Order Number 9000707

A study in popular culture—the New Orleans Mardi Gras: Formation of the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Krewe of Rex

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City University of New York, 1989

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A STUDY IN POPULAR CULTURE--THE NEW ORLEANS MARDI GRAS: FORMATION OF THE MISTICK KREWE OF COMUS AND THE KREWE OF REX

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1989

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

30 Mar 1989
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

7 April 1989
Date

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

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by

William John Koolsbergen

Adviser: Professor Glenn Loney

The purpose of this study is to examine the formative years of two Mardi Gras organizations--the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Krewe of Rex--in order to gain a better understanding of the New Orleans Mardi Gras as popular entertainment and as theatrical expression. The method followed is basically chronological, that is, the first five years of Comus (1857-1861) and the first five years of Rex (1872-76) are traced to demonstrate the nature of the parades and balls staged by these two organizations. In addition, a brief synopsis of the intervening years and of additional Mardi Gras Krewes formed during this period is presented. This study contains the following chapters: chapter 1 serves as an over-view of the subject; chapter 2 compares Mardi Gras to similar festivals; chapter 3 investigates the development of Mardi Gras prior to 1857; chapter 4 examines and analyzes the first five years of Comus; chapter 5 traces the Civil War period in New Orleans; chapter 6 details and analyzes the first five years of Rex, and chapter 7 is the conclusion of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the members of my committee for being so helpful during this project. Professors Glenn Loney, Florence Waren, and Charles Gattnig were very supportive of me during my period of research and writing. I especially want to thank Professor Loney for taking over as my Adviser.

This study was researched mainly in the libraries of New Orleans. Because I spent so much time in that city, I want to express my gratitude to the following people for their support: Maurice Hattier and Bruce Walker, Minnie L. Finley, Bill Bradford, Jeff Johnson, Louise Ward, and the staff of the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library. In addition I would like to thank Zuma Young Salaun, daughter of Perry Young, for the illustrations that appear at the end of this paper.

My most heartfelt thanks goes to Larry Rogers for the understanding, love, and support he gave me during this intense period.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my parents, Alma and Joseph Koolsbergen. Though neither of them completed junior high school, they gave me a great love for books and for education. It is especially poignant to me that my father died just before defense of this dissertation; they both are missed.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the New Orleans Mardi Gras is a unique celebration. It is a festival which dominates the cultural landscape of New Orleans from January 6 through Mardi Gras day, the last day before Lent. Mardi Gras is a mixture of masquerade and revelry, pageantry and theatrics. Throughout this dissertation, the name of this holiday will be capitalized because, that is how it is commonly used in New Orleans. In its popular usage, Mardi Gras refers both to the entire pre-Lenten season and to Shrove Tuesday.

There is no evidence to pinpoint the first Mardi gras[1] celebrated in the Louisiana colony. Interestingly, the first place names designated in the colony were Pointe du Mardi Gras and Mardi Gras Bayou, because, on March 3, 1699, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur D'Iberville made a campsite on the spot where that bayou entered the Mississippi River. That particular March day was the last Tuesday before the Lenten season, the day on which Mardi gras is celebrated.

Mardi gras literally translated, means "fat Tuesday." The French celebration was a day of feasting before the fasting of Lent. Historians of the Louisiana colony and state link this holiday with the Lupercalian festival and fertility rites of ancient Rome, traditionally held on February 15.

This juxtaposition of pagan celebration and Christian holiday is an example of the duality in nature that the New Orleans Mardi Gras represents. In New Orleans, the season from Twelfth Night to Mardi Gras is a time of inversion of status, much as in the Medieval Feast of Fools. It is a time to fulfill fantasy, a time to mock authority, a time to dramatize desire. New Orleans seems to be gripped during Mardi Gras by an institutionalized laissez-faire, a sanctioned make-believe. During Mardi Gras, reality is suspended. The traditions of the season may have had their origins in the Lupercalia, the Feast of Fools, the European carnivals, or the French royal courts, but in its Louisiana manifestation Mardi Gras is an American outgrowth of the cultural traditions of the European settlers and African slaves.

Because Mardi Gras is an expression of popular culture, one should study it by examining the time in which it formed and in which it was nurtured. Above all else, Mardi Gras is an entertainment. The celebration is a show put on for an expectant audience. In fact, Mardi Gras is often referred to, at least by its promoters, as the "greatest free show on earth." This dissertation will discuss this "greatest free show on earth" by examining the early years of the oldest of the Mardi Gras organizations. The formation of the Mistick [sic] Krewe of Comus and the Krewe of Rex will be examined in detail. In addition, the Twelfth Night Revelers and the Knights of Momus will be discussed, because both of these

organizations were formed during the early years of Mardi Gras.

The beginnings of Mardi Gras may be traced to the homesickness of the original French settlers who saw the Mardi gras masquerades as a chance to recreate the richness of the European court life they left behind, or it may be discovered in the human impulse to put on a mask and play. Whatever the speculation, the New Orleans Mardi Gras is a rich panorama of a joie de vivre, a crazy quilt of theatrics for all to see.

It was not until 1857 that Mardi Gras became an organized festival, when the Mistick Krewe of Comus was formed. Comus was established by six young men from Mobile, Alabama (part of the original Louisiana colony), as an organization of non-Creole New Orleanians. They banded together to impose a structure on the chaotic revelry of the Mardi gras season and to attract the general New Orleans population to their brand of revelry and theatre. Mardi Gras was born in a sense of fun; even the spelling of "Mistick" is a parody, and "krewe" is a created word. Later in this dissertation, the linguistic symbolism of these words and other Mardi Gras names will be discussed in detail.

Mardi Gras has its own lexicon. It would be best at this point to present and briefly define several of the most common terms necessary for a discussion of Mardi Gras. Those terms are the following: krewe, parade, float, ball, krewe captain, tableaux (both vivants and roulants), flambeaux, and

Creole. Of course, some of these are common to Standard American English, but the citizens of Mardi Gras have given them new meanings.

A krewe is a secret carnival organization whose purpose is to stage either a Mardi Gras ball, a Mardi Gras parade, or both. Until the latter half of this century, a krewe's membership was always composed of white Christian males.[2] In contemporary Mardi Gras there are a few krewes which have eschewed these ethnic and sexist characteristics. A krewe usually has a public organization to which it is attached. For example, members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus also belong to the Pickwick Club; members of the Krewe of Rex to the School of Design. The entire focus of a krewe is on Mardi Gras; often the membership will start planning the next season's events the morning after the current ball. Most, but not all, krewes produce both a parade and a ball; all krewes produce a ball.

Parading is serious business in New Orleans. The essence of a Mardi Gras parade is the <u>float</u>, because in New Orleans a procession composed only of people (whether they are costumed or not) is not a parade. The most common term used for a procession of marchers is a "Walking Club." This concept of a parade as a procession of floats, which may be integrated with marchers, equestrian units, and bands has developed over time. In fact, at least one of the earliest Comus parades had no floats, only costumed marchers. But

unless otherwise noted, in this dissertation a parade is a procession as described above. In addition, Mardi Gras parades always portray a theme. This theme may be drawn from literature, popular culture, or politics. The theme for the parade is continued in the tableaux at the ball.

In contemporary New Orleans, floats for most of the krewes are designed and executed by professional artists. The earliest superstructures were mounted on frames of wagons and later on specially built running-gear measuring twenty by eight feet. The platform itself is usually twenty-two feet long and from nine to ten feet wide. This amount of surface space allowed the floats to negotiate the corner of Orleans and Royal streets (the only corner in the Vieux Carré large enough to accommodate such a vehicle's turning). When the various parades of Mardi Gras moved out of the Vieux Carré during the 1970s, floats grew in width and length. Information on the float dimensions for the earliest years of the Mistick Krewe of Comus is sketchy. Probably, for the first two years of Comus, the floats were constructed on carriages and delivery wagons. Arthur La Cour, who devoted the most pages to the "Mechanics of Carnival" in his book, New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival, does not indicate the exact point at which floats were commissioned by the krewes. It is certain that by the time of the Krewe of Rex, 1872, floats were constructed according to dimensions noted above. Regarding the height of the floats, La Cour

noted that "originally [they] reached an altitude of twenty feet or more, but utility wires now limit the height to eighteen feet."[3]

The current Code of the City of New Orleans recognizes two kinds of floats: the "float" and the "minifloat." The code defines a float as a vehicle "with platforms used to carry maskers. Floats shall be not less than twenty-three feet long nor more than sixty feet long, nor less than nine feet wide, and not more than seventeen feet, ten inches high." A minifloat is defined as "a vehicle less than twenty-three feet long which may or may not have a platform for maskers."[4]

Currently, tractors are used to pull the floats. During the early days of Comus, horses were used to pull the wagons. La Cour noted that mules replaced the horses later; these mules were "those that drew garbage wagons by day."[5]

Parts of the floats and most of the costumes were made in Paris and shipped to New Orleans. It was not until 1873 that a parade was constructed entirely in New Orleans. Since then, Mardi Gras has become a growth industry for the city of New Orleans. There are professional designers and builders for floats, scenery, and costumes. Many of the krewes warehouse their floats and costumes, so that with alterations, they can be used for more than one season. The chief artist of the floats during the late nineteenth century was George Soulié. His son continued the family business into the twentieth century. The other famous float-building families

were the Deutschmans and, more recently, the Kerns (Blaine, Roy, and Betty).

The social highlight of the Mardi Gras season is the carnival ball. The ball is a huge party that the krewe stages for its members and their invited guests. From the very beginning, these balls were held in theatres. Most balls consist of three parts: (1) a series of tableaux dramatizing the theme, (2) a presentation of the royal court, and (3) a dance. The tradition is that only the men masquerade; the women dress in their most elegant gowns. This arrangement, of course, has changed with the newer memberships. Both the parade and the ball are the domain of the krewe captain. The captain is the most powerful member of a krewe, for the captain chooses the theme, the participants, and the members of the royal court. In terms of legitimate theatre, the captain's role is similar to that of a combination of the executive producer, the director, the playwright, and often, the star. The costs of the parade and the ball are borne entirely by the membership of the krewe.

From the earliest of Mardi Gras balls, the krewes made use of the finest artists for the design of the floats, balls, and costumes. Costumes were made either in Paris or in the costume houses of New York. The sets for the tableaux were designed by the resident artists of the flourishing New Orleans theatre community. Even today, most of the balls are designed by the Spangenberg Company which also designs and

builds sets for the professional theatres in the city. Since the Mardi Gras balls began their existence in the theatres of the city, the krewes always had available the most contemporary lighting design and equipment. The Mistick Krewe of Comus began this tradition with their long affiliation with the Varieties Theatre.

Tableaux are the dramatic stagings that are used to entertain the royal court and guests at a ball. There are two types of tableaux: tableaux vivants and tableaux roulants. The first of these are the "living pictures" which were popular forms of theatre throughout the nineteenth century and which have their antecedents in late Medieval royal entries.[6] Tableaux roulants were common in New Orleans Mardi Gras in the nineteenth century, and with the use of large convention halls now in the city, they have again become popular. A tableau roulant[7] is literally a tableau on wheels. In the early days of Comus, the floats were brought onto the stage of the theatre, and after a procession they were used to form several tableaux vivants. In contemporary New Orleans, the Krewe of Bacchus brings its parade into the Super Dome, thus revitalizing this custom.

Flambeaux are the torches that are used to light the night parades. Today these torches are merely symbolic, but during the early days of the Mistick Krewe of Comus, the torches were necessary to illuminate the night parade. Before the Civil War, the flambeaux were carried by slaves; at some

point after that war, the flambeaux were carried by paid employees of the krewe.

The final term to be defined is Creole. In this dissertation a very narrow definition of the term will be used. A Creole was a person descended from the original French settlers. Much has been written about who and what is "Creole" in New Orleans. Grace King and George Washington Cable spent a considerable amount of time trying to define this particular class of New Orleanian. The narrow definition cited above is adequate for the purpose of this discussion because the focus here is with the non-Creoles who organized Mardi Gras and not primarily with the Creole Mardi gras.

Reference has already been made to Mardi Gras as a form of popular culture. As Oscar G. Brockett noted, "concern for 'popular culture' is especially pertinent in studying nineteenth-century theatre history since the repertory was dominated by melodrama and minor forms usually scorned by literary critics."[8] One purpose of this dissertation is to study the "minor forms" that the Krewes of Comus and Rex, as producing agencies, brought to the New Orleans cultural scene. Mardi Gras is a special, vibrant and living form of theatre--one which is not available in all parts of the country. The popularity of Mardi Gras surpassed that of legitimate theatre in New Orleans in the twentieth century.[9] By studying the beginnings of the Mardi Gras traditions, we can come to a better understanding of how popular culture reflects the

social and entertainment needs of a particular community. In addition, these theatrical events afford us the opportunity to investigate the relationship between popular culture and theatre. Studying Mardi Gras fosters an appreciation of some of these many forms and the similarity of the methods and techniques of these forms to more legitimate theatre.

The method that this dissertation will follow is both historical and critical because it is important to chronicle the history of Mardi Gras to facilitate an analytical discussion of the Mardi Gras as theatrical expression. The periods immediately before and after the Civil War (particularly the first five years of Comus and the first five years of Rex) have been chosen for examination. Because of the vast amount of evidence available, narrowing the period under study affords a more analytical examination of the Mardi Gras.

The first period is the five formative years of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. As noted, Comus was organized in 1857 as an attempt to harness the Creole love for dance and masking with the American love for spectacle. Because Comus was the first krewe, its members were able to set many of the traditions that are practiced today.

The second period is the first five years of the Krewe of Rex (1872-76). This period has been chosen for three reasons. First, Rex has always been accepted by all participants as the "King of Carnival," and as such has

wielded considerable power in the establishment of cultural traditions of Mardi Gras. The second reason is that Rex set the theatrical norms for the tableaux of the stylized royal courts. The third reason is the relationship that Comus and Rex have developed. Both Rex and Comus parade on Mardi Gras day and both stage their balls in the same hall. Taken as a pair the two krewes reflect the dichotomy of the season. The Mistick Krewe is a highly secretive organization whose Comus is never identified by name. The Krewe of Rex announces the name of their king in the local press before the parade. Rex rules over the revelry of the day; Comus, the night. The courts of the two krewes meet at midnight to signal the end of the Mardi Gras.

There are "official" accounts of the first century of both Rex and Comus. Perry Young's The Mistick Krewe: Chronicles of Comus and His Kin and Leonard Huber and Pie Dufour's If Ever I Cease to Love: 100 Years of Rex are valuable resources for this dissertation because they are the most detailed accounts of these two krewes. Young, Huber, and Dufour were privy to the secret records of the organizations so their accounts are rich in detail. However, neither of these works makes any attempt to analyze Mardi Gras as theatrical expression. In both works the term "theatre" is used only in the title of an actual theatre, such as the Varieties Theatre. Neither work acknowledged Mardi Gras as a vibrant, living form of theatre; because of their "official"

status, both of these works treat the subject with reverence. The approach of this dissertation is to reevaluate the history of these krewes as theatrical production organizations and to analyze the role of Mardi Gras both as popular culture and as theatrical expression.

Because the works of Young, Huber, and Dufour are the most complete records of the krewes, they will be used extensively in this dissertation. Whenever possible, the local press coverage of the parades and balls will be used to augment descriptions offered by Young and Dufour.

There were several daily newspapers which were popular during this period. The Bee, which published in both French and English, is valuable as a resource because its writers reflected the attitudes of the Creole population. The Daily Crescent and The Daily Creole were widely read by both the French and American segments of the population. All three of these newspapers gave wide coverage to social aspects of the city. The Delta was widely read before the Civil War. The most valuable of the local newspapers were The New Orleans Times, The Picayune, and the Republican. All three of these papers gave considerable coverage to the antics of Rex during the period after the Civil War.

There are additional books about Mardi Gras that have proved valuable to this project. Robert Tallant's Mardi Gras is a small volume which covers the history of the carnival during the twentieth century. Interestingly, Tallant made no

connection of Mardi Gras to theatrical activity. Mardi Gras: A Celebration is another sketchy history of Mardi Gras. The main focus of this book is on contemporary Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New is a newly published book which discusses the contemporary Krewe of Bacchus.

Two additional works about Mardi Gras were important to this study. Arthur La Cour's New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival was useful, especially because of his chapter, "Mechanics of Carnival." His is the only work on this subject which deals with the size of floats and the mechanics of float building and transporting. Laurraine Goreau authored the chapter "Mardi Gras," in The Past as Prelude: New Orleans, 1718-1968. This essay was useful because it helped to place Mardi Gras into a political-historical perspective.

For purpose of general information about the Louisiana colony and state the works of three historians were helpful. Alcee Fortiers' History of Louisiana, Mel Leavitt's A Short History of New Orleans, and Charles Gayarre's Romance of the History of Louisiana all proved useful to this dissertation. Also cited in this project is Adele Bielenberg, a former teacher from Pass Christian, Mississippi, who continues to lecture on the Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans, Mississippi, and Alabama.

This dissertation will be a study of the years in question in order to record discovered facts about the theatrical nature of these celebrations in an accurate, coherent, and critical narrative. The investigation of this problem, the development of these two krewes and their stagings of Mardi Gras celebrations, presents the following causation and probability: what were the theatrical characteristics of the festivities staged by Comus and Rex, and what do these characteristics reveal about concepts of public spectacle of the period under investigation? Also to be considered are the intentions of the krewes as to the choice of themes and dramatic contents of their parades and balls.

The research plan consists of examination of primary and secondary sources that relate to the topic. Because those historians noted have not examined the Mardi Gras from a theatrical viewpoint, it will be necessary in this dissertation to return to as many primary accounts as possible to paint an accurate picture of the various celebrations as theatrical events, and to reevaluate descriptive accounts in terms of theatre.

Except for chapters 2 and 7, the pattern for this dissertation is essentially chronological. The study has the following sequence of chapters: chapter 2 offers a discussion of the similarities of Mardi Gras to others festivals and forms of popular culture and theatrical expression; chapter

3 investigates the development of Mardi Gras prior to 1857; chapter 4 examines and analyzes the first five years of the Mistick Krewe of Comus; chapter 5 treats the improvements of the production of parades and balls in the pre-Rex period: chapter 6 details and analyzes the first five years of Rex, and chapter 7 is the conclusion of this study. This discussion of Mardi Gras as a unique theatrical event will be supplemented by a summary examination of the ritual elements of the festival as well as the traditions which continue to date; e.g., the boeuf gras, throws, and dubloons.

Chapter 2

SIMILARITIES OF MARDI GRAS TO OTHER FESTIVALS

The New Orleans approach to the celebration of Mardi Gras is unique in the United States. Although other cities in the South stage parades and balls during the Mardi Gras season, none duplicates the energy that New Orleans gives to the festival, and none devotes the full season, from Twelfth Night to Mardi Gras, to the celebration. Several cities in the American South do stage celebrations during the pre-Lenten season. The largest of these is the festival held in Mobile, Alabama. Residents of Mobile often try to claim the distinction as the earliest home of Mardi Gras in the United States. As will be shown in Chapter 3, this distinction is incorrect, because the Mobile celebration was originally held during the Christmas-New Year season. As will be shown in the following chapter, Mobilians do have a special place in the history of Mardi Gras as it is performed in New Orleans.

Mardi Gras is also a part of the social seasons of many of the cities and small towns along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This coastline stretches from New Orleans to Mobile, and it was originally settled by those same Europeans who built the Louisiana and Alabama cities. Biloxi, Mississippi, offers the largest of these festivals. It is a twentieth century development which attempts to mirror the New Orleans Mardi Gras. Festivities are held only on the last weekend before the beginning of Lent; one parade and several balls are

staged for the general public.[10]

The development of the New Orleans Mardi Gras from the French festival to the organization of the Mistick Krewe of Comus will be traced in Chapter 3 [of this dissertation]. Mardi Gras does share similar characteristics with other festivals. To augment our understanding of the New Orleans Mardi Gras as popular culture and as theatre, it is necessary to note some of the parallels of the New Orleans Carnival to other festivals, thus, this chapter will be a discussion of the similarities that Mardi Gras has to other festivals and comparable expressions of popular culture.

The first aim of his chapter is to summarize the positions taken by the historians cited in the Introduction as to the lineage of Mardi Gras prior to its New Orleans manifestation. The second aim is to examine other expressions of popular culture and theatre which seem to parallel certain aspects of the Mardi Gras festivities. The purpose in this first part is not to attempt to prove or disprove that as an actual heritage, but only to record and analyze the similarities. It would be far beyond the scope of this paper to present any sort of detailed analysis of the various festivals to be mentioned. Rather, this discussion will present a brief analysis of the shared theatrical elements to foster better understanding of the Mardi Gras revels and to emphasize the role of Mardi Gras as a vibrant, living form of theatre.

The Lupercalia, Saturnalia, and Carnevale

The symbolic origins of Mardi Gras seem fairly obvious. Spring festivals celebrating the rebirth and fertility of the earth are as old as recorded history.[11] One of the earliest accounts of such a celebration is that offered by Ovid in the Fasti, in his discussion of the various festivals celebrated during the Roman year. A portion of Ovid's poem dealt with the Lupercalia, and the legend of Romulus and the she-wolf which suckled him. Ovid linked the Lupercalia to even older Greek festivities because of the Acadian worship of the god Pan. He noted that "there (Arcadia) Pan was the deity of herds, and there, too, of mares; he received gifts for keeping safe the sheep. Evander brought with him across the sea his woodland deities."[12] This seems to support the contention of Perry Young that "this spring festival was brought to what is now Italy by Evander."[13] At a later point in the Fasti, Ovid addressed the issue of nudity during the Lupercalia: "Why then do the Luperci run? and why do they strip themselves and bear their bodies naked...? The god himself is nude and bids his ministers go nude: besides, raiment sorted not well with running."[14]

In the Appendix of his translation of the Fasti, Sir James Frazer noted that the festival was "one of purification, which by ridding the community of the evil powers of barrenness and disease that had infested it in the previous

year, set free the kindly powers of nature."[15] Frazer in his discussion also made reference to the goat-skin thongs used by the priests to lash the supplicants. Robert Tallant, in his chapter of Mardi gras called, "Europa and the Bull," and Perry Young in the Introduction of The Mistick Krewe, both made reference to the link of this thong to the modern Mardi Gras tradition of "throws." Young referred to these goat-skin strips as februa; his contention was that as the popularity of the Lupercalia grew, the priests distributed the februa to the supplicants, and when the priests "surrendered this much, the festival lost most, and soon all, of its religious character, and assumed a secular and licentious nature."[16]

The Lupercalia became a national holiday for the Romans,[17] just as Mardi Gras became an official holiday for the New Orleanians. As Rome grew as a world power and diminished as a moral one, the Lupercalia became a festival devoted to spectacle in public performance and private celebration. Circuses and gladiatorial contests became popular public events, and orgies characterized by "costume travesties which belied the sex of the wearer"[18] became the norm for private entertainment.

Masking, which is such an integral part of the New Orleans Mardi Gras, had its beginnings in the Roman Lupercalia. This type of masking, essentially used as disguise, is not to be confused with the masks of the Greek theatre. The first maskers were worshipers of Attis. These

priests sacrificed their genitals to their god and wore phallic images around their neck. They masked as females and offered themselves as prostitutes to male celebrants as part of their religious rites.[19] Female impersonation has been a part of the Mardi Gras festivities since the earliest krewes dressed men as women to ride on specific floats.

During the Roman Empire, popular entertainment and cultural events, such as those mentioned above, superseded the popularity of the drama. Of this period, Oscar G. Brockett made the following assessment: "theatre became increasingly diversionary, with novelties of all kinds demanded and offered--new types of entertainments, ever increasing lavishness and elaborateness of spectacle, thrills of all sorts (nudity, sex, violence, and bloodshed among them)."[21] Although Brockett does not specifically name the Lupercalia, it would seem that his notation fits the descriptions offered by Tallant and Young.

Edward Gibbon in Chapter 26 of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, wrote of the final destruction of paganism in Rome. This chapter of Gibbon's work, which covered the period from 378-420 A.D., presented a discussion of how Theodosius ordered destruction of the pagan temples in an effort to control worship of gods other than the Christian one. Gibbon noted that people living outside the city, "disguised their religion under the appearance of convivial meetings. On the days of solemn festivals they assembled in

great numbers under the spreading shade of some consecrated trees."[21] Gibbon further noted that animals were sacrificed, but since no altar was used, no crime had been committed. There is an obvious parallel between this attempt at legislating the Romans and the later attempts to legislate the Creoles. The pagans of Rome circumvented the law as described above; the Creoles took their masking and dances into private arenas.

Gibbon's conclusion to the above mentioned chapter was a discussion of how the Christians incorporated such "pagan" characteristics as use of symbols, wine, and worship of the inanimate into the Christian elevation of martyrs to sainthood and the subsequent praying to them. He noted that "the ministers of the catholic church imitated the profane model which they were impatient to destroy." And he also stated that "the most respectable bishops had persuaded themselves that the ignorant rustics would more cheerfully renounce the superstitions of Paganism, if they found some resemblance...in the bosom of Christianity."[22]

The growth of the popularity of the Creole Mardi gras and its decline into chaotic revelry clearly parallels the growth of the popularity of the Lupercalia. Just as the Lupercalia would eventually finds its way into the church, the Mardi gras would be transformed by the Mistick Krewe into Mardi Gras. Chapter 3 [of this dissertation] will detail the lack of order in the Mardi gras which led that festival to

such a degenerate level. The parallels of the latter days of the Lupercalia and the Creole Mardi gras are easy to see. These two celebrations shared the following characteristics: (1) masks used for disguise, usually for a sexual liaison; (2) the relaxing of rules of order; (3) a rise of criminal activities, and (4) a day of rest, or atonement, directly after the last day of revelry.

In addition to the introduction of the februa, the priests of Attis also inaugurated another ritual which is fundamental to the Mardi gras. According to Tallant, after the Lupercalia, there were street processions in which images of the gods were exhibited in wagons drawn by oxen. These oxen were decorated with garlands of flowers; the resemblance to the boeuf gras of the Mardi Gras parades is clear. One of the oxen was chosen for slaughter in a rite to initiate new devotees into the cult.[23] It is clear that Tallant relied heavily on Sir James Frazer for his information, for in The Golden Bough Frazer offered a vivid description of the slaughter of the bull as part of the ritual of baptism.[24] Young linked the rite of the slaughtered bull to the Druids. He noted that as "the Lupercalia spread throughout the Roman Empire, it adopted and modified rituals and revels of the various peoples that the Roman came to govern."[25] The purpose of this study is not to present a definitive answer to the query as to which account is correct. It is clear that whether the decorated ox of the priests of Attis or the

decorated bull of the Druids, the similarity to the boeuf gras of the Mardi Gras is striking. Except for several of the early Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans, the boeuf gras was a representation, usually in papier-maché of a young bull decorated with garlands of flowers.

As has already been mentioned, Christianity could not erase totally the pagan celebrations; instead, Church leaders incorporated aspects of the festival into the Church celebrations. This type of revelry would eventually leave the Church, just as drama would shift away from religious themes to more secular ones and move out of the Church environment.

In 325 A.D., the Church held a conference in Nicaea in Asia Minor. One of their purposes was to fix the date of Easter Sunday.[26] The Nicene Council set Easter as the first Sunday after the paschal full moon. When Pope Gregory the Great devised the modern calendar (c. 600 A.D.), to replace the pagan Julian one, the present fluctuating date of Ash Wednesday was set as the beginning of Lent. Carnelevamen was the name given to this new festival. "This 'consolation of the flesh' was abbreviated to carneleval, and then to carneval, becoming in French carnaval, in English carnival, and in Italian carnevale.[27] Loosely translated as "farewell to the flesh," carnevale led to the modern term Carnival, which is used in this paper as synonymous with Mardi Gras. The Carnival celebration allowed Christians to feast before the fasting of Lent. A practical reason for allowing the

Carnival was to give Christians a chance to consume those foods which could not be kept in homes during Lent. According to Tassin and Stall, "not only was meat forbidden during the fasting in the early days of the Church, but butter, milk, eggs, and fat as well."[28]

Sir James Frazer, to a degree, identified the Carnival with the Saturnalia, the Roman festival honoring Saturn. The Saturnalia was held from about the seventeenth to the twenty-third of December. Frazer noted the following:

> **Yet, if the Saturnalia, like many other seasons of license, was originally celebrated as a sort of public purification at the end of the old year or the beginning of the new one, it may at a still more remote period, when the Roman year began in March, have been regularly held either in February or March and therefore approximately the same date as the modern Carnival.**[29]

Frazer contended that the Saturnalia was originally a festival of sowing which assumed orgiastic characteristics over time. "What wonder," Frazer queried, "then if the simple husbandman imagined that by cramming his belly, by swilling and guzzling just before he proceeded to sow his fields, he thereby imparted additional vigour to the seed?"[30]

The king of the Saturnalia was a young and handsome man who was chosen by lot and who reigned as the Lord of Misrule. At the end of the festivities the king would be burned in effigy. It is interesting that a "king" was chosen, much as with the Krewe of Rex. But Rex did not meet the same fate.

The Mardi Gras can be said to have gained much from the Lupercalia and the carnevale. The Greeks originated the celebration and initiated the idea of throws (the februa); the Romans gave masking, the fatted ox, and spectacle; the Christian Church added the festival of Carnival and set the date for what the French would ultimately call Mardi gras.

These ancient traditions were incorporated into the New Orleans Carnival by the Creoles and the Mardi Gras krewes. Chapter 3-6 [of this dissertation] will analyze how these various components became part of the Mardi Gras tradition. The focus will particularly be on those elements which are theatrical in nature--masking and spectacle.

