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"Almost All Have Callings:" Free Blacks at Work in Spanish New Orleans

KIMBERLY S. HANGER¹

This study concentrates on the occupational activities of free men and women of color in New Orleans during the period of Spanish rule (1763-1803), while placing them within the context of the larger society.² With few exceptions, persons of all colors and classes worked and played together, by choice and necessity. As one scholar notes, "however zealous [Louisiana] society was to maintain the European conventions and barriers, mutual interdependence tended to weaken class differences."³ White New Orleanians depended on free people of color to provide transportation, provisions, skilled labor, and a variety of services.

Opportunities for free labor burgeoned during the rapid economic growth of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At the same time, demographic increases within the free black population outstripped that of whites (Table 1). Over the four decades of Spanish rule in Louisiana, rising numbers of nonwhites hired themselves out, purchased their *cartas de libertad* (manumission papers),

¹ Research for this paper was funded in part by the American Historical Association Albert J. Beveridge Grant for Research in the History of the Western Hemisphere, the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States Universities, the Spain-Florida Alliance, and the University of Florida Department of History.

² Throughout this work the inclusive terms "free black" and "free person of color" are used to encompass anyone of African descent, be he or she pure African, part white, or part American Indian (*indio*). The exclusive terms *pardo* (light-skinned) and *moreno* (dark-skinned)—preferred by contemporary free blacks over *mulatto* and *negro*—are utilized to distinguish elements within the nonwhite population. Occasional references distinguish further between *grifo* (offspring of a *pardo(a)* or *indio(a)* and a *moreno(a)*), *cuarterón* (offspring of a white and a *pardo(a)*), and *mestizo* (usually the offspring of a white and a Native American, but in New Orleans sometimes meaning the offspring of a *pardo(a)* or *moreno(a)* and an *indio(a)*).

³ Caroline Maude Burson, *The Stewardship of Don Esteban Miró, 1782-1792* (New Orleans: American Printing, 1940), 253.

and continued to practice their trades as free persons. With the exception of the United States, in slave societies in the Americas (or the Western Hemisphere), including Louisiana, "the free coloureds helped supply the need for a middle stratum between the slaves and the white proprietary/professional class."⁴

Founded in 1718 on the site of a long-established Native American portage point where the Mississippi River comes closest to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain, New Orleans was colonial Louisiana's principal urban center and port. The furs, hides, timber, and agricultural products of the Mississippi River valley region flowed through the city en route to the West Indies, the British North American colonies (later the United States), New Spain, and occasionally Europe. New Orleans also served as the entrepôt for slaves and various goods such as flour and cloth that colonials could not supply or manufacture themselves. France held Louisiana from 1699 to 1763, when it ceded that part of the colony west of the Mississippi and New Orleans to Spain under provisions of the Treaty of Paris in that year. Spain, in turn, governed Louisiana until 1803, when the United States purchased it.

Under French and Spanish rule Louisiana's value was mainly strategic. Both Bourbon monarchies viewed it as useful primarily within the context of larger geopolitical considerations: neither wanted Britain to seize it. Although Spain, like France, considered Louisiana an economic burden, the crown hoped to utilize it as a protective barrier between mineral-rich New Spain and Britain's increasingly aggressive North American colonies. Thus, Spain actively endeavored to attract settlers and slaves to the region, not only to defend it, but also to

⁴ David P. Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of St. Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1982), 19. David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, "Introduction," in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 8, further note this link between the right and ability to purchase one's freedom and opportunities for artisans and traders: "Certainly the evidence suggests that where the 'pulling up' of wives and relatives by newly freed men was a relatively common practice it was a reflection of the opening of the economy to colored traders and artisans." In New Orleans many of these traders were females, who also purchased *cartas* for themselves and loved ones.

Table 1
Colonial New Orleans Population

Year	Whites	Blacks		Indian Slaves	Total
		Slaves	Free Blacks		
1721 ^a	278	173		21	472
1726 ^b	793	78		30	901
1732 ^c	626	258		9	893
1771 ^d	1,803	1,227	97	0	3,127
1777 ^e	1,736	1,151	315	0	3,202
1788 ^f	2,370	2,131	820	0	5,321
1791 ^g	2,386	1,789	862	0	5,037
1805 ^h	3,551	3,105	1,566	0	8,222

^a Jay K. Ditchy, trans., "Early Census Tables of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 13 (1930):214-20.

^b Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American Culture, 1992), 48-49.

^c Charles R. Maduell, comp. and trans., *The Census Tables for the French Colony of Louisiana from 1699 through 1732* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 75.

^d Lawrence Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946-1949), 2:196.

^e Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, leg. 2351, 12 May 1777.

^f *Ibid.*, leg. 1425, 1788.

^g Census of the City of New Orleans, 6 November 1791, New Orleans Public Library.

^h Matthew Flannery, comp., *New Orleans in 1805: A Directory and a Census* (New Orleans: Pelican Gallery, 1936).

balance the somewhat hostile French population remaining in Louisiana, as well as to promote agricultural and commercial growth.⁵

Many races and nationalities contributed to the social, economic, and cultural milieu of colonial New Orleans, making it one of the most cosmopolitan cities of North America and the Caribbean area. Visitor Henry Troth confirmed this when in 1799 he wrote that "the Inhabitants [of New Orleans] are a Mixture of Spanish, French, American, with an Abundance of Negroes and Mulattoes I believe nearly if not quite three to one white."⁶ Table 1 details the demographic character of the city by year and race/status. Although census figures conflict, measure geographic space differently, provide only approximate accuracy, and exclude or undercount significant groups (Louisiana Indians, women, and free blacks in particular), they point to a growing population. Between 1721, year of the city's first census, and 1805, New Orleans's population rose from 472 to 8,222, more than a seventeenfold increase.⁷ Most of this surge occurred toward the

⁵ For a survey of Louisiana's colonial history, see Bennett H. Wall, ed., *Louisiana: A History*, 2nd ed. (Arlington Heights: Forum Press, 1990).

⁶ "Journal of Henry Troth, 1799," transcr. Clinton Lee Brooke and Tyrrell Willcox Brooke, July 1970, p. 7. Manuscript in the Louisiana State Museum Historical Center.

