just an amazing combination to make that happen. That’s like a big part of Casa Samba as well as my life because ... being involved with him has changed my life a lot.

Jorge’s life changed through his involvement with Curtis and Casa Samba as well. His overall position on the changes that have occurred is positive, and Jorge loves the Pierre family deeply and views them as his own family. But adapting to life in a foreign place that felt not only strange, but cruel, and finding his place within the family and the city that was to be his home was a complicated process for Jorge. This process is not something that any of the Pierres recollect when they think about their relationships with Jorge and his interpretation of his relationships with the family add a layer of complexity to my thoughts on how Casa Samba came to be what it is.

When Oba Oba came to New Orleans, Curtis was very persistent in establishing a relationship with Jorge. This relationship would grow into a mentorship wherein Jorge taught Curtis how to run a real samba school. Jorge's authority as a drummer, instructor, music director, and representative of Brazilian samba authenticity would be paralleled by Curtis' and Carol's position as Jorge's American sponsors for legal residence, thus evening out—to a certain extent—a potentially lopsided relationship. Basically, Jorge lived with the Pierres and they made sure his legal paperwork was in order and he offered his knowledge and status to their nascent samba school.

Jorge described, at length, Curtis' persistence in bringing him to New Orleans permanently. He says that Casa Samba people had a party for him and some other Oba Oba members at Curtis and Carol's house, and then after that, when Oba Oba went on tour in the United States and Brazil, Curtis called all the time. When that seemed like it might not be effectively conveying his wish that Jorge come back to New Orleans and help him run Casa Samba, Curtis enlisted the help of his capoeira teacher, Cobra Mansa, who was a good friend of Jorge's. Cobra called Jorge and said, "Man, he want to bring you here for you build his group for him." Jorge remembered thinking, "Well, this is not bad. It's okay." He continues, "I made the cooperation. They say, 'He going to give salary for you, work permit, everything here. Everything legal.' Then I give everything. Curtis and Carol work very hard for this." This was in 1993, and Jorge left Oba Oba to come to New Orleans and work with the Pierre family on Casa Samba full time. Thus began his roles as Curtis' brother and Bomani's *padrinho*.

After being in New Orleans for two months, Jorge wanted to go home. He missed his children and his family, and he says Bomani arrived and the household changed as the new parents began to focus on their infant son. Cobra and Curtis each begged Jorge to stay, but he

left. Curtis called regularly. Jorge was running another group in Brazil, he'd traveled to Paris twice with them over the course of a year, and Curtis kept calling. Jorge explained his resistance to returning to New Orleans. "You want me to stay in the United States for what? I don't speak English. The living is so strange. You people are so strange. Strange people. Man, it was hard for me, you know? After a while, Curtis change, Carol change. They show me the real American people. That scare me right there because American people are terrible." At this, I laughed and asked, "Really?" And Jorge replied, "Oh boy. Shit yes. You know better than me." This discussion reveals Jorge's ambivalence about his American fictive kin. Life in the United States was hard, and having fictive family only made it slightly easier to live in a strange place.

But Jorge did give in to Curtis' persistence and return to New Orleans. Jorge had decided that the benefits of leading a samba school in the United States outweighed the costs of missing his family. Doing the same work in Brazil was not as lucrative in working in the U.S., nor did Jorge experience the kind of prestige and admiration that he received from American samba professionals who sought his guidance. The combination of Curtis' tenacity and Jorge's recognition that life in the United States offered opportunities he desired compelled Jorge to return to New Orleans. It did not hurt that upon his return he met a woman with whom he fell in love, lived for three years, and wanted to marry. This relationship made New Orleans bearable in ways that his kinship to the Pierre family had not. But ultimately, that relationship ended and Jorge moved back home with Curtis, Carol, and Bomani and renewed his investment in Casa Samba as its artistic director.

Jorge defines his return to the Pierre household following his break up with the woman he loved as a major turning point in his life. The breakup itself hardened his distaste for Americans

and their ways of being, and affirmed his idea that living in the U.S. would always be difficult.

He explained:

Well, Casa Samba started to be more important in my life after that. Because, [there were two choices]: [Either], kick the bucket and go back to Brazil?, [Or], stay here and face the situation. I prefer to face the situation. I stop to drink, I stop to smoke. I say, ‘Okay, that’s the life is supposed to be.’ And she teach me how to live in America now. She teach me the hard way how to live here. This is what makes me successful, because I know how to do it, now I know how to treat American people. I’m sorry, but that’s true. It’s totally different. The culture is totally different.

Jorge is not fond of Americans as a people or the United States as a place. This much should be clear from his characterization not only of a woman who broke his heart, but of the people with whom he has the strongest ties in the U.S. Jorge’s immigrant identity, his status as an outsider who can view American culture as a thing distinct from his own and dislike it, shapes his approach to life in New Orleans, life with the Pierres, and work with Casa Samba. But he followed up with a return to the fictive kinship he’d begun to develop with the Pierres. He said, “That [the break up] happened, then I dedicate more myself. And then Curtis’ family [met] and decided to help me. And then I started to be with Curtis’ sister and I marry her, too. You know, and life change after this.”

Part of what changed from this point forward is Curtis himself. In the early days of their friendship, and indeed in the earliest days of Casa Samba by all recollections, Curtis was a difficult person to work with. He was opinionated and not necessarily interested in sparing anyone’s feelings. He was egotistical and nearly never worried about how that impacted his relationships with group members, friends, or family. While Curtis has never been mean, bitter, or cruel, everyone I interviewed for this project—including Curtis, who I quote here—agrees that it was, at one time, “detrimental” to learn from him.

Thinking back, Jorge sees Curtis as a changed, and continually changing, man. He takes responsibility for helping Curtis change, for helping him become, perhaps, less American,

through the adoption of the various Afro-Brazilian cultural practices that Jorge offered and Curtis received. Jorge took his time explaining the vagaries of Curtis' gradual change:

Oh boy, [in the past], ‘excuse me,’ for him? This does not work. This is *babaca* [foolishness] [to Curtis]. To be humble for him, it doesn’t work, okay? He doesn’t know how to be humble. At all. Period. He’d tell you: ‘Do this!’ How you’re going to take [it]? That’s your problem. I made him understand where I was coming from. This hurt people. To me, he doesn’t do it anymore! He’s not crazy. If he does [it], he loses me. I told him already. He knows that, he knows that! Now, my situation’s changed a lot. I’m here [makes his hands equal in height]. Before, I [was] here [makes one hand lower than the other]. This was the problem, when I was here [indicates the lower hand].

I asked how Jorge and Curtis worked out their difficulties, and Jorge stopped me before I finish the question:

*Orixá.*²⁷ Orixás make him change. … He changed after me. I changed his life. Not [me], what I showed to him, and what I put in his life, changed his life. The reason he has this house today? Orixás help him a lot. Make him change. Because he thinks he makes connections, it’s impossible to happen in his life, it happens, now, it makes him trust something. Before, he was not trusting [anything].

Ultimately, Jorge brought the discussion back to American people in general to situate Curtis' way of being in the past. He said, “Curtis made me cry in the past, girl. The way he talks. [It's] sad. American people. To put him in the real position [took] a while.” I replied to this by asking, “but you helped?” And Jorge said, “Thank you god, thank you god, I did for good! He learned. And now everybody loves him at Brazil Camp.²⁸ Everybody gets him, everybody likes him. Before? This was impossible.”

I asked Jorge why he did it, why he helped Curtis become what Jorge believes is a better version of himself. Jorge, again, answered before I had really finished asking the question.

I did it because *he* brought me here! He gave the chance for me to start something on my own! Why [wouldn’t] I share my culture with him? Why [not] give him the spiritual life like he deserve? … I’m still with him because things worked. He appreciated everything I did. I always show him appreciation myself [for] everything he did. You know what I’m saying? It’s like, today, we’re definitely family.

I asked if his formulation of family includes Carol and Bomani, and Jorge replied, “Oh yeah, totally. Bomani is my baby. Carol’s, eh, Curtis’ wife. I don’t go there so much.”

Jorge creates the discussion of family on his own during our interview and shows that in spite of his ambivalence about Curtis, Carol, and Americans in general in the early days of his life here, he has adopted them as family through offering his culture to them. Jorge is undoubtedly the greatest, and most durable, Afro-Brazilian influence on the Pierre family. That their family life together has been rocky at times should not be surprising, nor should the fact that Jorge feels closer to his fictive brother and godchild than he does to his fictive sister-in-law. As in any family, gender differences can construct a wall between members.

Commenting specifically on his shaping of Bomani's life, Jorge said, "Bomani's going to be a big man! He's going to be a very big man when he goes away and does his own life. He's going to appreciate everything that I did for him, you know?" Jorge is certain that Bomani will move out of the house when it's time for him to go to college, and while he sees this as a positive thing for Bomani, he explains that Brazilian families stay together longer than American families and seems to favor the Brazilian arrangement. But putting that aside, and recognizing that Curtis and Carol want Bomani to experience life outside of their household and outside of New Orleans, Jorge returned to Bomani's specialness and his role in helping to raise Bomani right. He said, "He's good. He's a lucky boy because he grew up in the middle of good people, good spirit people, good *energia* [energy] people. You know? And *we* [did] not let him grow up on the corner. Especially on the corner, right? You don't see Bomani do this. You don't have friends coming here to call Bomani. No!" [Emphasis added.]

The fictive kinship that exists between Bomani and Jorge is especially strong. He may have some ambivalence in his feelings about Carol and Curtis. They are all adults. But Jorge feels a specific and paternal tenderness for his godson. Moreover, the godfather/godson relationship is one that is formalized to a greater extent in American and Brazilian cultures than is the fictive

kinship Jorge shares with Bomani's parents. Curtis and Carol, who have adopted Jorge's cultural practices, language, and mores to a certain degree, made a role for Jorge as a co-parent of their child, recognizing the strength of bond that could exist between him and their son. But the bond that the Pierre family as a whole has built between themselves and Jorge is so strong because Jorge was the family's primary collaborator in authenticating Casa Samba. His strong ties to the Pierres as a family member situate his role as a professionalizer and authenticator, and without the tumultuous and gradual development of genuine family ties, it is possible that Jorge would not have influenced Casa Samba to the extent that he has. But those ties, and the conflict that can appear in close relationships, do exist. Because of them, it was Jorge, more than anyone, who offered legitimacy to Casa Samba as a samba school, as a performance organization, and, ultimately, as a valid representative of Afro-Brazilian culture. Casa Samba accepted Jorge's offer of authenticity and with his guidance developed the best and most appropriate physical presence in the cultural landscape of New Orleans.