Carnival continued in various formats throughout the Middle Ages. The pre-Lenten festivities found special favor in France. Various of the French provinces added their own special character or ingredient to the celebration. For example, Provence had the Tarasque, a fantastic animal built of cloth and paper, which was animated by several men inside it who paraded around the village. Perry Young wrote of the "Prince Carnival" which was a straw figure built to resemble an unpopular person. The figure would be paraded throughout the day and then burned at night, obviously to the great joy of the costumed onlookers.[31]

The Feast of Fools

One festival of particular interest to this study is completely ignored in the works of the Louisiana historians

cited. The Feast of Fools, which is important to the development of comedy, is of interest to this paper because of the festival's use of inversion of status. The Feast of Fools was one of several celebrations assigned to the minor clergy of the Christian Church. There is no record of an exact date for the beginning of this tradition, but E. K. Chambers noted that "I do not find a clear notice of it until the end of the twelfth century."[32] The subdeacons's reveleries took place approximately around Twelfth Night. The inversion of status allowed the subdeacons to mock their superiors. The revelries were presided over by a "bishop fool", who assumed religious control during the festivities. The second krewe to be formed in New Orleans was the Twelfth Night Revelers whose leader was known as the "Lord of Misrule," as in the Saturnalia. In a broader sense the inversion of status is at the core of the Mardi Gras because the central theme of the New Orleans Carnival is the fantasy of becoming anything that one desires for a day. Just as a subdeacon could become the "bishop fool" and assume the duties of the bishop, a Mardi Gras celebrant could become, through disguise and/or official status, anything.

Court Pageants of the Middle Ages

In addition to the Feast of Fools, other festival activities of the Middle Ages shared similar characteristics with Mardi Gras. Tournaments, mummings, disguising, and royal entries shared elements of theatre with the New Orleans

Carnival. Tournaments, which began as combat training sessions for knights, had, by the fourteenth century, become royal entertainments. Tournament fields of play made use of decorated "mansions" which "established the allegorical context of the tournament."[33] In addition, the tournaments often made use of elaborate processions. The floats of the Mardi Gras are used to illustrate the theme of the pageant, much as the mansions. Mardi Gras parades frequently made use of equestrian groups, whose riders were costumed, and who were part of the procession (parade).

The very formal court dances of the Mardi Gras balls were similar in structure to the dances staged in sixteenth century mummings and disguisings. William Tydeman noted in The Theatre in the Middle Ages that "mumming seems to be a sophisticated survival of a pagan folk-ritual, or of the Roman Saturnalia...(mumming) consists of a processional visit on a winter night to a private house by masked and silent figures who may dance."[34] The disguises used by the participants included masks representing royalty.

Just as in the later Creole Mardi gras, disguising could be used for criminal intent. Both Tydeman and Brockett made reference to such indicents; Tydeman listed prohibitive legislation in London as early as 1418.[35] The parallel to the chaotic street revels of the Creole Mardi gras and the pre-Rex street festivities is striking. Repeatedly the governing agencies in New Orleans attempted to control the street

masking. It was only through the organizational efforts of the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Krewe of Rex that the potentially illegal nature of the unorganized activities of Mardi Gras came to be conquered. It is interesting also that disguisings were continued at the English court. Neither Comus or Rex sought to end masking as a part of Mardi Gras; their efforts were to control it by sanctioning it within their own courts.

It would seem that Mardi Gras pageants are most like the royal entries and street pageants which began in the thirteenth century. Royal entries and street pageants were staged for specific occasions such as the visit by a member of royalty, a coronation, a wedding, etc. At first these were merely processions; later tableaux vivants, were added to the various festivities. Tydeman wrote that "allegorical tableaux and devices feature in those street theatres which were frequently set up along the length of the main thoroughfares of medieval towns and cities, to grace royal entries and to welcome visiting celebrities."[36] It is clear that the Krewe of Rex, at least in part, owes its existence to such a royal entry, the visit of Grand Duke Alexis.

The tableaux vivants of the Middle Ages, like the tableaux vivants of the Mardi Gras, used history, mythology, and allegory as sources for their subject matter. Each of the Medieval tableaux was complete but was linked to other tableaux by a common theme. In addition, each of these was

mounted on its own wagon. Each of the tableaux in a Mardi Gras pageant is a complete piece. When presented at a Mardi Gras ball these "living pictures" are used to demonstrate various aspects of the chosen theme. A Mardi Gras tableaux may or may not be staged on a wagon at a ball. Usually they are presented as stage pictures for the entertainment of the court and their guests. When they are brought into the theatre or hall on a wagon, the term more commonly used in New Orleans is the aforementioned tableaux roulants. Elaborate set pieces are part of a tableaux vivant at a Mardi Gras ball; scenic devices such as flats or curtains are used to reveal the tableau to the audience.

The modern krewes of Bacchus and Endymion have returned to the use of tableaux roulants. These krewes use the enormous rooms of the Rivergate Convention Center and the Louisiana Super Dome to bring their parades literally inside. The procession moves through the hall then stops, so that the audience can inspect each [individual] float. This same technique was also used by the Mistick Krewe of Comus. There will be a detailed discussion of the krewe's use of tableaux roulants in chapter 4 [of this dissertation].

Fastnachtsspiel

Another festival which was similar to Mardi Gras was the German carnival of the fifteenth century. Phyllis Hartnoll compared the earliest of these Shrovetide plays to the English mummer's plays.[37] These plays tended to show,

through comic episodes, the weaknesses of professionals in the urban environment of Nuremberg. Although as a general rule, the presentations of the krewes of Mardi Gras do not use dialogue, often they do use comedic elements to satirize local dignitaries. This was especially true during the intense political period immediately after the Civil War. On a broader level, the figures of Comus and Rex can be seen as similar to the meistersanger in that they orchestrate the overall frivolity of Mardi Gras, just as the meistersanger wrote the carnival plays of the Fastnachtsspiel.

The Stuart Court Masques

In 1604 Queen Anne commissioned Ben Jonson to write a masque in which she could present herself and her ladies to her court during Christmas festivities. This was Jonson's first court masque and his first collaboration with Inigo Jones. The court masques introduced "Italian ideals of staging into England."[38] The masque was an allegorical story (similar to the Italian intermezzo) which was meant to honor a person by comparing that person to a character in the allegory. It is clear that the earliest members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus had acquaintance with the concept of court masques. Perry Young made several references to both John Milton's A Mask and Ben Jonson's Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue.

The Comus of Ben Jonson was "the god of good cheer, [who] rides in triumph, crowned with flowers and attended by

a rabble chorus who sing the song of the Bouncing Belly."[39] The Comus of Milton is the child of Bacchus and Circe, as he surpassed his mother at sorcery. The original members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus found this character attractive enough to name their organization after him.

There are clear similarities between the Stuart Masques of the seventeenth century and the entertainments presented at the Mardi Gras balls of the nineteenth century. Those similarities include: (1) both masque and Mardi Gras ball made use of allegorical presentation; (2) both produced the most spectacular effects for the audience; (3) both utilized the most professional designers available; (4) both incorporated dance into the presentation. The Stuart Masques normally had three dances during the presentation, with the dances performed by the courtiers. These dances--the entry dance, the main dance, and the exit dance--roughly parallel the entry of the royal court, the "call-out dances," and the grand procession of the Mardi Gras. In his book, Method and Meaning in Jonson's Masques, John C. Meagher explained that Jonson employed dance as an "image of order."[40] Meagher further stated that the dances were "primarily an interweaving and interchanging of geometrical figures."[41]

The second dance of the Mardi Gras ball and the second dance of the masque allowed the participants in the masque to dance with members of the audience. In both cases this dance was with "selected" audience members, not general audience

dancing. Some krewes of the Mardi Gras do hold open dancing after the conclusion of the ball. There will be further discussion of dance and Mardi Gras in chapters 3 and 4.

The French Carnival

It was from France that Carnival was introduced into North America. "French taste and wit, incorporating the fashions of Venice, Rome, and Florence, doted upon masquerades and carnivals."[42] The excesses of the courts of both Louis XIV and Louis XV were perfectly matched to the historical excesses of Carnival. Tallant noted that Louis XIV is said to have "created entire courts of mythological aristocracy." And Louis XV made masks "as popular at Versailles and Fontainebleau as they had been on the Venetian Canals."[43]

With the Revolution came restrictions on all Mardi Gras revels. But by 1805, Napoleon had restored the Carnival to its former grandeur. One innovation of this period was the descente de la Courtille, an all night party where drinking was the chief entertainment.[44] One of the most elaborate of the processions of this period was the Promenade du Boeuf Gras which numbered the rich and the poor among its celebrants. Maskers in the procession included those disguised as savages, gods and goddesses, and fantastic animals. A real bull was used for this procession; he rode on a glide car and on his back was a child costumed as Cupid. It is clear that processions such as the Promenade du Boeuf Gras had a great impact on the design elements of the early Mardi Gras parades.

Summary

It was the attempt of this chapter to demonstrate how Mardi Gras is similar to other festivals and celebrations. By examining these similarities, especially those of a theatrical nature, a better understanding of the New Orleans Carnival can be gained. It is clear that Mardi Gras grew from the revelries of the Creoles of Louisiana, the descendants of the original French settlers. References in this chapter to a variety of other festivals and celebrations were designed to establish the nature of Mardi Gras as a vibrant, living form of theatre, by comparing Mardi Gras to other similar forms of popular culture and theatrical expression.

From this examination the following summary points emerge: (1) the historians of the New Orleans Mardi Gras have found the origin of the Mardi Gras in the Lupercalia; (2) The Lupercalia degenerated into debauchery and criminal activity; (3) the Christian Church incorporated the pagan Lupercalia as carnevale; (4) various festivals and ceremonies of the Middle Ages bore striking resemblances to aspects of the Mardi Gras; (5) many of the traditions of modern Mardi Gras had antecedents in the Lupercalia, the various carnivals of the pre-Lenten season, the Feast of Fools, tournaments, mummings and disguises, royal entries, and Stuart Masques, and, (6) the types of revels which take place at Mardi Gras have a rich history of popular expression in a variety if European cultures.

Chapter 3

DEVELOPMENT OF MARDI GRAS PRIOR TO 1857

For an understanding of the development of the Krewes of Comus and Rex, it is necessary first to examine the history of New Orleans prior to 1857 and from 1861 to 1872. This chapter will discuss the foundations of New Orleans culture and society by isolating those key events and persons that contributed to the origin of Mardi Gras. Chapter 5 will analyze specific developments in the city that led to the formation of the Krewe of Rex.

Mardi gras was first celebrated by the Creole people of New Orleans during the governorship of the Marquis De Vaudreuil. De Vaudreuil may have introduced the festival of Mardi gras to the Louisiana colony, but it was the Creole culture which nurtured it, refined it, and almost destroyed it. This chapter will examine the establishment of the city of New Orleans by the French, the leadership of the Marquis De Vaudreuil, the development of Mardi gras customs such as the tableaux and the parades, and, finally, the American influence on Mardi gras.

The city of New Orleans was founded by the younger brother of Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur D'Iberville, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur De Bienville. In 1718, nineteen years after the older Le Moyne made a campsite at Pointe Du Mardi Gras,

Bienville established a camp on the southern end of a great curve in the Mississippi. This point was where the river was closest to the placid waters of the Great Lake (later to be named Pontchartrain). Bienville's spot was an excellent choice for military and commercial reasons. A port at the Great Bend could command traffic into the Mississippi Valley. The Le Moynes were French Canadian explorers skilled in choosing and building towns to support and defend New France.

The town was named New Orleans to honor Philippe, Duc D'Orleans, Regent of France during the minority of Louis XV. The city was not originally intended as the capital of the Louisiana colony. That honor went to the city of Mobile, which was located farther East on a protected bay off the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Until the capital was moved to New Orleans, the small town on the Great curve of the Mississippi did not have the financial backing of the French Court. Bienville did manage to have the capital moved, and by 1721 he had the young engineer Adrien De Pauger plan and construct a new city. The City of New Orleans was designed as a grid following the first curve in the crescent course of the Mississippi. The city would be "4,000 feet long by 1,800 feet wide. It would be subdivided into 66 uniform squares, fronting on the river."[45] Bienville set aside a portion of the river front for a "church, a prison, a barracks, and a rectory."[46] (see map # 1) Today this area is referred to as the Vieux Carré.

The new city was protected from the annual flooding of the Mississippi by man-made banks known as levees. Since New Orleans is technically below sea level, De Pauger had to design a protective system of dikes to protect the city and also to drain the city. In spite of these dikes, New Orleans in its earliest day was characterized by its muddy streets and its poor drainage. To facilitate walking in the city, merchants and home owners constructed wooden sidewalks in front of their buildings. These banquettes made life outside more amenable.[47]

The New Orleans climate must have been appalling to the earliest French settlers. The area is subtropical with characteristic heat and precipitation, which undoubtedly added to the drainage problems. The area could best be described as swampy and disease-ridden.

As stated earlier, no records survive to inform us about the first formal celebration of Mardi gras in New Orleans. Historians of that period speculated that during the governorship of De Vaudreuil, Bienville's successor, celebrations were common during the pre-Lenten season. Mel Leavitt has argued that the "first Carnival Bal Masques (masked balls) were probably designed to spice up De Vaudreuil's continual whirl of ordinary balls or soirées."[48] Mississippi historian Adele Bielenberg also has conjectured that the balls started shortly after the actual founding of the city in 1718. The early celebrations were called Soirées

Du Roi or the King's Parties and were held in "private homes of the fashionable French settlers."[49] And Charles Gayarre noted that De Vaudreuil was "fond of pomp, show and pleasure; surrounded by a host of brilliant officers, of whom he was the idol, he loved to keep up a miniature court, in distant imitation of that of Versailles."[50]

The Marquis De Vaudreuil became governor in 1743 when Bienville stepped down. De Vaudreuil was to govern for ten years. The upper-class citizens of early New Orleans were enamored of socializing. Most of them had left the glitter of the French courts and the excitement of the Paris theatres for the swamps and mosquitoes of New Orleans. It seems natural that these early settlers would attempt to regain as much of the French glamor as possible and to superimpose it on the harsh realities of New Orleans. And for these settlers, the Marquis was the perfect leader. According to Laurraine Goreau, Louis XIV "is said to have issued a decree permitting Carnival frivolities in the colony without penalty of law."[51] De Vaudreuil's soirées fulfilled their needs for such revelry.

De Vaudreuil's tenure as governor was marked by his extravagant entertainments, especially those staged during the Carnival season. Because Carnival coincided with the pre-Lenten season, the early festivities were within the weather dictates of the New Orleans social scene, because even though Carnival occurs during later winter, and winter is the most

capricious of the Louisiana seasons, it is also the most comfortable.

As has been noted, it was at some point during the Marquis's governorship that Mardi gras was formally celebrated. Of course, one can only speculate when; the why seems obvious. A note must be made at this time about the use of the word Carnival. In New Orleans, the term Carnival like the term Mardi Gras, can refer to the entire season or to the specific Mardi Gras day. In that sense, the term is generic. The original French Mardi gras referred only to the specific day, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Mardi gras is deeply rooted in French custom. It is probable that De Vaudreuil used Mardi gras as an excuse for another ball. According to the legends of the city, this is how the French celebration was transported from France to New Orleans.

In 1762, after the tenure of De Vandreuil expired, Louis XV gave Louisiana to his cousin, Charles III of Spain, as part of a complicated arrangement that brought Spain into the Seven Years' War.[52] But it was not until 1769 that Spain formally took possession of the city. There is no evidence to indicate that the social precedents that De Vaudreuil set did not continue during the period of Spanish rule. The Spanish influence in New Orleans can best be seen in the architecture of the Vieux Carré. The Spanish saw the similarity of the New Orleans climate to that of the Iberian Peninsula. Consequently, the Spanish gave the city the

courtyards, covered walk-ways, arcades, and plazas of the great Spanish cities. This emphasis on outdoor living is important to this dissertation, because so much of the Mardi Gras revels are staged, or simply occur, in open-air places. The Spanish are partly responsible for bringing Carnival activities out of the ballrooms and theatres, and thus making the celebrations more available to the public. The French banquettes certainly made walking easier during the capricious, and often wet, winters; the Spanish covered walkways and balconies allowed the maskers easier access to participate in public revelry. Many of the earliest statements about Mardi gras maskers are references to "ballgoers in fancy dress going to and from both public and private bal masques."[53]

For the brief period of November 30 to December 20, 1803, the French flag flew again over New Orleans, as Spain retroceded the colony to Napoleon. But it was on December 20, 1803, that the United States of America took possession of all of the huge Louisiana territory, with the signing of the Louisiana Purchase documents in the Cabildo, the government administration building in the Vieux Carré. However, a more subtle Americanization of the city had begun earlier with the growth of the port of New Orleans and the subsequent trade with the United States and her colonies.

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, Creole, as used in New Orleans, refers to those persons

descended from the original French settlers. Even after Louisiana became a state, French was still the language of choice for the Vieux Carré and the adjacent faubourgs, or neighborhoods, where the Creoles lived. The original French settlers of New Orleans were not all from the elite class of French society. The wealthy merchants, the administrators, and the military officials were members of the French aristocracy. But New Orleans was also settled by convicts, miscreants, and indigents from France who were imported to perform the labor and provide support services for the colony. The descendants of all of these peoples claim the name Creole. But, in its earliest manifestations, Mardi gras in New Orleans was a product of the upper class. Later Mardi Gras becomes more democratic.

New Orleans has often been referred to as the first melting pot in the New World. In addition to the Creoles, the early settlement had a large contingent of Germans who were brought to the colony to act as laborers. The Germans settled outside of the city on what is called the "German coast." Today the city of Des'Allemands is home for many of the descendants of those settlers. There were also slaves from Africa and the Caribbean, and free-men-of-color who lived in the Vieux Carré. After statehood for Louisiana in 1812, settlers from different European and Asian nations settled in New Orleans. Except for the Creoles, and later the former slaves, the peoples of New Orleans have blended without

incident. The Creoles kept themselves separate. Mardi gras began within this group of mixed Creoles, but the early krewes were still elitist. This tendency toward classism still exists in the Mardi Gras. This phenomenon is one of the many fascinating dichotomies about Mardi Gras. The Carnival is essentially a very public yet private spectacle.

Since the Creoles began the Mardi gras tradition, they set many of the precedents which evolved into fixed traditional aspects of the present festival. The staging patterns of the balls, the mock royal court, masking, the religious aspects of Mardi gras--all of these are products of the Creole culture.

The Creole elite attended subscription balls. Invitation lists to these balls were very restricted and the price for admittance was high. These private balls were attended by Creole ladies and gentlemen. There were also public balls. Attendance at these was limited, by custom, to the Creole gentlemen. The women attending these balls were young women (both white and of mixed color, but fair complexioned) who were looking for assignations. These early public balls cleverly matched the Creole's penchant for disguise and liaisons. A particular kind of public ball was the infamous "Quadroon Ball," where young women of color (only 1/8 black) were put on exhibition for males of the white society. The purpose was for the Creole males to choose their mistresses.

By the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the balls were largely given over to dancing, which was a very popular social function in New Orleans. Many, but not all of these dances, were also masquerades. The masking served two purposes. First, masking was a popular form of entertainment for the Creoles, and the masking became increasingly popular during the season leading to Mardi gras. Second, masking facilitated the sexual promiscuity mentioned above. This masquerading often led to problems and frequently led to prohibitive legislation. Masquerades were discouraged during the years of Spanish rule. The Spanish, who took their Roman Catholicism more seriously, issued a series of edicts to control the masking. Not only was disguising being used for sexual peccadillos, but men and women of color were found to be slipping into the white public masquerade balls and mingling with the white maskers on the street. By law of the colony, mixing of the races was prohibited (although for Creole expediency, the law was often ignored or circumvented by the quadroons). When the Spanish edict to limit masquerades to only whites failed, the Spanish administration forbade masking entirely. This ruling lasted through the first two decades of American rule.

However, the Creoles were not to be changed on this issue. The masquerade balls were such an ingrained part of the Creole social scene, that the balls simply went underground; all of the balls became secret. The idea of

secrecy in the balls, organizations, and meetings carried over into the traditions of Mardi Gras. Even today, the membership of a krewe is kept secret, and even the real identity of Comus is never published.

By the late eighteenth century the balls had become too large to be staged in even the biggest of private homes. In 1790 La Salle Condé, a simple wooden structure, was built specifically for the staging of balls. In 1791 a troupe of actors from Santo Domingo established a permanent theatre in New Orleans. This group, headed by Tabary, established their theatre on St. Peter Street.[54] Drama, which had been introduced by De Vaudreuil with the production of The Indian Father in 1753,[55] became increasingly popular in New Orleans. By 1812 a new theatre was built on St. Philip Street. This theatre became the home of the drama as well as the popular masquerade balls. As many as two balls a week were staged there.[56]

Mardi gras celebrations and legitimate theatre have had a healthy relationship since the days of the St. Philip Theatre. Goreau noted that during the eighteenth century, the "balls began with a theatrical presentation followed by dancing and supper."[57] This pattern was continued by Comus and Rex. Chapter 4 and 6 will deal in detail with the theatrical presentations of these krewes.

John S. Kendall raised an interesting question early in his treatment of the history of the English drama in New

Orleans when he noted on his first page that "New Orleans came into being in 1718. How its population survived the first three-quarters of a century of its history without a theatre is difficult to say."[58] If the Mardi gras celebration and all of the revels of the Carnival season are viewed as forms of theatre, the question is easily answered. Kendall is in error because his approach was to judge an era based upon the excellence of its drama, specifically English drama. But as Brockett noted, this approach is distorted, "for it suggests that 'popular culture' is insignificant. Yet the entertainments of the masses are more apt to represent the norm of the age than is the elitist art of 'high culture.'"[59] From the time of De Vaudreuil's governorship, the citizens did indeed have a great deal of mass entertainment, for even though Mardi gras was elitist, the Carnival, as popular culture, reflected the norms of Creole society.

It is an essential contention of this dissertation that the rich, cultural traditions which characterize the unique nature of the City of New Orleans were developed and nurtured in large part by the interactions of its people during the Carnival event and by their preparation for and participation in Mardi Gras. Another important proposal of this paper is that the Carnival process is theatre. Mardi Gras--which contains such theatrical elements as scenery, lighting, music, dance, actors, narrative, and costumes--can be traced back in history for thousands of years. T h e

street masking and the masquerade balls continued to be popular during the 1820s and 1830s. The focus of the Mardi gras celebration was to change with the development of the parades. Prior to 1827, any parading that occurred was actually a series of spontaneous processions through the streets of the Vieux Carré. Historians usually cite 1827 as the year of the first parade. During that particular Carnival a group of young Creole men, at home from their studies in Paris, organized themselves into a costumed marching group. The author of New Orleans Masquerade cited 1827 as the "first year in which Mardi Gras may be said to have been celebrated to a considerable extent in New Orleans." The young Creoles "dressed in fantastic garb, blowing horns and whistles, ringing cowbells, beating dish pans and singing, paraded around the French Quarter."[60]

The open-air celebrations gained in popularity during the 1830s. But these celebrations were for the most part spontaneous, not the organized parades seen today. Apparently, even at this early date there were floats in the parades. One eye witness was Colonel James R. Creecy who wrote of the 1835 procession:

> **Human bodies are seen with the heads of beasts and birds, semi-beasts, man bats from the moon; mermaids, satyrs, beggars, monks and robbers parade and march on foot, on horseback, in wagons, carts, coaches, cars, et cetera in much confusion up and down the streets, wildly shouting, singing, laughing, drumming, fiddling, filing and all throwing flour broadcast.**
>
> **One large nondescript car drawn by 4 horses uniquely caparisoned and draped with fiery**

> dragons, scorpions, et cetera was the moving prison of the devil chained securely--horns, tail and all--blowing from his mouth flames of fire and sulphur--surrounded by imps and devils whooping, yelling and gibbering.[61]

One can see from this description that as early as 1835, the public promenades made use of floats with thematic presentations. The flour broadcast made reference to in the description is an early example of what today are called "throws." During the nineteenth century, small bags of cloth were filled with flour and loosely tied. These were tossed to people watching the parade. The bag would break open on impact and cover the observer with flour.

The Picayune's description of the 1839 Mardi gras is as follows:

> Of all the outlandish Mardi Gras turnouts, the one that graced the city took the lead. It was longer, broader, further through and larger round than any procession preceding it in the goodly city, and occasioned an excitement and drew together a crowd of people such as had never before congregated in New Orleans. By half-past three every window, balcony, stoop, and doorway in Royal Street was filled.
>
> About four, the grand procession with banners on fish poles, "morus multicoulis" (Chinese mulberry) trees, badges and music took up the line of march. Everyone had an instrument adapted to his fancy, and played such tunes as come first in this head, or no tune at all. Some rode in splendid barouches, some on drays; some were mounted on splendidly caparisoned Arabians, others on surly-looking, dogged donkeys. There were heathen and Christians, Turks and kangaroos, ancient Greeks and modern Choctaws, friars and beggars, knights and princesses, hard-favored one at that; polar bears and chicken cocks.
>
> The grand squad moved up St. Charles to Julia and then down Camp to Chartres Street. It was understood their intention was to join in the

masquerading scene of Gustavus III which was performed in the evening at the Theatre D'Orleans.[62]

This passage is interesting because of the variety of costumes that are mentioned and because of the detailing of the parade route. As the City of New Orleans grew out of the original French Quarter, parade routes were expanded and then fixed. Today the various parades follow such a prescribed route. This is due to custom, expediency, and local law. No parades currently move through the Vieux Carré. In the 1970s, the New Orleans City Council forbade [such] parading in the Vieux Carré for two reasons. One of these was crowd control; the streets of the French Quarter are too small to hold the thousands that crowd the area to see the parades. The second reason is the size of modern floats. The streets of the French Quarter are so narrow that the large modern floats cannot negotiate the corners.

The parade of 1840 was sponsored by the Theatre D'Orleans. Not only was this the first parade to make extensive use of floats, but maskers in the 1840 parade were interested in female impersonation. From the Picayune: "Many of them (the maskers) were dressed in female attire and acted the lady with no small degree of grace."[63] The maskers were so effective that rumor spread through the crowd that ladies were participating in the parade. By custom, Creole ladies could not participate in such rambunctious revels; their role in Mardi gras was confined to the private balls.

The 1840 parade was planned to end its march at the Theatre D'Orleans during the finale of Gustave III, or Le Bal Masque by Auber. The parade marchers entered the theatre and ascended the stage to join the cast in the finale. This innovation was so successful that it was repeated for many years.

The patterns set by 1840 continued as such until the organization of the Krewe of Comus. Each of the years between 1840 and 1857 added something new to the proceedings. For example, each year the parades became more elaborate. In 1841 the Bedouins, a marching group of some 300 to 400 prominent citizens, led the parade through the streets and onto the stage for the finale of Gustave III, or Le Bal Masque, the production of which had became an annual event. Marching groups, like the Bedouins, participate in Mardi Gras today. Tradition decrees that these marchers mask as Arabs, with flowing robes and elaborate head-pieces.

Mardi gras celebrations during this period were sometimes dangerous. Since there was such a high degree of spontaneity surrounding the proceedings, it is easy to see how some of the revels could turn into pranks. Not only flour flew, but also bags of dust, lime, and even bricks. The City Council was forced to pass restrictive measures in 1846 to curb this threat of violence. Today, the Code of the City of New Orleans clearly spells out what one can and cannot do during Mardi Gras.

It is important to remember that during this time the festivities of Mardi Gras were almost exclusively Creole; New Orleanians of other than French descent acted as spectators. It was not until the formation of the Mistick Krewe of Comus that Mardi Gras became a structured event.

Mardi gras from 1852-57 was in disarray. A massive yellow fever epidemic hit New Orleans in 1853; the city administration was mired in corruption; gangs virtually ruled the streets; the police were demoralized. In addition, New Orleans was hit by a series of harsh winters. It is clear that during this period physical and social conditions were not conducive to the revels of Mardi gras. The press, which had so often described the revels in glowing rhetoric, now assailed them. According to the Delta: "Mardi Gras has become vulgar, tasteless, and spiritless"; L'Union: "Each year Mardi Gras loses its gaiety"; the Crescent: "We hope we have seen the last of Mardi Gras."[64]

The Cowbellions, who first appeared in New Orleans in 1852, took command of the situation during 1856 and changed the negative tide. The chaotic Mardi gras of 1856 could have marked the end of the celebration, but the young men from Mobile changed the climate of disarray and hooliganism into the Mardi Gras that is seen today. It is time now to discuss the Cowbellion de Rakin Society.

Tradition has it that the Cowbellions were organized on New Year's Eve, 1830, in Mobile, Alabama. Tassin and Stall

in their book, Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New, gave the following account of the story:

> **This group, as the story goes, was organized after a wild party held in Mobile on New Year's Eve 1830. It seems a group of the city's young men were quite inebriated by sunrise on New Year's Day. On their way home, they went past a mercantile store that (as was customary at the time) had some of its wares on the sidewalk out front. The young bacchanals, full of liquid reinforcement and mischief, picked up rakes, shovels, and cowbells and proceeded to raise forty kinds of hell up and down the streets.**
>
> **They soon found themselves in front of the mayor's home a few blocks away. Being not only a good politician but a master of diplomacy as well, the mayor invited the young men into his home, where he offered them breakfast and strong, black coffee to help the sobering process. He seized up Michael Krafft as the leader of the group and suggested that Krafft organize some form of entertainment the following year for the benefit of all of the citizens of Mobile--in exchange for not being thrown into jail.**[65]

Krafft and his group formed the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. The name was chosen because of the implements used in their spontaneous celebration and because of the parody in the created word (cowbellion, cow bell, rhymes with hellion) and in the spelling "rakin." The next year, keeping to their agreement, the Cowbellions marched in costume, with cowbells and rakes. This New Year's Eve celebration grew in size and ambition. By 1840, the members had added torchlights and floats. They followed their parade with a ball and a tableau vivant.

