

A History of New Orleans, LA., and Congo Square

New Orleans History - 1

Congo Square - 9



Congo Square Today

New Orleans History

Three thousand black slaves were brought to the French Province of Louisiana in 1717 by the Mississippi Company. The colonists of New Orleans had first tried to enslave the Indians of the area but it failed. The colonists were promised a life of indolent ease and were not about to work themselves, refusing to clear the forests and cultivate the land. The solution was to acquire Negro slaves. In the City of New Orleans in 1712 there were 600 Negro slaves and 400 white settlers. By 1724 the number of slaves had grown to 3,000 and the white settlers numbered 1,700.

The famous Black codes were signed in March, 1724. These codes were to insure safety for the settlers having slaves that all masters would impart religious instructions to their slaves and gave the legislative body the right to confiscate all blacks that were under supervision of any person not a Catholic. The Province, under French rule, was a Catholic domain. There were 49 other articles that dealt with the conduct and government of the black slave. Such articles as: no mingling of the races (which was ignored by many of the white settlers creating a large group of populace called 'Mulattoes' the result of

having a white father and a black mother), concubinage with slaves (the living together of a man and a woman not legally married), the marriage of a white and a black, free or slave, was forbidden.

The black Codes were first passed in March of 1724. These codes were borrowed from the existing laws of Santo Domingo and were to insure safety for the settlers having slaves and to control the treatment of the slaves. The harshest, most severe penalties were provided and enforced in case of any wrong doing on the part of only slaves which would seem to endanger the absolute supremacy of the white population. Within these codes the blacks were protected from any tyranny, neglect, cruelty or oppression from his master, much like the protection given the bond-servant or hired help in the State of Massachusetts. There were 50 articles that dealt with the conduct and the government of the bond slave. It not only dealt with Negroes, the first article of the original Black code ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the Province; with the next four articles prohibiting any form of worship excepting the Roman Catholic religion, and made it imperative upon the master to impart religious training to their slaves and provided finally for the confiscation of Blacks placed under the supervision of a person not a Catholic, as the Province, under French rules, was a Catholic domain. There was also a provision about working on Sunday or Holy Days. This would be one reason that plantation slaves got Sunday off as the codes insisted upon Sunday being a non-work day. The last 49 articles dealt entirely with the conduct and government of the Negroes. It prohibited any mingling of the races. This part was ignored by many of the white settlers, creating a large group of populace. An owner could not have concubinage with slaves. Marriages between blacks and whites was forbidden. It didn't matter if the black was free or a slave. These articles were enforced and heavy fines and penalties and other punishments were given for anyone not following the codes. There was a provision made for the manumission of slaves, with a master if he or she is ever the age of 25 and while living or by testamentary act, free the slave provided permission was first received from the Superior Council. This manumission granted the slave, 'the same rights, privileges, and immunities which are enjoyed by free-born persons, and also to their property, the same effects which our other subjects derive from the happy circumstance of their having been born free.' Bienville returned to Paris after he signed the codes.

Between 1724 and 1743 Bienville was in and out of authority in New Orleans with the situation continuing without any real improvement in the land and corrupt conditions always seeming to be present in New Orleans. Indian trouble continued to plague New Orleans for the next 25 years.

A master could grant manumission (freedom from slavery) if the slave was over 25 after obtaining permission from the Superior Council. Few slaves were granted manumission. If granted the slave would be free with the same rights, privileges and immunities which were enjoyed by free-born persons. The 'Black codes' (Code Noir) also restricted the activities of the free Negroes, and ordered all Jews out of the colony, forbidding the exercise of any other religion than the Catholic.

Those who violated the Black code were punished very brutally according to modern standards. First offenders were branded on one shoulder with a 'fleur-de-lis' (the lily flower used on the French flag) and had their ears cut off. Second offenders had the other shoulder branded and the heel tendons cut. Third offenders suffered the death penalty.

The neighboring Indians were a big problem to the settlers; many times these raids resulted in the Indians capturing the Negro slaves alive and bringing them to their village and enslave them as laborers. One such raid by the Chickasaw Indians in 1730 resulted in the loss of 100 women and 200 slaves.

In 1743, New Orleans population totaled 2000, of which 300 were soldiers, and 300 were Negroes of both sexes. In the Province of Louisiana there were 4000 white and 2000 Negroes a decrease of the preceding year of 1000. In 1796, in New Orleans, the population was 3,190, with 1,125 of that total Negroes. Within this number of 1,125, 31 were free Negroes, and 68 people of mixed blood, one of the earliest accounts of the 'people of color (Creoles). These Creoles were to play an important part in the history of New Orleans.

