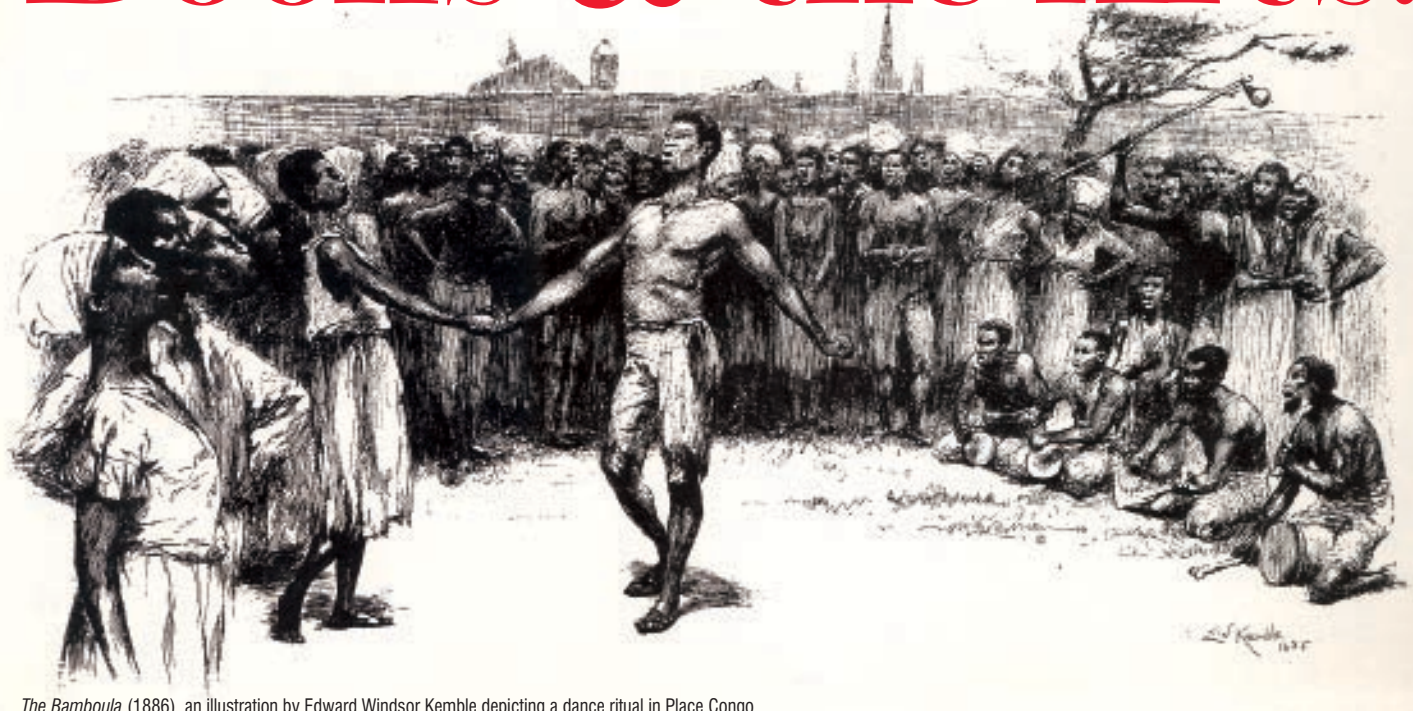


Books & the Arts.



The *Bamboula* (1886), an illustration by Edward Windsor Kemble depicting a dance ritual in Place Congo

HOGAN JAZZ ARCHIVE, TULANE UNIVERSITY

In Congo Square

by JOSHUA JELLY-SCHAPIRO

In 1682, the French explorer Robert Cavalier de La Salle set out from the Great Lakes and canoed down to the mouth of the Mississippi River, claiming its great watershed for Louis XIV. La Salle, a fur trader in Quebec more concerned with his own enrichment than with the crown's glory, returned to France and presented Louis with a false map showing the river's mouth close to Spain's silver mines in New Mexico, thereby winning the king's support to establish a colony. La Salle died before he could successfully set it up. But the French crown, competing with Britain and Spain for control of North America, sponsored a series of attempts to build a foothold in the marshy swamps of the Mississippi's delta.

