



FOLK TRADITION AT THE CREOLE RED RIVER

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Abstract

Recognized by the National Park Service, the Cane River Creole National Historical Park area of Natchitoches, Louisiana serves as a main intercultural backdrop of history as American, French, Spanish, and Native American traditions once occupied its banks. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Federal Writers' Project, a byproduct of the New Deal documented new oral histories from the region. Nineteenth-century folklore from the Natchitoches Cane River area reveals that French, Cajun, and more importantly African influences cast allegories for the spiritual journey they interpreted. My paper uses African oral origin traditions in places like Natchitoches and elsewhere in colonial America to argue on behalf of a "Time Capsule Hypothesis" where forgetting history happens when the past is obscured and the future is apocalyptic. Preservation of landmark heritage sites through the Cane River's origin folklore, architecture, and ecological history become a new esoteric medium. Reminiscent structures, such as the famous Magnolia and Melrose plantations on the Cane River have preserved a different history that focuses on conservation and cooperation. For us to understand the history of Natchitoches, Louisiana requires a new perspective on historical memory and technological sublime topics merging oral history and esotericism into an ecological time machine of Natchitoches. Creole Catholics emerged from Louisiana archdioceses and Black Christians became free by transforming mythic identities in their present moment to embrace creativity, literature, and technological acumen over their environment.

Keywords

Cane River, Ecology, Esotericism, Memory, Natchitoches, Time Capsule

A new cultural economy on Louisiana's Cane River made epistemological interventions into why religious formations became the guiding force driving colonial Africans to assimilate into America. Louisiana's, Texas's, and Arkansas's Red River locations are an ecological reserve of Caddo Indian and Afro-Creole folk culture. In my interpretation of African-American identity formation in America, I turn toward three authors whose approaches to this history employ an idea, historical memory, which I also use to reiterate my theory called the "Time Capsule Hypothesis" of mutual forgetting. Gary B. Mills' *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* focuses on the restorative power of oral histories to keep legends alive. But what about documents? Mills writes that while some historical records on the history of Black America are sparse, other paths to getting information remain in the social castes that remain, like Creoles who descend from Afro-French or Spanish ethnicity. Esotericists would admire how Natchitoches plantations like Melrose and churches represent the parish as a marked, artificial modification to the natural environment. It is also where colonial Africans learned to tell origin stories and predict the future. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* gives credence to origin myths, cosmology, and new dialects stemming from years of diasporic migration. The Time Capsule Hypothesis agrees that forgetting one's origin story is as pertinent to religion as it is to losing knowledge of Afro-Folk traditions that like the capsule, were never opened due to the suppression of knowledge in colonial America. Each era exists in a moment of perpetual forgetting as distant history from the past is forgotten, and the future trajectory of Afro-Creole cultures exists in skeptical anticipation of prophecies like end-time tribulations or natural calamities that destroy memories of the past.

Theophus H. Smith's *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* combines supernatural and natural medicinal elements into its relation of spirituality for colonial Afro-Americans. In historiography using the subsequent three books, it becomes clear that Louisiana's Red River is a microcosm of a larger colonial enterprise that used the tradition of origin myths and dualist philosophy as a social agenda to affect rural and later urban communities. Christianity and its iterations, including Islam were part of that effort. Smith caters to the fall of Babylon America as a symbol of an "Apocalypse figure" from the Book of Revelations that was important for

Black Panthers and Nation of Islam enthusiast, Elijah Muhammad.¹ Creole culture on the Red River had not been told with such vigor until the Federal Writers' Project, a byproduct of the New Deal by Franklin Roosevelt, was enlisted to compile data on interviews of former slaves. Lynette Ater Tanner in *Chained to the Land: Voices from Cotton & Cane Plantations, from Interviews of Former Slaves*, has the Louisiana interviews and incorporates the customs of French law and rule. Priestly vows of celibacy and prayer are only the start of it. Freed, former slaves are a significant component of Mills' *The Forgotten People* too, as is the faith in leaders like Augustin Metoyer, a Roman Catholic. In the following essay, I will uncover why it was not just the Federal Writer's Project and Harlem Renaissance that discovered great writers and orators, but that throughout the eighteenth-century folktales were canon in Red River Creole society. My historiography work on four authors from 1977 to 2014 will be an Ark of the Covenant moment for esoteric scholars in academia.