In 1769 in the Province of Louisiana, where many of the plantations were located, the population was 13, 538 of which about half were Negro slaves. The black codes were retained when the Spanish acquired the Province of Louisiana in 1762. In 1783 there were 42,346 people living in the Province; 1700 were free Negroes and 1800 there were 18,000 Slaves. In New Orleans at this time the population rose to 5, 338. The possibility of slave revolts was very real. One such revolt happened in 1795 in Ponte Coupee Parish. It failed when the leaders of the revolt disagreed amongst themselves. Twenty-five Negroes were killed and another 23 captured, these being hung from a boat going down the river, which stopped at each Parish where one of the 23 were hung.

In 1803 the United States of America purchased the Louisiana territory. A different set of codes were enacted, more lenient ones for the slaves, but the Black codes were retained, except when they differed with statutes of the U.S. In that case, new ordinances were passed relating to the conduct of the slaves. At this time (1803) there were 10,000 living in New Orleans, 5,000 white, 2,000 free slaves and 3,000 slaves.

On January 1, 1808, the U. S. passed a law prohibiting the importation of slaves into the country. This law did not stop the slave traffic, no more than prohibition stopped the consummation of alcohol, as a well organized smuggling ring, brought into New Orleans on a fleet of barges, Negro slaves being distributing them as far north as Donaldsonville. These smuggles had a strong hold on Grand Terre by the Gulf, where they would hold slave auctions. The organizer of this smuggling activity was Jean L'Fitte. His agents reported as many as 400 slaves sold and smuggled up the river each day. In 1814 the U. S. government destroyed Grand Terre, the raid being lead by Commodore Patterson. Another one of these smugglers who later was to gain fame and honor as an American hero was James Bowie. A narrative written by Bowie as a smuggler states:

"At that time each state was allowed to regulate the laws covering smuggled slaves in its own territory. In Louisiana the law said that smuggled slaves, when they were captured must be sold at auction by the customs officers. Half of the sale price always went to the informers who 'denounced' them to the officers. So we bought Negroes from Galveston at a dollar a pound - \$140.00 was the average price - and we took them, by boat or overland, to Louisiana. New Orleans was a favorite market. There we organize slave-handling companies which, immediately on arrival of a consignment, 'denounced' it and turned it over to the customs officials. At the auction which followed, the companies bought back their own slaves, and at once received half their purchase money because they had informed the custom officials. Then the companies took the slaves direct to the plantations, sometimes carrying them far up the Mississippi to resell them to planters. In this manner we often got the prices of \$1,000 for prime Negroes."

Early History-La Salle

Around the year 1677, the expedition of LaSalle descended the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico and claimed Louisiana for France. In 1713, Antoine

Crozat, a French banker and financier of considerable wealth, had tried for 5 years to make the territory commercially profitable, was replaced by the Mississippi Company in 1717. The site of present day New Orleans was founded in 1718 by Sieur de Bienville. A royal grant was given to John Law, a Scotsman. The French had founded settlements in Mobile, Natchez and on the eastern shore of Biloxi. Bienville founded the city of New Orleans 30 leagues from the Gulf of Mexico on a crescent shaped bend of the Mississippi River, a site he had surveyed in 1700. He named the site after the Duke of Orleans. The site was also the place of an Indian village named Tchoutchouma. Before the site could be completely free from flooding a system of levees had to be built to hold back the power waters of the flooding Mississippi River. Three hundred colonists from France began arriving in June of 1718. Sixty eight of them settled in the new town called New Orleans.

From the beginning the class of people that settled in New Orleans would be classified as lower class, many of them actually criminals, both men and women. Thus began what has been called the 'City of Sin' and at one time the roughest city on the North American continent.

Two kinds of women were sent to New Orleans by the French. The first group numbered 88. No children were ever born of these 88 women. No explanation why has ever been discovered.

A second group of women were sent over, called the 'Casket Girls,' so called because each of them had a small trunk filled with personal belongings. A sort of hope chest which had been give her by the company. In contrast this group of women were very prolific in child bearing, each having an extraordinary number of children. This biological miracle furnished practically every native family that can be traced descendents in an unbroken line to these Casket Girls. These marginable young ladies, of good character, were housed by the Ursuline Sisters that was guarded by soldiers until each found a husband.