It wasn't until 1718 that a French settlement of any permanence was established in the region. In that year, La Nouvelle-Orléans was founded adjacent to a centuries-old portage site, where the area's Houma and Choctaw people dragged canoes between the river and a large inland bay, across whose shallow waters lay the nearby Gulf of Mexico. The centerpiece of a colonial venture by which France's ruler, the Duc

d'Orleans, hoped to enrich his treasury through a newly chartered Company of the Indies, his namesake city was laid out on ambitious lines. Willing settlers were scarce, though, and no riches were forthcoming.

Effectively abandoned by the French crown in 1731, the colony was governed from that time by local elites, its levee becoming a bustling free-for-all of traders peddling everything from Mississippi furs to Martinique sugar and Mexican ceramics and maize. New Orleans's reputation as a low swamp of race-mixing and sin was present from the start and—as Shannon Lee Dawdy shows in *Building the Devil's Empire*, her penetrating study of the colony's founding—cited frequently as the explanation for its “failure.”

In French New Orleans, “smuggling not only helped fill the gaps of collapsed mercantilism,” Dawdy writes, “it was the basis of the local *political* economy.” Dawdy belabors this point throughout her book, which is slowed at times by bumpy prose, but she shows clearly how Nouvelle-Orléans—with its intra-American trade and tenuous ties to the metropole—became, by the 1740s, a self-consciously Creole place. (Here, she defines Creole as a person of European or African descent born in the New World, hewing to “the eighteenth-century Louisiana meaning

Building the Devil's Empire

French Colonial New Orleans.

By Shannon Lee Dawdy.

Chicago. 320 pp. \$35.

The World That Made New Orleans

From Spanish Silver to Congo Square.

By Ned Sublette.

Lawrence Hill. 360 pp. \$24.95.

of ‘native born’”—as opposed to the later widespread use of the word to connote cultural mixing or hybridity.) That Creole identity informed France's decision to let the estranged colony go, as Louis XV handed it off to his cousin Carlos III and Spain, who in 1768 encountered a Creole revolt—a sign that this “rogue colony” (Dawdy's phrase) would not be an easy rule.

What is unique about New Orleans, as Ned Sublette recounts in *The World That Made New Orleans*, an absorbing history of the city's rise, is how its identity was shaped by three colonial eras in rapid succession. As Sublette traces in his brisk *longue durée* account of New Orleans's first century, the Spanish—whose era began in earnest a few months after the Creoles' revolt—brought with them new laws, a new language and a new influx of African slaves. In the event, the Creoles didn't do badly; intra-Caribbean

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trade remained their lifeblood. The colony's permanent population, fed by an influx of German planters, Spanish merchants and French Acadians expelled from British Canada, rose from some 2,500 in 1760 to more than 8,000 in 1800, transforming a dissolute town into a bustling small city.

By the century's last decades, New Orleans's growth was also sustained by a burgeoning traffic of wooden flatboats from upriver, as Anglo-American settlers poured into the western reaches of Virginia and Carolina (out of whose territory were carved the new states of Kentucky and Tennessee in the 1790s). As these "Kaintucks" began developing the lands abutting the Mississippi, river-borne trade became increasingly crucial to the American economy. That New

New Orleans's Creoles, Jefferson wrote, 'were as incapable of self-government as children.'

Orleans would become a part of the United States began to appear inevitable, as Sublette shows. The manner in which this occurred, however, was anything but predictable, and was occasioned by the United States' entry into the kind of Great Power politics from which it had, in its revolutionary youth, claimed exception.

The story of New Orleans isn't merely rich with the enduring tensions of American history—between Old World and New, nation and federation, slavery and freedom. It is also in many ways at the center of American history: the city's acquisition was the midwife of American empire, and prompted the spread of a system of racial slavery whose rise led directly to one of our history's defining events—the Civil War. New Orleans—the "inevitable city on an impossible site," as one geographer memorably called it—has figured since 1803 not only as a crucial pivot of the US economy but also as an essential wellspring of its culture.