⁷ Ditchy, "Early Census Tables of Louisiana," 214-20. As was true in many areas of the Americas, censuses for New Orleans were taken sporadically and for specific purposes that excluded or undercounted some segments of the population. For example, Louisiana officials ordered population counts when they wanted to tax residents or enroll them in military service. Women, free persons of African descent, and Native Americans were poorly represented in these censuses, nor is there much detailed information on them. Characteristics such as name, occupation, and address were recorded only for heads of household, with few households headed by women or free blacks. In addition, census takers rarely provided specific ages, but rather grouped inhabitants into three age categories: 0-14, 15-49, and 50 plus. Extant censuses for Spanish New Orleans, some of them mere *resumens* (summaries), are from the years 1763, 1769, 1777, 1778 (in restoration at the Archivo General de Indias, Seville), 1785, 1791, 1795 (fourth ward missing), 1799 (parts of second and third wards missing), and 1803 (third ward free blacks missing). The French took far fewer censuses (1721, 1726, 1732, and 1746) and grouped people as whites, blacks, and Indian slaves. Some free blacks were included in the totals for whites, others in those for blacks. They rarely gave ages, merely distinguishing between men, women, and children. It appears that Indian slaves were increasingly included with black slaves following the early French population counts. The bottom line is that one can only use census records to approximate the number, age, race, and status of people in colonial Louisiana and to identify general trends.

end of the century and was due more to immigration than to natural increase.⁸ During the years of Spanish rule the white population almost doubled and the slave population grew 250 percent. The number of free blacks increased sixteenfold, and this group was undercounted throughout the period.⁹

In Louisiana, as in many areas of Spanish America, the crown fostered the growth of a free black population in order to fill middle-sector economic roles in society, defend the colony from external and internal foes, and give African slaves an officially approved safety valve. Colonial policy makers envisioned a society in which Africans would seek their freedom through legal channels, complete with compensation for their masters, rather than by running away or rising in revolt. In turn, slaves would look to the Spanish government to

⁸ Economic developments at the close of the colonial period only hinted at the spiraling and sometimes stunning material prosperity that lay ahead for New Orleans and its hinterlands. Spurred by the expansion and intensification of sugar and cotton production, rapid economic growth and population increase changed a small town into one of the leading commercial centers of the Americas. Dubbed "the grand mart of business, the Alexandria of America," New Orleans was the exchange point for natural and agricultural products flowing out of and manufactured goods and people coming into the budding Mississippi River valley. For the first time the region began to attract significant capital investment and labor. Nevertheless, high mortality rates continued to kill off much of the newly arrived labor force (primarily of German and Irish nationality) and restrain New Orleans's economic development for much of the nineteenth century. (Quote from Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator...to which is Added, an Appendix, Containing an Account of Louisiana...* 6th ed. [Pittsburgh: Cramer & Spear, 1808, originally printed in 1801]); Jo Ann Carrigan, "Privilege, Prejudice, and the Strangers' Disease in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *Journal of Southern History* 36 (1970):568-78; John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718-1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

⁹ For example, a count of ninety-seven free persons of color in 1771 was ridiculously low, given that militia rosters for 1770 list sixty-one free *pardos* and 283 free *morenos* between the ages of fifteen and forty-five living within four leagues (twelve land miles) of New Orleans. "Liste de la quantité des naigres libres de la Nouvelle Orléans, 1770," Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba (hereinafter cited as AGI, PC) 188-A, 22 February 1770. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall attributes this discrepancy to the tendency by the French to allow certain free blacks, especially mistresses of prominent whites, to pass as white, whereas the Spanish paid much more scrupulous attention to recording exact phenotypes, based primarily on appearance and sometimes reputation. See Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 258-64.

rescatarnos de la esclavitud (rescue us from slavery), and subsequently protect their rights and privileges as freedmen.¹⁰

Like free blacks in other American urban areas, those in New Orleans labored at middle- and lower-sector tasks in which they sometimes competed with lower-class whites and slaves but offered little threat to prominent whites. Policy and practice excluded them from the professions, clergy, and government positions, and relegated most of them to manual or skilled labor. Throughout the Americas competition and hostility flared between unpropertied whites and free people of color, most frequently manifested in attempts to limit free black participation in certain trades. Although craft guilds developed in other colonies, trade restrictions were rare in colonial New Orleans.¹¹ The demand for labor consistently surpassed supply, a situation that reduced competition and augmented opportunities for nonwhites to acquire skills.

The work that free blacks did reinforced their ambivalent position in the community. New Orleans's "society consisted of a small and exclusive aristocracy of higher officials, successful merchants, and prosperous planters" and "a larger middle-class grading from petty officials and small tradesmen and planters to a group which tended to merge itself with the free people of color, while these, in turn, drifted farther away from the ever increasing slave group without, however, becoming a recognized part of the other white castes."¹² Persistent dependency and even downward mobility plagued newly freed blacks, who often expended all their resources to gain liberty and then had to toil at the same tasks they had undertaken as slaves. On the other hand,

¹⁰ Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 217-41.

¹¹ Cohen and Greene, "Introduction," 16. Lyman Johnson, "The Impact of Racial Discrimination on Black Artisans in Colonial Buenos Aires," *Social History* 6 (1981):301-16, notes the development of guilds in colonial Argentina, whereas Mary C. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 200, finds few guild restrictions operating in early nineteenth-century Rio. The only restrictions this author has found for Spanish New Orleans were requirements for the licensing of doctors by a panel of their peers. In 1801 when licenses were reviewed, the free *moreno médico*, Santiago Derom, was limited to the curing of throat ailments and nothing else. (Records and Deliberations of the Cabildo [hereinafter cited as RDC], vol. 1, 8 May 1772, and vol. 4, no. 4, 14 August 1801.)

¹² Burson, *Stewardship*, 253.

those who had been free for many years or had been born free often attained economic independence as farmers, traders, business persons, and slave-owners. Economically successful free persons of color usually endeavored to distance themselves from their slave past and identify with values espoused by dominant whites.¹³ In a frontier society such as New Orleans, however, racial and economic groups relied on each other for peace and prosperity.

