

**“Nursery of Revolution”: Armand Lanusse and
the *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins dans l’Indigence*, 1852-1868**

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Abstract

The icon of the American educated citizen has traditionally been rooted in Jeffersonian Democracy, eventually taking shape in the Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common school movement in which state-supported public education has been assumed to be *the* measure of democratic progress. Alternatively this research engages curriculum history from a “transatlantic, multiracial, multicultural and multinational contact zone” in which Franco-Afro-Creoles of Louisiana of the antebellum period were active agents in constructing “public” education. This paper examines one Afro-Creole school, the *Société Catholique pour l’Instruction des Orphelins dans l’Indigence*, and its principal Armand Lanusse, from 1852-1866, to illuminate how its curriculum sought to situate Louisiana as part of the Atlantic World that constituted enlightenment ideologies of the “public” in which the “educated citizen” emerged as a “subject” identity. This research draws on archival documents (Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Historic New Orleans Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University) to not only trace the transnational, hybrid nature of these educational innovations, but to articulate the unique philosophical assumptions which undergirded the curriculum. Ultimately, this line of inquiry requires a reconsideration of the national narratives of American educational history that have been rooted in a Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common School narrative of education.

April 30, 1858

*Leonard Santos Esq.
Terrebonne, LA*

Dear Friends,

I think it a great pleasure of giving you an idea of the examinations that took place here a few days ago; for they were very beautiful...we read, made dictation, conjugated verbs, and made grammatical exercises. For the pieces of poetry, the school was so full of people that we could not get a place to sit down. The recitation began at three in the afternoon and finished at half past nine. There was a little girl that had two pieces she recited so well, that they threw two bouquets at her, and one cake to my friend Isidore.....

*Yours,
Leon Dupart¹*

Fourteen-year Leon Dupart, a free person of color and student at the *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* in New Orleans, composed this letter for his English composition teacher as part of his weekly class assignment. His letter reflects not only a deep sense of pride in his classmates’ intellectual prowess, but suggests that community performances such as these were popular literary events designed to pay tribute to the emerging talents of young Afro-Creole poets, artists and scholars. For Leon and his approximately 240 classmates, the school

provided a rich liberal arts education for both French and English speakers. Although the school was under the auspices of the Catholic Church, children of all religions were admitted.² According to the prospectus, every child, both girls and boys, would receive a practical, moral and religious education, regardless of economic status or future profession.³ The curriculum was designed to offer “invaluable advantage” to black children of the poorest classes who might only be able to attend a few months or at most a year.⁴ And while there were strict state prohibitions against teaching slaves, the school’s Board of Directors’ meeting notes suggests that there was heated discussion regarding the possibility of educating the enslaved.⁵ According to Mary Mitchell “the Catholic Institute was the cornerstone of the Afro-Creoles political work. One in which they developed a radical agenda aimed at attaining civil and political rights for people of color in the Americas.”⁶

Oft maligned for its lack of education and democratic vision prior to the Civil War, recent scholarship by Caryn Cossé Bell, Emily Clark, and Mary Mitchell contests a deficit view of democratic education in Louisiana by highlighting the role of a distinctive female Catholic tradition, an Afro-Creole protest tradition, and the republican idealism of French and Haitian intellectuals.⁷ While these works focus on the political, religious, intellectual and social heritage of democratic thought, my interest lies in the area of education. Specifically, my focus is on the *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* (also known as the Catholic Institute for Indigent Orphans, or Institute Catholique, or the Couvent School), between the years 1852-1866, when Armand Lanusse (1812-1867), a free person of color, was the principal. With a cadre of Afro-Creole men and women teachers, Lanusse developed a

curriculum that challenged emerging theories of scientific racism that posited blacks as intellectually inferior. Challenging these dominant stereotypes, the Catholic Institute worked within the severe restrictions placed on blacks in antebellum New Orleans to not only establish a school that served as a “public” institution in order to provide an education to the largest number of black girls and boys, but established a rigorous curriculum in which students were to become activists in imagining what freedom and full citizenship in a democratic society based on human equality might look like.

Dubbed “the nursery of revolution” the Catholic Institute challenges prevailing narratives of curriculum history that privilege the origins of “public” education as the exclusive province of the Massachusetts common school movement. The Catholic Institute also provides a unique space in which to examine a Afro-Creole curriculum that saw public education as critical to liberation and equality, and in which notions of “public” education challenged normative understandings of the relationship between citizenship, nation, and identity.⁸ The teachers and students of the Catholic Institute were situated as neither free or slave, black or white, French or American, but in the in-between and hybrid spaces of identity; citizenship and equality were continually contested and in flux throughout the antebellum period.⁹ Drawing on the student letters of the boys written for their English Composition class at the Catholic Institute, the minutes written by Armand Lanusse at the Board of Directors meetings and newspaper articles from the *Tribune* and *L’Union* written by the teachers and students, I examine in what ways a “curriculum of imagination” provided a critical space to re-imagine the “public” sphere as a site of freedom and moral equality.