"Gens de couleur libre" represented a caste system in Louisiana that was neither black nor white and it was this in-betweenness as a space that made society in metropolitan and rural areas of Louisiana exemplar of the "forgotten people" archetype Gary Mills presents. It was the beginning of the Cane River colonies whose history is tied to oral histories handed down from each generation. Mills' *The Forgotten People* shows how each successive generation went through a transformative period that stripped them of their previous post of knowledge. In the case of the Cane River colony, Marie Thérèse Coincoin earned her freedom in 1778 by learning the herbal medicines of her African parents and gained the manumission of the St. Denis family. Coincoin was even given a plot of land. According to other oral histories, indigo plants were planted, the first in the area for Natchitoches cultivation to make blue dye for uniforms, and she also found bear hides and grease to lubricate European weapons or carriages.² Melrose Plantation became built in an African style and used native materials at Coincoin's behest before she married a lucrative Frenchman, Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer. The Isle of Brevelle, as it is often referred to, prospered until doom arrived during the middle of the 1800s Civil War. The threat of doom and ruin was present throughout the history of Louisiana's Cane River colonies. African voodoo practitioners had to convert to Catholicism to be accepted and it was the Christian faith in marriages that could lead to happiness and also social destruction if the family was not nurtured.³ Code Noir's policies in the Isle were strict about slaves marrying whites, and Coincoin had to be expelled from Metoyer's household as an early example of it. Ecclesiastical and social ecology made Melrose Plantation and other architectural time capsules necessary to recount what happened at the time. The area became a literary center by the twenty-first century when authors such as William Faulkner, François Mignon, and others descended there to resurrect culture.

A continued legacy of the "forgotten people" ensnares Mills' work in *The Forgotten People* in journals and notebooks telling the features of construction in Natchitoches homes in the same manner as the climate. Clover-leaf boards (punkahs), ropes, mahogany and cherry wood, sterling silver, deer hide, cowhide, marble pestles, including crystal ornaments were the mainstay of Cane River architecture furnishings.⁴ A mutable identity was associated with uniting personal history with natural resolve. During the Civil War, northern soldiers and even Father Yves-Marie wrote in a diary and letters about "death beetles," speaking to why the quality of homes had to be great. Lightning had its way of influencing building on the Isle too, but it was wealth and status that had presided over many ornaments fitted to homes. For slaves, little would be forgotten too soon as they passed down building practices such as mud and log designs. Oak and cedar trees lined the entranceway to the most reputable mansions. African builders left mushroom-shaped cabins in a style familiar to the West Indies and subtropical Africa. It is known as the "Africa House."⁵ Other kinds of structured remnants were crucial to organized education and religious teaching.⁶ Isle of Brevelle schools worked with religious leaders of Louisiana to purchase small houses and tracts of land for missions. In 1858 a school for Daughters of the Cross opened, but again, the mission was doomed and by 1863 it closed as the war progressed. Nuns wrote home to Avoyelles, but the Red River was blocked by troops. And like the "death beetles" of the area, a natural "evil" was rampant according to letters from a Natchitoches French-born priest.⁷ Dances along the Red River, rowing, gambling, drinking, cockfighting, horse or fish racing, gay dressing, and blowing on shells often disregarded the religious calendar for appropriate festivities. Many of the pastimes of yesteryear were admired by the heritage of older folk, but they spelled disaster.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* shows a diasporic relationship emerging between Senegambia and Louisiana in the 1700s that united agriculture and cosmology. Afro-Creole culture can thank the Company of the Indies, a private company

¹ Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 238-39.

² Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xxvii.

³ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 162.

⁴ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 180-182.

⁵ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 70.

⁶ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 185-191.

⁷ Mills, *The Forgotten People*, 170.

licensed by the King of France.⁸ Bambara Kingdom wars, incessant Moors, and a grain-based commune system necessitated labor to work the land for nobles to remain viable. Symbolism in Mandekan creation myths relies on the foundations of life, like rain to unite the physical and metaphorical harvest into one cosmology. In modest opposition to Mills' use of architectural examples of natural embodiment, Hall emphasizes soul and soil germination by rain and *ni*.⁹ We live in a universal body, and the Bambara described an androgynous synthesis of harmony and the water spirit, Faro. Anthropologists and archeologists would be proud of the association with vegetation for life on Earth corporeal and without. Descendants of Bambara used charms to push back against spiritual corruption, and maybe more leather, blacksmith material, and animal talismans to match as self-embodied temples. What it amounted to was a revolution, much more radically aligned than what Mills presents as gradual steps toward freedom inside plantations. Instead, uprisings that happened in Natchez, Opelousas, New Orleans, and elsewhere were based on passionate unrest.¹⁰ Africans in Louisiana south were not powerless. In the northern Cane River Natchitoches, Creole took on a racially motivated, endogamous marriage akin to the androgynous body of Senegambia descendants. Cane River Creoles were more powerful by comingling into a natural reserve site where diversity in nature was integral to their success rather than demise.

In *The Forgotten People*, the Red River is the focal discussion, but in *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, we are met with the diasporic influence of riverways on another continent. Hall writes about the Senegal River, Gambia River, Niger River, Mississippi River, Arkansas River, Red River, and Ouachita Rivers in comparison. And if we are to evaluate them a revelation is revealed about settlements along those borders. Trading posts along these lines were not uncommon but so too were damaging pressures about boundaries. A boundary between Senegal and Mali at Fort St. Joseph was never convenient for loading or unloading due to it.¹¹ And at the Gambia River rival European traders were always in contention. Moors sided with the Dutch against the French for Arguin Island while the Portuguese already had a tradition established. And peace hardly ever lasted in the eighteenth century because of the proximity. Along the Mississippi River, some areas were not settled for fear of Indian attack. At Pointe Coupee, the French and Indian War damaged supply chains and while Indians ransacked already bad harvests the mid-eighteenth-century was besieged by the time capsule of river census data that would not come around again for a decade or more in the future. The 1708 census recorded sixty roaming Canadiens in Indian villages along the Mississippi River who ravished women that were supposed to follow Christian chastity.¹² Hall delves further into Creole folk who adapted to swamplands as a testament to the limitless nature of rivers and "forgotten people" to even suggest the linear regulated river channels had been turned into a swamp at some locations. Cypress swamps were named à la Ciprière. Neat waterways and bayous would only be a memory and at the Red River in the nineteenth century, a huge logjam would block all traffic until engineers figured out how to clear the debris from the area.

To fully surmise the literal and figurative muddiness of esoteric practices, with interjections into the natural reserve of cross-cultural abundance when it came to Afro-Creole culture we must think about the Black conjuring tradition. Time capsules of magic in the colonial world were linked to charms and supernatural objects such as a black cat bone.¹³ In Theophus H. Smith's *Conjuring Culture*, the experiences of conjuring culture throughout the South are represented in arts and entertainment, or the commercialization of the supernatural. The two previous methodologies were focused on the human qualities of intermingling social and economic motives, but for Smith, we are viewing a new paradigm of distinction between secular and spiritual worlds. Secular music, for example, is delineated as praising ungodly tenants and profane in a genre like blues. Blues draws from hoodoo and voodoo conjuring. Musical performers were, in addition to the rise in literary appreciation of the Cane River, creating a more sought-after inclusivity found rather in musical performance. Slave spirituals were sometimes the bedrock of hymn studies, and we can think of the shift to identifying folklore as not a "cultural refuse" but a popularized trend promoted to the secular world. Muddy Waters is a blues singer whose name tells us all about why swamps were more than a landscape. It was not uncommon to deride natural misfortunes like "death beetles" but in the Kongo, the Earth could be the embodiment of "unusual, bizarre, or twisted natural objects" from forests.¹⁴ Evil was embodied in many things and as a time capsule, getting rid of evil is next to impossible. The body as it ages becomes more profuse of excrements, and the natural processes of irritation, urine, and aesthetic decline are common.