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT: TWO KINDS OF SHOWS

Much of the professionalism that Curtis and Carol insist on in Casa Samba is related to ideals of professionalism that Jorge developed as a leader of Oba Oba. In chapter four, I examined the Pierres' understanding of professionalism as way of ensuring that Casa Samba is as authentic a representation of Afro-Brazilian culture as it can be. In this section, I will broaden that examination to include a discussion of how Jorge's ideas validated the Pierres' sense of how a professional performance organization would reflect the form of Afro-Brazilian culture that they value. In professionalizing Casa Samba, Curtis and Carol worked towards making their organization similar in some ways to Oba Oba. Oba Oba presented Brazilian culture to the

world in a performance style that Curtis and Carol believe is the highest form available for their goal of presenting authentic Brazilian music and dance to a wide variety of New Orleans audiences within the local tourism economy.

Curtis bluntly and briefly characterizes Jorge as the impetus for the group's professionalization. However, I believe that Curtis and Carol also had their own ideas about making the transition from the enthusiastic and nonprofessional Palmares to what they envisioned for a genuine music and dance organization. What Jorge did was impose an authority on the situation that neither Curtis nor Carol—as Americans who were learning samba themselves—could achieve on their own. According to Curtis:

So kind of like when Jorge came, the group, I was trying to head it like more towards professional, you know, like a performance group. But the people's skills were minimal that I had to work with, so when Jorge came it was even a little bit more difficult for people to hang on because his high expectations of people, you know, because he was with this group that was like the top of Brazilian entertainers.

Carol also argues that Jorge's arrival acted as a particular impetus for the group to push itself in the direction of professionalism. Jorge's status as an actual Brazilian drummer who had a lifetime of experience being a samba professional in Oba Oba gave him a credibility that Curtis and Carol valued as they shaped Casa Samba for American audiences and for others who might be more critical of their capacity to lead a samba school. As Carol explained it, Curtis' desire was to be taken seriously by people who knew what samba was supposed to be:

[Curtis] just wanted to develop a true samba band that played traditional music. He wanted to authenticate what we were doing because he didn't want to be a rag-tag band that just played whatever. But if somebody from Brazil came in, they would be embarrassed and say, 'Oh, that's not Brazilian!' [laughs]

What the Pierres got from Jorge was the validation that comes with having a Brazilian artistic director helping to shape what the group would become. The kind of show that Oba Oba performed in theaters all over the world, including a record-breaking tour in the United States,²⁹

is a revue of as many forms of Afro-Brazilian music, dance, and culture as can fit in a two-hour format. According to Carol and Curtis, this format is what Casa Samba is meant to utilize. In offering audiences an opportunity to see dances and hear music from a variety of regions and cities in Brazil, Casa Samba is achieving its goal of bringing Brazil—and specifically Afro-Brazilian cultural forms—to American audiences.

Curtis and Carol divide Casa Samba's performance styles into two main types. There is the long-form show, modeled after Oba Oba's repertory dance company production that presents Brazilian culture through dances and musical forms that represent various regions of Brazil. And there is the short-form show, modeled after the *escola de samba* show that occurs most frequently as the schools parade during Carnaval. Curtis characterized the long-form show as one in which Casa Samba presents "Brazil" itself. He contrasted this type of show with the shorter form: "I think [the shorter shows] put us on the regular level of performance and [the full show] puts us more on a theatrical level. I would say this would be a *theatrical* show: different costumes, different atmospheres, and I think that's really the way to separate them." Carol also made a clear distinction between the two main types of performance Casa Samba offers. Her distinction parallels Curtis'. Carol linked this long-form show directly to the influence Oba Oba has had on Casa Samba through Jorge's professional experience and her admiration for Oba Oba's performances. She explained:

Well, we've tried to professionalize it so we do create that kind of Oba Oba feeling, to represent a number of elements within the culture. You know, we try to present a broader spectrum, not just samba, not just *forro*, not just *frevo*, but a combination. When you put the *orixás* or you put samba reggae and things like *maculelê* or *capoeira* all together, you get more of a cultural show. You know, we'll do parades. We'll do all the little samba hit it quick kind of things. But when it comes to performances, we try not just to do samba reggae, but to do a complement of several things that represent the Brazilian culture.

Returning to her insistence that samba should not be viewed as a relative of pole dancing, Carol also argues that the long-form show contextualizes samba so that the overt sexuality of samba

dance is deemphasized because the dancers appear in a variety of costumes and perform choreographed dances that feature dancers in groups. In this way, an audience's attention is on a body of dancers rather than on a single dancer's body. She said that when the audience "can see the variety costumes, then they get a healthier respect for what it is we do. They see it's not just the [passista] costume, it's not just the samba. But it's a group that's doing a cultural presentation of another country."



Fig. 6: Carol performing as the *orixá* Oxum in a long-form show in 2009. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

The long-form show—which Curtis labeled “theatrical” and Carol referred to as “cultural”—can be meant to have a didactic function. In her description of the ideal version of a long-form show, one that Casa Samba rarely has an occasion to perform, Carol argued that American audiences find the cultural show most interesting when they know what they are seeing on the

stage. When Casa Samba has performed in university settings—at events meant to expose audiences to “international” cultures—the group has had a program that offers brief descriptions of the history and significance of each part of the cultural show so that American, or at least non-Brazilian, audience members know how to interpret the performance. Carol explained that academic audiences are the only ones for whom this highly didactic version of Casa Samba’s cultural show can be performed, and Casa Samba does perform for these audiences. But more commonly, Casa Samba performs a version of the cultural show for an audience that is also interested in dancing along (rather than remaining seated). For these shows, the “cultural” elements of the performance—those that feature elaborate choreography presenting elements of Afro-Brazilian folklore—are interspersed with popular *pagode* songs and longer sets of samba reggae that are ideal for audiences to dance while also watching the dancers on stage.



Fig. 7: Choreography and charisma in a long-form show, 2009. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

The short-form shows are Casa Samba's bread and butter. These shows are the ones that Casa Samba performs most frequently, and through these performances, the group earns the majority of its annual income. Curtis described the short-form shows in terms of their economic function for Casa Samba. He said,

Well, the things we do for like fifteen minutes, most of them are parades or we just go and perform for ... [He cuts himself off and restarts.] I don't really call those performances. For me, the best way [to describe these shows] would be [as] a 'grant' because they help the group continue to function. I mean, people get paid and the group gets paid as well. So it's an economic thing for the group.

In viewing these shows as less representative of Casa Samba's mission of presenting Afro-Brazilian culture to American audiences and more oriented toward generating income, Curtis echoes the sentiment Carol expressed above. Casa Samba is capable of quick performances that present only one element of its overall repertoire, but this is not all the group is capable of. Curtis and Carol both value opportunities to present the fuller range of what Casa Samba can offer. These opportunities are rarer than those in which the group performs a short-form show. This is partly because Casa Samba's performance opportunities overall are tied to the tourism economy.

The parades to which Curtis and Carol refer in their quotations are not the parades that dominate the city during Mardi Gras season. They are talking about short parades through a hotel ballroom or a meeting room in the convention center. These types of parades are utilized not only by Casa Samba, for whom parading can have both a Brazilian Carnaval and a New Orleans Mardi Gras referent, but also by many representatives of local carnival traditions such as second line groups and Mardi Gras Indians in their performances in tourist spaces. As researchers who have done work analyzing the perspectives of local tradition bearers regarding their participation in the tourism economy have recounted, many of these groups feel that they

save their energy for the performances that are for *their* people. They value the performances that capture the fullest nature of their abilities in presentation to an audience that understands the complexity and nuances of the tradition that set up a charged relationship between performer and audience (see Atkinson 2004, Regis 1999). The shows for out of town visitors to the city have the potential to be a validating experience for the performers, but the only guarantee is that the show will provide income.

Bomani offered the best description of actually doing one of these parades. His account of an average Casa Samba parade gig suggests that the tourist audience who views the parade is a vastly different type from the kind who views Casa Samba's cultural show. Bomani said, "I don't remember a show where we stood still because we're always doing those, what do you call those things?" He began to hum and mime a conga line, but the image was pretty vague. I laughed and said, "I don't know what that is." He said, "You know, cha cha cha, cha cha cha?" "Bomani, I think that's a conga line." "Yeah, alright, a conga line. We do it like six times around. And the people, they [are] *so* drunk. [Laughs] They don't understand. They don't understand that it's tiring. It doesn't bother them at all."

Because these short, tourist shows are associated with an uncaring audience and are viewed by Casa Samba's members and leadership primarily as a means of generating revenue, the group does not "parade" frequently outside of the venues where tourists gather when they are in town for something besides music culture. There are other tourist venues, however, in which Casa Samba performs its long form show because the visitors are here to experience the music and culture of New Orleans.³⁰ Carol expressed significant dismay at the fact that in 2008, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival invited Casa Samba to do a parade and did not put the group on a main stage. Casa Samba had performed its long-form show on main stages at Jazz Fest in

the past, and like many groups, expected to be restored to that position once it had pulled itself back together from the disaster of scattered membership that followed Hurricane Katrina. Doing a parade at a convention is one thing, but Jazz Fest was supposed to be a different kind of venue for the group. As Carol explained:

We're doing a parade. They won't put us on a stage! Crazy! So, we're going to give them what they want, I mean, [laughs] just what they asked for. Nothing more, nothing less. You know, we're not giving them our costumes. There's no sense in us wearing our really nice costumes to parade through the dust.

In sum, there are two primary forms of performance Casa Samba utilizes: the long-form show that it prefers because it represents Brazilian culture on a larger scale, and the short-form show that is less edifying and less representative of the group's total repertoire. The short-form shows can be performed more regularly and they bring in money that supports the group's commitment to open, inexpensive or free classes five days a week for anyone who wants to come and the free shows the group performs for smaller festivals for which its dancers and drummers who are part of the company do not get paid. However, the distinction between these two forms can be fuzzy. This is especially true when a short-form show takes on a deeper meaning by virtue of the location in which it is performed. Below, I examine Casa Samba's participation in Mardi Gras in an effort to explore not only how the group benefits and suffers in one realm of the tourism economy, but also how the significance of the group's performances is contingent on the spaces in which they occur.