In the 1790s Spain was in decline as an imperial power, its Armada defeated, its treasury empty. Shortly after Napoleon Bonaparte took power in France, by coup d'état, in November 1799, King Carlos IV entered into secret negotiations to cede Louisiana back to the French. The agreement was made formal on October 1, 1800, in the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso. In March 1801, reports of Napoleon's secret acquisition reached the United States' newly elected Republican president, Thomas Jefferson. For Jefferson, the ownership of New

Orleans by a weak Spain—whose governors had allowed US merchants to use the city for trade—was tolerable; the prospect of its falling to France, which was becoming the world's pre-eminent military power, was of grave concern. Jefferson conveyed to Napoleon that though the United States fondly desired peace, he would reluctantly go to war over New Orleans if necessary. Federalists like Alexander Hamilton urged Jefferson simply to take the city by force.

In early 1803 Jefferson made a last attempt to avoid war, directing his ambassador in France to attempt to purchase New Orleans for the United States. Jefferson also dispatched his protégé James Monroe to Europe on a mission "upon whose event," he wrote Monroe at the time, "depends the future

destinies of this republic." If the purchase attempt failed, the Anglophobe Jefferson instructed Monroe, he was to continue on to London to seek a military alliance with the

British (who could be expected to welcome the chance to counter their rival). Monroe went no further than Paris. Napoleon's representative stunned the Americans by offering not merely New Orleans but the entire Louisiana Territory—an immense tract of more than 500 million acres extending upriver to Canada and westward clear to the Rockies. The bargain price was 60 million francs (\$15 million). Jefferson had effectively bought a third of the continent for 3 cents an acre.

The reason the inscrutable Napoleon proffered this "noble bargain" had its roots in his shifting strategy. Just months before, Napoleon had appeared intent on building a new French empire in America. However, the first step in his New World plan—to quell a slave revolution in the French Indies and retake the lucrative sugar colony of Saint-Domingue—had met with ruin. The force of 25,000 he'd dispatched to the Caribbean under his brother-in-law Charles LeClerc had made landfall in Saint-Domingue, and after LeClerc tricked the slaves' leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, into a meeting, he took Toussaint captive (Toussaint would die in a French dungeon). When the colony's 500,000 blacks realized LeClerc's true intentions, and yellow fever began to rip through his ranks, his force was routed. (Early the next year, Toussaint's successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, would announce the founding of the independent Republic of Haiti.) Napoleon, it seems, had elected to cut his New World losses and focus his imperial eyes on Europe instead. Selling Louisiana provided necessary monies; it also headed off a prospective alli-

ance between Britain and the United States.

Under the Purchase Treaty, Louisiana's white inhabitants were to be granted the full rights of US citizenship. For a new nation founded on the idea that government by a distant power violated natural law, taking a colony of its own was vexing. The prospect of actually granting representation to the polyglot populace near the Mississippi's mouth—French- and Spanish-speaking rather than English-; Catholic rather than Protestant; many of its "whites" of evidently mixed descent—proved more vexing still. The city's Creoles, Jefferson wrote, were "as incapable of self-government as children"; for nine years Louisiana was governed by a colonial administrator appointed by the president. While New Orleans's "foreign" culture was troublesome, perhaps most unsettling of all was the density and relative freedom of its blacks. Its free people of color were far greater in number than those in Anglo-American cities like Charleston, South Carolina. Moreover, under the Spanish, its slaves enjoyed comparatively far greater rights than they would be accorded under the Anglo-American system. And it is this combination of factors, as Sublette writes, by which the city provided "an alternative path of development for African-American culture."

In French New Orleans, a *code noir* had nominally regulated the treatment of slaves and allowed them the right to assemble on the Sabbath for worship and market. Under the Spanish, all slaves were permitted to request contracts to buy their freedom, to own property and—most critical for the development of its culture—to continue to socialize en masse each weekend. The place where New Orleans's slaves came to meet, from the mid-1700s until the 1840s (when their gatherings were banned by the Americans), was a grassy square at the edge of the old city, which came to be known as Place Congo, later Congo Square.