Ultimately, this line of inquiry requires a reconsideration of the narratives of curriculum history that have perpetuated a normalized Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common School narrative of education. Louisiana's educational history during the Antebellum period contests not only the hegemony of the "common school" movement as the origins of "public" education, but also situates Louisiana as part of a larger Atlantic World (West Africa, the Caribbean, Western Europe and Canada) that constituted enlightenment ideologies of the "public" in which the "educated citizen" emerged as a "subject" identity. These ideologies, according to Paul Gilroy, are specifically the result of a "Black Atlantic" culture in which people of African descent engaged in an intense cultural exchange and invention (or creolization) that transformed and expanded the meanings of democracy.¹⁰ Despite calls for a more "transatlantic" history, an African-Franco-Creole ideology as articulated by Armand Lanusse and the Catholic Institute remains obscured due to the normative framings of curriculum history which Bernadette Baker maintains are embedded in an "occidental preoccupation with a certain series of sociological transformations and categories that enable the social projects of modernity and nationalism to be named, to slide easily by as though obvious, uncontested and universally understood."¹¹ Situating the Catholic Institute, its teachers and students, as critical agents in articulating the role of "public" education in shaping a democratic society is essential in contesting dominant narratives of curriculum history.

Armand Lanusse and an African-Franco-Creole Revolutionary Education Tradition

A need for learning is being felt everywhere. We are beginning to

understand that no matter what situation fate has placed us in, a good education is a shield against the spiteful and calumnious arrows shot at us.¹²

The "shield" to which Armand Lanusse (1812-1867), a New Orleans Afro-Creole Free Person of Color, refers to is education. As editor of *Les Cenelles*, the first anthology of African-American literature published in the United States in 1845, he began the volume by declaring that a "good education" was the shield that would protect young men and women of color from the "spiteful" arrows of racial discrimination. While Lanusse is perhaps best known for his literary work, this research seeks to situate his life and work as an educational activist and theorist whose work as a writer and poet, teacher and administrator, journalist, public intellectual and civil rights activist in nineteenth century Louisiana embodied an Afro-Creole revolutionary education tradition. Situated as neither free or slave, black or white, French or American, but in the in-between and hybrid spaces of identity, free people of color sought to assert, as Edouard Glissant maintains, an unique "creolized collective presence" in spite of the repressive binary (black/white) constructs of race imposed on them by Americanization.¹³ As part of a larger community of free persons of color whose Afro-Franco-Creole-Catholic traditions can be traced to the beginnings of the French colonial period, Lanusse was part of an Afro-Creole protest tradition shaped by a multilingual, trans-cultural, transatlantic, process of creolization that was critical to his unique theorizing of the relationship between identity, education, freedom and citizenship.¹⁴

While Lanusse is well recognized as an Afro-Creole poet, his role as a leading educational activist in New Orleans has been obscured. In fact, Lanusse was part of a larger network of transnational intellectuals whose

political radicalism was, according to Carolyn Bell (1997), based in the egalitarianism of the age of democratic revolution, a Catholic universalist ethic, and Romantic philosophy that saw education as central to liberation. Shaped by the ideals of the Haitian and French Revolutions, as well as the revolutionary fervor of radical French émigrés to New Orleans, Lanusse's vision of an egalitarian society came to fruition in a unique interracial intellectual tradition that saw "public" education as critical to humanization and the democratic ideals of equality.

For Lanusse, a "good education" was the shield that would protect young men and women from the "spiteful" discourses of racial discrimination. Although public education had been established in New Orleans in 1841, free people of color were barred from these schools even though their property taxes helped to fund them. This blatant exclusion from the public sphere fueled the activism of Creoles of color who saw "public" rights as reflecting "an even deeper and more radical insistence on the moral equality of all human beings" than political or civic rights."¹⁵ While those who could afford to do so continued the long held tradition of sending their children to private schools, either religious or secular, or to France for an education, concern was for those children of color who did not have this advantage. Lanusse and other Creole leaders (both black and white) undertook a campaign to promote education. In fact, the 1840's (simultaneous with the introduction of publicly funded schools for whites only), marked a critical period of educational innovation for free children of color and enslaved children in New Orleans including the St. Claude School, Sister of the Holy Family Bayou Road School, Collège de la Louisiane and the Catholic Institute, among others, that understood education not only as public, but as universal.

Armand Lanusse, born in New Orleans in 1812, unlike many other free men of color from Louisiana, was not sent to Paris to receive his education but most likely attended a small private school in the French Quarter. Under the tutelage of a private tutor, he would have been educated in the classics, French and Latin, and introduced to the great French romantic writers, such as Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo (who set one of his novels during the Haitian Revolution), Alphonse de Lamartine (an advocate of universal suffrage), and Pierre-Jean de Béranger (an advocate of social reform). This group of French romantic writers had an abiding faith in the ideals of the French Revolution. No doubt these writers, among others, had a deep impact on Lanusse as he imagined a society in which all men would be treated as full human beings.