PLACE MATTERS

Finding a place within the New Orleans cultural landscape for Casa Samba is a dynamic and continuously evolving process for Curtis and Carol. The Pierre family, including Jorge, uses Casa Samba's performances to create a boundary, a distinction, between what Casa Samba

presents and what is offered by other performers in New Orleans. The embodied nature of Casa Samba as a lifestyle, a tradition, a practice, and a business means that “place” is produced by Casa Samba not visually, but sensually (cf. Cohen 1995). Music, according to musicologist Sara Cohen, evokes place (1995:438). That is, music (and, presumably dance) is important for the expression of individual and collective identity that is tied to a physical or geographic location and it is also transportive (Cohen 1995:439).

In the case of older Yiddish-speaking Jews in Liverpool who are the focus of Cohen’s study, whose ethnic identity was expressed through spoken language and song and knowledge of songs, music is evocative of a place other than the one in which people find themselves (1995). But music, for the younger, more assimilated children of this generation, evokes a connection to Liverpool itself. This is a connection to the “journeys, routes, and activities of everyday life” of Cohen’s primary informant, Jack, an ordinary man with an intense memory of his youth as a music-loving dancer who made the rounds to all the dancehalls in his neighborhood (1995:442–443). In his memories of particular songs and dances, music produces place for Jack. He sings and moves with his own music when he tells Cohen his story so that Jack fills the space with music, sensuously producing it as a place, a meaningful area in which he articulates his own identity and expresses his connection to a collective one (1995:444).

Casa Samba is a place, one that has been sensuously produced by an accretion of thousands³¹ embodied experiences of living and breathing samba. Curtis, Carol, Bomani, and—in a different way—Jorge, defined the group as their home, a place in which their choices about preserving and presenting a living culture in a city far from that culture’s “natural” home made sense. What makes this sensuous production of a home place possible is that Casa Samba is itself at home, in a manner of speaking. New Orleans is the only city in North America, and perhaps in the world,

in which an urban carnival exists to rival those found in Brazil. While the tourism economy generally makes it possible for Casa Samba to exist in all its complex forms, that economy's relationship to Mardi Gras offers the specific context for Casa Samba's continued success in New Orleans. Tourism and Mardi Gras have always been closely tied; city leaders have used it to attract visitors since Comus hit the streets in 1857 (Gotham 2007:36–37). Jorge's response to a question about whether Mardi Gras (*not* "tourism") and samba are related suggests this as well. He said, "I think so because New Orleans is a *turista* city. That's the most important thing for New Orleans."

One thing that New Orleans shares with Rio de Janeiro, one of samba's birthplaces, is a tourism economy rooted in attracting visitors using African-derived cultural forms. These forms are often marketed in the context of the annual carnivals that occur each year. As historian Mark Souther demonstrates in his detailed history of the rise of tourism in New Orleans, Mardi Gras can be viewed as an intensified period of presenting local culture to out-of-town visitors (2006:132–158). The forces that shape Mardi Gras as an event that should appeal to tourists are related to those manifesting in French Quarter preservation, in promoting professional sports, in supporting the performance of jazz music, among other things (Souther 2006). In this way, performance groups ranging from Casa Samba to the Olympia Brass Band contend with processes that are both positive and negative in their impact on cultural production. On the one hand, local culture bearers can position themselves within the tourism economy to earn a living. On the other hand, whatever agency they have as independent practitioners may end up limited by the exigencies of that economy and the versions of authenticity that it produces. Casa Samba, in presenting a set of cultural practices that is foreign but related to New Orleans culture to

visitors from all over the world, offers an intriguing example of how to make tourism work in a group's favor.

CARNIVAL FROM BRAZIL

When Curtis returned to New Orleans but had not yet established himself in the position of leading Palmares' samba band, he was earning income by selling his pen and ink drawings in the French Quarter alongside dozens of other artists hoping to catch the attention of tourists. Curtis was a free-form, though not necessarily abstract, artist, preferring to capture the images in his head than to produce the kind of thematic art that most visitors to the city sought as a souvenir. His work sold, especially once he gave in and began to produce drawings that reflected the dominant imagery of New Orleans that the tourist industry has long cultivated. Eventually, however, Curtis grew frustrated with the French Quarter's art economy. He did not want to continue being "reduced to streetcars and saxophones and crawfish and crabs," as he put it. Fortunately, around the time that he had reached his limit with this art scene, Casa Samba was ready to emerge. He could focus his attention on that, an art form that offered him a way to engage with the tourism economy without compromising his values.

From the beginning, Casa Samba earned a steady income from the tourism economy. Curtis explained why Casa Samba is a popular commodity with visitors:

Most of the work we get for tourists is as 'over the top.' [That] means that they've had every type of New Orleans entertainment they can have, and then they want something different. We'll come in to be the difference. We're like the cream. We're the icing on top of the cake. They've done the Mardi Gras Indians, they've done everything. [They ask,] 'What do you have that's different, but that has to do with carnival? [The answer is:] 'Casa Samba.'

In this interview, I had asked Curtis to clarify whether Casa Samba is framed as "carnival" directly. He said, "That's how we get introduced, you know, as 'carnival from Brazil.' ... That's our motif."³² Asked whether the "carnival from Brazil" label is accurate, Curtis replied, "Oh

yes, definitely, all the way around the board. Because by working with people the way I do, like some of the samba schools charge people to come in and be part of the group, but some people are so poor you don't charge them anything. That's the way I work."

By explicitly tying his performances in the tourist environments, where Casa Samba is labeled "carnival from Brazil," to the larger mission of the group, Curtis establishes a connection between the short form, "hit it quick," shows and the group's ongoing success in *all* of its manifestations. While he, Carol, and Bomani all view the shorter shows primarily as income-generators, there is never a context in which Casa Samba is fully divorced from its core values of professionalism in presenting Brazilian carnival and Afro-Brazilian culture in support of offering audiences (as well as students and members) an understanding of the connections between New Orleans and Brazil. In a discussion of Casa Samba's impending application to perform at the 2012 Jazz Fest, Curtis accentuated exactly this connection. Arguing that Casa Samba should perform on a stage that ordinarily hosts a number of Mardi Gras Indian performance groups, Curtis said, "Well, this is carnival! There's another dimension to carnival besides just the Mardi Gras Indians." He went on to say that Casa Samba has performed in at least ten different areas of the Jazz Fest, so it must be possible for them to return to one of the main stages at some point. In an imaginary gambit to a Jazz Fest board member, Curtis would like to say, "Look, Casa Samba's been here for *twenty-five* years. We are a part of New Orleans *culture* here!" Curtis emphasized that Casa Samba has a place in carnival in New Orleans and, because of its tenure, a place in the wider cultural landscape of the city that is, as Mark Souther (2006) and Kevin Gotham (2007) argue, shaped partly by carnival's appeal to visitors. In the following section, I hope to demonstrate how deep Casa Samba's connection to New Orleans Mardi Gras practices is, even as the group works within Mardi Gras as a representative of "carnival from Brazil."

ZULU AND CASA SAMBA



Fig. 8: Casa Samba passistas at the short-form, but prestigious, Zulu performance, 2011.
Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

What would become the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club first appeared in New Orleans Mardi Gras in 1901 as a loosely organized “group” that had formed as a benevolent society and first appeared as “Zulu” in 1909. The organization was incorporated under its official title in 1916. Zulu’s parading krewe was known for its specific form of double mockery wherein the krewe’s black members dressed in black face and grass skirts in an exaggerated presentation of the backwardness that white people attributed to Africa and its descendent people in the New World. Taking control of the white mockery of black people, Zulu’s black membership decided

to own the images as a means of satirizing white ignorance. By the 1960s, the changes wrought by the Civil Rights movement had begun to impact Zulu's membership numbers; "dressing in a grass skirt and donning black face were seen as demeaning." By the late 1960s, however, Zulu had rebounded and in 1968 was pushed to parade on the main parade route (St. Charles Avenue and Canal Street) utilized by white Mardi Gras.³³ In the 1970s, the club opened its well-known clubhouse on Broad Street in Mid City. In addition to housing the club's memorabilia collection and serving as a meeting space, this building is the site of many year-round community activities organized by Zulu. By the 1980s, Zulu was an institution in the city's Mardi Gras celebration. Its annual ball is attended by thousands of people, the king and queen are chosen from among the city's black elite, and its parade is a much anticipated Mardi Gras morning tradition for people from all walks of life and from all over the city and the world.³⁴

Here I analyze Casa Samba's performance at Zulu's annual Mardi Gras Ball to interpret the relationship between distinct, yet overlapping, carnival practices exhibited by Casa Samba and Zulu. Casa Samba is New Orleans' only consistent representative of the Afro-Brazilian elements of Carnaval. Through a relationship that Curtis established with the leadership of Zulu, the club decided to include Casa Samba as a group of drumming and dancing ambassadors of Brazilian carnival. Initially, Casa Samba marched in Zulu's parade on Mardi Gras morning, and eventually they began to perform at Zulu's ball on the weekend before Mardi Gras. Casa Samba's role at the ball is to parade in through the crowd of guests after the king and queen have been crowned in an elaborate ceremony and pay tribute to the new royalty.