Louisiana folklorist Robert Tallant is fond of the effectiveness of apothecary and plant roots for their potency, but the people he studies are not the only ones to recite the incarnation of deformities in stones, animals,

⁸ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 31.

⁹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 47-49.

¹⁰ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 373.

¹¹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 32.

¹² Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 3.

¹³ Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 145.

¹⁴ Smith, *Conjuring Culture Biblical Formations of Black America*, 48-49.

or insects. As with the Red River, New England charm makers like Increase Mather “borrowed and appropriated these traditions” for themselves.¹⁵ As with the androgyny of Bambara culture or endogamous marriage, and Creole traditions, the inventory of a white layman like Mather had refuge in dolls, puppets, sealed religious inscriptions, and images from Africa itself. It was as Smith reiterates, a “symmetry” of European and African charm characters. James River, Virginia becomes the site of diabolical African poisoning.¹⁶ Ritualistic poisoning was discovered all over the South and was indigenous to Africa. Alexander Garden, another white layman who was a commercial botanist from South Carolina noted the damaging effects of poison, as did Thomas Winterbottom from Britain. Like people or plants, certain animals could be representative of a conjuring power. Unusual species and creatures were often associated with mud, dirty water, or slime. And thus, healing traditions become tantamount. The topic of indigenous healing is what helped Coincoin gain freedom from her Cane River plantation in the Natchitoches. Black spiritualists today such as Protestants, Baptists, and Pentecostals are all conjurers in their own right but are representative of a new community of supernaturalists. Afro-Creoles on the Red River are not completely forgotten but remembering the Natchitoches environment and ecology requires restoring the value of historical artifacts, buildings, charms, and the natural landscape.

A recent volume by Lynette Ater Tanner in *Chained to the Land: Voices from Cotton & Cane Plantations, from Interviews of Former Slaves*, will offer substantive evidence from the Federal Writers’ Project about oral histories that need to be remembered, backing up new primary sources about the Red River’s history.¹⁷ The Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas handles of the Red River are a geographical boundary bigger than the Natchitoches but encapsulate the routes Caddo Indians took to inhabit the land. Oral stories from natives along the same banks speak of prophets in their religious order. Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis at the turn of the twentieth century is a great segway into the conflicts with these people as America manifested destiny.¹⁸ And it was the Great Raft logjam of the Red River from 1838 to 1873 and steamboat engineers who removed it steadily that formed a nexus in Caddo history. There are no inland waterways in Texas with a “higher diversity of native aquatic life.”¹⁹ Tanner’s *Chained to the Land* is a restatement of the power of silenced voices to add to the diversity in historical sources, and a singular trait of Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s work as a Haitian anthropologist.²⁰ My Time Capsule Hypothesis will build on the remnants of Cane River history and its heritage to bridge the divide between an Afro-Creole past of indigenous knowledge, something bordering a portentous future of freedom and anguish.