By 1850 several members of the Cowbellions had settled in New Orleans, and in 1852 the group took part in the Mardi gras parade as the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. The Cowbellions, who were not Creoles, decided in 1856 to organize a parade similar to their parades in Mobile. They wanted to impose order on the revels which that year had become quite disorganized. By 1857 their membership had grown to eighty-three and the organization changed its name to the Mistick Krewe of Comus.

In summary, it is important to note that Mardi gras traditions began in New orleans with the Marquis De Vaudreuil; that Mardi gras was a Creole celebration; that masking, dancing, and parading were important to the Creole spirit: that Mardi gras involved the use of elaborate costumes, impersonation, and procession; that there developed a noisy, festive, communal ritual incorporating performers and spectators in a celebration; that the Creole masked balls, especially those held during the Carnival, enjoyed a healthy relationship with the legitimate theatre; and, that by 1856, Mardi gras had become too wild and had degenerated into a social activity that was chaotic, illegal, and dangerous.

Chapter 4

FORMATION OF THE MISTICK KREWE OF COMUS

As noted in chapter 3, the Mistick Krewe of Comus was founded by some of the original members of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. Their motive for the organization of a club devoted to the preservation and presentation of Mardi Gras seems obvious. Prior to 1857, the Mardi Gras celebrations had fallen into disarray. Incidents of law-breaking and injury were numerous. The pre-Lenten festivities which were such a part of the Creole spirit of the city were in such ill repute that their continuation was not certain.

It was at this crucial period that the non-Creole membership of the Cowbellions decided to act. Their New Year's Eve celebration, which began as a drunken act, had become the highlight of the Mobile cultural season. As Perry Young noted, "they reached the conclusion that the Mardi Gras of New Orleans could be revived and made respectable by introduction of such an order as celebrated the New Year's Eve in Mobile."[66]

Understanding the nature, composition, and motivations of the Cowbellions is important to understanding the Krewe of Comus. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will examine the backgrounds of those men who shifted from Cowbellions to Comus. This discussion will be followed by an analysis of the

presentations of Comus during its first five years.

The Cowbellions were citizens of Mobile, Alabama, a city even older than New Orleans. Mobile began its existence as a fort (one of several) founded by Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur de Iberville, and named "Louis de Mobile;" its present day location is near Dauphin Island. The town of Mobile was founded a short time later at the upper end of the great bay which Dauphin Island protected. Mobile became the first capital of the Louisiana colony.

The early settlers of Mobile descended from the same stock as the Creoles of New Orleans. Contemporary Mobilians argue that Mardi Gras appeared in their city before making its appearance in New Orleans. Along with speculation regarding the influence of The Marquis De Vaudreuil, granting Mobile this distinction would be mere conjecture. Mobile did have the "Spanish Mystic Society" as early as 1793. This group paraded in costume on Twelfth Night. And, of course, Mobile accepted the American influence with greater calm, for the history of Mobile is not peppered with the cultural clashes that illustrate the history of New Orleans.

Michael Krafft, founder of the Cowbellions, was a Pennsylvanian who moved to Mobile in his youth. During his years there (prior to 1830), the Spanish Mystick Society continued their parades on Twelfth Night, and the Mardi gras boeuf gras was celebrated. It can be assumed that Krafft saw these presentations. Krafft and his friends had organized

themselves as "The Revellers" prior to the incident which led to the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. The membership included Thomas Niles, Denry Daggett, Robert Roberts, Richard Corrie, Nathaniel Leonard, Samuel Kipp and Michael Krafft.[67] For ten years the Cowbellions paraded in Mobile, usually on foot. In 1840, their parade was completely on wagons and had as it theme, "Heathen Gods and Goddesses." Young noted that they "followed [this parade] by theatrical tableaux and a ball at the Alhambra Hall, and the fame of this celebration spread throughout the country."[68]

By the 1850, several members of the Cowbellions had settled in New Orleans. As noted in chapter 2, these members decided to form an organization to stage a parade and a ball, and in late 1856 six of them met at Dr. Pope's drug store and formulated such a plan. By February of the next year their membership had grown to eighty-three and at the suggestion of Dr. J. H. Pope, the society became The Mistick Krewe of Comus.[69] Of the original eighty-three members, only six had French names,[70] hence the assumption that this new organization was not restricted exclusively to Creoles.[71]

There is a great deal of parody in the official title, Mistick Krewe of Comus. According to mythology, Comus, the son of Bacchus and Circe, was the god of revelry. The word mystic is defined in Webster's Third New International Dictionary as "(2a) of or relating to ancient mysteries," and "(5) secret, hidden, covert, disguised."[72]

These two definitions seem very appropriate to the Krewe of Comus. Comus is a secret society; the identity of the man chosen to portray Comus is hidden from the public; the membership appears at public functions (balls and parades) in disguise. The spelling of the key word as "mistick" conveys mock-antiquity. This organization is designed to take fun seriously. If the work "krewe" appears in a dictionary, its definition relates to the Mardi Gras organizations. In their book on Bacchus, Tassin and Stall posit that "by calling the group a 'krewe' instead of a 'crew'... a semblance of Greek influence"[73] would be presented. In addition, both mistick and krewe are Anglicized versions of the French. Thus was the Mistick Krewe of Comus born.

At this meeting on February 8, Charles M. Churchill was chosen captain. The captain of a krewe is responsible for the staging of the parade and ball. The captain is the most powerful member of a krewe. Joseph Ellison was appointed chairman of the dress committee. Since Mardi Gras of 1857 fell on February 24, there was not enough time to build costumes for the celebration. Ellison was dispatched to Mobile to secure costumes from the Cowbellions, which would pictorialize the theme chosen by the members. The theme, "The Demon Actors in Milton's Paradise Lost," was somewhat expedient for the Cowbellions had chosen "Pandemonium Unveiled" as their theme. Thus, double use would be made of the clothing.

1857

What did the Krewe of Comus do in their first year that was so different from the Mardi gras celebrations of previous years? The answer to this question is organization. By 1856 the revels of Mardi Gras had gotten so out of hand that the "toughs, masked or otherwise, ruled the day. Instead of the customary flour, they threw lime and bricks. The newspapers implied that it wasn't safe to be on the streets."[74] Options for the city fathers were few; they could pass legislation against masking or they could use police to control the revelers. The first of these options had been tried, unsuccessfully, a number of times. The Creole spirit was not to be controlled by law. The New Orleans police were hard pressed to control the crowds of revelers because there were no laws against revelry. What the Comus organization accomplished was to establish citizen control over what had previously been a spontaneous celebration.

There is no mention in the local press of the emergence of Comus prior to the debut on the evening of February 24, 1857. But the chroniclers of Mardi Gras referred to in this dissertation agree that rumors of Comus were circulated throughout the city prior to Mardi Gras day.

The Comus festivities were divided into two parts. First, the parade was produced to pass through the American sector; second, the tableaux were staged at the Gaiety

Theatre. Parades prior to Comus followed a route through the French Quarter, crossed Canal Street, and ended at one of the many theatres. Comus began its parade at the corner of Julia and Magazine Streets, well above Canal Street. (See map #2.) Comus then moved down Magazine to Theatre Alley and through the stage doors of the Gaiety. The theme, as stated earlier, was "The Demon Actors in Milton's Paradise Lost." The parade consisted of two floats. The first depicted Comus, god of mirth and revelry. The second featured Satan atop his Palace of Lucifer. The parade, which was lit by flambeaux carried by young black men, also featured maskers on foot. Costumed as devils of all varieties, these maskers were positioned in front of, between, and at the rear of the floats.

Apparently, the parade appeared suddenly. Comus had a secret club-house at Magazine and Julia; at the stroke of nine the krewe open the doors and rushed onto the street. The members of Comus had spread rumors throughout the city that such an event was to take place, and there was a large and enthusiastic crowd awaiting the parade. "Flying rumors had been circulated that Mardi Gras night would be insidiously invaded by a horde of demons in human shape inspirited by up and stirring citizens of the American continent."[75]

Press coverage of this first appearance of Comus was limited to the English-language papers; the Creole press ignored the new organization. Coverage in the American papers was lavish in its praise. It is important to keep in mind

the cultural feuding that divided New Orleans during the period. As can be seen on Map #2, the city was literally bisected by Canal Street. The area below Canal was distinctly Creole. The original city (the French Quarter or Vieux Carré), and the surrounding neighborhoods (called faubourgs in New Orleans) had French street names and were serviced by a French daily newspaper. The area above Canal, the American sector, was the area of commerce and industry. Canal Street acted as a dividing line; the center of the street was designated as "neutral ground." That name is still used in New Orleans today for any street median. It is no wonder that the French press ignored Comus and that the American press praised the group. Coverage by the Daily Crescent is indicative of the contemporary reportage.

> **After going through the principal streets, to the great astonishment and admiration of the outsiders, and calling upon Mayor Waterman--for the purpose, we suppose, of obtaining a license to "raise the supernatural" in the Gaiety Theatre, they proceeded to that elegant establishment in order to entertain the host of guests they had summoned.**[76]

It is unfortunate that coverage of early Mardi Gras is often presented in the same sense of fun and parody that was the spirit of the season. As in the Daily Crescent piece cited above, we are given more fanciful editorializing than reporting. The line "to 'raise the supernatural'," only points out that the newspapers were engaged in the same sort of frivolity as the members of Comus. Because of the style

of the coverage and because of the feuding, there is little actual description of this first parade.

Although the parade was a public event, the focus of the Krewe of Comus was in the staging of their tableaux at the Gaiety. This event was by invitation only. This distinction, a public spectacle with the parade and a private spectacle with the tableaux and ball, is still the normal arrangement for the krewes of New Orleans.

The coverage by the press of this first Comus ball was similar to the coverage of the parade. The American press was magnanimous in their praise; the Creole press was desultory. The Daily Delta, one of the leading Creole papers, had this to say of Comus:

> **When night came on matters were not mended by the Mistick Krewe of Comus, each man habited rather as a "goblin damned" than a human being, perambulating the leading thoroughfares with torches. They went their way to the Gaiety Theatre, and there gave a series of infernal tableaux, more startling than pleasing. Pandemonium seemed the natural home of every one of them, and we doubt not that our surmise will be verified in the course of time. Then came the ball, in which devils and citizens strangely commingled, and thus the time wore away.**[77]

The Daily Crescent, on the other hand, gave good descriptive coverage of the events at the Gaiety:

> **In due time the Mistick Krewe appeared on the stage, in the full glare of the lights. If we may so speak, they were beautiful in their ugliness--charming in their repulsiveness. Such masks were never seen in New Orleans before. There were upward of a hundred of them, and no two alike, whilst all were grotesque to the last degree. As may be**

> inferred they represented the different characters with which religion, mythology and poesy have peopled the Infernal Regions, and which Milton has aggregated in his "Paradise Lost."
>
> Four tableaux were given. The first represented Tartarus. The characters in this scene were Plato and Proserpine, presiding over the three Fates, Clotho, Lachesis, and Aropos; the three Fairies, Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone; the three Harpies, Aello, Ocypete, and Celaeno; the three Gorgons, Medusa, Stheno, and Euryale; with Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus, Minotaur, Cerberus, Charon, and Chimera. All being arranged in classic attitudes, they were beautiful to behold.
>
> The second tableau was The Expulsion. In this were represented, Satan, Beelzebub, Moloch, Dagon, Belial, Isis, Osiris, Mammon, and a host of other infernals. The third tableau represented The Conference of Satan and Beelzebub. The fourth and last represented Pande-monium. This was a most magnificent spectacle, in which the passions of Gluttony, Drunkedness, Indolence, Avarice, Murder, Vanity, Theft, Discord, Licentiousness, and Jealousy, were personated, all being presided over by Satan, and flanked in by Sin and Death.
>
> The different tableaux were arranged in accordance with description in Milton's immortal poem, and they were acted out truly and successfully in a manner which reflected the highest credit upon the public taste and judgement of the gentlemen comprising the "Mistick Krewe of Comus." It is needless to say that these representations, being somewhat new in New Orleans, afforded the highest pleasure in the audience--a pleasure which was manifested in the highest and most unmistakable manner.[78]

Perry Young described the conclusion of the pageant in the following passage from The Mistick Krewe:

> After the fourth curtain there was a brief interval of music by Mr. Meyer's orchestra, as between each of the tableaux, and a fifth scene then disclosed the stage entirely cleared and brightly illuminated. At the back was a great arch of gas-jets, displaying in letters of fire

the words, "Vive la danse!" The Mistick Krewe filed in and marched around the great floor which extended over the entire parquette, and the signal was given for the dance.[79]

It would be best here to discuss theatrical conventions of New Orleans in 1867, so that we can put the descriptions offered above into a theatre context. To understand the exact nature of what transpired on the stage, one can look to Kendall's discussion of the Gaiety Theatre.

The Gaiety replaced the Varieties Theatre on Gravier Street after a fire. The first manager of the Gaiety was Dion Boucicault. It was a brick building, four stories high. The ground floor was a clubroom; the auditorium was on the floor above. Kendall noted that the public announcements for the opening of the Gaiety proclaimed that the theatre was to be "a theatre devoted entirely to comedy and the fine arts, where the style of the performances should always be of the first order, and the actors of the first class."[80] Kendall also noted that under Boucicault's leadership the Gaiety was "a memorable failure."[81]

Boucicault was succeeded in 1856 by W. H. Crisp. Crisp had great success with his importation of the actress Matilda Heron in such plays as The Hunchback and Camille. Miss Heron, the Irish actress who introduced the French style of acting to the American stage, proved so successfull for the Gaiety, that in Crisp's second year of management, the name became the Crisp Gaiety. During the interum summer, Crisp

had remodeled the interior of the theatre, replacing the upholstered seats with cane seats, so that 2,000 spectators could fit into the auditorium.

Spectacle, opera, tableaux vivants, drama, and comedy were all staged, at the Gaiety. New Orleanians proved their love for theatre during the middle of the nineteenth century. Kendall, in The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre, detailed the success of the many theatres built in New Orleans during this century. In this study, the link that Mardi Gras has had with the legitimate theatres of New Orleans has been established. It is easy to see why the Krewe of Comus choose the Gaiety as the site for its inaugural ball. The Gaiety had developed a reputation for its elaborate tableaux vivants, or "show pieces," as Kendall called them.

1858

The Mardi Gras of 1857 was successful in restoring the spirit of the festival. After the debut of Comus, thirty-eight new members applied to the krewe for acceptance. Among these new members were several Creole names. Although the Creole press had largely ignored Comus, the Creole population were charmed by the spectacle and moved toward cooperation with the Americans. By June 1857 the members of the krewe decided to organize a closed social club, a public arm of the secret krewe. This is the genesis of the Pickwick Club, the

first of many such organizations that are the public personas of the private carnival organizations. The Pickwick Club allowed the myth of the Krewe of Comus to continue. The membership wanted to continue the mysterious aspects of the krewe.

Charles Churchill, captain of Comus, was elected president of the Pickwick Club, which had a meeting place on St. Charles Avenue near Canal Street.[82] The first and second floors of his building were given over to the functions of the Pickwick Club; the third floor was the secret abode of Comus.

Soon after the formation of the Pickwick Club, elections were held for officials for the carnival season of 1858. Colonel A. H. Gladden was elected president and Captain Joseph Ellison was named captain of the krewe.

The success of the 1857 Comus parade and ball was so great that the Mardi Gras season of 1858 saw a number of mask and fancy dress balls. Masquerades were staged at both the Theatre de l'Opera and the Orleans Theatre. Apparently spurred on by the opulent stagings of Comus, the Young Men's Society staged the "Celestial Empire Club." But it was Comus that the populace awaited.

Thirty floats, or tableaux roulants, bearing the Gods and Divinities of Olympus, greeted the waiting citizens. Interspersed between the floats were marching bands and the whole parade was lit by flambeaux. The theme for the parade was "The Classic Pantheon" and the presentation was so

successful that The Daily Crescent called it "the greatest affair of this kind ever got up in the city."[83]

The first float depicted the god Comus. His car was followed by that of Momus, the god of mirth. In succession came Janus and the Four Seasons, Flora, Ceres, Bacchus, Silenus, Diana, the Nine Muses, Vesta, Destiny, Cybele, Jupiter, Juno, Iris, Argus, Venus, Aurora, Apollo, Atlas, Hercules, Mars, Minerva, Night, and other characters from Greek and Roman mythology. From the descriptions in the press it appears that each float was carriage-like with appropriate animals or denizens of mythology pulling the carriage. All of these representations were mounted on a wagon pulled by horses, as was the custom during this period. For example, Flora sat in a flower-bedecked carriage pulled by butterflies; Minerva's car was drawn by owls; Juno's, by peacocks; Venus', by swans.

The Daily Crescent gave two full columns in the February 17, 1858, edition to describing the pageantry.

> **The Krewe assembled at Lafayette Square at 9 O'clock, with torchlights and music. Then they were met by his honor the Mayor--Mr. Waterman--and after obtaining permission from that gentleman to raise a festive excitement in his goodly city then took him prisoner and started off in procession--the streets as we have already stated being crowded with eager multitudes throughout the line of march.**[84]

As in the previous year, the parade marched through the American sector, ending at the rear door of the Crisp Gaiety (very soon to be renamed the Varieties Theatre). It

is unclear from the available documentation just how the participants got into the theatre. But the subsequent tableaux made use of the scenery on the various floats. Young notes that the tableaux made use of "their dismounted scenery and mythological paraphernalia."[85]

> **The theatre was brilliantly decorated for the occasion and a floor laid over the parquette as a continuation of the stage for the festivities of the night....**
>
> **Before the tableaux commenced the theatre was jammed in every conceivable place, the multitude comprising the elite of our city and visitors from all parts of the country, and the dressing circle resplendant with the fair faces and costumes of the ladies....**
>
> **At the proper hour the curtain rose and the Mistick Krewe presented themselves in their first talbeau. Three other tableaux were given; and it would be a waste of words to say more than that they were tasteful in the highest degree, and indescribably beautiful.**[86]

The parade was preceded by a lighted transparency on which the following was printed:

> **Marry, but you travelers**
> **May journey far and not look on this again. Here**
> **You do behold the gods and goddesses; presently**
> **you shall see them unfold themselves.**[87]

The above was also printed in the program for the ball.

The first tableau was entitled "Minerva's Victory." Participating in this were the characters of Ganymede, Jupiter, Juno, Iris, Venus, Cupid, Hera, Diana, Ceres, Vesta, Pluto, Minerva, Neptune, Bacchus, Mars, and the Muses. There was no dialogue for this or any of these tableaux vivants. Instead, the appropriate passage (original or from poetry) was

printed in the program. The performers in the tableau would march about the stage with musical accompaniment. They would form themselves into a stage picture which was the embodiment of the passage in the program. Unfortunately, programs from this early Mardi Gras period are scarce. The press, especially The Daily Crescent, would often print some or all of the program notes.

This kind of presentation is what most krewes stage at their balls. In the late twentieth century, organizations such as the Krewe of Bacchus and the Bards of Bohemia have added live entertainment to their balls. Some krewes use members for entertainment; others hire professional performers. But during the nineteenth century, the stage-pictures were normally presented by krewes such as Comus and Rex.

The second tableau was entitled "The Victory of Time." According to the program, as cited in The Daily Crescent, Aurora appeared as the audience read, "See morning peep from beneath the shadow hills; kissing the dew from off the lips of Night." At this point the figure of Apollo entered, as the audience read the appropriate printed dialogue. Also in this tableau were the characters of Nox, Castor, Destiny, and Time. The point of the stage-picture was the visualization of Day gaining victory over Night, the immortal competition of darkness and light with the progression of time determining the everchanging victor.

The third tableau concerned the relationship of the various deities who controlled mirth, revelry, and the attendant vices. Bacchus, Silenus, Momus, Comus, Flora, and Pan figured prominently in this picture:

> **Round about his group of Satyrs**
> **Bearing Cymbals, Flutes and Thyrses,**
> **With mad leaps and wanton capers,**
> **Madly sing delicious verses.**[88]

The final tableau was the procession of the entire krewe. The performers in the tableau came off the stage and into the audience. As has already been noted, Crisp had replaced the permanent seating in the auditorium with cane seats, allowing a more flexible arrangement. The krewe members moved through the crowd and encouraged dancing on the enlarged stage of the auditorium.

The cost for the first two years was $30,000. In 1929, the Pickwick Club printed a pamphlet "Reminiscences of the First Balls," in which the cost of 1858's pageantry is noted: "The Krewe spent only $10,000 on their first display, but that $20,000 was expended on the heathen gods."[89]

1859

The success of 1857 and 1858 made Comus the true reigning god of Mardi Gras 1859. Young estimates that 20,000 maskers participated in the activities of the day and evening.[90] By 1859 the Krewe of Comus was so well established

in both the American and Creole sectors of the city, that the route of the parade was changed to accommodate both regions. The Daily Delta noted in the coverage of Comus that their den was on Orleans; this clearly shows how much the Creoles had accepted the American group.

The date was March 8; the theme was "The English Holidays." The new parade route moved toward the Mississippi River on Orleans Street to Royal, proceeded up Royal across Canal and onto St. Charles Avenue (Royal Street becomes St. Charles at Canal). The progress was then up St. Charles to Lafayette Square, through the Square to Camp, up Camp to Julia, Julia to Carondelet, down Carondelet to Gravier and then to the Varieties Theatre. As in previous years, lighted transparencies were used to introduce the title for each float. Illumination was again produced by flambeaux carried by young black men.

According to The Daily Delta, the procession was led by a "knight mounted on a white steed, followed immediately by an ensign, bearing a transparency with the words 'Twelfth Night.'"[91] This was followed by a float carrying the "Lord of Misrule" and the "Abbot of Unreason." Their eminences were followed by maskers on foot depicting various games of chance. Ending the presentation of the first of the English holidays was a masker disguised as an enormous cake:

> **Next in order came the "May Day," headed by Jack in Green, Tom the Piper, and the Tabor man performing upon three different instruments. The Hobby Horse attracted great attention and applause--from the children:**

> **the Morris dancers followed, followed by Robin Hood and Friar Tuck, guarding the fair maid Marian, portrayed to the life.**
>
> **The third division of the procession, of which we had a better view, was the "Midsummer Eve." First in order were the characters of St. George and the Dragon. The figures of Gog and Magog were the observed of all the observers, and by their antics created a great deal of merriment. Then came the faeries of the court, surrounding the Queen. The character of Titania was well sustained, and for some time we could not but believe that our eyes were fixed upon some lovely female, so captivating did it appear.**[92]

The fourth part of the parade was dedicated to Christmas. Marchers included the Christmas Tree, Papa Noel and Peiper Heidseick. There is no evidence available to indicate just how many floats were used in this parade. Even A. B. LaCour, who is so precise in his listing of themes and costumes, only notes that "the parade was a combination of floats and maskers."[93]

The Daily Crescent noted that the procession halted at City Hall (the site of Gallier Hall on St. Charles Avenue), and the maskers went inside to toast the Mayor. This appears to be the beginning of the tradition of the Mayoral Toast that is still part of contemporary Mardi Gras. In the two previous years of Comus, the Mayor was involved, at some point, but here one can see the formal beginning of the official toasting at City Hall.

The ball was held at the Varieties Theatre. Comus had always held their balls by invitation only. Since the krewe was a "secret" organization, tickets were hard to obtain.

This intense secrecy was, no doubt, one of the reasons for the huge success of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. The following passage from the previously cited "Reminiscences of the First Balls of the Mistick Krewe of Comus" addresses this secrecy:

> **Third Advent: May 8, 1859--A beautiful day, sunlight and warm. I am in my carnival costume, it's a hey day for us all to enjoy, everybody is making the most of it, all the balls that night were jammed, and the crown of all is the coming "Mystick [sic] Krewe of Comus" tonight.**
>
> **The mysterious preparations have excited everyone's curiosity, oweing to a few who penetrated into the last ball. It is difficult to get invitations to the dance, every one has to be certified to, by a member, and many of the fair ladies are asking their lords to "join the Krewe" as as to command invitations, and many have been rejected today, it being a day of culling.**[94]

As in the previous year, four tableaux were presented on the stage of the Varieties. The stage was again extended by flooring over the parquet. Descriptions of the tableaux and any notice of the commentary in the program was not covered in the press that year.

1860

The Mardi Gras celebration of February 21, 1860, almost did not take place. A winter rainstorm with gale-force winds hit the city during the mid-day. There was flooding in the Vieux Carré and the American sector. Those maskers who had appeared early in the day were forced indoors. But as suddenly as the storm began, it ended. By mid-afternoon, the

streets were filled with revelers.

The parade of The Mistick Krewe of Comus began at 9:00 P.M., and it followed the same route as the parade of 1859. The theme for the parade, and for the tableaux at the Varieties, was "The History of America." The fifteen floats of this parade were perhaps the most ambitious of Comus' efforts.

The first item in the parade was a transparency depicting the image of Comus and the official title of the procession: "Statues of the Great men of Our Country."[95] This was followed by the fifteen floats and interspersed marching units. Perry Young noted that "each [float was] so fashioned as to represent a block of granite, and each containing a group of living statues, representing the famous historic persons of our country." Apparently the masks were very life-like. The Crescent noted that "the masks were all made to represent the features of the originals, and were very faithful, particularly those of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster."[96] Each float contained a number of such "living statues," who were krewe members in costume.

In addition to the fifteen floats, there were marching groups who complemented the figures on the wagons. All of the participants in the parade were clothed in white to resemble marble statues. Even the flambeaux carriers were clothed in white, and the horses pulling the floats were covered with white. Bands were interspersed through the

procession to provide music.

Clay, Calhoun, and Webster were joined in the column by the likes of Jackson, Columbus, Cabot, Ponce de Leon, Bienville, Hudson, national heroes of the Revolution and local heroes of the war of 1812. These were followed by groups of marchers as American Indians, Pilgrims, and Revolutionary War soldiers. But, interestingly, the characters who led the white-clad horses, were the traditional Arabian characters of Mardi Gras.

From the contemporary descriptions it can be seen that the maskers on the floats remained motionless throughout the course of the parade. Each float was made to resemble a marble base with the various statuary above. Each krewe member stayed still as the procession moved through the streets. This effect created is markedly different from the parade participation of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In these later parades, the maskers on floats are very animated.

At the Varieties Theatre, ten tableaux were staged. The pattern that had been established in the previous years was again followed in 1860. The parade route ended at the stage door on Theatre Alley. Maskers on floats dismounted and joined maskers on foot on the stage of the Varieties. The first nine of the tableaux illustrated some important event in the history of America. There was not as much descriptive coverage of the tableaux in the press; to gain some picture

of the 1860 ball, we must turn instead to Perry Young. Even Young, who called this parade and ball the "greatest of Comus pageants,"[97] is negligent in his description of the first nine tableaux. He does note that they were "illuminated by colored gas-light effects."[98] One can only speculate as to what those lighting effects were. As was discussed earlier, the krewe was capable of spelling out their name in gas jet flames.

The tenth tableaux was an ensemble effort which took the form of a triumphal march. "The characters marched across the center of the platform to the dress circle, separated in two lines, and marched back around the margin of the dancing floor. . .forming a circle around the theatre."[99] To carry out the all-white theme, the dance floor of the theatre was covered in white canvas. "Pedestals representing blocks of marble were in position [around the theatre], and at the Captain's signal each masker mounted one of these, and for several minutes all stood thus, in the attitudes of sculptured marble."[100] At this point in the procedure, "colored calcium lights successively threw the stone characters in beautiful relief."[101]

Perry Young and the writers in The Crescent and The Picayune all noted the faithful representations of the living statues. The Picayune even noted that the copy of the equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson was "perfection."[102] But The Daily Delta, in its coverage of the Mardi Gras of 1861, made the following reference to these living statues: "Then

they were statuesque representations of the fathers and great statesmen of the country, with supernaturally large heads and disproportionate lower extremities."[103] The Daily Delta description would suggest a lampoon of the historical characters, a somewhat political statement. Later in their history, the Mistick Krewe of Comus did become very political in their choice and depiction of themes, but there is no other evidence to suggest such a political bent this early. In order to ascertain which account is more correct, one must keep in mind the division between the Creole and American sections of New Orleans. The Daily Delta was one of the Creole newspaper; one must take this into account when evaluating their reportage on the events of the non-Creole Krewe of Comus.

1861

Louisiana seceded from the Union before Mardi Gras, 1861. But "a perfect furore of enthusiasm swept New Orleans. The Pelican flag of Louisiana appeared all over town. For sixty days, Louisiana was a free, sovereign, independent state awaiting formation of the new Confederacy."[104] New Orleans, a city of revels, had a grand new beginning to celebrate. As The Picayune noted, "The Union is dead, and with it all the hopes and all the fears that divided and agitated our people."[105]

New Orleans was one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the South. New Orleanians, like Southerners in general, thought that when war came it would be quickly concluded by the Confederate Army. Under the new flag of Louisiana, which was unfurled on Mardi Gras day, the Creoles and the former Americans could unite against a common enemy, the United States of America.