As a young man, in his early thirties, Lanusse saw education as a means to not only maintain Afro-Creole French-speaking culture, in an era of increasing Americanization, but as a means to counter the racial degradation implicit in the emerging plantation/slavery system. Free people of color were determined to challenge the increasingly harsh nature of race relations through counter-spaces that signified the goals of democratic revolution. Afro-Creoles focused their activism on the development of schools. Private schools, such as the Sainte-Barbe Academy, founded by Michel Séligny, and the G. Dorefeuille Academy were interracial schools that flourished in the 1820's. The emergence of a class of educated persons of color, proficient in multiple languages, the classics, music, theatre, and drama challenged the increasingly insidious images of black inferiority perpetuated in the emerging constructs of "scientific racism." By 1830 legislation was passed that made it a crime to write anything that might cause "discontent among free people of color or insubordination

among the slaves,” the penalty being life imprisonment at hard labor or death.¹⁶ By 1855, free persons of color could not move about the streets without permission. Many free people of color moved permanently to France, the West Indies, Mexico or Haiti rather than endure continued persecution.¹⁷

Despite these setbacks, Afro-Creoles, like Lanusse, redirected their activism to the establishment of literary and educational institutions through which they could contest images of racial inferiority. However, given the context of repression, this posed severe limitations for Afro-Creoles political activism. For Lanusse, his writing did not directly address political issues (given that this was a crime). However, his own writing and publications sought to combat ignorance of racial prejudice by highlighting the contributions of Creoles of color to the intellectual and cultural life of New Orleans. In 1843, Lanusse created an interracial literary journal, *L'Album Littéraire*, which published the works of both Creoles and Creoles of color. Although only six issues were published, it was bold for its time and place. In it, Lanusse published “Un Marriage de conscience” a story that criticized the practice of *plaçage*, a practice in which a young Creole woman of color would be “placed” with a rich white man in exchange for financial security and support. This practice demeaned women as property (a parallel to slavery) often leaving them destitute. This critique of gender relations (as perhaps also mirroring race relations) was also a critique of the Catholic Church, which Lanusse suggests closed their eyes to the practice. In *Les Cenelles*, he published a second poem critiquing *plaçage* entitled “Epigram.” A mother of a young Creole woman of color is in the confessional with the priest ready to be absolved of all her sins when she asks the priest “Before grace sparks my soul,

tell me I can ... Set up my daughter with a rich white man!” With these final lines the poem ends, the complicity of the priest a critique not only of the Catholic Church, but of institutionalized white (sexual) supremacy.¹⁸

Lanusse’s critique of racist and sexist social relations clearly propelled him to activism in education. It is perhaps no coincidence that this literary outpouring of Afro-Creoles coincided with the establishment of publicly funded education (for whites) in New Orleans in the 1840’s given that free people of color were barred from these schools even though their property taxes helped to fund them. This inequity galvanized the Afro-Creole community, particularly Armand Lanusse, to support the formation of the *L’Institution Catholique des Orphelins dans l’Indigence* (also known as the Catholic Institute for Indigent Orphans). In 1837, Madame Marie Couvent, a free woman of color in New Orleans and devout Catholic, had bequeathed to the Catholic Church the money necessary to provide a school for free black orphans in the Faubourg Marigny.¹⁹ Public officials opposed expanding educational opportunities for free people of color and discouraged the formation of the school. However, after ten years, Father Manehault, Couvent’s spiritual advisor and supervisor of her will, approached Mr. Francois La Croix, a black philanthropist and slaveholder, as well as other prominent French-speaking free men of color for the purposes of carrying out the will of Widow Couvent.²⁰ These men formed the society known as the “Catholic Society for the Instruction of Indigent Orphans” which was chartered in Baton Rouge in 1847. Although the school was under the auspices of the Catholic Church, children of all religions were admitted.

The Catholic Institute provides a unique space in which to examine Lanusse’s role as

principal in creating what some consider the first black “public” school in Louisiana as well as the development of a bi-lingual curriculum in which students were to be active agents in imagining what a democratic society based on equality might look like. We are fortunate that student letters from the period 1858 to 1865, written as an English exercise, have survived. Not only do they speak about the school, their classmates, the curriculum, and their Principal Armand Lanusse, but the exercises in writing reflect the school’s curriculum of imagination in which fictive letters provided students an opportunity to construct alternative identities and imagine worlds in which freedom was a reality.

Re-Imagining Citizenship: The Trans-Atlantic, Imaginative Spaces of Freedom

May 8th, 1857

Dear Friend,

I write you this short letter in order to let you know that I desire tolerance in this country. Tell me what you think of Mexico if I should be well there with my family.

*Your devoted friend
Armand Nicolas²¹*

Fourteen-year old Armand Nicolas, writing to a fictive friend in Pueblo, Mexico, is trying to imagine what it might be like to emigrate and live in a country that is free of racial discrimination. Although barely a teenager, it is obvious that he has experienced the increasing restrictions on free people of color that preceded the Civil War. Despite these racial prejudices, Armand sees himself as clearly entitled to the full benefits of citizenship. His keen sense of social justice has been nurtured by the radical pedagogy of his

principal and teachers that empowered these young men to envision their lives as active agents despite the harsh realities of racial oppression. The curriculum of imagination of the Catholic Institute was infused with a global, transatlantic sense of identity in which connections to France, Haiti, Cuba, and Mexico, not only allowed them to conceptualize freedom, but also underscored a sense of global citizenship (as opposed to being a citizen of a nation) with those in other countries and their struggles for equality. For the students at the Catholic Institute, democratic revolution would require a radical re-imagining of the public sphere in which citizenship was conceptualized within the trans-Atlantic, imaginative spaces of freedom.²²

