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Casa Samba: Twenty-One Years of Amerizilian Identity in New Orleans¹

A Thesis

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

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

by

Lauren Lastrapes
B.A., The George Washington University, 2001

December 2008

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ABSTRACT

Samba drumming and dance traditions work in New Orleans in ways that they do not elsewhere. Casa Samba, a drumming and dance troupe in the tradition of the Brazilian *escolas de samba*, shows how it works. Integral to this analysis of Casa Samba are the ways in which the group's identity and the identities of its individual members are processual, mutable, and "unfinished, always being remade" (Gilroy 1993:xi).

This thesis examines how Casa Samba has situated itself in the New Orleans music scene. This work seeks, through ethnographic interviews with long term members, to identify what makes Casa Samba attractive to New Orleanians who choose to join this musical troupe as opposed to the myriad of other musical organizations available. Finally, this thesis looks at Casa Samba's post-Katrina rebirth and the ways in which the group's willingness to continuously evolve throughout its history has made this rebirth possible.

KEYWORDS

Identity, samba, New Orleans, Casa Samba, Hurricane Katrina, dance, drumming, *escolas de samba*, carnival, Mardi Gras, Brazil

1. The word "Amerizilian" is not mine. In an interview with Curtis Pierre, he talks about how he and some of the members of Casa Samba came up with this word to refer to themselves. Curtis and the others feel that through the preservation of a Brazilian cultural form like samba in the United States, that they are a part of both "America" and Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

Deciding to do an ethnographic study of Casa Samba was a complicated process. I had learned, from my undergraduate thesis research on capoeira angola, that writing about something in which you are a participant prior to becoming a participant observer was no easy feat. I knew that I would not write about capoeira, and since capoeira belongs to the general oeuvre of Casa Samba, I had written it off as a subject.

At a Casa Samba gig at the Howling Wolf, a New Orleans Warehouse District club where the group plays frequently, I pondered my fate and fake-sambaed like the rest of my American friends. It occurred to me that Casa Samba should not be off limits as a research subject. I looked at the men and women on the stage, dancing and drumming, and realized that, apart from Curtis, I did not know them at all. Asking them to work with me to construct a history of the group would not compromise me as a member because the capoeira element of Casa Samba is only a small part of a larger whole.

The next day, I told Curtis about what I was thinking and asked him if he would sit down for an interview with me and less than a week later, he did. In that interview, I learned about how Casa Samba came into being, what the early days of the group were like, what drove and motivated Curtis, as he put it, to “bring Brazil to New Orleans,” and how the group has resuscitated itself in the years following Hurricane Katrina.² Curtis is a gifted narrator of his own story. He clearly understands how his charisma and his devotion to professionalism have shaped the group and its development. This first interview provided a basic framework for the three that would follow over the next six months. Through those subsequent interviews, it became clear that Casa Samba was an even more unique phenomenon than I had imagined. Casa Samba runs like a Brazilian samba school even though it is not in Rio or Salvador. Yet, Casa

Samba is also familiar. It reflects a rootedness in elements of New Orleans traditions as it simultaneously challenges certain claims of authenticity as they apply to New Orleans music. Casa Samba operates from a place in between the national borders of Brazil and the United States, in between the aesthetic boundaries that separate black musical traditions from one another, and over the edge of frontiers beyond which exists a rich creolized culture that refracts Africa through Brazil and New Orleans.

This acceptance of interstitial categorization makes Casa Samba and the people who participate in it an ideal subject through which to elucidate several theoretical concepts of identity. These concepts have come primarily from Stuart Hall (1999), Paul Gilroy (1993, 2000), and others who are often associated with cultural studies, as well as from practitioners like James Clifford (2000) who have worked within the discipline of anthropology.

In addition to ethnographic interviews, I have gathered information from participant observation in Casa Samba classes/rehearsals during which I attempted to learn to play the *tambourim*, a deceptively difficult instrument. I also attended Casa Samba gigs that ranged in size and scale from performances at small neighborhood festivals, to house parties, to full blown folkloric productions on stages at clubs, and in one case, at the Zulu Mardi Gras Ball. Another source of information about the goings on of the group is my ongoing participation in the capoeira angola group. We meet for class three days per week. The Sunday class is now held in Curtis' backyard due to the New Orleans Recreation Department's (NORD) somewhat baffling transformation of their Race Street community center into an administrative office that closes on Sundays. Attending the backyard class means that I am an occasional witness to the weekend life of the Pierre family.

One goal of this thesis is to fill in the ethnographic blanks in some of the more sweeping theories about both personal and group identity. Another is to describe the multivalent identity of Casa Samba as the key to the group's and its individual members' abilities to thrive in post-Katrina New Orleans. Stuart Hall usefully connects identity with the future rather than with the past. For Hall, identity is the "stuff that enables us to become political agents" (Ang 2000:1). In a city in which ideas about the future are now as significant as its typical veneration of the past, this view of the power of identity is even more valuable. Casa Samba is many things: professional performing group, samba school, social network, after-school program. In being many things, and in refusing to be limited by essentialized notions of self-definition, and in appealing to and recruiting many kinds of people for many reasons, Casa Samba has always looked to the future—to what both the group and its members would become—rather than to a past or to a history that is locked in place and deterministic. The hopefulness that underwrites Hall's view of identity is found in the stories members of Casa Samba tell in their interviews and in the activities in which the group engages. Casa Samba offers a lesson in how to survive and thrive in the interstices between the typical categories into which human beings group other human beings. This is a highly valuable skill in post-Katrina New Orleans.

NOTES

2. Four people were interviewed for this thesis. They are: Curtis Pierre, interviewed on 10/8/2007, Carol Pierre 3/10/2008, Conni Corll 3/19/2008, and Cliff Taylor 5/7/2008.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is rooted in two main research strategies: ethnographic interviews and participant observation. Between October of 2007 and May of 2008, I conducted four interviews that ranged between one hour and two and half hours in duration. These interviews were with original or long-time members of Casa Samba who have the longest histories with the organization and who are most integrally involved with all aspects of the samba group—rehearsing, teaching, performing, and making costumes.³

The first interview was conducted in October of 2007 with Curtis Pierre. This was the logical choice because Casa Samba is, by all accounts, Curtis' brainchild and he is the one of the leaders of the Casa Samba organization. I interviewed Curtis' wife and Casa Samba's co-director, Carol Pierre, in March of 2008. Carol was already involved in the Brazilophile social group, Palmares, that existed prior to Curtis' return to New Orleans. She and Curtis were two of a small group of Palmares participants who initiated the transition from social club to professional performance group and samba school, from Palmares to Casa Samba. Carol is the primary dance instructor for the group. She also teaches classes at Tulane University, where she is employed full time as the Assistant Vice-President for Student Affairs.

The Pierre house, where these interviews were conducted, is an ideal setting for interviews because the living room contains much evidence of the fact that Casa Samba is the focus of the couple's life. Costumes, pieces of costumes, bags of materials, stacks of VHS recordings of performances, drums and other instruments, and awards that the group has received over the years comprise the décor of the room that is otherwise dominated by a sofa and a giant television. In the corner there is a projector and a screen that are called into service whenever large groups are present to watch videos of past performances.

The third interview with Conni Corll took place over dinner at a restaurant near Conni's house in Uptown New Orleans. Conni has been a Casa Samba member since the very first open call Curtis issued when the group was getting off the ground and looking for people who were willing to learn to play or dance samba. Conni had little prior musical knowledge and went to the call with a couple of friends who had seen Palmares marching in a parade during Mardi Gras in 1986. She has been with the group ever since and now assumes much of the responsibility for making costumes, along with other extraneous duties during the hectic Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest performing seasons. Both Carol's and Conni's interviews lasted for about an hour.

The final interview was with Cliff Taylor at a coffee shop in Mid City in May of 2008. Cliff has been a musician, a drummer in particular, since he was a teenager. He has been a part of many bands, all in New Orleans, and he speaks of joining Casa Samba as being "drafted" into the group by Curtis one afternoon while having tea at Café Brazil in 1988. Cliff is quiet at rehearsals and backstage at performances, and I thought our interview might be on the brief side as a result. I was mistaken. Cliff began talking about Casa Samba and his involvement in the group the minute he got into my car. We talked nonstop for the duration of the interview.

The interview protocol is Appendix A. I rarely needed to ask all of the questions I had prepared because the answers to them seemed to come naturally as the interviews progressed. Additionally, many questions I had not thought of prior to the interviews were raised and answered as we talked. For the most part, I did not do a lot of talking.

Between October of 2007 and June of 2008, I attended eight Tuesday night Casa Samba class/rehearsals and nine Casa Samba performances. I was a direct participant in one of the performances because capoeira was added to the program. Participant observation of this kind offered a window into the workings of the group that I would not have had access to through

interviews alone.⁴ Some of the class/rehearsals were more like rehearsals (especially the ones preceding Mardi Gras events or Jazz Fest events), while others were more like classes. There are many ways to learn to play instruments, to learn choreography, and to learn other facets of performance (such as running through dances and music pieces for transitional smoothness and working out bumpy parts). Casa Samba's respect for pedagogy with respect to samba reveals a duality about the group that is referenced directly by the members of the group with whom I have done interviews. Casa Samba is at once a school and a performing organization. Sometimes, the line between the two is blurred, other times it is more concretely drawn.

Casa Samba performances took place at a variety of venues. Some were larger performances at which Casa Samba was the featured act, e.g., their Southport Hall show. Others were festival performances on smaller stages, such as at the French Quarter Festival, or the Festival Latina sponsored by Tulane University. Others represented departures from Casa Samba's pre-Katrina modes of performance, such as the group's having a parade slot at Jazz Fest instead of their usual performance on one of the major stages. A new type of show is one which occurred at a pizzeria in nearby Jefferson Parish. The pizzeria has become a hub of sorts for many of the Brazilians living in the New Orleans area since Hurricane Katrina. On several occasions, Casa Samba has played casual shows to a primarily Brazilian audience there. A full list of performances I attended is Appendix B.

It would be difficult to provide a meaningful analysis of Casa Samba without first examining the history of samba as a cultural form. It is to this history that I now turn.

NOTES

3. I intend this thesis to be a pilot study for a larger work and, knowing this, Curtis recommended the three other people interviewed for this thesis as people who could help me to understand the larger history of the group and set the stage for future interviews with other members of the group.

4. The notes I wrote following the class/rehearsals and performances have both informed the theoretical positions of this thesis and generated questions for the larger, ongoing research that I hope to continue to engage in over the coming years.

SAMBA IN BRAZIL: A BRIEF SOCIAL HISTORY

According to Hermano Vianna, “Samba is Brazil’s ‘national rhythm,’ its prime symbol of cultural nationalism” (1999:xiii). In his discussion of the development of samba as a musical genre and popular culture product in Brazil and internationally, Vianna’s tone is largely optimistic as he presents samba’s trajectory from one of many Afro-Brazilian cultural representations subject to political repression to an exalted and somewhat reified national musical tradition. Where other academics, such as Alison Raphael (1990), who were writing about samba in the 1990s focus on the co-option of samba by Brazil’s white middle class and the ways in which “authentic” samba has been altered by North American cultural and political influences, Vianna focuses on a longer view of the genre. Vianna’s position is that in no period of samba’s development is samba finished changing. For example, Vargas-era *mestiço* (mixed) nationalism and 1980s black power influences both shape samba in important and different ways, but neither has had a totalizing impact on the genre.

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.

In the 1930s, Vargas, in alliance with several Brazilian social scientists (most notably Silvio Romero), viewed racial mixing as a path to increased “whiteness” in the Brazilian population. Vargas and his academic ideologues, through their iron grip on government, media, and popular culture, are arguably the originators of the oft-debated notion of “racial democracy” in Brazil (Vianna 1999). Whether this ideology is right or wrong, supported or not, is not my concern and, following Vianna, I will largely leave the notion alone. What is clear, however, is that even as Vargas shaped social policy with the goal of a *mestiço* nation (read “whiter nation”)—an action that was concurrent with samba’s coming into its own—there was dissent in the ranks.

