“The American Invader”:
George Washington Cable’s
*The Grandissimes* and US
Expansionism in the Creole Caribbean

George Washington Cable is perhaps best known as a progressive writer of local color stories set in Louisiana. His oeuvre is punctuated with critiques of his Creole characters’ regressive attitudes towards people of color, slavery, segregation, and industrial progress. In his overtly political *The Grandissimes*, Cable positions these morally opprobrious Creoles of French New Orleans against a new, progressive, democratic US on its ascendancy across the North American continent with violent, tragic results. This political expansion correlates well between the text and Cable’s present, marking moments of regional and global ascendancy for the United States. Jennifer Rae Greeson points out that his local color fiction, especially “Jean-Ah Poquelin,” “mak[es] an episode of recent national history into a widely applicable paradigm for U.S. empire” (*Our South* 265). *The Grandissimes* replicates a similar paradigm of national expansion. The novel’s concern with the historical legacies of events beginning in 1699, nearly 105 years earlier, roughly corresponds with Cable’s 1880 and the birth of the United States in 1776, another period of about 105 years. This temporal similarity superimposes two narratives of national creation, encounter, and expansion. For Cable’s present, expansion was at the forefront of political life in the United States, as it seems to be in his novel. President Grant, in 1869 and 1870, set the Western Hemisphere apart when he proclaimed, “hereafter no territory on this continent shall be regarded as subject to transfer to a European power” (LaFeber 36). Grant implies, then, that the entire hemisphere is the especial purview of US paternalism, protection, and subjection. *The Grandissimes* itself also is concerned with
the success of this project. In it, the acquisition of the Louisiana territory represents, as Adam Long notes, “a moment of significant nation-building. . . . the characters are explicitly and publicly concerned with creating an acceptable narration of nation” (81). Moreover, in the US’s final political and cultural conquest, Cable legitimizes the US American even as it subsumes the Creole. The narrative’s concern with the US as a growing regional power in the northern Americas hearkens to Cable’s present moment of US expansionism across the globe, allowing him to examine the legitimacy and cultural possibilities afforded by US expansionism during his present over quasi-European, colonial, Creole order.

Cable’s narrative is not specifically concerned with a past, completed historical moment, but allegorizes the potential for an ongoing political and social project of post-Reconstruction assimilation and imperial expansion. Indeed, Cable often imagines Louisianan regionalism as antagonistic towards the higher ideal of American nationalism. In “My Politics,” Cable reflects on The Grandissimes as “a study of the fierce struggle going on around me, regarded in the light of that past history—those beginnings—which had so differentiated Louisiana civilization from the American scheme of public society” (14). This “fierce struggle” of culture following Reconstruction seems to arise from Louisiana’s continued difference from the larger “American scheme” both in past and present. For Cable, the solution to this differentiation lies in a rejection of or at least a subsumption of regional identity for a more advanced US social and political superstructure. Cable articulates as much in an address to students at the University of Mississippi, where he implores, “What we want—what we ought to have in view—is the No South! Does the word sound like annihilation? It is the farthest from it. It is enlargement. It is growth. It is a higher life” (Burnett 21). In this configuration, the southerner, the Louisianan, becomes a secondary identity to the American. If these citizens accept with pride the new “American scheme of public society” and reject or demote those regional idiosyncrasies that contradict the acceptable national character, then what remains of their culture may be legitimized within the “higher life” of US citizenry.