The history of the Louisiana Province until about 1721 was in a state of confusion, failures and mis-directions. A new administrator, Duvergior, was sent to straighten out the situation and was given the authority over Bienville. Having been relieved of many of his numerous duties, Bienville had the time to begin building the now famous 'Vieux Carre' (old square-French quarter)

The difficulties of administration in New Orleans caused many changes in the head administrator and soon Bienville was reassigned to that post after Duyvergior was recalled. In August of 1722, the Capital of the Province was moved from Biloxi to New Orleans. In 1727, in the spring, a company of Ursuline

Nuns arrived in New Orleans to work at the hospital and teach both white and black girls the beauties and comforts of a religious life and to care for the previously mentioned Casket Girls until they found husbands. They did a great job, one source claiming each of the Casket Girls had 100 (one hundred) children. In his book 'The French Quarter' Herbert Asbury states:

"By some queer physiological mischance, none of the correction girls apparently ever bore a child. On the other hand, the Casket Girls would seem to have been extraordinarily fertile, each becoming the mother of at least a hundred children."

The New Orleans of 1727 is described by one of the Ursuline Nuns, Madeleine Hachard:

"Our town is very handsome, well constructed and regularly built, as much as I could judge on the day of our arrival; for ever since that day we have remained cloistered in our dwelling. The streets are large and straight. The houses well built, with upright joists, the interstices filled with mortar, and the exterior whitewashed with lime. In the interior they are wainscoted. The colonists are very proud of their capital. Suffice it to say, they sing here a song in the streets to the effect that this town is as fine a sight as Paris. I do not, however, speak of the manners of the laity, but I am told that their habits are corrupt and scandalous. There are, however, a great number of honest people, and one does not see any of those girls who were said to have been deported on compulsion. The women here are extremely ignorant as to the means of securing their salvation but they are very expert in the art of displaying their beauty. There is as much luxury in this town that there is no distinction among the class as so far as dress goes. The magnificence of display is equal to all. Most of them reduce themselves and their family to a hard lot of living at home on nothing but sagamite, and flaunt costly ribbons. They paint and rouge to hide the ravages of time, and wear on their faces, as embellishment, small black patches."

The laziness of the settlers and inability of the Indians to adapt to hard labor brought on the necessity of bringing over Negro slaves. In 1712 the first slaves arrived to build the city and begin its agriculture. In 1721 there were 5000 slaves. The population in 1724-3300 whites and approximately 1700 slaves.

A new era began upon the arrival of the Marquis de Vaudreuil. The Marquis's reign brought the splendor of the French Court of Versailles to New Orleans in 1743. His administration was clothed in splendor but it also was very corrupt. Thieves, vagabonds and prostitutes streamed into New Orleans. Laws

were passed to counter-act the rise of vice but were not enforced. The splendor of the official functions such as parties, balls, etc. couldn't save the Marquis who was soon replaced by Louis Billouart de Kerlerec who arrived in New Orleans on Feb. 9th, 1753. He was an honest man but an unfortunate one as he had corrupt officials. His administration made little progress in its attempts to control the raising criminal elements and corrupt officials.

Throughout the history of New Orleans one will find corrupt officials and the city attracted the criminal element. It was during this administration that a 'war' broke out over the assigned missionary territory between the Jesuits and Capuchins.

In 1762 Spain took possession over the Province and New Orleans took near two years to physically send someone to rule. First was Antonio de Ulloa on March 5, 1766. His authority led the people to revolt, led by the Acadians and the Germans from up the river. In 1768, Alexander O'Reilly, an Irish soldier of fortune, was sent by the Spanish Government to take control. He took firm control of the province but governed it with kindness and moderation and for awhile there was an absence of political problems. During the Spanish rule there were two large fires that destroyed a good part of the city in 1788 and 1794. New Orleans was rebuilt using the Spanish style of architecture replacing the French style.

In 1791, Baron de Carondelet was made Governor. (In present day New Orleans streets are named after Carondelet, Bienville and Claiborne.)

Within months of the re-possession by France in 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana territory. On December 17th, 1803 Governor Claiborne took possession of New Orleans in the name of the United States. One of the results of the purchase was the migrating of a large number of the U. S. population into this new frontier. The Mississippi River became an important part of the increased commerce it carried now that the river was open to traffic into the Gulf of Mexico.

Instead of many days travel using the overland route to the Atlantic coast ports, flatboats now carried goods from the large industrial cities of the north to New Orleans, fast becoming a number one port for exported American shipping. Steamboat traffic appeared on the Mississippi River around 1812. By 1844 there were at least 450 steamboats operating on the Mississippi River. (The steamboats dealt the flatboat men, generally a group of bullies, a fatal blow as they couldn't compete with the speed and power of the steamboats.

With the steamboats appeared the menace of the river, the gamblers, who presence lasted until around the Civil War. It seemed like it was always on problem or another for the city of New Orleans.

Creoles

From the beginning of their existence in Louisiana, the free people of color maintained a society of their own. One in which class lines were as rigidly drawn as among the whites.