For Gilberto Freyre, 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 long range view of the primacy of *mestiçagem* in the creation of samba as a genre 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 somehow lost its authenticity (1990). This definition of authenticity is a rigid one that works contrary to other, more flexible (and useful) definitions such as the one offered by Richard Handler (1986). According to Handler, authenticity is a Western construct that "says more about us than about others" (1986:2). Raphael's view that samba was negatively affected by outside influences may reflect her own cultural position more than that of the samba school participants with whom she worked. 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). However, she does not define “genuine.”

Leaving aside the negative impact of Raphael’s view of what is or is not authentic or genuine for the moment, her essentialized view yields an understanding that Vianna, in his more optimistic position, does not focus so heavily on. Raphael sees the introduction of radio and recording technology as the beginning of the end of authentic samba music. Vianna sees it as the beginning of samba’s rise to a pinnacle it rightly deserves. Both authors present the same facts about this time in samba’s creation myth, when radio airtime needed to be filled, musicians needed more music. 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 changes forever as a result of these exchanges, which were rarely fair to the *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 another point about which Vianna and Raphael appear to agree. But, Hermano Vianna claims: “Within Brazil, they [samba and carnival] stand for mixture—*mestiçagem*, racial and cultural mixture” (1999:xiii). 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. While his

ecumenical view of the contributions of people from all races to the development of samba historically is representative of the idealism inherent in the genre, Vianna glosses over the ways in which samba has been a platform for black Brazilians to influence popular culture on their own terms. Raphael, in contrast, 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 Orleanians 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. All of her description is put into service defending the existence of a monoracial, black movement that operated in a vacuum. Thus, Vianna's view of the gray area becomes useful again in that he accounts for the multiracial influences of many of these early carnival groups in Rio.

For Raphael, all white participation in *escolas de samba* is a sign of cooptation. Vianna's discussion of the ways in which white participation in the development of samba is not always of the rape-and-pillage variety becomes the antidote to Raphael's less nuanced sense of history. Vianna 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 extrapolates too far from this idea to become nostalgic over a golden age in which samba was an all black, and therefore, authentic, endeavor. There was no such golden age.

Furthermore, 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 Carnival 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 Carnival, and on *escolas de samba* in particular. One anecdotal example of the impact of the primacy of the tourist 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 Carnival 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.

It is also 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). What Raphael fails to acknowledge is the existence of other effects of

intercultural communication with North America. She misses 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, Moura 2001, Perrone and Dunn 2001, Da Matta 2003).

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, etc. 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. Raphael's insistence that globalization is somehow degrading samba seems extreme 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, Raphael only barely acknowledges the 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 a long-term relationship with one 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 are.

The section that follows offers explanation of how Casa Samba came to be. The origins of the group aid in an understanding of the ways in which Curtis' personal journey contributed to the creation of a unique cultural form, which is rooted in the music and dance traditions of Brazil, in New Orleans.

CASA SAMBA: THE ORIGINS

In 1986, Curtis Pierre returned to New Orleans after having spent many years living in Detroit and then Los Angeles becoming a percussionist. On the advice of his friend, local percussion legend Bill Summers, Curtis came home and connected with Palmares. Palmares was an official carnival krewe comprised of amateur samba drummers and dancers that marched in Mardi Gras parades. Carol was a member of Palmares before Curtis returned from California. She came to join Palmares through her professional connections at Tulane University where she was the Director of Multicultural Affairs at the time. Carol was not a dance teacher during her tenure in Palmares. Rather, like many of Palmares' early members, she used her love for Brazilian culture and an understanding of the link between Brazilian carnival and Mardi Gras to become, as she says, "a participant and not a spectator" during Mardi Gras. Carol's impression of the musical talent in Palmares captures the amateur nature of the organization. She says "It was more of a parading group, they had one or two *surdos* and a lot of folks who made noise, but it wasn't really samba [laughs]. It wasn't really samba, but it was fun."

Curtis joined the organization, and within a year (having taken over for the original leader after he left), began to transform it into the professional group that Casa Samba is today. He recruited members of Palmares to help him effect this transition, most notably Carol and her brother Chuck, who is also a musician. Curtis began teaching people to play Brazilian percussion, and to dance samba, from scratch. According to Carol, Curtis was her first samba instructor—he showed her some basic steps and from there she taught herself from videos and by finding Brazilian teachers as they passed through New Orleans. Conni, one of the longest-term members of Casa Samba, began her nearly two decades with the group at an open-call "organizational meeting" at Tulane University. She showed up, like most of the people who

showed up that day, with no musical experience, a vague idea of what Brazilian music was, and a strong memory of having watched the Palmares group marching in a Mardi Gras parade in 1986. As Conni explains it, word of mouth drew together an impressively diverse group of people on a Saturday in December of that year. While those assembled mingled and wondered what would happen next:

This guy drives up. He had this tiny little car, it was this old, beat-up Chevette or something like that, but there were drums sticking everywhere out of this car. I mean, huge drums, it was just crazy. I just can't even describe it. We were like 'What the heck? How did he ever get all those ...?' He had two or three surdos ... and all these varieties of things and these big bags of stuff, you know? Well that, of course, turned out to be Curtis (Conni).

In that first year, Casa Samba hit the ground running. The organizational meeting Conni describes above happened in December of 1986, and by Mardi Gras season of 1987, Casa Samba not only marched in both the Tucks and Zulu parades, but traveled to Fairhope, Alabama to march in their Mardi Gras and represent a connection to both New Orleans Mardi Gras and to Brazilian Carnival. Conni describes the trip to Fairhope as “magical. We all got on this school bus with fifty people we didn't really know well at all, it was really fun.” The excitement that Conni, and undoubtedly all the members of the group, felt in the early days was underwritten by a significant amount of work. Rehearsal was Casa Samba's primary activity from the beginning, and it remains primary today.

Carol, Curtis, and Chuck (who is no longer with the group), launched Casa Samba and organized rehearsals all over town. As they would get kicked out of one place because of the noise generated by the drumming, they would hustle to find another location. They moved from Tulane's campus, to a warehouse on Magazine Street, to the house in which Carol and Chuck lived and into which Curtis moved when he and Carol began dating (or just prior to their beginning a romantic involvement—as Curtis jokingly says “that's where the instruments

were”). Later they moved rehearsals to Café Brazil on Frenchmen Street when it was available. In 1987 or 1988, Chuck and Curtis went to Brazil for the first time and, according to Carol, “brought back all this stuff and got really excited.” The roots of Casa Samba—professional performing organization, *escola de samba*, and presence in the New Orleans music scene—appear to have been officially planted by this time.

Around 1989 or 1990, Casa Samba began a relationship with the phenomenal Brazilian troupe Oba Oba, which was on tour in the United States.⁵ In 1991, Oba Oba’s musical director, Jorge Alabe, came back to New Orleans to perform at Jazz Fest with Casa Samba. Jorge stayed for about six months in 1991, living with Curtis and teaching Casa Samba members what it meant to be real samba musicians and dancers. He returned to New Orleans in 1992 and stayed until 2002. Jorge lived with Curtis and Carol for most of the ten years he was in New Orleans. During Jorge’s decade with the group, Curtis thinks that Casa Samba became more focused on “the actual preservation of culture” because he himself no longer bore the responsibility of going to Brazil to absorb what he needed to impart to others, and bring it back to the group. Having a Brazilian-born master drummer and teacher among them allowed Casa Samba to become part of what Curtis calls a “cultural exchange.” Principally, the exchange took place between Curtis and Jorge personally, as they learned one another’s languages. This exchange also occurred between Jorge and the entire group, as he gave them a bona fide model of Brazilian percussion and dance to follow, as well as a model of Brazilian approaches to life that they could choose to adopt or not. As Conni explains, Jorge “took Curtis deeper and deeper into the cultures of Brazil and opened up a whole lot of doors, for the whole group, really. He showed us what a professional samba group should be like.”

For Curtis, living with Jorge offered an opportunity not only to learn everything he could from Jorge, but to spend ten years “growing with him.” Importantly, Casa Samba grew too. By the early to mid-1990s, Casa Samba had grown into a performance group that was sought-after for many types of occasions. Curtis’ and Jorge’s high expectations led to what Cliff describes as the crest for the group that would remain in place until Hurricane Katrina induced a forced migration of many of Casa Samba’s core members. According to Cliff, during this ten year crest, Casa Samba had many players for each of the instruments that constitutes a “full sound,” and a repertoire that included all types of samba and folkloric dance performances. The group’s membership was large and dedicated. Drummers and dancers rehearsed at least twice a week, worked to support children’s and community programs, arranged music and choreographed dances, and made costumes.

By 2005, Casa Samba had won a Big Easy Award, an Offbeat Best of the Beat Award, and been nominated for both awards numerous times between wins. They had performed at every Jazz Fest between 1988 and 2005, both on one of the major stages and in the Kids’ Tent each year. They released an album in 1993 that was so good that, in 1998, Casa Samba’s tracks were used without the group’s permission to comprise the second CD of a double album called “Do Brazil!”⁶ In 1997, Casa Samba, an American samba group, toured with the Brazilian national soccer team to Korea and Japan to play in clubs prior to the game and to participate in the halftime performance. This tour was so significant to Cliff that he begins his narrative about his life in Casa Samba by talking about this international journey. They were regular marchers in Endymion and other major Mardi Gras parades, performers at the balls for various carnival krewes, as well as a regular featured act at innumerable neighborhood festivals, parties, and of course, conventions.

Many drummers and dancers have passed through Casa Samba's ranks. In explaining the attractiveness of joining Casa Samba, Carol echoes Conni's description of Casa Samba's first open-call meeting:

People found out [about Casa Samba] through word of mouth. There were a lot of dance companies here in the city and we were just one of them, and for some reason we drew a very diverse group of people. [People] from all walks of life, all socioeconomic [classes], all races. Something about samba is unifying.

Casa Samba has invented itself and found a role in the vibrant New Orleans music and culture scene. The group has learned to perform the music and dance that are typical of a variety of samba styles. What follows below is a discussion of the different types of instruments employed in the *bateira* (instrument line-up) and of the various samba performance styles in which Casa Samba engages. But first, I will try to explain a feature of Casa Samba's performances that does not lend itself to written description.

NOTES

5. Oba Oba is described by Curtis as "the only Brazilian group that's ever been on Broadway," one that broke a record for the duration of its stay on Broadway. Casa Samba members threw a huge party for Oba Oba, performed for and with them during their stay, and generally began what would be a lifetime relationship between the two groups. The relationship between the two groups was later codified into a relationship between Oba Oba and the City of New Orleans when, in 1992, Oba Oba was given International Honorary Citizen status by then-mayor Sidney Bartholemy.

6. This album is a strange thing. The only record of it that I have found is through the website of the British record store, Townsend Records. I heard the album in 2000 in the home of a friend who had purchased it on Ebay. I remarked at the time that the unnamed and un-credited group on the CD sounded like Casa Samba, but until I spoke with Carol, I did not realize that the tracks on "Do Brazil!" were in fact taken directly Casa Samba's album.

SAMBA STYLES

The repertoire of Casa Samba reflects a wide range of styles of samba. The main styles performed by the group are: samba enredo, samba reggae, pagode, and Orixá drumming and dancing (which is more overtly 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 roll 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 at the same time. This part of a Casa Samba show elicits more audience reaction than any other. People will dance, and, if they are familiar enough with Portuguese (or with Brazilian music to the point that they can fake an understanding of 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.

Other instruments that are used in the samba *bateria* are *surdos*; the large drums that produce a very deep bass tone (“surdo” means “deaf” in Portuguese); *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 most 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 samba have become 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 Carnival 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 Carnival, 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 displacing 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. It is important to emphasize that this style of samba, samba enredo, is used in the service of showcasing the groups that perform it. Different *escolas de samba* achieve this end in varying ways.

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. 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 dance moves employed in a solo of this type are usually both highly sexual and aimed at showing off the performer's samba skill. The impact on the audience depends on how many men are present, and on the circumstances of the performance—for example, whether or not it is Mardi Gras season.

Samba reggae is Casa Samba's other primary performance style. Sometimes referred to as *bloco Afro* [literally, "African bloc," the label given to carnival parading associations that are more intentionally Afrocentric in their persuasion than the more typical *escolas de samba*], samba reggae is a style of samba that is influenced by Jamaican and other Caribbean musical styles. Samba reggae 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. Many of Casa Samba's samba reggae numbers feature the dancers performing what Curtis, Carol, Conni, and Cliff refer to in interviews as "folkloric dances."⁷ 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 of Carol's, Curtis,' and the dancers' own creation. 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 has become more prevalent in the repertoire. The new 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: Brazilian people. Philip Galinsky's brief history of pagode (1996) offers insight into the transitions the style itself has undergone. My observations and the opinions of all the Casa Samba members interviewed point to the significance of the changing audience.