Censuses for the period were often incomplete, and undercounted the free black population as well as its contributions. Nevertheless, census returns offer valuable information on a broad spectrum of occupational pursuits. In 1791 and 1795 officials in New Orleans compiled information on each head of household, including his or her name, occupation, age category, and race. In addition, they indicated the number (but not the names or occupations) of persons residing in each household by age group, gender, race, and status.¹⁴

The 1791 and 1795 censuses furnish at least partial glimpses of the tasks at which free persons of color toiled. Table 2 separates data on the type of occupation by gender and age group solely for free black heads of household in 1795. Especially numerous were free black carpenters, shoemakers, seamstresses, laundresses, and retailers.¹⁵ Among heads of household, ten out of nineteen shoemakers, twenty-one of thirty-seven carpenters, thirty of fifty-nine seamstresses, and thirty-two of thirty-three laundresses were free people of color. Scanty data from the 1791 census of New Orleans further indicate the frequency of certain occupations among free black male household heads: seven carpenters, five shoemakers, three tailors, one blacksmith, one hunter,

¹³ Examples of such behavior are presented in this article and in Kimberly S. Hanger, "*Personas de varias clases y colores: Free People of Color in Spanish New Orleans, 1769-1803*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1991). Researchers have noted such a division among free blacks and alliances with whites or slaves throughout the Americas. For a summary, see Cohen and Greene, "Introduction," 11-16.

¹⁴ Census of the City of New Orleans, 6 November 1791, New Orleans Public Library; "Recensement du 1er, 2me, et 3me Quartiers," July 1795, AGI, PC 211 (hereinafter cited as 1795 Census). See also Hanger, "*Personas*," Appendix A, for data on occupation for all heads of household, white and free black, for both years.

¹⁵ Karasch (*Slave Life in Rio*) also finds in early nineteenth-century Rio that the most common occupation among skilled slaves and freedmen was that of carpenter, or, more generally, any construction craft, including joiner, caulker, and mason (p. 200). Most females served as domestics and/or vendors (pp. 206-8).

one cooper, one wigmaker, and one gunsmith. A 1798 census of household heads in the upriver suburb of St. Mary recorded three male wood dealers, two male carpenters, one male carter, one male gardener, two female settlers, one female tavernkeeper, and one female washer, out of a total free black population of ninety-six.¹⁶

Free blacks probably pursued those trades in which they had been trained as slaves, or in which there was less competition from white workers, and/or demand exceeded supply. Although few written regulations restricted access to jobs by race, custom and practice all too frequently relegated free persons of color to positions with low prestige, responsibility, and pay. One contemporary observer, Claude C. Robin, commented upon the lucrative trades of baker and butcher. A few years prior to his writing, half the city's butchers were free blacks, but there was only one free black out of fifteen bakers. Robin also noted that among tailors the "competition of Colored men practicing this trade does not noticeably cut down the profit of Europeans, who are assumed to be better acquainted with fashions."¹⁷

As in most colonial societies, gender, as well as race, helped define occupation.¹⁸ With few exceptions free black females and males in New Orleans performed separate tasks, a practice reinforced by both African and European traditions. Men functioned as artisans and laborers, whereas women favored retail activity, running small commercial establishments, such as shops and stalls, and peddling their wares on the streets. Women monopolized such gender-specific tasks as seamstress and laundress, while male tailors supplied and repaired men's clothing. Interestingly, tavernkeepers among the white population were most commonly males, whereas among free blacks they were females. Among tavernkeepers licensed by the city in 1787 there were sixty-three white males, two white females, two free black males, and

¹⁶ "Recensement du Faux-bourg Ste. Marie pour l'année 1798," AGI, PC 215-A, 1 February 1798. Organized and subdivided beginning in 1788, the Fauxbourg Ste. Marie (Arrabal Santa María) was located just outside the city walls upriver. By 1798, 240 whites, ninety-six free persons of color, and 256 slaves resided in the suburb.

¹⁷ Cohen and Greene, "Introduction," 16; Claude C. Robin, *Voyages dans l'intérieur de la Louisiane*, 3 vols. (Paris: F. Buisson, 1807), 2:59-61. In 1795 three of the city's free black male heads of household listed their occupation as tailor, as compared to fifteen white males. Fourteen whites and only one free black were bakers, but two of the four butchers were free African Americans.

¹⁸ Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio*, 185-213, 335-69.

Table 2
Occupations of Free Black Heads of Household by Gender and Age,
***New Orleans, + 1795**

Occupation	Females			Males		
	14-49	50+	NG	14-49	50+	NG
PUBLIC SECTOR						
military				1		
SERVICE SECTOR						
midwife		1				
tailor				3		
seamstress	25	1	3			
baker	1					
pastry cook						1
butcher	1			1	1	1
blacksmith				2		
tavernkeeper	1		1			
laundress	25	4	3			
hunter				4	2	
MANUFACTURING SECTOR						
cooper				2		
joiner				5		
carpenter				17	4	1
mason				1		
shoemaker				9		1
silversmith				2		
gunsmith				1		
mattress maker	1					
COMMERCE SECTOR						
wholesaler				1		
shopkeeper	11					
retail dealer	9	5	3			
MISCELLANEOUS						
farmer	1			1		
TOTAL	75	11	10	50	7	4

*No free black heads of household in Age Category One (0-13) / +Returns for the fourth quarter missing.
 NG not given / Source: 1795 Census.

six free black females. These figures probably concealed male-female partnerships in which the man obtained the license but operated the business jointly with his female consort. For example, upon being imprisoned for debt, the free *moreno* Francisco Barba begged the court for leniency; he and his wife ran a tavern and boarded soldiers of the Mexican fixed regiment, and his wife faced difficulties managing the service by herself.¹⁹

Material from notarial registers and court cases, like the example above, adds color to the census's sketch. When visiting New Orleans in the early 1800s, Robin remarked that "almost all...have callings" and that the variety was astounding. He further observed that "in the New World, the cities still have few of those useless families who boast of the crime of doing nothing."²⁰ Constant labor shortages kept all hands busy and reduced competition. In New Orleans free *morenos* and *pardos* pursued numerous trades, as noted in 1801 by Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, a writer and planter from Saint-Domingue:

A great number [of free blacks], men, women, and children, crowded together in the city, are busied some in the mechanical arts, for which they have great aptitude and little attachment, or in some little retail trade, and the others in the chase, the produce of which they bring into the city where they sell it.²¹

One of the most famous free persons of color to emerge from the Spanish period was Santiago Derom (James Durham), the former slave of the Scottish doctor, Roberto Dow, and himself a skilled *médico*. Born in Philadelphia in 1762, Derom acquired his medical talents from one of his masters, Doctor John Kearsley, who was an authority on sore throat distempers. Doctor Dow of New Orleans

¹⁹ RDC, vol. 3, no. 2, 31 December 1787; Court proceedings of Carlos Ximénez, fols. 243-45, 30 November 1804.

²⁰ Robin, *Voyages*, 2:75.

