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A River Separates Them, A Culture Connects Them:
The Mohawk Hunters of Algiers and the Mardi Gras Indian Tradition in New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of History
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

Monisha Jackson

BAS National-Louis University, 2007

December 2017

This paper is dedicated to Tyrone “Big Chief” Casby Sr. , Jamal “Zulu” Casby, Charles “Cubby” Dillon Jr., Senator Troy Carter Sr., the entire Mohawk Hunters Tribe, Allyson Neal and especially to the people of Algiers for making this possible. I promise I won’t let you down.

-Monisha

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ABSTRACT

All over the world, Carnival is a time for a break in human activities, and inversion of the usual hierarchies. In New Orleans, Carnival is a time when the powerless take over the streets, and, for a time, invert control and ownership. One of the New Orleans carnival organizations are the Mardi Gras Indians, groups of African Americans who dress as Indians during the day and take over the streets of their neighborhoods, showing their power and beauty in a breathtaking display of costumes, music and dance. The Masking of the Mardi Gras Indian is a tradition dating back to at least the early nineteenth century. The Creole Wild West were the first named Indian tribe on record in 1884 but this does not mean they were the only or earliest tribe to mask. In the beginning some gangs would get together on Mardi Gras but did not mask under a proper name. The Mardi Gras Indian practice is a practice rooted in resistance to white oppression and African Americans' demands for inclusion in the city's Mardi Gras celebrations. The history of Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans is not limited to the East Bank of the Mississippi River but is also includes residents on the West Bank, specifically in the neighborhood of Algiers. Within the Algiers neighborhood there are several different sections. Probably the most well known section, Algiers Point, consisted of mostly white residents. The Oakdale area, later known as the Fischer Housing Development, and the Cut-Off, an area that borders the bayous of Plaquemines Parish consisted of mostly African Americans. Although the origins of Indians masking on both sides of the River is a point of debate among scholars, some evidence suggests that Indians from Algiers masked as early as the early twentieth century. This thesis is an examination of the longest-running tribe in Algiers, the Mohawk Hunters who started out in the Oakdale area but currently most of their members now reside in the Cut-Off area. Using archival material as well

as recently conducted oral histories, it explores the relationship between the Algiers Indian tradition and the more well-known groups on the East Bank. By their deep attachment to their neighborhood, despite its separation from the rest of New Orleans by the Mississippi River, they have helped to strengthen the Mardi Gras Indians' neighborhood-bound traditions of community service and youth education. Not many people are privy to some of the information that was passed along to me through the oral interviews conducted but my personal connection to some the Mohawk Hunters, including my cousin Charles "Cubby" Dillon, possibly allowed me to gain a deeper look into the organization. I was able to use text messages for follow-up questions and this was access most interviewers may not have had. Although few residents on the East Bank know of their existence, they are a model of the community-engaged, twenty-first century Mardi Gras Indians.

Key words: Algiers Mardi Gras Indian, Mohawk Hunters, Mississippi River, Resistance, Tyrone Casby, William Casby

INTRODUCTION

On Mardi Gras Day in 1968, the Mohawk Hunters Mardi Gras Indian Gang donned their suits and got ready to mask in Algiers just like on every other Mardi Gras since their inception more than 25 years earlier around 1943.¹ The exact origin dates of the Mohawk Hunters are not known. Algiers is a neighborhood within the bounds of New Orleans, but it is located across the Mississippi River from the rest of the city, on what is known as the West Bank. The only Indian tribe on the West Bank at the time, the Mohawk Hunters paraded around the neighborhood, stopping at local bars and the homes of willing residents who allowed them to make pit stops. Once they reached Algiers Point near the Algiers Ferry landing, where ferry boats connect Algiers to the foot of Canal Street in downtown New Orleans, some members decided to take the ferry and parade on the East Bank while others decided to stay on the West Bank. When the Mohawk Hunters made their final stop, which was in the Oakdale area of Algiers, a confrontation occurred.² As current Mohawk Hunter's Big Chief Tyrone Casby tells it, the Big Chief in 1968 (who Casby did not name), wanted to parade on the East Bank and join up with the other Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans and be a part of the traditional Mardi Gras celebration. Most members of the Mohawk Hunters, however, decided that instead of joining in the with

¹ For the purposes of this paper the words costume and suit will be used interchangeably to describe the hand-sewn garments the Mardi Gras Indian wore. The name depends on the time and/or the tribe. Also, the words tribe and gang will be used interchangeably to describe what a group of Mardi Gras Indians called themselves

² William J. Fischer Homes/The Fischer Projects, <https://fischerprojects.wordpress.com/urban-planning-and-development/william-j-fischer-homes/>. Casby mentions this area as Oakdale but in 1968 when the events took place, this area had already become the Fischer Housing Projects, which were built in 1965. Casby goes back and forth between calling this area Oakdale and The Fischer, I assume because the time frame of the events was so close to the time that this particular area in Algiers was going through a major change. Oakdale is now a part of the city of Gretna, which is located right outside Algiers. A good portion of Gretna used to be a part of Algiers until about 1870 when Algiers was annexed to the City of New Orleans.

Mardi Gras Indians on the East Bank, they would remain on the West Bank. For some West Bank residents, the parading of the Mohawk Hunters was the only Mardi Gras Indian celebration they would see because those residents did not have the means to travel to the East Bank.

Tyrone Casby, who in 1968 was a Flag Boy with the Mohawk Hunters, recalls the specific event as the “Only time I was involved in a physical altercation.”³

As Casby recalls the events of that day, the members who tried to parade on the East Bank were not able to get across the river because the ferry was out of service at the time, so they thought they would be able to rejoin the members who initially decided to stay on the West Bank. Those who stayed on the West Bank argued the group should never have split and that it was disrespectful for those who left to try to rejoin the group. Once a member walks away from a Mardi Gras Indian tribe, that member is no longer a part of that tribe because loyalty is very important in the Mardi Gras Indian world. The disagreement resulted in a physical altercation and a split in the group for about five years.