Scholars generally agree that The Grandissimes locates these antagonistic idiosyncrasies in southerners’ undue arrogance and the spectrally haunting “shadow of the Ethiopian” and concur that Cable offers generally progressive yet problematic suggestions for exorcising this dark doppelgänger from the recalcitrant, defeated Creoles. John
Cleman notes, “Cable’s Creole civilization is characterized by pride—a perverse and arrogant loyalty to blood lines, however ambiguous, and presumptions of aristocratic status, however dubious” (52). Racial ambiguity within presumably “lily-white” aristocratic bloodlines only highlights the ironic presence of mixed-race people that represents a violation of social and racial boundaries erected to prevent that mixture (Cable 22). As Christopher Bollini asserts, the Creole neurosis regarding this racial mixture is attended by “a history of racial violence and its resultant traumas [that] inform the novel’s milieu” and simultaneously reflects Cable’s own “abhor[rence of] the continued systematization of racial injustice” (168, 167). Cable’s moral repugnance at this social system is not only found in the novel’s repressed abuses and indignities but also attenuated by his characters’ expressions of what Jonathan Daigle calls “cross-racial sympathy” (10). This, as Daigle suggests, reveals something of Cable’s “radical possibilities” for a Louisiana that may become more “equit[able], merit[orous], and progress[ive]” (38).

However, other critics find this progressive vision is tempered by the novel’s problematic treatment of characters of color. Thomas Fink and Eva Gold argue that it expresses an “intense ambivalence . . . towards the category confusion embodied in the mulatto characters” (70). Though The Grandissimes offers a solution to New Orleans’s cultural and moral problems through the “higher life” of American assimilation, the treatment of characters of color expresses troubling possibilities for these personified racial aberrations within geographies “set aside” for ascending US social, cultural, and political dominance. The termination or exile of those of mixed-race descent represents, according to George Handley, the “successful Americanization of the Deep South, centered on the healing rationality of the northern apothecary, at the cost of the expulsion of the history of miscegenation” (66). In offering the US South as the site for testing and enacting cultural expansion of the “American scheme,” Cable situates the politically and socially integrated US South within a larger configuration of continued expansion of US polity into “foreign” spheres that troublingly expels the “history of miscegenation” as one of the region’s idiosyncratic characteristics.

While I do not necessarily intend for this essay to displace prevailing scholarship about the story’s problematic treatments of race and nationalism, I do want it to resituate Cable’s Louisiana within an alternative geographical and political framework that helps reveal more clearly the imperialistic registers of the text. Cable’s choice of Louisiana
as the site of this imaginative test of political, social, and cultural expansion is, in one sense, practical, as New Orleans was his home. Nevertheless, New Orleans’s and Louisiana’s difference when compared to the US South renders Louisiana, according to Burnett, a “‘South’ all [its] own” (22). The state’s cultural difference from the broader southeastern United States—succinctly expressed in the term “Creole”—is perhaps most obvious in its French and Spanish colonial history, especially with regard to political, religious, linguistic, and legal distinctions. A quick analysis of terminological frequency suggests not so much concern with a “southern” identity as with a Creole identity. References for the “South” as a discrete cultural or regional entity occur only five times throughout The Grandissimes.1 “Creole” and its derivative words occur 195 times—nearly forty times more often than “South” as a cultural marker. This terminological frequency demonstrates Cable’s more intense concern with exploring the localized interaction between a specifically Creole identity (rather than a general southern identity) and the ascendant “American scheme.” Such concern is hindered by the moniker “local color,” which limits the critical scope of the circum-Caribbean connections the novel evokes.

This concentration on the Creole of Louisiana is significant, as the connotations of the term during the period are often decidedly Caribbean. This expands the potential regional focus of the novel from the US South into the South’s “Souths” of Latin America and the Caribbean. Berndt Ostendorf highlights this Caribbean connection in the lexical history of “Creole,” arguing that “Creole” has been used in the process of “cultural formation across transatlantic or racial divides” since the beginning of the colonial period, especially among French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies (103). The term originally applied to anyone born in these empires’ colonies in the New World and would often apply to those of both African and European descent, especially those in Franco- or Hispanophone spaces. This common ethnic identifier came to also represent a more broad “Afro-Creole-Indian charter culture” (110) as

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1The term “south” as a directional or descriptive term comes up twelve times in the novel. These occurrences are not wholly related to the “South” as a general cultural entity, though some yield interesting imaginative connections: one describes the “passionate southern sky,” which connects southernness with geographically determined desire and intensity—something antithetical to the rational “coolness” of the northern Frowenfeld (Cable 129). Others are perhaps merely incidental; one, for example, occurs as Agricola Fusilier reads Frowenfeld’s meteorological recordings (138).
the term applied across those “transatlantic or racial divides.” The acquisition of the Louisiana territory by the US represented, then, the first major acquisition of a culture strongly identified with a Caribbean Creole identity rather than a US southern identity.