Pagode is a version of samba that developed in the 1970s and 1980s in response to what many *sambistas* saw as the cooption of their musical form by parties unrelated to the original samba tradition. Where samba music in the *escolas de samba* had become limited to the work of

sanctioned composers and highly regulated in the rehearsal context, pagode was an informal gathering of composers and musicians, normally in someone's backyard, at which the old samba songs and improvised new songs were sung. Pagode experienced about a decade of extraordinary popularity in Brazil and internationally. Many careers were launched. But, by 1990 pagode was passé. Around 1992, new groups playing music in the relaxed pagode samba style emerged. Their songs were love songs, not songs that broke down the realities of life in the *favelas* (slums that ring most Brazilians cities) like those in the repertoire of 1970s and 80s pagode groups. Once again, pagode was popular, but it was different (Galinsky 1996:126–127). Galinsky (1996:121) examines old pagode and new pagode as separate idioms that create “divergent sonic and ideological perspectives: one of a national, tradition-bound Afro-Brazilian cultural lineage (the older pagode), and the other, of an internationalized black Brazilian aesthetic (the new pagode).” Both old and new pagode, however, walk a fine line between truly resisting cooption and reveling in the largesse of commercial popularity.

Casa Samba made a conscious decision to expand the use of pagode in its repertoire following Hurricane Katrina. The production of the relaxed, improvised quality that makes pagode what it is relies heavily on the participation of several Brazilians who can do the singing and verbal improvising in the proper manner. Curtis and the other non-Brazilian participants are more than capable of the instrumentation. Pagode also appeals most readily to Brazilian audiences and can be accommodated by smaller performance venues, such as Rotolo's Pizzeria in suburban Old Jefferson just outside of New Orleans. Casa Samba's recent pagode gigs there nearly replicated pagode nights I attended in bars in Brazil. The audience 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, offers Casa Samba an opportunity to use pagode more regularly than it did prior to Hurricane Katrina.

When asked to describe some of the changes Casa Samba has gone through since Hurricane Katrina, everyone I interviewed spoke of there being an increased number of Brazilian people living in the area as a positive impact on Casa Samba. Casa Samba has, for most of its history, operated in a different realm from those kinds of Latin bands for whom a local immigrant community provides a regular and dependable audience. The members of Casa Samba are particularly attuned to an increase in the number of Brazilian residents in the area because of a demographic change in their audiences, and they spoke of this increase long before it was noted by those studying post-Katrina immigration trends. A recent survey produced by the Brazilian Mobile Consulate (Fussell 2007) confirms Casa Samba members' assumption that there are more Brazilian people in the area. The survey does not estimate an actual number of post-Katrina Brazilian migrants to the area, but it does confirm that there has been a significant increase from the pre-Katrina number (Fussell 2007). This group of migrants is primarily male, most with families who live elsewhere, mostly from other parts of the United States (most commonly Massachusetts, Georgia, or Florida), and primarily are employed in the manufacturing or construction industries (Fussell 2007). Since many of the post-Katrina migrant workers have arrived in New Orleans to perform dangerous jobs for pay that is only slightly higher than pay in other areas, the survey concludes that many of the Brazilian migrants who are here now may leave as soon as they can (Fussell 2007). Only two in five of migrants surveyed said they intended to stay in New Orleans for more than two years (Fussell 2007). Whether or not the Brazilian community expands permanently, Casa Samba is benefiting from its current growth.

The self-conscious increase in focus on pagode within the normal Casa Samba show of fantastic *pandeiro* tricks, feathered and glittered dancers, and fast and heavy drumming, in addition to being a response to a post-Katrina audience shift, can also be seen as a microcosmic playing out of what spawned the 1970s pagode movement in Brazil. Doing the full blown samba performances all the time is a lot to ask of a group. Pagode offers some respite from the high-energy glitz of samba enredo and the insistent and persistent funk of samba reggae. Of course, it is more complicated than that. The nature of 1970s and 1980s pagode in Brazil was reactionary, particularly against North American cultural influences. Evidence of this is that one of the most popular songs to come out of that movement was “*Eu Não Falo Gringo*” or “I Don’t Speak Gringo” (Galinsky 1996:138). In the 1990s-era pagode movement, such unabashed preference for Brazilian particularism and against “gringo” cultural and political activities was replaced by a more accommodating mode of expression that accepted certain North American contributions to Brazilian music (Galinsky 1996:139). It is the sentiment of this 1990s-era pagode on which Casa Samba relies, even while most of its pagode songs are the favorites from the older pagode movement.

The relationship between Brazil’s Carnival and New Orleans’ Mardi Gras is obvious when one sees Casa Samba perform. Whether they do a stage show or a parade, perform for locals at a club or conventioners at a hotel, the connection between the two carnival cultures is easily drawn. Samba is the music of Carnival, and it seems fitting that Casa Samba should find its place in the music scene in a city in which songs and musical genres have developed in association with Mardi Gras. The central idea of Roberto Da Matta’s “The Magical Power of Carnival Music (Deciphering ‘Mommy I Want ...’)” (1993) speaks to the way in which all carnival culture is likely linked.⁸ Da Matta describes popular music, and carnival music

especially, as “the vehicle through which society itself is revealed” (1993:60). Da Matta thinks that this revelation involves both the construction of “society” and its alteration (1993). He says, “Society, as it were, along with its spirits, exists, and we believe in these things, follow and obey them, but in order to be able to converse with society—to see it in its eventual density—it is necessary to invoke it and, for all that, it is necessary to move it from its given position” (Da Matta 1993:64). It is during Carnival that society, the filter of a human group’s values in Da Matta’s scheme, is invoked and then altered immediately to suit a specific, often satirical, purpose (Da Matta 1993:64).

Carnival music is the green light that tells people it is okay to behave in ways that are normally not acceptable. Da Matta describes the ways in which carnival music forms a unique subset of popular music, unites Brazilian and foreign carnival participants across lines of race, class, gender, and nationality, and otherwise elicits what he calls “carnival behaviors” (1993:64–65). Popular music, in general, functions in opposition to the mores of bourgeois society and also provides a means of fighting against atomization, impersonal existence, and the general feeling of being abandoned and alone, all of which Da Matta believes are markers of modern Brazilian society (1993:70). Carnival music, in particular, allows revelers to invert and subvert social roles and behave in ways in which they would not be permitted to behave in any other context. Similarly, the work of Jason Berry (1988), Helen Regis (1999), and Connie Atkinson (2004), among others, explores the ways in which carnival traditions (including those such as second lines and jazz funerals, which appear outside of the context of Mardi Gras) allow participants to contest space and to alter social roles. Da Matta’s explanation of the function of carnival music is consistent with such explanations for carnival traditions in New Orleans. A provisional link can thus be established between Brazilian carnival and New Orleans carnival. In

its attempt to both preserve the Brazilian carnival samba tradition and to locate this tradition in North America's carnival city, Casa Samba can be seen as a literal manifestation of such a link.

NOTES

7. The imagery conveyed by the choreography and costumes revolve around a theme that has been classified by Casa Samba members as "folkloric." The dances are not folk dances from Brazil.

8. This translation, and all translations from Portuguese to English, are mine. Anything attributed to Roberto Da Matta in quotation marks is translated.

MUSIC IN NEW ORLEANS: MARDI GRAS AND “AMERICA’S CREOLE SOUL”

In response to the post-Katrina debate about New Orleans’ cultural validity that occupied a significant number of Americans—from ordinary residents of other cities and towns who wondered why the place should be rebuilt at all, to fundamentalist preachers who exclaimed that the storm was evidence of God’s distaste for the sinful ways of New Orleans’ inhabitants—Roger Abrahams, Nick Spitzer, John Szwed, and Robert Farris Thompson (2006) produced an appeal for sanity. These four writers have spent significant portions of their careers investigating, talking about, and writing about the things that make New Orleans and southern Louisiana a unique and culturally distinct part of the United States. Together they produced a book that demands that its readers recognize the uniqueness of New Orleans as a cultural landscape and recognize it as a landscape worth saving.

Abrahams et al present a passionate defense of Mardi Gras as the primary representative of hundreds of years of creolization and creative living (2006). New Orleans, they argue, “is the contact point for introducing stylistic alternatives born in the Afro-Latin Caribbean and places even farther east” (Abrahams et al 2006:10). Support for the centrality of New Orleans in any preservation of African tradition in the United States is offered by the work of Connie Atkinson (2004), Jason Berry (1988), and Helen Regis (1999), among others. Mardi Gras is the cultural phenomenon that offers a *raison d’etre* for the continued existence, and indeed prominence, of many African-derived expressive traditions in New Orleans, making it the location of “America’s creole soul” (Abrahams et al 2006). Abrahams and the others believe in the viability of New Orleans, and they believe in the necessity of the existence of such a place in the United States. For them, it is a fact that America needs a creole soul. In a city that, like Da Matta’s Rio de Janeiro, welcomes “carnival behaviors” on a year-round basis, misapprehension by other

American citizens of what its residents are doing is reasonable. However, criticism based on such misapprehension will never be relevant to those who value and work to retain the dignity of the culture of a unique and irreplaceable American city.

Jason Berry traces the ways in which the African cultural past of New Orleans “articulates its presence” in the city in such a way that New Orleans remains a place apart from the United States (1988:3). His focus is not Mardi Gras, *per se*, but those traditions that have a relationship to Mardi Gras and can be seen as feeding off of carnival behaviors, regardless of the date on the calendar. Helen Regis contributes a succinct explication of the expansion of carnival beyond the dates on the calendar that bookend Mardi Gras season, and expresses what most observers of Mardi Gras tacitly recognize, when she writes: “...it must be pointed out that, in the United States, only in New Orleans has the black community created and sustained such a year-round cycle of massive commemorative celebrations of dignity, freedom, solidarity, and blackness” (1999:494). This did not happen to the same extent in the rest of the United States.

Berry identifies specific links between modern black traditions in New Orleans and both modern and historical traditions in Africa and in other locations within the black diaspora. He argues that the retention of a significant number of African elements in the city’s music, food, dance, and other manifestations of culture makes New Orleans a place unto itself as well as a link to Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa (Berry 1988). Where other cities in the United States directly outlawed gatherings or celebrations among slaves or free people of color, New Orleans, while it was by no means a bastion of freedom, was a city whose laws repressing the activities of black people were either lenient or easily subverted (Berry 1998:6). Berry meticulously traces the development of black music in New Orleans from its roots in Congo Square, linking everything from jazz to Mardi Gras Indians to Professor Longhair and Alfred

“Uganda” Roberts, to those early drumming and dancing festivals (Berry 1998:6–10). As a final thread maintaining Congo Square’s long-reaching web into the future, Berry provides a case study of the jazz funeral of Big Chief Pete, the leader of the Black Eagles tribe (Berry 1988:10–11). In Berry’s depiction of the event, which contains elements knowable to anyone who has attended a jazz funeral and elements that are clearly understood only by those on the inside of the tradition, the reader can see the extent to which black culture in New Orleans—a culture that comes both from Africa directly and through circuitous routes—remains strong.

Berry’s thesis, advanced in his extensive journalistic and academic writing on jazz, popular music, and culture, establishes a base from which to consider whether Casa Samba’s continued success in New Orleans is due in part to the fact that African cultural forms have managed to flourish here to an extent not seen elsewhere in the United States. Samba groups similar to Casa Samba exist all over North America and in Europe in places lacking a pronounced African presence. The relationship between a samba group and racial culture (or a lack thereof) in the larger community is significant. In places where there are no specifically African traditions, the samba group may be the only representative of one. In other circumstances, black cultural forms are only relevant to a closed black community. In still others, black samba musicians often perform for exclusively white audiences. New Orleans is different. Participants in and observers of local cultural traditions with African roots are black and white, local and migrant. Casa Samba’s membership and audiences are similarly varied by race, class, and gender. Casa Samba is a different kind of group maneuvering in a different kind of American city. It is a city that has more in common, in many ways, with Rio de Janeiro or Salvador, Bahia, than it does with other major cities in the United States.