²¹ Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, *Vue de la Colonie Espagnole du Mississipi, ou des Provinces de Louisiane et Florida Occidentale, en l'Anée 1802* (Paris: l'Imprimerie Expédite, 1803), 253, and Robin, *Voyages*, 2:75. Ironically, in another section of his account Berquin-Duvallon perpetuated the myth (p. 252).

subsequently purchased Derom. Derom in turn purchased his freedom in 1783 for 500 pesos, and by 1788 the free *moreno*, "then 26 years of age, and speaking French, Spanish, and English fluently, had become the most distinguished physician in New Orleans, with a large practice among both races." Few physicians earned the designation "distinguished" in the eighteenth century, particularly a free black in a racially stratified society, but Derom practiced his craft with skill. These accomplishments, however, did not exempt him from financial difficulties, as a 1791 civil case shows. Derom successfully sued Doña Isabel Destrean to collect a debt of 100 pesos owed him from 1788, when he provided treatment and medicine to slaves on her plantation. An 1801 ruling from the *cabildo* (town council) limited Derom's practice to the treatment of throat ailments, his specialty. He was one of the few free black physicians in colonial Louisiana and the earliest known licensed African-American physician in what became the United States.²²

Free men of color often served as agricultural laborers, overseers, and managers; some even operated their own farms and plantations (*habitaciones*). According to traveler Berquin-Duvallon, "part of them [freedmen] who live in the country cultivate food products, especially rice, and some small fields of cotton."²³ In 1777 a white couple paid the free *pardo*, Pedro, 530 pesos for serving as an overseer on their plantation, although the document did not indicate how long Pedro worked to earn this amount.²⁴ Carlos, also a free *pardo*, operated a dairy farm belonging to Don Luis Allard, whose plantation now forms part of City Park in New Orleans. According to

²² Acts of Leonard Mazange, no. 7(1), fol. 303, 2 April 1783; "Executivos seguidos por Santiago Derom, Negro libre contra Doña Isavel de Trean, sobre el cobro de pesos," Spanish Judicial Records, Louisiana State Museum Historical Center (hereinafter cited as SJR), 30 April 1791; RDC, vol. 4, no. 4, 14 August 1801; Charles B. Roussève, *The Negro in Louisiana: Aspects of His History and His Literature* (New Orleans: Xavier University Press, 1937), 9-10. In the eighteenth century doctors were not esteemed as highly as they are today and usually ranked well below government officials, planters, merchants, and even lawyers on the colonial social scale. In the New World colonies of various nations barbers often doubled as surgeons and dentists, many of whom were free people of color. For examples, see Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio*, 202.

²³ Berquin-Duvallon, *Vue*, 253.

²⁴ Acts of Juan Bautista Garic, no. 8, fol. 399, 5 November 1777.

the terms of the three-year contract, Allard supplied a *moreno* slave to assist the free black, and Carlos earned one-fourth of the newborn calves and half the milk produced.²⁵ In addition to owning a large plantation twelve leagues north of New Orleans, the free *pardo* Simón Calpha commanded the free *pardo* and *moreno* militia and was awarded an annual pension of 240 pesos for his heroic leadership in campaigns against the British at Baton Rouge, Mobile, and Pensacola during the American Revolution.²⁶ A 1796 census of Metairie, situated just outside New Orleans, listed seven free black families who in total possessed thirty-four slaves and land measuring forty-two by forty *arpents* (in linear measure one *arpent* is about 190 feet).²⁷

The most common trades for free black males were those in the construction and shipbuilding industries.²⁸ They worked as skilled carpenters, joiners, masons, and caulkers and as unskilled manual laborers. In 1791 Adelaida Raquet, *cuarterona libre*, paid the free *pardo* carpenter, Pablo Mandeville, 903 pesos for building her a house fifty-five by nineteen feet with a gallery of four feet. The house probably replaced the one for which Raquet claimed a loss of 1,500 pesos in the great fire of 1788. By 1801 Mandeville was forty-four years old and a first corporal in the first militia company of free *pardos*.²⁹ The last will and testament of Andrés Cheval, *pardo libre* and natural son of the *morena libre*, Manon, stated that three white persons and one free black man owed him money for his work as a carpenter. Cheval owned a young slave whom he ordered exchanged for the freedom of his legitimate daughter by his slave wife. He also

²⁵ Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 25, fol. 275, 24 October 1793.

²⁶ Acts of Andrés Almonester y Roxas, fol. 287, 2 November 1772; Court proceedings of Esteban de Quiñones, no. 1, fols. 87-103, 8 February 1779; "Award of Medals and Expression of Thanks from His Majesty to Officials of the Militias of Color of New Orleans," Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Santo Domingo (hereinafter cited as AGI, SD) 2548, 18 January 1782. Calpha's militia service is detailed in Hanger, "Personas," 169-72, 182-85.

²⁷ "Tableau des habitations...Metairie," AGI, PC 211, 12 March 1796. The two white households included in the census together possessed fifty slaves and land measuring twenty-four by forty *arpents*.

²⁸ Karasch finds the same for Rio (*Slave Life in Rio*, 200).

²⁹ "Relación de la perdida que cada Yndividuo ha padecido en el Yncendio de esta Ciudad acaecido el 21 de Marzo del presente año..." AGI, SD 2576, 30 September 1788; Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 7, fol. 222, 7 May 1791; Free Black Militia Rosters, AGI, PC 160-A, 1 May 1801.

provided funds to purchase the freedom of his legitimate son, but not his wife. Although the will was dated 1790, in 1801, at age forty-six, Cheval held the position of second corporal in the *pardo* militia.³⁰

Rafael Bernabé was another free black carpenter, more specifically a joiner, who served in the militia. In 1801 he was a forty-four-year-old first sergeant in the first *moreno* company. Freed *graciosamente* (gratuitously) by the priest Pedro Bernabé in 1775, Rafael earned respect for his competence and loyalty. In 1797 Don Andrés Almonester y Roxas, the philanthropist who built Saint Louis Cathedral; the Presbytère; and other landmarks in New Orleans, commissioned Bernabé to craft all the doors, windows, staircases, and other woodwork in the *cabildo*, completed in 1799 to house the town council. Almonester paid Bernabé 550 pesos up front, but the free *moreno* had to guarantee his work with the value of two houses he owned.³¹

Wood for burning and building was an important commodity in colonial New Orleans, where wood vendors gathered in the Plaza de Armas to market their product. A 1798 census of Fauxbourg Ste. Marie listed three free black wood dealers living outside the walls of the city. Native American women and free persons of color gathered wood from the forests and plantations surrounding New Orleans and then brought it to the city's central square. Inhabitants paid as much as four pesos per cord in order to heat their homes, cook their food, and operate their businesses. The trade was so profitable that some free blacks and slaves began to cut timber illegally from the forests of the city commons and privately-owned cypress groves along Bayou St. John. In 1794 anxious planters petitioned the *cabildo* to remedy what they perceived as increasingly frequent incidents of pilfering and destruction to fences, livestock, and slaves caused by wood dealers, hunters, and

³⁰ Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 7, fol. 20, 17 September 1790; *ibid.*, AGI, PC 160-A, 1 May 1801.