Tradition is an integral part of the Mardi Gras Indian practice. Those dressed as Mardi Gras Indians have taken the time all year to hand-sew every part of the suits that are worn during Mardi Gras and on Saint Joseph’s Night and Super Sunday. All of these celebrations are tied to the Lenten Season in New Orleans. Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, is the day of “sin” before Ash Wednesday, which is the start of Lent. Saint Joseph’s Night, which is always March 19, developed from the large Sicilian community in New Orleans who celebrate a Saint Joseph’s Day Feast as a break from Lent.⁴ Super Sunday grew out of Saint Joseph’s Day in which Mardi

³ Tyrone Casby, Oral Interview conducted July 1, 2016.

⁴ When Sicilians arrived to New Orleans in great numbers in the 1880’s, they were marginalized and treated poorly by the authorities. Included in this treatment was that they were only allowed to parade on St. Joseph’s Night, St. Joseph being the patron saint of Sicily. Black

Gras Indians celebrate the Sunday before Saint Joseph's Day and called it Super Sunday. During Super Sunday celebrations several of the Mardi Gras Indian tribes come together to dance chant and show off their costumes. This event is held during the day so that spectators can get good look at the intricate work on display with the colorful suits. Saint Joseph's Day celebrations evolved into Saint Joseph's Night in which the Mardi Gras Indians pay homage to those Italians/Sicilians who allowed the tired and thirsty Mardi Gras Indians to use the Italians' places of business for rest during their parades.⁵ Family and friends come out to see the Indians, listen to second-line bands, eat local foods, and have a good time. These events include the meeting of the different big chiefs from the tribes located in the different neighborhoods to do "battle" around the Greater New Orleans Area.⁶

Despite their long history, the Mardi Gras Indians of Algiers remain little known outside of the Indian community and Algiers itself. This thesis is an examination of the longest-running tribe in Algiers, the Mohawk Hunters. Using archival material as well as recently conducted oral histories, it explores the relationship between the Algiers Indian tradition and the more well-known groups on the East Bank. It argues in their deep attachment to their neighborhood, a neighborhood separated from the rest of New Orleans by the Mississippi River, they helped to strengthen the Mardi Gras Indian tradition as a whole. Although few residents on the East Bank

New Orleanians realized that this night was a space in which they might also take advantage, so they began also to parade on St. Joseph's Day.

⁵ Edward Branley, NOLA History: Mardi Gras Indians on "Super Sunday", www.gonola.com, accessed October 20, 2016.

⁶ Doing battle in the Mardi Gras Indian world means different chiefs meet up along with their tribes and pose to show off their suits. They chant, dance and pretend to fight using their spears or tomahawks. The tradition used to get very violent but now it is all in fun and for bragging rights.

may know of their existence, they are a model of the community-engaged, twenty-first century Mardi Gras Indians.⁷

Only a five-minute drive across the Mississippi River Bridge, Algiers is a community located directly opposite New Orleans's French Quarter. Algiers is often considered to be quite separate from the rest of the city, not only geographically but also in terms of its identity. Some accuse it of not being part of the "real New Orleans". (*Figure 1*).



(*Figure 1.*) View of Algiers, West Bank (Bottom Left), Downtown New Orleans, East Bank (Top) with only the Mississippi River separating the two. This photo shows how close in distance Algiers is from downtown New Orleans. Accessed from nola.com, 11/22/2016. http://www.nola.com/weather/index.ssf/2011/03/mississippi_river_levees_will.html.

⁷ For the purpose of this paper the terms Mardi Gras Indian, Black Indian, Negro Indian and Black Carnival Indian will be used interchangeably, also Algiers may be listed as the West Bank and New Orleans Proper may be listed as the East Bank or the Greater New Orleans (GNO) area.

In the summer of 2016, an informal survey was conducted in order to do research on the Mardi Gras Indians of Algiers. Local residents and tourists around the New Orleans area were asked what they knew of the Mardi Gras Indians from Algiers and the general response was, “What Indians in Algiers?” As a part of the survey many participants expressed that they did not feel Algiers was a part of New Orleans (proper) and they thought it was its own city.⁸ These misconceptions and misunderstandings about the history of Algiers have rolled over to other cultural traditions in New Orleans including the Mardi Gras Indian tradition.

Although a river separates the West Bank of New Orleans from the Greater New Orleans area, the traditions within the African American community in Algiers have remained tied to traditions in the rest of the city. One practice that helps maintain those traditions is the masking of the Mohawk Hunters. Historian and geographer Michael Crutcher argues that about 90 families from the Tremé neighborhood, behind the French Quarter, were forced to move into the Fischer Homes Development in Algiers development in 1965.⁹ Many New Orleans residents moved into the low-income housing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, even if it forced them into new neighborhoods. Though there is evidence to suggest there were Mardi Gras Indians in Algiers before this migration into housing developments there, this relocation may be at the root of the Mohawk Hunters’s rise as the neighborhood’s main Indian tribe. Despite displacement from their old neighborhood, the Mardi Gras Indians in Algiers continued to express their historical and cultural ties to the rest of the city, across the Mississippi River.

⁸ In the summer of 2016, Monisha Jackson, conducted an informal survey with 20 people. There were only three questions asked on the survey, “Where are you from?, Have you heard of the Mardi Gras Indians?” and “What do you think of the Mardi Gras Indians of Algiers?”.

⁹ Michael E. Crutcher, *Treme’: Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood*, (The University of Georgia Press, 2010) 44.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The current writings about the Mardi Gras Indians range from general works to scholarly exploration of the group and their practice. *Mardi Gras Indians* (1994) by Michael Smith, examines the history and traditions and focuses on the theme that the Mardi Gras Indian tradition started with the Buffalo Bill's Wild West show which traveled to New Orleans in 1884 and the emergence of the Buffalo Soldiers, black troops who were sent to settle lands west of the Mississippi River. Crutcher argues the Buffalo Soldiers could have imitated the Plains Indians' garments. In contrast, Smith writes about the close relationship with runaway slaves and local Indigenous tribes in south Louisiana, which seems to be the most accepted theory by Mardi Gras Indian maskers of how the tradition came to be. The pictures included in the book document the costumes of the various tribes. Smith includes photographs of the White Eagles, Wild Magnolias, Yellow Pocahontas, Creole Pocahontas and other Mardi Gras Indian tribes all located on the East Bank, but only briefly mentions the Mohawk Hunters with a picture of "Little Chief" Tyrone Casby Jr. at Super Sunday in 1980.¹⁰ Tyrone Casby Sr. is in the picture as well but he is unidentified.