The Griffe was the off-spring of a Mulatto and Negro, looked down upon the pure-blooded Negro; the Mulatto regarded the Griffe with scorn and was in turn spurned by the quadroon; the Octoroon refused to have social relations with any of the others.

The mulatto is a first generation off-spring of a Negro and a white. A quadroon is a person of a quarter of Negro ancestry. An Octoroon is a person of one-eighth Negro blood. The Griffe is the off-spring of a mulatto and a Negro. A Creole of color is a descended of early French or Spanish settler of the Louisiana area mixed with Negro blood. Gens de Color was a group embracing the families of the same stock in the male line.

Grace King writes about the Creoles:

"During the ancient regime in Louisiana, the pure-blooded African was never called colored, but always Negro. The Gens de Couleur, colored people, were a class apart, separated from the superior to the Negroes, ennobled, were it by only one drop of white blood in their veins. The caste system has existed from the first introduction of slaves. From the first appearance of Gens de couleur in the colony, dates the class Gens de Couleur libres. No more explanation than this of the origin of the free blacks has been given by any Louisiana historian, although Lyle Saxon boldly ventured the opinion that 'in those first far-off days when there were no white women in the colony, there were numerous mulatto children born to Negro slave women.'

The Quadroon women were renown all over the world for their beauty. The famous Quadroon balls would attract men from all over the world where they would select one of the Quadroon women as their date for the night (and well into the morning.) Many well-to-do New Orleans citizens would have a Quadroon for their mistress and would secure a house for them 'on the Ramparts.' This arrangement continued even after the Quadroon's citizen became a married man.

In many instances the father set these women free, and since under the law children always shared the condition of their others, they became free also, and so swelled the ranks of the Gens de couleur libres. The Gens de couleur formed a part of the population at a very early date in the history of Louisiana. They are specifically mentioned in the Black Code, promulgated by Bienville in 1724, 6 years after the founding of New Orleans and they were forbidden to marry either their own slaves or slaves owned by white men. They were also mentioned in the police regulations issued in 1751 by the Marquis de Vaudreuil."

By 1830 some of the Gens de Couleur had arrived at such a degree of wealth some owned cotton and sugar plantations with numerous slaves. They educated their children as they had been educated in France. Those who chose to remain in France attained distinction in scientific and literary circles. In New Orleans they became musicians (Gottschalk) merchants, hunters, tailors, carpenters, etc. Frequently they attend the Orleans Theater, sitting in the second tier, reserved for their exclusive use, where white people of either sex were never allowed. All the inhabitants or citizens of this colony were forbidden to permit, on their plantations, or at their places of residence, or elsewhere, any assembly of Negroes or Negresses, whether under pretext of dancing or for any other cause that is to say, excepting the Negroes whom they may own themselves. It was forbidden them to allow their slaves to go out of their plantations or premises for similar purposes, because his Majesty had prohibited all assemble in the town of New Orleans or in its vicinity, or elsewhere, under an pretext whatever, under the penalty of said Negroes, of province permit on his plantation or premises' an assembly of Negroes other than his own, under an pretext whatever, he shall, for the first offense, pay one hundred crowns to the treasury of the church, and for the next offense of this kind, be sentenced to work for life on the king's galleys.

Congo Square

When the Spanish, under O'Reilly, governed the Province, all regulations but the Black code were repealed. From the year of the Marquis' Police Regulations (1751 until 1786) there was a gradual lessening of the rules for slave gatherings and dancing, for in 1786 we find a law 'forbidding slaves to dance in the public squares, on Sunday and Holy days until the close of evening services.' That meant there were assemblies that were allowed, this dancing being

observed by many visitors to the city. In 1799 one such visitor to New Orleans took a stroll after his last meal of the day. He relates to us that on the edge of town he saw, 'vast numbers of Negro slaves - men, women and children, assembled together on the levee, dancing in large rings.' The following Sunday he again saw them dancing, this time inside the city 'upwards of 100 Negroes of both sexes, dancing and singing on the levee.'

In the back part of the old city on the corner of Rampart and Orleans Streets there was a square first known as Circus Square. Today it is known as Beauregard Square. Its fame rest on the name it was known by when it was the site of the get together of large numbers of Negro dances, that is Congo Square. A law was passed in 1817, restricting Negro public dancing to Sundays before sundown and in places designated by the mayor. The only place he designated was Congo Square. The dancing was held under strict police supervision. A number of people have recorded their impressions of the dancing they saw and the music they heard in Congo Square. The best of these accounts is that of Henry Latrobe, an architect. On Sunday afternoon, in 1819, Latrobe, by accident, came upon the dancers and estimated he saw between 5 to 6 hundred dancers:

"They were formed into circular groups in the midst of 4, of which were two women dancing. They held each a coarse handkerchief extending by the corners in their hands, and set to each other in a miserably dull and slow figure, hardly moving their feet or bodies. The music consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man sat astride of a cylindrical drum about a foot in diameter, and beat it with incredible quickness with the edge of his hand and fingers. The other drum was an open staved thing held between the knees and beaten in the same manner. They made an incredible noise. The most curious instrument, however, was a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. On top of the finger board was the rude figure of a man in sitting posture, and two pegs behind him to which the strings were fastened. The body was a calabash.