*The Grandissimes*, in its intentional confluence of historical and contemporary moments of Louisiana and US social and cultural policy, represents Cable’s own imaginative “test” of the “American scheme” in a context more aligned with the Creole Caribbean than the US South. Cable also positions the Louisiana Creole as the gateway to further potential expansion. This is culturally and historically significant, given that by the time of the novel’s publication, expansionist imaginations were beginning to shift from the largely annexed, incorporated US West and Midwest towards the Pacific Islands and the Central and Caribbean Americas. Walter LaFeber notes, “The Caribbean had long been considered in fancy, though not in fact, as belonging to the United States” (37). In the 1870s, American interventions in anticolonialist uprisings and political revolutions throughout the region were informed by an attempt to reap “the positive benefits which might be derived from such policies” (LaFeber 37). As noted above, President Grant set the hemisphere apart for American influence and domination and, in implying the primacy of the United States in determining the economic and political destiny of the Caribbean and Latin America, established his nation as the *de facto* power of the region. Louisiana, a Creole territory in language, religion, and legal order, was central to this goal not only as an economic or military staging ground but also as a cultural, imaginative point of exchange between the US and the Caribbean and Latin America. In this sense, Cable’s present and fictional New Orleans

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2This is connected, in large part, with “Manifest Destiny,” which the *OED* defines as “the doctrine or belief that the expansion of the United States throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable.” Though imperialistic territorial expansion rarely occurred in a *de jure* sense following the Louisiana Purchase and immediately following the Civil War, it certainly figures within the rhetorical framework that led to several filibusters, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, and the territorial acquisition of former Spanish colonies.

3As a practical example, New Orleans acted as a critical staging ground for US military and propagandistic forces deployed during the Mexican American War. Not only were the city’s maritime capabilities instrumental in the amphibious assaults at the mouth of the Rio Grande, the blockades of Tampico and Veracruz, and Winfield Scott’s invasion near the close of the war, its print capabilities were central in distributing news and pro-war propaganda that led to the lionization of future presidents Zachary
represent, according to Greeson, a “geographical liminality . . . at the southernmost limit of the US, but the center of the American hemisphere” (“Expropriating” 507). But, the “center of the American hemisphere” overgeneralizes the regional importance of New Orleans, as it lies at a more specific regional and cultural configuration than just the entire American hemisphere. This cultural configuration is broadly geographical—circum-Caribbean, but also cultural. John Lowe examines its cultural category as a “rhizome-like cultural grid” and notes its status as “multiethnic and multiracial” “cradle of culture” bound by a race-based plantation, slave economy (9,11). In this more regionalized circum-Caribbean configuration, Cable’s Louisiana Creole becomes differentiated from the larger “South.” This “Latin” Creole identity bears more rhizomatic connections to the cultures of Cable’s contemporary Caribbean than those within the broader US South. By setting the novel at the border of this “rhizome-like cultural grid,” Cable tests the reification of Creole culture afforded by the “higher life” of American subjugation, using it to ideologically and imaginatively project out into the Caribbean basin. Thus, by imagining empire through the Crescent City, Cable also subtly gestures out and into the Caribbean. The Creole Louisiana becomes Cable’s cultural “frontier,” standing in for the largely Creole Souths beyond his contemporary, dominantly Anglo-Irish, Protestant US South. Primarily, Cable accomplishes this through a mindful pattern of cultural links, especially the perception of shared decadence among Creole cultures and repressed memories of slave revolts, and offers a concerning exclusionary, segregated vision for US imperial ascendancy not only in Creole Louisiana, but potentially across any “Franco-Spanish-American” city of the souths of the South (Cable 170).