The importance of what happened in Congo Square, not only to the history of New Orleans but to American culture at large, is neatly caught in a phrase that becomes a leitmotif of Sublette's book. "On sabbath evening," recorded the writer H.C. Knight on visiting the city in 1819, "the African slaves meet on the green, by the swamp, and rock the city with their Congo dances." According to Sublette, this is the first use of "rock," as verb and metaphor, in the manner that would a century and a half later become common to the idioms of pop music and youth culture worldwide. Tales of those "Congo dances" are not limited to the domain of scholars alone; they are rich in the oral lore of a city

that claims to have invented not only jazz but funk (whose name perhaps derives from the Kikongo *lufuki*, for strong body odor) and where, as Sublette notes, in a rudimentary studio not one block from Congo Square in 1947, Roy Brown recorded “Good Rockin’ Tonight,” a tune with as much claim as any to being the first rock ‘n’ roll song.

Of course, one can no more pinpoint the birth of rock ‘n’ roll—as Sublette acknowledges—than definitively trace the many African strands that inform the black cultures of the New World. This doesn’t stop Sublette, whose energized, digressive style evokes a brashly erudite bar stool raconteur, from doing his part for early New Orleans. As in his previous book, *Cuba and Its Music* (2004), a widely praised account of that island’s history “from the first drums to the mambo,” music here becomes a means to trace the movement of peoples and the evolution of place. While the general reader is well served by Sublette’s synoptic account of New Orleans’s history within the broader context of the eighteenth-century Atlantic, what most distinguishes his book is its original research into the timbre and effect of the rhythms that filled the muddy streets and Creole dance halls of libertine New Orleans from the start.


Sublette is a sonic sleuth charting the successive waves of Africans who shaped this black city’s culture: from the first arrival, in Nouvelle-Orléans, of two slave ships from Benin carrying the Ardra people, from whose *foddun* spiritual practice derives the core of Louisiana voodoo; to the influx during the early French period of Wolof and Bambara people from the Senegal River in West Africa, whose melismatic singing and stringed instruments were crucial forerunners of blues and the banjo; to the Spanish era’s preponderance of slaves from the Central African forest culture of Kongo, whose hand-drummed polyrhythms came to undergird dance rhythms from Havana to Harlem. Drawing on travelers’ sketches and his wide knowledge of Afro-Caribbean music, Sublette conjures up a vivid picture of what these scenes in Congo Square may have looked and sounded like.

As with all work of this kind—and all writing about music that exists neither in recording nor notation—these genealogies involve much conjecture and guesswork. Sins of overenthusiasm are here easily forgiven, however. Even if the veins and streams from Congo Square to today are best understood to be as much metaphoric as empirical, it is not hard to credit that in Sabbath-day gatherings there, important seeds were sown for the growth of the astonishing musics with which New Orleans and the United States

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Sublette's account ends decades before the advent of jazz—that quintessence of African-America born on European instruments in the late 1800s—though not before he explicates how the neighborhood with which jazz is most closely associated “became French.” As with that slippery term “Creole,” the meaning and source of the French Quarter’s “Frenchness” has changed over time. Its street plan comes from its French founders, but its oldest buildings were erected during the Spanish era. And as Sublette writes, the bulk of its “French” character dates from the influx, following the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, of thousands of Francophone planters and “Creoles of color” fleeing the blood-soaked Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue—especially the arrival, in 1809, of some 9,000 refugees who had spent a decade-plus in eastern Cuba before being expelled by the island’s Spanish governor. Not only did the Haitian Revolution help precipitate New Orleans’s becoming a part of the United States (with some help, as it happens, from Jefferson, who, despite his hostility to Toussaint’s cause, covertly supplied his troops with arms to weaken Napoleon’s hand); so too did its aftermath ensure that New Or-

leans remained a “foreign” place for its first decades in the country.