Calabash

Fruit hollowed out into a gourd

It was played upon by a very little old man, apparently 8 or 9 years old. The women squalled out a burthen to the playing at intervals, consisting of two notes, as the Negroes, working in our cities, respond to the song of their leader. Most of the circles contained the same sort of dancers. One was larger, in which a ring of a dozen women walked, by way of dancing, round the music in the center. But the instruments were of different construction. One, which from the color of the wood seemed new, consisted of a block cut into something of the form of a cricket but with a long and deep notch down the center. This thing made a considerable noise, being beaten lustily on the side by a short stick. In the same orchestra was a square drum, looking like stool, which made an abominably loud noise; also a calabash with a round hole in it, the hole studded with brass nails, which was beaten by a woman with two short sticks. A man sung an uncouth song to the dancing which I suppose was in some African language, for it was not French and the women screamed a detestable burthen on a single note."

As far back as 1799, fifes and duffles were used in the orchestras and in time one hears banjos, triangles, Jews harps and tambourines being used to accompany the dancers. Some observers recorded seeing dances they described as jigs, fandangos and Virginia breakdowns in the square. While accounts tell of the primitive character of the dances of Congo Square they also show dances of the surrounding culture beginning to creep into the dancing in Congo Square. On the participants in the dancing, Leroy Jones states:

"It is safe to assume, for instance, that there were no black Creoles dancing in Congo Square."

This dancing in Congo Square was one of the few opportunities the Negroes had to sing and dance for any length of time. The slaves were brought to and brought back from the square by their masters, and, of course, supervised by the local police while they were there. These gatherings in Congo Square were said to contain examples of some African songs which were supposedly forbidden as they were thought to be part of the voodoo cult. So the music in Congo Square was a mixture of African music and music the Negro heard around him. One of the first examples of use of an African chant was the chant about the great drum the 'Bamboula."



Bamboula Drum

Gottschalk based one of his most famous compositions, La Bamboula, on what he was supposed to have heard when taken to Congo Square by his black baby sitter.

Sometime, between 1837 and 1843, the dancing was stopped in Congo Square. Records cannot be found as to exactly when or why, but in 1845, an ordinance was passed resuming the dancing in Congo Square. The dancing was a popular tourist attraction and numerous citizens had asked that it be restored. It was to continue until the time of the Civil War when it was permanently stopped.

Thus the Council of Municipality issued the following ordinance: "whereas, numerous citizens have requested the Council of Municipality Number One to grant permission to slaves to assemble on Sundays in Circus Square (Congo Square), for the purpose of dancing. Whereas, when such a merriment takes place before sunset and is not offensive to public decency, it can be tolerated provided it being under police inspection. Resolved that from the first of May to the thirty-first of August of each year, the slaves, provided with a written consent of their master, be permitted to assemble Sunday on the Circus Square for the purpose of dancing from four to six-thirty o'clock p.m. Resolved that it shall be the duty of the commissaries of police of the third and fifth wards, of the commanding officer at Post Treme and five men of the day police, to watch that no police ordinance be violated during the time allowed to Negroes to dance at Circus Square."

In his book on 'The French quarter' Asbury states:

"The weekly concourse of slaves in Congo Square reached the height of its popularity and renown during the fifteen years which preceded the Civil War; sometimes there were almost as many white spectators surrounding the Square to watch the slaves "dance Congo" as there were black dancers weaving and stamping under the sycamore trees. Even in earlier days a Congo dance was

considered one of the unique attractions of New Orleans; a visitors were always taken to see the slaves at play, and in their eyes the spectacle ranked second only to a Quadroon ball as a colorful, exotic display. The "Circus Public Square," wrote the editor of New Orleans' first directory, published in 1822, "is very noted on account of its being the place where the Congo and other Negroes dance, carouse and debauch on the Sabbath, to the great injury of the morals of the rising generation; it is a foolish custom, that elicits the ridicule of most respectable persons who visit the city; but if it is not considered good policy to abolish the practice entirely, surely they could be ordered to assemble at some place more distant from the houses, by which means the evil would be measurably remedied."