One significant link between New Orleans and the two Brazilian cities mentioned above is reliance on a tourist economy. While many cities in the world have marketed themselves as great places to visit, New Orleans, Rio, and Salvador share a particular kind of marketing that is based on selling their African and African-derived cultural traditions to potential visitors. Tourists who travel to New Orleans, Rio, or Salvador are looking for a certain kind of experience, one that has something to do with what Berry calls the African “presence” of the place (1988:3).

Drawing on the fact that the idea of an African “Other” in the form of a (technically) American city is attractive to those planning a vacation, Atkinson argues that “Visiting New Orleans ... gives white middle class American tourists the chance to play out fantasies of sin and danger” (2004:173). Regis (1999) and Atkinson (2004) both examine the ways in which music and the cultural manifestations associated with it shape social networks and alter ideas of space and ownership of the urban landscape. Regis provides a comparison between two distinct forms of music and dance performances: that of the real, local second line and that of the fake, de-localized second line performed at a convention or political function (1999). She describes the ways in which second line parades “transform urban space, creating an alternative social order that private clubs actualize by ‘taking it to the streets’ in those very neighborhoods ordinarily dominated by the quotidian order of inner-city poverty and spatial apartheid” (Regis 1999:472–473). Regis goes on to show the ways in which second lines staged for tourists “serve to conceal the popular, street-based tradition behind a minstrel-like show, at the same time that the ‘second line’ becomes an icon for New Orleans culture as a whole” (1999:472–473). It is Atkinson’s position that “music constructs social networks that shape notions of locality, reinforce family unity, and provide an important context for the issues of ownership and control

of music and responsibility for the way music is used” (2004:176). She delimits the ways in which these networks are exploited by those who maintain the tourist economy of the city, but simultaneously, through interviews with local musicians who perform for both locals and tourists on separate occasions, she exposes the ways in which local musicians and other performers respond to being watched (Atkinson 2004:176–181).

The work of Regis and Atkinson both provide examples of performers of a cultural tradition altering their presentation for a paid gig (be it Mardi Gras Indians accepting money to mask for a white, middle-class, party or a brass band staging a second line at a convention’s opening night). Regis includes a quote from a social aid and pleasure club member regarding “holding back” certain elements that are “not intended for outsiders” during a performance: “‘It’s another occasion to wear our suits. And make a little money doing it. Now I’m not gonna *jump* as high at the paying gigs’” (emphasis in original, 1999:475). The idea that local performers would intentionally fail to invest as much energy into show for an audience that does not have a deep understanding of the performance is not terribly surprising, especially given the high level of interaction that occurs between audience and performers at neighborhood second lines. This distinction between commodified and noncommodified performance that Regis and Atkinson make is important. Atkinson (2004), certainly, is far from incorrect when she explains that the majority of tourists arrive in New Orleans with expectations of exoticism, debauchery, and sinfulness (all wrapped in the potent package of American, carefully coded, racism that sanctifies white people and makes heathens of black people). But the distinction between commodified and non-commodified performance may not exist for Casa Samba.

Casa Samba performances, for the most part, establish a high level of rapport and connectedness between the performers and the audience, regardless of who is in the audience.

Even before our formal interview began, Cliff spoke at length about seeing Casa Samba perform at Jazz Fest shortly before he was “drafted” by Curtis into joining the group. He says he observed the energy that he thought passed between the performers and the audience and knew, on some level, that he would eventually be a part of this group. Conni, too, was attracted to the group because of the way in which it related to those watching a performance. She saw the transitional Palmares/Casa Samba organization (see below for further explanation) in a Mardi Gras parade and, as a result, showed up at the first open call audition for Casa Samba. The group’s ability to connect to audiences, combined with the fact that it is a school—and not a performing organization to which one must arrive fully formed and able to play the drum or dance samba—is what keeps its membership steady. Casa Samba performers give one-hundred percent at gigs large and small, for kids and adults, for locals and for tourists. This seems to be one of the reasons more than 5,000 people have passed through the group in its twenty-one years.

Casa Samba does not hold much back, even if it wants to. Another anecdote supports this. When the performance line-up for Jazz Fest 2008 was announced, it was decided that Casa Samba would be performing their usual stage show at the Kids’ Tent, but would not appear on one of the larger stages. Instead, Casa Samba was given a parade slot. Casa Samba members, who were to be performing at Jazz Fest for the first time since 2005, were appalled. Carol expressed some hesitation with respect to Casa Samba’s going all out in this case. She said, “I mean, we’re doing Jazz Fest for the first time in three years, but they won’t put us on a stage. Crazy! You know? So we’re going to give them what they want, [laughs] I mean, just what they asked for, nothing more, nothing less. You know? We’re not giving them our costumes.” A parade slot is acceptable for groups whose business is parading, but as Carol says, “They [second

line groups] can do that, but we're not that kind of group. We parade, but that's not what we do.”

Carol was resolute about not giving a full performance for the parade at Jazz Fest, and many members of Casa Samba echoed her sentiment at rehearsals. As the performance neared, however, Curtis made an announcement at the end of a rehearsal that Casa Samba would, in fact, be wearing full costumes, and not the less elaborate uniform of Casa Samba t-shirts they had agreed to use previously. He explained that there were some press inquiries directed to him about the group and said that if the group was going to be the subject of any articles or photographs, that they should look their best. No one questioned his decision. The Jazz Fest parade, with the dancers wearing the beautiful black and yellow costumes sewn for Mardi Gras that year, turned out to be the highlight of many peoples' Jazz Fest experience. A nearly impenetrable crowd followed Casa Samba as it wended its way through the Fairgrounds, cameras flashed continuously, men and women from everywhere joined in the dancing, and more than a few people expressed their amazement at seeing such a remarkable thing as a samba school parading at a festival whose focus is ostensibly Louisiana's cultural heritage.

Unlike performance groups that are manifestations of African culture local to New Orleans, Casa Samba represents the act of bringing Afro-Brazilian music and dance to a place where a relationship to carnival makes them a valuable addition to those existent Afro-Latin traditions that make New Orleans unique among American cities. Because Casa Samba plays the role of introducing a form of Afro-Latin culture to a place in which its own versions are highly valued, the mode of performance—whether it is for locals or tourists—remains more or less the same. Where second line groups, brass bands, and Mardi Gras Indians are called into service to sell their culture to represent New Orleans, a calling that logically causes members of

these groups to react by protecting some part of what they have for themselves and their neighborhood audience/participants only (Regis 1999), Casa Samba does not appear to feel the same conservationist need. Casa Samba is the only continuously functioning *escola de samba* in New Orleans. Others have come and gone, samba dance teachers appear and disappear, other Latin musicians have enjoyed success in the music scene in the city, but Casa Samba is the only *escola de samba*. Because of this unique position in the musical culture of the city, it seems as though the group has no choice but to represent samba well, one-hundred percent of the time, whether the audience members are locals or tourists.

The impact of the prevalent tourist economy on New Orleans musicians is similar to the impact of tourism on musicians in Salvador, Bahia, a city that resembles New Orleans in a multitude of ways. Some elements of the resemblance between these two carnival cities with a serious tourist economy are noteworthy. Piers Armstrong, in an analysis of the samba reggae group Olodum's place in what he calls the "globalized carnival community," examines the ways in which Olodum's artistic performance and social activism play out in the tourist economy of Salvador, Bahia (2001). In what he calls a "crucial qualitative paradox," the majority of international tourists attending the Bahian carnival are white and from the North Atlantic region of the world, but their "ideological parameters are Afrocentric" (Armstrong 2001:179). The fact that white tourists are witnessing celebrations of black culture, such as Olodum's weekly public rehearsals, validates "the aesthetic privilege of the celebration of negritude in a city whose history records periodical repression of such celebration" (Armstrong 2001:184). Salvador is often marketed as a black cultural stronghold. For those who are less engaged in celebrating negritude, it is a place where visitors can see in the architecture, museums, and slower pace of life, a living example of Brazil's colonial period. New Orleans is marketed in a similar manner.

The difference between Salvador and New Orleans is that there are enough tourists whose “ideological parameters” can be described as “Afrocentric” who visit Salvador to enable Armstrong to write an article about it. It seems likely that many visitors to New Orleans do bring with them some Afrocentric parameters, and that many arrive here looking not for the purely exotic or the sinful. But for the most part, New Orleans is not marketed that way (Atkinson 2004). I suspect that marketing blackness differently is largely responsible for the different types of visitors to Salvador and New Orleans. Blackness in New Orleans is not marketed on its own terms, but only on the mediated terms described by Atkinson and Regis. Some visitors may eventually find their way to Handa Wanda, a Central City bar, and watch The Wild Magnolias practice on their own turf, but the majority will see Mardi Gras Indians out of their context.

With Olodum, it is the opposite. Most visitors to Salvador will visit a Sunday rehearsal with Olodum, some will see them perform at major venues, but the latter is hardly necessary. Armstrong claims that the reason tourists in Salvador are invited to participate in ways that encourage interaction between the audience and performers, such as Olodum’s rehearsals, is because of the type of tourist who travels to Salvador: the wealthy, white, residents of the North Atlantic who paradoxically validate black culture (2001). As a result, it can be said that black is beautiful to tourists on its own terms in Salvador, while black in New Orleans is beautiful in certain contexts in which contact between performers (who are marked as such by costumes or passes hanging around their necks) and audience are thoroughly mediated. This is an admittedly heavy handed representation of differences in marketing strategies that exist between two places. A fuller, more nuanced, representation of these differences would be a paper in itself, but differences in how blackness is lived and marketed are notable. As a friend and fellow New

Orleanian with whom I visited Salvador in 2001 said, “Man, this place [Salvador] is like New Orleans with less obvious hate for black people.”

The similarity that exists between the two cities is remarkable, regardless of differences in marketing strategies. Carnival dominates a specific segment of the calendar and infiltrates ordinary existence in both places. Black residents of both cities, regardless of whether they have had permission to do so or not, have fought to maintain elements of their African identity in a less-than-ideal diasporic situation. Evidence of slavery, of colonialism, and of modern day equivalents of both, pervades Salvador and New Orleans, from the former’s UNESCO-restored Pelourinho district to the latter’s historically preserved French Quarter. In the places where most tourists shop, dine, dance, observe, and otherwise encounter the local culture, the buildings, and streets themselves recall a past that is marked unevenly with loss and victory, tragedy and comedy, servitude and freedom.

For samba music to travel from Brazil to the United States, from Rio and Salvador to New Orleans in particular, is not difficult to imagine. As Paul Gilroy explains, and as is discussed at length below, music is the element that is the keystone of black Atlantic’s continuous transmission of culture to and from all points in the diaspora (1993). The preservation of and respect for black traditions (however mediated), carnival calendars and carnival behavior that strays from such calendars, and unstable tourist economies link Rio and Salvador to New Orleans. It was in Los Angeles during a rehearsal in which he was playing alongside Bill Summers that it occurred to Curtis that such a link existed. As they played and walked along with everyone else, Bill asked Curtis why he did not return to New Orleans and start a samba group since, after all samba music is carnival music. As Curtis explains it,

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!’ ... I think it

was because of the culture I came from. It wasn't percussion orientated because it was always about the jazz band blah blah blah, you know? And it [samba] wasn't the cultural thing here [in New Orleans].

As discussed above, Casa Samba was built through hard work and a persistent belief that an *escola de samba* could make a place for itself in the New Orleans music scene. The group has found a place in that scene, but has found it on its own terms—and because of a certain comfort with existing in between the usual categories, two carnival traditions, and a variety of musical and dance traditions. At what can only be described as one of the peaks of the organization's career, Hurricane Katrina dealt Casa Samba a devastating blow. Casa Samba is still in the process of recovering, and the group has been helped in this process by its unique identity.