Cable opens The Grandissimes by insinuating the instability and decadence of Creole New Orleans through the implied breakdown of the carnival borders. The bal masqué renders what Mikhail Bakhtin

Taylor and Franklin Pierce. Similarly, the notorious filibuster William Walker was at one point an editor for and co-owner of New Orleans Crescent before he moved west. There, he led a small contingent of mercenaries and conquered La Paz in 1853 to create another slave state, where he imposed Louisianan laws and slave codes on his “Republic of Lower California” until he was arrested. A few years later he conquered Nicaragua, becoming the president of the country for almost a year before being captured by the US Navy and repatriated to the US. Walker then tried to conquer Honduras; he was executed there in 1860.
calls “syncretic pageantry...” without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators” that “suspend[s]” “All distance between people” and empowers “free and familiar contact among people” of disparate social hierarchies (122, 123). The suspension of distance is problematic in execution, as Cable’s bal masqué takes place in a segregated context. Yet, it brings into contact elements of society unable to interact under “normal” circumstance and enables eccentric performance not usually tolerated outside the parameters of the ball. When confronted with the possibility that Honoré Grandissime is in attendance, one ball-goer remarks: “Honoré in a mask? he is too sober-sided to do such a thing” (3). Apparently not, for Honoré indulges in the coquetry of the ball to its fullest extent, falling under the sway of love “here... baffled, there deceived, yonder takes prisoners and here surrenders” as he unknowingly talks with the Nancanous—sworn enemies of the Fusilier and Grandissime clans (3). This behavior and interaction is tolerated, if not encouraged, at the bal masqué, but sustained only by the continued anonymity of the party-goers. In hiding behind a performed, masked eccentricity, the old order may be stably reinstated at the party’s close. Without that performative obfuscation, prejudices and conflict would move freely between the carnival and non-carnival spaces of everyday life, rendering the difference between decadent party and the commonplace meaningless. This anonymity and the borders between the acceptable performance of sane and “mad” are violated in the mutual unmasking of Honoré and Aurora, which violates the sacred laws of the Creole carnival and moves its tolerated madness beyond the social barriers founded on anonymity. This tinctures Honoré with a romantic madness formally limited to an “acceptable” performance occupying only a few nights per year. Honoré reflects: “Now, sir,... we’ll return to our senses,” which the narrator ironically undercuts: “‘Now I’ll put my feathers on again,’ says the plucked bird” (7). Honoré’s preeminence as “the uttermost flower on the topmost branch of the tallest family tree ever transplanted from France to Louisiana” renders him a representative of the entirety of Creole culture (82). Now that this uttermost flower is compromised, so too is the entirety of Creole Louisiana.