Most contemporary observers and citizens of New Orleans agree with the above estimate of the slave gatherings; it seems the majority of the people of New Orleans and most observers looked upon them as a Sunday afternoon innocent merriment and would have a beneficial effect on the slave, giving them an outlet for their energies and repressions acquired during a week of hard labor. With the strictness of the police supervision it was unlikely there would ever be any trouble with the Negroes dancing in Congo Square.

The slaves usually began arriving at Congo Square an hour or so before the scheduled time of the dancing, with the men strutting proudly in their cast-off clothes given them by their masters and the women in dotted calicoes, wearing bright-colored Madras Kerchiefs tied about their hair to form the poplar headdress which the Creoles called the Tignon. The slaves brought their children with them, dressing them in old garments rather plain but blighted up by colorful feathers or bits of gay ribbon. The spectacle never failed to draw the Hawkers of refreshments and on the outskirts of the noisy crowd they peddled their wares, some with big trays slung around their necks and others with 'meal tables screened from the sun by cotton awnings, and offering ginger beer, pies, lemonade, and little ginger cakes called Maulatto's Belly. Then on a signal from the police officials, the slaves were summoned to the center of the square by the rattling of two huge beef bones upon the head of a cask, out of which had been fashioned a sort of drum or tambourine called the Bamboula. This rattling changed to a steady beat of the drums. The dances began doing their dancing as the drummer, without a pause and no break in the rhythm, continued until the sunset ended the festivities.

The favorite dances of the slaves are described in a lengthily article by Cable. The dances had such names as the Calinda, (a variation of one used in the

Voodoo ceremonies) and the Bamboula. Both of these dances were primarily based on the primitive dances of the African jungle. Through a period of years these dances inter-mingled with the dances of the Louisiana culture, especially the contra-dances of the French segment of New Orleans.

Another person who saw the dances in Congo Square was J. G. Flugel, a German trader. He observed the dancing on Feb. of 1817 and recorded in his journal the following:

"Their dances certainly are curious, particularly to a European. Their posture and movements somewhat resembled those of monkeys. One might be a little imagination take them for a group of baboons. Yet as these poor wretches are entirely ignorant of anything, like civilization (for their masters withhold everything from them that in the least might add to the cultivation of their minds) one must not be surprised at their actions. The recreation is at least natural and they are free in comparison with those poor wretches, slaves of their passions. I saw today among the crowd Gildmeister of Bramen, clerk or partner of Teatzmann. He told me that three of the Negroes in the group closest to us were formerly kings or chiefs in Congo. I perceive in them a more gentile address. They are richly ornamented and dance extremely well."

A correspondent of the New York world describes the dancing:

"A dry-goods box and an old pork barrel formed the orchestra. These were beaten with sticks or bones, used like drumsticks so as to keep up a continuous rattle, while some old men and women chanted a song that appeared to me to be purely African in its man vowel led syllable words. Owing to the noise, I could not even attempt to catch the words. I asked several old women to recite them to me, but they only laughed and shook their heads. In their patois they told me - no use, you could never understand it. "C'est le Congo' - it is the Congo. The dance was certainly peculiar, and I observed that only a few old persons, who had probably all been slaves, knew how to dance it. The women did not move their feet from the ground. They only writhed their bodies and swayed in adulatory motions from ankles to waist. The men leaped and performed feats of gymnastic dancing which reminded me of song step in the jota aragonesa. Small bells were attached to their ankles. "Vous ne comprenez pas ceet danse-la?" An old women asked me. I did not altogether understand it, but it appeared to be more or less lascivious as I saw it. I offered the women some money to recite the words of the Congo song. She consulted

with another and both went off shaking their heads. I could obtain no satisfaction."

Lafacadios Hearn, the one-eyed poet and writer, mentions that throughout the land Negroes on the plantations dance on Sunday and he describes some of the instruments they used:

"The old African dances, the Calinda and the Bele (which latter is accompanied by chanted improvisation), are danced on Sunday to the sound of the drum on almost every plantation in the land. The drum indeed, is an instrument to which the country-folk are so much attached that they swear by it. Tambo being the oath uttered upon all ordinary occasions of surprise or vexation. but the instrument is quite as often called "Ka" because it is made out of a quarter barrel, or quart, in the patois "Ka." both ends of the barrel having been removed, a wet hid, well wrapped about a couple of hoops, is driven on and in drying the stretched skin obtains still further tension."

In another one of Hearn's descriptions on music originating in New Orleans from 1860 to 1880. He writes:

"The other end of the "Ka" is always let open. Across the face of the skin a string is tightly stretched to which are attached, at intervals of about an inch apart, very thick fragments of bamboo or cut feather stem. These lend a certain vibration to the tones."