House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald Lewis by Rachel Breunlin, Ronald Lewis and Helen Regis is, according to museum director Ronald W. Lewis, a "Colorful History Documenting Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and Cultural Education Center." This cultural center, which was created by accident but was necessary to the preservation of the Mardi Gras Indian culture especially after Hurricane Katrina, is located in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana, has been a fixture in that area since 2003 and is located in Lewis's backyard on Tupelo Street. Besides being the director and curator for the

¹⁰ Michael Smith, *Mardi Gras Indian*, (Pelican Publishing Company, 1994), 95-97.

House of Dance and Feathers, Lewis is also the president of the Big Nine Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Former Council Chief of the Choctaw Hunters, former King of Krewe du Vieux, and a central character in Dan Baum's post-Katrina best seller *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death and Life in New Orleans*.¹¹ This museum collection contains Mardi Gras Indian costumes, pictures and other artifacts dealing with the traditions of the Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and other groups such as the Skull and Bone Gangs and the Baby Dolls.

House of Dance and Feathers contains the first-hand knowledge Lewis has as a member of different Mardi Gras Indian tribes and Social Aid and Pleasure clubs.¹² These clubs were akin both the traditions West African burial traditions and to the benevolent societies established by African Americans in many former slaveholding societies and were essential to the survival of black communities in New Orleans, especially in the era of segregation. They were formed because of the need for assistance in the Black community with things such as providing food for the poor, helping women whose husbands went off to war, and helping pay for funerals for people who could not pay for the service. Most of these clubs also had a jazz band that would play for funerals, second lines and ultimately Mardi Gras. These clubs were part of the larger "marching culture" of New Orleans and many, like Lewis, participated in both Social aid and pleasure clubs Indian masking.¹³

Until about the 1980's, women did not mask with Indian groups, and some women started their own parade tradition. Kim Marie Vaz's *The "Baby Dolls": Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*, tells the story of African American

¹¹ Dan Baum, *Nine Lives; Mystery, Magic, Death and Life in New Orleans*, (Spiegel and Grau, 2009.)

¹² Rachel Bruelin, Ronald W. Lewis, Helen Regis, *House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald Lewis*, (Neighborhood Story Project, 2009).

¹³ Bruelin et al, *House of Dance and Feathers*, 125-132.

women who inserted themselves front and center into the picture of Mardi Gras celebrations.¹⁴

The Baby Dolls, or ladies who danced the jazz, and the social aid and pleasure clubs both provided help to the Black communities, mainly where they were located. The Baby Dolls broke down racial and gender boundaries, which contributed to the inclusion of adding the Big Queen as a position in the Mardi Gras Indian gangs. The Baby Dolls also took care of members of their communities especially women. Some of the Baby Doll's benevolent work has been listed as contributions to the New Orleans Musicians Clinic, feeding the homeless alongside the Sheriff's Department on Thanksgiving, and countless appearances in nursing homes and other venues to promote the culture.¹⁵

Before women could mask as Mardi Gras Indians, being a Baby Doll was the answer to men being in a Mardi Gras Indian gang. Women had previously held their place in background sewing costumes and assisting the Mardi Gras gangs during practices and other events but in present day women and children mask. There is currently not a Baby Doll crew on the West Bank. However, when Tyrone Casby was asked about the possibility of Baby Dolls parading on the West Bank, his response demonstrated his concern with the "authentic" nature of marching on the West Bank. If such a group arises, he said he hoped they would be authentic to the culture, possibly link up with the Mohawk Hunters and represent Algiers and the West Bank to the fullest.¹⁶ The Mohawk Hunters do have many female members as part of their gang including a Big Queen.¹⁷

¹⁴ Kim Marie Vaz, *The "Baby Dolls": Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*, (Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Vaz, *The "Baby Dolls"*, 113.

¹⁶ Tyrone Casby, Oral Interview conducted July 1, 2016.

¹⁷ Although the Mardi Gras Indian culture has changed unfortunately one tradition has not changed and that is the race of the Mardi Gras King and Queen. The King and Queen of the Rex Parade are considered the King and Queen of Mardi Gras. To this day there has never been and

Michael E. Crutcher Jr.'s *Tremé: Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood* tells the story of what he calls oldest predominantly African American neighborhood in New Orleans.¹⁸ The African American residents in this neighborhood did not choose this area for themselves but the first French settlers in New Orleans chose it for them. The Tremé was just a few blocks from the French Quarter. Whites resided in the Quarter because the land sat at its highest point, which was considered prime realty because about fifty percent of New Orleans sits below sea level. African Americans and free people of color settled below the Quarter, in the Marigny section and behind the Quarter in what is know as Tremé. Multiple benevolent societies and social clubs have their origins in Tremé including The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. In Crutcher's *Treme*, he states that according to New Orleans official tourist agency, "The Faubourg Treme", or as it is more frequently referred to, Treme', is not only America's oldest black neighborhood but it was the site of significant economic, cultural, political, social and legal events in Black America for the past two centuries.¹⁹ Some of the Mardi Gras Indian tribes started in the Treme' as well. Since Blacks were not allowed to participate White Mardi Gras balls and parades, they created their own traditions, which included the Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Skull and Bone Gangs and the Baby Dolls.²⁰

Big Chief Harrison and the Mardi Gras Indians is a biography of one particular Mardi Gras Indian, Donald Harrison Sr., better known as Big Chief Harrison was the Chief of the

African American King or Queen of Mardi Gras. See Bruce Nolan, "Bitter Mardi Gras debate of race, class evolves 20 years later into a diverse celebration" New Orleans *Times Picayune*, Feb 12, 2012.

¹⁸ Michael E. Crutcher, *Treme': Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood*, (The University of Georgia Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Crutcher, *Treme*, 15.

²⁰ Vaz, "Baby Dolls", 7.

Guardians of the Flame, which included members from all parts of New Orleans, and until his death, Chief Harrison resided in the Upper Ninth Ward of New Orleans. Chief Harrison began masking in the Uptown area where he lived as a little boy.²¹ Tyrone Casby was interviewed by the author Dr. Al Kennedy for the book, and he talked about his first encounter with Chief Harrison. Casby told a story about how a waiter, who ended up being Big Chief Harrison, gave Casby some unsolicited advice to add African designs with American Indian beading patterns.²² That short conversation turned into phone conversations about how to better the Mardi Gras Indian culture as not only Big Chiefs but as leaders in their respective communities. Kennedy's book offers further illustration of the deep connections between the Mardi Gras Indians of the East and West Banks.

