

New Orleans between Atlantic and Caribbean

Reinterpreting the Saint-Domingue Migration

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Even though it was strategically important to early French colonization in the Americas, New Orleans remained a minor actor in the Atlantic world during the eight decades that it was under French and then Spanish control (from its founding by the French in 1718, to the Louisiana Purchase and its integration into the United States in 1803).¹ Throughout this period, the city was the seat of the administration of the colony of Louisiana, a huge territory many times the size of the present-day state of Louisiana, stretching from the Gulf Coast in the south to the Great Lakes in the north, and from the Mississippi River in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west. Nevertheless, both the colony and its capital city were demographically weak and economically shaky and thus remained at the margin of the Atlantic world for most of the eighteenth century. Colonial Louisiana did not receive large settler cohorts, nor was

¹ Since the advent of Atlantic history in the late twentieth century, the Atlantic has served as a conceptual framework to reinterpret the history of the Americas. Analyzed as a space of exchange (of people, products, ideas, and cultures), the rise of the Atlantic as an interpretative tool has complicated the history of the development of the Americas. It has enabled the writing of a more-connected history of the region's empires and nations. New Orleans, with its peculiar colonial history, its location at the crossroads between the British, French, and Spanish Empires, and its receipt of incessant migrations, has largely benefited from these reinterpretations. Recent historiography has reconnected the city not only with Europe and Africa, but also with the rest of the Americas. On Atlantic history, see Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). On Louisiana and the Atlantic world, see, among many others, Bradley Bond, ed., *Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2005); Cécile Vidal, ed., *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013); and, more recently, John Eugene Rodriguez, *Spanish New Orleans: An Imperial City on the American Periphery 1766–1803* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2021).

it a major center of slave importation. It was difficult to defend, not self-sufficient, and ultimately of such limited interest to the European powers that France ceded it to Spain in 1762 (something that would have been unthinkable in the case of a colony such as Saint-Domingue). For similar reasons, in 1800, Spain retroceded Louisiana to France, without much hesitation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, after it had become a Spanish colony, Louisiana experienced relatively low population influxes, absorbing neither voluntary nor forced migrants in large numbers. The former category included a few thousand Spaniards from Málaga and the Canary Islands, the latter a few thousand Acadians expelled by the British from Canada, as well as African slaves after the trade resumed under Spanish rule. Moreover, what little immigration there was typically affected the rural regions of Louisiana rather than its main urban center, New Orleans.

The aftermath of the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions drastically changed the situation. All three directly or indirectly triggered significant migratory waves to New Orleans. Throughout the Age of Revolutions, the city received important population groups that moved on their own free will (migrants from the early US republic) or under pressure (exiles from the French Revolution, refugees of the Haitian Revolution). Among those moving under pressure, some chose their destination (the Saint-Domingue refugees), whereas others obviously did not (the slaves who came with the refugees). New Orleans is thus fertile ground for the study of involuntary migrations, particularly of enslaved individuals and refugees of color.²

There are several reasons for this. The first is a matter of terminology. New Orleans was a welcome refuge for several migrations that were characterized by a varying mix of mobility and coercion. The term “exile” was mostly used in nineteenth-century Louisiana to describe the condition of the Acadians who had settled in Louisiana after 1763, after being expelled from Canada between 1755 and 1762 by the British authorities for refusing to pledge allegiance to the British Crown.³ The term

² See, for instance, Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans during the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, 2016); Rebecca J. Scott, “Paper Thin: Freedom and Reenslavement in the Diaspora of the Haitian Revolution,” *Law and History Review* 29 (2011): 1062–87.

³ The term has been used in North America by commentators and historians since then. See, for instance, Arthur G. Doughty, *The Acadian Exiles: A Chronicle of the Land of the Evangeline* (Toronto, 1916). On the expulsion of the Acadians from Canada, see also Liam Riordan's chapter in this volume.

was also used to designate the French who had moved to Louisiana for political reasons, for example, after the French Revolution, Napoleon's downfall, or the two French revolutions of 1830 and 1848. The Saint-Domingans, however, were always called "refugees" in Louisiana, a term that has been widely used by historians for more than two centuries. But like the French Royalists or the partisans of Napoleon, they, too, had actively chosen Louisiana as their land of welcome. The enslaved people who were transported to Louisiana when the slave trade resumed under Spanish rule, or who were brought or sold by their American owners after the 1808 ban on the international slave trade, were never described in such terms by either nineteenth-century New Orleanians or historians, with the one exception being enslaved people from Saint-Domingue, who were sometimes included in the "refugee" group. This terminological differentiation is consistent with the fact that Louisiana was, at heart, a slave society in the early nineteenth century. In the eyes of Louisianans, the Saint-Domingue refugees had fled a slave rebellion for their lives, whereas the French and the Acadians had been forced out of their countries by political circumstances. As for the enslaved, they were considered mere additions to the Louisiana slave population. That the enslaved from Saint-Domingue were sometimes included in the refugee group may be attributable to the lore of the faithful slaves who had chosen to accompany their masters, and who were often said to have saved their masters' lives by hiding them and helping them flee.