Today the Louisiana Purchase is recalled as the great achievement of Jefferson’s presidency. At the time, his acquisition enjoyed wide popular support. Jefferson himself—a Republican who’d spent the nation’s infancy arguing for a weak executive and strict constructionism—hesitated over constitutional scruples. In Congress, he was opposed by Federalists who sought to weaken his administration by questioning the legality and wisdom of a president’s annexing a “vast wilderness unpeopled with any beings except wolves and wandering Indians.” He pressed on, though, convinced of the vital interest served by preventing a foreign power from occupying the nation’s western edge and seduced by the opportunity to extend an “empire of liberty” halfway across the continent.

In the eyes of many Congressmen in 1803—and, as Sublette rightly argues, in the eyes of history as well—acquiring Louisiana was equaled in importance by the decision to allow slavery on its soil. Reopening a question that had embroiled the nation from its founding—and whose nonresolution made a dent in the federal idea, slavery begging national consensus rather than sectional understanding—abolitionists pointed to the incommensurability of human bondage with republican ideals; Northern Congressmen, hostile to slavery or not, were determined to prevent the expansion of the “slave power” (the favored term for the notorious “three-fifths clause” of the Constitution, which granted slaveholding states extra electoral votes in proportion to three-fifths of their black populace, and upon which those states had insisted as a condition of joining the Union). In the end, Jefferson and his Congressional allies won out; no provision against slavery’s spread was included in the final bill of annexation. The tensions thereby exacerbated, however, would not be resolved until the Civil War.

Though Jefferson viewed slavery as a “hideous evil” and believed its eventual extinguishment on American soil was desirable and inevitable, he was equally convinced that freed blacks could never live peaceably alongside whites; mass emancipation would have to be accompanied by mass repatriation to Africa or the West Indies. “We have the wolf by the ears,” went his famous summation of the issue, “and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go.” In declining to limit slavery in lower Louisiana, he privately argued that his treaty with France entailed respecting the “property rights” of existing residents, and also that “diffusing” the Chesapeake’s dense

concentration of Negroes into the new Southwest might lessen slavery’s intensity, thereby hastening its demise. Less grandly, he hoped it might lessen the likelihood of Haiti-style conflagration in Virginia.

Sublette, for his part, argues that slavery’s spread was “not an unintended consequence of territorial expansion but...devoutly desired by Jefferson’s constituents.” While this is certainly so, Sublette errs in placing slavery’s spread near the core of Jefferson’s aims in Louisiana, offering a caricatured portrait of Jefferson’s venality and racism that does little to illuminate his actions in the context of his time. One of course empathizes with the aim to examine Jefferson “from the perspective of slavery”; in recent years, especially since the 1998 DNA study that all but proved Jefferson fathered children with his slave Sally Hemings, his hypocrisies have become well publicized. Yet depicting Jefferson as little more than a stooge for Southern interests is to simplify considerably. For one thing, his “diffusionist” stance had many Northern supporters. Moreover, his approach to Louisiana was governed, above all, by concerns of national security and expansion; his silence on slavery as president—however detestable—came from his reasoned belief that neither the Union nor his political career could survive federal intervention on the question of how and when the states should end the “peculiar institution” (all facts that, in any event, bolster rather than weaken arguments about slavery’s intrinsic role in the political economy of the early Republic).

Flaws of historiography aside, Sublette’s emphasis on what the Louisiana Purchase meant for the rise of a domestic slave trade is beyond debate. That trade, as detailed in crucial recent books by historians Walter Johnson (*Soul by Soul*, 1999) and Adam Rothman (*Slave Country*, 2005), enabled the spread of a Cotton Kingdom throughout Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, accompanying the growth of America’s slave population during the first half of the nineteenth century from 900,000 to nearly 4 million. The forced migration of hundreds of thousands of blacks, marched south from the Chesapeake in coffles or sailed south in boats around Florida to New Orleans, not only afforded the development of a society based on slave labor but made the value represented in slaves its essential form of capital. By the 1830s, Virginia field hands were fetching upward of \$1,000 at market in New Orleans; light-skinned “fancy girls” as much as \$7,000. Bought and borrowed against, mortgaged and sold, Negro slaves came to be seen as investments more secure even than land; their estimated cash value by 1860 (some \$4 billion) would equal seven times