³¹ Acts of Juan Bautista Garic, no. 6, fol. 171, 26 June 1775; Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 46, fol. 125, 19 June 1797; *ibid.*, AGI, PC 160-A, 1 May 1801. Additional information concerning Bernabé's role in a joint white/free black conspiracy to overthrow the Spanish government in the 1790s is provided in Hanger, "*Personas*," 297. Bernabé remained loyal to the Spanish regime. Further discussion of militia members' occupations can be found in *ibid.*, 181-83.

runaway slaves. Several of the city's hunters were free people of color.³²

Free black women also pursued a variety of trades and business enterprises. Several operated small stores or peddled goods that they had made themselves or had purchased wholesale from another merchant or producer through the streets of the city and along roads leading into New Orleans. City Treasurer Pedro Pizanie collected eighty-one pesos from "las negras y otros individuos que venden en la Conga del mercado" in 1787.³³ Early in the nineteenth century, traveler Thomas Ashe remarked that "people of color, and free negroes, [along with Spaniards, mainly Catalonians] also keep inferior shops, and sell goods and fruits."³⁴ According to the 1795 census of New Orleans (Table 2), seventeen free black female household heads

³² "Recensement du Faux-bourg Ste. Marie pour l'année 1798," AGI, PC 215-A, 1 February 1798; RDC, vol. 3, no. 3, 19 September 1794. Among household heads in New Orleans in 1795 were one white and six free black hunters. Slaves commonly earned extra money by cutting and selling wood to their owners or other free persons both in the city and on plantations. One temporary resident also noted that Native American women living on the outskirts of New Orleans "go into the forests to gather wood, which they carry into the city. They still sell the wood per day for thirty-six or forty sols." (Paul Alliot, "Historical and Political Reflections," in *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807*, trans. and ed. James Alexander Robertson, 2 vols. [Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1911], 1:83.) Gwendolyn Midlo Hall finds much interaction between slaves, runaways (maroons), and planters in the Bas du Fleuve region, that area between the mouth of the Mississippi River and New Orleans where many of the cypress swamps (*ciprière*) were. According to Hall, "the lands on and behind the estates afforded excellent, nearby refuge to runaway slaves.... The maroons living in the *ciprière* maintained a symbiotic relationship with sawmill owners. They cut and squared cypress logs, dragged them to the sawmills, and were paid for each log delivered." (*Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 202, 207.)

³³ City Treasury Accounts for 1787, cabildo records, box 1, folder 4, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University (hereinafter cited as LLMVC). In New Orleans, as well as in Rio, "one of the most important peddling operations was the vending of all types of foodstuffs, fresh and prepared." (Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio*, 207.)

³⁴ Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America Performed in 1806*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1808), 3:260. In addition to free people of color and poor whites, other marginal economic groups—"primarily city slaves engaged in selling the surplus of their gardens and loot from nocturnal activities, or Indians peddling vegetables, fish, blankets, and trinkets"—participated in the city's retail industry. (Clark, *New Orleans*, 256.)

were *revendeuses* (secondhand dealers) and eleven were *marchandes* (shopkeepers).

In response to increasing numbers of retailers and complaints that street vendors posed unfair competition, the *cabildo* in 1784 resolved to construct a central, permanent market near the levee. *Cabildo* members in part created this marketplace in order to tax and regulate New Orleans's growing retail industry. Such an arrangement benefited the town council, which received rents from the stalls; the shopkeepers, who could reduce costs and competition because their overhead expenses now more closely equaled those of stall renters; and the general public, who could purchase officially regulated products in a central location. Although the fire of 1788 consumed this marketplace, the *cabildo* authorized construction of a replacement in the mid-1790s.³⁵

Few free women of color elected to or were allowed to rent stalls directly from the city council. Of the thirty-three persons licensed to sell goods from stalls on the levee in 1795, only two were free blacks, both males.³⁶ Apparently, however, holders of these licenses rarely sold items from these stalls, but sublet them instead to free women of color and slave women. Describing the market which "adjoins the levée at the lower end of the Town," New York merchant John Pintard wrote in 1801:

Market hours commence at 6 & are mostly over by 8.
Very few people go to the market in person. All is
brought by domestics—especially the females—who

³⁵ RDC, vol. 3, no. 1, 10 September 1784; Petitions, Decrees, and Letters of the *Cabildo* (hereinafter cited as PDLC), book 4079, doc. 234, 2 September 1794. Both French and Spanish local officials actively involved themselves in ordering daily living, their most vital task being regulation of colonial food supplies. Authorities attempted to provide adequate, edible foodstuffs to the population at fair prices for both producer and consumer. During the Spanish period, government regulation of the New Orleans market intensified as the *cabildo* began exercising "a direct and increasing influence upon the daily economic life of the town." In this capacity town council members "set prices, inspect[ed] for quality, assure[d] the use of standard weights and measures, and prevent[ed] recurrent food shortages from benefiting monopolists and forestallers at the expense of the public welfare." (Clark, *New Orleans*, 257.)