Among those migrations, the Saint-Domingue refugees are of particular scholarly interest, since they rapidly disappeared from both public and historical discourse, certainly because of the timing of their arrival. Indeed, although recent studies have shown that they remained cohesive for a relatively long time,⁴ they were also rapidly absorbed into the French-speaking community that was then uniting to fight the social, cultural, and political changes that the new Anglo-American rulers were trying to implement in the city. They were thus a beneficial addition to the New Orleans Creole population of French and Spanish descent, and they helped the Francophones retain political and cultural power over the American newcomers, at least for a time. Finally, because the migration of the Saint-Domingue refugees was diasporic, scattered across the

⁴ See, for instance, Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville, FL, 2007); Nathalie Dessens, *Creole City: A Chronicle of Early American New Orleans* (Gainesville, FL, 2015); Angel Adams Parham, *American Routes: Racial Palimpsests and the Transformation of Race* (Oxford, 2017).

Caribbean, in the Gulf South, and in the eastern United States, but also – in some cases – in France, the convergence of a large portion of them in New Orleans repositioned the city in the Atlantic and Caribbean worlds.⁵

Using the voluminous correspondence of Jean Boze, a Saint-Domingue refugee who lived in New Orleans from 1809 until his death in 1842, and Henri de Sainte-Gême, another refugee who arrived in 1809 and remained there until his relocation to France in 1818, this chapter examines the role played by the Saint-Domingue refugees in repositioning the city within the Atlantic and Greater Caribbean.⁶ It contends that by studying a group of people who migrated under pressure (the refugees from the Haitian Revolution), we can develop new conceptual frameworks (in this case, the Greater Caribbean) and spur fertile historical reinterpretations (of, in the present case, New Orleans's position in the Americas).

NEW ORLEANS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC

The population of New Orleans grew exponentially in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1803, it had a mere 8,000 residents; by 1810, it was the seventh most populous city in the United States, with a population of 17,242. In 1820, it boasted 46,082 residents and was the fifth most populous city in the United States, having grown by 57.6 percent over the previous decade. In 1840, with 102,193 residents, it ranked as the third most populous city in the United States, behind New York and Philadelphia. This represented a stunning increase of 121.8 percent in just twenty years.⁷

In the late eighteenth century, the three Atlantic revolutions spurred this demographic development. The American Revolution had the most immediate effect on Louisiana in general and New Orleans in particular: In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the then-Spanish colony welcomed significant immigration from the early United States. The

⁵ For a global perspective on French émigré settlement in this period, see Friedemann Pestel's chapter in this volume.

⁶ Whereas the "Caribbean" is often used to designate the islands (also called the West Indies or Antilles) situated in the Caribbean Sea, the "Greater Caribbean" includes all the colonies and states bordering the Caribbean Sea, including the continental colonies and islands of Central America and the Gulf Coast.

⁷ See Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," *United States Census Bureau*, www.census.gov/topics/population.html.

French Revolution triggered migratory fluxes to the Americas in general and New Orleans in particular. The turmoil that followed the French Revolution, from the Napoleonic years to the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848, also brought a continued influx of French migrants to the Louisiana capital. Having once belonged to the French Empire, New Orleans offered migrants from metropolitan France a welcoming refuge that was culturally, religiously, and linguistically familiar.⁸ The Haitian Revolution was the last upheaval – chronologically – and also the one whose impact on nineteenth-century New Orleans was the most profound.⁹

The first refugees from the Haitian Revolution made New Orleans their home in the last decade of the eighteenth century, at approximately the same time that Anglo-Americans started migrating to Louisiana. Over the next twenty years, a period that witnessed New Orleans's last decade as a colony and its first as part of the United States, somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 refugees from the Haitian Revolution arrived in Louisiana in several waves, with 80 to 90 percent settling in New Orleans. Among them were Henri de Sainte-Gême and Jean Boze, whose correspondence features prominently in this chapter. The refugees' arrival was a major factor in the demographic development of the city, as they more than doubled its population in less than two decades.¹⁰ Over time, the influence of this migration eventually waned, since it was not followed by further waves of Haitian arrivals, whereas Anglo-Americans kept migrating to New Orleans on a steady basis. Nevertheless, the refugees from the Haitian Revolution played a decisive role in the story of New Orleans during the early years of the American republic.

Although individuals and families arrived throughout the entirety of the twenty-year period, the migration was marked by successive mass influxes.¹¹ The first influx occurred at the time of the Haitian independence, in late 1803, and the following two when the authorities in Jamaica

⁸ For more on this, see Marjorie Bourdelais, *La Nouvelle-Orléans: Croissance démographique, intégrations urbaine et sociale (1803–1860)* (Bern, 2012).

⁹ Although some New Orleanians participated in the Latin American revolutions of the nineteenth century, and although Louisiana's former Spanish colonial status attracted some Spanish loyalists after these former colonies won their independence, the Latin American revolutions did not have a significant impact on the city's demography.

¹⁰ For more information on the twenty-year migration, see Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*.

¹¹ For a detailed explanation of the various waves of migrants, see Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 22–45.

(1803–4) and Cuba (1809–10) declared French citizens there *personae non gratae* in response to Napoleon's disputes with Britain and Spain. Most of these French citizens migrated to New Orleans in response. The largest wave occurred when Napoleon decided to intervene in the Spanish succession crisis in 1808, eventually replacing King Ferdinand VII with his own brother, Joseph, on the Spanish throne in 1809. Several thousand French refugees from Saint-Domingue who had settled in Cuba – and more specifically in the *Oriente* (mainly Santiago de Cuba, the Sierra Maestra, and Baracoa) – after fleeing the Haitian Revolution had to leave (at least temporarily) their Cuban asylum. All those who had not acquired Spanish citizenship had their possessions sequestered by the island's authorities and were expelled, including Henri de Sainte-Gême and Jean Boze.¹² Finally, several thousand Saint-Domingue refugees who had settled on the Atlantic coast of the United States also chose to join their families, friends, and fellow refugees in New Orleans, having been drawn to the cultural environment they found there. New Orleans was so similar to the society they had known in Saint-Domingue that they remained and put down lasting roots.