For Armand and his approximately 240 classmates, the school provided a rich liberal arts education including instruction in French and English (eventually they also offered Spanish), grammar, composition, mathematics (arithmetic, algebra, and geometry), rhetoric, geography, catechism, history, logic, basic accounting and personal hygiene.²³ Encouraged to engage their imaginations, students were given the space to imagine different futures and to envision themselves as active agents in shaping a society in which the ideals of democratic revolution and universal brotherhood would come to fruition. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the imaginary letters students wrote.²⁴

Several months earlier in November of 1856, Armand had written to his imaginary friend in Grand Lake, LA

My mother is very well now, she is going off for Marseilles, and then to Paris to see her brother who lives in the city, and she will go and see your wife. I think in the course of the next month I will write you more than I do now because I have not

this month left my plantation. Present my best to your wife, and all your family.

Your faithful friend,

A. Nicholas²⁵

The young men (ironically the young girls do not participate in this letter writing, and are in fact educated separately from the boys) write convincingly about their travels throughout the world, including visits to Spain, France, Mexico, Haiti, as well as various cities throughout the United States including Boston, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. They envision family members spread throughout the globe engaging in business ventures, leisure, travel and commerce. These assignments allowed the boys to imagine positions of wealth and authority that were denied them given the political situation in the south, including that of being a plantation owner. While these young men were encouraged to visualize the prospects of full citizenship with equal political rights, this also included the economic potential to participate in the slave economy.

A few days later, on November 28, Armand's classmate, William Green wrote to his brother in Monterey, Mexico;

*You inform me that after you have settled in Mexico (where you are making a good business) that you have the intention to leave for Nicaragua where you expect to succeed.*²⁶

In the 1850's, under the increasing racial repressions that preceded the war, the teachers of the Catholic Institute encouraged the students to forecast lives for themselves in places outside the United States, countries that might offer them freedom and equality.²⁷ It is clear in the letters that these migrations, and success in a foreign country, were dependent on being well educated

and engaging in a profession. The curriculum of the Catholic Institute (which went from first to eighth grade) stressed the importance of trade as well as networking. Most of the children were expected to enter an apprenticeship with an artisan or tradesman; most likely as a tailor, cigar maker, grocer or shoemaker, professions that had long been a monopoly of free people of color. William Greene wrote in February of 1857 to his friend in Grand Lake, LA.

*Oh! What a prize it is to me who has a good hand, and more especially to one who is about to enter the commercial line. My intention is not to inhabit this country forever, a country that offers so little advantage as this. And I am about to prepare seriously to leave by studying, to bid an eternal adieu to my native home ...*²⁸

The boys made connections between Marseilles, Paris, Mexico, and Nicaragua, intertwining commerce with transatlantic relationships. Mitchell has highlighted that the focus on emigration in the letter writing of the students did two very important things, "first, it strengthened the ideological and historical ties that existed between free blacks in the U.S. and other settlements of free blacks in the Diaspora. Second, the prospect of emigration created an ideological and geographic space in which free blacks could envision and articulate the kind of freedom they hoped to achieve in a society without slavery."²⁹ What is remarkable about these letters is that given the focus on "freedom" little is said in regard to slavery. Clearly, the legal prohibitions against seditious writings prompted the teachers to caution students to craft their letters carefully.³⁰ And given the fact that some free people of color were slave owners, it clearly

must have been a challenge for the young men to negotiate these tensions between “freedom” and “slavery,” as well as their own space in between.

Given these contradictory spaces, a curriculum of imagination becomes not only a powerful antidote to the increasing racial discrimination and injustices that these young men are experiencing, but situates the students as active agents in negotiating the complex terrain of race, identity, and power relations in which they are simultaneously privileged and oppressed. In these early letters, the boy’s understanding of freedom is located within countries in which slavery has already been declared illegal (France, Mexico and Haiti). According to Mary Mitchell “the students at the Catholic Institution constructed their own moral geography; that is, they mapped their prospects about freedom, testing ideas about a future in other nations outside of their own.”³¹

While we might read this migration as a form of “escape” from oppression, these letters envision a black Atlantic community that transcended the boundaries of individual nations and, in the minds of the students, perhaps transcended racial oppression as well. This curriculum of imagination was one that the teachers of the institute hoped would ignite a revolutionary zeal among the students in which they would construct freedom for all people of color, uniting them in a transatlantic citizenship that extended beyond national boundaries. This transgression of the dominant discourses of “citizenship” as transnational was intimately related to the ways in which rights discourse was emerging in relation to conceptions of public and private. Nowhere was this discussion more relevant than in relation to the Catholic Institute.

Re-imagining public education

May 27, 1858

To S. Armstrong, Esq.
Attakapas, La.