Natchitoches folklore stories during the Federal Writer’s Project that began in 1935 until 1940 were rediscovered by typists to promote the esoteric and supernatural tales of the Cane River. Superstitions also of the Cane River are documented in the FWP reserve at Northwestern State University. One such town of folklore was known as Antony, Natchitoches. And there, a Mrs. Roy Heim at 3698 Piedmont Drive described the life and ways of Antony and some of the spiritual ruminations of the place.²¹ A “Spirit Photograph on Mirror” memory says that a girl had been accosted by a storm and after her mutilation by the storm and laid to rest outside, her image did not disappear. Instead, the girl in the town of Campti after the electrical storm is said to have had her face imprinted onto a mirror. What a gruesome and distorted reality it was, but it was not the only close encounter with the haunted, especially with repeated disasters on the horizon. My Time Capsule Hypothesis benefits from haunted houses as the premonition of the deceased haunts a home without the knowledge of its inhabitants. Haunted homes obscure the past in the form of an ethereal presence and keep the future full of scary surprises. In many instances, the story of a haunted home was not known and became forgotten. Only rumors that amounted to speculations about what the Cane River house was, remained. Another memory of the FWP was of the “Simmons House” in Natchitoches.²² Simmons House was a two-story home near Natchitoches that was said to have been haunted, yet the actual history surrounding the disturbance was not known. And at Grand de Couer, a more real-time capsule was buried in contrast to the haunted homes above the surface.²³ A genuine treasure was said to be buried near Grand de Couer during the Civil War reign of Butler. Union General Benjamin Butler himself was the bane of the South and occupied New Orleans, though the memory only says “Butler” to add to the forgetting.

Next to folklore stories were folklore customs, and it made up part of the same section of archival sources about Natchitoches’ memories. One such folklore custom was about “Coffee Time” which occurred each afternoon

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Smith, *Conjuring Culture Biblical Formations of Black America*, 76.

¹⁷ Lynette Ater Tanner, *Chained to the Land Voices from Cotton & Cane Plantations, from Interviews of Former Slaves* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2014).

¹⁸ Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr. *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

¹⁹ Shannon Tompkins, “Caddo Lake’s History Is the Stuff of Legend,” *Houston Chronicle*, 2009.

²⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 2015).

²¹ Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), Spirit Photograph on Mirror, 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers’ Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

²² Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), Simmons House, 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers’ Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

²³ Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), Grand de Couer, 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers’ Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

between three and four.²⁴ The habitual nature of coffee time in Natchitoches appeals to the Time Capsule Hypothesis as an indication of social regulation going back to when hand mills ground fresh coffee. Scheduling coffee time, like other pastimes on the Cane River was set in anticipation for the future when fresh, never reheated coffee would not always be the case. As a nature reserve, the Natchitoches is one area where coffee au lait was never used or reheated coffee as well was avoided. At about three o'clock each day, Mrs. Heim said that a "sound like heavy rain" came from all the coffee mills and houses turning at once. A natural ambiance was never missed out on when it came to coffee time, but like the sound, it was an omniscient force regulating peoples' activity throughout Natchitoches. Retrograde memories after the onset of some traumatic event may add to the legitimacy of other research studies about short-term and long-term memory from recent activity.²⁵ For example, caffeine from coffee consumption may have a physical and emotive effect on memories and may explain my Mrs. Heim associated so many positive attunements to coffee time and the atmosphere.