New Orleans was indeed the closest approximation to the refugees' lost colony in the Americas. Despite four decades of Spanish rule and the sale of Louisiana to the United States by Napoleon, the population of New Orleans remained overwhelmingly French speaking. The society the newcomers found upon arrival was a Catholic slave society, organized in three tiers, just as Saint-Domingue had been before the revolution, a feature that was familiar to an incoming population that was composed more or less evenly of three socio-racial groups: free Whites, enslaved Blacks, and free persons of color, with the third being an important intermediary group of racially mixed individuals and freed Blacks. Such a grouping would have been less common in Anglo-American slave societies. By January 1810, the last refugee wave from Cuba, the one best documented by the new American officials of Louisiana, had brought to New Orleans 2,731 Whites, 3,102 free people of color, and 3,226 migrants whom the mayor counted as slaves. Their enslaved status was never questioned in New Orleans, and the historical narrative has

¹² For more information on the Napoleonic Wars and their effect on the Americas, see Christophe Belaubre, Jordana Dym, and John Savage, eds., *Napoleon's Atlantic: The Impact of Napoleonic Empire in the Atlantic World* (Leiden, 2010). The volume includes a chapter by Nathalie Dessens, "Napoleon and Louisiana: New Atlantic Perspectives," (63–80), which deals specifically with Louisiana.

consistently called them slaves, although they had been freed in 1794 in Saint-Domingue and were thus surreptitiously (and unknowingly) re-enslaved after their relocation to the slave colonies of the Caribbean or the slave states of the United States.¹³ The purchase of Louisiana by the United States seemed to guarantee the persistence of slavery for the refugees, while the shifting French policies had made them wary of settling in the French West Indies and had encouraged many of them, in the decade of the Haitian Revolution, to settle in the seaboard states of the United States instead of Louisiana before they moved on to New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase.

The Saint-Domingue refugees' impact on New Orleans, in particular their influence on the positioning of Louisiana in the Atlantic and Caribbean, raises a set of interesting questions. How did they orient their adopted city southward at a time when the expansion of the early American republic weighed heavily on its newly acquired territories, such as Louisiana? How did they look to the Atlantic at the very moment when New Orleans was becoming a US city?

RE-CENTERING NEW ORLEANS IN THE ATLANTIC

New Orleans's significance to the Atlantic world began in the early nineteenth century, at the apex of the city's demographic and economic expansion. This process was consecutive to the arrival of the Saint-Domingue refugees, although the integration of Louisiana into the early American republic played a major part in this reconfiguration by dynamizing Louisiana, and its capital in particular. New Orleans immediately became the second largest port in the United States after New York in terms of passenger arrivals and exports. Strategically located at the mouth of the Mississippi River, it was the main outlet for all goods produced in the northwestern United States that were bound for Europe and the Americas.

From 1791, when the first refugees from Saint-Domingue started arriving in New Orleans, to around 1803, the refugee diaspora was extremely spread out across the Americas and France. Many sets of correspondence archived in New Orleans show that the Saint-Domingans remained in contact on both sides of the Atlantic and between the various

¹³ Report from the Mayor of New Orleans to Governor Claiborne dated January 18, 1810, in *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane*, January 27, 1810. For details on figures and sources, see Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 27–28.

American asylums they chose to settle in.¹⁴ These relationships helped reinforce New Orleans's connections to the Atlantic world. The Saint-Domingue refugees also displayed high levels of mobility compared with the Louisiana Creoles and the new Anglo-American residents who had retained few connections with Europe. The Saint-Domingue refugees crisscrossed the Atlantic, moving between France and the various Caribbean colonies where some of their counterparts had found refuge. They maintained ties with far-away families and friends in France and the Caribbean, and they established economic networks that spread over the Atlantic, bringing over ideas, political ideals, and cultural innovations closely associated with the Antillean territories that they had left.¹⁵

The correspondence between two Saint-Domingue refugees – one who had resettled in Louisiana, Jean Boze, and another who had returned to France after spending seven years in Cuba and eight years in New Orleans, Henri de Sainte-Gême – attests to New Orleans's Atlantic connections and the means by which they were maintained. Although a single correspondence cannot document the totality of the refugee experience in New Orleans, Boze's 158 letters, totaling 1,150 pages over a twenty-year period, are a particularly rich source. Boze penned his letters in the form of newsletters, quoting heavily from the press, providing information collected through his interactions with the refugee community, painstakingly chronicling the expansion of New Orleans, and transmitting news received from other members of the refugee diaspora in and around the Caribbean Basin. His letters show the regularity of the exchanges, both personal and commercial, between New Orleans and France. They document the reinforcement of bonds between Louisiana and its former colonial power and the centrality of the refugees in this stronger connection.¹⁶ They also show how this reconnection gave the Atlantic renewed importance for New Orleans.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Howard Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Special Collections, MS 244, Lambert Family Papers, 1798–1905.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

¹⁶ The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans (THNOC), Sainte-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Correspondence from Jean Boze to Henri de Sainte-Gême. All translations from this correspondence, originally written in French, are by the author of the present chapter. All further references to this correspondence will be made in the body of the text, only the folder number being mentioned. Boze wrote 158 letters, covering over 1,150 pages tightly written in very small characters to Sainte-Gême between 1818 and 1839. Boze's letters are found between Folders 19 (January 18, 1818) and 286 (August 6, 1839).