The Mohawk Hunters not only had to fight to be respected by the Mardi Gras Indian tribes on the East Bank but they also had to fight to be accepted by the White residents of the Algiers community. Algiers native Richard Remy Dixon wrote several books on Algiers and what its importance meant to the City of New Orleans, and one of those books was *This is Algiers; The Heart of New Orleans*.²³ This book speaks about some of the founders of Algiers, how Algiers was built, some of the important businesses in Algiers and how Algiers contributes to the city of New Orleans, however this book does not mention one African American in Algiers. Most of Dixon's books are about Algiers and its centennial, but mentions little to no African Americans, and when the books do the African Americans are referred to as "colored" and usually not mentioned by name. One has to keep in mind these books were written mostly in

²¹ Al Kennedy, *Big Chief Harrison and the Mardi Gras Indians*, (Pelican Publishing Company, 2010) 28.

²² Kennedy, *Big Chief Harrison and the Mardi Gras Indians*, 229.

²³ Richard Remy Dixon, *Algiers: The Heart of New Orleans*, Upton Printing Company, 1st Ed., 1973.

the 1970's, but it is an example of how the Mohawk Hunters' contributions to the community of Algiers were overlooked for a long time.

Algiers has often been left out of the historiography on New Orleans. Local historian Allyson Neal, who grew up in Algiers, has published two valuable books on the history of the neighborhood. *Algiers: The Untold Story of a New Orleans Treasure*²⁴ and *Algiers: The Untold Story, The African American Experience 1929-1955*.²⁵ Neal uses Dixon's books as references but her books give a deeper insight to the African American experience in Algiers because they are written from an African American's perspective. In *Algiers: The Untold Story of a New Orleans Treasure* Neal gathers information on Algiers history, jazz musicians, schools, churches, social life and family. In *Algiers: The Untold Story, The African American Experience 1929-1955*, Neal uses oral history to gather stories of what the African American experience was like in Algiers during The Great Depression and during and after World War II, up until 1955. Both books offer portraits of prominent African Americans in Algiers and including the Mohawk Hunters, who up until 2014 were the only Mardi Gras Indian tribe in Algiers since its creation about 1943. Neal is also the only author in this thesis to mention the late great-grandfather of Tyrone Casby, William Casby, who was considered one of the oldest living people to survive previously being enslaved. William Casby was 114 when he died.²⁶

²⁴ Allyson Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story of a New Orleans Treasure*, 2009.

²⁵ Allyson Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story, the African American Experience, 1929-1955*, 2001.

²⁶ Allyson Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story, the African American Experience*, 451.

A New Oral History of the Mohawk Hunters

In order to get a better understanding of the Mardi Gras Indians on the West Bank, I conducted a formal oral interview with Big Chief Tyrone Casby of the Mohawk Hunters who is the central figure of the Mardi Gras Indians of Algiers.²⁷ The interview was conducted at Landry-Walker High School where Chief, or Mr. Casby, as he is known at the school, was serving as interim principal. With Casby's open-door policy, there were a couple interruptions but the open door policy he has for both staff and students demonstrated one reason why Casby is so beloved in the Algiers community as a leader and mentor.

Professionalism is another important aspect in the Mardi Gras Indian culture, especially with the Mohawk Hunters and this was evident in the interviews conducted with two of the younger members of the Mohawk Hunters: Tyrone Casby's son, Jamal "Zulu" Casby and Charles "Cubby" Dillon Jr. Jamal Casby and Dillon had been high school football rivals but were from the same neighborhood in the Cut-Off section of Algiers and were friends off the field. This friendship led to them becoming college roommates at the University of Louisiana Lafayette (ULL). While at school Casby began to tell Dillon about the Mardi Gras Indian culture and how he missed masking because of being away from home. The history and the culture intrigued Dillon so this is how he became interested joining the Mohawk Hunters but he would find out it was not that simple to join a Mardi Gras Indian gang.

I interviewed Dillon at his home in lower Algiers, an area better known as the Cut-Off. He has been masking since 1999 and first started off as the Skeleton Man because at the time he did not know how to sew. After five years, however, he became the Second Flag Boy. Dillon is also an educator currently teaching at Pierre A. Capdau Learning Academy in the Mid-City area

²⁷ There were also informal interviews conducted via text message in order to ask a question or get clarification on information pertaining to the formal interview.

of New Orleans. Dillon previously taught at Fischer Charter School in Algiers for many years. Jamal, is the First Flag Boy and Second Chief in line for the Mohawk Hunters. Jamal's interview was conducted at the New Orleans Public Library in Algiers. Jamal, who has been masking with the Mohawk Hunters since he was 3 years old, became First Flag Boy around 1999. Just like his father, Jamal is an educator and teaches at Martin Behrman Charter School in Algiers. Both Jamal Casby and Charles Dillon Jr. are youth football coaches in Algiers for the New Orleans Recreational Department Commission (NORDC) and attribute their desire to work with children to the mentorship of Tyrone Casby.

In addition to the three members of the Mohawk Hunters, I interviewed Louisiana District Seven Senator Troy Carter at his office in Algiers. This was another hectic environment to conduct an interview because Senator Carter had a meeting before my interview and an interview with a local news station right after me. Senator Carter, a lifelong resident of Algiers, and a community leader, gave an elected official's perspective on the value of the Mardi Gras Indian tradition to Algiers. Carter, a graduate of Oliver Perry Walker High School (currently a part of Landry-Walker College Preparatory High School) acknowledges a close relationship with Big Chief Tyrone Casby and the Mohawk Hunters. Carter states that, "I've known Tyrone (Casby) for many, many years, so I happen to have firsthand awareness of what they (The Mohawk Hunters) do in the community, from football games, to voter registration drives, Super Sunday, you name it, it's just their presence you know...they even performed at my nieces wedding."²⁸ This interview displayed the impact Mardi Gras Indians not only have on the residents who live in their respective communities but also the policymakers who make the laws for those communities as well.

²⁸ Senator Troy A. Carter Sr., oral conducted September 26, 2017.