³⁶ Report from Juan de Castañedo, city treasurer, 1795, *cabildo* records, box 2, folder 6, LLMVC.

seem to be the chief buyers & sellers of the place. One meets with wenchers with large flat baskets containing all kinds of goods with a measure in her hand traversing the streets & country in all directions. They are experts in selling, wait upon the ladies with their wares and are very honest & faithful to their employers.³⁷

Judging from the account above and the following case, it appears that hawkers, most of them women, continued to ply their wares through the city's streets long after the establishment of a marketplace. In 1797 Don Fernando Alzar and Co. together with fifty other *mercaderes* (shopkeepers and retail merchants) asked the town council to prohibit the activities of increasing numbers of women, slave as well as free black, who daily sold merchandise on the streets and other parts of New Orleans and even on plantations in the countryside. Lamenting that such practices detracted from their livelihood, the supplicants appealed to the mercy of the *cabildo*: they had to pay exorbitant rents for their shops and at the same time try to feed their families.³⁸

Several free women of color operated taverns and boarding houses, most of them located on streets lining the levee where sailors, soldiers, and travelers could gain ready access upon disembarking from their boats or leaving the barracks. Like other port cities in the

³⁷ John Pintard, "New Orleans, 1801: An Account by John Pintard," ed. David Lee Sterling, *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 34 (1951):232. United States officials increased restrictions on license holding with similar results: "In the month of January, 1823, thirty-two vending licenses were issued by authorities. Only free males could procure the licenses, but the license-holders seldom did the actual selling. That task was generally reserved for black slaves: many plantation owners regularly sent their slaves into town to hawk surplus produce in the street. Most of these hawkers were women." (Lilian Crété, *Daily Life in Louisiana, 1815-1830*, trans. Patrick Gregory, [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981], 64.) Travelers to Rio imparted the general impression that city market stalls were the domain of African women. These women, however, actually owned the stalls. Karasch surmises that "since so many stall owners were freedpersons, perhaps they had acquired a stall and freedom." (*Slave Life in Rio*, 207.)

³⁸ PDLC, book 4079, doc. 287, 6 October 1797. The merchants referred to the "crecido número de Mulatas y Negras tanto libres." The New York merchant Pintard wrote that "one finds however but very little interchange of courtesy among the merchants—too great jealousy of each other prevails." ("New Orleans, 1801," 232.)

Americas, New Orleans catered to the needs of a large transient population that kept the numerous tavernkeepers, innkeepers, and billiard hall owners in business. Colonial governments taxed and regulated these institutions which relieved the thirst of travelers and residents alike. Local authorities tried to protect the public from adulterated or sour alcohol, to keep spirits out of the hands of Louisiana Indians and Africans, and at the same time to raise revenues from licensing fees.³⁹ As noted above, only six of the seventy-three persons licensed by the *cabildo* to operate a cabaret were free women of color, but as in the case of free black retailers, others probably ran taverns whose licenses were in another person's name.

According to the 1795 census, the *morena libre* Carlota Derneville was one such tavernkeeper who also owned several rental houses, despite losing 2,000 pesos worth of property in the 1788 fire. Both as a slave and as a free person, Carlota had labored diligently and saved her earnings. At age thirty-seven she purchased her freedom from Don Pedro Henrique Derneville for 400 pesos. Two years later in 1775 she agreed to serve Santiago Landreau without running away as long as the court ordered, if he would free her twenty-one-year-old son Carlos. Carlota was among those persons who paid a thirty peso licensing fee to operate a cabaret for the year 1787 and a forty peso fee in 1799.⁴⁰

Many New Orleans free women of color labored as seamstresses and, like their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere in the Americas, "sewed dresses and made lace in the households and dressmaking establishments of the period."⁴¹ The free *morena* seamstress, Prudencia Cheval, "*de nación Pular*," was given her freedom,

³⁹ "Proclamación por Gobernador Unzaga y Amezaga para regular las casas de Trujos, Posadas, y Tabernas," 26 August 1770, AGI, PC 110; Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Regulation of Taverns and the Liquor Trade in the Mississippi Valley," in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 149-82. In 1791 New Orleans boasted more tavernkeepers than any other occupation—a full seventy heads of household. (Census of the City of New Orleans, 6 November 1791, New Orleans Public Library.)

⁴⁰ Acts of Andrés Almonester y Roxas, fol. 268, 27 October 1773, and fol. 85, 16 February 1775; City Treasury Accounts for 1787, *cabildo* records, box 1, folder 4, LLMVC; "Relación de la perdida..." AGI, SD 2576, 30 September 1788; 1795 Census; City Treasury Accounts for 1799, *cabildo* records, box 2a, folder 8, LLMVC.

⁴¹ Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio*, 201.

along with that of her two *pardo* children, at age seventeen by Don Francisco Cheval. In his will dated three years later, Don Francisco designated Prudencia and her children (most likely his children as well) as his only heirs. The inheritance included a two-story house, which Prudencia promptly leased to a prominent white resident. Boarders and renters often provided free blacks like Cheval and Derneville with supplemental income.⁴²

Some free black women performed more than a single occupation. The *cuarterona* Magdalena brought her master before the governor's tribunal in 1793 to obtain manumission at the price of her estimation. In determining her worth, the slave owner emphasized that Magdalena had mastered various domestic chores: cooking, sewing, washing, ironing, and candy and pastry making. The slave, on the other hand, claimed that she was old, ill, had given birth to many children, and could not work much. Nevertheless, both appraisers valued Magdalena at 700 pesos, 200 of which she had to borrow to obtain her *carta de libertad*.⁴³

Upon the death of Don Santiago Constant, the *parda libre* Mariana San Juan sued his estate for 1,344 pesos, equivalent to what she considered a less than just salary of eight pesos per month for fourteen years. During this time Mariana had served as Don Santiago's wife, cook, and laundress and had sold goods from his store throughout the streets of the city. In addition, she had managed his personal business as a faithful servant and his best confidante. The court awarded her remuneration of five pesos per month for three years, for a miserly total of 180 pesos.⁴⁴

Like most white persons and slaves, free people of color acquired their skills by observation and apprenticeship. With the exception of the Ursuline school for girls, the royal Spanish school, and some private classes given by "qualified" individuals, few institutions in New Orleans offered a formal education. Wealthy

⁴² Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 7, fol. 89, 23 December 1790; Court proceedings of Francisco Broutin, no. 23, fols. 277-88, 20 August 1793; Acts of Carlos Ximénez, no. 6, fol. 162, 25 April 1794. Don Francisco also donated a house and land to the free *pardo* carpenter Pablo Cheval and Pablo's sister Luison Cheval, the mother of seven *cuarterones* by Don Carlos Vivant (Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 25, fol. 169, 9 June 1793, and no. 40, fol. 177, 31 May 1796).