The letters show, for instance, that many of the Saint-Domingue refugees traveled to France for short or longer stays. They repeatedly mention that every year when regular exchanges resumed after the summer season – once the specter of yellow fever and hurricane risks had subsided – people returned to New Orleans from France and commodities were imported, launching new fashions, notably in the cultural field and everyday life. In November 1832, for instance, several boats are said to have arrived from Le Havre, bringing back New Orleanians and “luxury and fashion tat for the lovers of Carnival balls” (F 212). According to Boze, the arrival of the first boats from France each year was an occasion for celebration. In November 1830, he wrote: “The youth is already making preparations to celebrate the captain commanding the first vessel that will arrive with the tricolor flag” (F 170).

Whereas the ties between the Louisiana Creoles and their French families tended to loosen generation after generation, the Saint-Domingue refugees were able to reaffirm connections between Louisiana and France at the moment when France let go, for the second time, of its Louisiana colony. Paradoxically, Louisiana then became more connected to France than ever. The regularity of vessels bound for or coming from France – mostly Bordeaux and Le Havre – encouraged mobility between France and its former colony and made New Orleans a nodal point in the Atlantic world.¹⁷ Because exchanges with France and French colonies had been commonplace in Saint-Domingue, the new Louisianans were extremely mobile and often crossed the Atlantic on personal or business missions. They visited their families in France, went on pleasure tours of Paris, or went to France for various other reasons: to cure their diseases, develop economic ventures, or bring back cultural features (opera, theater, music, or fashion). There was also a significant intellectual, artistic, political, and economic elite of free refugees of color of Saint-Domingan origin who regularly traveled to France for short or longer periods.

Both Whites and free people of color with Saint-Domingue roots sent their children to France to be educated. Even after the US Civil War, this continued to be the case. To take a single example, Louis Charles Roudanez, a free New Orleanian of color born of Saint-Domingue refugees, sent all of his children to Paris for their education, including his daughters. For those Louisianans who had been free Creoles of color in Antebellum Louisiana,

¹⁷ The passenger lists of boats traveling between New Orleans and the French harbors of Le Havre and Bordeaux, among others, attest to the existence of these continuous transatlantic movements.

asserting their “Frenchness” was probably also a strategy to maintain their rank among the elites of New Orleans, once the emancipation of slaves had leveled the population of color, free and enslaved.¹⁸

Not all social classes of Saint-Domingue refugees participated in these movements, of course, but many did, as they had managed to rapidly climb the New Orleans social ladder.¹⁹ The economic and social integration of a large part of the refugee population was easy, probably because they all chose to eventually settle in New Orleans. Some had been forced to flee Saint-Domingue and, later, to leave Jamaica and Cuba, whereas others had, early on, found refuge in the cities of the East Coast of the United States. Although they had moved under duress (often on several occasions), New Orleans was an asylum of choice, and this made them more eager to participate fully in its life and development. They were not migrants who were passing through on their way to another destination. They chose to settle and put down lasting roots. They also reached New Orleans at a time when the Creole population, whether White or of color, considered them a welcome addition to the resistance against those Anglo–American influences that would have reduced the power of the White Creoles and the prerogatives of the free Creoles of color. Their integration into the community ensured both their progression up the social ladder and their influence over New Orleans’s long-standing population groups. Altogether, the Saint-Domingans’ stronger ties with France and the Atlantic made the city more Atlantic as well.

New Orleans’s newspapers, the majority of which were founded, directed, and staffed by Saint-Domingue refugees, were full of news from France, and all the main political events occurring in France were largely covered by the Louisiana press.²⁰ To give just a few examples, in May 1830, the newspapers dealt at length with the response of the French representatives to King Charles X’s decision to adjourn the assemblies until the following September. The New Orleans newspapers expanded on the proposal, voted on by 221 representatives in reaction to Prime Minister Jules de Polignac’s reactionary government, in which the French *députés*

¹⁸ For more details on Roudanez, see Nathalie Dessens, “Louis Charles Roudanez, a Creole of Color of Saint-Domingue Descent: Atlantic Reinterpretations of Nineteenth-Century New Orleans,” *South Atlantic Review* 73 (2008): 26–38. Please note: The denomination “Creole of color” was not used in the nineteenth century. Although anachronistic, it is used here for the sake of clarity.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 91–109.

²⁰ See, for instance, the issues of *L’Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1827–1923), www.jefferson.lib.la.us/genealogy/NewOrleansBeeMain.htm.

expressed their defiance to the government (F 164). Likewise, the city's newspapers were also full of details about the assassination attempt against King Louis Philippe I on July 28, 1835 (F 258). These long articles, absent from the Anglophone press, suggest renewed interest in French politics thirty years after Louisiana's transfer to the United States, including in French domestic debates that did not directly influence international politics and thus had no repercussions for Louisiana or the United States. The Francophone population often took sides, and some political events in France even prompted fiery debates between French-speaking New Orleanians, whether they were French exiles, Saint-Domingue refugees, or Creoles. The press, in turn, played its part in giving visibility to the debates.