These coincidences of chronology, secession and the uniting under a new flag, raised the New Orleanian frenzy for celebration and pageantry to a fever pitch. Perry Young noted that Mardi Gras was "a day of wild revelry, the gayest in years. At night there was a ball in every hall in town, and the usual concourse on the streets awaiting the arrival of the Mistick Krewe."[106]

The theme for this fourth Mardi Gras celebration was "The Four Ages of Life." Because of the political situation in 1861, it would seem that Comus would have chosen a more stirring theme. Why, for example, did the theme not lampoon Lincoln, who was overwhelmingly defeated in his quest for Louisiana's electoral votes, or salute the virtues of states' rights, or the newly forming Confederacy? It is important to remember two points about Comus at this time. First, the Mistick Krewe was not a political club, per se. Its functions were social and cultural. Comus was founded to give order to the chaos that Mardi Gras festivities had become and to preserve this unique celebration. Second, Comus's theme had

to be chosen much earlier than the blossoming events of 1860-61 would have allowed. The first Comus parade and ball were hastily arranged affairs where the resources of the Mobile Cowbellion de Rakin Society were used. After their initial success, the members of the krewe had to plan their parades and balls carefully, so that each year would be viewed as more exciting and newer than the last. Planning a Mardi Gras celebration is a time-consuming project. In contemporary Mardi Gras, it is not unusual for a krewe to have ball themes picked out several years in advance.

The parade depicting "The Four Ages of Life" did not include any floats. There is no evidence to indicate why this decision was made. Neither Perry Young or the "Reminiscences of the Early Comus Celebrations" cited earlier give any clue why the Mistick Krewe, which in 1860 used fifteen floats, chose to use none in 1861. It would be speculation to attempt to link this decision to economic factors or the war effort. Perry Young even raised the question when he wrote that "one is prompted, despite the lavish praise in the press, to wonder if the threatening political clouds had not induced economies."[107] But he offers no evidence to answer his query. Whatever the reasons for the decision, the parade of 1861 was vastly different from the tableaux roulants of statuary seen in 1860.

The marchers used the same route that had been established in previous years. The parade was led by walkers

carrying an arch hung with lanterns and showing the banner of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. This was followed by the transparency giving the title, "The Four Ages of Life." The nature of the theme made this the most allegorical of the first five celebrations of Comus. In the first year, as noted, the krewe borrowed the costumes (and to some extent) the theme from the Cowbellions. The second year, the krewe chose the subject of mythology, with representations of mythological figures. In their third year, the membership of Comus chose the English holidays, and their parade and ball showed those most famous characters and characteristics associated with the holidays chosen. The fourth year saw, of course, the statuary depiction of the great heroes of America. It is easy to see that the choices to be made in characterization and costuming of these four themes are limiting in that all four themes have established images.

But the theme, "The Four Ages of Life," has no such fixed imagery. The four stages of childhood, youth, manhood, and old age do not offer the easy choices that mythology, holidays, and history offer. This need to resort to allegorical representation made the fifth Mardi Gras of Comus the most theatrical.

To represent the stages of childhood and youth, the Mistick Krewe masked themselves as kites, tops, marbles, sweet-cakes and other objects. Manhood was depicted through visualization of his virtues and foibles. For example, Young

noted that hypocrisy was shown as a "smiling giant, ten feet high, two-faced, with hands both front and back."[108] Some of the members disguised as the more earthy vices rode beasts--gluttony rode a pig; stubbornness rode a goat.

As in previous years, the procession ended at the stage door of the Varieties Theatre for the Comus ball. Four tableaux were staged to correspond with the four stages of human life. The Daily Delta noted that the "tableaux represented a succession of allegories expressive of the various stages and conditions of human life, not omitting the ultimate and inevitable figure of 'living Death'."[109] According to Perry Young, the "Comus ball was the same brilliant and recherché event of preceding years."[110]

Dancing

No discussion of the Mistick Krewe of Comus would be complete without a discussion of dancing. In his book, Music in New Orleans: the Formative Years, 1791-1841, Harry A. Kmen called New Orleans a "music-mad city," and he noted that "dance came first in the hearts of fun-loving New Orleanians."[111] All other amusements had often to compete with a ball; most concerts prior to 1830 were, in fact, coupled with a ball.

Balls occurred most frequently during the Carnival Season. New Orleanians needed to get as much fun in as

possible before Lent, and fun for the Creoles (and later the Americans) meant dancing. In no other American city did dance, as social interaction, gain such popularity. Why was this so? As has been noted earlier, the first French settlers brought many of their customs to the Louisiana colony. It has already been demonstrated that the Marquis de Vaudreuil attempted to create a mini-Versailles, part of which would have included the dancing popular at the French Court. It must also be noted that dancing can take place anywhere. No special building is needed for citizens to participate in a dance, but, of course, the New Orleanians would build them.

Another reason that dancing had such a strong hold on the citizens of New Orleans was the very diversity among its citizenry. Much has already been said about the Creole love of dance. It must also be noted that the first Americans to inhabit the city were from the American frontier, where dancing was already popular because it was such inexpensive entertainment. Dancing, too, can cross language and cultural barriers, and as such it eases assimilation into a melting-pot society.

New Orleans, unlike the cities on the Eastern coast of the United states, was founded by Roman-Catholics whose attitude toward dancing was vastly different from the various Protestant sects that were responsible for other American cities. Dancing was perfectly acceptable for the Creoles, and it became so much a part of the culture of the city that

repeated attempts at controlling the balls through legislation failed.

As early as 1792, New Orleans had a building devoted just to dancing. The Condé Street Ballroom opened on October 4, 1792; it was a single story, "about eighty feet long by a little over thirty feet wide." The Condé had "boxes 'such as in a theater' and a surrounding corridor for those not dancing."[112] The Condé Street Ballroom was followed by others, such as the Orleans; in addition, major hotels built in New Orleans were equipped with large ballrooms.

Coupled with the love for dance, was the Creole love for masking. If it was fun to dance, imagine what fun it would be to dance while disguised. It has already been noted how the popularity of dancing and of masking led to the near demise of Carnival. But, Mardi Gras, as it is known today, would never have taken hold as it did without the love for dance that the city demonstrated.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus made dance an integral part of their celebration. Normally, the first dance of the early Comus balls was a quadrille of four couples, including Comus and his partner. Other dances that were popular in the early years were the polka, the mazourka, the galop, the schottische, and the waltz. As new dances became popular, they were incorporated actively in the dances; after the presentation of the <u>tableaux</u> the hall was given over to dancing, which continued until midnight. Although Comus must

be given credit for incorporating dancing into the presentation, it is the Krewe of Rex that standardized the Mardi Gras ball into the format seen today. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Summary

The Mistick Krewe of Comus made several important contributions to the traditions of Mardi Gras. The membership of Comus created the word "krewe" and gave a sense of parody to the proceedings with the spelling "mistick." As the first Carnival organization, Comus did much to refine and preserve the French traditions of Mardi gras. In addition, the Mistick Krewe of Comus effectively crossed the cultural barriers established by the Creoles, and created a Creole-American organization. Comus established the krewe as an all Christian, male, secret society--a tradition which has only recently been altered.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus established Mardi Gras as a viable expression of popular culture. Mardi Gras reflects the New Orleanian desire to take fun seriously. In no other American city is a season, even a holiday, celebrated with the kind of revelry demonstrated in New Orleans during Mardi Gras. It was the Mistick Krewe of Comus that saved this revelry from possible extinction.

In his recollections of the Mistick Krewe of Comus, Mark Twain noted that the parade had "knights and nobles, and

so on, clothed in silken and golden Paris-made gorgeousness, . . .and in their train all manner of giants, dwarfs, monstrosities, and other diverting grotesquerie--a startling and wonderful sort of show."[113] Twain's description of that early parade could just as easily have described parades in the twentieth century. The Mistick Krewe of Comus did much to preserve this tradition.

Chapter 5

WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION: THE YEARS BEFORE REX

The Civil War brought a temporary halt to the celebrations of the Carnival season. The Mardi Gras years of 1862-65 saw no Comus parade or ball. Even during the period of United States occupation, there were some masked balls, but none given by the Mistick Krewe.

On January 29, 1861, the Louisiana legislature voted to secede from the Union. As was noted in the previous chapter, the Pelican flag was raised for the first time on Mardi Gras day, 1861. On March 25, Louisiana joined the Confederacy. At this time, New Orleans was the richest and the largest port in the Confederacy. Yet, in little over one year after joining the Confederacy, New Orleans was captured by the Union army. Federal troops arrived in New Orleans on May 1, 1862, under the leadership of General Benjamin Butler. They were to remain in the city for fifteen years as occupying forces.

Reconstruction was more devastating to New Orleans than the actual fighting of the Civil War. As Mel Leavitt noted: "The river had been blockaded during the war. Cotton rotted on the wharves. Trade came to a standstill. Most New Orleans banks failed. Louisiana, the richest state in the antebellum South, became one of the poorest."[114] But the

unbridled spirit of the natives was not destroyed; by 1866 Comus was ready to appear again.

Laurraine Goreau wrote that "reconstruction racked what was left of the city, but Comus rolled forth on his float, golden goblet in hand, loyal krewemen behind on foot, a symbol to a miserable city."[115] Perhaps at no other time in its history has the Mistick Krewe of Comus been such a barometer for its city. In performing their theatrics during this period of massive hardship and corruption, the Mistick Krewe clearly demonstrated the power of the unique joie de vivre that is the New Orleans Mardi Gras.

This chapter will detail the celebrations of the Mistick Krewe during the period of reconstruction and will provide an examination of the emergence of Comus as an expression of popular culture that reflected the spirit of the times. In this discussion, the theatrics of Comus through 1872 will be covered.

As was noted in the introduction of this dissertation, the theme for a parade or ball could be drawn from literature, popular culture, or politics. The Carnivals of 1866 and 1870, were very political. This chapter will not provide the detail of the previous chapter on Comus, but it will be an examination of how Mardi Gras, as popular culture, used theatre as a reflection of reconstruction.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus occupied their new headquarters (under the social guise of the Pickwick Club) on

December 16, 1865. The Mistick Krewe soon issued announcements that Comus would reappear for the 1866 Carnival. Membership of the Mistick Krewe chose as their first post-war theme, "The Past, The Present, and The Future." For the first time, there were no Negro slaves to carry the flambeaux, so the members of the krewe carried their own lanterns. Each member of the krewe carried a golden goblet.

The date was February 13, 1866; the location was again the Varieties Theatre. The Mistick Krewe presented four tableaux. The first of these concerned the past:

> **Strife and Desolation snatching from the hand**
> **Of Time and scythe of ruin, sits aloft,**
> **Or stalks in dreadful majesty abroad.**

Characters representing the horrors of war--destruction, grief, strife, want, and terror--appeared and formed a stage picture. The second concerned the present:

> **Now the storm is o'er;**
> **O, let freemen be our sons;**
> **And let future Washingtons**
> **Rise to lead their valiant ones**
> **Till there's war no more.**

This tableau represented the blessings and beauties of peace. Krewe members represented industry, commerce, science, agriculture, history, art, and mechanism. In the center of the stage was a krewe member guised as Peter Patriae. The third concerned the future:

> **Down the dark future, through long generations,**
> **The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease,**
> **And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,**
> **I hear once more a voice say--"Peace."**[116]

For this tableau the krewe presented members as statues of beauty and peace in the background, as other members of the krewe toasted the future with their goblets raised.

All of these were very solemn and political tableaux. The Mistick Krewe of Comus used the medium of the Carnival Ball to acknowledge the defeat of the Confederacy and to seek a reconstruction of peace. The Daily Crescent noted that "it [the ball] was unexceptionably the most suggestive and intelligible living allegory we have ever seen."[117]

The mood of the ball was radically altered as the fourth tableau was presented. This was the traditional presentation of Comus and his court. The court marched around the stage and into the auditorium. Dancing began afterwards, and at the stroke of midnight, the members of the krewe disappeared.

The offer of peace and goodwill that came from Comus was ignored by the Union. Thus began the abysmal period of Reconstruction in New Orleans. The debate as to what to do with the defeated states of the Confederacy was being waged throughout the United States. Should the Southern states be readmitted, with all of their rights intact--as they left the Union, or should they be readmitted with harsh penalties? Louisiana suffered under the harsh dictates of the second of these options. Violence broke out as early as the summer of 1866; thirty-seven men were killed. This, and other

incidences of violence, led to the Reconstructions Acts of 1867 and the return of an occupying army. The Union army would patrol the city for twelve years.

Mardi Gras fell on March 5, 1867, three days after the passage of the Reconstructions Act. The exuberant spirit of the New Orleanians could not be repressed, and the Mistick Krewe paraded through the streets with the theme, "Triumph of Epicurus." The major float of this parade was a representation of the boeuf gras, a character directly taken from the French Mardi gras. Three tableaux were presented at the Varieties. These corresponded to the three courses of a meal. Much use was made of papier-mâché; the chief representations, from raw oysters to codfish á la Jonathan, marched in the procession inside the theatre as oversized food items from an epicurean nightmare. The last tableau presented the perfect end to such a meal, coffee and cigars.

The Mardi Gras of February 25, 1868, saw Comus break from their own traditions of parading with theme floats. Instead, the Mistick Krewe presented an equestrian procession through the streets of New Orleans. The subject was "The Departure of Lalla Rookh from Delhi." Perry Young noted that "two hundred horsemen in oriental costume and bearing oriental arms, formed the principal element of the pageant, divided into two main units, one of white horses and one of black."[118] Another aspect of this procession was the inclusion of six elephants who carried the princess and the ladies of the

court. In all likelihood the princess and her ladies were krewe members in female disguise. The krewe then proceeded to stage twelve tableaux at the Varieties Theatre.

The Mardi Gras of 1869 saw Comus return to a parade with a number of floats. The theme, "the Five Senses," was depicted on six floats. The first of these carried Comus and the announcement of the theme. The other floats represented sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Once again, Comus turned to Olympian symbols to portray the allegory. Thus, Phoebus was Sight, Orpheus was Sound, Flora was Smell, Ceres was Taste, and Venus was Touch. The floats had a statue of the represented sense in the center, and costumed members of the krewe represented attendant personages. The interpretation of the sense was treated seriously, while the costumed members of the krewe were treated more as caricature. For example, Flora's car had a krewe member disguised as a nose, and another costumed as the Giant from Jack and the Beanstalk. Comus had reached such a high degree of sophistication with their presentations and their balls had become so popular, that the krewe sought a bigger hall for their festivities. For the first time the Mistick Krewe used the New Opera House (later the French Opera) as setting for their tableaux. Each of the senses were presented in a tableau, and the last of these was dedicated to the "Revel of the Senses." The Mistick Krewe would

alternate for the next several years between the French Opera and the Varieties Theatre.

Even as the Mistick Krewe continued to flourish, the political climate of Louisiana continued its chaotic spiral toward anarchy. This period in Louisiana was marked by the perceived political corruptions of the carpetbaggers and the scalawags. In 1868, Henry Clay Warmouth was elected governor, with Oscar Dunn, the "black Pericles," elected Lieutenant Governor. Warmouth was only twenty-six at the time; he soon affiliated himself with the white members of the Democratic Party. During his administration, Oscar Dunn, who many thought qualified to serve as governor, died under mysterious circumstances. About this period, Mel Leavitt wrote that "graft became epidemic; there was wholesale bribery, crushing taxation, general plundering, and inevitably, racial violence."[119] The Governor's blanket statement was, "Dammit. Corruption is demoralizing down here. But it's the fashion."[120]

During this dire period, the New Orleanian spirit manifested itself in the formation of a second krewe. In 1870 "the Twelfth Night Revelers, staged a parade of eighteen floats and had their first ball."[121] The Twelfth Night Revelers were not in direct competition with the Mistick Krewe, for the Twelfth Night Revelers held their parade and ball on January 6.

Although the Twelfth Night Revelers only lasted for seven years, this second krewe added much to the traditions of Mardi Gras. The leader of the Revelers was dubbed the "Lord of Misrule." This character would appear in many guises throughout the further history of Mardi Gras. The Revelers were also responsible for three other traditions. The first of these was the introduction of the King Cake as part of the festivities. The King Cake was a feature of the earliest of Creole parties. Legend has it that the host of a party would bake a bread-like sweet cake with a bean hidden in it. Whatever guest got the slice with the bean would host the next party.[122] The Twelfth Night Revelers brought a huge King Cake to their first ball. All of the ladies present were to be given slices and the fortunate one who found the bean would be chosen queen. This is the second of the Revelers's innovations. Never before had a woman been incorporated into the actual presentation; the Mistick Krewe was all male and female characters were played by men. The Twelfth Night Revelers broke this tradition; the woman chosen as queen did not become a member of the krewe, she reigned only as queen for the night.

The third innovation of the Revelers was the institution of the grand march. Comus often paraded around the floor of the theatre, but it was the revelers who introduced the very formal procession of the entire court around the hall.[123]

For Carnival 1870, the Mistick Krewe used "The History of Louisiana" as their theme. The design of the parade and the ball was similar to the design of the pageantry for Mardi Gras, 1860, "Statues of the Great Men of Our Country." The parade of 1870 consisted of sixteen floats, each with a statue of a famous figure from the history of Louisiana. This theme was depicted with a mixture of realism and allegory. For example, the first float had "Louisiana, attended by New Orleans, and by Sugar, Cotton, and Rice."[124] The ball and tableaux were staged at the Varieties. There were seven stage pictures, the last being a depiction of Louisiana and her defenders. The Mistick Krewe returned in 1870 to a political theme. As the disarray and corruption continued, the members of Comus chose to portray the finer times of Louisiana before the occupation of the United States Army.

In the next two years, Comus returned to literary themes, first by using "Spencer's Fairie Queen" as the focus for their 1871 celebration, and second, "Dreams of Homer," for the 1872 festivities. Both of these parades were quite large; the 1871 Mardi Gras parade had thirteen floats and many marching units, the 1872 parade had twenty-five floats. The first of these two was held at the French Opera, the second at the Varieties. Comus' domination of Mardi Gras was to be challenged in 1872 by the first appearance of the Krewe of Rex.

The Mardi Gras prevailed over all of the harshness of the Reconstruction government. The celebration of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers only gained in popularity as the city approached bankruptcy. Although the Revelers ceased parading after seven years, they continued their balls well into the twentieth century. The year 1872 was a major year in the development of Mardi Gras because of the emergence of the Krewe of Momus and the formation of the Krewe of Rex. The important aspect to remember about this period during and after the war, was the indomitable spirit of the New Orleanians, especially those members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. With all of the political and physical hardship around them, Comus continued to "take fun seriously."

Chapter 6

FORMATION OF THE KREWE OF REX

The Krewe of Rex came into existence in 1872 at least partially as a response to a visit to New Orleans by the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia. Unlike Comus, which was an ordered response to the chaos of the Creole Mardi gras, Rex was hurriedly organized to present an entertainment for the visiting royalty. Since the Grand Duke's visit was to coincide with Mardi Gras, it was natural for New Orleans to plan a parade.

The spontaneity of the formation of Rex shows how important the celebration of Mardi Gras had become to the citizens of New Orleans. As has been previously noted, balls and parades were important aspects of the popular culture of New Orleans. The year of 1872 was in the midst of the harsh period of Reconstruction, and the Mistick Krewe of Comus had repeatedly responded to the city's despair with elaborate spectacle. It is easy to see why the arrival of the Grand Duke inspired New Orleanians to organize a new krewe. As Laurraine Goreau noted, "the Carpetbagger government wasn't going to organize suitable entertainment for him (Alexis), the honor of Orleanians was at stake."[125]

The period from 1872 to 1876 was one of tension in the city. As the city government grew steadily more corrupt and

bankruptcy loomed, the white social leaders used Mardi Gras as a means to exhibit their disregard for the Union-imposed government. This chapter will continue the discussion of this period begun in the previous chapter. The main focus will be on the first five years of the Krewe of Rex. This discussion will follow the same chronological format used in Chapter 4. In addition to the discussion of Rex, there will be an analysis of the activities of the Knights of Momus and of the Twelfth Night Revelers. The final part of this chapter will deal with the presentations of the Mistick Krewe of Comus.

It is important to note that as the period of Reconstruction continued, the governmental structure of the city was one imposed by Washington; the citizens were almost powerless to establish policy. But the citizens--at least the socially prominent white males--did control the celebration of Mardi Gras. As we shall see, the political frustration that these citizens felt was translated into the Mardi Gras spectacle, and thus, the Mardi Gras became an increasingly popular means of political expression. Theatrically, the celebrations of the krewes tended toward political allegory and satire. Threaded throughout this chapter will be analyses of how the themes selected by Comus, Rex, Twelfth Night Revelers and Knights of Momus functioned as dramatic statements of political dissatisfaction.

1872

His Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Alexis Romanoff Alexandrovitch, brother of the heir apparent to the throne of Russia, arrived in New York on November 20, 1871, and began his tour of the United States. Although traveling incognito as Lieutenant Romanoff, he was accompanied by three vessels of the Imperial Russian Navy. His itinerary included visits to most of the cities of the East Coast as well as a buffalo hunt in the West. Of particular importance to this discussion is the fact that while in New York, Alexis saw Miss Lydia Thompson perform in Bluebeard. He was apparently taken with Miss Thompson and her performance, for when Alexis heard that she was to perform that role again on tour, he changed his itinerary so that he could be with her again. Miss Thompson was scheduled to perform in New Orleans in late January and early February of 1872. The Grand Duke ended his buffalo hunt and led his entourage (including his personal guide and host, George Armstrong Custer) to Louisiana.[126]

The visit of the Grand Duke coincided with the Mardi Gras of 1872. New Orleanians had already demonstrated their love for the pageantry of royalty, as discussed in Chapter 3. It was with unbridled enthusiasm that the citizenry met the challenge of a visit by authentic royalty. Toward the end of January of 1872, a notice was issued calling for a meeting to organize maskers into a procession for Mardi Gras. The

purpose of this call was to honor the Duke, because, as noted earlier, the "honor of Orleanians was at stake." Twelve days were available from the time of the announcement of the impending visit to the Duke's arrival on Mardi Gras eve. That gave this fledgling group little time to plan and executed a parade.

The accounts of the formation of the Krewe of Rex agree that it was the visit of Alexis that served as an impetus, but it is important to understand that other factors were instrumental in the formation of the new krewe. Prior to the formation of the Krewe of Rex, there were only two carnival organizations in New Orleans. Both Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers were designed to be "for the amusement of themselves and their immediate friends."[127] As has already been documented, these two organizations and their theatrics had so gained in popularity that their original aim had been dwarfed by their immense appeal. The astounding growth of the popularity of the carnival was one reason for the addition of a new krewe.

In addition, the rowdiness of the Mardi Gras public celebration had gotten out of control. Perry Young noted that there were three murders reported during the celebration of the 1871 Mardi Gras.[128] No doubt this increase in disorder was partly due to the anger and resentment that the citizens felt during Reconstruction, but it was also partly due to the very nature of the outdoor revels, the Creole spirit, and the

popularity of Comus. Just as the Mistick Krewe of Comus was formed to create order, a new organization was needed to restore it.

The Krewe of Rex organized with astounding rapidity. Prominent citizens, including some members of Comus, raised $10,000 to produce the first parade of the new krewe. A series of announcements were released to the local papers by the krewe which heralded the upcoming event. The first of these appeared in the Republican on February 1, 1872. This was in the form of a request to Mayor B.F. Flanders, seeking permission to parade on Mardi Gras.[129] This public correspondence is the first evidence of Rex being proclaimed as "King of Carnival." The Mistick Krewe was led by the god, Comus; the Twelfth Night Revelers were governed by the Lord of Misrule. Both the god and the lord fit nicely into the mock antiquity of the Mardi Gras melange. By adding a king to the hierarchy, the Krewe of Rex gave a contemporary and political feel to the celebration. Whereas the god represented a celestial rule and the lord an appointed one, the king symbolized both an absolute and earthly governance. And although Rex's reign would encompass only one earthly day, his would be total control over the New Orleans population. Undoubtedly the Krewe of Rex chose a king as ruler because of the impending visit of actual royalty, but an argument can be made that this particular naming was a reflection on the

chaotic local government which suffered from a lack of strong leadership.

From the earliest celebrations of Mardi gras in the Louisiana colony, the citizens of New Orleans displayed their adamant attachment to the celebration of the pre-Lenten festival. Repeated attempts at controlling masking through laws were failure. New Orleanians took their fun seriously and Mardi Gras was the epitome of fun. By choosing a "King of Carnival" the Krewe of Rex sent a clear signal to the federally-appointed government.

Robert Tallant noted that "it was an effort both to render the day more placid and to welcome the visitor that prominent citizens. . .decided upon the formation of a new krewe and the selection of a 'King of Carnival.'"[130]

It is apparent that the membership of the Krewe of Rex was so well placed politically and socially that all of Rex's edicts met with compliance. They demanded that the military take part in the ceremonies, that government offices be closed on Mardi Gras day, that private businesses close during the afternoon, and that judges adjourn their courts before noon. All of these proclamations were published in subsequent editions of the Republican.

The King of Carnival welcomed the visiting Duke with the following announcement in the Republican: "His Royalovitch Highnessoff the King of the Carnival, officials llywelc, omest one worle ansh isroy alcous inth emostp uiss ant Duke Alexis

Alexandrovitch Romanoff, andwi llh o ldaspe ciala udie ncef orh Isrece pti on atsu nse ton Mardi Gras."[131] This word play again demonstrated the mocking quality of the carnival proceedings. The greeting translates as: "His Royal Highness, the King of Carnival, officially welcomes to New Orleans His Royal Cousin, the Most Puissant Duke Alexis Alexandrovitch Romanoff, and will hold a special audience for His reception at sunset on Mardi Gras."

The Duke arrived in Carrollton, upriver of New Orleans, on the evening of February 11. Though some of this party left the ship and journeyed to the city over land, Alexis stayed on board and hosted a party. The ship traveled the short distance down river to the Gravier Street Wharf the next morning, Mardi Gras eve. After an official welcome by city officials, the Duke was established in the St. Charles Hotel.

During the days before Mardi Gras, the fledgling Krewe of Rex had been busy preparing their parade to honor the Duke and to introduce the new monarch of carnival. Since they did not have as much time as Comus to prepare, the krewe borrowed what vehicles they could and they hastily decorated them. Costumes for Rex and his dukes were borrowed from the production of Richard III, starring Lawrence Barrett, playing at the Varieties Theatre. Other than the parade scheduled for Mardi Gras day, there were no special entertainments planned for the Duke's visit. New Orleans at this time had

a number of popular theatres which offered a variety of fare. Miss Lydia Thompson was herself appearing in the burlesque of Kenilworth at the Academy of Music. Miss Thompson was so popular in the city that she had a baseball club named after her.[132] The Grand Duke was particularly taken by a nonsense song that Miss Thompson sang in Bluebeard. This song, "If Ever I Cease to Love," was to become the theme of all of Mardi Gras.

Word of Alexis' fondness for this song preceded him to New Orleans. Leonard Huber, and Pie Dufour, in If Ever I Cease to Love: 100 Years of Rex 1872-1971, noted that it was a music teacher, Augustus Davis, who took the song and rearranged it as a march so that marching bands could play it.[133] The lyrics of the song are nonsensical. "If ever I cease to love," Miss Thompson originally sang, "May sheepsheads grow on apple trees, may the moon be turned into green cheese, may oysters have legs and cows lay eggs, if ever I cease to love."[134] The popularity of this song continues today in New Orleans; the silliness of the lyrics seem to match the frivolity of the carnival season. As Perry Young noted: "The anthem of the Carnival Dynasty has a surer place in the heart of New Orleans than even the favorites which linger forgotten from the lost French Opera."[135]

The title "King of Carnival" has been used repeatedly in this discussion. It was not the intention of the Krewe of Rex that the Grand Duke Alexis become the King of Carnival.

Rather, the members of the krewe would select a king to reign over the festivities and to royally welcome Alexis. One of the most important structural aspects of a Mardi Gras krewe is the selection and presentation of a figurehead. As noted, Comus presented a god and Twelfth Night Revelers presented a lord. The choosing of the name Krewe of Rex sent a clear message from the new organization that their figurehead was to rule supreme. In addition, it is clear that because of the chaotic political climate in 1872, the members of the new krewe chose a king as figurehead because of the symbolic richness of the image. A king is supreme ruler and demands the love and respect of his subjects. This was especially true to the descendants of the original settlers of New Orleans. Theirs was a binding loyalty to the Bourbons and the splendors they represented, and this heritage was an integral part of the krewes of carnival. It is important to remember that the New Orleans Mardi Gras is essentially a French tradition; however much it may have been developed and structured by the American settlers, the heritage is from the Mardi gras.

The message of "king" was to criticize not only the political chaos of the carpetbagger government, but also to criticize the new equality that the Civil War had forced on the Confederacy. After all, a monarchy is built upon a class system; a democracy is based on the principle of equality for all; in New Orleans this included the recently freed slaves.

The krewes of the New Orleans Mardi Gras were secret organizations with selective membership. Though the system has somewhat relaxed in modern times, its structure remains intact. The Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers were not inherently political in their infancy. It is impossible not to see that the Krewe of Rex was.

The members of the Krewe of Rex chose Lewis J. Salomon as their first monarch. Salomon was responsible for raising a large part of the money needed to stage the first parade. Because there was no time to have costumes made for the king and his court, the krewe turned to the theatrical community, and as has already been stated, the first Rex was garbed as Richard III. The krewe added a crown and scepter to the outfit.

There has been a practical link between the krewes of Mardi Gras and the New Orleans legitimate theatre since the founding of the Mistick Krewe of Comus; the participants in the first Comus celebration borrowed their costumes from a theatre in Mobile. Once the design and construction of floats, costumes, and sets were finally centered in New Orleans, and not Paris, the krewes relied heavily on the professional theatrical community for these services.