Cable not only highlights the ubiquitous decadence of the Creole characters through the violation of the “rules” of the carnival but also differentiates these morally compromised Creoles from his ideal “American” reader through a clever interpolation in the “Recording
According to Catherine Belsey, “interpellation (address) in turn facilitates the interpolation (inclusion) of the reader in the narrative by the presentation of events from a specific and unified point of view” by “construct[ing] . . . a position for the reader, which is a position of identification with the subject of the enunciation” (70, 72). In textual acts that address or suggest a reading individual or audience, Cable creates a subject position for the reader thoroughly identified with the narrator’s moral position over the actions within the text. Cable explicitly articulates this relationship between enunciator and interpolated subject through the “Recording Angel” and consistent inclusionary language that sets the reader socially and culturally apart from the ball-goers and on the same plane as this bureaucratic ethnographer. His Recording Angel is highly naturalistic; it needs to locate meaning and classifiable truth in a situation rife with confusion, misinterpretation, and subterfuge: “the Recording Angel, whom we understand to be particularly about those things, had immediately made a memorandum of [the misidentification made by Dr. Keene costumed as Lufki-Humma]” (4). The bureaucratic Angel needs to note and record items in a ledger—an act identified with a scientific, naturalistic, if not legalistic gaze antagonistic to the laissez-faire attitude of the bal masqué. Cable even brings the audience into the retinue of the narrative angel, interpolating them a subject-hood bound to a naturalistic, bureaucratic identity: “all this is an outside view; let us draw nearer and see what chance may discover to us behind those four masks” (3; emphasis added). Cable groups the reader with this Recording Angel through the inclusionary “us” and directs attention towards the object—the mysterious, partying Creoles. The Creoles, then, become objects of discovery, subjects of the gaze of Cable’s Recording Angel, whom Cable guides through this confusing “Battery” of foreign languages, ironic relationships, and jokes about mixed-race lineages encapsulated in “child-like badinage,” “delightful nonsense,” and “wailing” and “screaming harmonies” (6, 6, 1, 3). Thus, Cable creates a stark difference between the Creole and his Recording Angel readership now identified with a position thoroughly non-Creole.

In Honoré’s compromise that represents the inherent madness of Creole society, Cable’s Recording Angel emphasizes that connection: “‘Now I’ll put my feathers on again,’ says the plucked bird” (7). In labeling Honoré, who embodies the best of Creole culture, as a plucked bird, Cable suggests not only a personal, but also a social violation as
well as an inherent moral indignity that may never be repaired. Beyond acting as an ethnographer of local color, the Recording Angel becomes incorporated in a moral discourse regarding Creole character. The sanctioned borders of the carnival have broken, revealing the moral and social decadence extending beyond the party’s boundaries into the fabric of everyday Creole society. Simultaneously, by creating a subject position that continually identifies the carnival as grotesque, alien, and decadent, Cable insinuates the impending collapse of Creole culture towards madness. Thus, Cable insists indirectly the need for a clarifying, naturalist examination of the Creole cultural body to locate the true heart of its diseased identity for potential amelioration.

Following this scene, Cable directs the focus of the text onto the character Joseph Frowenfeld, a recent émigré from a vague North to New Orleans who represents the incoming curative power to these social ills. Frowenfeld, the protagonist of the narrative, represents an invasive, intrusive force, but one framed sympathetically—almost a living embodiment of the “Recording Angel.” As the Recording Angel has prescribed the reader’s reading style, Cable then binds his reader with Frowenfeld as he moves southward down the Mississippi towards New Orleans. Frowenfeld, according to Cleman, becomes “the novel’s center of consciousness” and is “Cable’s central device for introducing Louisiana’s colonial history and complex social arrangements.” Frowenfeld then becomes little more than an investigative chorus, containing and focusing the reader’s gaze towards objects of his “American” interest to explain Creole character: “Frowenfeld’s initiation into the mysteries of the region then becomes the reader’s initiation as well” (Cleman 51). The reader, Cable interpolates, is a complete foreigner to Creole life, and must examine the parts of this society to effectively operate within and shift the Creole consciousness towards a more appropriate subject to inevitable US dominance.

Now connected to the uninitiated Frowenfeld, the interpolated reader attempts to deduce the heart of Creole society, which Cable suggests is characterized by a repressed history of miscegenation. These “problematic” relationships represent for Cable one of the major hurdles to integrating the region, if not the entire plantation Caribbean, into the US imperial project. Cable, in connecting the “white” Lousianan to the fraught, racialized etymology inherent to the term “Creole,”
slyly allegorizes a similar “problem” of a larger Creole Caribbean culture through an essentialist understanding of a Latin character and culture. Of the French, Cable writes:

Thus, while the pilgrim fathers of the Mississippi Delta with Gallic recklessness were taking wives and moot-wives from the ill specimens of three races, arose, with the church’s benediction, the royal house of the Fusiliers in Louisiana. But the true, main Grandissime stock, on which the Fusiliers did early, ever, and yet do, love to marry, has kept itself lily-white ever since France has loved lilies—as to marriage, that is; as to less responsible entanglements, why, of course—. (22)