Still another description is given:

"In the time of Pere Labat, the Negro drums had a somewhat different form. These were then two kinds of drums - a big tamtam and a little one, which used to be played together. Both consisted of skins tightly stretched over one end of a cylinder, or a section of a hollow tree trunk. The larger was from 3 to 4 feet long, with a diameter of from 15 to 16 inches; the smaller 'Baola,' was of the same length, but only 8 or 9 inches in diameter. The skillful player (bel tambouye) straddles his Ka stripped to the waist, and plays upon it with the finer tips of both hands simultaneously, taking care that the vibrating string occupies a horizontal position. Occasionally the heel of the naked foot is pressed lightly or vigorously against the skin so as to produce changes of tone. This is called 'giving heel' to the drum-bailly talon. Meanwhile a boy keeps striking the drum at the uncovered end with a stick, so as to produce a dry, clattering accompaniment. The sound of the drum itself, well played, has a wild power that makes and masters all the excitement of the dance - a complicated double roll with a peculiar billowy rising and falling. The tapping of a Ka can be heard at surprising distances and experienced players often play for hours at a

time without exhibiting weariness, or in the least diminishing the volume of sound produced."

Another description of the dancing:

'The movement of the Calinda and the Bamboula were very similar, but for the evolution of the latter the male dancers attached bits of tin or other metal to ribbons tied about their ankles. thus accoutered, they pranced back and forth, leaping into the air and stamping in unison, occasionally shouting, "Dansez bambojls, Badoum, Badoum." The women, scarcely lifting their feet from the ground, swayed their bodies from side to side and chanted an ancient song as monotonous as a dirge. Beyond the groups of dancers were the children, leaping and cavorting in imitation of their elders, so that the entire square was an almost solid mass of black bodies stamping and swaying to the rhythmic beat of the bones upon the cask, the frenzied chanting of the women, and the clanging of the pieces of metal which dangled from the ankles of the men. The Congo plains must have presented an extraordinary spectacle on the festive occasions."

The best description of Negro music after the Civil War was published in 1886 by George Washington Cable, a native of New Orleans who fought under southern colors in the War and was forced to leave because of his writings which expressed his disapproval of the southern postwar mistreatment of the blacks. While it is a very lengthily article, we will quote only the parts that would be important to us in our quest for knowledge of early Negro music.

"The booming of African drums and blast of high horns called to the gathering. The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and having a sheep or goat skin stretched across the other. One was large, the other much smaller. The tight skin heads were not held up to be struck; the drums were laid along on the turf and the drummers best rode them, and beat them on the head made with fingers, fists and feet. With slow vehemence on the great drum and fiercely and rapidly on the small one. Sometimes an extra performer sat on the ground behind the larger drum, at its' open end, and beat upon the wooden side of it with two sticks." The smaller drum was often made from a joint or two of very large bamboo, in the West Indies where such could be gotten, and this is said to be the origin of its name' for it was called the Bamboula. In stolen hours of night or the basking-

hour of noon the black man contrived to fashion these rude instruments and others. The drummers, I say, best rode the drums; the other musicians sat about them in an arc, cross-legged on the ground. One important instrument was a gourd partly filled with pebbles or grains of corn, flourished violently at the end of a stout staff with one hand and beaten upon the palm of the other. Other performers rang triangles, and others twanged from Jew's harps an astonishing amount of sound. Another instrument was the sawbones of a horse or mule, and a key rattled rhythmically along its weather-beaten teeth. At times the drums were re-enforced by one of more empty barrels or casks beaten on the head with the shank bones of cattle. A queer thing that went with these was the Barimba Brett, a union of reed and string principles. A single strand of wire ran length-wise of a bit of wooden board, sometimes a shallow box of thin wood, some eight inches long by four or five in width, across which, under the wire, were several joints of reed about a quarter of an inch in diameter and of graduated lengths. The performer, sitting cross-legged, held the board in both hands and plucked the end of the reed with his thumb nails. The result was called music.

But the grand instrument at last, the first violin, as one might say was the banjo. It had but four strings, not six; beware of the dictionary. It is not the 'favorite musical instrument of the Negroes of the southern States of America.' Uncle Remus says truly that is the fiddle; but for the true African dance, a dance not so much of legs and feet as of the upper half of the body, a sensual, devilish thing tolerated only Latin-American masters, there was wanted the dark inspiration of African drums and the banjos trump and strum."