Because of the advance publicity for Rex, the crowds and participants were numerous. Estimates of the size of the actual procession ranged from 5,000 to 15,000.[136] The parade route was not the same as Comus. The parade of the Krewe of

Rex formed on Canal Street at 3:00 p.m. The march moved throughout the French Quarter and the American sector. Since the first Rex parade was organized so hurriedly, there was not the number of elaborate floats that were characteristic of Comus. Rex led the parade, riding on a bay charger. Salomon's identity was not "officially" known to the public. This secrecy of the monarch was the same procedure that the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers followed. Later, the Krewe of Rex would change this policy and announce the identity of their monarch.

The Republican described the first Rex parade:

> **So many odd conceits were never seen before at a New Orleans Carnival and Satire was not without its votaries. The excesses of fashion, political vice and political personages were not spared and royalty itself did not escape caricature. The kleptomania of carpetbagism was typified by couples carrying burdensome sack. The nepotism of President Grant was conspicuously illustrated.**[137]

Rex had in his procession the boeuf gras, the symbol of the last pre-Lenten meat to be consumed. The boeuf gras dates from carnival customs of the Middle Ages. Young, Huber, and Dufour noted that the first Rex "fatted calf" was called "Old Jeff," and he was a statue mounted in a wheeled platform and was pulled as a lure for reluctant cattle. According to Pie Dufour, Old Jeff was "a splendid animal of milk white color. . .(with) a gray covelet and its horns decorated with ribbons and flowers."[138] The boeuf gras was accompanied by a company of attendant butchers.

Rex and the bouef gras were followed by a marching group masked as a deck of cards. Each of the participants wore costumes constructed on "light wood frames,"[139] and they marched in single file to City Hall. There two of the aces of the deck presented special decks to the Grand Duke and Governor Warmoth. The marching deck of cards was followed by one of the hastily decorated floats. The Duke's Guards, clad in costumes from the Varieties Theatre, rode in a furniture van. It is apparent that in this first Rex parade there was no theme for the maskers and floats to follow. There were very pointed political jibes in some of the masked depictions; this was especially true in the form of "the Grand Juke." "The Grand Juke" was a rider disguised as an "Ethiop in splendid regalia, armed with a sledge."[140]

In addition to "the Grand Juke," Rex's first parade hosted several caricatures of President Grant and of local carpetbagger officials. This first parade of Rex also saw a popular performer, who was visiting New Orleans, march. Dan Rice, best known for his equestrian and circus shows, had become the manager of the Academy of Music in New Orleans in 1852. The Academy, which was later to be renamed the Dan Rice Ampitheatre, was booked almost exclusively with equestrian acts. Rice's popularity waned before the Civil War, but he experienced a resurgence both as actor and producer after the war. Dan Rice's trained animal act was given a full marching section by the planners of the first Rex parade.

Alexis saw many things in the first Rex parade that must have seemed strange. In addition to Dan Rice's trained animals and the caricatures of President Grant, the Grand Duke witnessed a [varied] mix of political satire and product advertisement. Robert Tallant in Mardi Gras gave the following account:

> **(There were) carriages of Chinese merchants in magnificent costumes, impersonators of the Ku Klux Klan on horseback, carriages filled with sailors with extremely buxom figures and painted faces, satirical and bitter representations of...Lincoln, even of the governor and the mayor besides him, troupes of actors from the theaters, Arabs, American Indians and savage-looking Turks, and a stream of maskers on foot in every conceivable costume, including a few who were dressed in what were representations of himself.**
> **And, perhaps most mystifying to him, there were the vans and wagons advertising things: the Old Gem Saloon, Wagner's Bitters, the Singer Sewing Machine, Mme. Tigau's Elixir for Ladies, the Old Reliable Furniture Company, and Dr. Tichenor's Antiseptic.**[141]

Advertising was a curious feature of the early Rex parades. This can be attributed to two phenomena. First is the hurried nature of the primary organization of the Krewe of Rex. Even though many of the founders of Rex were members of the Mistick Krewe, there were also members from the professional and working sections of New Orleans. Lewis Salomon was a merchant and businessman who, after all, was chosen because he raised the most money.[142] The second reason is directly related to the carpetbagger government that was imposed on the city. As has been noted, the city government

was near bankruptcy at this point, but the private sector of the city's economy was on the rise. The presence of such commercialism is an indication that, despite the negative impact of the government, the local economy was alive and healing. The carpetbagger rule was not needed.

The Rex parade, which began at 3:00 p.m., ended hours later with Rex at the Clay Statue. There he reviewed the parade and dismissed his followers. The planners arranged for a brass band to be positioned on each corner of Canal Street, from Camp to Rampart Streets. This was to ensure that the celebrants would continue to dance and revel until dark, there to mingle with those who came to see the night parade of the Mistick Krewe of Comus.

The Grand Duke, after viewing the procession of Comus, attended the masquerade ball of the Mistick Krewe at the Varieties Theatre. His entertainments after Mardi Gras were widely reported in the local press; he took in performances of L'Africaine at the Opera House and he saw Miss Lotta in The Little Detective. Lydia Thompson was soon replaced by a new love. Before Alexis left New Orleans for Mobile, he is reported to have given Miss Lotta "a bracelet of turquoise, pearls, and diamonds."[143]

Rex's first appearance had been a success. Although the first appearance was punctuated by an abundance of press coverage and an improvised parade, the people of New Orleans loved it. There is no better indication of this popularity

than the instant celebrity of Lewis Salomon. He became a frequent guest speaker and an advertising spokesman. He is quoted in newspaper ads as "having dined at Begue's [a local restaurant], and having cooked at home on 'Buck's Brilliant Stove'."[144] The popularity of Rex, and of Mardi Gras in general, was such that Mardi Gras became a legal holiday. Act 42 of the Louisiana General Assembly, which was endorsed by O.H. Brewster, Speaker of the House, and by Pinchback, the black Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate, was approved by Governor Warmoth on April 23, 1872.

The Krewe of Rex set another precedent during their first year. The krewe chose the official colors of Rex, which became the official colors of Mardi Gras. The colors of purple, green, and gold decorated the galleries of houses along the route of march and the official viewing stand at City Hall. There is some disagreement among the historians of Rex as to when the colors were assigned their symbolic meanings. Perry Young, Leonard Huber, Pie Dufour, and Robert Tallent noted that the colors were used for decoration and for the official flag of Rex, but in their discussions of the first year of Rex, they do not mention the symbolic intent behind the colors. Myron Tassin and Buddy Stall observed that the three colors were predominant on the improvised regalia of the first Rex, Lewis Salomon. What is clear is that by 1892 the colors had official symbolic designations. In that year the theme of the Rex parade and ball was "Symbolism of

Colors," and purple represented justice, green signified faith, and gold indicated power.

The flag of Rex, which was established by one of the many Rex proclamations, was displayed prominently throughout the city. The flag has a bar of gold extending diagonally from the upper left to the lower right; the upper triangle is of purple, the lower of green.

The year 1872 began with the visit of the Grand Duke Alexis and the formation of the Krewe of Rex and the establishment of the King of Carnival, and the year also saw the official recognition of Mardi Gras by the state government. Those events made 1872 one of special significance to the history of the New Orleans Carnival. But, the year saw another event of importance to Mardi Gras. In the latter part of the year another krewe was organized. This krewe was the Knights of Momus.

The membership list of the Knights of Momus was more like the selectiveness of the Mistick Krewe of Comus than the economic democracy of the Krewe of Rex. Both Tallant and Young have noted that the new organization had similar characteristics and goals, but that Momus attracted younger men. Young even noted that the first roster of Momus was composed of the "sons and nephews of the latter (Comus)."[145]

The city government saw a change during the intervening months of 1872. A new mayor was seated in City Hall, "a gentleman agreeable to white citizens,"[146] and in

Baton Rouge, two rival governors were about to be inaugurated by competing legislatures. During this period the state was to have two governors, a white Republican endorsed by Washington, and a white Democrat.

Further discussion of the Knights of Momus and analyses of the presentations of the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers will follow the discussion of the 1876 Rex celebration.

1873

Rex held no ball in 1872; instead the Grand Duke Alexis was entertained at the ball of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. Although Rex began in 1872, it was in the year 1873 that the various traditions of Rex were set. In its second year, the membership of the Krewe of Rex increased from the original forty members to one hundred. Between the time of Mardi Gras 1872 and Mardi Gras 1873, the krewe issued patents or official documents of privileges which were emblazoned with the seals of the State of Louisiana, the City of New Orleans, and the Royal House of Rex. These patents were much sought after by the citizens, for to own such a document was to be linked to the royal line. The krewe kept the myth of the King of Carnival alive during the intervening months by placing stories in the New Orleans Times of Rex's travels in Assyria.[147]

It is clear that Rex had every intention of making a second appearance as the King of Carnival for, as Pie Dufour has noted, "early in the summer an agent was dispatched to Paris for the purposes of preparing all the necessary court regalia. . .banners, properties, and costumes."[148] In addition, the Krewe of Rex leased Exposition Hall for a period of three years, for each Mardi Gras night. Exposition Hall became known as the Carnival Palace. The hall was on St. Charles Street, between Julia and Girod, near City Hall. The Carnival Palace was very near the popular theatres of the American sector of the city.

The second Rex parade had as its theme, "Egyptians," and it was designed in six divisions. Over 10,000 maskers participated in the procession, and some 40,000 visitors crowded the city for the events of Mardi Gras.[149] Rex first appeared on that Tuesday, February 25, at 11:00 a.m., on Front Street near the Mississippi River. The second Rex, E. B. Wheelock, was disguised as an ancient Egyptian, astride a richly decorated charger. He was joined by his royal court and other mounted regiments. This royal cavalcade was estimated at 4,000, and it took forty minutes for all of them to travel the short distance to City Hall. There Rex and his immediate court toasted city officials until time for the parade to begin officially at 1:00 p.m.

The first division of the parade began with a wagon upon which a masker held a red banner that proclaimed: "Make

way for the King." On the wagon was a decorated platform on which stood maskers who presented a tableau depicting the royal coat of arms of the King of Carnival. From the descriptions in the local press and in the Young account, it appears that there were four maskers in the tableau. In the center, one held a shield on which the crown and sceptre were depicted. To the sides were maskers costumed as Hercules and Jupiter; in the rear a final participant constantly rang a bell, signifying the approach or royalty.

This second Rex parade, which had perhaps a larger percentage of marchers to floats than any other, was also remarkable for the variety of marchers. A squadron of police followed the initial wagon; the police in turn were followed by the mayor and his staff, riding in an open carriage. A variety of military groups and marching bands followed. One of the military groups surrounded three walking pages who carried the keys to the city, the jeweled crown and the orb. Mounted pages immediately followed carrying the royal mace, banner, shield and sword. E. B. Wheelock followed.

A contemporary description of his costume noted that he was "robed in a brilliantly-hued Egyptian frock, sparkling with jewels and fringed about with gold, while at its front he wore a golden breastplate, from whose burnished surface the sun reflected its rays with dazzling brightness.[150] Rex was followed by his immediate court, who were also costumed in garments with Egyptian motifs. While Rex was mounted, his

court rode in open carriages.

The court was followed by 400 mounted Bedouins. As has been noted previously, Bedouin or Arabian costumes had been a feature in Mardi Gras parade since the early days of Comus. The Bedouins were followed by a bit of comic relief. In an apparent salute to the opera bouffe, a carriage supporting the "Daughter of the Regiment," was drawn by four bays. The "Daughter" was a man, reputed to weigh in excess of 400 pounds, and he was costumed appropriately. "She" was followed by the royal elephant, the royal luggage, and various wagons depicting the accoutrements of a royal household in forced march. These representations preceded the arrival of the royal navy.

The Lord High Admiral led the fleet in a carriage decorated with small boats and yatching paraphernalia. The fleet consisted of twelve racing yachts from Biloxi, Mississippi. Each of the boats was mounted on a decorated flat truck pulled by four horses. Members of the navy rode in the yachts; each held twelve officers and men. After the Royal Navy there were marching bands and more than 800 maskers on foot. The first division ended with the appearance of the boeuf gras. Unlike the papier-mâché representation of the previous year, this boeuf gras was a real steer. He was blood-red in color and his horns were decorated with ribbons and his body was covered with a garland of flowers.

The second division was given over to the royal cavalry, who appeared in two separate regiments. In the first of these were some 200 mounted guardsmen, costumed in suits of chain armor. This cavalry was outfitted with spears, scimitars, and decorated broadswords. At the end of the second division came the State Lancers, who were dressed as Crusaders. Included in their number were participants costumed as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Sandwiched between these two groups were several bands and the Ancient Order of Oxonians, who represented the meat industry. This group of 100 were intended as escort to the boeuf gras, much as the company of butchers had been in the 1872 parade.

Unlike the second division, which was composed of marching and mounted units, the third division was composed of floats and open carriages. Although seven large floats depicting the "Seven Ages of Man" were the centerpiece of this division, they were not the only components. The Third Division was led by the Lord of the Carriages, as the Second Division was led by the Master of the Horse. The Lord of the Carriages, riding in an open carriage, led a contingent of seventy-five cars filled with a variety of maskers.

Because of the great size of the parade, not much descriptive detail was given by the local press. It is impossible, therefore, to describe these floats accurately. Young only described the seven ages of man as a "comic pantomime."[151]Huber, Dufour and Tallant, who rely for most of

their description of this period on J. Curtis Waldo's History of Carnival in New Orleans, only briefly noted the inclusion of floats. Since the Krewe of Rex had members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus in their organization, it is fair to speculate that Rex floats were similar to those of Comus. Large flat-bed wagons were borrowed from companies, such as the Southern Express Company. The front of these wagons contained a raised seat for a driver and companion; the (rest) of the wagon was (given over to) open space, upon which could be easily staged a tableau.

More floats followed in the Fourth Division which was led by the Lord of the Vans. This division was perhaps the most motley, for included in its number were all kinds of public vehicles, including delivery vans and milk carts.

The Lord High Sheriff of the Guilds led the fifth division. This section of the procession contained over 6,000 maskers on foot or in a variety of vehicles. This was the advertising section of the Rex parade, and it was made colorful by a variety of signs, designs, banners, and costumed product endorsers. Among the establishments represented were Werlein's Pianos, Robert E. Lee Stables, Leighton's Premium Shirts, Pelican Fertilizer, and the Original Express Company. In addition, several "platforms on wheels on which were displayed all sorts of articles representing any trade or business,"[152] traveled in this part of Rex's entourage.

The last division of the parade was the most diversified and the largest. This division was led by the Lord of the Unattached, and it consisted of those maskers who came to watch the parade who chose to join in the march. It is clear that the intent of the Krewe of Rex was to involve as many people as possible in their revels.

The theme of the parade "Egyptians," was chosen to continue the ruse of Rex as a "real" monarch. During the year the press had covered stories of Rex's adventures in Assyria, so it is clear that the Middle Eastern theme enhanced that ruse. It is interesting that the six divisions of the second Rex parade emphasized the idea of the monarch in exile, moving about with his entire population. The obvious political satire intended here is [the perception of the white citizens] that the carpetbagger government was forcing the New Orleanians into a spiritual exile. The federally supported city government, even with its sympathetic mayor, was hated by the white citizens because of the Republicans' "systematic plundering."[153] In addition, the citizens were critical of what Mel Leavitt called the "Africanization" of Louisiana. The years of 1873 and 1874 would see a growth in such anti-black organizations as the Ku KLux Klan, the Knights of the White Camellia, and the White League. It is impossible to separate the public creations of the krewe from the political climate of the time.

Unlike 1872, the second year of Rex saw the King of Carnival celebrate his royalty in a masquerade ball. Four thousand invitations were issued for the fete at Exposition Hall. Tiers had been erected around the perimeter of the room to seat the guests. Unlike the balls of Comus, the first Rex ball did not present any tableaux. Guests, in costume or formal attire, had begun to arrive as soon as the parade of the Mistick Krewe had passed. At 10:15 p.m., the band began playing "If I Ever I Cease to Love," and the royal court entered the room. Rex and his eighty dukes of the realm marched around the floor at the orchestra continued to play Rex's theme.

Before 1873 there was no Queen of Carnival. It is true that the Twelfth Night Revelers did choose a woman to govern with the Lord of Misrule, but Carnival had seen no queen. This was to change in 1873. There had been rumors throughout the day that Rex would choose a queen at the ball. After Rex and his court marched twice around the hall he stopped before the woman he found most beautiful and most worthy. Apparently the choice of queen was left totally to the reigning Rex. Although the choice of a queen for Rex has changed somewhat in format over the years, it is essentially still an individual choice of the current monarch. E. B. Wheelock chose as his queen Mrs. Walker Fearn. Mrs. Fearn's husband was a member of the United States Diplomatic Corps and he would one day serve as Ambassador to Greece. Mrs. Fearn

was somewhat surprised at her selection; as she noted, she "was wearing her second-best black silk (dress) and a black bonnet, the clothes (she) had worn all day while watching the parade.[154]

After choosing his queen, Rex summoned his pages, who fastened a regal mantle about her shoulders. Rex then placed a jewelled crown on her head, and led her to their throne. During all of this pomp the orchestra continued to vamp through "If Ever I Cease to Love." The King and Queen of Carnival then received guests. During this first Rex ball there was no public entertainment and no dancing. The much more elaborate ball of the season was the ball of the Mistick Krewe of Comus, which had as its theme Darwin's Origin of Species. This ball will be discussed later in this chapter when the presentations of Twelfth Night Revelers, Comus and Momus are analyzed. Of most importance for Rex in 1873 was the establishment of a Queen of Carnival.

Rex's escapades during the time between Mardi Gras of 1873 and that of 1874 was reported in the press by the poet Mary Ashley Townsend. Writing under the pseudonym, "Xariffa," she chronicled the exploits of the King of Carnival as he journeyed through the East, home of his mythical kingdom, to New Orleans. The Krewe of Rex attempted to have one of her poems acclaimed as the official theme song of Rex. This poem, "The Soldier's Song," was set to music and was printed in newspapers throughout the Mardi Gras season. Mrs. Townsend

even had Lydia Thompson, who was again appearing in New Orleans, sing the song during a performance at the Academy of Music. But the efforts were unsuccessful, for "The Soldier's Song" quickly faded from memory.

"The Soldier's Song" was a long poem which described Rex's journey. The "song" was sung by a chorus of thousands of slaves:

> **Then let us sing of Rex our King,**
> **Who rules the realm of folly;**
> **Who frees the land on every hand**
> **Of grief and melancholy.**
> **From all the walls let bugle calls,**
> **Ring out through airy spaces,**
> **For him whose nod, where'er we plod,**
> **Make happy hearts and faces.**[155]

News of Rex's progress was interspersed with official edicts from the King of Carnival, much as in the first year of the organization. Included in these announcements was one proclaiming the "arrival of Rex." Thus began a tradition that would continued until World War I. On the Monday before Mardi Gras, Rex arrived at the foot of Canal Street aboard the Royal Yacht, a decorated steamer. Rex was accompanied by his Royal Household, but no military units. He was formally greeted by the Mayor, and informally by a large and enthusiastic crowd. Rex was then taken by carriage to the St. Charles Hotel, through an admiring crowd, thus staging an impromptu parade on the day before Mardi Gras.

One of the Rex edicts of 1874 had ordered the leading theatres to hold free matinees for the subjects of the King on Lundi Gras. Special matinees were added at the four largest theatres in the city. Matinees had already become a staple in the New Orleans theatre scene during the Civil War. David Bidwell, manager of the Academy of Music during that period, added the matinees on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.[156] This was done to make theatre available to the women and children of the city. During the period of the Civil War there were few men in the city; women, of course, could not attend the theatre at night unescorted.

The Rex parade on Mardi Gras day was similar in composition to the parade of the previous year. The theme of 1874 was "Persian," and the marchers were divided into five divisions. These divisions corresponded to components of the royal entourage. One change from the parade of 1873 was the decreased number of advertisements in the procession. As was noted in the Republican, "fewer of the class of advertisers who were too mean to show off their wares through the recognized avenues."[157]

The Krewe of Rex chose William S. Pike as the King of Carnival for 1874. He was costumed as Totila, King of the Ostrogoths, and he and his troops rode in chain armor in the midst of the first division was led by a float depicting the royal galley, shown in gold and drawn by four seahorses. Included in the marchers and riders of his division were

players representing the Shah of Persia, Boabdil the Moor, and the harems of both. As Rex and his entourage passed the Canal Street reviewing stand, Pike spotted eighteen-year-old Margaret Maginnis in the crowd. He pointed his scepter toward her and acknowledged her as his queen. This established a precedent that is in effect today; the Queen of Carnival is always a debutante.

The second division was led by the Lord High Constable. Included in this motley krewe of unorganized maskers was the boeuf gras, this year in milky white. There is no extant descriptions to determine whether this boeuf gras was a real cow or a statue of one, so it is impossible to assess whether or not Rex established the pattern of a live steer or statuary for the boeuf gras in his third year.

Division three was the mounted division led by the Master of the Horse, and division four consisted of various decorated vehicles led by the Lord High Sheriff. As in the previous year, the Lord of the Unattached marshalled the miscellaneous masqueraders in the final division. Waldo noted that after the 1874 parade "everyone was pleased and pronounced the procession the best ever."[158]

On Mardi Gras night, Rex and his Queen paid a visit to the Royal Court of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. This established the tradition which is a highlight of contemporary Mardi Gras; this tradition, the meeting of the two courts, today signals the end of the carnival season. In 1874, this

visit meant that Rex and his Queen did not arrive at their own ball at the Exposition Hall until 11:00 p.m.

There is not as much description of the 1874 ball and parade of Rex as there is for previous years. The historians Young, Huber, Dufour, and Tallant only make the most cursory mention of this year at all. Pie Dufour, the official historian of the Krewe of Rex, devoted only a portion of a page to this year. Scanning the local press for this period will also give only a modicum of descriptive passages, whereas in the two previous years the reporting was voluminous. One reason for this discrepancy would seem to be the sheer volume of Mardi Gras activities. New Orleans society and masquerade balls had always attracted press coverage. By 1874 there were four carnival krewes competing for coverage, and there were countless public balls. A second reason would seem to be the affiliation the Krewe of Rex had with the Republican. This newspaper had become the unofficial publicist for the King of Carnival; all of the Xariffa poems were carried there. The year of 1874 was to see the decline of the Republican. Because of this affiliation, other newspapers assigned their reporters to cover Comus, Momus, and Twelfth Night Revelers.

Perhaps the most important event of the Mardi Gras of 1874, at least as it relates to the Krewe of Rex, was the formal incorporation of Rex's parent organization, the School of Design. Fourteen incorporators joined before a notary on April 28, 1874, to sign a charter officially organizing the

"School of Design, the Rex Organization." Eight of the charter members had been with Rex since the beginning of the krewe. They were William Pike, E. B. Wheelock, Charles T. Howard, Edward J. Hancock, Lewis J. Salomon, Samuel Mullen, George H. Braughn, and William Mehle. Joining them were Norman Doane, Joseph Hernandez, W. S. Bailey, David C. Johnston, John A. Morris, and Eugene May. The School of Design held its first meeting on May 8, 1874, at which time William Pike, that year's King of Carnival, was elected president.[159] Like the Pickwick Club, which served as the official arm of the secret Mistick Krewe of Comus, the School of Design would serve as Rex's public liaison.

In the early days of the School of Design, the man who was in charge of designing and producing the parades and balls of the Krewe of Rex was called the manager. By 1920 that title had been changed to captain, which is the term in use today. The festivities of 1872 and 1873 were the responsibility of Francis W. Baker; Edward C. Hancock held that office from 1874 to 1876. The work of the captain goes on year-round. The captain of Rex is rewarded by having the distinction of leading the Rex parade and opening the celebration at the Rex ball.

1875

The newly formed School of Design set to work planning the events for the Mardi Gras of 1875. The Krewe of Rex, like the other carnival organizations, had every intention of making Mardi Gras 1875 the biggest and best ever. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The chaotic political situation was such that Mardi Gras festivities were canceled for that year.

J. Curtis Waldo summed up the situation: "The political cauldron boiled with such fierceness that our mystick associations thought it best to forego their usual festivities, an even the jolly Rex, yielding to the examples of others remained in his Eastern home."[160]

Although the parades were ready and invitations were issued to some of the balls, on January 4, 1875, General Philip Sheridan banned the celebration. Since Momus had changed its scheduled date from New Year's Eve to the Thursday before Mardi Gras and since the Twelfth Night Revelers were to present their ball on January 6, no Mardi Gras celebrations were held that year.

On January 6, 1875, this notice appeared in the New Orleans Picayune:

TWELFTH NIGHT REVELERS

Proclamation

Whereas, joy having fled for a season from our happy city; armed hosts becoming interpreters of public opinion, driving gaiety

> **from our homes, hope from our labors, and commerce from our port, and even slander has clothed itself in "official orders" to malign our citizens: and,**
>
> **Whereas, the present offers us no time for revelrie; Be it ordained, That the Twelfth Night Revelers postpone their annual festival to a more fitting season.**
>
> **Lord of Misrule**[161]

Exactly what happened in New Orleans in late 1874 that caused this federal restriction on Mardi Gras and the actions of the Twelfth Night Revelers, Momus, Comus, and Rex? Past attempts at legislating the revels of the carnival season had always met with failure. But the tensions produced by the Civil War and the carpetbagger regime had reached a boil and, by 1874, an undeclared war had broken out in the city.

The government of the State of Louisiana was bankrupt and its debt was $53 million. Both the federal and the state government apparently turned its back to the corrupt practices of the carpetbaggers, who consistently kept power by manipulating black voters. Although two governors sat in Baton Rouge, the Republican, Henry Pitt Kellogg, had the sheriff of New Orleans seize 37,000 pieces of property for back taxes. At the same time, the federal government sent in troops to maintain the peace.

In June 1874 the White League was born in New Orleans; the Ku Klux Klan already had representation in the besieged city. The White League was a paramilitary organization dedicated to ridding the state of the Republican carpetbaggers and returning the state to white rule. It was an armed group

which practiced regularly during the night. Since the White League was a secret organization, it is impossible to ascertain who its members were. Perry Young surmised that "the best elements of the city were in the White League and. . .the three secret societies drew their membership from the same element." Furthermore, in quoting a late captain of the Mistick Krewe of Comus, he noted that it "is safe to say that every member of the Pickwick, Boston, Chalmette, and Louisiana Clubs, capable of bearing arms, participated."[162] Certainly, the krewes of Comus, Momus, and Rex had already made their political feelings known through the satirical presentation of their parades and balls during this period.

On September 14, 1874, the tension escalated into what has been called the "Second Battle of New Orleans." As Mel Leavitt stated, "few American battles have been contested under stranger circumstances."[163] The battle was publicized in advance and crowds had massed, and a Mardi Gras atmosphere was in evidence. The battle took place on Canal Street, from St. Charles to the River. At St. Charles and at Camp, barricades were hastily erected. It is not sure who fired first, the White Leaguers or the members of the black Metropolitan Police, led by Governor Kellogg, but the members of the White League quickly outflanked the police. Kellogg was forced to seek refuge in the United States Customs House, official American territory. The Metropolitans withdrew; the battle lasted fifteen minutes. The White League seized the artillery

of the opposition and they occupied the State House in the city. For two days, the unofficial Democratic Governor of the State, John McEnery, became, at least in New Orleans, the official governor. President Grant, fearing an escalating insurrection, ordered more federal troops into the city and had three navel vessels anchored at the foot of Canal Street. The Republican government was restored, but the message of the battle was clear; no federally imposed government could survive without a large commitment of federal troops. Grant's government in Washington was already burdened with federal troop displacement throughout the South and the West.

The White League actions were considered a victory for the respectable elements of New Orleans and as such should have led to a major Mardi Gras celebration. But it was not just the bloodshed of September 14, 1874, that led the Twelfth Night Revelers to cancel their plans. The actions of Philip Sheridan must be taken into consideration. Lieutenant Philip Sheridan, who led the federal troops, declared the White Leagues "banditti," in a telegram sent to President Grant on January 5. By asking the President to declare the members of the White League (and thus some of the membership of the krewes) as bandits, Sheridan could treat them as criminals. The telegram was made known to the citizens. These were the circumstances that Perry Young argued led to the cancellation of Mardi Gras of 1875. He noted: "Men of proud antecedents, of high position in their community, saw the public officials

they had elected to office discharged by the armed forces, . . .and saw themselves characterized as 'banditti,' with the implication that the government might treat them as such."[164]

There was still some thought that the krewe would celebrate the holiday, but the Bulletin carried a note that on January 22 the School of Design decided to abandon their activities and that the older societies would follow.[165]

The year 1875 was the last year in which politics played such a part in the carnival celebration. Though there were not any organized celebrations, it was still officially a holiday. There was masking in the streets of the French Quarter and several thousand revelers, who had not read the papers, waited on Canal Street for the arrival of Rex. In addition to the cancellation of the parades and balls, the city also was visited by a rain-storm on that Mardi Gras.

Throughout the history of this unique celebration, only one other Mardi Gras was canceled for a reason other than a declared war (there was no Mardi Gras during the Civil War or World War I or World War II). In 1979, threatened by a city-wide police strike, Mayor Ernest Morial officially canceled the holiday. In both 1875 and 1979, unofficial activities took the place of the scheduled events, thus testifying to the tenacity of New Orleanians in their dedication to celebrating Mardi Gras.

1876

Mardi Gras in 1876 fell on February 29, the only time that the holiday would fall on a Leap Year's extra day until after the year 2000. There was a lull in the political climate of the city and the state, so that the Mardi Gras festivities could continue. The Twelfth Night Revelers opened the season on January 6 with their parade and ball, and on the Thursday before Mardi Gras the Knights of Momus held their celebration. On Monday, February 28, Rex arrived on the cutter "John A. Dix" at the foot of Canal Street. Many of the harbor craft were decorated to greet the arrival of the King of Carnival, and they and Rex presented a water procession. Rex and his court were not in costume; instead, Rex and court were in black suits. Because of the secrecy of the organization, the men wore masks with their formal dress.