BECOMING AMERIZILIAN: CASA SAMBA, AUTHENTICITY, AND IDENTITY

According to Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, “The history of the black Atlantic yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade” (1993:xi). This single claim, perhaps more than any other, provides a basis from which to develop an account of what Casa Samba is and continues to become. Gilroy’s work offers theoretical support for the kinds of patterns that emerge when Casa Samba members talk about what the group means to them, and what they think it means on a larger level. The black Atlantic itself seems to be the perfect heuristic device for understanding an organization through which musicians, dancers, and capoeiristas, black, white, Creole, Latin, male and female, New Orleanian, American, Brazilian, teach, learn, and perform Afro-Brazilian music, dance, and martial arts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Gilroy uses “black Atlantic” to refer to the “stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (1993:3). Double consciousness, the continuous mutability of identity, and the modern realities of the black diaspora, are all convoluted, unstable concepts. Gilroy’s exploration of blackness and identity across the world is not a simple extrapolation of ideas about identity formulated best by Stuart Hall and his interpreters, it also critiques the “ethnic absolutism” that Gilroy believes had come to dominate black political culture by the 1990s (1993:5). Writing against nationalist and absolutist approaches to black identity, Gilroy asks his readers to “conceive of the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis ... and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (1993:15). Casa Samba, by being a transnational and intercultural thing unto itself,

does more than provide a convenient example of what possibilities can arise from a holistic approach to black cultures and identity. It generates its own theory in that regard.

Curtis and other long-term members of Casa Samba recognize the benefits of existing in the interstices of cultures when they describe their own and others' relationships to the group. Clearly marking this between-the-lines, between-nations, identity, Curtis describes a label he and some others invented in casual conversation one evening. The label, "Amerizilian," is a combination of the words American and Brazilian, and it accurately situates the group.⁹ In the most basic sense, Casa Samba is not a one-hundred-percent, genuine-article samba school because of its location in the United States, its preponderance of American members, and the fact that it was founded by and continues to be directed by Americans. Nor is Casa Samba a typical or traditional New Orleans music group. Similar to groups, brass bands, and Mardi Gras Indian tribes, Casa Samba plays for the tourists at conventions or nationally advertised events like Jazz Fest. Just as with the traditional and typical musical groups, Casa Samba plays Mardi Gras balls and parades, neighborhood festivals, and house parties. But at these local events, audiences hear samba reggae, samba enredo, or pagode music and watch women dressed in elaborate feathered costumes modeled on those made famous in Rio de Janeiro's carnival, perform a dance that is to Brazil what tango is to Argentina: an iconic representation of national identity. With Casa Samba, however, the things that typify Brazilian samba schools are altered by a non-Brazilian perspective. Women drum, and men dance. White American transplants to New Orleans perform alongside recently arrived Brazilians and black people born and raised in the city. The limits of the boundaries of gender, nation, race, and local heritage are challenged by Casa Samba's very existence. Casa Samba's cultural product cannot be characterized simply as black, African, Brazilian, or New Orleanian. It is all of those things and more. Casa Samba is

“Amerizilian.” Since Casa Samba functions as both a school and a professional performing group, operating on the model of a typical *escola de samba*, and makes a living in the tourist-centered economy of New Orleans. Casa Samba’s version of authenticity is to exist between America and Brazil, and so, the concept “Amerizilian” redefines authenticity for the group.

In a city whose music can act as a principal symbol of authenticity because of its reified status on a national and international level, Casa Samba is all the more innovative as a continuous presence in a scene in which authenticity is only flexible in certain ways. Casa Samba offers evidence that New Orleans is firmly located within the larger black Atlantic. In offering such evidence, in making room in an already crowded music scene for a particular form of Afro-Latin music that represents not only the transmission of black music throughout the African diaspora but also represents the nation of Brazil itself (as Getulio Vargas decreed), Casa Samba challenges the hegemony of New Orleans music as it is typically defined. Expanding on Richard Handler’s definition of authenticity, it is fair to say that Casa Samba suggests that authentic New Orleans music is not something that exists quintessentially in any way (1986). Early anthropological conceptions of authenticity created a divide between an imagined, socially isolated, pristine social group that could be defined as “authentic,” and a mixed-up, mongrel, modern social group that was inauthentic because it lacked the purity of form that was imagined to exist for the “authentic” (Handler 1986). This kind of conception is at the root of a viewpoint that assigns the label of “authentic” to a musician like Wynton Marsalis who plays music associated with New Orleans despite the fact that he lives in New York and performs infrequently in the city for whom he acts as a musical ambassador, and assigns the label of “inauthentic” to a group like Casa Samba whose members live, work, and make Brazilian music

in New Orleans. “Authenticity” functions, at times, to make some cultural products of the city representative and to make others apocryphal. This is a false division.

Carol and Cliff both expressed some frustration with what they see as the insular and political nature of the New Orleans music scene that holds up some artists and projects as authentic and rejects, in ways large and small, those that stray from the dominant paradigm. Tellingly, Carol and Cliff use the same reference points to explain the reasons for their frustration. Responding to a question about whether she thought musicians (of all types) in New Orleans were respected by entities like the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, Inc., the entity that controls the Jazz and Heritage Festival, Carol says:

There is such a wealth of talent in this city that is so unrespected [sic] by people like Jazz Fest who pay all these out-of-town folks all this money and won't support the local musicians unless you have a name that ends in Marsalis or Neville or Batiste, you know? Unfortunately, they get the gigs, them and their friends. It's real cliquish here, that's the one thing about New Orleans that I don't like, the favoritism they show to some groups.

Cliff explains his view of Casa Samba's relegation to parade-group status at Jazz Fest similarly: “That's where the politics come in, because everybody, when you think about New Orleans, you're only thinking about the Nevilles, Marsalises, you know, who else is there? Batiste. Stuff like that. But there's a lot more musicians here!” The on-the-ground popularity of groups like Casa Samba, other Latin music performers like Fredy Omar, and even some of the newer generations of brass bands who eschew the purely traditional aesthetic for one that is blended with hip hop or rock and roll elements, is not often recognized by the Jazz and Heritage Foundation or by other arbiters of what is allowed to represent New Orleans to the wider world.

Often these groups stay for a while on the outskirts of authenticity and eventually the controllers of the New Orleans image come to view them as possible members of the tradition-bearing body. Casa Samba has certainly had a good relationship with Jazz Fest in the past, and

as Cliff relates with some ambivalence, has blended easily into the music scene in the past as well. Nearly an hour after using the Marsalis family as one example of the insular music scene, Cliff said, “Yeah, well, you know Jason [Marsalis] used to play with us on and off.” He continues, his tone betraying a fondness for the memory rather than any kind of resentment: “One year we did the Endymion parade and they showed it on television because the parade used to pass right in front of Cox [Cable’s building] then, and I remember we were watching it and as we passed, one of the lady announcers said ‘and there’s Jason Marsalis’ ‘cause he was marching with us.” Conni, in response to a direct question about how she thinks Casa Samba fits into the New Orleans music scene, does not share Cliff’s or Carol’s ambivalence. Without mentioning politics or insularity, she talks about ways in which Casa Samba and more typical local musicians have interacted over the years. She says:

I think we add a great dimension to the city musically. We’ve jammed with all those other kinds of musicians. We’ve done Super Sunday with the Mardi Gras Indians. It was wild! It was so much fun! [laughs] We taught them samba and they taught us, you know, back groove funk! We’ve jumped in with brass bands on the street, too. It’s a fun element to the New Orleans scene and I think it’s great because it’s a cultural exchange that the city’s open to, you know?

The fact that a representative of one of the first families of New Orleans music can pick up a drum and march with a samba group during a Mardi Gras parade speaks to a certain connection between New Orleans and Brazil, between Afro-Latin musical traditions as they develop in both places with the help of carnival. National boundaries begin to lose some of their meaning when this happens, but paradoxically, nationalism can become more tenacious.

Just as Casa Samba ambivalently experiences the New Orleans music scene, so goes its relationship with Brazilian participants or audience members who challenge the group’s authenticity on the basis that it is not Brazilian enough. While recognizing that an increase in the number of Brazilian people living in the New Orleans area has led to an increased audience for

Casa Samba, Carol notes that there now exists an increased number of critics who believe that they know what samba is because it is so integrally related to their national identity. As Carol explains:

Well, there's always this feeling, you know that we're American, and for Americans to have a Brazilian group, you know, it's always 'how many Brazilians you got in your group?' [laughs] Well, at one point we didn't have any! So that really challenged people: 'Well, how are you a Brazilian group when you don't have any Brazilian people?' ... Brazilians are funny people, they can be arrogant at times and feel that because they're Brazilian and we're doing Brazilian music that they know what's what. So, Curtis and I are, I don't know, I don't consider us being arrogant or anything, but you got to show me! [laughs] I've seen a lot of folks come and say they can samba. You can samba, but can you do choreography?

Even while rejecting an explicit link between samba acumen and national heritage, Casa Samba members do accept the notion that some Brazilian sensibilities, as they relate to samba and to life in general, do exist. They believe that the group benefits from contact with Brazilian people and a Brazilian ethos. Everyone I interviewed understands Jorge Alabê's continuous presence as a leader of Casa Samba as something that adds to Casa Samba's authenticity as an *escola de samba*, that is, as a purveyor of Brazil's national music. For Cliff, it is a simple matter of nationality. In describing Jorge's impact on the group, Cliff says:

When Jorge came to the group, he brought us to a different level. We were learning more stuff, we got a whole repertoire and stuff. Jorge's from there. It was good to learn firsthand from somebody that's from there.

For Conni, Jorge was the person who so impacted Curtis' life and increased his already prodigious talent for percussion in such a way that Curtis could become a conduit for Jorge's knowledge for the rest of the group. For Curtis and for Carol, Jorge was a person who lived in their home for more than a decade, a person who has witnessed their son's entire childhood to date, and a person with whom Curtis, in particular, set up what he calls a "cultural exchange" wherein he and Jorge learned one another's languages, developed the group's repertoire, and

collaborated in making Casa Samba the most professional *escola de samba* it could be. This was not a simple process for Curtis.

For Casa Samba to become and continue becoming what he knew it could—i.e., a great samba school—Curtis believed that he would have to go through a personal transition and make an increased commitment to Casa Samba. He also believed that everyone who intended to remain in the group would have to follow suit. Curtis explains:

When Jorge came, I was trying to head [the group] like more towards professional, but the people's skill was minimal that I had to work with and when Jorge came, it was even a little bit more difficult for people to hang on because of his high expectations and because he was with this group [Oba Oba] that was like the top of Brazilian entertainers.

Those Casa Samba members who did remain in the group, and any members that have come and gone since Jorge came to the group, have been a part of an organization that does more than just make music. Curtis thinks that Casa Samba's role in the community, as a representative of Afro-Brazilian musical traditions, as a group that welcomes people of all skill levels, and as a group that works not only with adults but with children makes it more than a music or dance group, it makes it a group within which the process is as important as the product. Casa Samba is an *escola de samba* in the broadest sense of the term. Curtis also sees Casa Samba's authenticity, as perceived by its Brazilian critics, as enhanced not by Jorge's simple presence, but by his relationship with Jorge. As he says of Jorge's time with the group:

So that's when the group started to take on a little bit more of a focused point, on, you know, actual preservation of culture. Although, that was my intention from the beginning. But it took on a stronger aspect to have, instead of me continuing to go to Brazil and ... I brought Brazil here. But then Jorge being here ... kind of made me understand the culture, more of a way of life, more things than learning how to just play and drum and dance. It became like a lifestyle.

Casa Samba has undergone numerous changes since its inception. Thousands of people have participated in the group, and that alone would suggest that its identity is not fixed. Many people

have also grown up in the group, from members who started as children through New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) programs or Casa Samba's own after-school programs, to Curtis' and Carol's son who was literally born into Casa Samba. This is not to say that Casa Samba is so completely shaped by its variable membership that it is structurally formless. Rather, because Casa Samba is, at its heart, a school, new members can always replace those who have left and people who stay on for a long time will transition into new roles. Whether or not critics know how to classify the group, Casa Samba is always what it is: a school of Brazilian drumming and dance located in the city of New Orleans. Casa Samba is, thus, a living example of the paths black music has taken over the centuries since slavery became the organizing principle of modern colonialism. Casa Samba makes it easier to do what Paul Gilroy asks and "conceive of the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis" (1993:15). When we do this, the questions about whether or not Casa Samba is an "authentic" representative of Brazilian culture, or American culture, or New Orleans culture, become less relevant. The notion that Casa Samba is a thing unto itself, existing within and because of the black Atlantic and the prominent place of music as a black Atlantic cultural form easily transmitted across borders and bodies of water, begins to become more relevant. Casa Samba—always becoming instead of being—can best be described as "Amerizilian," a term fittingly conjured out of a conversation had in passing and possibly not meant to be remembered. The concept has been developed by Curtis throughout his life, and its label is less important in comparison to the journey that created it. The section that follows explores, in greater detail, the concept of becoming and being "Amerizilian" through an examination of its role in the life history of Casa Samba's founder.