Cable’s approach to French character renders it indirectly against the ideal “American” essence. The Gauls’ description as “pilgrim” fathers contrasts them against the legendary Pilgrims of New England, suggesting an ironic dissimilarity between the mythical moral immensity of the English Puritan fathers and these “reckless” and licentious Gauls. Not only that, they mix indiscriminately with “wives and moot-wives from the ill specimens of three races,” racially tainting themselves with “less responsible entanglements” that are “of course” to be expected of French-Creole people. Even Honoré, “the uttermost flower on the top-most branch of the tallest family tree ever transplanted from France to Louisiana, Honoré,—the worshiped, the magnificent” (81-82) is compromised by this essential character of Creole culture by the haunting presence of his mixed-race brother, Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c. Cable’s normalization of miscegenation to the Creole condition seems to be his direct response to Creole defensiveness of their whiteness through an ironic insistence on maintaining a “true, main . . . stock” and minimizing the gravity of “less responsible entanglements.” Handley notes that this repressive behavior by white Creoles occurred “In response to a northern perception of their cultural and racial blackness” in the intermingling of “Catholic and African beliefs in the region” (62). Also, Cable’s Creoles fear and resist any appearance of blackness, suggesting paranoia about the perceptions of their potential African or Indigenous lineages. Cable exploits the paranoid response for condemnation, not just purely naturalistic detail. Cable’s ironic insistence on the “lily-whiteness” of the Creole and its implied falsehood render it an essential part of the larger New World French character that binds Louisiana to other French colonies and, more generally, to the Creole character of the Caribbean.
This connection to the miscegenated Caribbean French culture allows Cable indirectly to reflect on the Caribbean’s ethnic history and deeper social and political anxieties, especially regarding the history of slave revolts shared by Louisiana and the broader Caribbean. Even if it is unacknowledged in the text, around the proposed historical setting of the novel, approximately ten thousand refugees of the Haitian Revolution arrived at a New Orleans populated with approximately eight thousand inhabitants (Ostendorf 111). Adam Long suggests that Cable nods to this moment in the city’s demographic history by “conceiv[ing] of a character of mixed race possibly upsetting the [family] hierarchy” and thus implying a revolution of sorts (80). Yet Cable intentionally ties this historical moment to the significant political upheaval represented in the Haitian Revolution. Just as the Haitian Revolution is suppressed in the imaginations and histories of the South, so too is the story of Bras-Coupé in Cable’s Creole Louisiana. The spectral memory of Bras-Coupé in the oral history of the Creoles bears a strong resemblance to the traumatic memories of the Haitian refugees during the novel’s contemporary moment while also hearkening back to the actual historical figure of Squire/Bras-Coupé from the 1830s. Surprisingly, scholarship on this connection is lacking, considering the similarities among the Haitian Macandal, New Orleans’s own Squire/Bras-Coupé, and Cable’s Bras-Coupé. By orienting the novel around Bras-Coupé’s revolution and mixing the historical and literary legacies of Squire/Bras-Coupé and Macandal, then, Cable evokes the repressed memories of slave revolts generally, divulging the shared anxieties of the Louisiana Creole, the French-Creole Haitians, and white Caribbean Creole culture across the 1800s.