Dear Brother,
The Catholic Institution, to which I belong has increased its prices two weeks ago and I will tell you the causes thereof. You know yourself, dear brother, that the prejudice against the colored population is very strong in this part of the country. The Legislation used to give every year, for this establishment, fifteen hundred dollars; but this year, when they went to get it, they did not want to give anything at all, and they treated them very bad. Then the Direction (director) of this establishment had a session so as to see what could be done. They saw that they could not go any further. Then they increased the contribution of every scholar, by a few cents. The pupils who have a father and mother, have to pay fifty cents a month, instead of twenty, those who have their mother only, have to pay half price. But the ones who are deprived of both, their father and mother needn’t to pay nothing at all. Is this not too bad, my dear brother? The white people have an Institution in every district, and they are all protected very well. But we, who have, but a single one, cannot be protected at all.

Your invariable friend,
A. Frilot³²

The sense of despair that A. Frilot conveys in his letter reflects the increasing racial discrimination

being experienced by students at the Institute. The tuition increase was just one more example of the worsening injustices against free people of color. Several letters written during the week of May 27th, 1858 convey concerns about the impact of the increased tuition, including whether students will be forced to leave the school and the outrage of parents at rising costs. What made this financial burden all the more painful was that it brought home the favoritism shown to white children at black children's expense. A. Frilot was quite cognizant of the fact that whites had schools that were paid for through public funding whereas, while free people of color paid taxes and received no educational assurances in return.

The teachers had obviously not shielded the students from the racial discrimination inherent in the educational system. In fact, they were quite direct in relaying to the students the strategies and actions they engaged to protest this injustice. As young Frilot conveys, the director, Armand Lanusse, confronted this injustice, and while unsuccessful, Lanusse and his staff, provided the students with not only a specific incident of, and critique of social injustice, but conveyed a form of pedagogical activism in which they engaged directly in not only contesting injustice, but in re-defining and crafting meanings of the public sphere.³³

The status of the Catholic Institute, as either a "public" or "private" space has long been contested. While some have characterized it as "the most famous Negro private school," evidence suggests that the directors and the free colored community considered the school a "public" one.³⁴ Donations and such sent to the Catholic Institution were often addressed to the "Public School for Indigent Orphans of the Third District" (*l'Ecole Publique des Orphelins indigents du Troisième district*). The school had received funds from the state legislature for

several years. The directors justified their requests given that black property owners had to pay taxes for public schools without having access to them. Directors of the school had managed to convince the state legislature and the New Orleans city council to appropriate money to the school for the care of its indigent and orphaned pupils.³⁵ These grants may well have constituted the first governmental subsidy for black education in the South.³⁶ The school's board of directors also agreed to follow the disciplinary rules of the public schools. While the school remained under the auspices of the Catholic Church (which functioned as a form of protection), the institution admitted children of any religious denomination, French and English speaking students, rich and poor children, as well as boys and girls. At various times, there were heated discussions among the Board of Directors as to whether to give consideration to educating enslaved children, however, given the severe penalties for this, the Directors of the School decided it would be best to let the slave owners be in charge of the education of their slaves.³⁷ While this was clearly a community without consensus, the directors, teachers and students were actively engaged in contesting dominant notions of what constituted the "public" by re-inscribing the term with their own understandings. First and foremost was their absolute right to complete participation in the "public" sphere as equals, especially as it pertained to education.

Expectations that the students would participate in constituting the public sphere were also clearly conveyed to students. Student activism was not limited to the practices of a curriculum of imagination by writing letters within the confines of the schoolhouse. Teachers at the Catholic Institute (including Lannuse and Paul Trevigne), as well as the students, engaged in real world activism by writing editorials and

poems to the *L'Union*, (after two years it became the Tribune) the French-language bi-weekly newspaper founded in 1862 by Afro-Creole leaders.³⁸ Cofounded with Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez, and his brother Jean-Baptiste Roudanez, and edited by Jean-Charles Houzeau, a Belgian activist, who passed for colored, *The Tribune* published editorials, essays and literary works that set the Civil War within the context of an ongoing age of revolution.³⁹ Armand Lanusse and other Afro-Creole writers drew once again on their radical literary traditions to address the possibilities and circumstances of the Civil War and Reconstruction, using the medium of the newspaper, to imagine with readers a nation of composite citizenry, an unprecedented United States.⁴⁰

On December 6, 1862, an article signed “A student of the Catholic Institute” (no doubt it would have been potentially dangerous to sign their name), criticizes an article in the *L'Abeille* (The Bee, another New Orleans Newspaper), for misrepresenting the actions of the school’s director, Armand Lanusse, in regards to an incident in which the U.S. flag was supposedly torn apart at the school house.⁴¹ The student’s scathing critique of *L'Abeille* suggests that the paper purposely misrepresented the incident in order to cast suspicion on the school. The student suggests that readers of newspapers must have a critical eye in order to “leave aside everything that is only there to tease partisan hatred.” In regards to the majority of readers, the student describes them as “those old geezers stuck in the groove of a routine and who for all their life have not missed reading the digest after sipping on a half cup of coffee, still believe blindly the news found in the papers; or maybe the pure-bred secessionist, the kind that does not exist in Europe, that was engendered by the Southern States’ rebellion.” The curriculum of the school

clearly resulted not only in critical readers of the news, but in students who were empowered to write in real world spaces to expose the social injustices they experienced. Throughout the Civil War, the teachers and students contributed poems, editorials and articles to New Orleans newspapers in which they sought to articulate a vision of the “public” that was not merely rights based, but was revolutionary in imagining a transatlantic brotherhood in which citizenship transcended the nation by conceiving of an international brotherhood united by political and economic freedom.