CURTIS PIERRE: ORIGINAL AMERIZILIAN

As Gilroy points out, black culture has been crossing and crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean, peeking in and out of the Caribbean Sea, and making landfall on the Gulf Coast since black people were removed from Africa (1993). Sudden awareness of new forms of intercultural exchange within both academic and nonscholarly circles, hype about the rapidity of the supposed rise of globalization and the subsequent decline in the power of national boundaries, and exclamations about either the blessing or curse of diversity, reveals a postmodern failure to consider that the history of the world, and communication among its inhabitants, is older than the modern state and the postmodern critiques of it.

One particular form of black culture whose travels across the globe in current times has been discussed with great interest is, of course, music (Gilroy 1993). In considering black music and “the politics of authenticity,” Gilroy describes black music as being creole in origin, resistive of totalizing commodification, and as being produced by artists who understand that artistic practice can be an “autonomous domain either reluctantly or happily divorced from the everyday lifeworld” (Gilroy 1993:73). For Gilroy, music is the black cultural form that best embodies reactions to the unmitigated terror of slavery. It is a cultural exchange that functioned among enslaved Africans from many traditions as a form of protection against the dehumanizing effects of bondage. Put another way, a degree of freedom from the tragedy of everyday life was achieved by enslaved Africans through music. It should not be surprising that music and movement traditions rooted in communication of joys and sorrows rendered unspeakable in the past still find validity today among those who need them. Music, Gilroy argues, is a keystone of black Atlantic culture:

Examining the place of music in the black Atlantic world means surveying the self-understanding articulated by the musicians who have made it, the symbolic use to which

their music is put by other black artists and writers, and the social relations which have produced and reproduced the unique expressive culture in which music comprises a central and even foundational element (1993:74–5).

The human beings who were and are central purveyors of creolized musical traditions exemplify, in Gilroy's view, the Gramscian definition of intellectuals (1993:75). That is, black musical traditions "have supported the formation of a distinct, often priestly caste of organic intellectuals," intellectuals who receive little benefit from relationships to the modern state and have no secure location within the institutionalized cultural universe (Gilroy 1993:76). Curtis Pierre is this type of intellectual. In his relentless pursuit of a life that would be different from the one he thought himself destined to live; a life that offered no escape from the daily subsistence routine of black, working class, Louisianians, Curtis transcends a potentially demoralizing present through an understanding of the power of musical expression. Through his charismatic leadership and performance style, Curtis offers this knowledge to anyone who would care to take advantage of it. It is clear that his efforts are conscious and deliberate. He knows that he is preserving and passing on a means of divorcing oneself—whether reluctantly or happily—from the everyday lifeworld. Curtis does not need postmodern scholarship to tell him this. He is fully aware of the implications of preserving black culture. Gilroy sees this awareness as a trait of organic intellectuals in the black Atlantic as a whole, he recognizes that regular people "do not need an intellectual vanguard to help them speak or tell them what to say" (Gilroy 1993:79).

One integral element of Casa Samba are classes geared towards children. The group offers free children's classes every Saturday at which the kids learn samba drumming, samba dance, and stilt walking. Currently, Curtis teaches classes in two public schools, works with summer programs through NORD and through private organizations, teaches separate capoeira

classes for kids, and is planning to expand all of these projects. Before Katrina, Casa Samba offered a summer-long Brazil Camp for kids that, unlike many other summer camps, actually lasted through the summer. As Carol explains:

We had a very successful camp right before the storm. It was a Brazil Camp. We had forty or fifty kids in the program and ran it for, usually summer programs are what? Seven weeks? We ran it for ten. Right up until the kids went back to school because we didn't believe in that month of nothing. It's like, 'Why do you send your kids to camp and then let them off in August when school doesn't start until mid-August?' That doesn't make any sense.

According to Carol, Brazil Camp has not been restarted yet because a lot of the kids who were involved did not return after Katrina.

Not all of Casa Samba's interactions with children occur through the medium of formal classes. Curtis, in his role as a charismatic leader, an "organic intellectual" to take Gramsci's term, often meets kids where they are and draws them in to learning what he learned on his own path to self-awareness (see below). Many of the kids from the neighborhoods where Curtis has lived know him and he has often recruited kids off the street and into Casa Samba. Moreover, many of the people who turn out to be core members of the group started when they were young. Curtis' ability to get kids interested in samba and to keep them interested as they become adults is significant. In neighborhoods that lack coordinated activities that keep kids out of trouble, Casa Samba, wherever it is located, does that job. In explaining the loss of some of his best drummers to Katrina, Curtis tells the story of one man who had been with him since he was a kid. He says:

... Another guy who was in the group since he was ten, or eight, moved out of town [after Katrina.] He'd been with me since I picked him up in the street with his cardboard band, you know? He and some friends of his just coming down the street with these cans and boxes. I still got that recording today. I'll never forget it. They were coming down the street and I recorded them and I had all these drums in the house. I was doing Casa Samba, but I brought them in the backyard where I had a little driveway. Every Thursday, we would meet after school and we do a little bit of half marching band, half

samba thing. Two of them stayed with me until they were like twenty and then one got into a little trouble and he just couldn't get out of it. Actually, the one I thought was going to have the most problems, he did the best. He wound up getting married and then only the storm pushed him away.

This reveals Curtis' and Casa Samba's ability to operate as a source of social aid, putting Casa Samba at least partway into another category into which many carnival groups fit. Not only does Casa Samba make music that is associated with another version of carnival that is related to Mardi Gras musically and experientially, but the group also functions to take care of people. Perhaps any club or social group does this. But the kind of benefit the neighborhood experiences when one compares Casa Samba to other, more typical, social aid and pleasure clubs is rooted in the same principle. Conni offers an explanation of how Curtis, as an individual and resident of his neighborhood (as opposed to as a teacher in organized programs), embodies the ethos of social aid:

You know there were lots and lots of kids that needed some guidance because they weren't getting any at home. They were just running the streets, and Curtis would draw them in with the drums and kind of guide their whole lives through the drums. Some of those kids stuck with it for a long time.

While there are certain aspects of the Pied Piper about Curtis, the reality of what he offers his students is more complicated than his ability to teach them samba and keep them interested in it. Curtis thinks of himself as a philosopher, and he is one. He is often asked for advice, particularly from the younger men in the group, and usually he is willing to give it. He has reached a place in his life from which he can handle almost anything that comes his way. He explains:

Seeing something that I spent a lot of time working on succeed, that's what makes my life, that's what makes me tick and, as a philosopher within myself, I've learned how to create happiness without paying for it. Once I figured that out, that was the key to life for me ... You know, bad days don't exist for me anymore. Every day is cool.

Curtis recognizes that it took him a long time to reach the point where bad days are not something he experiences. Part of what he provides for people who come to Casa Samba is a means for developing faith in themselves and for overcoming the kind of self-doubt he sees in many young people. It is Curtis' position that people delude themselves and work against their own interests in trying to be something other than who they really are. He uses an extended metaphor to describe this position:

I'm trying to teach them, they're still young and they haven't dealt with the big complications, with insecurity within [themselves], and they're not really focused, not internally focused. People have a lot of baggage that they can't through it all, they can't get through all those clothes to get to the bottom of the suitcase. And they keep constantly wondering whether they wanna try this on, or whether this looks good on them, or this is going to make them look fat, or if this is going to make them look tall, and they're going through all these clothes in the bags and they've got twenty bags to go through and they're still trying to go through all these bags. "Take all these bags and throw them away, it's going to be what it is." ... No matter what you do, this is the way it's going to be.

Curtis encourages people to take the time to learn who they are and figure out from there what kind of life they might have. He learned how do this for himself when he left New Orleans as a twenty-two year old, released from the Navy on a hardship discharge, heading for Detroit after his first wife left him to stay with his brother.

In order to understand how Curtis has reached a point in his life where he can be considered to be the kind of musician, leader, intellectual, and counselor that he is, it is necessary to understand some of his personal history. Curtis experienced a dramatic period of change concerning his personal identity in the years after his first wife and he separated and he moved first to Detroit (and later to Los Angeles). Curtis is clear when describing his travels that the divorce from his first wife was something that bothered him a great deal. His dedication to both learning percussion and continuing his training in Asian martial arts in places far from New Orleans seems to have arisen primarily from a desire to fight for a life different from the one he

was certain he was supposed to have. Curtis contrasts the unhappy life he believes he was destined to have with his current, satisfying life:

If she [his first wife] wouldn't have left me, and I still love my first wife today, we wouldn't be sitting here talking. I can tell you exactly where I would be. I would be on the corner, or I would be at work right now, waiting to come home and watch the game and get me a six pack of beer or drink me some wine or get high or something like that, waiting to come home. I'd be working at the Avondale Shipyard, which all of my brothers have done, and one of them is still there, you know? That's what I would be doing, and I would be very unhappy and filling myself with alcohol day by day to keep the unhappiness away. I know that. It's because of me not wanting any more than her.

Curtis acknowledges that his devotion to martial arts was “pretty much a way out of [his] life.” He also believes that the combination of his dedication to martial arts along with a renewal of his earlier interest in percussion that was rooted in his experience working with legendary percussionist Bill Summers as a young man, made Detroit the place where he “got [his] life to start over.” This idea of starting over—the act of looking for a way out of what looks like a bad prospect—most clearly relates to Stuart Hall's definitions of identity as being connected with the future and not the past, and with what a person might become rather than what they have come from (Ang in Gilroy 2000). This is not to say that the past is irrelevant, either to Hall or to Curtis, but transitions of the kind Curtis conscientiously undertook in the years after leaving New Orleans are about the future. Identity, Hall argues, must be defined as a “production,” something constantly in process, rather than something that is seen as an “accomplished fact” (1990:222). Identity, for individual people and for groups of people, is constructed, and as such, identities are “dynamic repositories or channels of historical agency” (Ang in Gilroy 2000:10).

Although Hall sees identity as mutable, processual, and connected to the future, he does not contend that anybody can simply choose to become anything. One's personal history and one's place in the world shape what kind of future is possible. An individual's identity may not

be fixed or permanent in any way, but “the very content of identity is flexible, situational, and dependent on very specific histories and cultural repertoires of enunciation” (Moura 2001:172).

Curtis chose to pursue the art of percussion as an avenue for starting over, in part because he had some experience with it as a younger person. After assembling a collection of percussion instruments and teaching himself to play many of them, Curtis joined a percussion choir. An old man in the choir offered him some advice. Curtis recounts their exchange:

“Look, if you’re really serious about doing percussion, the first thing you need to find is a teacher.” I was like “Teacher? What? Where do you find a teacher for something like that? I thought you just do it.” And he says, “Yeah, you gotta find a teacher, but in order to get a teacher, you have to find a music that moves your soul.” The Brazilian thing seemed to click with me a little better than ... the traditional African stuff, so that’s what I picked.

Curtis did more than find a teacher. He attached himself to Airto Moreira, an international Brazilian percussion superstar. He eventually followed Moreira to California and continued playing percussion with different groups. Of that time, Curtis says: “That’s where the journey really started ... after the marriage [to his first wife] and I had let all that go ... I met Bill Summers again in Los Angeles.” This meeting—a highly significant moment given Bill Summers’ early influence on Curtis, Summers’ presence in the New Orleans music scene, and his participation in larger international musical movements—was a literal catalyst for Curtis and for Casa Samba. It was during a rehearsal in Los Angeles that Summers asked Curtis why he did not return to New Orleans and “get something started in the carnival there.” The idea set in, and soon after this conversation Curtis came home to build a life, a family, and a samba school that all stand as testimony to the effort Curtis put in to changing his identity and redirecting his future. He did not come back to work at Avondale, drink beer, or wait for the woman who left to come back to him. Curtis changed his destiny through music.