He next discusses the voices and their human cry of tremendous volume:

"To all this was sometimes added a Pan's pipe of but three reeds, made from single joints of the common brake cane, and called by English speaking Negroes 'The quills.'"Such was the full band. All the values of contrast that discord can furnish must have been present, with whatever there is of ecstasy in maddening repetition, for of the African can never have too much. And yet there was entertaining variety. Where? In the dance! There was constant, exhilarating novelty - endless invention - in the turning and leaping of the dancers. Moreover, the music of Congo plains was not tamed to mere monotone. Monotone became subordinate to many striking qualities. The strain was wild. Its contact with French taste gave it often great tenderness of

sentiment. It grew in fervor, and rose and sank, and rose again, with the play of emotion the singers and dancers.

With what particular musical movements the occasion began does not now appear. Maybe with very slow and measured ones; they had such that were strange and typical. I have heard the Negroes sing on-though it was not of the dance-ground but of the cane fields that showed the emphatic barbarian of 5 bars to the line, and was confined to four notes of the open horn. But I can only say that with some such slow and quiet strain the dance may have been precluded. It suits the Ethiopian fancy for a beginning to be dull and repetitions; the bottom of the ladder must be on the ground. The singers almost at the first note are many. At the end of the first line every voice is lifted up. The strain is given the second time with growing spirit. They swing and bow to right and left, in slow time to the piercing treble of the Congo women. Hear that bare foot slap the ground! One sudden stroke only as it were the foot of a stag. The musicians warm up at the sound. A smiting of breasts with open hands begins very softly and become vigorous. The women's voices rise to a tremulous intensity. Among the chorus of Frano- Congo singing girls is one of extra good voice, who thrusts in, now and again, an improvisation. Now the chorus is more piercing than ever. The women clap their hands in time. Yonder brisk and sinewy fellow has taken one short, nervy step into the ring, chanting with rising energy. he moves off to the farther edge of the circle, still singing, takes the prompt hand of an unsmiling Congo girl, leads her into the ring, and leaving the chant to the throng, stands her before him for the dance.



Will they dance to that measure? Wait! A sudden frenzy seizes the musicians. The measure quickens, the swaying, attitudinizing crowd starts into extra activity, the female voices grow sharp and staccato, and suddenly the dance is the furious Bamboula. Now for the frantic leaps. Now for frenzy. Another pair is in the ring. The ecstasy rises to madness; one-two-three of the dancers fall, with

foam on their lips and are dragged out by arms and legs from under the tumultuous feet of crowding newcomers. The musicians know no fatigue; still the dance rages on; No wonder the police stopped it in Congo Square. Only the music deserved to survive, and does survive. Will they dance nothing else? Ah' the music changes. The rhythm stretches out heathenish and ragged. The quick contagions caught by a few in the crowd, who take it up with spirited smiting of the bare sole upon the ground, and of open hands upon the thighs. From a spot near the musicians a single male voice, heavy and sonorous, rises in improvisation, The Mandingos brought that art from Africa - and in a moment man others have joined in refrain male voices in rolling, bellowing resonance, female responding in high, piercing unison. Suddenly the song changed. The rhythm sweeps away long and smooth like a river escaped from its rapids, and in new spirit, with louder drum beats and more jocund rattle, the voices roll up into the sky and the dancers are at it, other couples have stepped into the grassy areas, the instrumental din has risen to a fresh height of inspiration, the posing and thigh-beating and breast patting and chanting and swinging and writhing has risen with it, and the song is changed. There were other dances. Only a few years ago I was honored with an invitation, which I had to decline, to see danced the Bamboula, the Cata (or Chacta), the Counjaille, and the Calinda. Then there were the Voudou, and the Congo, to describe which would not be pleasant. (The Clainda was a dance of multitude, a sort of vehement cotillion.) The true Calinda was bad enough. In Louisiana, at least, its song was always a grossly personal satirical ballad, and it was the favorite dance, all the way from there to Trinidad. To dance it publicly is not allowed this side of the West Indies. All this Congo Square business was suppressed at one time, 1843 says tradition. In my childhood I used, at one time, to hear, every morning, a certain black peddler women selling rice croquettes-chanting the song as she moved from street to street at the sunrise hour with her broad, shallow, laden basket balanced on her head.

The Calinda ended these dissipations of the summer Sabbath afternoons. They could not run far into the night, for all the fascinations of all the dances could not excuse the slave's tarrying in public places after a certain other 'bou-djoum' (that was not of the Calinda, but of the regular nine o'clock evening gun) had rolled down Orleans street from the Place d'Armes and the Black man or women who wanted to keep a whole skin the back had to keep out of the Calaboose. Times have changed, and there is nothing to be regretted in the change that has come over Congo Square. Still a glamour hands over its dark

past. There is the patios of slavery, the poetry of the weak oppressed by the strong, and limbs that danced after toil, and of barbaric love making. The rags and semi-nakedness, the Bamboula drum, the dance, and almost the banjo, are gone; but the bizarre melodies and dark lover's apostrophes live on.