Although the Mohawk Hunters are considered the first Mardi Gras Indian tribe on the West Bank, they are not the only tribe on the West Bank, which was a title Chief Casby and the Mohawk Hunters's held with pride. One of the members of Casby's Mohawk Hunters was Troy Young. Young is about the same age as Casby's oldest son who was also a member of the Mohawk Hunters. Young was Second Chief of the Mohawk Hunters but assumed that he would never become big chief with Casby's son waiting in line. In 2014, Young decided to start his own Mardi Gras Indian tribe, the Algiers Warriors 1.5. This would become only the second actively running Mardi Gras Indian tribe in Algiers. Currently there is some tension between the two tribes, and most of the time they do not parade at the same events. Casby feels the way that Young left, without Casby's blessing, was disrespectful, and it should have not been done in that manner. This is similar to what happened with the tribe members who wanted to split with the group and paraded on the East Bank in 1968 and were never let back into the tribe. In Mardi Gras Indian culture, disrespect and not following the rules of the culture are not tolerated. At the present time, the Algiers Warriors do not participate in the West Bank Super Sunday but they do participate in the Uptown Super Sunday, which is located on the East Bank.²⁹

²⁹ Young was not available to interview to tell his side of the story.

Early Algiers

Algiers, on the West Bank side of the Mississippi River, was part of the land grant given to New Orleans's founder Jean Baptiste LeMoyne Sieur de Bienville by the Company of the Indies in 1719. Algiers was not actually a settled neighborhood at the time, by European standards, even though the Choctaw Indians had lived in the region for many years before the French "founded" it. Through much of the nineteenth century, Algiers was plantation land. In 1870, Algiers was annexed to the City of New Orleans and became its Fifth Municipal District.³⁰

Algiers Point played a significant role in the city's participation in the Atlantic and domestic slave trade. Algiers was a central location for housing enslaved individuals in slave pens.³¹ These slave pens were not only a place for slave-traders and slave-dealers to hold enslaved people and "prep" them to be sold in the slave market in the French Quarter area of New Orleans. They were a place where slaves communicated and shared their different traditions and culture with one another as a means to help with survival so the same reasons the Mardi Gras Indians were created by African Americans on the East Bank, those same reasons resonated with African Americans on the West Bank to honor the culture as well. In addition, the local indigenous population, comprised mainly of the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, inhabited lands in an around Algiers. In the colonial period, according to Michael Crutcher,

³⁰ Allyson Ward Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story, the African American Experience, 1929-1955*, 2001, p. 3, 48.

³¹ Algiers Historical Society, <http://algiershistoricalsociety.org/algiers-history.html>. Slave Pens or Slave Jails were small, enclosed spaces where enslaved individuals in Antebellum New Orleans were held. In these pens the enslaved people were "fattened", dressed up or down according to the type of buyer, greased up, made to look younger or healthier with harsh tactics such as plucking individual grey hairs and dying of the hair with tar. Once ready for sale, the enslaved people would be sent by boat or by ferry to the French Quarter, which was just on the opposite side of the Mississippi River from Algiers Point, to be sold on the auction block. Once on the auction block the ridicule did not end. Slaves were then made to sing, dance and were inspected by bidders who wished to buy them.

“Unions between native women and African slaves became common because many more male Africans arrived than did female Africans. In addition, African slaves frequently ran away and joined local Indians in their villages or maroon communities.”³²

Origins of Mardi Gras Indians

Evidence to support claims of when the first Blacks masked as Indians is hard to uncover. The first known photo to be taken of the Mardi Gras Indians in February 23, 1903, published by the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, is significant to the story of the Mardi Gras Indians of the East Bank and the West Bank. (Figure 2.) *The Daily Picayune* (in a 1916 merger became a part of the *Times Picayune*) has one of the earliest published accounts of the “negroes who mask as Indians” in 1900. The article was titled, “The Coon Carnival Ends in the Usual Free Fight, Fast and Furious, Resulting in Two Being Wounded and Three Suspects Landing in the Jail.” The article describes how two Black Indian tribes, the Chickasaws and the Red, White and Blues or “Negroes dressed in Indian Masks” as the articles states, got into an altercation. The event happened on what was then Perdido and Franklin streets, what today is the intersection of Perdido and Loyola, near what is now the New Orleans City Hall building. According to the reporter, an altercation arose because bystanders of the two crews began to comment on the better appearance of the Chickasaws and someone from the Red, White and Blues got jealous and “cracked” one of the Chickasaws on the head. This started the fight and eventually gunfire,

³² Michael E. Crutcher, *Treme’: Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 22. See also Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the 18th Century* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1992).

which resulted in two black men, John Henry Lewis and Lawrence Clementine, wounded and a host of others in jail.³³



(Figure 2.) The first known photograph of the Mardi Gras Indians. February 23, 1903 New Orleans *Times-Democrat*. This photo was taken from a journal article, “Don’t Bow Down on That Dirty Ground: A Photographic Essay of the Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans, by Robert Brown in the *Focus on Geography*, a publication of the American Geographical Society.

³³ “The Coon Carnival Ends in the Usual Free Fight, Fast and Furious Resulting in Two Being Wounded and Three Suspects Landing in the Jail, *The Daily Picayune*, February 28, 1900.

The *Daily Picayune*'s article implies that the city's black residents had been masking as Indians for some time: "Every Mardi Gras Day, bunches of negroes get together, masked as Indians, a hundred strong, they race through the streets playing fools antics, and at the same time have their eyes open for trouble".³⁴ Although this was the first known account to be found in a newspaper, this does not mean that this was the first Mardi Gras that blacks masked as Indians. Accounts of blacks dressed as Indians date back to the pre-Civil War era. The accounts come from stories passed down from through generations of New Orleans residents insisting their ancestors paid homage to the Native Americans who housed and protected runaway slaves. Out of all of the oral interviews conducted, all of the interviewees believe they are paying homage to the indigenous population but also honoring their African roots as well. Jamal Casby states that he understands that the culture probably started with the French and Indian war and natives housed his ancestors, but he also feels that there were also Black Indians (Indigenous people with darker colored skin) in south Louisiana even before Bienville.³⁵ Charles Dillon also states that when he puts his suit on he transforms because he understands that he doing it for his (African) ancestors and the Indians who housed them during slavery, but also those Mardi Gras Indians who did this before him.³⁶

Other contested theories suggest that the tradition started when Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show visited New Orleans in 1884. An article appropriately entitled, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show In New Orleans," describes the show's month-long stay in New Orleans, from December 1884 to January 1885, featuring cowboys, Mexicans, Indians, special marksmen and riders.³⁷

³⁴ "Coon Carnival", Times Daily Picayune, February 28, 1900.