⁴³ Court proceedings of Francisco Broutin, no. 16, fols. 48-115, 12 January 1793.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 22, fols. 518-27, 23 September 1793.

colonists sent their children to schools in Europe, but the majority relied on private libraries and the expertise of master tradespersons.⁴⁵ Free blacks in particular learned trades, because there was a demand for their skills and they were excluded from most professions that required formal learning. According to physician Paul Alliot in 1803:

there are many workmen of all kinds at New Orleans. All the men of color or free negroes make their sons learn a trade, and give a special education to their daughters whom they rarely marry off.⁴⁶

For example, Luison Santilly, a *parda libre*, apprenticed her son to José Joaquín Fernández, master carpenter, for five years. During that time Santilly agreed to feed, care for, and provide medical expenses for the eleven-year-old boy.⁴⁷

Skilled free blacks also trained others. The free *moreno* carpenter Pedro Laviolet contracted with María Josefa Roy to teach his craft to her *moreno* slave, who was ten years old. According to terms of the contract, Roy agreed to lodge, maintain, and dress the slave during the first four years of the deal, and Laviolet did the same during the final two years. Over the full six years Roy paid for the slave's medical care and reimbursed Laviolet for any time lost to illness or truancy. Laviolet was only to work the apprentice half a day, and on days that the slave was not needed by Laviolet he could work for Roy.⁴⁸

Many freed persons acquired skills during their enslavement, and they often used these talents to earn the money that purchased their freedom. For example, the hairdresser Pompé, *moreno* slave of Don Josef Antonio de Hoa, chief official of the royal customhouse, purchased his liberty for 600 pesos. Having already deposited 400 pesos, Pompé was to make installments based on his monthly earnings

⁴⁵ Henry P. Dart, "Public Education in New Orleans in 1800," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 11 (1928):24-52; Roger Philip McCutcheon, "Libraries in New Orleans, 1771-1833," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (1937):152-58; Minter Wood, "Life in New Orleans in the Spanish Period," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939):642-709.

⁴⁶ Alliot, "Historical and Political Reflections," 85.

⁴⁷ Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 15, fol. 245, 27 July 1792.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 70, 17 March 1792.

of twenty pesos, from which Hoa subtracted five pesos for haircuts for himself and his brother. In addition, Pompé had to serve Hoa freely for eight months.⁴⁹ Andrés Nata, a *moreno* blacksmith, purchased his freedom for the arbitrated amount of 800 pesos. Unfortunately, he enjoyed liberty for only a short time; he was buried four years later at the age of forty.⁵⁰

Women and men involved in the service sector most likely learned their occupations less formally than artisans or managers did. They watched other slaves and free persons sewing, hunting, washing, cleaning, and selling, and then imitated their actions. On 21 May 1803, Don Antonio Jung manumitted *graciosamente* his *pardita* slave María Clara, the seven-year-old daughter of his former slave Francisca. That same day Doña Margarita Landreau registered a note of obligation assuming responsibility for the education of María Clara. In exchange for the *pardita's* labor over a twelve-year period, Landreau agreed to teach her the arts of cooking, washing, and everything else necessary to manage a house. One day before he manumitted María Clara, Jung also freed María Clara's sister Virginia, a three-year-old *pardita*. In this case, the free *morena* Venus, who had purchased her *carta de libertad* from Jung at the same time, promised to educate and care for Virginia until she could do so for herself. Virginia brought to the household all her clothes and fifty pesos to help Venus with food and clothing, but love primarily motivated Venus's action.⁵¹

Although free blacks acted upon every opportunity, several factors, some of them beyond their control, influenced the capacity of free persons of color to acquire economic security or accumulate wealth that was then passed on to their heirs. First, free blacks who acquired marketable skills either before or after being freed tended to prosper. Throughout the Americas skilled blacks found it easier to purchase

⁴⁹ "Promovidos por Pompè, negro contro el Sr. Dn. Josef Antonio de Hoa, Admr. de Rl. Aduana sobre que le otorgue su livrtad, por la cantidad de 400 ps.," SJR, 7 January 1793; Acts of Carlos Ximénez, no. 4, fol. 193, 12 April 1793.

⁵⁰ Acts of Andrés Almonester y Roxas, fol. 262, 8 May 1779; Earl C. Woods and Charles Nolan, eds., *Sacramental Records of the Roman Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of New Orleans*, 7 vols. (New Orleans: Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1987-1992), 3:220, 24 October 1783.

⁵¹ Acts of Pedro Pedesclaux, no. 44, fols. 421 and 423, 20 May 1803, and fol. 428, 21 May 1803. The sisters' mother, Jung's former slave, had either died or been sold to another person.

freedom and continue to earn as free persons. Many slave holders rented out their slaves, taking a portion of the slaves' *jornales* (day's wage) and permitting them to keep the remainder.⁵² The *morena libre* Helena poignantly revealed the impact that possessing a skill high in demand could have on attaining and retaining free status. She tried to convince the court that appraisals of her slave son were excessive because he knew no trade and his master had readily admitted that the slave was a thief and drunkard. In her plea she provided several examples of skilled slaves who had purchased their freedom for the amount her son was appraised at and pointed out that an unskilled *moreno* slave could never earn such an exorbitant sum.⁵³

The free person of color's ties to and reputation in the white community constituted a second factor in the succeed-fail equation. A corporate society stratified by race and class prevailed in Spanish New Orleans primarily operating according to *parentela* (extended family) and *clientela* (patron/client) relationships. Advantages accrued to those free blacks who were linked by kin and patronage to leading white families. When a prominent white man, Don Luis de Lalande Dapremont, brought charges of criminal activity against the free *pardo* Pedro Bailly, he threatened the livelihood of Bailly and his family. Bailly claimed that the charges were false and entered out of spite. Dapremont had just recently lost a suit that Bailly had brought against him for collection of a debt. Bailly also stated that the mistrust engendered by these charges had seriously affected his retail business because white patrons from whom Bailly had borrowed funds and goods were beginning to harass him for payment and refused to extend him additional credit. A militia officer and loyal servant of the king, Bailly had earned the distinction of a *buen vasallo* (good subject) meriting the favor of local leaders. The court eventually dropped Dapremont's charges against Bailly, thereby restoring his favorable reputation.⁵⁴

Free persons of color occasionally formed business partnerships with white individuals. Pedro Viejo jointly owned a small dry goods

⁵² For example, see Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio*, 362, 364.

⁵³ "Elena Negra libre sobre darle la Libertad a su hijo Esclabo de Dn. Henrique Despres por el precio de su estimación," SJR, 12 August 1780.