Casa Samba's history of performing at the Zulu ball strengthens Curtis' claim that Casa Samba is a part of New Orleans culture. Casa Samba is not representing indigenous carnival practices or local cultural traditions, but it is building on those practices and traditions by making

a connection between two carnival traditions that have arisen in cities in which black culture has a particular prevalence.³⁵ An annual presence at the Zulu ball reinforces Casa Samba’s tie to black Mardi Gras in particular, and in the context of this prestigious venue, Casa Samba’s short form show acquires a different meaning from the one described above. The Zulu performance’s value for Casa Samba supports Cohen’s (2005) argument that embodied musical experience defines place in a meaningful way. The value of this performance also validates Curtis’ own position that representing “carnival from Brazil” is not reductive, but variably meaningful for Casa Samba. While the show at the Zulu ball looks similar to shows Curtis, Carol, and Bomani describe as being less valuable to Casa Samba, *this* show is a highlight of Casa Samba’s carnival season. This show is not about the money, this show is about prestige. By performing for New Orleans’ black royalty at its annual gala of black carnival, Casa Samba not only asserts its position as a valued piece of the New Orleans cultural fabric, it also reinforces a bond with the Brazilian samba schools after which it is modeled. As Curtis explained, he likes doing the performance at Zulu because “that’s my time of carnival, compared to Brazil, that’s my time of carnival.” He elaborated and said that for the samba schools in Rio, the height of their carnival season is the night that they “go through their thing.” If a samba school makes its march through the Sambódromo on the Friday before Carnaval, then that is the height of their season. From that point on, that group’s members will relax and enjoy Carnaval more as participants and less as performers. Curtis sees Casa Samba’s presence in Mardi Gras as mirroring that of its Brazilian counterparts. The performance that occurs closest to Mardi Gras Day will be the height of Casa Samba’s season.³⁶ In 2011, and in previous years, that honor went to the Zulu ball.



Fig. 9: Casa Samba passistas at the Zulu ball, 2011. Photo by Jeffrey Ehrenreich.

DRUM LINE

From the time he was able to go to Mardi Gras parades, Bomani dreamed of joining a marching band when he went to high school. In our first interview, when he was still in middle school, we talked about where he might go to high school. Bomani had already established a ranking for schools based partly on whether their bands were highly ranked in the city's informal and formal systems for such things. Bomani was a regular observer of the marching bands and he knew, partly because of his percussion training and partly because he and his peers in school debated such things, which bands were the best. Marching bands provide the musical accompaniment for football teams, as well as the soundtrack to the traditional parades that wind

through the city in the weeks preceding Mardi Gras Day. Top bands often march in many parades throughout the season, and the most prominent also perform at special events and on Fat Tuesday itself.

By the time Bomani and I began meeting regularly for interviews, he was a freshman in high school and a new member of the Warren Easton Charter High School drum section. Proving not only that is he a self-assured, talented, and ambitious high school freshman, but also that he knows how marching band culture functions in New Orleans, Bomani's method of joining Warren Easton's band was to challenge the drum section leader. "Challenging" is what it sounds like. One drummer challenges another with increasingly difficult cadences and the winner appears to be determined by both drummers and a corps of onlookers. Bomani described this with a teenager's instant remorse for telling a story that others might frame differently. He said, "Actually, it was funny how I got in the band. I walked up to the guy who's the section leader now and I said, 'Hey, y'all um, y'all want snare drummers?' And he said, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Well, I want to challenge you right now.'" I laughed and said, "You did not!" Bomani replied, "I did. But he beat me. But I liked him and it was fun and he told me after, 'Yeah, come to band practice tomorrow.'" When I interpreted his story as being about directly challenging a representative the established hierarchy of the marching band, Bomani backed off. "I wasn't trying to say like, you know, 'I really want to challenge.' I was just, you know, having fun. Somebody told me he was the section leader, then it was just trying to get a good relationship." When I asked if it worked, if he had a good relationship to the section leader in the band two months into the school year, Bomani said it did. The section leader gave him rides home "all the time."

As of this writing, Bomani is about to begin his second carnival season marching with the Warren Easton band. During the last season, Bomani’s double duty—as a member both of a band that marches throughout the Mardi Gras season *and* of his family’s samba school that experiences a significant increase in bookings during this time—took a toll on him. Though he enjoyed himself and is accustomed to being overbooked and very busy, balancing his commitments for both groups proved challenging. The challenge of keeping up with his schedule may have also impacted his grades. Bomani’s strongest focus is not his academic work, it is his musical work. From the beginning of his high school career, he has been threatened with or actively on probation from the marching band—sometimes by the band director’s decree, other times by his parents’ orders. But this focus on his musical work, while his parents are less than thrilled with his academic performance, is not unexpected. Bomani has been a professional musician for his whole life.

Bomani’s participation in the marching band, and in a brass band comprised of other high-school-age musicians, sets him apart from both of his parents and from his mentors, Jorge and Marcio. While Curtis and Carol enjoy Mardi Gras³⁷ and New Orleans music, neither of them performs with any group that could be considered a representative of either of these things. But Bomani, being in a traditional marching band, and in a brass band that enacts the tradition of playing jazz infused with contemporary black musical forms on the street, and in Casa Samba is overlapping his practices in a way that his parents and mentors do not. Bomani is, thus, the embodied conjuncture of New Orleans culture and Afro-Brazilian culture. His discussion of the relationship between his experiences in marching band and his experiences in Casa Samba reveal the extent to which Bomani is consolidating the diverse but related cultural practices with which he lives. In contrasting Bomani’s interpretation of Casa Samba’s place in New Orleans with

Curtis', I hope to show that there exists a generational variation in what gets interpreted as "authentic."

THE LIMITS OF OVERLAPPING PRACTICES: CASA SAMBA VS. NEW ORLEANS

Bomani and Curtis both note specific distinctions between Casa Samba and New Orleans carnival practices. Their evaluation of these distinctions is informed, however, by how they each came to be samba musicians. For Bomani, this was something he was born into. For Curtis, choosing to learn Brazilian percussion and develop the skills and connections necessary to lead a samba school outside of Brazil was a product of a series of choices made as an adult in search of a practice that "moved his soul." Given their different arrivals into samba as a practice, it is not surprising that Bomani and Curtis differ in their interpretations of Casa Samba's place in the local performance scene.

In nearly every instance in which Bomani compares marching band to Casa Samba, he offers examples of how the two groups are alike. Curtis does not have this impulse to tie the traditions together, and this speaks to his role as not only the current leader of Casa Samba, but also the main agent of its authentication. For Curtis, samba is pure, and his mission with Casa Samba is preserving Brazilian samba and interpreting it, authentically, for New Orleans audiences. Curtis recognizes that New Orleans provides a uniquely relevant location for this interpretation because of its being the site of Mardi Gras. He insists, however, that samba and New Orleans music are separate, and that samba is the better form. For Curtis, samba exists alongside, but not intermingled with, marching band, second line, and jazz music. Bomani recognizes his father's distinctions, but does not make them. He interprets the cultural forms he practices as being different not in musical terms, but in terms of his relationship to each of them.

Curtis believes that being in the Warren Easton band will “only raise [Bomani’s] level,” and increase his “sensitivity to music.” Curtis insists, however, on a contrast between Bomani’s samba skills and the knowledge he will gain through four years in marching band. Bomani will learn new skills in marching band, but, according to Curtis, “in the marching bands they make you play everything really exact, whereas in the traditional bands, everything is exact as well, but it’s a little more sophisticated.” Curtis went on to explain that “traditional” bands are those, like Casa Samba, which are rooted in what Americans view as “unorthodox” drumming techniques that do not adhere to the standards of order and organization that mark orthodox forms. Casa Samba does not conform to principles of “squaring everything off” that he identifies in marching band.

Curtis sees the driving principles of marching band drumming as “American,” but he also recognizes that marching band is part of set of musical practices that pertain to New Orleans carnival and views samba as being in conflict with these forms. Curtis also sees that Bomani is devoted to marching band and that he is fond of other New Orleans musical styles, but he declares victory in an imagined battle for his son’s musical attention. Bomani likes samba more. Curtis explained, “He is into the New Orleans thing, it’s a passion, but luckily I won and he’s into the samba thing. Now, he likes to second line, but I’ll be honest with you, second line is definitely on a lower class than samba.”

For Curtis, second line music—the version of jazz that accompanies New Orleans street parades bearing the same name—has not evolved the way samba has evolved over the past three decades. In arguing that samba has evolved, Curtis is making an authoritative statement of the power of the authentic form he has dedicated his life to performing in New Orleans. Relating the two forms to their locations of origin, he said, “The second line, Mardi Gras music, has not

changed. They keep the same beat and change the song. In Brazil, there are all types of sambas. Here, there's only one type of second line." Curtis sees himself and the group he runs as presenting a superior style of music, but he also relates samba to other New Orleans cultural forms that exhibit the complexity he sees in samba. He said, "Well, I think the only people that come close to what they do in samba schools are the Mardi Gras Indians and the buck jumpers because they're a group, and they have dancers and drummers and they have a theme."

In this way, Curtis identifies the means through which his adopted carnival form is related to contemporary local carnival forms. Having dancers, drummers, and a theme is central to samba schools and to the New Orleans traditions Curtis cites as being capable of evolving the way samba has. On the one hand, Curtis, the leader of a samba-based organization, takes a position that the samba school is a highly evolved cultural form in contrast to a popular musical tradition in the New Orleans carnival pantheon. On the other hand, he identifies local cultural organizations that are as evolved, in his estimation, as the samba school. In making a place for Casa Samba in the cultural economy of the city, Curtis is willing to draw on similarities to certain indigenous practices while asserting the superiority of his form to others.

For Bomani, a comparison of marching band and Casa Samba comes not from an evaluation of each from the outside, but from an interpretation of his personal involvement in the two forms. He does not discuss Casa Samba in relation to other indigenous carnival practices as Curtis does, revealing that he is less interested in contextualizing samba and authenticating its place in New Orleans carnival culture and more interested in explaining his participation in two distinct practices. Bomani views both marching band and Casa Samba as organizations that require discipline, personal sacrifice, and patience. In neither marching band nor Casa Samba does a person automatically receive respect. Real membership comes with time and observable

dedication. He talked at length about the initiation new members of the marching band experience during Homecoming Week. In order to become recognized band members, the first-year drummers are dressed up in funny costumes, the boys are mainly dressed as girls, and have their behavior monitored by older members. Bomani was particularly irritated by the traditional prohibition against talking to girls at school, but he did not mind wearing barrettes in his hair or otherwise being dressed as a girl. Interpreting the activities of Homecoming Week in the frame of carnival's silliness and gender role reversals, he explained, "It's like stuff you can do yourself on Mardi Gras Day, like walk around in a tutu. It's not embarrassing, the only people who might laugh are the freshmen. It's basically your initiation. But there's an initiation to everything."