³⁵ Jamal Casby, oral interview conducted August 14, 2017.

³⁶ Charles Dillon, oral interview conducted August 15, 2017.

³⁷ William E. Deahl Jr., Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association, Vol. 16, No.3 (Summer, 1975), 289-298.

The Indians that traveled with the show were Plains Indians, whose garments were very different from those located in the swamps of Louisiana. The headdress of the Plains Indians is very similar to the headdress of the Mardi Gras Indian. (*Figure 3.*)



(*Figure 3.*) Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill 1895. This photo shows the Indian headdress, which is very similar to Mardi Gras Indian headdress. Digital file original item downloaded from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ds.07833>, Library of Congress

Chief Casby and the Mohawk Hunters

In the documentary *Spirit Leads My Needle: The Big Chiefs of Carnival*, Chief Casby is the first person to speak, his words were, “Mardi Gras is a culture within itself, within that culture there is a subculture called the Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans today. I think the highlight of it all I think that folks want to know where are the (Mardi Gras) Indians.”³⁸ In the documentary other Big Chiefs (leaders of the different Mardi Gras Indian gangs) talk about what it means to be a Mardi Gras Indian and how it feels to make and wear the suit. No matter what their neighborhood of origin, every chief described a certain “spirit” that comes over them when they put on the costume. This “spirit” or feeling comes from paying homage to their ancestors who survived slavery by escaping their masters and being embraced by the indigenous people.³⁹

There is some evidence that suggests that the Mohawk Hunters are not the first tribe to mask in Algiers. Marcus Christian, a professor at the University of New Orleans (UNO) until his death in 1976 and author of the unpublished manuscript, *The Negro in Louisiana*, contributes to the mystery of the beginnings of the Mardi Gras Indians on the West Bank because he mentions the Eight Red Men from Algiers as one of the original six Mardi Gras Indian tribes, but that is all he mentions. After reviewing a rough draft of Christian’s manuscript, a footnote about the Eight Red Men was found stating, “Through interview with Richard Washington, a masker with the

³⁸ “Spirit Leads My Needle: The Big Chiefs of Carnival”, A Film By the Ohio State University at Newark with the Mardi Gras Council, 2016.

³⁹ In the introduction of the chiefs who were interviewed, each chief announced who they were, what tribe they represented and where they were from. One person that stood out was Big Chief Waddie Griffin. He introduced himself as the Big Chief Waddie of the Young Cherokees, West Bank, Algiers. This was a little confusing but it also shed light on the fact that a person could be the Big Chief of a tribe but not be from the area that the tribe represents. In this case the Young Cherokees are based out of Gert Town in the 17th Ward of New Orleans or Carrollton area but Chief Waddie is from Algiers.

Wild Squatula and Red White and Blue Tribe.”⁴⁰ One can only speculate what area of New Orleans the Eight Red Men were from, when they started or how long they lasted.

When Big Chief Casby was asked about the Eight Red Men, his response was, “Never heard of them, who told you that? Oakdale was the only African American community in Algiers where this culture was practiced.”⁴¹ The response that Casby gives suggests that he feels the Mohawk Hunters are the oldest Mardi Gras Indian tribe located in Algiers. Despite Christian’s assertions, Casby’s argument cannot be discarded because both accusations were given by word-of-mouth. Casby’s information was passed down to him from his uncle and Christian’s information was passed to him from interviews he conducted while working with the Negro Writer’s Project under the Works Project Administration (WPA). In Christian’s final version of *The Negro in Louisiana*, there are no footnotes or references but there is a note, almost like a disclaimer stating, “Most of the data collected concerning this chapter came from personal interviews. For this reason the usual footnote arrangement has been dispensed with.”⁴²

According to Tyrone Casby, in his youth, residents in New Orleans from the East Bank rarely came to the West Bank for Mardi Gras because that was not the center of the Mardi Gras attractions. Popular Mardi Gras routes and gathering places like Canal Street, Bourbon Street, Claiborne and Orleans Avenue, Saint Charles Avenue and Congo Square in the Treme’ were all located on the East Bank so if the Mardi Gras Indians on the West Bank wanted to participate in

⁴⁰ Marcus Christian, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Collections, Digital Collections, Archives and Manuscripts, Marcus Christian Collection, *The Negro in Louisiana* 1942-1976.

⁴¹ Tyrone Casby, Informal Interview follow-up conducted November 20, 2016.

⁴² Marcus Christian, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Collections, Digital Collections, Archives and Manuscripts, Marcus Christian Collection, *The Negro in Louisiana*, 1942-1976.

the traditional Mardi Gras celebrations along with their fellow New Orleanians, they would have to make the journey to the East Bank.

One reason the Mardi Gras Indians in Algiers did not attend events with the other Mardi Gras Indians in the city was because the travel was brutal, physically and mentally. According to Casby, before the Mississippi River Bridge was built in 1954, the Mohawk Hunters' only way of getting to downtown New Orleans was to use the Canal Street/Algiers Ferry. Casby described the trip as being one that many members of the Mohawk Hunters did not want to take because they had to wear their suits, which could be 30 to 50 pounds. They had to travel down Canal Street, and continue on to downtown New Orleans and follow Claiborne Avenue to Orleans Avenue where mostly African Americans gathered to see the Mardi Gras Indians on Mardi Gras Day. During their journey, the Mohawk Hunters endured a long walk and the elements and were subjected to mocking and ridicule by people on the streets who did not respect them.

Casby insisted that the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) was not of much help either. Not only did they not try to prevent the violence, sometimes the Indians themselves would get into altercations with the police. This disrespect by the police often led to fights and other forms violence with residents and other Mardi Gras Indian tribes.⁴³ Even as Mardi Gras Indians today work with the NOPD on allowing tribes to parade freely during their celebrations there are still some minor incidents with the local police. St. Joseph's night celebrations were still an issue in 2011. There were incidents that year of police arresting people and/or telling them they could not parade without a permit on the East Bank and on the West Bank despite an ordinance that allows the Mardi Gras Indians to parade without a permit. In 2011, the *Times*

⁴³ Tyrone Casby, Oral Interview conducted July 1, 2016.