⁵⁴ "Criminales seguidos de oficio contra el Pardo libre Pedro Bailly," SJR, 7 October 1791. Bailly was tried and convicted on similar charges in 1794, see Hanger, "Personas," 288-329.

store with the *morena libre* Juana. A native of Guinea, Juana was a former slave and the daughter of two slaves who had been married in the Catholic church. Half the enterprise belonged to her, and she designated Viejo as her only heir.⁵⁵ Antonio Sánchez and the *cuarterona libre* María Juana Ester were partners in another retail business. A native of New Orleans, María Juana had one natural daughter named Francisca, also a *cuarterona libre*. In her will María entrusted Sánchez with selling her share of the partnership's goods and placing its proceeds in her daughter's possession. Included in the estate inventory were farm and carpentry implements, wagons, ox teams, cows, horses, lumber, a canoe, slaves, and two farms.⁵⁶

Kinship ties to white persons as well as patronage gave some free people of color added economic leverage. Some white fathers publicly acknowledged their free black consorts and offspring and donated personal and real property to them.⁵⁷ In his 1794 will, Don Pedro Aubry declared that he was single but that he had two natural children—Pedro Estevan and María Genoveva—by the *morena libre* María Emilia Aubry, all his former slaves. As his only heirs, the children received a farm twenty-one miles from New Orleans, two slaves, livestock, furniture, and household goods.⁵⁸

When Don Francisco Hisnard died on 28 July 1798, he left a will written three months earlier in which he declared that he was single but recognized his three natural children by the free *morena* Mariana Grondel, more commonly called Hisnard. Don Francisco instructed his executors to divide the proceeds from the sale of his goods among his only heirs, his three natural daughters. In addition,

⁵⁵ Acts of Andrés Almonester y Roxas, fol. 389, 1 September 1775.

⁵⁶ Court proceedings of Narciso Broutin, no. 53, fols. 225-98, 11 June 1802. Of interest is the fact that the inventory recorded personal names for all the oxen, but not the other animals.

⁵⁷ Several white fathers manumitted their natural offspring and slave consorts along with donating property to them. The present writer agrees with Loren Schweninger, however, that "even with the advantage of inheritance, it took energy, industry, and business acumen for these people [free people of color in the lower South] to maintain their property holdings. In towns and cities, free men and women of color took advantage of the continued demand for service businesses, the relatively small numbers of skilled whites and immigrants, and the general appreciation in city property values to expand their estates" during the antebellum period. ("Prosperous Blacks in the South, 1790-1880," *American Historical Review* 95 [1990]:36.)

⁵⁸ Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 30, fol. 328, 23 December 1794.

the three women came into possession of their mother's estate, Grondel having died one year before Hisnard. They inherited property totaling 1,852 pesos from their mother and 468 pesos 5 reales from their father. One daughter, Eufrosina, had served as the former slave and long-time consort of Louisiana's *auditor de guerra*, Don Nicolás María Vidal, for whom she bore three *cuarterona* daughters. One of these daughters, María de la Merced, "caused an international incident in Pensacola when she appealed to Andrew Jackson as territorial governor to intercede with Spanish officials to recover documents regarding her late father's estate."⁵⁹ Kinship ties with propertied whites and free blacks enabled some free persons of color to wield greater influence.

A third factor that could help a free person of color succeed materially was that of being born free or having free kin. Second or third generation free blacks usually inherited the accumulated riches, no matter how meager, of past generations, and slaves who had well-established free black friends or relatives stood a better chance of being rescued from slavery than those with no ties to the free black population. For example, Juan Bautista Hugón, born free and a captain of the free *pardo* militia when he died in 1792, purchased the freedom of four out of five of his children and at least one of their mothers during his lifetime. At the time of his death Hugón's goods consisted of a house and land in New Orleans, one slave, furniture, and clothes. He donated to a *morena* slave named Magdalena a bed, a stoneware fireplace adornment, one pig, and the chickens on the patio of his house. Hugón also requested that his testamentary executor, a captain in the *moreno* militia, purchase his fifth child's *carta de libertad*. Hugón's goods sold at public auction for 1,095 pesos. After paying for the *carta*, outstanding debts, and burial and court costs, the executor turned over 227 pesos, 5 reales to Hugón's children.⁶⁰

One final testament shows the extent of property a free person of color could accumulate during a lifetime and bestow upon relatives

⁵⁹ "Testamentaria de Don Francisco Hisnard que falleció en el Puesto de Opellousas," SJR, 27 August 1798; Acts of Pedro Pedesclaux, no. 40, fol. 81, 6 February 1802; Acts of Narciso Broutin, no. 4, fol. 544, 31 December 1802; Jack D.L. Holmes, "Do It! Don't Do It!: Spanish Laws on Sex and Marriage," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward F. Haas (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, for the Louisiana State Museum, 1983), 23.

⁶⁰ "Autos fecho por fin y Muerte de Juan Bta Hugón," SJR, 8 August 1792.

and friends when he or she died. It also reveals the intricate kinship and patronage ties among free blacks and whites. Perrina Daupenne, *parda libre*, drew up her will in August 1790. She was the natural daughter of a white man she confessed not to know and the *parda libre* María Daupenne, single, and without any children. Daupenne owned a house in the city and ten slaves, five of whom she freed *graciosamente*. She also instructed her executor to purchase the freedom of a *pardo* slave belonging to a white man. In addition to giving the charity hospital ten pesos and a priest thirty pesos to say thirty masses for her soul, Daupenne donated slaves, livestock, clothes, furniture, linen, household goods, and a cypress grove to her friends, aunts, and cousins, all of them women. To her brother she gave her share of their dead brother's estate. Daupenne's white godmother received her most prized possessions: all her gold jewelry and a mahogany armoire. Daupenne appointed another white person and government official, Don Andrés Manuel Lopés de Armesto, to be her executor. Finally, she named as her heir the *moreno libre* Candio Tomás, legitimate son of her female cousin.⁶¹ Few free people of color went to their graves so wealthy, but those who did usually raised the material level of at least some free blacks and slaves who remained behind.

Free men and women of color in Spanish New Orleans actively participated in the economic and social life of the society. Though not as prosperous or prominent as leading white persons, some free blacks successfully battled downward mobility and secured a stable niche in the middle stratum. They astutely availed themselves of legal, demographic, economic, and political conditions in Spanish New Orleans to attain economic stability, even prosperity, and at the same time advance their social standing. In Louisiana and other colonies metropolitan and local discrimination against non-whites both in the courtroom and on the street restricted access to resources needed to enter the upper echelons of the social hierarchy. Records for the Spanish period of New Orleans's history attest to the daily battle free blacks waged in order to fight off poverty, free their families, and acquire property and patronage.

⁶¹ Acts of Francisco Broutin, no. 7, fol. 1, 23 August 1790.