Some French events triggered, in a sort of butterfly effect, important demonstrations in New Orleans. News of the dethroning of Charles X in 1830, for instance, prompted scenes of jubilation in the Louisiana capital. Boze detailed the celebrations of the population at large (which gave "many serenades, accompanied with military music"), of the artillery battalion (which fired the cannon twenty-one times in "homage to the tricolor flag that was flown on several public buildings of the city"), and of the Louisiana Legion and other elite corps, which "took up arms to celebrate the triumph of freedom over despotism, in the presence of a wealth of people of all ranks and all classes" (F 174).

Shortly thereafter, while visiting France, two New Orleanians were entrusted with "a beautiful tricolor flag that the Louisiana Legion sends as a present to the National Guard of Paris" "in sincere homage of the Louisianans' admiration for the heroic events that have just insured France the guaranty of its liberties." This was an occasion for a new display of French patriotism in the city: "a detachment of the battalion of artillery, gathered on the levee, salut[ing] [the] departure [of the vessel] with twenty-five cannon shots, with the immense support of a thousand cries of joy from our fellow citizens, who sang the Marseillaise anthem" (F 174). New Orleanians then organized banquets and celebrations to display their joy, showing how present France had remained in residents' minds.

The population of New Orleans also welcomed French heroes with great pomp and ceremony. In 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette's visit to the Crescent City was celebrated by the whole population, including Anglo-Americans.²¹ The visit to New Orleans of Dr. François Antommarchi,

²¹ François Weil, "The Purchase and the Making of French Louisiana," in Peter J. Kastor and François Weil, eds., *Empire of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase* (Charlottesville, VA, 2009), 302–3.

Napoleon's last physician in Saint Helena, ten years later, in October 1834, showed the persistence of links to France's history. Boze writes: "the news of the arrival of a man to whom are connected so many memories, has occasioned among us the keenest enthusiasm" (F 245). Throughout Antommarchi's stay in New Orleans, daily banquets were organized in honor of "this respectable foreigner so deserving," who had shown "such virtuous behavior in the exile of the great man," and who was an example of "enlightenment," "goodness," and "affability," to such a point that he was "eagerly sought out by people, whatever their religion," religion here meaning most certainly much more than religion itself and suggesting both political religion and ethnic origin (F 246). The whole city seems to have been collectively enthralled by this French guest whose connection to Napoleon was of paramount importance to those Saint-Domingans who still remembered his desperate attempt to regain power in Saint-Domingue in 1802.

Important French military victories were also occasions for celebration in New Orleans, even though it was no longer part of the French Empire. While the refugees had long hoped that France would regain ground in Saint-Domingue, this hope abated after the formal recognition of Haiti by France in 1825 and the payment of indemnities to the former colonists at the turn of the 1830s. French colonization, however, remained a topic of interest, probably in a more symbolic way, in the 1830s. Boze thus paid close attention to the French colonial victories that were detailed in the New Orleans press, despite the fact that France's colonial possessions never attracted much interest from the New Orleans Francophone population otherwise, thus suggesting that their interest was more symbolic than real. In 1830, for instance, commenting on the fall of Algiers, Boze rejoiced in "the surrender of that Barbaric place which will purge the Mediterranean of those pirates and will forever free Christianity of slavery after so many centuries of suffering." He added, "You can well imagine how this must have delighted the whole population of this city in general, and principally the French who ardently wished the arms of France to triumph in this conquest after all the great sacrifices the country had made to succeed in extinguishing this Moorish power" (F 174). On December 15, 1837, New Orleanians commemorated the capture of Constantine (in Algeria) two months earlier: "All the French vessels which were in the harbor of New Orleans have hoisted the colors today and an artillery salvo was shot at noon sharp on board the schooner *Bastamente* in the middle of the river, to commemorate the victory of the French army in front of Constantine and the capture of this fortress."

From noon, “the cannon was fired every quarter of an hour in remembrance of the loss of General [Charles-Marie Denys de] Damrémont in that city on October 12” (F 279).

While New Orleans had been a peripheral point in the dynamic eighteenth-century Atlantic world, the arrival of the Saint-Domingue refugees clearly recast the city’s geographic orientation. By the early nineteenth century, New Orleans had become one of the main demographic and economic centers of the United States; it was also the country’s main internal slave market and one of its two major ports. For these and other reasons, the city could have been reasonably expected to look eastward. Yet the networks and connections of the Saint-Domingue refugees reinforced the city’s Atlantic ties, among which were connections with the West Indies.

NEW ORLEANS IN THE CARIBBEAN

The arrival of the Saint-Domingue refugees, which tethered New Orleans to the Atlantic, coincided with the moment when the development of the Americas began to weaken the Atlantic as a paradigm. Although ties were maintained with Europe due to the persisting colonial status of some territories (notably of the French, Spanish, and British Caribbean colonies and of Portuguese Brazil), the loss by England of its thirteen colonies, by France of its richest and most dynamic colony (Saint-Domingue), and the wave of successful Latin American independence movements transformed the relationships between Europe and the Western Hemisphere. This movement, initiated in the late eighteenth century, was reinforced by the relative breach with the African continent induced by the progressive ban on the transatlantic slave trade. Even if Portuguese Brazil and Spanish Cuba did not end the trade until late in the nineteenth century, the joint actions of Britain and the United States in favor of the ban were instrumental in loosening the ties between the Americas and Africa. All in all, transatlantic connections became less central to the nineteenth-century evolution of the Americas.