Picayune reported that the police made a questionable arrest of the Wildman of the Mohawk Hunters in Algiers.⁴⁴

Violence was not what the founder of the Mohawk Hunters, Tyrone Casby's uncle, Frank Casby wanted when he started the tribe in the early 1940's. The official start date of the organization could not be verified because Frank Casby is now deceased. Tyrone Casby said that there were no official records (held) back then. Frank Casby was Tyrone Casby's uncle so the tradition of the Mohawk Hunters wanting to be non-violent was instilled in Tyrone since he was a little boy.

According to Tyrone Casby, Frank Casby organized the Mohawk Hunters because he wanted to bring the Mardi Gras Indian tradition to the West Bank, and in particular, Algiers. Celebrating African American tradition, pride and resilience in the Casby family in the community of Algiers has roots that date back to slavery. This was through the patriarch of the family, William Casby, Tyrone Casby's great-grandfather, who was born into slavery in 1856. William Casby was 14 years old when Algiers was annexed to the City of New Orleans in 1870.⁴⁵ Once Reconstruction ended and the emergence of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White League began to form, life for a former slave in New Orleans would have been particularly harsh. In 1963, William Casby was photographed by portrait photographer Richard Avedon who titled the image, *William Casby Born Into Slavery*. According to Tyrone Casby, his great-grandfather, who died at the age of 114, instilled the importance of hard work and leadership to his offspring, which would become the foundation of the Casby family values. (*Figure 4.*) This resilience is what led to Frank Casby starting the

⁴⁴ Katy Reckdahl, *Mardi Gras Indians, New Orleans police meet to avoid conflicts on St. Joseph's Night*, www.nola.com, March 18, 2011. Accessed September 29, 2016.

⁴⁵ Ward Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story*, 452.

Mohawk Hunters. Through his father William, Frank Casby had first-hand knowledge of the importance of honoring the culture of his African ancestors, especially those who lived through slavery and paying homage to the indigenous who helped those enslaved.



(Figure 4.) Photo by Richard Avedon, March 24, 1963. Rare photo of one of the oldest living former slaves at the time of the photo, which happens to be Tyrone Casby's great-grandfather William Casby. Pace/MacGill Gallery, downloaded from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/richard-avedon/william-casby-born-in-slavery-algiers-louisian-aa-08lOIQ-b1LQci1SAWyWW9w2?>.

From after World War II and to this day the Casby family lived in and owned several businesses in Algiers including a shoe repair shop, a laundromat and a construction company. They were also active in the Civil Rights Movement by marching, participating in sit-ins and as Tyrone Casby says with a laugh, “Some things I can’t mention.”⁴⁶ They also fought for equality for African Americans in Algiers, which before the 1980’s was predominantly white. Although Tyrone Casby was only a young boy, about 11 years old during the Civil Rights Movement, he participated alongside other members of the Casby family. Tyrone states, “After World War II, African American men had endured so much during the War that they wanted to make a difference when they came home.”⁴⁷ That home was Algiers, and one way the Casby family made a difference was starting the Mohawk Hunters. Just like the Mardi Gras Indian tribes that were started in the Tremé area of New Orleans or in the Uptown area of New Orleans, both located on the East Bank, the people on the West Bank had the same desires to fight inequality, and one way they did this was with masking as Mardi Gras Indians. It was their form of resistance. According to Chief Harrison the term “Mardi Gras Indian” was synonymous with “resistance.” Harrison felt that Black Indians were in the forefront of civil disobedience, and they were courageous and determined and compared them to early civil rights demonstrators.⁴⁸ In 2017, Casby continues his legacy by celebrating 50 years of masking as a Mardi Gras Indian with the Mohawk Hunters. (*Figure 5*).

⁴⁶ Oral Interview, Tyrone Casby, July 1, 2016.

⁴⁷ Allyson Ward Neal, *Algiers: The Untold Story, the African American Experience, 1929-1955*, 2001.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Big Chief Harrison*, 37.



Figure 5. Photo of Big Chief Tyrone Casby of the Mohawk Hunters celebrating 50 years of Masking as a Mardi Gras Indian. Accessed July 1, 2017 from via Senator Troy A. Carter’s Instagram page.

Donald Harrison Sr., was one of Casby’s elders, and although Harrison taught Casby some of what was needed to know to be a Mardi Gras Indian Chief, Casby set a standard for the Mardi Gras Indian “outside of the suit” for the Algiers community. Casby has always been actively involved in helping the youth of Algiers, as an administrator, educator and coach for the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Casby is now the permanent Principal at Landry-Walker

College Preparatory High School, which before *Brown vs. The Board of Education* was the only high school African Americans could attend in Algiers.⁴⁹

Chief Casby makes sure to continue to honor the culture and stay true to it. All members of the Mohawk Hunters must sew their own costumes. In the Mardi Gras Indian culture if a person does not sew their own suit they are not respected. All people interviewed spoke negatively about those who paid to have their suits made or those who wore the same suit more than one Mardi Gras season. As stated earlier when Dillon asked to join the Mohawk Hunters he did not know how to sew a suit so Chief Casby told him he could be the Skeleton Man. Dillon said he did that the first year by himself and then the next year he came back with a whole skeleton crew. The skeleton men did not have to sew a suit they only had to sew patches for their aprons which is part of the skeleton costume. This is how Dillon learned how to sew, so that is why after five years of being the Skeleton Man Chief Casby decided that Dillon could now officially mask as a Mohawk Hunter. Dillon states that when that happened he brought his family along and it is a family tradition every year for his kids to decide the family colors for the following Mardi Gras season. The kids even make a patch for their suit so they are learning early.⁵⁰

Jamal (Casby) has also brought his family along to mask as well. He feels that the more kids know about the culture and learn how to sew a suit, then they have less time to be on the street. Jamal says that people from the East Bank would tell him how they respected the Mohawk Hunters because they would sew a new suit every year even though they mostly only paraded on

⁴⁹ Daniel Driellinger, *Landry-Walker Gets New Interim Principal*, www.nola.com, April 18, 2016, accessed September 29, 2016. Tyrone Casby was initially selected as interim principal of Landry-Walker College Preparatory High School in April of 2016. As of August 1, 2016, Casby was selected as the permanent principal of Landry-Walker.