For Armand Lanusse and the students at the Catholic Institute, when the Civil War broke out in 1861, they believed this would be the democratic revolution they had been waiting for. Central to this revolution would be a society in which the human dignity of all persons would be signified in the public sphere through free, integrated schools. For Lanusse, this goal was most clearly articulated in his writings in *The Tribune* where he wrote on February 17, 1865

[Segregated Schools] perpetuate from childhood the infatuation of the white, and prompt the black to retaliate by enmity or envy, [and] ... draws a line between the two elements of one and the same people, from the cradle itself up to the time of manhood and throughout life ...⁴²

Once again, a curriculum of imagination played a powerful role in envisioning a new America. Poems, printed on the front pages of the *Tribune* worked to create a vision of the nation based on the newly declared rights of all humans, against which actual events could be judged.

For Afro-Creole activists, the Civil War was far more than a struggle to preserve the

Union, it was a necessary step toward the fulfillment of republican ideals. The editors wasted no time in setting out the goals of radical creoles: “We inaugurate today a new era in the South. We proclaim the Declaration of Independence as the basis of our platform ... You who desire to establish true republicanism, democracy without shackles, gather around us.”⁴³ A few weeks later they wrote “a new sun, similar to that of 1789 ... is on our horizon.”⁴⁴ The paper also carefully noted that when France had emancipated all remaining slaves in her possession in 1848 that they had also been granted universal male suffrage. The objective was clear- achieving the full rights of citizenship for all African-Americans in the United States. How this would be achieved was the task that lay before them.

Student letters to the newspaper reflect how the outbreak of the Civil War challenged students in new ways to negotiate the meanings of freedom and citizenship. At the start of the war, their principal, Armand Lanusse and many other free people of color chose to support the confederacy. A student letter from April 1861 describes the large assembly held in the schoolyard at which Lanusse, “a brave Creole of our glorious Louisiana,” roused creoles of color to enlist in the Confederacy. Lanusse was quoted as saying:

So my dear friends, it is not for liberty that we are about to spill our blood in struggling; but our right and “our right we shall have or die on the fields of battle.”⁴⁵

Invoking the language of rights to participate in the military, a “public” institution, Lanusse’s decision to initially join the confederacy suggests the complex, contextual and situated meanings of

public rights. Later Lanusse joined the Union, and in an 1866 editorial, wrote:

Our future is indissolubly bound up with that of the negro, and we have resolved ...to rise or fall with them. We have no rights which we can reckon safe while the same are denied to the fieldhands on the sugar plantations.⁴⁶

The strategic political use of race distinguished the *Tribune* writers as radical thinkers of the time. Given that the prevailing theories of race were biological, to construct race as political or as the result of historical circumstances was radical.

Throughout the Civil War, the teachers and students contributed poems, editorials and articles to New Orleans newspapers in which they sought to articulate a vision of the “public” that was not merely rights based, but was revolutionary in imagining a transatlantic brotherhood in which citizenship transcended the nation. Imagination, not just the rational discourse of rights, was seen as essential to creating a “public” in which the equality of all human beings would be honored.

In Conclusion

Shortly before his death in 1867, Lanusse, while still principal, published a poem in *L’Union*,

And since among us the ills of slavery will cease, let us forget our suffering of yesterday; Let us honor our martyrs and forgive the outrage. This is how a proud and free people avenges itself!⁴⁷

While the ideal of complete freedom had yet to be reached, the activism of both the teachers and students of the Catholic Institute cannot be

underestimated. After the Civil War, the former students and teachers were among the leaders in creating an integrated, public school system open to every child in New Orleans.⁴⁸ The Louisiana constitution of 1868 not only mandated the establishment of a state-funded system of public education, but it forbade segregation. According to Caryn Cossé Bell, it was by far the most radical blueprint for change in the Reconstruction South.⁴⁹ Although, Lanusse died in the year preceding the writing of the constitution, it embodied his vision of a truly “public” sphere that honored the dignity of all humans. For Lanusse, civil or political rights could never bestow equality if unequal social relations in the public sphere, (like segregation) were sanctioned by the law. It was in the public sphere, not in individual civic or political rights, that the roots of true “brotherhood” took shape. For Afro-Creoles, the Constitution of 1868 fulfilled this radical revolutionary vision. “Public” integrated schools (the first in the nation) in New Orleans lasted only through Radical Reconstruction giving way to the segregation that increasingly marked the “Jim Crow” south. However, the ideology of “public rights” as central to equality continued to inform a Franco-Afro-Creole protest tradition that would become the impetus for “Plessy vs. Ferguson” and the modern Civil Rights era.