At this moment, the Americas started relying increasingly on intra-continental exchanges. The Caribbean Sea, which joined together, in a single and easily navigable space, North, South, and Central America, as well as the West Indies, became central to a new pattern of American exchanges and supported the construction of a new American identity (understood in a continental sense). The Greater Caribbean, even though it was not a new configuration, became an increasingly central space for

the nineteenth-century Americas, and the Saint-Domingue refugees were instrumental in reinforcing New Orleans's presence in it. To be sure, New Orleans had been strongly connected to the Caribbean during its colonial periods. What changed in the nineteenth century, however, was that the city became still more tightly connected to non-French and non-Spanish colonial spheres (the British World, in particular) and that the connection extended to the continental territories bordering the Caribbean.²²

Although the Louisiana Purchase should have turned New Orleans's eyes north toward its new nation, when – in 1810 – the Cuban wave of Saint-Domingue refugees spread into the city, it instead revitalized New Orleans's southern connections. Cuba and Louisiana had been connected by their common status as Spanish colonies and by the fact that Cuba had become the seat of the military, judicial, and ecclesiastical administration of Louisiana, in 1769, as well as the main trading center for Louisiana merchants. Although New Orleans's ethos remained extremely French during the four decades of Spanish rule, New Orleanians were accustomed to the Spanish language, mores, and culture. They had seen constant movement back and forth between Louisiana and the other Spanish colonies, and the arrival of the Cuban wave of Saint-Domingue refugees was the starting point of a reshaping of the connection between the Spanish Caribbean and Louisiana.

It is, of course, extremely difficult to assess the respective significance of the Saint-Domingue refugees relative to the other migrations. What is clear, however, is that they were the ones who maintained the closest bonds with the Spanish island, reinforcing New Orleans's existing Caribbean connections. Boze's letters to Sainte-Gême show how intricately connected Cuba and New Orleans became in this period.²³ When the letters commenced, in 1818, the tensions between Spain and France that had been brought about by Napoleon's moves had eased in part. By then, Louisiana had been a US state for six years. Relationships between New Orleans and Havana had resumed. In April 1818, Boze wrote: "I am struggling with my thoughts ... Whether I will simply return to Saint-Yago or settle here, finding some employment. I have not yet decided what choice I will make" (F 20). This apparently anecdotal moment of

²² For New Orleans's connections to the Caribbean during the colonial period, see Cécile Vidal, *Caribbean New Orleans: Empire, Race, and the Making of a Slave Society* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2019).

²³ Out of Boze's 158 letters, 25 were written from Cuba between 1820 (F 43) and 1828 (F 134).

hesitation tells us much about the nineteenth-century Americas and New Orleans, in particular, suggesting a strong sense of interconnectedness between the different American territories. This porousness between the empires and nations of the Americas, I argue, suggests the need for new conceptual frameworks to understand the nineteenth-century Americas.

In 1809, along with thousands of other refugees from the Haitian Revolution, Jean Boze sailed to New Orleans from the Cuban *Oriente* on one of Sainte-Gême's ships. After six years in Cuba, he had to find another refuge to escape the turmoil of the Caribbean colonial world. Despite this second migration under pressure, he returned to Cuba in 1820, and remained there for eight years before sailing back to New Orleans. Throughout his stay in Cuba, he wrote to Sainte-Gême on a regular basis. Although the refugees of the Haitian Revolution had to suffer the consequences of the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1810s, Boze's experience shows that the European empires were largely interconnected in the Americas and that the refugees had few limitations on their movements and economic ventures (with the exception of Haiti). It also shows how tightly connected New Orleans and Cuba were, and how freely people and goods circulated between the two and throughout the Caribbean in general. Living in Cuba in the 1820s was thus no real challenge for a French citizen who was a refugee from one of the Atlantic revolutions. A study of the Francophone community of Santiago shows that, as early as 1812, hundreds of the former Cuban residents expelled in 1809 had started returning to Cuba.²⁴ Ships regularly brought passengers from New Orleans: forty on the *Luciano* and sixty-four on the *Dolores* in 1812 alone.²⁵ These figures may seem low on their own, but the recurrence of these journeys made for a steady stream of passengers that eventually restored a significant Francophone presence in the Cuban *Oriente*, and these residents were, for the most part, Saint-Domingue refugees.

Boze's correspondence offers evidence of these numerous exchanges. Although migration to Cuba had been difficult in the early 1810s, right after the expulsion of the non-naturalized Saint-Domingue refugees, it resumed later in the decade, as Agnès Renault shows. Explaining why he was delaying a trip to the island, Boze wrote, in November 1818, "Since last May, four vessels overloaded with passengers of all colors went to Saint-Yago and all write that they found in that country more

²⁴ Agnès Renault, "La communauté française de Santiago entre 1791 et 1825," PhD diss., l'Université du Havre, 2007, 639–46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 640.

destitution and all regret to have made the journey" (F 24). Although in May 1819 he was still postponing his trip because of rumors that Great Britain was attempting to take Cuba from Spain (F 34), he eventually went there and remained for eight years. In letters written during his stay in Santiago, he refers to the many ships that sailed between the Spanish island and the Louisiana capital, carrying products, news, and letters (F 65, for instance). After his return to New Orleans, his letters bear witness to the numerous points of contact between New Orleans and the Cuban capital. Several times, he announces the arrival of ships from Cuba and transmits news from common friends there (F 163). The ships brought newspapers informing New Orleanians about the yellow fever or cholera epidemics raging in Cuba, or letters from friends providing details on the Cuban economy.²⁶ In a letter detailing the shipwreck of a schooner bound for Havana in the fall of 1832, we learn that several New Orleans residents had been on board, evidence that movement between the two capitals was still frequent in the 1830s (F 211). Boze repeatedly mentions ships to and from Havana, as well as the people on board who came from the Cuban capital or traveled to it, either for temporary or more permanent stays.