Oral history as stated above and elsewhere went through a National Endowment for the Humanities, NEH-funded "oral history boom" and after it, new postmodern linguistics techniques came about to change how we study the same oral histories.²⁶ In our quest to understand forgetting and remembering the past, Cane River's Magnolia Plantation records in the archive are good examples of learning how to interpret their behaviors as a total ephemera of qualities, something representative of the past as a whole and not merely actions. The esotericism of churches and the Cane River is indicative of semantic phraseology as well and in reading about Derry, Louisiana we come upon a fusion of natural and allegorical dialect choices about the ecology of Natchitoches and the Red River. In a source filed in 1940 by Grace Dunn, several phrases and words come up for us to study.²⁷ "Menocks" which are wild lotuses, "grass sacks" or burlap sacks used during "barrel fishing," and "brush harvest" for the A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) camp meetings. In the document about Derry, Louisiana we get to witness the architectural prowess of African Americans in Natchitoches where they created a shelter for benches at the A.M.E. church. We also get to understand the idioms they use and why language is just as esoteric as buildings because it brings nature into focus. Folklore values oral history for keeping alive associations to phrases such as "petrified oak" because it enlightens the church and Natchitoches about the environment more directly than other sources might. Why do they call it a "big rock that is petrified oak" as if it was endowed with some haunting power? Dunn writes about whether it is a comet since there are "no rocks near Derry."²⁸ "Coal oil" or kerosene to light lamps on a large candle and a Cane River that is "damned" proliferates my Time Capsule Hypothesis for holding onto time inside a plantation home like Magnolia, or next to the water and its fish such as shrimp, crawfish, and minnows as a pastime festivity. When the river is low, partygoers could forget about their harm and focus on what is good in the world. Fishing rodeos turned the fish into a mammoth stew for everyone.

Cane River superstitions were none better described than by Lyle Saxon who was a novelist and journalist and directed the Works Progress Administration's FWP guide to Louisiana. In a newspaper article from 1925 he recounts the superstitions and asserts that the "backcountry in Louisiana, is surrounded by an unseen world, full of omens and signs and strange taboos," and is part of a heritage, some forgotten, but haunting nonetheless.²⁹ A point of veneration is the "negro" who Saxon places in a quagmire of evil from the fairies and folktales of old Africa. Their memories are mostly of slavery, the negro, and their religion does not harken to Africa always, though, in Saxon's refutation, the strange beliefs and proverbs they tell him are universal. Saxon resided near Melrose Plantation in Natchitoches where he recorded the superstitions. It was Joseph Henry, an elder patriarch of the Melrose Plantation who left it to John and Cammie in 1899, who named the plantation after Sir Walter Scott's poem, "Melrose Abbey," in literary spirit.³⁰ Obscuring the past, as in the present, brings up common themes in some of the supernatural forebodings when the natural environment is involved because dangers were regularly on the horizon. The stories and novels of Lyle Saxon themselves are a solemn time capsule of emotions lost in time. Bad luck comes from all kinds of places: the lightning striking you if you plow the field on Good Friday to destroy your crop; seeing the new moon through the trees; telling dreams before breakfast; moving a cat or broom from one house to another unless by passing it through a window; a rabbit crossing your path at night predicts bad misfortune too unless you walk backwards from the spot said rabbit passed; never eat goobers (peanuts) in your house or yard

²⁴ Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), Coffee Time, 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers' Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

²⁵ Thomas J. Anastasio et al., "Defining Collective Memory," *Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9173.003.0006>.

²⁶ Leigh Campbell-Hale, *Remembering Ludlow but Forgetting the Columbine: The 1927-1928 Colorado Coal Strike* (University Press of Colorado, 2023), 228.

²⁷ Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), 17 Feb 1940, Cane River (at Derry, La.), 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers' Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

²⁸ Folklore Natchitoches Stories (town of, Antony), 17 Feb 1940, Cane River (at Derry, La.), 1935-1940, Folder 63 (Magnolia), Federal Writers' Project Collection. Cammie Henry Research Center. Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library.

²⁹ Lyle Saxon, "Cane River Superstitions," *The Times-Picayune*, September 20, 1925, p. 3.