While the national narratives of history have situated the origins of “public” education in a Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common School narrative, the Afro-Franco-Creole protest tradition of Armand Lanusse, and the Catholic Institute, disrupts that story by situating Louisiana as part of a complex trans-national, Atlantic World that developed “vernacular concepts of equality” which shaped understandings of “public education.”⁵⁰ Armand Lanusse theorized an Afro-Franco-Creole protest tradition in which subjectivity was a process of creolization

understood as an active, affirmative principle of cultural heterogeneity and innovation,⁵¹ in which public practice as embedded in public education was critical to understanding what it means to be human; and in which social action was enacted through imagining a transnational citizenship that disrupted the nation state as the locus of identity.

The contribution of Armand Lanusse and the Catholic Institute have remained unintelligible given the normative tropes of curriculum history that continue to be wedded to an Anglo-Protestant-Northern Common School narrative. Like the recent work of Daniel Tröhler, the deployment of curriculum history must interrogate the methodological roots that are at the base of Anglo-American historical studies of the modern school; disrupt the borders and boundaries that constitute national studies of curriculum history; and historicize the “languages” of education that have naturalized a science of education that is devoid of history.⁵² Unleashing curriculum history from the tropes of monumental narratives, the nation-state, and the dominant languages of education will require a re-envisioning of curriculum history that takes seriously the contributions of an Afro-Creole educational protest tradition.

¹ Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. Archdiocese Archives in New Orleans, from now on AANO.

² Higher studies for advanced pupils were also made available. Clearly there was a differentiated curriculum in which students were grouped according to perceived ability with what was understood at the time as the appropriate curriculum.

³ Classes operated on the basis of the pupil’s aptitude and progress, and only at the turn of the century was the regular grade system adopted. In 1852 there were 165 students enrolled, the number of boys and girls being

equal. 1853 there were 240 students, 25% of the free children of color attending school in New Orleans.

⁴ Mary Niall Mitchell (2008). *Raising Freedom's Child*. New York: New York University Press, 19.

⁵ Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon suggest that a few of the teachers “dared to teach slaves to read and even to advocate racial equality” (pg 42). As the conditions became increasingly hostile for Free People of Color prior to the Civil War, it became more and more difficult to challenge the unjust racial system. Given that it was a crime to teach any slave to read, any efforts to teach the enslaved would have been covert. In D. Devore & J. Logsdon (1991). *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991*. University of Southwestern Louisiana: The Center for Louisiana Studies. “The Story of St. Louis School of Holy Redeemer Parish New Orleans, La. Formerly St. Louis or the Colored.” By Roger Baudier, November 1956, AANO.

⁶ Mary Niall Mitchell (2008). *Raising Freedom's Child*. New York: New York University Press, 18.

⁷ Caryn Cossé Bell (1997). *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University; Emily Clark (2007). *Masterless Mistresses*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press; Mary Niall Mitchell (2008). *Raising Freedom's Child*. New York: New York University Press.

⁸ D. Devore & J. Logsdon (1991). *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991*. University of Southwestern Louisiana: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 42.

⁹ The concept of the “public,” and specifically “public rights,” in defining citizenship, has recently been illuminated by Rebecca Scott in relation to an Atlantic and Caribbean worldview. Specifically she highlights how

“vernacular concepts of equality” in Louisiana were the result of social networks that spanned place (Africa, Europe and the Caribbean), historical events including the Haitian and French Revolution, as well as the constant flow of peoples throughout the Atlantic who brought a “strong tradition of claiming equal rights for themselves.” See Scott, R. J. (2007). *The Atlantic World and the Road to Plessy v. Ferguson*. *The Journal of American History*, 727.

¹⁰ Paul Gilroy (1988). *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹¹ Bernadette Baker (2009). *New Curriculum Histories*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pg. xi.

¹² Armand Lanusse (Ed.) (1845) *Les Cenelles: A Collection of Poems by Creole Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century*. Translated and with a Preface by Règine Latortue and Gleason R. W. Adams. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co. xxxvii.

¹³ Glissant, E. (1989). *Caribbean Discourse: Selected essays*. Trans. J.M. Dash. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia (Original work published in 1981).

¹⁴ Author, Curriculum & Pedagogy

¹⁵ Rebecca Scott (2005). *Degrees of Freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 45.

¹⁶ Ibid, pg xi.

¹⁷ Charles Roussève (1937). *The Negro in Louisiana*. New Orleans: The Xavier University Press, 48.

¹⁸ (Fabre, 1998).

¹⁹ Marie Couvent was originally from West Africa where she was enslaved as a child and sent to Saint Domingue. She escaped to New Orleans during the Haitian Revolution and eventually married Bernard Couvent, a free black carpenter in the city.