It is true that, by then, New Orleans had become a major US city and that its harbor was an essential asset of the Louisiana economy. By 1836, it had become, with New York, the main export center from the United States to the Caribbean and to Europe, the first port for the export of flour, for instance. Even though development occurred steadily over the first half of the nineteenth century, the city witnessed particularly rapid growth in the early decades of the century. For instance, already in the first six months of 1819, thirty-nine ships carrying flour left New Orleans for Havana.²⁷ Economic relationships between New Orleans and Cuba were both plentiful and significant, especially because many residents of one or the other had connections and interests in both places. These exchanges, favored by the extraordinary development of New Orleans and by the presence, in the Louisiana capital, of thousands of people who had lived in Cuba during and after the Haitian Revolution, were made easier by the porosity of the empires and nations of the Americas.

²⁶ Folder 181 mentions, for instance, a letter from Mr. Revé from Cuba, dated February 3, 1831, indicating the price of coffee and sugar there.

²⁷ Alfred Toledano Wellborn, "The Relation between New Orleans and Latin America, 1810–1824," *The Louisiana Historical Review* 22 (1939): 773.

Boze's letters show that he was apparently comfortable in his many social and business interactions on the island. Nothing seems to have impeded his prolonged stay in Cuba, and nothing would have prevented his permanent settlement there, had he wished it. Apparently, he would have been able to stay without acquiring citizenship.²⁸ All in all, his stay on the Spanish island was easy, and his relationships with Cubans seem to have been friendly. He decided not to remain in Cuba for personal reasons and returned to New Orleans in 1828. Still a French national, he settled again in the capital of the state of Louisiana and lived there, unbothered, for the remaining fourteen years of his life.²⁹

Many of his letters mention the multiethnic character of the island population and its connections with New Orleans and the United States. It is, once again, difficult to specifically attribute these intensified connections and the cosmopolitanism of the Cuban *Oriente* to the presence of Saint-Domingue refugees as opposed to the increasing dynamism of the United States. It shows, however, that it was clearly possible to circulate in the Americas in the first half of the nineteenth century and that New Orleans was the obvious port of entry to the United States from Cuba, and vice versa. The city owed its distinctive role to its new Atlantic dynamism and to the abundant refugee population that reinforced its connection with the Caribbean. The refugees' presence throughout the Greater Caribbean strengthened the connections between the various territories in the area, whether they were the remaining colonies of the European empires, like most of the Antillean islands, or new nation-states, like the continental territories. This new network was in close contact with the New Orleans refugee community.

A MORE CARIBBEAN THAN ATLANTIC SPACE?

Boze's example shows that tight connections remained between a former French and Spanish colony, by then integrated to the United States, and a Spanish colony in the Caribbean. The colonial history of Louisiana

²⁸ For more on the French in Cuba, see Agnès Renault, *D'une île rebelle à une île fidèle. Les Français à Cuba (1791–1825)* (Rouen, 2012).

²⁹ The Louisiana archives contain no evidence that Boze ever pursued US citizenship; at the same time, no extant documentation attests to his lack of interest in citizenship, either. Unfortunately, the archival records are incomplete, especially for the early decades after Louisiana's entry into the United States. What can be said, however, is that Boze never mentioned US citizenship, insofar as it concerned him, in his correspondence, whereas he did allude to Sainte-Gême's having acquired US citizenship and then renouncing it after his return to France to be made Knight of the Military and Royal Order of Saint-Louis.

and Cuba could certainly account for these bonds, but so, too, could the presence in New Orleans of some 10,000 Saint-Domingue refugees who had been residents of Cuba for about ten years, or the resettlement of hundreds of refugees in Cuba, after a few years in New Orleans.

Cuba, however, was not exceptional. Boze's letters suggest that these close economic and personal contacts were never limited to the Spanish island. The rest of the Caribbean islands (whether French, Spanish, Dutch, or British), but also Mexico and, to a certain extent, several areas in Latin America, were also tightly connected to New Orleans. Throughout his correspondence, Boze repeatedly mentions boats arriving from Mexico, in particular from Tampico. These ships brought information in various forms – through newspapers that fed the New Orleans press, letters that conveyed more personal news, or even testimonies of people who had resided or sojourned there and who went about narrating their experiences and encounters in Mexico. Apparently numerous were those who had decided to leave New Orleans to seek a fortune in Mexico and who either resettled in Mexico or returned, after a few years, to New Orleans. Many among them were Saint-Domingue refugees.