Casa Samba may not have a formal initiation period that mirrors that of the marching band, but Bomani makes a connection between his earning a place in the band and Casa Samba members' having to earn a place for themselves within the group. He stated it clearly: "I mean, in Casa Samba, you automatically get respect as a person, but you have to earn your respect as a *real* drummer or a *real* dancer. You're not going to just walk into Casa Samba. It's really the same [as marching band] in a way" (emphasis mine). By "real," Bomani means "professional," and I interpret his definition as recognizing the framework of authenticity through professionalism discussed in chapter four. Real samba drummers and dancers, including Bomani, are those that have dedicated themselves to embodying samba practices in accordance with his parents' and Jorge's ideas of what professional *sambistas* are. Real sambistas can authentically represent the samba form to audiences in situations where they are paid to do so, and they also participate in the complex of activities that supports such performances.

Though he tends to focus more on similarities between Casa Samba and marching band, Bomani does see them as distinct entities. His way of distinguishing between membership Casa

Samba and in marching band comes from his definition of tradition. Marching band is clearly important to him, but the meaning of his membership in Casa Samba is more holistic. In the middle of explaining how people in Casa Samba have to “prove” themselves, Bomani suddenly asserted that Casa Samba is different from marching band because it is a “tradition.” When pressed to clarify, he defined tradition in terms of his life in a samba-centric family. Casa Samba is a tradition, he argued, because it is “passed down” from his father to him, but also because he makes annual pilgrimages to Brazil with his family, and because he practices an Afro-Brazilian religion. Additionally, while he might only be involved in marching band for four years, Bomani will be in Casa Samba for a lifetime.

GENERATIONAL POSITION MATTERS

The comparisons of Casa Samba and indigenous carnival practices presented by Curtis and Bomani indicate that interpretations of relationships among divergent cultural practices vary according to the position of the interpreter. Curtis has devoted nearly half of his life to getting to the point where he runs an authentic samba school in New Orleans. He sees samba as a pure tradition, one worthy of preservation and presentation in the city outside of Brazil in which it makes sense due to a shared history and contemporary carnival culture. In his role as the group’s leader, Curtis is also its authenticator—with the benefit of Jorge’s instruction and with his blessing. Bomani has the benefit of being the second-generation interpreter. He assumes that Casa Samba exists; he did not create it. He also assumes that Casa Samba has an unassailable authenticity; his father, mother, and godfather say it does, and auxiliary Afro-Brazilian cultural practices shape Bomani’s daily life. Where Curtis is often in a position to prove that Casa

Samba is an authentic representation of Brazilian carnival that is logically consumed alongside representatives of indigenous carnival, Bomani does not share this responsibility.

Curtis' and Bomani's divergent interpretations of Casa Samba's relationship to indigenous carnival practices illuminate Bruner's notion that authenticity is a struggle and a process rather than a quality inherent in a particular object or entity. Curtis needs authenticity. He constructs it through his authority as the group leader and this authority, in turn, uses this construction to enliven his definition of what his organization is and what it does. Bomani does not need the concept or the authority the process of creating authenticity can imbue. But he will inherit his father's organization and will, thus, inherit the rights and limits of authentication.

Bomani will be a different kind of Casa Samba leader from his father because of differences in how samba entered and shaped their lives. Bomani's interpretation of what an "authentic" samba school is in a New Orleans context could produce a very different organization in twenty years' time. But what Bomani will share with his father, and what every second-generation leader will share with his predecessor, is the necessity of negotiating with the tourism economy. Beyond authenticity defined by Curtis, Bomani, or any other leader of a cultural organization, there exists that economy's definition.

OVER THE TOP: CARNIVAL PRACTICES AND THE TOURISM ECONOMY

Bomani is already conscious of the way the tourism economy operates. When I asked him what, besides football games and Mardi Gras parades, the band performed in, Bomani paused and, after a few seconds, said, "It's the same. Honestly, Easton's marching band is the same thing as Casa Samba to me besides the sound that we play." He explained that Casa Samba and the Warren Easton marching band play for the same groups of hotel guests and convention goers;

they operate in the same economy. For Bomani, this equalizes the groups on an important level. He is doing the same job in each, that is, he is performing for tourists in the spaces in the city that are created for them.

Curtis also talks about the relationship between Casa Samba and the tourist industry, but again, where Bomani's frame is similarities between indigenous groups and Casa Samba, Curtis' is difference. As I discussed above, Casa Samba is frequently introduced as "carnival from Brazil" and Curtis believes that this is an accurate representation of the group. He claims that "carnival from Brazil" characterizes all the activities of Casa Samba, not just the performances in hotels or at conventions, because Casa Samba is like Brazilian samba schools that are often also labeled according to their performance identities. Casa Samba and Brazilian samba schools offer classes to people regardless of whether they can afford to pay, run children's programs, and otherwise maintain a presence in the city that goes beyond the shows they perform in tourist spaces. For Curtis, the definition of a samba school must include the idea that anyone can join the group, and that anyone can be turned into a performer, eventually. "Carnival from Brazil" is about more than one day of Carnaval in which the samba schools parade through the *Sambódromo* in Rio or the equivalent in other Brazilian cities. As with the New Orleans carnival-based organizations that Curtis evaluates positively, Casa Samba's practices are about more than the act of drumming or dancing.³⁸

Where Casa Samba's portrait of Brazilian samba might be "the difference" for tourist audiences intent of absorbing as many forms of carnival as possible on a short trip, the long-term reality is that Casa Samba, Warren Easton's marching band, Mardi Gras Indians, social aid and pleasure clubs, and second line bands are tied together by their participation in New Orleans' tourism economy. Each of these forms is more complex than the show they offer visitors would

suggest. But the expectations of the tourist, as perceived and acted upon by political and civic leaders who make New Orleans a welcoming place for visitors, shape the practices of these groups. Although Curtis may broadly interpret the tourist industry’s “carnival from Brazil” label to include the community-oriented activities of Casa Samba, the performances they often do under that label are brief and decontextualized from these activities. Their tourist audiences may have no notion of what Casa Samba does apart from the short show they witness. This is the case for most cultural organizations who present a version of what they do for consumption. There is a context that the tourists will not see unless they follow the group home.

Visitors’ expectations—created and managed by political and civic leaders who make New Orleans a welcoming place for them—shape the performance styles Casa Samba employs in tourist venues. These expectations also influence the group’s identity as a whole. Curtis is acutely aware of what the tourist industry requires to meet consumer expectations, and his son will acquire this sensibility as well. Though they may interpret Casa Samba differently in relation to the city’s indigenous carnival traditions, and though father and son may situate the “authenticity” of Casa Samba and other New Orleans cultures differently, claims to authenticity made by the tourist industry have a different authority than that of culture bearers themselves. The expectations of potential visitors are what fuel the industry’s authority to construct its own definition of an “authentic New Orleans” experience that will satisfy the largest number of such visitors. In order to earn a living presenting their culture to tourists, Casa Samba and other cultural organizations must interact with the assumptions and expectations of visitors as interpreted by tourism gatekeepers in charge of hiring performers.

Any cultural organization relies on the addition of new members for its continued existence. Casa Samba and many other organizations in New Orleans (and many samba schools in Brazil)

are family affairs in which the children run the group when their parents no longer can. That the kids have a different vision of the group than their parents have is not surprising, but organizational continuity depends on the fact that the fundamental principles that define the group remain the same as the leadership changes hands. Bomani will not think exactly as his father does—his life and his path to becoming a Casa Samba member are very different from Curtis' and both Bomani and Curtis are aware of this. But some certainties about the future emerge. In both their minds, Bomani will run Casa Samba one day and make Curtis proud. Bomani will grow into his own authority and develop a definition of an authentic New Orleans samba school that may diverge from his father's, and Curtis will support him in this. Bomani will inherit the right to define the organization. He will, as its leader, authenticate it. But Bomani and the next generation of leaders of all cultural organizations in New Orleans will confront the hegemony of the tourism economy. The question of who owns tradition and how they own it will continue to be asked, and the terrain of this struggle will be authenticity.

CONCLUSION

Margaret Kenna, reflecting on forty years of fieldwork on tourism in Greece, is among those anthropologists who reject the use of authenticity as a term. She says,

People cannot help but equate ‘authenticity’ in their cultural forms with the past, and with notions of ‘tradition.’ They also take on board Western notions of being true to themselves, of the hypocritical nature of acting in one way while believing or thinking something else. In other words, authenticity, however it may be defined as an analytical category, at an ‘emic’ level is socially constructed (Kenna in Scott and Selwyn 2010:xx).

I agree with Kenna. Authenticity is socially constructed at an “emic” level, and it is equated with the past, and with notions of “tradition.” Where Kenna resists the use of the category, however, my work acknowledges the potential limits of calling something authentic and explores the power relations that support and validate the use of such a label. In this chapter, I have

examined the relationship between Casa Samba, a local cultural organization performing samba for visitors to New Orleans, and a city with what might be called an authenticity infrastructure that persuades tourists that they are experiencing real, local culture in specific ways. The Pierre family, with significant input from Jorge, has constructed an organization that is dynamic and changing even as it is shaped by specific definitions of what samba is.

These definitions arise from “notions of tradition,” to use Kenna’s terms, and there are critics of Casa Samba who dismiss the group’s work because its version of tradition varies from their own. This is fine because Casa Samba is both part of the “real local” culture that visitors seek, and it is apart from that milieu, and Curtis and Carol know their audiences. They interpret what version of Casa Samba appears before each audience based on years of experience developing a variety of performance styles to suit a variety of audiences. They know that Casa Samba has a valuable role in New Orleans—in Mardi Gras, at Jazz Fest, at conventions, and in the city’s educational system—and are not thrilled when they feel disrespected by the decisions cultural arbiters make. But life, and Casa Samba, goes on. Curtis, Carol, Bomani, and Jorge believe that the organization they have devoted their lives to is an authentic one. They are right, because they are the ones who determine this and they are allowed to change what that means over time.

Their familial relationships, and the years of tension and contest that produced strong bonds between these four people, are the source of a shared sense of what is authentic. Jorge’s intervention in Casa Samba is as an original, genuine, authenticator bringing particular physical forms of presenting Afro-Brazilian culture. Bomani, the next generation, the future authenticator, has an orientation towards both the traditions Jorge and his parents present and the musical traditions to which he has access as a New Orleans public high school student. In the continuum between Jorge’s and Bomani’s narratives that explain, perhaps, the genesis of the

organization and Casa Samba's future, we can grasp the ways in which authenticity is socially constructed. The Pierre family knows well that authenticity is not "a property inherent in an object, forever fixed in time" (Bruner 1994:408). They are engaged in "a struggle, a social process in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history" in New Orleans and are happy to meet that challenge (Bruner 1994:408).