Squire, an enslaved Creole known for his ability to entertain by performing literal acts of minstrelsy for masters and the enslaved, escaped from his enslaver and had his right arm amputated as punishment, which gave him the name “Bras-Coupé” (“Arm Cut Off”). He escaped again and established himself as the leader of a maroon community. According to some accounts, he had magical powers, including an imperviousness to bullets. From his wilderness hideout, he robs and raids across the countryside until he is betrayed by an ally who murders him to claim the reward. Bryan Wagner identifies a few notable differences between the story of Squire/Bras-Coupé and Cable’s Bras-Coupé. The latter, unlike the historical Squire/Bras-Coupé, is an African prince and never organizes a collective revolt against the planter class. Instead of a
story of revolution, Cable transforms it into one of personal vengeance (Wagner 127–28). Cable’s Bras-Coupé also never has his arm removed by the state; instead, he names himself Bras-Coupé to reference the metaphorical neutralization of the Jaloff by his defeat and abduction: “Truly it would have been easy to admit, had this been his meaning, that his tribe, in losing him, had lost its strong right arm close off at the shoulder.” Cable further moralizes on this choice: “He made himself a type of all Slavery, turning into flesh and blood the truth that all Slavery is maiming” (171). This psychic “maiming” is also embodied in Squire/Bras-Coupé’s amputation by the government. The moment of his “disarming,” according to Wagner, “rematerializ[es] the threat of castration . . . [and] symbolizes the irrecoverable moment when identity is bestowed” by the dominating slave-state (123). Though the original history Wagner cites is not so obviously self-aware of this dehumanization, Cable’s indirect reference to the indignity of enslavement connects the Code Noir to his contemporary Jim Crow society (181). This appropriation of the history of Squire/Bras-Coupé localizes the story; moreover, Cable’s choice to shift the time of Bras-Coupé’s revolt from the 1830s to the 1790s makes the Bras-Coupé revolt contemporaneous with the Haitian Revolution. In doing so, Cable emphasizes collective white anxiety in the Caribbean, especially that of white, French-Haitian refugees as it spreads across the plantation societies of the circum-Caribbean.

One story of slave revolt that Cable seems to incorporate into Bras-Coupé’s narrative is that of Francois Macandal, whose legacy fed into the eventual Haitian Revolution. Though the accounts vary, each iteration shares interesting diegetic similarities to Cable’s Bras-Coupé.4 One iteration of the Macandal story Cable at the very least had access

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4The multiple ways this story moves and changes across the Atlantic suggests a vibrant print culture that reflects the communal values of the respective journals’ readerships. For example, the French and English versions, found in the Mercure de France of September 1787 and The Literary Magazine and British Review of January 1789, respectively, present the story in the context of histories and biographical accounts. The Bostonian version found in the Massachusetts Monthly of January 1793 provides the story in its section devoted to “Entertainment.” The difference between the presentation of the Macandal story as historical truth or pure amusement deserves more exploration, especially by scholars interested in the study of print culture in a transatlantic context. The identification of these texts was facilitated by the work of Duncan Faherty, Ed White, and Toni Wall Jaudon in “Account of a remarkable Conspiracy formed by a Negro in the Island of St. Domingo.”
to is found in M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*. Moreau de Saint-Méry begins his account by stating his deep regret that he must be “obligé d’en nommer un dont l’atroce existence a été un fléau pour l’humanité” (“obliged to name one whose atrocious existence has been a scourge to humanity”) as if the idea of including this story is tolerable only as an educational duty (629). Even though he later acknowledges “on ferait un ouvrage volumineux de tout ce que l’on rapport sur Macandal” (“we would make a voluminous work of all that we report on Macandal” he leaves the dramatic responsibility to a forthcoming edition of the story in the *Mercure de France* of September 1787 (631). In Moreau de Saint-Méry’s account, Macandal is abducted from Africa and taken to Haiti where, following the loss of his hand in a sugar mill accident, “Il devint fugitif” (“He became/went fugitive”) and then “il se rendit célèbre par des empoisonnements qui répandirent la terreur parmi les nègres” (“he made himself famous by poisonings which spread terror among the negroes”; 630). After a long period of absence, Macandal attends a “calenda nombreux” and gets drunk when “un jeune nègre” betrays him to his overseer (630). After another brief escape and a dramatic chase, Macandal is captured again and sentenced to burn at the stake. There, he vows to turn into a fly to escape death. At his execution, in the midst of his agony, he breaks free of his chains but is struck down by a guard, incinerated, and the narrative concludes.