Once Curtis returned to New Orleans, he began studying capoeira angola, the more traditional, and more Afrocentric, of several forms of capoeira that exist today. Capoeira is a martial art that is said to have been practiced by enslaved people in Brazil (people presumably brought from the region of modern Angola). They were forced to disguise the martial aspects of their training with songs and music, making the kicks and escapes look like dance moves to avoid punishment from masters who were uncomfortable with the idea that their slaves might be able to defend themselves.¹⁰ Curtis initially approached capoeira as many students of Eastern martial arts do. He tried to perfect capoeira with the more precise and rigid Eastern form. After some early struggling with the imperfectability of capoeira, Curtis came to understand that capoeira could be left as it was and still fit into his life. He explains:

I just had to let all the other martial arts stuff go. It was like, ‘This is what I’ve been looking for!’ You know? In all of the martial arts movies where I used to see people doing flips and all of these fascinating things, and unorthodox things, it came to me and it was like, ‘Okay, this is like in the movies. I don’t want to get to just regular martial arts, I want to get to something extravagant!’ This is what I had been looking for. I could never really do it, in all the years I had been doing these thousand push ups and two hundred million kiyah-kiyahs every day, I could never walk on my hands. I started walking on my hands when I was twenty-six years old! Then I started to get that holistic thing, you know? This is a martial art. This is from Africa. And like the samba thing, ‘Okay, there’s music with this!’ Percussion instruments!

Capoeira angola is, as Curtis says, “from Africa,” and the philosophy associated with it is one of resistance to white oppression. On this basis, capoeira angola is an Afrocentric art form. For Curtis, replacing Eastern martial arts with capoeira angola made sense and ultimately rounded out his experiential life so that everything was about Afro-Brazilian culture. Choosing capoeira “helped [him] to make his whole life complete.” It seemed obvious, furthermore, that he could help other people in the same way. He began offering classes in capoeira angola to both adults and children under the aegis of Casa Samba, thus starting the only capoeira angola group in New Orleans and making Casa Samba appeal to an even wider range of people.

NOTES

9. Curtis is the only one who uses the term “Amerizilian,” but everyone I interviewed made some reference to the sort of in-between place Casa Samba operates from as a Brazilian cultural phenomenon located in the United States. Conni refers to herself and others in the group as “fake American Brazilians” as she laughs and explains that sometimes she and the others are asked if they are Brazilian. Cliff, without applying any label to himself, also remarked that he is often thought to be Brazilian by audience members.

10. Several books written about capoeira angola support the descriptions I rely on here. My understanding of the basics of capoeira angola does not come from these books, though it is nice to find validation for one’s position in writing; it comes from discussions had with Mestre Cobra Mansa, who was my primary teacher from 2000 – 2006, and from conversations with fellow students and practitioners of capoeira angola. The best English-language text written about capoeira angola is John Lowell Lewis’ *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* which was published in 1992 by University of Chicago Press.

CASA SAMBA AND AFROCENTRICITY

At no time was membership in Casa Samba (either the samba or the capoeira part) restricted to black people alone. But Casa Samba has consistently been Afrocentric in its positions. Applying this label to the group may seem unnecessary to those who would prefer to view race as a social construct that, because of its scientific invalidity, has little impact on the lives of people who can rise above racial categorization. But this label is necessary in that Afrocentrism is what allows black culture to survive the way it has. If no one, black or not, valued black traditions in the diaspora, related these traditions to Africa, or defended them against attacks from an insecure non-black majority, the current sociocultural realities of the West, and the world, would be very different. Afrocentricity has been variously defined in philosophical and ideological terms. Often, the term is exclusive, but it does not have to be. Casa Samba show this by being open to participation from people from all backgrounds, from all races, from all classes, and from all places. As Carol is quoted as saying above, “Something about samba is unifying.” More accurately, something about Casa Samba is unifying. Curtis and Casa Samba’s ideology is what Paul Gilroy might call “anti anti-essentialist” (1993:99–103).

One factor that shapes the experience of black people in the United States and in other areas in the diaspora is what Gilroy calls “double consciousness,” based on W.E.B. DuBois’ concept and on Richard Wright’s characterization of himself and other black Americans as being both inside and outside of the West (1993:30). As Gilroy explains, integral to the idea of double consciousness is the fact that the slave trade and colonialism put black people in a position to lead two lives (1993). The first life is the one an enslaved African was living before he was captured, the second is the new life in the new world into which he was forced to migrate. Descendants, many generations removed from an ancestor who was captured and enslaved, have learned the skills of double consciousness out of continued necessity. Since the social position of black people in Europe, the United States, South America, and the Caribbean, and indeed in much of Africa, is often still the lowest, knowing how to live a double life—one in which one’s traditions are valued and another in which these traditions may be reviled—retains its utility (Gilroy 1993).

For some, the double consciousness is a problem to be solved, and the method of doing so is to adopt either an essentialist or a pluralist standpoint with respect to black identity (Gilroy 1993:31). The essentialist standpoint, which Gilroy characterizes as “brute pan-Africanism,” simply inverts the world order so that black people are better than all other people (1993:31). It requires such absolutism with respect to what is and what is not culturally appropriate for black people that its proponents often react with disgust at the actual cultural choices and products of actual black people. Highly-trained intellectuals are employed to save ordinary black people from themselves.

The pluralist standpoint is rooted in the position that “blackness” is so variable that it becomes all encompassing. The “culture police” tactics employed by supporters of the

essentialist position are decried, but then pluralists replace them with a view that sees race as a social construction, and only as a social construction, so that any power that could be derived from a nuanced understanding of the history of the creation of (post)modern black identities is nullified.

Gilroy finds both of these basic standpoints lacking and “locked in a fruitless relationship of mutual interdependency” (1993:100). The most public debate between supporters of each position has, not surprisingly, taken place in the musical arena. Taking a page from Clifford Geertz’s playbook, Gilroy argues for an “anti anti-essentialism” with respect to identity politics in the black Atlantic context. Both the essentialist and the pluralist position require music to be static—it is either “this” or “that,” so post-plastic-surgery Michael Jackson either nullifies or typifies black music—and Gilroy reminds us that music is dynamic and changing, and that musicians are constantly adding new things to old things to make new old things. Relating music directly to Hall’s thought on identity, Gilroy claims that, “Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers” (1993:102). Identities are lived in, even if they are not stable. They are not products whose development reaches an eventual end. Rather, they are forever mutable.

Casa Samba’s identity is complicated by this give and take between changeability and permanence. It has a basis in Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance styles that are foreign yet familiar to New Orleans audiences. People join the group as complete novices, seasoned musicians or dancers (or both), and everything in between. Some people experience rehearsals as though they were classes and rarely or never perform, while some people perform at every

gig. Black Americans and black Brazilians learn and perform alongside white Americans and white Brazilians. No one is denied access or entry to the group. Casa Samba can accommodate all comers, and grow and change as the membership grows and changes, because there is a root that holds it down. The root is unique to Casa Samba and based in an ideology that sees Afrocentrism as valuable, as an understanding that black culture can and should be the primary reference point for culture in the Western Hemisphere. Casa Samba allows Afrocentric positions to be accessible to all people. The root of Casa Samba grows out of the rich musical tradition of urban centers in Brazil and waters itself with the equally rich musical traditions of New Orleans.

SURVIVING KATRINA: “THE GROUP HAS ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT”

For the most part, my interviews with Casa Samba members dealt with the past (e.g., the origins and history of the group, personal recollections of joining it) and with the general (e.g., how Casa Samba is similar to *escolas de samba*, how Casa Samba fits into the local music scene). Never able to come up with a good way to talk about the impact of Hurricane Katrina, I instead relied on a question that made me feel like an outsider and an ass whenever I asked it: “What do you think has changed for the group since Katrina?” The saving graces of my asking that question are that I am a native New Orleanian and I am not a complete outsider to Casa Samba. Everyone answered it. And everyone answered differently. Some even before I got around to asking the question itself, so integral has Katrina been to their everyday lives for the past three years.

Casa Samba’s capacity to survive Katrina is worthy of some discussion considering that many musicians left New Orleans permanently after the storm, and many more commuted (and continue to commute) from Dallas or Atlanta to play gigs. That the group was gigging again as

soon as possible, hosting what Conni says Curtis called the “world’s largest samba class” at the Festival Latina in early 2006, is a testament in itself. What it shows is that Casa Samba is a resilient organization, not as a result of the storm, but because it is the nature of the group to be resilient. Being both a school and a performance group is ideal when trying to rebuild from the ground up. Still, the effects of the storm were severe. Conni estimates that the group lost seventy percent of its core membership. Curtis ticks off the names of people who are still living out of town, along with the names of people who have returned, but whose lives have simply become too difficult to include samba practice. Cliff and Carol each make references to changes in the personnel of the group. What all of them conclude, however, is that rebounding from Katrina was an inevitability for Casa Samba. Resilience is a part of its identity.

Conni’s account of the impact of Katrina on Casa Samba is the most encompassing. She begins by talking about how many members of the group are still “lost,” and ends with a discussion of the new opportunities the post-Katrina increase in the Brazilian population offers the group. As she talks about the first rehearsals that happened after people began to trickle back into town, Conni begins to cry:

We lost so many beloved friends, you know? And members, ‘lost’ being that they’re out of town, they’re scattered all over the whole country. And that was the hardest part, to have that just [pause] almost like dropping a bomb in the middle of the group and everybody just flew everywhere it’s just [pause]. I mean, our first practice back after the storm, there was such a small little group, a core of us hanging on to each other, hanging on to the group.

She continues and explains that resuming rehearsals right away helped individual members to begin rebuilding their lives and livelihoods in New Orleans. Casa Samba, especially for the long term members, was more than an organization to which they belong. Membership in Casa Samba had unified and created deep friendships between people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. As people returned to New Orleans and began to confront the

devastation that would continue to surround them, fellow Casa Samba members drew strength from each other, and from the group's renewal, and began to feel as though some sense of normalcy was returned to their lives. Conni does not complete the thought, but she articulates this idea: "Everybody had gone through such a similar experience ... and there was so much collective heartache and things, but then the determination and the hope that the group, that we all brought to each other ..." The immediate resumption of rehearsals undoubtedly also provided Casa Samba with a running start in terms of getting back into the performance cycle as soon as it was back in gear.

While it had experienced a dramatic decline in membership and a tragic loss of core members who were instrumental to the "full sound" and general professional nature of the group, Casa Samba has not had to adapt a great deal to get itself back together. Conni talks about the Festival Latina, one of the first gigs the group did after the storm and about the recruitment process for new members. She says:

You know, we were trying to get everybody in the whole crowd to just come and learn one samba step, to draw them in. And we did lots of recruiting like that. And with Carol teaching her classes at Tulane like before, that's kind of a pool we recruited from for dancers. And for drummers, you know, different word of mouth, other drummers would hear about the group and they would call. And a lot of Brazilians have come to help with the rebuilding effort, you know, and when they heard something Brazilian was going on in the city ... we've had an influx of new blood I guess, it's so neat to see how it's evolved. But the group has always been like that though ... so that hasn't really changed. We have a whole bunch of new faces since the storm, but the spirit is still pretty much the same.

Membership in Casa Samba is now variously defined as it always has been. When I asked Cliff how the group has changed over the years, he immediately expressed some ambivalence: "Oh boy, it's changed! Well, not exactly, as far as change, it's personnel changes. I've seen people that have left for a bit and come back, you know?" Cliff, in acknowledging that belonging to Casa Samba has always been flexible for individual members, echoes Conni's opinion that new

faces and members' returning after an absence do not represent a departure from the group's normal way of being.

Carol and Curtis, as the leaders of the group, talk about the constant flux and flow of members in a slightly different way. For dancers, leaving and returning to Casa Samba is especially normal. Carol explains:

Yeah, the storm really killed the dancers, the dancers went everywhere. But dancers have always been in and out, you know? If you can no longer wear that costume, you can't dance! Or, you can become a *baiana*,¹¹ and that's a whole different thing. A lot of people don't want to do that so they just stop dancing ... I've got a bunch of people who have come back, though. Not necessarily to dance at a performance level, but I'll retrain. I've retrained and retrained [laughs] so many dancers over the years.