Chapter Seven: A Conclusion

TO UTOPIA

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to connect the concepts of personal authenticity and external authenticity by demonstrating that the life experiences of Curtis, Carol, and Bomani Pierre are in ongoing interaction with the structures shaping the city in which they live in work. The primary shaping structure of New Orleans—one that affects the ways many residents experience the city—is the tourism economy. Working and living in New Orleans as a producer of culture has advantages and disadvantages. I believe that the experiences of the Pierre family in their different, yet collective, pursuit of authentic lives raise questions about how constructing identities can also be about constructing dignity. As the world's cities have, since the middle of the twentieth century, increasingly competed within the tourism cycle of a global capitalism, this discussion of dignity can proceed into a discussion of rights. Because this discussion of dignity and rights seems useful, I am compelled not to offer a discursive conclusion to this document. Not only might a traditional conclusion supply meanings I may not intend and close a discussion I think can remain open, a neat summary of the preceding chapters feels irrelevant given the fact that this is the beginning of an ongoing examination of the Pierre family's ideals and practices and Casa Samba's place in New Orleans. In this chapter, I will, however, reorient slightly some of my current findings towards questions of human rights and justice as they are raised in the work of Paul Gilroy (2011), Susan Fainstein (2010), and David Harvey (2008). But first, I want to say one more thing about authenticity itself.

In a January 17, 2012 interview on the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air*, author and actor Ayad Akhtar reflected on his time studying with experimental theater guru Jerzy Grotowski.³⁹ Near the end of the interview, Terry Gross asked Akhtar to describe what he

learned from Grotowski that helped him “either as an actor or as a person or as both” (Fresh Air 2012). His answer suggests a relationship between the actor and the person that I believe Loic Wacquant (2004) identifies in his examination of his own process of becoming a boxer, but more importantly, that I believe Curtis, Carol, and Bomani identify in their collective insistence that authenticity is directly tied to practice. Explaining that Grotowski believed that an actor’s self-consciousness about acting had to be overcome for the actor to feel real and thus convince others that he is real, Akhtar said:

Grotowski’s technique had a lot to do with practice. His belief was that if you really, really practice something for a long time and you’ve got it completely fixed and you’ve got it completely right, that your body and your mind would begin to take over and begin to do it by themselves. And then that structure, that commitment to structure actually led to true spontaneity (Akhtar, interviewed on Fresh Air 2012).

The product of practice, of eliminating the sense of watching oneself act a scene and say lines, is authenticity. The actor reaches a place in which neither body nor mind “was asking what does it need to do” (Akhtar, interviewed on Fresh Air 2012). Akhtar calls this a “place of authenticity, a place of what’s really interesting to him or her, and suddenly the action or the text of the scene is alive in a different way...” (Akhtar, interviewed on Fresh Air 2012). According to Akhtar, Grotowski believed that acting techniques that led a person down the road to authenticity could be used as psychoanalytic tools. Without entering into what is likely an ongoing debate on that subject, I would suggest that the techniques of developing the practice to which one is devoted do have alternative applications. My own interpretations of the Pierre family’s search for authentic identities rest, at least in part, on the assumption that adopting samba practices changes their senses of self and affects all elements of their lives. Akhtar’s position that spontaneity and genuine presentation of actions and behaviors on stage comes from encoding the structures of actions and behaviors through practice supports my position that to become a samba drummer or dancer is to become a different person. While some parts of being

this different person only occur on stage and in costume, other parts of this restructured identity manifest offstage. Perhaps more importantly, this restructured identity—from the fact of its production to the actions that present it to the world—proves that the identities into which we are born are not permanently fixed.

It has been difficult to adequately capture the importance of the offstage elements of restructured identity in this document. The importance of arguing for a place for samba in the New Orleans cultural landscape is easier to talk about persuasively. Curtis and Carol traffic in the relationships between Carnaval and Mardi Gras. They assert that “carnival from Brazil” makes sense in New Orleans and challenge Casa Samba’s exclusion from the scene whenever it occurs. Ideas about the translatability of one black Atlantic cultural process to a site with its own, related, processes support the Pierres’ position that samba has a place in New Orleans (see Gilroy 1996). But on the level of personal authenticity, in the context of the Pierres’ idea that identity is mutable and can be altered conscientiously, there exists a broader argument that eludes me as I try to contain it within the limits of language.

I have suggested a few frames for understanding what the Pierre family and Casa Samba are doing apart from samba itself. The imposition of the frame of personal authenticity—of seeking to live a life that reflects one’s values—along with other frames such as “utopian projects” and “cultures of belonging” is perhaps not adequate to the task of presenting the fullness of the critique embedded in Curtis’ and Carol’s choices to pursue more complex identities. In an essay examining the historical trajectory of the political idea of human rights, Paul Gilroy argues that the struggle against racial hierarchy is not associated clearly enough with discussions of human rights on a world scale (2011:55–119). Whether or not this is the case, Gilroy uses Bob Marley—the details of his life combined with the facts of his international stardom—as a means

of orienting an idea of human rights around resistance to “objecthood” in racial terms (2011:72, 87–119).

Bob Marley’s ongoing appeal to a world of consumers could be simplified into a facile apprehension of Marley as a ganja-smoking antihero whose music makes an excellent soundtrack for a party. Gilroy argues against facetlessness of this kind and suggests that the utopianism present in Marley’s thinking and in his music resonates with people around the world. In his resistance to Babylon, Marley proposed that the destructive racial hierarchy and the rat race of capitalism be replaced by a system of relating to one another on the basis of “will, inclination, mood, and affinity” (Gilroy 2011:91). In this way, Marley argued that shared humanness should be the basis of social relationships, and indeed, that opposition to racism is what produces the kind of “authentic, disalienated humanism” that is not found in Babylon (Gilroy 2011:94).

The idealism, indeed the utopianism, expressed in Marley’s music regarding the idea that skin color could eventually mean less than eye color emerged, in part, because of the nomadism that shaped his life. Even before he was touring the world with the Wailers, Bob Marley moved around. Living in the United States in the late 1960s and travelling to Europe put Marley in touch with musicians and musical styles that he would have missed out on had he remained rooted in Jamaica. For Gilroy, Marley’s movements enabled him to engage in constructing an identity of transcendent blackness for himself and for his music in such a way that “a new version of black identity would be artfully assembled” for the young people who comprise his audience—then and now (Gilroy 2011:112).

While it should be clear that Curtis and Carol are not Bob Marley, there are some parallels that suggest ways of talking about the rejection of racial hierarchy and a desire for human rights. Marley’s experiences as an individual gave him the power to create ideas about collective

identity that were rooted in justice, humanity, and dignity. His movement around the world confirmed what he believed he knew. I do not believe it is accidental that Curtis and Carol each physically uprooted themselves and moved away from home as part of an effort to determine who they are. I believe their ongoing musical and cultural engagement with people from a place other than the one in which they live is also important. This kind of continuous movement, this enduring rootlessness even as they have made a home in New Orleans, is what may invest their utopianism with a sense of genuine possibility.

Having been other places, having seen other things, and continuing to engage with difference as an acceptable and necessary element of their lives, the Pierres encourage us to think about the moral implications of their cultural adoption. Their capacity to encourage real cooperation across race and gender lines in the production of samba music and dance in New Orleans, within the familial confines of Casa Samba, suggests not just a political Afrocentricity or a socially oriented utopianism that can remain at the level of culture. Sharing culture means sharing identities, and for Curtis and Carol, this means sharing responsibility for nudging racial hierarchy to the side so that human dignity belongs to everyone in all the locations on earth through which they travel. The Pierres share with Bob Marley the faith that a fundamentally human identity can outrun a limited racial one. In my view, their life histories, like Marley's lyrics and his own history, "also admonish anybody who hesitates before the weighty existential responsibility which comes with knowing that—contrary to even the most awful appearances—you do rule your destiny" (Gilroy 2011:91–92).

In arguing life should be about human dignity and its pursuit, Curtis, Carol, and anyone else living in a twenty-first century city must confront the fact that our political leaders at every level have a different framework for understanding life's possibilities. The dominance of a neoliberal

economic model that privileges the creation of a good business climate above all else has created a situation in which “the desirability of growth is usually assumed, while the consequences for social equity are rarely mentioned” (Fainstein 2010:2). As Susan Fainstein points out, critics of this model emerged as it made its way to the dominant position it now occupies. These critics “condemned policies that favor downtown businesses while ignoring neighborhood needs and giving priority to tourist facilities and stadiums over schools and labor intensive industries” (Fainstein 2010:3). But in their condemnation, these critics only “implied a model of the just city” that is rooted in a “virtually instinctive” sense of what is unjust (Fainstein 2010:3). Very few critiques of contemporary urban politics and planning offer a suggestion for what would be better, for how urban institutions could incorporate “the criteria of justice that they propose” (Fainstein 2010:4).

Fainstein’s goal is to produce an urban theory of justice. She characterizes her book’s purpose as offering a form of “realistic utopianism” in this regard (Fainstein 2010:20). Through an examination of the ways philosophical theories of justice should impact urban planning policy and the extent to which justice is considered a planning goal in New York, Amsterdam, and London, Fainstein compromises. She advocates for real, palpable reform within the confines of a global capitalist economic system, suggesting that “humane capitalism” is possible (Fainstein 2010:6). Although they do not necessarily employ a case study methodology or formally review existing theories of justice, in arguing for Casa Samba to be taken seriously in New Orleans’ tourism economy, Curtis and Carol (and to a different degree, Jorge) suggest something similar. They will not concede to the popular argument that authenticity is destroyed by commodification and participation in the capitalist market. Casa Samba’s history as a commodity in the New Orleans economy is long, and in fact, without this history, the group would not be what it is

today: a consistent reminder of difference and change in a tourism economy that relies on durable and timeless images that promote the city's brand.