On Mardi Gras, Rex, Albert Baldwin, rode in the first division of his parade. For the first time Rex did not ride mounted. Baldwin rode through the streets in a throne car drawn by six white horses. This marked the beginning of the current tradition of Rex riding on a throne float. The parade was a huge one; contemporary estimates put the length at three miles.

The theme for the parade and ball was a continuation of the themes of 1873 and 1874, Persian and Egyptian. As in those previous years, the marchers were separated into five

divisions, each led by a master of part of Rex's royal entourage. There were still no floats like those used by the other krewes; Rex made use of existing carriages and wagons. In addition, the reduction of advertisements in the parade was continued. This year would mark the end of Rex's "forced-march" approach to thematic structure. Beginning with 1877, the School of Design would choose historical, literary, or allegorical designs, much as the other krewes.

The New Orleans Times of March 1, 1876, gave the following description of a portion of the parade:

Anthony and Cleopatra

> **...the dress of the "Semi-Atlas of the World," was very rich. He wrote a white satin tunic and above this a shirt of cloth of gold with short crimson sleeves, and draping from his shoulder a purple toga; his helmet was of gold with the "circling wings," and he carried a short Roman sword. Cleopatra's costume was too splendid for description. It was beyond the power of our reporter, who is not Worth, nor any other man Milliner. It is enough to say that Egypt's Queen could not have blushed at the state in which her mimic appeared.**
>
> . . .
>
> **The next feature of the procession was five Satyrs, preceding Pan, their God, riding on mules. Pan and other Satyrs were mounted on a car, painted to represent a bower of roses, growing in the wildest profusion. Pan was the half man half goat of mythology, one of those wild, grotesque creations of ancient Greece.**[166]

The masked ball was again held at Exposition Hall. Baldwin chose as his queen the debutante, Cora A. Townsend, the daughter of Xariffa. Rex set another precedent in 1876. He chose three additional debutantes to serve as court for the

Queen of Carnival. Louise Dugan, Julia Tyler, and F. H. Hoey become the first of a long line of debutantes to serve as Maids of Carnival. Today being either Queen of Carnival or one of her Maids is the dream of every socially prominent young New Orleans woman.

The New Orleans Times offered a lively description of the ball and the throne:

Terpsichore's Reign.

The Ball and Reception of Rex

> **The ball occurred at Exhibition Hall, on St. Charles Street, and was in all respects a grand affair. The Throne Room was what was called the Art Room, and in order to reach it, it was necessary to pass through the ball room from the St. Charles Street front.**
>
> **The King's Throne was at the end, in the center of the concave of a semi-circle, on either hand being arranged the colors and escutcheons of His Knights. The front of the throne was a circle enclosed with iron railing and filled with rare flowers and evergreens, in which were hidden statues of the Ron, the Royal Beast, and from it floated the sweet sounds of many music boxes.**[167]

Summary of the First Five Years of Rex

Rex's parades and balls during the period 1872-76 paled in comparison to the Comus presentations. But during this five year period both krewes were overtly political. The precipitous arrival of the Grand Duke Alexis set into motion this new organization's subtle criticism of the status quo through the allegorical presentations of the mythical King of Carnival. Unlike the Mistick Krewe of Comus, which yearly chose different themes from literature or history and used

them to show parallels with the carpetbagger government, the Krewe of Rex created a mythical kingdom, a theme that stretched over five years. In these first five years, Rex repeatedly turned to the Middle East for inspiration for the Royal treatments of costumes and scenery and characters for the krewe members to portray.

Many of the traditions that are evident in contemporary Mardi Gras were established by the Krewe of Rex during the first five years of its existence. The Krewe of Rex established the King of Carnival, a monarch to rule over all of the various festivities of the season. In addition, Rex introduced the Queen of Carnival and made that position one so desirable to debutantes. The School of Design is also credited with both the official colors and the official flag of Mardi Gras. The Krewe of Rex was responsible for the first daytime parade and for making the boeuf gras a fixture in the parade.

The Krewe of Rex is also given credit for introducing the Mardi Gras anthem, "If Ever I Cease to Love," even though that song was a happy accident of the visit of the Grand Duke Alexis. The nonsensical lyrics of the song so beautifully matched the revelry of the holiday, that Rex's own attempt to displace it with another proved unsuccessful.

In the parades of the first five years, Rex could not compare with the extravagant floats of the Mistick Krewe. Rex did set a number of precedents in his first parades. Rex

parades were divided, with each section generally headed by a member of the Rex Court. This pattern reappears throughout Rex's history, even when the themes of the processions are literary. By his fifth year the King of Carnival had moved from being astride a horse to being seated on a throne. This particular float has become part of every Rex parade.

Rex, like Comus, was always masked. Unlike Comus, the identity of Rex is known to the audience. The King of Carnival is also responsible for the activity that closes the Mardi Gras season. In his third year, the King of Carnival and his queen paid a visit to the court of Comus. This visit of royalty to divinity now marks the official end of the season.

The Krewe of Rex added a necessary order to the revels of Mardi Gras. Just as Comus had been established to create order out of the Creole Mardi gras, Rex was created to structure the daytime activities of carnival. Under the heading "local Intelligence" the Republican summarized that intent:

> **A number of good citizens. . .banded together as if by chance and quickly brought out of chaos. One was chosen as leader, giving him the name Rex or King of Carnival. As they were gentlemen of intellect and position, they readily perfected a plan to make the day attractive, adding new features as new ideas presented, but the members retained individual secrecy. . .One of the foremost considerations in this display is to make our city attractive, not entirely for citizens, but primarily for visitors. Items of these things have gone abroad, and public attention had been drawn to New Orleans. This will bring hither not less than 15,000 people, and they will, on a low**

> **average, expend fifty dollars each, thus bringing capital to our city. Every visitor, on returning home, will give his less fortunate neighbors a glowing account of the wonders of the Crescent City. Next year the number of visitors will be doubled and so our city will be benefited.[168]**

It is clear from the success of the initial years of the Krewe of Rex that the designs set forth in the Republican were met, and in spite of the political climate of the period, Rex helped established the city's reputation.

Additional Carnival Activities, 1872-76

The Knights of Momus

The Krewe of Rex was not the only new carnival organization to form in 1872. The Knights of Momus presented their first pageant on New Year's Eve of that year. Although technically not a celebrant of the official Mardi Gras season in its first two years, Momus is included for discussion in this dissertation because, by 1876, Momus had moved its activities to the Thursday before Mardi Gras. The membership of the Knights of Momus was similar to that of Comus. Perry Young noted that "it was an organization of the same exclusive character as Comus, with similar purposes and characteristics, composed, however, of younger men."[169]

The Knights of Momus chose Sir Walter Scott's The Talisman for their first theme. There is no extant description of the cars that Momus used for its first night parade through the city. Apparently the membership of Momus

was not as wealthy as that of Comus, for most of the participants in their parade rode on horses. The parade had four divisions with Momus and his court riding ahead of the first division. The first act of Momus and his court was to visit Mayor Wiltz in City Hall and to present him with a badge of allegiance. It must be remembered that this mayor was more acceptable to the white citizens of the city. The political implications of their actions here is clear; their choice of theme does not give as clear a message.

Their parade was populated by characters from The Talisman. The first division of the procession was the English one; it was led by a masker carrying the standard of the Plantagenets. The second divisions must have had at least one float; Young in his list of the pageants made reference to the "car of Richard Coeur de Lion, who was on a throne and under a royal canopy, (and). . .Philip of France on a throne, attended by the Archbishop of Tyre and the Earl of Champagne,"[170] The third division was led by the Grand Master of Templars; the fourth by the car of Saladin.

The ball of the Knights of Momus was held at the New Opera House (later the French Opera). Four tableaux vivants were presented for the entertainment of the invited guests. Each of the tableaux represented a famous scene from the novel. In the first, "The Defiance," Richard is seen defying Leopold at Mount St. George. In the second scene they are reconciled. The third and fourth tableaux concern Sir

Kenneth's defeat of Conrad and the subsequent victory celebration. Choosing a literary theme became popular for the early krewes. By choosing a popular work, the krewe was assured that the invited audience would clearly understand the tableaux.

The Knights of Momus, and their affiliated organization, the Louisiana Club, chose as their motto, dum vivimus vivamus, or "while we live, let us live." In the twentieth century, the Knights of Momus have become known as a "good-time" club, a clear reflection of their motto. But in the chaotic political days of the 1870's, the motto could also be interpreted as one of determination. They chose as the theme for their second pageant, "The Coming Races." Held on December 31, 1873, the night parade and ball centered on caricaturing the works of he five naturalists: Darwin, Audubon, Cooke, Cuvier, and Humboldt. This parade was composed of seventeen cars or floats, with each representing two products of "naturalism." Each character was a product of the union of two unlikely partners. For example, character number eleven was the descendant of a Philadelphia lawyer and other sharks; number thirty-one, the cross of a tadpole and a mouse. This pageant of Momus was a pale imitation of the 1873 parade and ball of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. Comus "Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of Species," which arguably was the most political of all the Mardi Gras presentations of this period, will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Because Comus left such a strong impression on the populace with their 1873 pageant, the Knights of Momus, with their similar theme, could only suffer by comparison.

The Knight of Momus planned to move their festivities to the Thursday before Mardi Gras in 1875, so there was no scheduled presentation for 1874. The events of 1875, as previously chronicled, forced the cancellation of the 1875 Knights of Momus pageant. The Knights of Momus celebrated their first true Mardi Gras on February 24, 1876. The krewe chose for their theme 'Louisiana and Her Seasons." The nineteen wagons in the parade included depictions of such Louisiana staples as "Princess Rice," "Queen Sugar," and "King Cotton." The ball was again held in the New Opera House, with three Tableaux presented. The first and second of these presented the seasons, in tableaux, for the audience. The last saw Momus and his court greeting the seasons.

Although it is technically outside the intended scope of this dissertation, the Momus pageant of 1877 bears mentioning because its ridicule of the political situation caused the strongest reaction from the federal government. It was late in the evening of February 8, 1877, when the parade of Momus began. The delay was caused by the need to tear down the front wall of the carnival den to allow the overly wide floats to exit. Apparantly the designer had constructed the floats too wide for the opening. The title of the parade was "Hades--A Dream of Momus," and it was

possibly the most direct attack on the Republican government and the whole period of reconstruction. There were nineteen tableaux floats, each depicting in allegorical form, an aspect of the local, state, and federal administrations. The krewe members depicted local and federal leaders as citizens of hell. Car one, titled the "Department of State," showed the devil in his lair; his face was that of Hamilton Fish.

Each car was damning to those the krewe wished to denigrate. On the "Grand Counsellors" float Baal was shown as commander-in-chief of the "infernal armies." His likeness was that of Tecumseh Sherman. The "Keeper of the Archives of Hell" was General Orville Babcock; the "Prince of Death" was Philip Sheridan, and so on. No one who had caused grief to the socially prominent whites of New Orleans was spared the biting satire of the Knights of Momus.

The official reaction from the Republicans was swift. Momus' timing was somewhat off; by 1877 both the Republican government and the Democratic leaders were trying to bolster conciliatory efforts. The Momus attempt perhaps would have been better received in the previous year. The press was mixed in their reaction to the parade. The Republican noted that "the unmitigated malevolence of the Momus parade was gratefully relieved by its obscurity and cheap designs."[171] And the New Orleans Times stated that "though many will endorse the satire of the pageant, its violently partisan animus was not at all calculated to restore an 'era of good

feeling.'"[172] Both the Democrat and Bee were complimentary; the French edition of the Bee even acknowledged that "a joke could be of dubious taste without constituting an insult."[173]

Though its criticism was perhaps ill timed, the 1877 Knights of Momus parade is important to this study also because it was clearly one built expressly as a parade, with all floats designed and executed in the city. The year 1877 saw then the Knights of Momus and the Krewe of Rex join the Mistick Krewe in presenting complete tableaux roulants.

Twelfth Night Revelers

The organization known as the Twelfth Night Revelers was also active during the five years covered by this chapter. They held their third parade and ball on January 6, 1872. They chose as their theme, "English Humor," and their procession was led by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza carrying the title transparency. Since Twelfth Night Revelers gave an evening parade, their staging and lighting techniques were similar to those employed by the Mistick Krewe of Comus.

Twelfth Night Revelers were perhaps the most social of the early krewes; their screening process for membership and attendance at their private functions was considered the most rigid. Twelfth Night Revelers only paraded for a few years; the organizations ceased staging outdoor procession in 1877. The Revelers went through various incarnations, including periods where they were known as the King's Own Royal Guard

and then the Argonauts. In contemporary New Orleans, the Twelfth Night Revelers are regarded as a "benchmark" krewe. Anyone invited to a Twelfth Night Ball is considered worthy of admission to any other ball.

Twelfth Night Revelers gave Mardi Gras the Lord of Misrule, the Grand Procession, and the concept of women participating in the celebration. It was the second court of the Lord of Misrule that crowned the first "queen" of a ball. The queen of the Twelfth Night Revelers is not to be confused, or equated, with Rex's Queen of Carnival. Twelfth Nights's lady only ruled over the one organization for the one night. The Twelfth Night Revelers chose their queen by the use of the King Cake and the hidden bean. The lady at the ball who chose the piece of cake with the golden bean became the queen. Twelfth Night Revelers are responsible for yet another first Mardi Gras. By 1872 the local press began to print the names of the ladies attending the ball and to describe their attire. Prior to this it was considered improper for a polite woman's name to appear in print.

In addition to the theme of "English Humor," the period of 1872-76 saw a variety of topics chosen by the Twelfth Night Revelers for their parade and balls. In 1873 the krewe presented "The World of Audubon," reinforcing the notion that naturalists were popular in the Crescent City. In 1874 the Twelfth Night pageant was "Dolliana and Her Kingdom." Like the other krewes, Twelfth Night Revelers did

not entertain in 1875; they were, in fact, the first krewe to announce that decision, and, therefore, influenced the other krewes. In 1876 the Lord of Misrule presented "The March of Time."

Rather than discuss all of the presentations of this period, it would be more fitting to discuss the one which most represented the temper of this difficult time. "The World of Audubon" was that celebration. According to Perry Young, the 1873 display of the Twelfth Night Revelers is "remembered traditionally in New Orleans as one of the most beautiful in carnival history, especially by reason of its costumes."[174] "The World of Audubon" was impressive not only because of the amount spent on the production of the elaborate costumes, but also because the symbolism in the costumes made such impressions. That particular January 6 was a very tense one. The state legislature had met to plan action to control the White League, which shared members with the krewes. Three extra companies of federal troops had been brought into the city to control the anticipated crowd; violence was expected at any moment.

It was in this powderkeg atmosphere that the Twelfth Night Revelers revealed the seventeen floats of their parade. As was tradition for the krewe, the first float carried a replica of the Twelfth Night Cake; that float was preceded by three heralds, flamingo, red egret, and scarlet ibis, announcing the theme. The Lord of Misrule followed the float

on horseback. Float two carried a statue of Audubon, attended by his Negro cook and Indian guide. Each of floats three through seventeen depicted a pantomime of specific birds in a social or political situation. For example, float sixteen, titled "Union-Justice-Confidence," showed two tableaux areas. The front of the float showed a set-piece of the scales of justice under which kneeled a player disguised as the pelican (Louisiana's states bird), with its wings spread in supplication. The rear, or interior, of the float revealed the assembly-room of the Louisiana State Legislature. At the podium stood a crow who conducted the session with vigor. Beside him was a raven, dressed in clerical robes, who gave the benediction. The legislators were various kinds of crows, including the carrion crow who displayed a prominent carpetbag.

It was obvious that the display was a not-too-subtle indictment of the black and tan legislature that the federal government had forced on the state. Though its intent was obvious, its satiric bite did not at all compare with the Mistick Krewe's "Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of Species," which came on Mardi Gras of 1873. These two presentations, along with "The Talisman" of the Knights of Momus and the ongoing travails of Rex in Egypt, clearly earmarked 1873 as the year in which the attitudes of the socially prominent white citizens were most eloquently displayed through this medium of popular culture. The theatres and the opera houses

were not producing original dramas to reflect the anguish and resentment felt by the citizens of this defeated city. It was the secret organizations that, through their Mardi Gras pageants, rallied their followers and alerted their adversaries to the resentment that Reconstruction brought. At perhaps no other time in the history of Mardi Gras would it have such a clear cathartic purpose. The parades and balls of the krewes gave voice to the frustrations that the citizens felt; it was their lot to see their city and state become more corrupt and approach bankruptcy. Like the slaves of the period before the Civil War, theirs was now a powerless position. The expressions of Mardi Gras gave vent to their feelings.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus

The Mistick Krewe chose a variety of interesting themes for their pageants during the period 1872-76. In 1872 they presented "Dreams of Homer," returning again to mythological ideals for the twenty-five floats and four tableaux presented at the Varieties Theatre. In 1874 the krewe turned to a political and geographical theme with its "Visit of Envoys from the Old World and New to the Court of Comus." The twenty-five floats and two tableaux presented allegorical interpretations of particular countries and specific locations. There was no pageant in 1875. In 1876 Comus rebounded with a pageant structured around the history of the

Jews. "Four Thousand Years of Sacred History" was staged with twenty-three floats and two tableaux.

It was the procession and ball of 1873 that most expressed the temper of the times. Comus chose "The Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of Species," as the theme, and the political satire was blatant. This discussion will briefly focus on the 1872, 1874, and 1876 pageants; a more lengthy analysis of the 1873 events also will be presented.

1872

The Comus parade and ball of 1872 was overshadowed by the arrival and procession of Rex. There was such anticipation of Rex because of the advance publicity and the announced visit of the Grand Duke Alexis. But Comus was very much a part of Mardi Gras 1872. That was the first year that the public could enjoy both a day and an evening parade. Rex had stationed marching bands on Canal Street to help the crowds entertained while awaiting the arrival of Comus and company. The crowds had already had a full day of entertainment with the huge parade of Rex; they were further entertained by the Mistick Krewe's presentation.

Comus did not begin until late in the evening on February 13, 1872. The float announcing the theme was a large flat-bed car on which was mounted a bust of Homer before a Doric temple. Marching before the float were two heralds

carrying the lighted transparency announcing "Dreams of Homer." Comus followed in his decorated carriage holding aloft the two symbols of his divinity, the golden goblet and the bejeweled scepter. Each of the floats in this particular parade detailed some character or aspect from the Homeric narratives of The Iliad and The Odyssey. The Mistick Krewe made extensive use of tableaux roulants in this pageant. The typical float, for example, number six, used members of the krewe to present the "Argument between Achilles and Agamemnon" before the walls of Troy. The costumed players presented a variety of stylized poses depicting the argument.

The floats moved in the same progression as the two Homeric narratives, detailing in tableau the Trojan War and the travels of Ulysses. Moving between the floats were marching bands and equestrian units.

The masked ball at the Varieties Theatre displayed the same theme in four tableaux vivants. Because there was no Rex ball in 1872, the Grand Duke Alexis was entertained at the Comus ball. The four tableaux he saw were titled "The Judgment of Paris," "The Trials of Ulysses" and "The Battle of the Frogs and Mice." The third of these was presented in nine separate mini-tableaux placed around the walls of the auditorium. The Grand Duke stayed in the theatre for the general dancing that followed the formal presentation. There is no record of his reaction to the Comus ball; it is known from a variety of sources that he did not dance.

1873

The Comus pageant of 1873 produced a new phenomenon in the annals of Mardi Gras. Rather than interpreting a piece of history or a subject from literature, the Mistick Krewe produced their own poetic narrative for the parade. Rex would attempt to duplicate this effort in 1874 with the "Chronicles of Xariffa," but the Comus poem was presented during the course of the parade, not in the local press. Comus chose "The Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of Species" as the theme for its first New Orleans built parade. Prior to 1873 all of the masks and set pieces and most of the costumes were made in Paris and shipped to New Orleans; with the Comus pageant of 1873, New Orleans artisans began producing the effects needed for the Mardi Gras activities.

There were seventeen floats in this parade. The title car bore an altar on which a giant cup of incense produced a cloud of smoke which served as background for the lighted transparency of the title. Behind this float came Comus in a car decorated with wings and pulled by six Shetland ponies. The remaining floats were almost identical in structure. Each of these was a simply decorated flat truck on which a costumed player representing a particular genus stood. On each float were two attendants, costumed as asses, who held the lighted transparency on which was printed a pertinent portion of the

poem. Following each float were members of the Mistick Krewe whose costumes and over-sized papier-mâché masks depicted representatives of the various genera. What made the parade so politically shocking was that many of the masks were designed to resemble local and federal representatives of the carpetbag government.

The masks and costumes were designed by Charles Briton, a local lithographer, who submitted them to the Pickwick Club soon after the Mardi Gras of 1873. The Captain and his design committee almost rejected the designs because of the delicacy of the masks. Their experience with the Parisian artisans had not been good in the past. A "careless movement of a masker might rend a ghastly hole in his expensive countenance, and a false step might shatter whatever towering shape he represented."[175] The design committee simply did not want to risk such possible disaster with the Briton designs. At this particular time, George Soulié, a young Frenchman living in New Orleans, was employed by the Mistick Krewe to repair the papier-mâché masks and properties when they arrived damaged on their journey from Paris. Soulié assured the krewe that he could build the masks from Briton's designs. In addition, Soulié promised his masks would be stronger so that they could survive the parade and the New Orleans climate undamaged. Apparently, another problem with the Paris masks was surviving the humidity of New Orleans in the winter. The Krewe commissioned Soulié to create a model

for testing purposes. His model was subsequently vigorously tested by the krewe, who then gave their approval.

As Soulié completed each figure, he called the design committee to see his product and to verify the correctness of the caricature. It is clear that the design committee had political caricature in mind because Soulié's son, Henry Soulié, of Soulié and Crasson, verified that, "if ever there was doubt as to the countenance of a political character, or difficulty of recognition, (he) was required to rebuild it."[176] It was with the work of Soulié that the design and construction of Mardi Gras became an industry in New Orleans. In 1873, as in contemporary New Orleans, the industry of Mardi Gras turned to the artisans of the local theatres for their sources. Thus another link between carnival and legitimate theatre was established.

Although the designs of Charles Briton [plates of which appear in the appendix of this dissertation] and the work of George Soulié are acknowledged, there can be no credit given to the creator of the poem that was presented in the 1873 parade, because the Mistick Krewe never named its author. The poem's verses presented the following sequence for the parade: Title Car, Car of Comus, Equus Asinus, Zoophytes, Mollusca, Crustacea, Fishes, Amphibia, Reptiles, Fruit, Flowers, Insects, Rodents, Rumanantia, Carnivora, Pachyderma, Quadrumana and Moral. Each of the [various] verses, shown on different transparencies, introduced characters who were

played by members of the krewe. Rather than reproducing the entire poem, which is very lengthy, only a sampling will follow:

1. Title Car.

Oh! mighty Darwin, Monarch of all Sages
Adorning this or long forgotten ages,
Whose magic touch ope's portals paleologic
And shatters seals of periods geologic--

Before whose search the mysteries of creation
Dissolve like mists of morning exhalation--
Who thread'st the line of life to Nature's germs,
To find God's image in ancestral worms!

We, rich in faith and warm in strong affection
For thy great creed of "Natural Selection,"
Convinced that man--the modern institution--
Owes his proud place to laws of "Evolution,"
Now come, great Sage, a living grand memorial
Oh man's descent through lineage "Arboreal,"
"This Missing Links"--those pre-historic sires
Whose loves and lives a wondering race admires.

. . .

6. Crustacea.

There warmed the spark in its crustacean bed,
Till Shrimps, enraptured, on its sweetness fed;
Impassioned Lobsters clasped seductive claws,
And jealous Crabs succumbed to Hymen's laws.

. . .

17. Quadrumana.

Enchanting age of soul dissolving bliss,
When life's whole span was one long burning kiss,
No wonder, soon in some bright torrid vale,
Where quadrumana waved prehensile tail,
To honeyed airs aglow with warm desire,
Arboreal loves should nobler types aspire;

Or Chacma Monkeys fall like ripened grapes,
Resistless victims of the Bearded Apes;
That Mandrils, lost in soft voluptuous swoons,
Should grace the nuptials of the bold Baboons,
And Chimpanzees from waving tree tops hang,

To court caresses from the fond Orang.

Oh! rosy hues of Time's dim twilight morn!
In such an hour the "Missing Link" was born;
The great Gorilla, flinging wide the gate
Oh Darwin's Eden, and our high estate.

Through nature's void, by arm creative hurled,
Thus fell the spark which warms and lights a world;
Its pregnant beam first thrilled old Ocean's caves,
In myriad forms pulsated through the waves,
Then clad with verdure arid rocks and sand,
Bade waving branches plume the smiling land;
Sighed 'neath the shadows where burst forth living things,
And peopled air with gauzy, rain-bowed wings.
Thus stood Love's temples in expectant state
Of rites delayed--but little time they wait.
Evolving race, sluggish, wan and cold,
Wake into natures active, fierce and bold;
Selection's laws their joys unconscious guide;
To nobler types they thus unerring glide.
Perfection's heights are scaled up to the brink
Of that abyss--spanned by the "Missing Link."
There simian Cupid stands in hairy state,
But oh! what Psyche was his nobler mate?

Moral

Here sleepless science pales its searching power,
And awful mystery shrouds the nuptial hour;
Our father Ape, by all with pride confessed--
But she, whose love his ardent passion blessed,
Like Pleiad lost, is hid behind Time's veil,
We only know--her offspring dropped his tail.

The problem vast new Darwins shall engage
To swell the knowledge of a future age,
Until the secret countless cycles sealed
Bursts into life and Man stands forth revealed.[177]

Some, but not all, of the [various] creatures were built to look like famous personages of the day. The Tobacco Grub bore the likeness of President Grant; the Hyena wore the face of Benjamin Butler. The Bloodhound was costumed in the uniform of the Metropolitan, the black Republican-sponsored police unit. Perhaps the cruelest of the characterizations

was that of the final entrant, the Gorilla. He wore the visage of a Negro. As The New Orleans Picayune reported, the last link, the "Gorilla; a specimen, too, so amazingly like the broader-mouthed varieties of our own citizens, so Ethiopian in his exuberant glee, . . . so enraptured with himself and so fond of his banjo, that the Darwinian chain wanted no more links."[178]

The march of the Mistick Krewe of Comus was brief on that Mardi Gras. The police continued to protect the marchers, even after they became aware of the intent of the procession. The parade made its way down St. Charles toward Canal Street, following the traditional route of Comus to the Vieux Carré. But the progress was stopped on Canal Street. There the floats and marchers were met by hundreds of angry men, many of whom were armed. The krewe members disbanded the parade and progressed to the Varieties Theatre for their ball. It would seem that two distinct kinds of citizens were angry about the parade. There were those who objected to the theme because of their own loyalty to the Federal government. A larger contingent of protestors were concerned with the theme itself. New Orleans, which has consistently been a Catholic city, viewed the Darwinian theories with disdain. The political characterization aside, the depiction of Darwinian theory was anathema to Creole sensitivities. The New Orleans Times blasted Darwinian theory in an editorial the next day. But Perry Young opined that Comus was "gratifying the ire of

the populace against the very affairs which was supported by the Metropolitan Police."[179]

The ball at the Varieties broke new technological ground in theatrical presentation. Dissolving views, introduced by new lighting techniques, were used in the tableaux vivants. The world beneath the sea, for example, was shown with teeming marine life; the waters then accomplished by using stage wagons, movable flats, and traps and flies.

1874

The Mistick Krewe chose to have the world visit and pay homage to Comus in 1874. The parade, again built by George Soulié, featured twenty-five floats. Each float was unique, unlike the 1873 parade which had similar floats. Comus led his procession; this year he toasted his followers from his car, mounted on a float, drawn by six reindeer of Soulié's creation. The second float showed a krewe member as Europa, astride a white bull, with figures representing peace, strength, science and art at her side. It is easy to see just how elaborate the Comus parades were becoming by looking at the lists of floats. In addition to the two mentioned, there was Britannia, in a full galley; players as Charlemagne, Louis XIV, and Napoleon representing France; the Emperor of China with a full banquet scene; America in a chariot drawn by larger-than-life buffaloes; Scandinavia, represented by

Valhalla and its gods. The New Orleans Times description of the Spanish float is an indication of the intricacies of the design.

> **A richly ornamented stately war vessel was seen, just about to plunge beneath the waves. Spain's ancient naval supremacy and glories were evidently indicated thereby, with a suggested hint at the present distracted condition of that grand old land. At the stern of the sinking vessel stood a Female, strangely garbed; the red cap of Liberty, or of the Commune, as you will, was borne in one hand; the monarchial flag and crown in the other. She wore the dress of the Republic, but was enveloped in the robes of royalty. Her attitude was defiant, her look and dress symbolized the fierce struggle of confounding factions in her native country.**[180]

There were two tableaux presented at the Varieties. The first of these showed the Goddess America mounted on buffaloes, with all of the representatives of the North, South, and Central America around her. The second depicted the globe. Comus was perched atop the orb; the nations of the earth were grouped in four quarters. Dissolves and lighting techniques, as well as set pieces, were used to create the desired effects. It is clear that the theatrical presentations undertaken by the Mistick Krewe shared the advanced technology of the legitimate theatres of New Orleans.