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It would be an overreach to suggest that such profits were foreseen by Jefferson's constituents and served as a key motive for the Purchase. That said, in 1804 Virginia's planters certainly knew that they stood to gain from sending surplus Negroes to market down south. And soon, a ban on importing new Africans guaranteed their share. On January 1, 1808, the trans-shipment of slaves from abroad to US ports was made a federal crime, thereby outlawing a traffic that, wrote Jefferson, "the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country have long been eager to proscribe." As so often before and after, Jefferson's moralizing belied its effect; ending the import trade spurred the homegrown one. This likely explains why the ban's 200th anniversary this year—as opposed to its widely commemorated British analogue in 2007—has been allowed to pass largely unnoticed. While the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 resulted from a popular movement of Quakers and others morally opposed to slavery, the American ban served to protect a domestic industry in buying and selling people—an industry of which New Orleans remained the vital center until the Civil War.

When New Orleans became a part of the United States, its acquisition made the inchoate Republic an imperial nation on the world stage. In the two centuries since—from the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, where the new Republic's old colonial master was defeated for a final time; to the Civil War; to Reconstruction, Jim Crow, civil rights and Katrina—the city has time and again been the site for some of our most dramatic reckonings with who we are as a nation. Once the largest city in the Confederacy, New Orleans has long depended on federal largesse: first a hundred miles upriver, where the immense works of the Army Corps of Engineers at Atchafalaya keep the Mississippi from changing course and not flowing past New Orleans at all; and second, at the edge of the city itself, where the Corps' levees are meant to keep this sinking metropolis from filling with water—a task, as the world knows, at which it tragically failed on August 29, 2005.

The traumas born of that day were in the first place personal, and counted in the thousands. For the larger community of New Orleans and its astonishing culture, however, the collective tragedy has been that so many of those scattered by the storm were the human carriers of that culture's stories, traditions and symbols. Not everyone, though, has left, and in a vivid coda to his narrative, Sublette offers a tableau of some who have stayed. On a cool

Mardi Gras morning in February 2006, in St. Augustine's Church, the oldest black Catholic congregation in the country, he describes a krewe of Mardi Gras Indians—black men who, as has been the practice since the 1800s, don elaborately fashioned costumes whose beads and colors recall Africa but that are made to resemble the feathered headdresses of Sioux warrior fame (partly in homage, it is said, to the more proximate tribes with whom runaway slaves found refuge in Louisiana's swamps). "I'm the Big Chief of the Congo Nation!" bellows musician and krewe leader Donald Harrison Jr., just returned from

months living in a Baton Rouge motel, as he leads his troupe, Congo Nation, from the church. "And on Mardi Gras Day I cause the sensation!" When Congo Nation encounters a rival krewe on the street, its refrain, like that of all the Indians, is, "We won't bow down"—an ethos in which Sublette hears New Orleans's refusal to cooperate in its own erasure, its people continuing still to "rock the city with their Congo dances."

And yet what is important about this city, and about such "only in New Orleans" traditions as the Mardi Gras Indians, is not merely what they recall from the past—be that



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past Kongo, French, Spanish, Houma or Haitian—but what makes them quintessentially American: as living stories about how people from those cultures and their descendants have reconciled themselves to this place, and to one another, to make something new. In the history of New Orleans—where in key

ways the American empire was born and where, in the ongoing disaster since Katrina, many have seen a marker of its current fall—lies in microcosm a tale about the entire New World. It remains a test of our nation, and of a new administration in Washington, to make New Orleans anew once more. ■

bery, in which celebrity attorney F. Lee Bailey tried and failed to convince a jury that Hearst bore no responsibility for her crime because she had been brainwashed.