And yet, Casa Samba has a moral dimension, one that operates simultaneously with the elements of it that can be shaped into consumable pieces. Curtis and Carol have raised their son to know and taught their students to understand that engaging in activities, such as samba, that require dedication and practice can be fulfilling. They contrast this fulfillment with the emptiness they identify in American consumerism and they are vocal in their rejection of capitalism's deleterious effects. In addition, leaders and members of Casa Samba work together to produce culture, and to produce the conditions for love and mutual respect to be the guiding principles of interaction. Is it possible that the latter can be marketed with the former? When audiences absorb Casa Samba's public performances, what do they see? Among the many things that it is possible to see in a Casa Samba show, one is a form of complexity that challenges neat divisions between American and Brazilian, black and white, male and female. In challenging these divisions on the "open market," by performing restructured, personally authentic identities in the tourism economy and offstage in their day-to-day existence, Casa Samba suggests, as Fainstein does, that diversity—not simply equity—should be considered in the planning strategies of cities.

Casa Samba's different roles in New Orleans' tourism economy make me wonder why the city's authenticity is premised on simplification and not complexity. The relationships between samba and styles of music that are indigenous to New Orleans raise questions about whether those engineering the city's economy would consider constructing a more diverse representation of the city to attract potential visitors. The implications of this kind of thinking for culture producers in New Orleans are interesting. Inserting an idea of justice, underwritten by a genuine

respect for difference and diversity, into the formats through which agents of the tourist industry engage with the public could increase the city's opportunity to generate tourism revenue.

Valuing a wider variety of the living cultures of this place could also open up opportunities for artists to have greater control over their place in the capitalist structure in which they must participate to earn a living anyway. Many of the city's cultural traditions are marketed without the consent and involvement of the people producing them, and even when people are genuinely involved in the promotion of their cultures, the product has the moral component stripped away. This is the injustice of simplification, of failing to value all the meanings of a practice or tradition.

So what if a concern for human rights, real human rights, became the primary framework through which the value of a group's participation in the New Orleans tourism economy was measured? Given what we may know of the system through which white-dominated manipulation of "folk" (read: black) traditions is disguised as genuine respect for the people producing these traditions, and given what we see when we look at the developer-led "rebirth" of the city following Hurricane Katrina, the idea of human rights being central to planning and tourism in New Orleans might seem laughable. But when we are finished laughing, we should consider the idea that human rights can take a specifically urban form, and that in its urban form, citizens of cities can, without sentimentality and moralism (which is distinct, in my mind, from morality) demand that our human dignity be respected. More than that, we can demand that our cities change to suit us and our senses of dignity.

According to David Harvey's definition of the idea, the "right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (2008:23). Harvey puts the power to reshape processes of urbanization in the hands of

urban citizens as a group. Harvey's analysis of the right to the city is, like Fainstein's theorization of justice, rooted in an interpretation of neoliberalism in contemporary urban society. Where Fainstein's concern is focused on the larger structures of urban planning and how these might be reshaped were justice to be considered in planning policy and practice, Harvey's focus is on what neoliberalism as an ethos encourages in city dwellers. He recognizes neoliberalism's economic functions and impacts, obviously, but theorizes not what the top must concede regarding justice, but what the bottom must do to demand it. In this way, for me, Harvey's and Fainstein's positions complement and clarify each other's—even as they differ regarding the potential for and necessity of a revolution against capitalism.

Situating the right to the city as a collective one is, perhaps, what is most revolutionary about the idea that the nature of contemporary urban life requires us to rethink human rights. As Harvey puts it, “this is a world in which the neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism, and its cognate of political withdrawal from collective forms of action, becomes the template for human socialization” (2008:32). This is the fundamental problem with American life that Carol and Curtis identify repeatedly throughout our conversations. It is to this malaise of consumption-driven individualism that they believe Casa Samba offers an antidote. So what is Casa Samba? Is it a social movement capable of challenging the image of the city “put forward by developers, who are backed by finance, corporate capital and an increasingly entrepreneurial minded local state apparatus” (Harvey 2008:33)? Or is Casa Samba a viable “culture of belonging” (hooks 2009) that is accessible to all interested parties and that can “overcome isolation” and, in a smaller way, “reshape the city” (Harvey 2008:33)? I do not believe there is one answer to this question, at least not now.

This research shows, however, that the emergence of a collective is rooted in individual experiences and positions—some of which are long-standing beliefs, others of which are fleeting and unexamining impressions. The relationship between individual and collective identity in Casa Samba and the relationship between Casa Samba and the city in which it is located could be interpreted in a variety of ways. This document represents just one interpretation. I hope that I have not reduced the complexity of Casa Samba’s story, or the stories of the family that produced this marvel of continuous transnational communication. I hope this research raises more questions than it answers and that like any good beginning, it could send us off in an impossible number of directions.

CODA

New Orleans has a reputation for permitting the type of experimentation with culture that this research purports to document and trace. Throughout this process, I have been grateful to have been raised in New Orleans and to be doing work here now. It has been made cliché by those in charge of representing this place to the outside world, but New Orleans is a friendly, inviting, curious place once you pass certain tests that prove your value in it. From their position in a place that encourages creativity and a looser approach to life than many others, New Orleans musicians have developed relationships with the musical cultures of other places. I had an accidental encounter with a musician recently that suggested that Brazilian styles and rhythms are making their way around. Pianist Tom McDermott and I talked at length, standing in line at a coffee shop, about his inordinate love for Brazilian *choro* music and he mentioned that he has recorded more than one album comprised entirely of choro. I explained my project with Casa Samba to Tom and he thought it was interesting. We will likely remain in conversation about

our various interests in and attachments to Brazilian music and culture, and, New Orleans being what it is, perhaps punt this whole project into one of those directions I mention above.

Tom is not alone in being a New Orleans musician who incorporates Brazilian pieces into his albums, or Brazilian rhythms into his pieces. Musicians from Dr. John to John Boutte, from Curtis' hero Bill Summers to trumpeter Irvin Mayfield, have recognized the relationship between Brazil and New Orleans and expressed it in music. And most recently, the popular band Galactic released a new album called *Carnivale Electricos* featuring a mixture of Brazilian and New Orleans rhythms and musicians. On the third track, "Magalenha," Casa Samba is the featured artist supporting Galactic's fusion.

ENDNOTES

1. I use the term “Afro-Brazilian” to refer to the cultural complex of which *samba*, *capoeira*, and *candomblé* are a part. This term can be broadly applied to any element of Brazilian culture in which the ideas and practices of people whose ancestors were captured and forcibly brought from Africa are mixed with the ideas and practices of people whose ancestors arrived in Brazil without being captured first.
2. Curtis, Carol, and Bomani have adopted a range of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices among which samba is primary. Maintaining a link to Brazilian samba and presenting samba onstage is the main purpose of Casa Samba, however, as is discussed in the main text below and in subsequent chapters, Casa Samba has multiple uses and functions. The Pierre family also practices *candomblé*, and Curtis and Bomani play *capoeira angola*. Because my research with the Pierres has focused on samba and on Casa Samba’s mission as a samba school, I will not complicate things by trying to situated the history of each Afro-Brazilian practice they utilize. There are many excellent sources of information on the history and practice of *candomblé* and *capoeira*. I am fond of Ruth Landes’ groundbreaking examination of *candomblé* *The City of Women* [1947] (1994) which was ahead of its time as a representative of reflexive ethnography and explores *candomblé* as an evolving product of cultural change. The best English-language history of *capoeira* remains, in my opinion, John Lowell Lewis’ *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* (1992), though many other books about *capoeira* have been published in many languages. Adriana Albert Dias’ *Mandinga, manha e malicia: uma história sobre os capoeiras na capital de Bahia (1910-1925)* (2006) examines the development of *capoeira* in the period during which the art form experienced heightened repression in Salvador following the “emancipation” of Brazil’s enslaved population. This period is underexamined even in those histories of *capoeira* that claim to be comprehensive, though Matthew Rohrig Assunçao’s *Capoeira: a history of an Afro-Brazilian martial art* (2005) is pretty detailed overall.
3. “Surdo” means “deaf” in Portuguese.

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4. Casa Samba's various performance styles are discussed in further detail in chapter four. Here, I hope to give the reader a brief sense of how the music shapes these performances. Photos that appear in chapter four should help illustrate the difference in costume, venue, and atmosphere that the shows exhibit.
5. Casa Samba played most regularly at Rotolo's in 2007 when the group was paid through a grant that funded entertainment geared towards newer populations. The nature of this grant remains unclear to me as I learned about it in casual conversation. Coco Bamboo, as the location is now called, is still a pizzeria and caters more overtly to the somewhat diminished Brazilian population in New Orleans.
6. Regarding sharing of interview documents: Bomani did not want to read or listen to interviews after they happened, so I never gave him transcripts or audio files. I only interviewed Jorge one time on the day before he left New Orleans for a trip to Brazil before returning to his home in the San Francisco Bay Area. He did not want a document of the interview.
7. While I have taken photos of Casa Samba, I am not a good photographer. The photos contained in this document and those that I present in public discussions of my work were taken by my advisor Jeffrey Enhrenreich. Were it not for these high quality photos taken by a person with real talent for capturing the beauty in the spectacular and the mundane, my work with Casa Samba would be less interesting and my interpretations would have suffered from a lack of visual reference.
8. The information on Avondale comes from a study of the shipyard's history and utility as its current owner, Northrup Grumman, begins the process of shutting it down. The full report for this study can be found here: http://uno.academia.edu/SteveStriffler/Papers/1179886/Avondale_The_Uncertain_Future_of_a_Great_American_Shipyard. Last accessed December 19, 2011.
9. One useful mechanism for understanding some of the complexity of how racism and segregation affects an American's chances for having a happy and fulfilling life is the "school-to-prison pipeline." Lawyers writing for Harvard's Civil Rights Project in 2003 captured the essential definition of this phenomenon in a brief framing paper that became the basis for their own expanded work on the subject and that of others. While the "school-to-prison pipeline" had not been identified as such in Curtis' youth and young adulthood, the ingredients for it were very present in his experience. Johanna Wald and Daniel Losen's short paper may offer a clearer understanding of my position that Curtis could predict negative outcomes for himself on the basis of where he lived and how he was educated. That paper is available at: http://justicepolicycenter.org/Articles%20and%20Research/Research/testprisons/SCHOOL_TO_%20PRISON_%20PIPELINE2003.pdf
Last accessed January 29, 2012.
10. On its official page on the Neighborhood Partnership Network's website, the Pension Town area is described as "devastated by mass abandonment and neglect since the Depression." This description is accurate for many of the other neighborhoods in which Curtis lived during his time in New Orleans. See <http://www.npnnola.com/associations/neighborhoods/view/202/leonidas-pensiontown-neighborhood-association> for a full description of Pension Town/Pigeon Town. Last accessed January 30, 2012.
11. A shakeree is a large rattle that is made from a hollowed out gourd around which a net made of string is wrapped. Knotted in expanding squares throughout the net are hundreds of small plastic beads. When one shakes the gourd, the beads crash against it and make a very resonant clack. Controlling the clacking to produce intricate beats and rattles requires significant training and practice. Impressing an audience with the variety of beats and rattles of a shakeree requires the most training and practice.
12. Carol's parents were a part of what most American historians refer to as the "second Great Migration." The first Great Migration occurred between 1910 and 1930 when millions of black Americans moved to northern and western states seeking some respite from Jim Crow. The second occurred between 1941 and 1970 and involved many urbanized black Southerners who sought jobs in the World War II and postwar boom economies in northern and western states in addition to less overtly racist situations. James Gregory's 2005 *The Southern Diaspora: How the*

Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America offers a detailed analysis of both waves of migration and the impact of these movements on the United States.