Curtis' view of the post-Katrina situation's resemblance to the ordinary mode of operation for Casa Samba is slightly different. He sees the post-Katrina period as related to the early period of the group when he alone was responsible for teaching members. At the same time, he sees that he has changed in the twenty-one years since he started Casa Samba, and reflects on that change:

I miss the people [those who are gone since Katrina], you know? It's like when I started, I had to make people. I didn't have any people, I had to make them. So that's what I'm doing now, I'm making people. It just takes patience. And I'm constantly telling myself, 'Look, you have to make these people. They're not the same people you had, you have to remake them. They're going to come out a little bit different, but if you do the same thing, they're going to be good.' I'm not as intense when I'm teaching as I used to be. [laughs] I've kind of cooled out ... it's not like it used to be, you know, where it was like a detrimental thing for people to learn.

The capacity to use skills it has developed over its entire history to rebound following a devastating event like Katrina has been a blessing for the group. The fact that Casa Samba functions as both a school and a professional performance organization has enabled the group to get back on track with greater ease than musical or dance troupes whose professional performers are trained elsewhere before they come to the performance group. Casa Samba's ability to rely on established patterns of training and retraining performers has been valuable, but it does not

mean that nothing has changed for the group in the years since the storm. Casa Samba's adjustments following Hurricane Katrina involve more than personnel shifts. The issue of class/rehearsal space has also become prominent.

Casa Samba has been based in the New Orleans Recreation Department's (NORD) Race Street center (at the intersection of Race and Annunciation Streets in the Irish Channel) since about 2004. This center had been an ideal location for rehearsals and for children's programs, particularly since it is located about three blocks from Curtis' and Carol's house, making it so that a charismatic pair of leaders from the neighborhood operates out of a neighborhood center. Having Curtis, Carol, and Casa Samba operating out of a NORD center should have been something that NORD viewed as a benefit, as the sort of thing that would aid the department in serving the community. This has not turned out to be the case.

After Katrina damaged a number of NORD's facilities, the department decided to make the Race Street center more of an administrative office than it had been in the past. NORD cancelled the piano lessons and the ballet lessons that had previously been taught in the Race Street building and informed Curtis that the hours between 3pm and 6pm, ideal hours for kids' programs since participants can come directly from school, would not be available to him in spite of the fact that the class space was no longer in use during those hours. Casa Samba now holds rehearsals only in the late evenings (after 7pm) and on Saturday mornings. Additionally, NORD has decided that Curtis can no longer have keys to the building. As a result, a NORD staff person must be in the building, not only to unlock and lock it, but also to watch over the personnel files that now take up a great deal of usable space in the center, during any time that Curtis or anyone from Casa Samba is there. NORD has allowed Casa Samba to leave its instruments in one small closet in the space, but if Curtis or anyone else from the group needs

instruments at any time that a NORD staff person is not in the building, they cannot access them. Curtis has begun storing instruments in his house and at the NORD center so that there are always instruments available for the group. This division of supplies has been chaotic at times. Curtis and Carol both feel as though NORD has treated them unfairly by limiting their access to the building and they feel as though they are being treated with less respect than they have earned.

NORD's behavior following Katrina has pushed Curtis and Carol to consider finding a way to have a permanent rehearsal space. Carol says that she took advantage of the "Katrina break" from her job to work on Casa Samba's 501(c)3 application. They've received their non-profit organization status, and are at a point at which the group can begin to apply for grants on its own. Curtis and Carol have both mentioned that they are looking to purchase a building, or perhaps a lot on which they could build, in the neighborhood in which they would create a permanent home for Casa Samba. Carol thinks of the group's having its own building as a path to "really be[ing] able to do the school part of it, like every samba school in Rio, being a cultural center." Having enough grant money and performance income to support a space that is Casa Samba's alone would allow the group to have workshops, bring teachers from Brazil or elsewhere, and become a community center with a samba focus. It would also change Carol's life. Currently, she works full time at Tulane University, where she has worked for the last twenty-five years. Her paycheck has always been the reliable income for hers and Curtis' household, not, Carol makes this clear, because Curtis does not bring in money with Casa Samba—which is his full time job. Curtis does earn a living with the group, and Carol supports his capacity to put all of his energy towards Casa Samba, sometimes twenty-four hours a day. Significant grant funding, perhaps funding that would pay her for all of the administrative work

that she does in addition to teaching samba dance, would allow Carol to devote her full attention to Casa Samba as well. Hurricane Katrina, especially its effect on NORD and NORD's capacity for "acting crazy," as Carol puts it, has been a catalyst for Casa Samba to explore new options in terms of how it operates.

Cliff's post-Katrina aspirations for Casa Samba have little to do with NORD's behavior. In his mind, Casa Samba should be going on tour and/or trying to benefit from the recent boom in the film industry and get itself placed in some movies. These things could take place even if NORD decided that Casa Samba should be relocated to its Lower Ninth Ward center, which is, for all intents and purposes, currently located in the middle of nowhere, and which is something NORD did suggest that Casa Samba do. Cliff would show up for rehearsal if it happened on the moon. NORD is not his primary concern. His issue is that he is secure in his knowledge that it is "in the cards" for Casa Samba to make it big someday, and that he is feeling the way many people are in the years following Katrina: everything can change at any time. The idea that evidence of decades of a person's life could disappear suddenly is not a foreign one to anyone in New Orleans anymore. Cliff is anxious to see Casa Samba achieve the recognition he feels the group deserves before it is too late. As he explains when I asked what the group should be doing now:

Mainly, [we should be] going on tour. We don't tour because I don't think a lot of people want to stay away from their day jobs too long ... but if the right people came along and made us an offer, we might just take it ... I'd like to go to the islands, any of the islands, or mainly to Africa ... It wouldn't have to be no big lengthy tour, just a little small tour, you know?

It appears that Cliff's position regarding Casa Samba's needing to go on tour and make a bigger name for itself is a pre-Katrina one that has been sharpened a little by the storm's calling-everything-into-account feature. Cliff is a very patient person. He is a person who thinks things

through before acting, or even speaking, and who seems to take his time coming to a conclusion about what is right or wrong, what should or should not happen. Because of this attitude, and because he has been involved in the music business in New Orleans in one way or another since he was a teenager, Cliff's faith in Casa Samba's making it really big does not seem misplaced. The capacity of one group to remain relevant and interesting for more than twenty years, with more than 5,000 people drawn into it during that time, is remarkable. It is the group's willingness to accept a constantly mutable identity that has allowed it to last as it has and allowed it to make the kind of comeback it has since Katrina. Casa Samba's resilience is in its Amerizilian-ness. It would not be possible to arrive at this interpretation of Casa Samba's post-Katrina rebirth without the combination of ethnographic methods and theories about identity that appear to grow out of a more cerebral relationship with the world and its inhabitants. The value of this combination for producing serious "a-ha" moments as this research has happened (and as it continues, I expect) cannot be overstated.

NOTES

11. A baiana is a dancer who wears the long, full skirt that is modeled after the style of Afro-Brazilian traditional dress worn by women in Bahia.

CONCLUSION

In an attempt to gain an understanding of both identity and identity politics as they play out in the current world contexts, James Clifford suggests that we use a “reconstituted cultural anthropology” that he defines as “patient, self-reflexive ‘listening’ across cultures and histories” (Clifford 2000:98). In seeming agreement with Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s assessment that the value of the term “culture” has become diminished (2003), Clifford says that the focus of this reconstituted cultural anthropology is not culture or cultures, per se, but “conjunctures,” “complex mediations of old and new,” of the “local and global” (Clifford 2000:98). An ethnographer who makes use of this reconstituted anthropology is oriented towards the history of a place and the people who live there, and as such, recognizes the existence of the invention of tradition, but also traditions of invention, that is, a pattern of the old and new mingling within systems of global capitalism (Clifford 2000:98).

Setting the particulars of terminological debate aside for a moment, one can see what Gilroy, Trouillot, and Clifford, are writing against: narrow interpretations of “culture” or “identity” that seem to occur with increasing frequency at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. These narrow renderings need to be countered, and essentialized meanings need to be discouraged. New approaches for examining the existence of overlaps in, invention of, and hybridization within culture need to be developed. Casa Samba, in being what it is and continuing to evolve on its own terms, offers a bounded phenomenon with which to explore the possibility of responding to Stuart Hall’s exhortation, which Clifford uses as an epigraph to his essay: “Gramsci said: ‘Turn your face violently towards things as they exist now.’ Not as you’d like them to be, not as you think they were ten years ago, not as they’re written about in the sacred texts, but as they really are: the contradictory, stony ground of the

present conjuncture” (in Gilroy 2000:94). This returns us to the link between concepts of culture and identity.

Casa Samba is a group built upon ideas about identity, beginning with Curtis’ personal identity and the changes he consciously made as he went about constructing it, and continuing with the group’s identity as a whole, which can be described in a variety of ways that have been discussed above. There are ways in which Casa Samba is an *escola de samba* in the Rio de Janeiro model and in the *Bloco Afro* model of Salvador, Bahia (Guillermoprieto 1990, Vianna 1999). Just as importantly, there are characteristics of Casa Samba revealed through interviews and through seeing the group in action that make it very similar to carnival traditions that are local to New Orleans, especially those traditions with year-round carnivalizing impacts like the social aid and pleasure clubs, brass bands in impromptu second lines or jazz funeral parades, and Mardi Gras Indian tribes (Berry 1988, Regis 1999). Curtis’ reflexive use of the words “tradition,” “preservation,” and “culture” link Casa Samba to both the Brazilian samba culture of which it is a definite representation, and to the parading culture that in large part metonymically represents New Orleans’ identity to the rest of the world. Casa Samba is the product of globalization, the outgrowth of African traditions in Brazil and Louisiana, as well as the realization of one man’s personal journey to find himself. Casa Samba is a constantly changing representation of many identities at once. The group’s twenty-plus year history in New Orleans and its ability to rise to the challenge of thriving after Hurricane Katrina scattered many of its core members and changed the landscape in which the members of Casa Samba lived, worked, and performed is an example of what happens when history has direct bearing on the present. The group is accustomed to not fitting into one category or another. The “contradictory, stony ground of the present conjuncture” is the home territory of Casa Samba.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Casa Samba: Twenty-One Years of Amerizilian Identity in New Orleans

1. Where are you from?
2. When did you join Casa Samba?
3. How did you find out about the group?
4. How often do you rehearse with the group?
5. How often do you perform?
6. How would you describe Casa Samba to someone who didn't know what it was?
7. Would you consider yourself a professional musician/dancer?
8. What other kinds of music/dance do you play/do?
9. In what ways are things different since Katrina?
10. How do you think Casa Samba fits into the New Orleans music scene?
11. Is Casa Samba a real samba group?
12. Do you speak Portuguese?
13. Have you been to Brazil?
14. Has being a member of Casa Samba changed your life in any way?
15. Does participating in Casa Samba reinforce or deemphasize any other markers of your identity such as your race or gender? How so?

APPENDIX B: LIST OF SHOWS ATTENDED

1. February 1, 2008 – Zulu Ball
2. April 6, 2008 – Festival Latina
3. April 12, 2008 – a) Kid’s Stage at French Quarter Festival
4. April 12, 2008 – b) Multicultural Student Celebration at Tulane University
5. April 26, 2008 – Casa Samba opened for Ozomatli at the Howling Wolf
6. May 2, 2008 – Jazz Fest parade
7. May 3, 2006 – Casa Samba, sole performer, at Southport Hall
8. May 4, 2008 – Casa Samba and Samba Kids perform at the Kids’ Tent at Jazz Fest
9. June 13, 2008 – Rotolo’s Pizzeria pagode

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**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: December 3, 2007

Protocol Title: "Casa Samba in New Orleans: Twenty years of Amerizilian
Identity"

IRB#: 01Dec07

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are compliant with the University of New Orleans guidelines but exempt from human subjects regulations at 45 CFR 46 per exempt research under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed prior to implementation by the IRB to ensure continued exemption.

Best of luck with your project!
Sincerely,

Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

VITA

Lauren Lastrapes was born in New Orleans on November 29, 1979. She left New Orleans in 1997 to attend the George Washington University where she studied Anthropology and engaged in acts of political resistance large and small. She received a B.A. in 2001 and is still waiting to receive her FBI file. Lauren remained in Washington, DC until 2006. In the years following her college graduation, she retired from political activism in the typical sense and devoted most of her time and energy to training capoeira angola. Following Hurricane Katrina, Lauren, like many self-exiled residents of New Orleans, was compelled to return home. In establishing herself in the city as an adult and as a researcher, she has been reminded of the importance attached to where one went to high school. Lauren attended Benjamin Franklin High School.