Stockholm syndrome was everywhere in the 1970s. Hearst's case was but the most notorious. The "brainwashing" of soul-searching youth by religious cults became the paramount obsession of the middle class (in Sunday school at my Reform temple in Milwaukee, we were trained to resist their wiles). "Between 1969 and 1977," Graebner points out, "more than thirty zombie movies appeared in the United States and in other countries." The most notorious of them all, *Dawn of the Dead*, came out in 1978—the same year that a remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* dramatized a "fear that human beings are vulnerable creatures, rather easily drained of the basic qualities of humanness," in this case by aliens who arrive in the form of lovely flowers that turn the citizens of San Francisco into "a new race, identical in appearance to the old one but, like zombies, lacking emotive qualities." Students of American culture will recognize the signposts of national anxiety: San Francisco, flowers, zombies. "If you're going to San Francisco/Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair," went a 1967 hit song about the "Summer of Love." The Bay Area was a national catchment for lost souls, a symbol of horror for parents who no longer considered their children their own. (Congress was worried enough about the problem to pass a Runaway Youth Act in 1974.) The fact that Hearst was kidnapped in no less a zombie reservoir than Berkeley would be central to the national discussion of her fate.

The SLA's Svengali, small-time crook Donald DeFreeze, recruited from among the upper ranks of the runaways who flocked to Berkeley to "find themselves" amid the ashes of '60s idealism. (SLA comrade Cujo was the son of a Pennsylvania anesthesiologist; Teko had played on the golf team at his Indiana high school.) Charles Manson had been a similar kind of pied piper seven years earlier in Haight-Ashbury. "In Berkeley, a city symbolic of personal and political change," Graebner writes, "being an urban guerrilla was a lifestyle option." The SLA lived that lifestyle to the hilt. (Its slogan: "Death to the Fascist Insect That Preys Upon the Life of the People.") Three months before the Hearst kidnapping, the SLA murdered the school superintendent of Oakland. The "Black Judas in Oakland" had issued student identification cards, which in the fevered logic of the SLA and other factionistas obviously portended fascism.

But the SLA was also implicated in the typical dodges of thug life. The most fascinating witness at Hearst's trial was Ulysses



An FBI simulation of Patty Hearst in various wigs, summer 1974

That Girl

by RICK PERLSTEIN

The story of the hostage who comes by turns to identify with the captor is one of the oldest ever told. Tales of un-sullied Puritan maidens kidnapped by Indians only to end up "going native" were staples of early American literature. *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, which describes the ordeal of a minister's wife held for eleven weeks by Narragansett Indians during King Philip's War in 1676, was among the first such narratives, and it was enormously popular when it was published in Boston in 1682. Three hundred years later, a similar story seized the West's imagination: in Stockholm in 1973, after four customers were taken hostage in a holdup of the Sveriges Kreditbank, there were reports that one of them became affianced to one of the bank robbers. The archetype is of such sturdy provenance, in fact, that it surprised me to learn from William Graebner's *Patty's Got a Gun* that it wasn't until six years after the Kreditbank incident that the term "Stockholm syndrome" appeared in the American mass media. The phrase first surfaced in 1979, Graebner explains, "when *Time* magazine suggested that the syndrome might have taken hold among those being held hostage by Iranian militants in Tehran." Perhaps the obsession with the notion of a loss of self

Rick Perlstein's most recent book is Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America.

Patty's Got a Gun

Patricia Hearst in 1970s America.

By William Graebner.
Chicago. 218 pp. \$20.

under conditions of duress is so primal, so elemental of modern anxieties, that people feared to give it a proper name. Until, that is, the 1970s—a time so drenched in the detritus of captivity that the culture suddenly could not do without the shorthand.

The captivity narrative at the center of Graebner's book is the 1974 kidnapping of a modest and nondescript California heiress by a murderous ultra-left cult that called itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. A stranger story has hardly ever been told. Months after her kidnapping, Patty Hearst appeared on surveillance footage of a bank robbery brandishing an M-1 machine gun. Ten days later the SLA would release tapes of her calling her parents pigs and insisting that if she had been brainwashed, it was only via "the process whereby the people are conditioned to passively take their place in society as slaves of the ruling class." When the police torched an SLA safe house with most of the group still inside, Patty watched it on live TV from a motel near Disneyland with the rest of her SLA "combat unit." Thus began a flight during which, apparently as a full-fledged member of the gang, she never once tried to escape for more than a year. Then came her trial in 1976 for armed rob-