³⁰ Patricia Austin Becker, *Cane River Bohemia: Cammie Henry and Her Circle at Melrose Plantation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

unless you want bad misfortune to strike; to keep a dog from leaving home cut an end from its tail and bury the piece beneath the front steps; never throw away combings of hair so birds do not make a nest of it and you go crazy; the married person tips over a chair upon rising will never marry again; a baby that looks at itself in the mirror before three months old will die prematurely; it is bad luck to carry a spade, hoe, or axe through the house; a picture falling from the wall, especially of a person means death; "Little bird sing too soon in de mawnin', big hawk catch him befo' night"; move to a new house on Sunday if you never want to leave it; give a girl a fan if you want to fan away the friendship; sew a button or mend a rip in a dress you are wearing with something in your mouth to avoid someone lying about you; and other misfortunes arrive when a washerwoman wets her gown as the husband may beat her or when a child sleeps with arms above their heads, hardships may occur.³¹

If we were to continue with rhymes, bad omens, and superstitions, Saxon categorizes more of them into segments we can relate to in times of distress but other writers also contribute to Creole culture's mythology canon. Saxon further writes about superstition in illnesses; and superstitions peculiar to women, the weather, and animals and birds. Who were the other literary giants of the time we can read today? One such personality was George W. Cable.³² Cable's Creole novels inspired "nasty utterances" but have since been forgotten as critics praised him in other ways for Cable's "sympathetic heart" and myopic imagination, skill, and attention to the perilous Creole civilization. Even the use of enunciations and words, and intonation were immaculate. An esoteric portrayal of writers from the nineteenth century made esoteric sorrow and sanctity by opting instead for "The End of the World" as Dr. William H. Holcombe had done. The abyss and tragedy were themes that were inseparable from these writers, like R.T. Buckner, and others. And as the frontier loomed nearer with each year across the plains of America, native folklore was hard to forget in the Time Capsule landscape that is North America. Red River mythology and prophecy were tormented by the origin and future of Caddo Indians. In effect, the "disappearance" of their ancient tribal cult is connected in some way to the temples.³³ And similar to Turner's frontier thesis, Thomas Carlyle's Great Man theory rested on our cultural heroes, some of whom could be most notorious for a destined return, or be placed somewhere in the afterlife like pharaohs or Christ. And the Caddo Indians of the Red River referred to great men of their own such as *yuko* or *yoko* doctors who were said to have known what was going to happen in the future.³⁴ Foretelling epidemics and other disasters were normal for these prophets. In culminating the Time Capsule Hypothesis, it is crucial to embrace Creole culture's remembrance of prophecy. With the future ahead, and misfortune and bad luck abound, it was wise to accept superstition.

Esotericism and ecology are critical subjects, from which the Natchitoches Cane River area can be studied in a theoretical embrace of mythology, Creole identity, and environment. Intervention into these matters can be traced back to some of the earliest theoretical frameworks, what we know of as epistemology.³⁵ Conscious interactions with oral histories bring them to the present moment to argue on behalf of the Time Capsule Hypothesis of unending forgetting. What we do remember is the anticipation, or superstition, of misfortune or salvation ahead. Our natural world is an allegory taken up by oral histories, writers, and folklore enthusiasts who know the Red River well and keep bringing up its past to hypothesize the perils of the future. Magnolia and Melrose Plantations also are the architectural backdrop of what time can do to the environment. It erodes but it also preserves memories in the decorations people structure on it, and the families who inhabit the homes are susceptible to collapse or rebirth. Haunting memories keep folklore going by forever indicating impending doom. If one wants to understand the Creole Cane River and Louisiana history, knowing the 1935 Federal Writers' Project and its credibility as a source of documentation will add more instruction to the biodiversity we need to survive.

³¹ Lyle Saxon, "Cane River Superstitions," *The Times-Picayune*, September 20, 1925, p. 3.

³² Genevieve L. Markstein, "Louisiana Literary Gems" *The Times-Picayune*.

³³ Jay Miller, "Changing Moons: A History of Caddo Religion," *Plains Anthropologist* 41, no. 157 (1996): pp. 143-159, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2052546.1996.11931784>, 251.

³⁴ Miller, "Changing Moons: A History of Caddo Religion," 252.

³⁵ Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Wallach Scott, and Gary Wilder. "Theses on Theory and History." *History of the Present* 10, no. 1 (2020): 157-65. <https://doi.org/10.1215/21599785-8221515>.

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