²⁰ This included, Barthelemy Rey, Nelson Fouche, Emile Brule, Adolphe Duhart, and Armand Lanusse. “A History of Saint Louis School of Holy Redeemer Parish formerly known as Catholic Institute for Indigent Orphans founded April 20, 1847. Sister Mary

- Eugenius Gallaher, Sisters of the Holy Ghost (S.H.G.). (April 11, 1976), AANO.
- ²¹ Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. Archdiocese Archives in New Orleans, from now on AANO.
- ²² The concept of the “public,” and specifically “public rights,” in defining citizenship, has recently been illuminated by Rebecca Scott in relation to an Atlantic and Caribbean worldview. Specifically she highlights how “vernacular concepts of equality” in Louisiana were the result of social networks that spanned place (Africa, Europe and the Caribbean), historical events including the Haitian and French Revolution, as well as the constant flow of peoples throughout the Atlantic who brought a “strong tradition of claiming equal rights for themselves.” See Scott, R. J. (2007). The Atlantic World and the Road to Plessy v. Ferguson. *The Journal of American History*, 727.
- ²³ “History of the Catholic Indigent Orphan Institute” (Dauphine and Touro Streets) Published by the Board of Directors (1916), AANO. Roussève, Charles (1937). *The Negro in Louisiana*. New Orleans: Xavier Press, 43.
- ²⁴ Classes operated on the basis of the pupil’s aptitude and progress, and only at the turn of the century was the regular grade system adopted. In 1852 there were 165 students enrolled, the number of boys and girls being equal. 1853 there were 240 students, 25% of the free children of color attending school in New Orleans.
- ²⁵ Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. AANO.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Throughout the 1850’s, the state legislature and city of New Orleans increasingly erased the legal distinctions between slaves and free people of color. This included laws that forbade free people of color to own coffeeshops, billard halls where liquor was sold, and a city ordinance that outlawed the assembly of people of color, free or slave. See Mitchell, 20.
- ²⁸ Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. AANO.
- ²⁹ Mary Niall Mitchell (2008). *Raising Freedom’s Child*. New York: New York University Press, 26.
- ³⁰ An 1830 law prohibited anyone from teaching slaves to read or write under penalty of imprisonment. See Caryn Cossé Bell (1997). *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 131.
- ³¹ Mary Niall Mitchell (2008). *Raising Freedom’s Child*. New York: New York University Press, 16.
- ³² Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. AANO.
- ³³ The directors continued to press for funding, in 1862 Representatives from the Institute petitioned for financial aid from the Bureau of Education. The petition reminded the Bureau “the colored population contribute also to the Public School fund of this Department, where from they derive no benefit whatsoever...” The school did receive \$3000.00 to be expended under the supervision of the Bureau of Education and the Superintendent of Public Schools. . “A History of Saint Louis School of Holy Redeemer Parish formerly known as Catholic Institute for Indigent Orphans founded April 20, 1847. Sister Mary Eugenius Gallaher, Sisters of the Holy Ghost (S.H.G.). (April 11, 1976), AANO
- ³⁴ The school is described as “private” by John Blassingame (1973) *Black New Orleans 1860-1880*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 108. See Mitchell, 18, for a discussion of the “public” nature of the Catholic Institute.
- ³⁵ This was also a vehicle that had been used by the Ursulines to secure monies from colonial

- officials. See Emily Clark (2007). *Masterless Mistresses*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- ³⁶ Devore & Logsdon, 42.
- ³⁷ “The Story of St. Louis School of Holy Redeemer Parish New Orleans, La. Formerly St. Louis or the Colored.” By Roger Baudier, November 1956, AANO.
- ³⁸ Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez and his brother Jean-Baptiste Roudanez were the other co-founders.
- ³⁹ See K. Richard and Author (In Press). ‘We now think for ourselves, and we shall act for ourselves’: The *New Orleans Tribune* as Advocate for Public, Integrated Education 1864-1870, *History of Education*. Also Caryn Cosse Bell, 2.
- ⁴⁰ Caroline Senter (2000). Creole Poets on the Verge of Nation. In S. Kein (Ed.), *Creole*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- ⁴¹ The incident referred to by the student was the refusal of Lanusse, after the surrender of New Orleans, to fly the Union flag as ordered by General Butler. Lanusse had served during the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. Later he confessed to being misguided in this matter and publicly apologized. See Armand Lanusse (Ed.) (1845) *Les Cenelles: A Collection of Poems by Creole Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century*. Translated and with a Preface by Règine Latortue and Gleason R. W. Adams. Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co, xxv. Eventually the Catholic Institute became an arsenal for the weapons of free black men fighting to defend the Union and defeat the slaveholding South, see Mitchell, 47.
- ⁴² *New Orleans Tribune*, February 17, 1865. Quoted from James M. McPherson (1965). *The Negro’s Civil War*. New York: Vintage Books, 289.
- ⁴³ L’Union, September 27, 1862 as translated in James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War* (New York, 1969), 276.
- ⁴⁴ L’Union, October 18, 1862, *ibid*
- ⁴⁵ Catholic Indigent Orphan Asylum [Couvent School]: Student Composition Books, 1856-1863 AR/00635. AANO.
- ⁴⁶ Caroline Senter (2000). Creole Poets on the Verge of Nation. In S. Kein (Ed.), *Creole*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 283.
- ⁴⁷ L’Union, December, 2 1866
- ⁴⁸ Devore & Langsdon, 42.
- ⁴⁹ Bell, 1.
- ⁵⁰ See Rebecca Scott (2007). Public rights and private commerce: A nineteenth century Atlantic Creole itinerary. *Current Anthropology*, 48 (2). 237-256, for a further discussion of “vernacular concepts of equality.”
- ⁵¹ E. Glissant (1989). *Carribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J.M. Dash. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- ⁵² Daniel Tröhler (2011). *Languages of Education*. New York: Routledge.