⁵⁰ Charles Dillon Jr., Interview conducted August 15, 2017.

the West Bank and not many people would be able to see them. Jamal's response was, "That's where you're wrong, if you're doing it for show, then you're doing it for the wrong reasons, we're not doing it for each other we're doing it for the community." He even states growing up in Algiers many people were aware of who his father was so he could not do anything wrong if he wanted to. Elders in the community would tell him, "I can't let you do that because if your daddy knows that I was around and I let you get in trouble, then he would be disappointed in me and that's not gonna happen."⁵¹

There are other stories like this throughout the Algiers community of how Chief or Coach Casby has helped a lot of the young African American men. For instance, someone who did not want to officially go on record states that his mother taught with Chief Casby at Lord Beaconsfield Landry High School, and when he got into some trouble and went to jail, his mother called Chief Casby to vouch for the young man's character and Chief Casby was able to get that young man out of jail. This is what Chief Casby means to the Algiers Community but Casby's reputation is not only known in the Algiers community, it is also know throughout the entire Mardi Gras Indian community. In a visit to the House of Dance and Feathers Cultural Museum, when Lewis was asked about Chief Casby, Lewis said he admired Casby and what he was doing on the West Bank as far a giving back to his community as an educator. Lewis also said that he was not the only chief who felt that way and that other chiefs in the Mardi Gras Indian community felt the same way about Chief Casby. ⁵²

⁵¹ Jamal Casby, Interview conducted August 14, 2017.

⁵² Ronald Lewis, Informal Interview Conducted April 15, 2017.

East Bank and West Bank Indians Form a Connection

On Saint Joseph's Night 2005 Mardi Gras Indians from all over New Orleans were participating in the celebration that had been going on for years. On this particular night the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) decided that the noise from the drums and the chants of the Indians was causing a disruption so they tried to break up the celebration. This resulted in an altercation between the NOPD and the Mardi Gras Indians and their supporters. In the documentary, "Spirit Moves My Needle", there is video footage of the altercation and one can clearly hear a NOPD officer saying, "Get em' out the street, get em' out the street!" After this happened Big Chiefs from areas of the City of New Orleans, including Chief Casby demanded to speak with then mayor, Ray Nagin and the New Orleans City Council.

When the date came to meet with Mayor Nagin and the city council, different chiefs began to speak on why the Mardi Gras Indians should be able to celebrate in the streets of New Orleans and why they were important to maintaining the culture. One person to speak was Big Chief Tootie Montana. While addressing the council, Big Chief Montana suffered a massive heart attack and died right there in the council chambers. The room went somber and then one person started to sing the *Indian Red* (a common chant amongst the Mardi Gras Indians), "Indian!" (pronounced Indjiuuun). After this event the Mardi Gras Indian celebrations were embraced by the Mayor and the NOPD and were not interrupted, instead they began to work together on the safety of those who attended the celebrations. In 2012, the *Times Picayune* quoted Casby reflecting on the crisis with the police and efforts to develop more positive

relationships since Tootie’s passing in 2012: “A seed was dropped [in 2005]. And hopefully we can cultivate that seed and watch it grow.”⁵³

Allowing the Mardi Gras Indians to mask with the assistance to the NOPD was important because after Hurricane Katrina people all over the world wanted to know more about the culture in New Orleans, including the Mardi Gras Indian Culture. This is evident to Jamal (Casby) who states that he was handpicked by Mitch Harrison of the City of New Orleans as one of the Mardi Gras Indians who would go to other countries along with Wynton Marsalis and be ambassadors of the Mardi Gras Indian and Jazz culture. A trip to the Middle East and Southeast Asia took them to Sri Lanka, New Delhi, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai.⁵⁴

The aftermath of Katrina was also a moment when the Mohawk Hunters gained new perspective on their importance to their own neighborhood, too. Jamal Casby describes the first time the Mohawk Hunters masked for Mardi Gras after Hurricane Katrina, in 2006 and an elderly lady was walking slowly, sliding her feet saying I’m coming baby, so he slowed the crew down. His dad, Big Chief Casby was yelling to the front for Jamal to pick it up because the Flag Boy controls the pace of the crew, but Jamal said he knew he had to wait for that old lady because this was the only part of Mardi Gras she would be able to see.⁵⁵

Although the traditions followed by all Mardi Gras Indians are relatively the same, at one time the Mardi Gras Indians in Algiers rarely participated in events with the Mardi Gras Indians of the other side of the Mississippi River, but this is beginning to change. On Mardi Gras Day, the Mohawk Hunters only parade on the West Bank, but other celebrations have expanded the opportunities for participation. There are now three Super Sunday celebrations,

⁵³ Katy Reckdahl, *Indian tribes, New Orleans police establish peace pact*, www.nola.com, February 6, 2012. Accessed September 26, 2017.

⁵⁴ Casby, Jamal, Oral Interview Conducted August 14, 2017.

⁵⁵ Casby, Jamal, Oral Interview Conducted August 14, 2017.

one in Uptown New Orleans, one in Downtown New Orleans, and one in Algiers. There are also two Saint Joseph's Night celebrations one on the East Bank in New Orleans and one on the West Bank in Algiers. Mardi Gras Indian tribes from all over the city attend Super Sunday celebrations and Saint Joseph's Night celebrations. The tribes from the West Bank go the East Bank and the tribes from the East Bank go to the West Bank.

The history of the Mardi Gras Indians is incomplete without the history of the Mardi Gras Indian culture on the West Bank. From the origins in slavery and the intermingling and assistance of indigenous groups and paying homage to them, to representing African tradition, to rebellion, resistance, community activism, and fighting for equal rights in the Jim Crow South, the Mohawk Hunters of Algiers have played a vital role in preserving Mardi Gras Indian culture.

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VITA

Monisha Jackson was born and raised in New Orleans, LA. After completing high school in 1999, she enlisted into the United States Air Force. While serving on active duty, she was trained in radio communications and telecommunications and received her undergraduate degree in Business Administration from National-Louis University in 2007. Subsequently, in 2008, she earned an associates degree in Information Systems Technology from the Community College of the Air Force. Monisha was honorably discharged from the Air Force in 2008, and in 2009 was hired by the federal government where she currently works for the Social Security Administration. In August of 2015, Monisha started graduate school at the University of New Orleans.