13. A Mardi Gras krewe is a social organization that puts on a parade and, usually, a ball during the carnival season. Some krewes that emerged in the mid-twentieth century are referred to as superkrewes because of the size of their memberships (which are somewhat more open than those of the older krewes), the dimensions of their parade floats (which are two stories tall), and the spectacular nature of their balls.

14. Casa Samba has been critiqued by others in the New Orleans dance community for the apparent sexual explicitness of its dance moves. Samba, more broadly, has been critiqued in the same manner. A detailed discussion of Casa Samba's performance styles as strategies for combatting this critique appears in chapter six. Here, I hope to establish the beginnings of that discussion, but limit my interpretation to Carol's experience of learning and teaching samba.

15. The relationship between Casa Samba and Oba Oba is a highly significant one. This relationship will be elaborated upon below and in chapter six.

16. Casa Samba dancers wear a variety of styles of costumes in their performances as the shows often present various styles of Afro-Brazilian dance. The revealing passista outfit is one among many of the costumes used.

17. In order for the dancers Carol mentions by name to remain anonymous, I have assigned them random letters. I felt that letters disguised identity even more than pseudonyms.

18. Habitus is Pierre Bourdieu's label for the practices that are shared by members of a group. Habitus sets the scene for individual and collective decisions about how to behave within their cultural group but is, according to Bourdieu, not a rigid set of rules. Habitus, in fact, has "an endless capacity to engender products—thoughts, expressions, actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (1977:95 quoted in Moore 2004:329).

19. In Jamaica Kincaid's brilliant examination of how slavery, colonialism, and tourism are related phenomena and of their historical impact on her native Antigua, she explains why embracing capitalism might be odd for some black people. She asks the reader: "Do you know why people like me are shy about being capitalists?" And she answers: "Well, it's because we, for as long as we have known you, *were* capital, like bales of cotton and sacks of sugar, and you were the commanding, cruel capitalists, and the memory of this is so strong, the experience so recent, that we can't quite bring ourselves to embrace this idea that you think so much of" (Kincaid 2000:36–37).

20. Here, my argument applies Kelley's definition of an expandable blackness that some may read as contradicting previous characterization of Casa Samba as inclusive in its construction of a culture of belonging. Kelley's discussion of blackness and black identity does, in fact, focus on people who have black skin, but his overall argument has some validity for all people seeking to understand a tradition of black radicalism as meaningful for their own struggles against biological determinism.

21. The nature of the United States system of racial categorization is analyzed thoroughly by scholars in a range of disciplines. My interpretations of this system are rooted specifically in the examinations by Lee Baker (1998), Steven Jay Gould (1996), and Ashley Montagu (1997) in the anthropological universe. Some of my thoughts have been shaped by historians Arnold R. Hirsch's (1998) and Thomas Sugrue's (2005) examinations of the role of race in the construction of midcentury urban ghettos.

22. Especially 1996's *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*.

23. The scholarship associated with whiteness studies most clearly delimits this position. The work of historians such as Noel Ignatiev (1995) and David Roediger (2005), presages the work of cultural critics such as Tim Wise (2008), whose work has also influenced my position on white identity as limiting and damaging.

24. A deeper analysis of the details of Bomani's life history appears in the next chapter. In this section, I mean only to discuss his role in the family's business of running Casa Samba.

25. Casa Samba is not alone in being a twenty-first-century manifestation of surrealist thought. In 2009, the rap artist Mos Def released an album called *The Ecstatic* on which he explores many of the themes related to surrealism and utopian dreams. In the track "Life in Marvelous Times," Mos Def's lyrics directly express recognition of the fact that life is often difficult, cruel, and unfair in the most mundane ways, but he insists that "we are alive in amazing times," nonetheless. Commenting directly on the issues arising from capitalism as a global economic system that produces much of the unfairness he references, he says: "And more and more and more and more/And more of less than ever before/It's just too much more for your mind to absorb/It's scary like hell, but there's no doubt/We can't be alive in no time but... NOW!/It's just another shot to the heart/It's just a sure shot in the dark/It's just another place in the stars... /Wonders on every side, life in marvelous times."

26. I sat down for one interview with Jorge, but I never had an opportunity to interview Marcio. For this reason, I cannot discuss Marcio's relationship with the Pierre family to the same extent that I can discuss Jorge's. Suffice it to say that I do not believe they have similar relationships. Jorge's is a much longer relationship, and he came to the Pierre household as more of an adult, an equal with Curtis, who was nonetheless in a position of authority *as Casa Samba was getting started* on its path to professionalism. Jorge's role in shaping of the group is clearer than Marcio's as Marcio came later in the group's history and did not come as a primary source of authenticity.

27. Here, Jorge is referring to Curtis' adoption of the Afro-Brazilian religious practice, *candomblé*. Jorge initiated Curtis into this practice and for this reason takes responsibility for the positive change that Curtis' religious practice inspired. Candomblé is an important part of the Pierre family's life. Curtis, Carol, and Bomani host rituals in their home, and they are in contact with Jorge and other spiritual guides as they need to be to maintain their practice. A full discussion of candomblé and of the Pierre family's practice of it is not possible in this research.

28. Brazil Camp is an annual two-week course of Brazilian music and dance that takes place in northern California. Curtis and Jorge are both instructors at this camp.

29. Curtis is the one who told me that Oba Oba holds the record for the longest running "foreign" performing group on Broadway. Oba Oba's website verifies this, but says that the group's record is for being the "first show of a foreign culture to complete a six-year tour in the USA" between 1987 and 1993. See: <http://www.obobashow.com/pagine/usa/usa.html>. Last accessed January 7, 2012.

30. In an article in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Helen Regis and Shana Walton (2008) critically examine the Jazz Fest as a complex event in which people participate in a variety of ways, and through which New Orleans musicians and culture bearers experience the opportunities and constraints of the tourism economy in intensified form. Curtis and Carol, like many New Orleans culture producers, view Jazz Fest as a source of prestige and recognize its power to expose their work to a wide audience even as they are critical of the Fest's class divide. Local talent, as Regis and Walton confirm, are treated differently and rewarded with lower pay than nationally and internationally famous performers (see especially 2008:411–415).

31. Curtis and Carol estimate that over 5,000 people have been members of Casa Samba since 1986.

32. At the 2011 Jazz Fest, Curtis and Bomani led a performance of samba drumming by the Roots of Music marching band—a group with whom the Pierres had been working on samba, but which usually plays traditional New Orleans marching band music. The stage manager, at the end of an enthusiastically received performance, thanked Casa Samba and closed the set. He made the relationship between the two musical traditions being merged on the stage by saying "Curtis Pierre and Samba Kids featuring Roots of Music y'all! Bringing Brazil to New Orleans and New Orleans to Brazil!"

33. In his critical presentation of Zulu's history, Mark Souther (2006:135–141) argues that Zulu capitulated to pressure to parade on the old-line krewes' route after these krewes had decided that without the buffoonery of Zulu, their celebration of white gentility would not be as obvious. I agree with Souther's analysis, but because my

research focus is interpreting Zulu itself, I rely on the Zulu website for their less analytical description of their history.

34. All of the information in the preceding paragraph, including the quotation, comes from the Krewe of Zulu website: <http://kreweofzulu.com/history>. Last accessed March 9, 2012.

35. Casa Samba's samba styles are drawn from those that are popular in the Carnaval in both Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Bahia.

36. Casa Samba also performs regularly at the super-krewe Endymion's Mardi Gras ball that follows its parade on the Saturday before Mardi Gras. This is also a highly prestigious show for Casa Samba, and it can compete with Zulu for the honor of being the pinnacle of Casa Samba's season.

37. Curtis and Carol intended to get married at the Zulu parade after Casa Samba had finished marching in it in 1989. Their enthusiasm for Mardi Gras generally and for Casa Samba's place in it is, I think, reflected in this plan. In typical New Orleans fashion, their plan was foiled by the fact that no one could locate the celebrant of their marriage ceremony who was supposed to meet them on the parade route.

38. For more information on the practices of second line organizations see Regis 1999, 2001. For more on Mardi Gras Indians see Lipsitz 1988 and Smith 1994.

39. The link to the transcript of Akhtar's interview is:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=145334491>. Last accessed March 9, 2012.

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APPENDIX A: IRB EXEMPTION

***University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans***

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey Ehrenreich

Co-Investigator: Lauren Lastrapes

Date: October 18, 2010

Protocol Title: "Casa Samba: Identity and Authenticity in New Orleans"

IRB#: 02Oct10

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

VITA

Lauren Lastrapes was born, raised and, most importantly, attended high school in New Orleans. After a decade-long sojourn in Washington D.C.—during which she went to college, became pretty decent organizer of and participant in protests against the death penalty, war, and the depredations of global capitalism, and began learning capoeira angola—Lauren was pleased to return home to continue her education in postdiluvian New Orleans. She is still pleased to be here and will probably stick around.