Business had obvious ramifications throughout the Caribbean. Sainte-Gême had invested in Cuba and New Orleans, but also in Jamaica, with the Maison Hardy from which Boze repeatedly tried to recover the money owed to him. Historian Agnès Renault, in her study of the French in Cuba between 1790 and 1825, shows that many French residents living on the island had assets in New Orleans, diversifying their activities to increase their profits.³⁰ A Captain Laminé, one of the former acquaintances of Sainte-Gême in Cuba, was also doing business in Saint Thomas; whereas Francisco Sentmante y Sayas, a Cuban who had married the daughter of Bernard Marigny, a prominent New Orleans Creole (who gave his name to the eponymous faubourg), was conducting business in Mexico. A Captain Couapé, whom Boze had met in Saint-Domingue, had gone to Jamaica, and then Santiago de Cuba, around 1820. Later, after residing in New Orleans for a few years, he began business there. Renato Beluche, also a Saint-Domingue refugee in New Orleans, and the former second-in-command to Barataria's privateer Jean Lafitte, entered the Mexican navy with the title of admiral before returning to New Orleans, while his wife had settled in Curaçao (F 204). Boze also regularly provides news of three grinders recommended by Sainte-Gême who had settled in Mexico, or of Widow Blondeau, who had a shop

³⁰ Renault, "La communauté française de Santiago," 637.

in Matamora (F 229), thus giving evidence that there were regular channels through which news circulated easily. Not only were New Orleans residents who had tried their luck there numerous, but the connections were also so frequent that New Orleanians received regular news from them. Steady exchanges existed, at one point or another, between New Orleans and Tampico, Matamora, and Nantilla, although, regarding the last, Boze writes, in 1833, that “it is no longer frequented by commerce” (F 234). Throughout the letters, he gives news from Porto Cabello, in Venezuela, Saint-Domingue (F 161), Colombia (F 172), Cayenne, in French Guiana (271), St. Thomas, and Curacao (F 172), mentioning the many connections between those places and the Saint-Domingue refugee community of New Orleans.

Despite regular attempts by the various European empires to impose restrictions on mobility, particularly in times of war, the Caribbean was a very small, tightly connected space, where people circulated, regardless of either citizenship or the status of the territories they visited, sojourned in, or even settled in. Movement was still more frequent than it had been during the Age of Revolutions. In several instances, Boze refers to men with family roots in Sainte-Gême’s village, Sauveterre, who had arrived in New Orleans after sojourning in Saint-Domingue and Havana, and then eventually left for Mexico on business, settling there permanently. The family networks of Saint-Domingue refugees were instrumental in upholding these connections. The example of the Tinchant family, studied by Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard, shows how the family organized and operated a commercial network between New Orleans and Mexico (where two brothers had settled and established a cigar production business), and how they then used the settlement of a third brother in Belgium to connect this business to the Atlantic world. As this example shows, the Saint-Domingue refugees played an important role in turning New Orleans into a major actor in the Greater Caribbean, and in maintaining the connectedness of the city (and the Greater Caribbean) within a larger Atlantic context.³¹ It is important to remember that the networks supported by the refugees were not limited to elite White refugees. The opportunities provided by these networks were such that not only less-affluent Whites participated in the associated movements, exchanges,

³¹ In the prologue to their book *Freedom Papers*, Scott and Hébrard write that “a pivot point for the family’s story is the city of New Orleans,” 3. The whole book follows the family from Africa to Saint-Domingue to New Orleans and throughout the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

and business ventures, but also free people of color – meaning that this group, too, was instrumental in the Atlantic and Caribbean repositioning of New Orleans.³²

The Western Hemisphere was obviously a place of regular economic exchange and important population movements. Independent nations and European colonies alike accepted one another's residents without much control or hostility. The Caribbean was a significant space of exchange and New Orleans had become an important point in it. Because the American Revolution and Louisiana Purchase had made New Orleans a major port city in the United States, because the arrival of refugees from the French and Haitian Revolutions had reconnected it with the Atlantic, and because the Saint-Domingue refugees tightened its connections with the Caribbean, the city became a major node in the Americas after spending the previous century at the periphery of this rapidly evolving world.

Whereas the colonial pact that regulated commerce between the European countries and their colonies had long attempted to restrict interconnections between the various colonial empires, the extreme fluidity perceptible in the nineteenth century between the various American territories, whether colonies or newly independent nations, together with New Orleans's new vitality and centrality, makes the Atlantic a useful conceptual framework for analyzing its early nineteenth-century history. European revolutions and wars induced important changes in the Americas, triggered wide-ranging migratory intracontinental movements, and spurred the development of tight economic exchanges between the American territories, independent or imperial, giving New Orleans a newfound significance. This framework, which historians have already applied to the late eighteenth and even early nineteenth centuries, can also be useful for the later nineteenth century.

Boze's example – and his letters – suggest, however, that, after the 1820s, the fluxes of products, ideas, and people increased and diversified within the Americas. This does not mean that transatlantic exchanges ceased, but they were complemented by strong relationships, internal to the Greater Caribbean, that testified to the heightened connectivity of this region within the nineteenth-century Americas. It also shows that New Orleans was strongly involved in this reshaping and that the Saint-Domingue refugees were instrumental in this repositioning.

³² For more on the free people of color, see Nathalie Dessens, "Réinterpréter les migrations des gens de couleur libres: La Nouvelle-Orléans dans l'espace atlantique au XIXe siècle," *Revue française d'études américaine* 164 (2020): 23–37.