The New Orleans Times described the two tableaux of the evening in the following manner:

> **Surrounded by clouds and lit up by rosy fires, appeared an entirely natural group, most artistically and effectively arranged.**
>
> **The Goddess America**
>
> **sitting upon the two great buffaloes of the plains, was elevated high in the air, looking serenely down on the whole glittering scene.**

> Beneath her the Genius of the United States reclined upon her Eagle, and was supported on her front by the Telegraph, Old Probabilities, the Steamboat, and the Monitor.
>
> To the right of America were grouped, Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, and the West Indies and Guayana.
>
> To America's left was the Artic Queen, with the Esquimaux and the Polar Bear.
>
> The curtain fell midst the vehement and well-earned applause of the delighted spectators. Presently, it again arose, to display
>
> The Second Display,
>
> which presented no less than eighty-three figures, occupying the whole depth, breadth and height of the stage. The scene depicted the entire assemblage of the Globe--Europe, Asia, Africa and America.
>
> In the topmost cloud, at the giddy height, Comus the jovial monarch of all he surveyed, sat upon the globe. Lower down, on his right, Europa appeared, seated on her Bull. On the same level, to the left of Comus, appeared the United States and the American Eagle. In the foreground, on either side, stood the Buffalo. Back, rose the stately groups of Asia on the Elephant and Africa on the Camel. The whole front of the stage, between the buffaloes, was filled up with various nationalities we have described.
>
> Lit up with many colored lights, these numerous figures, so vivid in contrasting attitudes, costumes and colors, presented a gorgeous picture that even Rubens, with his wonderous palette, would have delighted to place upon canvas.
>
> Amidst a storm of applause, the second and last tableau closed, and when the orchestra gave the signal for the march and procession of Comus and his guests around the parquette, and before the admiring and inquisitive audience.[181]

The same writer in the New Orleans Times also gave insight into the nature of the dance at a ball of Comus. The reporter noted that "like a flock of bright birds, the ladies then descended to the dancing area; the gentlemen followed . . . dance followed dance with little interruption, until at

midnight Comus and his guests suddenly vanished."[182]

1875

The Mistick Krewe suffered the same fate as Rex, Momus and Twelfth Night Revelers in 1875. The Pickwick Club was forced to cancel both the parade and the Comus ball. Like the other krewes, Comus had already prepared their presentations; invitations to the ball had been printed; costumes and masks were constructed. There was anticipation that both Rex and Comus would march on Mardi Gras say, but the two chose to follow Momus and Twelfth Night Revelers.

1876

For their pageant of 1876 the Mistick Krewe again set a precedent by choosing to honor the history of a group of people. Their "Four Thousand Years of Sacred History" would be the first attempt by a Mardi Gras organization to depict Biblical History. Interestingly, the Mistick Krewe followed this presentation by "The Aryan Race" in 1877. Never before has Comus attempted themes of such scope.

The New Orleans Times, in a large headline called the pageant "A Scene of Unequaled Splendor."[183] The Mistick Krewe supplied the crowds with a procession of twenty-three floats, each of which displayed a story from the Old Testament. The

krewe chose to depict such scenes as the Garden of Eden, Noah and his Ark, Babel, Moses in the bulrushes, and Solomon, and the theme was so grand that the New Orleans Times noted that "in attempting even its partial delineation the Mistick Krewe of Comus has dared a dizzy height."[184]

Comus returned again to the use of narrative on their transparencies, as they did with their Darwinian venture. Each of the floats was preceded by a lighted transparency with a quotation from the Bible. For example preceding the float depicting the Garden of Eden was this passage: "Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death." The New Orleans Times description of that float is typical of each of the twenty-three:

> **The scene is Eden, nature's virgin Elyseum, where, on velvet turf reclining, reposes the first created man.**
>
> **Eve--her golden tresses in wanton ringlets waving--extends the succulent symbol of destruction. Human happiness yet tremble in the balance, for a lamb and a lion lie peacefully together, and a timid doe frolicks in the fresh young verdure, but circling the tree of knowledge hisses a glittering serpent and man's heritage of woe is on the eve of consummation.**[185]

In this pageant of 1875 the Mistick Krewe [perhaps] came closest to the pageant-wagon presentations of the Medieval theatre. It is clear that there was no dialogue involved in these parades, but the theme of this particular dumb show is strikingly similar to pageants tableaux presented by the Medieval guilds to celebrate the feasts of Corpus Christi. The floats of New Orleans Mardi Gras were pulled in

a continuous procession through the streets. At the time discussed here, the parade did not make stops to present a special performance. Therefore, it is fair to assert that the tableau described above was held static and seen in the same form by all of the outdoor audience. As in 1874 the ball of the Mistick Krewe gave two tableaux, elaborating on the same Biblical theme.

Summary of Activities of Momus, Twelfth Night Revelers and the Mistick Krewe of Comus

The Knights of Momus, the Twelfth Night Revelers, and Mistick Krewe of Comus were more specific in their political satire than Rex during this period. Momus came into existence as a "younger" version of Comus, with many of the same membership requirements as the older krewe. The most famous of the early Momus presentations happened just outside the period under study. Their 1877 pageant, "Hades--A Dream of Momus," caused perhaps the strongest reaction of any theme.

The Twelfth Night Revelers continued as the first pageant of the carnival season. Although they would discontinue their parade later in the decade, their balls continued as the inaugural event of Mardi Gras. Their most important contribution to this period was their decision to not celebrate the Mardi Gras of 1875, thus setting into motion the cancellation of Mardi Gras for that year.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus continued during this period to produce the highest quality parades and balls. Their decision to make the physical production of the accoutrements of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, instead of importing them from Paris, changed the economy of the holiday and of the city. Their decision started Mardi Gras as a business and led eventually to the Carnival being the second largest industry in New Orleans. The Mistick Krewe continued to be the cultural leader of the Mardi Gras season. Their themes and interpretations during this period most clearly reflected the temper of the times. In their decision to display political satire with their "Origin of the Species," the Mistick Krewe mirrored the dissatisfaction that the white citizens felt with the federally imposed carpetbagger government.

On April 24, 1877, federal troops left New Orleans; Reconstruction was over. The federal attempt at legislating the attitudes of the white citizens toward the former slaves was a failure. As Mel Leavitt noted, the freedmen "were promised everything yet wound up with little more than a subtle form of bondage. . . Negrophobia became the prevailing theme of political life."[186]

The four krewes under study served as barometers of this difficult period. As popular culture, the Mardi Gras of the Reconstruction period spoke volumes about the attitudes of its participants. Even though the freedmen were left with

little after the withdrawal of federal troops, they would soon learn the power of Mardi Gras as expression of attitudes. In 1894 the first black carnival organization was formed; by 1895 the Illinois Club staged its first ball. In 1909 Zulu was formed. With the Zulu parade of 1909 the descendants of the freedmen of Louisiana were able to use the traditions of carnival to satirize the very restrictions of Mardi Gras. Over its long history, Zulu has continued to be a parody of the all-white krewes.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to describe the New Orleans Mardi Gras both as popular culture and as a vibrant, living form of theatre. The Mardi Gras festivities are composed of many of those elements that are ingredients of legitimate theatre production. A list of those components would include costume and scenery design, lighting, dance and movement, acting, music, and story-telling. The following artisans of the theatre work at the production of the Mardi Gras balls and parades: costume, scenery, and lighting designers; musicians, actors, dancers, and mimes; writers, choreographers, directors, and producers. From the beginning of the organized activities of 1857, the Mardi Gras krewes have established themselves as organizations dedicated to the production of these theatrical events. This paper has attempted to show how Mardi Gras, because of both its ritualistic elements and its use of theatrical techniques, is valuable for inclusion in the theatrical history of the United States because it so clearly mirrored the attitudes and needs of the people who conceived it.[187] New Orleans during the nineteenth century had a rich theatrical life, as has been detailed by John S. Kendall in The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre. Unfortunately Mr. Kendall chose to ignore

the Mardi Gras pageants. The index for his text has no listing for either Mardi Gras or Carnival, yet the city about which he wrote was so enamored of this particular kind of revelry that by the end of the nineteenth century, Carnival celebrations stretched from Twelfth Night to Shrove Tuesday.

The Material presented in the previous six chapters will now be revised to draw conclusions about the actual nature of this special theatrical event. One aim of this dissertation has been to recognize that a form such as the Mardi Gras is valuable for study because such study allows the theatre historians an opportunity to chart the development of a unique culture's particular theatrical expression.

Mardi Gras gave voice to the citizens who organized and participated in it. To be sure, that voice was one that today would be called both racist and anti-Semitic. But in the context of the period under study, Mardi Gras allowed those citizens to acknowledge their reflections on their cultural heritage before and after the Civil War. The various Mardi Gras organizations became unifying and controlling devices for the city's natural desire to participate in both outdoor revels and indoor masquerades.

Chapter 2 of this study was an attempt to better understand Mardi Gras by comparing it to similar festivals throughout history and to other celebrations that bear the same name. Mardi Gras did not just spring in full form from the heads of the original Cowbellion de Rakin Society.

Masking and dancing were integral parts of the societal makeup of early New Orleans. What the gentlemen from Mobile did was to give structure to the chaotic festivities. Throughout history this same pattern has been repeated. When the Lupercalia degenerated to its lowest point, its intent as celebration was saved by its mightiest enemy, the Church, who transformed the pagan rites into the Carnival. The Cowbellions, representing the more conservative views of the Americans who settled in New Orleans after the Creoles, saved Mardi gras from its own destruction and put it under the aegis of "polite" New Orleans society.

This pattern was again demonstrated when the Krewe of Rex put a structured sensibility to the day-time revels of Mardi Gras in 1872. By that year the day-time activities of New Orleans had degenerated to the level of the chaotic night-time revels of 1857. The Krewe of Rex moved to preserve the Mardi Gras by harnessing the chaos and channelling the city's energy into a "spontaneous" ceremony to honor the visit of true royalty.

The Mardi Gras is unique because it has incorporated so many elements of ritual and theatre into its physical productions. Where else in the United States but New Orleans can one see the rituals of class society not only condoned but sanctioned by the city government? Especially on Mardi Gras day, the people of New Orleans are transported back to an earlier time of monarchs and their courts, designated class

strata, and official royal favors. From its earliest manifestation in New Orleans, the monarch and gods of Mardi Gras have been recognized and honored by the Mayor. Rex, especially, is granted a power few Americans will ever experience. It is true that much of this is symbolic, but even in that symbolism there is the kernel of reality. For a New Orleanian who participates in Mardi Gras the symbols are as powerful as any reality.

Chapter 2 also attempted to discuss how those historians of Mardi Gras traced its heritage to early Greek and Roman festivals. The purpose of this particular section was to present their opinion in summary fashion to afford a better understanding of just how serious Mardi Gras is to New Orleanians. The genealogy presented by Young, Dufour, et. al., is the accepted one in New Orleans because it gives credibility to the Carnival excesses. For the Mardi Gras reveler it is perfectly natural, and even required, that during Carnvial reality is suspended and the worlds of myth, legend, and allegory became acceped. The lineage of Mardi Gras from Roman antiquity through eighteenth century French court spectacle justifies to the Mardi Gras reveler the very existence of that revelry.

Any discussion of Mardi Gras as theatre must include mention of the striking resemblance that Mardi Gras has to entertainments of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Feast of Fools, tournaments, disguisings, and royal entries

were activities that had parallel structures or intents with the Mardi Gras. The Stuart Court Masques and the various European Carnival also contain elements of presentation that parallel those of nineteenth century Mardi Gras.

Conclusions to be drawn from this second chapter include: (1) Mardi Gras, like the Lupercalia, went through a period of degeneration marked by debauchery and criminal activity, only to be "saved" by an outside force and converted into a structured revel; (2) Mardi Gras's rich traditions can be seen in pageants and festivals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; (3) Mardi Gras, like the Lupercalia and the various European Carnivals, was deeply ingrained in the cultural expressions of those who participated.

Chapters 3-6 (of this dissertation) were historical and chronological. Chapter 3 traced the development of the Mardi gras in the French colony and the state of Louisiana. The aim of this chapter was to show how the Carnival, which undoubtedly came to the colony with the French settlers, was nurtured by the Marquis De Vaudreuil and his soirées du Roi. The Mardi gras gave yet another excuse for the Creole population of the city to mask and dance. These two entertainments, masking and dancing, were popular in both the private homes and on the banquettes of the Vieux Carré because they were accessible to all and they were not necessarily expensive. While De Vaudreuil and his guests danced at elaborate masked balls, the young Creole men revelled and

danced in the streets. This dual nature of the Carnival--private party indoors and public revels outdoors--became the established pattern for Mardi Gras.

Chapter 3 also detailed the growth of the chaotic nature of he outdoor revels. By the mid-1850s the New Orleans press was labeling the Mardi Gras as "vulgar, tasteless, and spiritless."[188] Into this atmosphere came the members of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society who had a similar love for the activities of Mardi Gras and who wanted to see it preserved, but in more controlled and dignified form.

Conclusions to be drawn from this third chapter include: (1) balls and masquerading were popular during the tenure of the Marquis De Vaudreuil, one of the Louisiana colony's earliest governors; (2) Mardi gras was well-known to the Creoles; even the first names in the new colony contained the term Mardi gras; (3) the weather dictates of the Louisiana colony made the winter months the most comfortable, the time of year when Carnival traditionally takes place; (4) the popularity of the balls and outdoor revels could not be controlled by the various governing authorities that came to own the colony; (5) the combination of the French and Spanish architecture which dominated the Vieux Carré enhanced outdoor festivities; (6) special buildings for masked balls were built during the early part of the nineteenth century; (7) by 1827, New Orleans saw the first organized procession; by 1835,

floats appeared in a parade; (8) the parade of 1840 integrated a theatre performance into its finale; (9) prior to 1857, the Mardi gras was limited to the Creole population of the city; (10) by 1857 the revelries were in disarray, with criminal acts on the rise.

It was into this disarray that the Cowbellions came. Members of the Cowbellions, joined by other citizens of New Orleans, set about to restore order to the situation and by so doing preserve the traditions of the Mardi gras. The original members of the new organization chose as their name "The Mistick Krewe of Comus," signifying both a mock antiquity and a secretive quality. It is apparent also that there is a linguistic link between Comus, the god of revelry, and the Greek word, komos from which we get comedy.[189]

Chapter 4 presented a discussion of the activities of the Mistick Krewe of Comus during their first five years when many of the traditions that are evident in modern Mardi Gras were set. These traditions include: (1) the structure of the organization as a secret one with selective membership; (2) the addition of a public organization, the Pickwick Club; (3) linkages to the legitimate theatre of the city both for design functions and use of space for balls; (4) the structure of the parade as a series of floats each depicting some aspect of a common theme; (5) parade routes linking the French and American sectors of the city; (6) institution of the night parade using flambeaux for illumination and lighted

transparencies to display float titles; (7) the use of both tableaux vivants and tableaux roulants; (8) the interjection of contemporary political commentary into parades, especially in their theme of 1860, "The History of America"; (9) the use of the most up-to-date technical effects in their balls staged at legitimate theatres; (10) the structure of the Mardi Gras ball which consists of three parts--court presentation, entertainment, dancing.

Even though the Mistick Krewe of Comus was not a political organization, the club did function as a barometer of the political attitudes of the times. Their choice of themes in this period before the debacle of the Civil War rejected the optimism that the city felt. It is clear that their pageant of 1860 reflected the pride felt by the city toward such events as the War of 1812 and the founding of their own colony. What is puzzling about the Mistick Krewe at this time was their failure to choose a satiric theme in 1861, after Louisiana's withdrawal from the Union. Certainly, the krewe was aggressive in their political statements after the Civil War. There seems to be two reasons for this; the first rests with the amount of time needed to build a pageant and the second concerns the vision that the Mistick Krewe had of itself. The original krewe members saw their organization as just a social one, and during their first years the political situation was more optimistic than pessimistic. With the harsh realities of Reconstruction, the Mistick Krewe

became much more overt in their use of their Carnival to express their dissatisfaction with the carpetbagger government. It is important to note that in both instances, the Mistick Krewe was reflecting what the krewe members felt was the overall temperament of the times.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus established Mardi Gras as a viable expression of popular culture. The success of the Mistick Krewe is testament to the propensity for this kind of popular entertainment in the city of New Orleans.

Chapter 5 examined the years from 1862 to 1872. This was the period of the Civil War and the early years of Reconstruction. The Mistick Krewe did not parade from 1862-65, but in 1866, Comus rode forth again as a strong symbol to the citizens and their captors. The Carnival presentations during this period became increasingly political. The pageantry of 1865 offered a hand of friendship to the occupying forces; that hand was rejected. Comus used the milieu of the parade to express their reactions to the horrors of the Civil War. Their theme, "The Past, the Present, and the Future" was an attempt to present tableaux depicting the strife of war and the possibility of future reconciliation. As the Daily Crescent noted: "[the ball] was unexceptionably the most suggestive and intelligible living allegory we have ever seen."[190]

During the period discussed in Chapter 5, a new krewe was formed. In 1870, the Twelfth Night Revelers staged a

parade and ball on January 6. The organization chose the Lord of Misrule as their figurehead. The formation of the Twelfth Night Revelers demonstrated the popularity of Carnival in New Orleans, and the New Orleanian ideal of having fun even in the face of adversity. The Twelfth Night Revelers also began three important traditions of Mardi Gras. This krewe gave Mardi Gras the "King Cake," the grand march at the ball, and the inclusion of women in the festivities.

It is important to remember that it was through the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers that Mardi Gras survived this difficult period in the history of the city. It is certainly indicative of the special nature of New Orleans that the city would continue to produce and support Carnival activities even during the harsh realities of the Union imposed government. Comus continued to "take fun seriously."

The Krewe of Rex was the third Carnival organization to form. Chapter 6 presented a discussion of the period 1872-76. The impending visit of the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia may have been the impetus for the formation of Rex, but the chaotic state of the daytime revels dictated a need for a new organization to restore order. Rex and Comus share this particular experience as necessary organizations. The Krewe of Rex was formed in 1872. This was in the midst of the Reconstruction Period. This was a time of particular tension in the city. The citizens, especially the white males who had

been New Orleanians before the Civil War, were especially frustrated by the stripping of their power by the "Carpetbagger" government. The Mistick Krewe of Comus had already established Mardi Gras as a reflection of popular attitudes; during this period the existing krewes made the Mardi Gras spectacle increasingly political.

The first parade of Rex was hastily organized. Using borrowed wagons for floats, the krewe presented a motley procession for the visiting royalty. The Grand Duke's visit not only inspired the new krewe, it also gave the Mardi Gras its theme song. "If Ever I Cease to Love" was a nonsense song that Alexis heard Miss Lydia Thompson sing in New York. With such lines as "may the moon be turned into green cheese, may oysters have legs and cows lay eggs," this song was a cliché for the frivolities of Carnival. Even an attempt by the Krewe of Rex to replace the song with one written in praise of Rex failed. The Krewe of Rex also made social commentary by choosing the name Rex, King of Carnival, for their figurehead. The imposed democracy of the Reconstruction Period was obviously not pleasing to the krewe members. By establishing a monarchy, even a symbolic one, Rex made a call for social classes and groupings.

Rather than choosing a theme for each year, the Krewe of Rex extended a theme over several years. Rex chose to depict a monarch in exile over the course of these years. They kept the myth alive by having Rex's exploits in far away

lands chronicled in the local press, between the Mardi Gras seasons. While the Mistick Krewe of Comus chose overtly political themes, the Krewe of Rex displayed a monarch deposed and on forced-march, waiting for his throne to be restored.

From chapter 6 several summary points can be drawn concerning the Krewe of Rex's contributions to Mardi Gras. Those include: (1) incorporation of an official song, official flag, and official colors--as symbols, these give stability and longevity to the festivities; (2) choice of a King of Carnival, a monarch to rule over the entire festival, thus unifying all of the various elements of Mardi Gras; (3) the addition of a Queen of Carnival, which continued the trend established by the Twelfth Night Revelers and made more full the monarch status of Rex; (4) division of a parade into several parts, corresponding to various members of the King's entourage; (5) parading on Mardi Gras day; (6) addition of the French boeuf gras to the pageantry; (7) development of advance publicity to enhance excitement about the parade and ball; (8) incorporation of debutantes into the ball, and, (9) formation of the School of Design.

The Mistick Krewe of Comus and the Twelfth Night Revelers were also active during this period. The Twelfth Night Revelers continued to become the most social of the organizations, with elaborate screening for membership and rigid control of guest admission to the ball. These attitudes heightened the secrecy of the carnival organization. The 1873

presentation of the Twelfth Night Revelers was considered, at least by Perry Young, "one of the most beautiful in carnival history."[191] The theme was the "World of Audubon," and it was a pageant featuring elaborate costumes with symbolic intentions. The Revelers mocked the Carpetbagger administration by depicting them as the most disreputable of birds, such as crows and vultures, and praised the white citizens by showing them as the state bird, the Pelican, posed heroically.

In 1873, the Mistick krewe of Comus produced the first parade and ball built entirely in New Orleans. Prior to that year, costumes, set pieces, and masks were imported from Paris. In 1873, Comus commissioned George Soulié to build the masks designed by Charles Briton. This established a new industry in the city, an industry that thrives in modern times. Also in 1873, Comus incorporated an original script into both the parade and the ball. Unlike Rex's "Chronicles of Xariffa," which appeared in the local press in advance of Mardi Gras, Comus prepared a long poem on the theme, "Missing Links to Darwin's Origin of the Species." Stanzas of the poem appeared on the lighted transparencies before each float, and the poem appeared in the program at the ball. The poem, in not too subtle form, compared the Union-imposed government of the city and the federal government to various odd creatures of a nightmare evolution. In perhaps the krewe's most racist statement, the final character displayed was the "missing

link," a gorilla designed to resemble the white man's impression of the banjo-strumming Negro.

The Krewe of Rex was not the only krewe formed in 1872. The Knights of Momus joined the ranks of carnival organizations. Momus was a younger version of Comus, and the new krewe gained a reputation for being the most fun-loving of the early krewes.

From the discussion of the activities of Comus, Twelfth Night Revelers, and Momus in Chapter 6, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) the popularity of Mardi Gras increased as the tensions of Reconstruction grew; (2) krewe presentations became increasingly satiric in their allegory, especially toward the Carpetbaggers and the Negroes; (3) the design and construction of masks, costumes, and set pieces became an industry in the city; (4) the relationship of the Mardi Gras krewes to the theatres of the city continued both in the instances of shared space and shared technical skill; (5) the Mardi Gras of 1875 saw no parades or balls from any of the Mardi Gras krewes; (6) throughout this difficult period, the Mardi Gras organizations represented the political atmosphere of the times and they served as reflections of the attitudes of their white, Christian, male membership.

The scope of this dissertation covered a difficult period in the history of New Orleans. Both the period before the Civil War and the period after were times of political flux; the period before was one of anticipation and

excitement, the period after was one of frustration and steadfast adherence to old values. The presentations of the krewes of Mardi Gras reflected these attitudes. To be sure, not all periods of New Orleans history were as turbulent as this one. Mardi Gras, over its entire history, can be seen as a festival of joy and frivolity. It is indicative of the special nature of this festival that it makes use of theatrical techniques to express the mood of the citizens who control it.

As was noted at the end of Chapter 6, various groups have learned to use Mardi Gras much as the original krewes used it. In modern New Orleans there are black krewes, women's krewes, gay krewes and a variety of krewes of mixed ethnicity. This is a reflection of the attractiveness of the Mardi Gras to everyone, a clear indication that, at least in New Orleans, everyone wants to "put on a mask and play."

The traditions set in the early days of Mardi Gras are intact today. Krewes are still secret organizations with closely guarded membership. Parades are the public expressions; balls are for invited guests only. The parade routes determined by Rex and Comus are still reasonably intact. Even though no parades travel through the French Quarter, they do journey on its fringes, thus uniting the French and American sections of the city. Throws, which most historians trace (rather grandly) back to the <u>februa</u>, and which certainly had antecedents in the flour broadcast of the

Creole days, became popular traditions in the twentieth century. No historian is certain as to when beads first appeared as throws but in modern time the desire to catch beads from a float is paramount to a reveler. Doubloons, coinage for a particular krewe, first appeared in 1960. Doubloons, which have no face value, have recently surpassed beads as the most desired throw.

Modern Mardi Gras exhibits the same dichotomy as the earlier New Orleans festival. The outdoor festivities are still the "greatest free show on earth," while the indoor activities, the various balls, are the most closely guarded secret. The balls follow the same format as developed by the first four krewes. There are still tableaux vivants which depict that year's theme; in modern times the participants in the entertainments are just as likely to be professionals as members of the krewes. Formal dancing is very much a part of contemporary Mardi Gras; now krewes have open dancing after all of the formal presentations.

Mardi Gras has made use of those elements of theatre which are most loved by New Orleanians. The essence of Mardi Gras is masking; everyone who wants to participate can don a costume and mask and impersonate a character. Some maskers, members of krewes, get to ride on a float. They become part of a tableaux exploring a particular theme; here we have then a kind of pantomimic display which is pulled throughout the city and which is seen by huge crowds. Still other maskers,

members of krewe courts, are allowed to impersonate royalty and deities for the entertainment of invited guests. These participants take part in formal dances and court ritual.

All of the celebrants of Mardi Gras are part of the visual symbolism of the revelry. To see a Mardi Gras parade is to see an incredible depiction of supplicant and priest, as the members of the crowd stretch their arms out, imploring riders on a float to give them some token of the festivities. The chant of "throw me something, mister" has become the ritualist imploring of the supplicant to the priest for a symbolic recognition; to be part of this cathartic event known as Mardi Gras.

NOTES

Chapter 1. **INTRODUCTION**

1. Throughout this dissertation, Mardi gras refers to the French and Creole celebration of Carnival.

2. In one of the most interesting exceptions that surrounds Mardi Gras, the Krewe of Rex chose a Jewish man, Lewis Salomon as their first king. According to Leonard Huber and Pie Dufour, W. S. Pike, a prominent banker was chosen to be the first Rex, but due to illness (Huber and Dufour's reason) or "cold feet" (Young's reason), he declined the honor. At the last minute, Salomon was chosen because he raised the most money for the parade. Though the issue of anti-Semitism is not discussed by these particular historians, it is clear that Mr. Salomon is one of very few Jews to participate in these earliest krewes.

3. Arthur Barton La Cour, New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing House, 1957), 222.

4. Code of the City of New Orleans, 226.51.

5. La Cour, 224. La Cour gave no date for the transition from horses to mules.

6. The tableau vivant is the most frequent kind of entertainment staged at a Mardi Gras ball. In all probability, the earliest tableaux vivants of Mardi Gras were close to the pantomimic actions described by Oscar Brockett as "living pictures." In these, the actors would assume a pose and then freeze (remain motionless) for a period of time so that the audience could look at a particular picture. The tableaux vivants of more contemporary Mardi Gras continue this format only at the balls, not on the floats.

7. The term tableau roulant is apparently another gift from New Orleans. The term does not appear in any work examined for this study, except those pertaining specifically to Mardi Gras. the earliest tableaux roulants consisted of participants posed as for a tableau vivant but on a float. This float would them be pulled into the hall where the Mardi Gras ball was being held.

8. Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987), 488.

9. It is clear from John S. Kendall's Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre that by the end of the nineteenth century the theatres of New Orleans were concentrating more and more

on spectacle and circus than on legitimate drama. This trend continued into the twentieth century.

Chapter 2. SIMILARITIES OF MARDI GRAS TO OTHER FESTIVALS

10. The most interesting of all the Coast festivals during Carnival is the one held in Pass Christian, Mississippi. This is a small town of about 6,000 citizens. Their Mardi Gras, which according to local historians R. J. and Katy Caire, dates back to 1915, is closely tied to the local Catholic Parish, St. Paul's. The krewe is called the Krewe of King Christian (named for the founder of the town, Christian L'Adnier); membership comes from the parish. The Krewe of King Christian, in a departure from other krewes, selects their king in a special fund-raising effort. The krewe nominates two potential kings, who select queens in advance, and both parties stage activities to raise funds for the parish. The couple who raises the most money in a prescribed amount of time becomes the royalty. Participants in the ball and parade pay all their own expenses; the parish reaps the profit. A parade is staged on the Sunday before Mardi Gras; the ball is the night before that.

11. In an entry in the New Catholic Encyclopedia called "Fertility and Vegetation Cults," F. De Graeve discussed the universality and antiquity of such cults. The article noted:

> **"Since religion is intimately connected with the existential situation of man in the cosmos, the central place of fertility and vegetation cults ought not to cause surprise, for they deal with the mystery of life itself." (897)**

12. Ovid, Fasti, translated by Sir James Frazer (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1931), 77.

13. Perry Young, The Mistick Krewe: Chronicles of Comus and his Kin (New Orleans: Louisiana Heritage Press" 1931, 1. (Of course, Young tended to treat Evander as a real, not a mythological, person).

14. Ovid, 79. (For another reference to the Lupercalia and running naked see William Shakespeare's Julius Caesear).

15. Ibid., 394.

16. Young, 1.

17. Grant Showerman, Rome and the Romans (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1931), 302.

18. Young, 2.

19. Myron Tassin and Gaspar "Buddy" Stall, Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 17.

20. Brockett, 53.

21. Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1963), 444.

22. Gibbon, 449.

23. Robert Tallant, Mardi Gras (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 87.

24. Sir James George Frazer, The New Golden Bough, edited by Dr. Theodor H. Gaster (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1959), 374.

25. Young, 2.

26. De Urbina, I. Ortiz, "Nicaea I, Council of," in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 10 (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), 433.

27. Young, 2, and Tallant, 89.

28. Tassin and Stall, 18.

29. Frazer, 653.

30. Ibid.

31. Young, 3.

32. E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, Volume I (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), 275.

33. Brockett, 121.

34. William Tydeman, The Theatre in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 73-74.

35. Ibid., 75.

36. Ibid., 90.

37. Phyllis Hartnoll, Editor, The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 274.

38. Brockett, 185.

39. Young, 66.

40. John C. Meagher, Method and Meaning in Jonson's Masques (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 82.

41. Ibid., 95.

42. Tallant, 92.

43. Ibid.

44. Young, 6.

Chapter 3. DEVELOPMENT OF MARDI GRAS PRIOR TO 1857

45. Mel Leavitt, A Short History of New Orleans (San Francisco: Lexikos, 1982), 29.

46. Ibid.

47. It was during the last decade of Spanish Rule that the architectural character of the Vieux Carré emerged. Much of this character is due to Don Andrés Almonester y Roxas, an "architect, contractor, supplier, and subcontractor" (Leavitt, 53) who financed the Cabildo. A fire destroyed much of the city in 1794. The new city reflected much of the Spanish style including arches of heavy masonry and roofs of Spanish tile. Most houses were two stories, with a shop below. The banquettes were the wooden sidewalks which were attached to the buildings. Above the banquettes was the balcony of the building, so that the combination of the banquette and the balcony offered a protected (from rain and sun) walkway for the revelers.

48. Leavitt, 79.

49. Adele Bielenberg, "History of Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Pass Christian" (transcript of a lecture delivered at the Pass Christian Historical Society, Pass Christian, Mississippi), February 14, 1983.

50. Charles Gayarre, Romance of the History of New Orleans (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1948), 66.

51. Laurraine Goreau, "Mardi Gras," in The Past as Prelude: New Orleans 1718-1968, ed. Hodding Carter (New Orleans: Tulane University-Pelican Publishing House, 1928), 342.

52. Leavitt, 41.

53. Goreau, 343.

54. John S. Kendall, The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theatre (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1952), 2.

55. Leavitt, 38.

56. Goreau, 345.

57. Ibid.

58. Kendall, 1.

59. Brockett, 488.

60. La Cour, 11.

61. Ibid., 12, quoting the account of Colonel James R. Creecy.

62. Ibid., 14, quoting from the Picayune. This particular newspaper (later the New Orleans Picayune) is not available at the New Orleans Public Library, thus the reliance on La Cour.

63. Goreau, 348, quoting the Picayune from La Cour.

64. Ibid.

65. Tassin and Stall, 23.

Chapter 4. FORMATION OF THE MISTICK KREWE OF COMUS

66. Young, 66.

67. N. M. Ludlow, Dramatic Life as I Found It: A Record of Personal Experiences; with an Account of the Rise and Progress of the Drama in the West and South, with Anecdotes and Biographical Sketches of the Principal Actors and Actresses who have at times appeared upon the Stage in the Mississippi Valley (St. Louis: G. I. Jones and Company, 1880), 587.

68. Young, 65.

69. The original membership included the following: S. M. Todd, L. D. Addison, J. H. Pope, Frank Shaw, Jr., Joseph Ellison, William P. Ellison, Charles M. Churchill, Louis Lay, Alex Smith, Jr., John Hanning, William Wood, Ben Conyers, William H. Ellis, E. M. Ross, Sam Ferguson, C. W. Newton, W. S. Campbell, Joseph Murphy, and S. L. Butler (from Young 66. His list does not include all eighty-three members).

70. Tassin and Stall, 25.
71. Ibid.

72. Webster's Third New International Dictionary, unabridged, 1968, s.v. "mystic."

73. Tassin and Stall, 25.

74. Goreau, 350.

75. La Cour, 16.

76. Daily Crescent, February 26, 1857.

77. Daily Delta, February 26, 1857.

78. Daily Crescent, February 26, 1857.

79. Young, 61.

80. Kendall, 359.

81. Ibid., 360.

82. Young, 68.

83. Daily Crescent, February 17, 1858.

84. Ibid.

85. Young, 70.

86. Daily Crescent, February 17, 1858.

87. Young, 70.

88. Daily Crescent, February 17, 1858.

89. Young, 71.

90. Ibid.

91. Daily Delta, March 9, 1859.

92. Ibid.

93. La Cour, 29.

94. Ibid., 11.

95. Young, 74.

96. Daily Crescent, February 22, 1860.

97. Young, 73.

98. Ibid., 75.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid.

102. New Orleans Picayune, February 22, 1860.

103. Daily Delta, February 22, 1860.

104. Leavitt, 106.

105. New Orleans Picayune, February 13, 1861.

106. Young, 77.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., 78.

109. Daily Delta, February 13, 1861.

110. Young, 78.

111. Harry A. Kmen, Music in New Orleans: the Formative Years, 1791-1841 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 3.

112. Ibid., 17.

113. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Life on the Mississippi (New York: Heritage Press, 1944), 270.

Chapter 5. WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION: THE YEARS BEFORE REX

114. Leavitt, 112.

115. Goreau, 352.

116. Young, 82-83.

117. Daily Crescent, February 14, 1866.

118. Young, 88.

119. Leavitt, 114.

120. Ibid.

121. Joy Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 304.

122. Mitchel L. Osborne and Errol Laborde, Mardi Gras: A Celebration (New Orleans: Picayune Press, 1981), 141.

123. Tassin and Stall, 27.

124. Young, 221.

Chapter 6. FORMATION OF THE KREWE OF REX

125. Goreau, 355.

126. Tallant, 131; Osborne and Laborde, 55; Goreau, 355.

127. Young, 98.

128. Ibid.

129. The exact announcement was as follows:
To the Hon. B. F. Flanders, Mayor:
His Majesty, the "King of Carnival," believing that both the peace and prosperity of the city could be better secured by organizing the wandering maskers on Mardi Gras into a procession on Canal Street, respectfully requests your permission to carry out his views, and the cooperation of police in enforcing his "self-assumed" authority. An early answer is respectfully requested.

130. Tallant, 131.

131. Republican, February 1, 1872.

132. Young, 101.

133. Charles L. "Pie" Dufour and Lenoard Huber, If Ever I Cease to Love: 100 Years of Rex 1872-1971 (New Orleans: The School of Design, 1970), 7.

134. Osborne and Laborde, 56.

135. Young, 103.

136. Ibid.

137. Republican, February 14, 1872.

138. Dufour and Huber, 11.

139. Young, 104.

140. Ibid.

141. Tallant, 137.

142. Young, 105.

143. Tallant, 139.

144. Young, 105.

145. Ibid.

146. Ibid., 111.

147. Dufour and Huber, 17.

148. Ibid.

149. Tallant, 141, quoting J. Curtis Waldo.

150. Young, 114.

151. Ibid.

152. Ibid.

153. Leavitt, 114.

154. Tallant, 143.

155. Young, 130.

156. Kendall, 568.

157. Republican, February 18, 1874.

158. Dufour and Huber, 24, quoting Waldo.

159. Dufour and Huber, 24.

160. Dufour and Huber, 24, quoting Waldo.

161. New Orleans Picayune, January 6, 1875.

162. Young, 135.

163. Leavitt, 114.

164. Young, 137.

165. Bulletin, January 23, 1875.

166. New Orleans Times, March 1, 1876.

167. Ibid.

168. Dufour and Huber, 6, quoting from the Republican.

169. Young, 107.

170. Ibid., 242.

171. Republican, February 9, 1877.

172. New Orleans Times, February 9, 1877.

173. Young, 148, quoting from the Bee.

174. Ibid., 127.

175. Ibid.

176. Ibid. In both notes 175 and 176, Perry Young credited Henry Soulié as his direct source.

177. Ibid., 119-124.

178. New Orleans Picayune, February 14, 1873.

179. Young, 118.

180. New Orleans Times, February 18, 1874.

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid.

183. Ibid., March 1, 1876.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

186. Leavitt, 117.

Chapter 7. CONCLUSION

187. Study of popular culture is on the rise in the United States. In 1977 the American Society for Theatre Research and the Theatre Library Association jointly sponsored a "Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment." Papers were presented on such entertainments as vaudeville, amusement parks, and medicine shows. Myron Matlaw, editor of American Popular Entertainment: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the History of American

Popular Entertainment, noted in the preface of that work (and quoting Brooks McNamara) that the conference centered "around long-neglected aspects of theatrical performance which are currently generating much interest among theatre students and scholars." (page x) Matlaw further noted that study of such entertainments "helps to re-create our cultural heritage by presenting an overview of popular entertainment and by sorting out the individual forms of the genre" (page xii).

188. Goreau, 348.

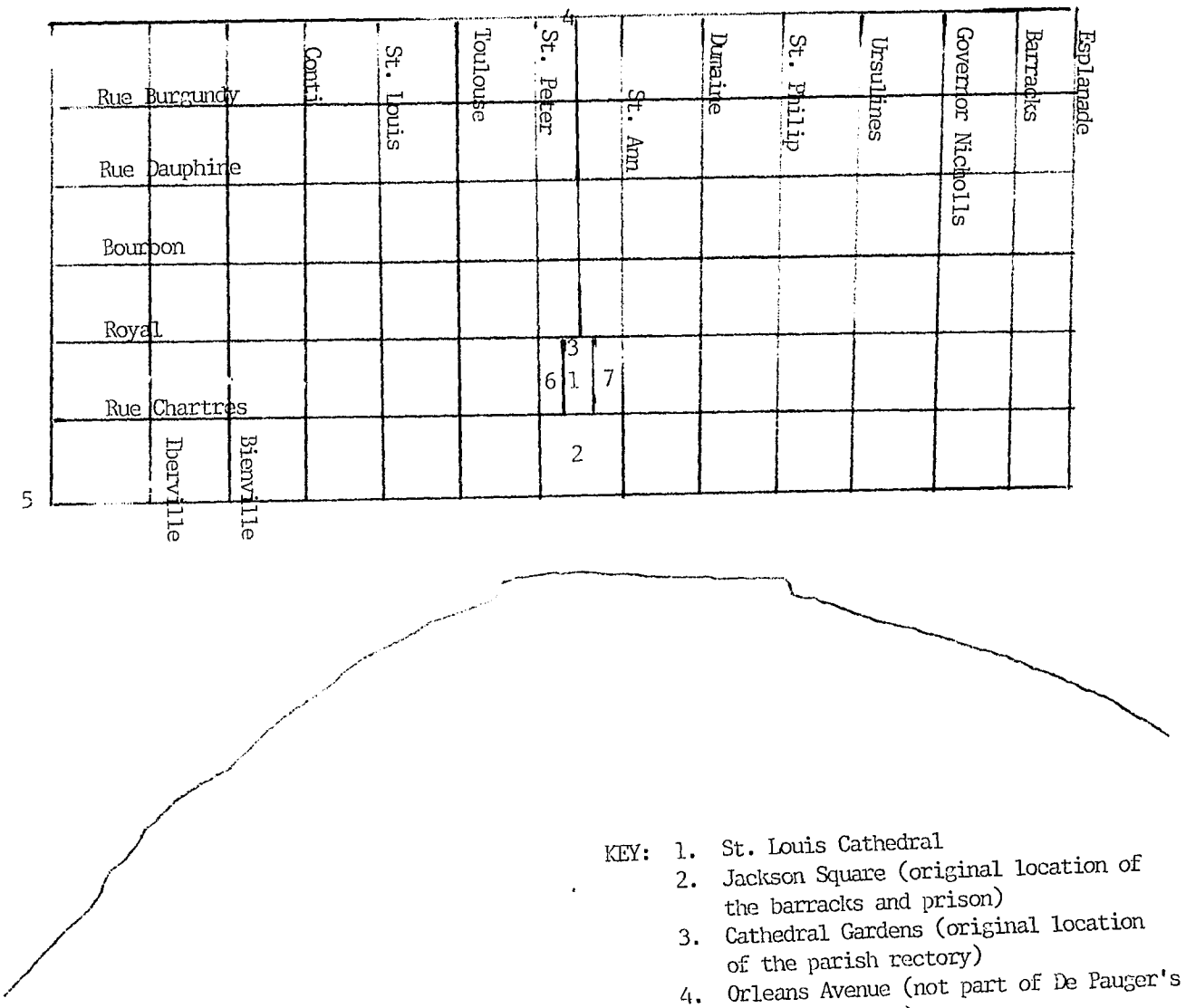
189. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre: A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day (London: George G. Harrap & Company LTD., 1948), 19. Writing in a section titled "The Origins of Tragedy and of Comedy" Nicoll made the following observation: "Comedy had a similar development. It arose out of the less decorous mummery associated with the κῶμος (comos; the Latin comus), or voluntary procession organized by the townsfold in honour of Dionysos and ending with a phallic song." It is interesting to note in this quotation such key words to Mardi Gras as Comus, procession, and mummery.

190. Daily Crescent, February 14, 1866.

191. Young, 107.

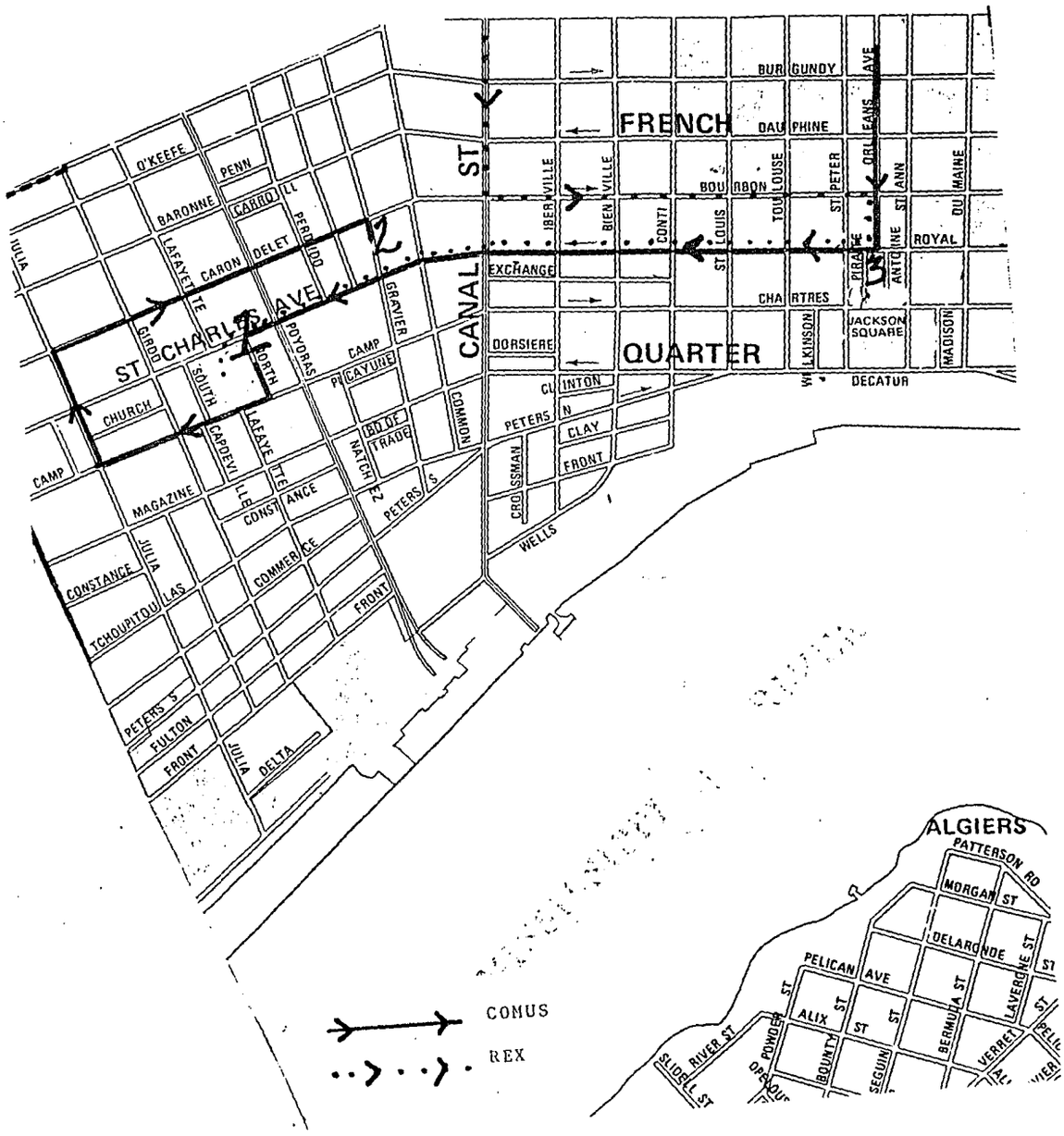
ILLUSTRATIONS

Map # 1: The French Quarter



KEY:
1. St. Louis Cathedral
2. Jackson Square (original location of the barracks and prison)
3. Cathedral Gardens (original location of the parish rectory)
4. Orleans Avenue (not part of De Pauger's original design)
5. Decatur Street (approximately the location of the first levee; Decatur was not part of the original design)
6. Cabildo (seat of Spanish government, built by Almonester)
7. Presbytere (completed in 1813 by the Americans)

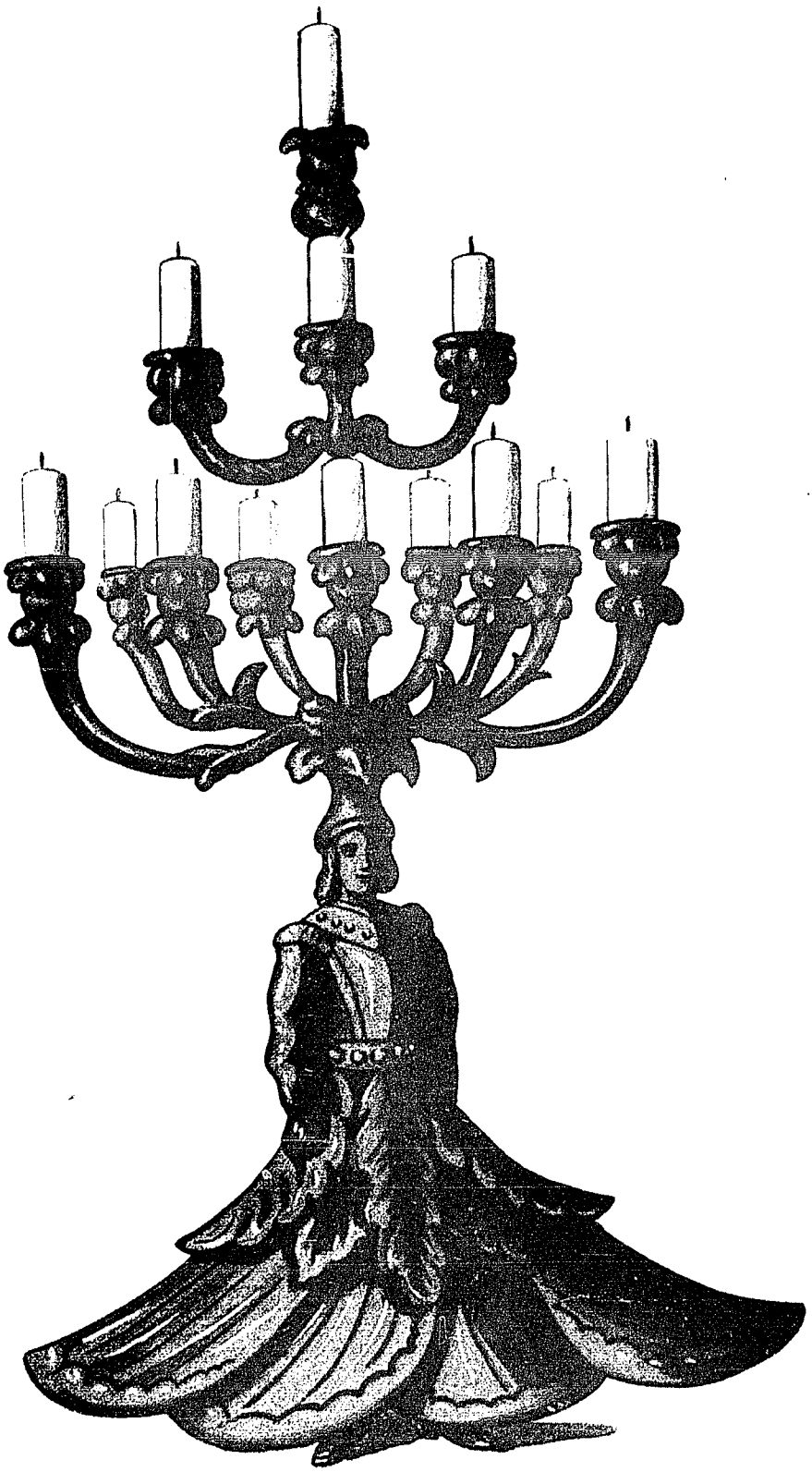
Map # 2: Parade Routes of Comus and Rex, 1872



KEY: 1. City Hall
2. Varieties Theatre
3. St. Louis Cathedral

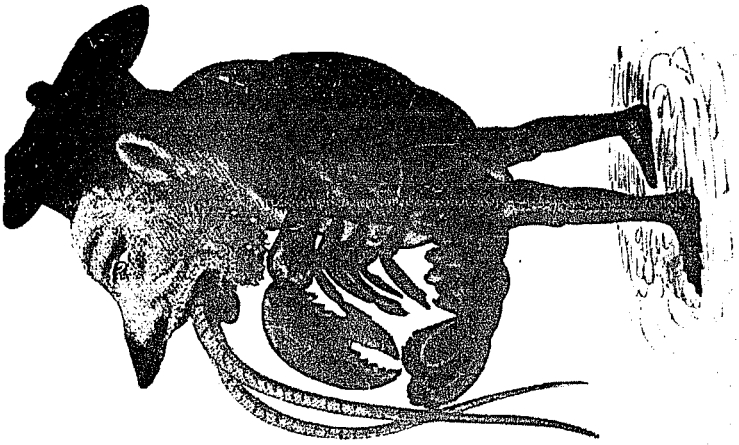
BOEUF GRAS IN THE TRIUMPH OF EPICURUS, COMUS, 1867.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.

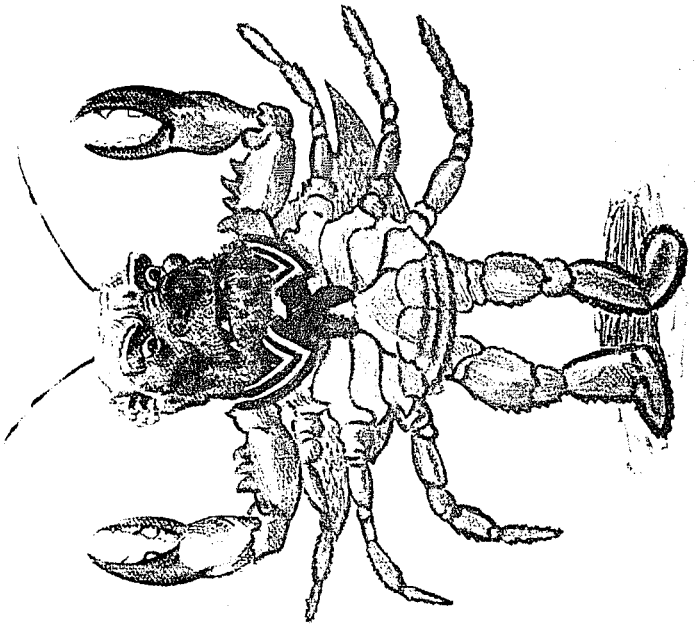


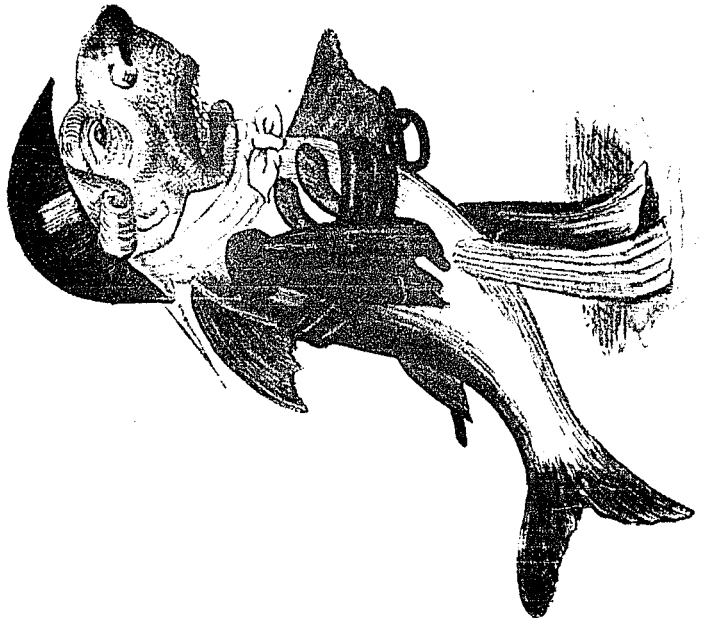
A CANDELABRUM MASKER IN THE "TRIUMPH OF EPICURUS," COMUS, 1867.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.



IMPASSIONED LOBSTERS CLASPED SEDUCTIVE CLAWS, AND JEALOUS CRABS SUCCUMBED TO HYMEN'S LAWS.



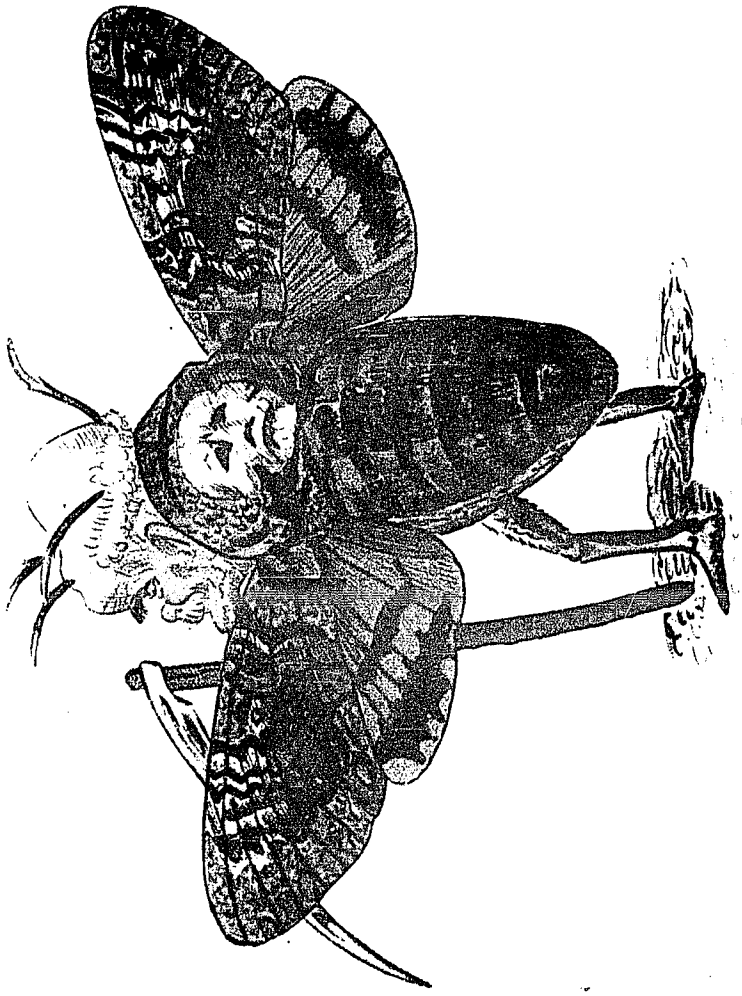


LOVELORN PASSIONS THRILL THE CRUEL SHARK.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.

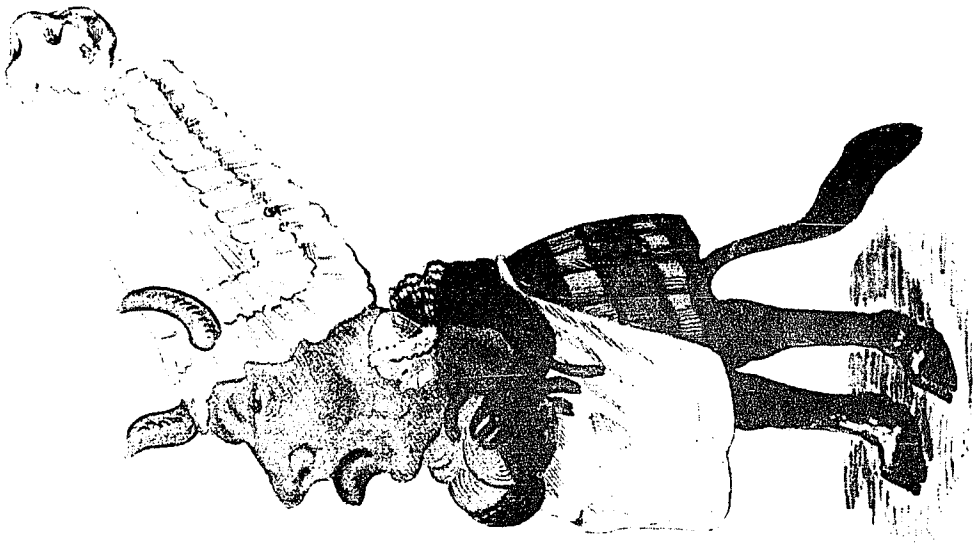
THE CUNNING FOX WHICH JOINS THE COON.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.



THE MOTH SEEKS SOLACE IN THE BEETLE'S ARMS.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.



AND THEN THE BULL, OF BRAWN AND BEETLING BROW, LEADS IN THE DAINTY CREAM-DISTILLING COW.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.

COMUS—A NUMBER ONE COSTUME PLATE, BY MISS WILDE.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.

REX—NUMBER ONE COSTUME PLATE, 1890, BY WICKSTROM.

Illustrations courtesy of Zuma Young Salaun.

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