Moreau de Saint-Méry’s Macandal shows some obvious similarities to the historic Squire/Bras-Coupé. Both have lost an arm because of the demands and persecutions of enslavement, both organize a collective effort against the planter class, both have magical abilities attributed to them, and both are betrayed by comrades. Macandal, however, does not merely operate through raids, small skirmishes, and robberies but instead works a terror campaign based on poisons derived from his knowledge of botany and voodoo. Similarly, Cable’s Bras-Coupé uses a vague magic to poison or “curse[]” the crops and strike the enslaved workers with fever, which render the operations into “invalid camp[s]”

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5Lowe notes Cable’s use of de Saint-Méry’s text and acknowledges it as a primary source for his descriptions of the Jaloff people in *The Grandissimes* (107-08). It is not, then, implausible to think that perhaps the story of his Bras-Coupé was inspired by this text’s account of Macandal.
(187). His noxious influence over the entire hinterland of New Orleans renders him a voudou practitioner of the highest and most feared sort, much like Macandal, the “scourge to humanity” (de Saint-Méry 629).

The other iteration of this story from *Mercure de France* by the anonymous Monsieur de C., the same one that Moreau de Saint-Méry references, is far more sensationalized and may be a source of the more romantic elements of Cable’s Bras-Coupé. Though the overall plot of the story is the same, except that Makandal never loses his arm in a sugar mill, de C. is far more inclined towards melodrama: he includes two separate love triangles, both of which involve Makandal, betrayal, lost love, suicidal romance, a grisly execution, and a tragic fall reminiscent of Greek tragedy. Makandal, the story notes, is of a royal or aristocratic bloodline and is well versed in medicine and the arts. Makandal escapes enslavement only after a jealous enslaver almost lashes him without cause, decrying “such a barbarous order [is] to him a signal of liberty” (105, my translation). This iteration of Makandal, though corrupted by his own ambition, seems to be figured as a freedom fighter, though one who has lost the way due to his hatred and sexual ambition.

Cable’s Bras-Coupé, like de C.’s “sensational” Makandal, is a displaced prince from Africa. Similarly, the Makandal of de C.’s story is well versed in magic, becoming, like Cable’s Bras-Coupé, a powerful voudou leader. A strong romantic theme also runs through both stories. Where de C.’s Makandal participates in two love triangles, the first with his enslaver and their shared interest in a young, beautiful, enslaved woman and the second with Zami and their shared interest in Samba, Cable’s Bras-Coupé is involved in only one, in which he competes with Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., for Palmyre’s affection. Both Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., and Zami kill themselves at the loss their loves, though Honoré’s loss is romantic rather than mortal, as Palmyre emigrates to France, whereas Zami’s Samba is murdered by Makandal. The similarities shared between Cable’s Bras-Coupé and de C.’s Makandal suggest an appropriation, intentional or otherwise, of the discursive patterns of sensational slave revolt narratives, perhaps even that of many textual afterlives of the Haitian Makandal.

The French slave revolt discourse Cable hijacks suggests not only his own imaginative link to the French cultural center, but a broader awareness of the anxieties of colonial Caribbean cultures still operative at the time of the novel’s serialization that percolate into Cable’s Creole Louisiana. Though the stories of Macandal/Makandal and the Bras-
Coupés rely on the bondage of chattel slavery as the point that engenders horrifying revolts, which had ended broadly in an explicitly *de jure* sense across the US South and some of the Caribbean by the time of the novel’s publication, the racial caste system was still active. And, like the memories of the Bras-Coupés, the ever-present reminder of a sovereign African state in the middle of the Caribbean embodied the “shadow of the Ethiopian” (156) for the circum-Caribbean region. As it bordered the economically critical Windward Passage bisecting the Greater Antilles, its presence could never be ignored. Secondarily, the persistent and paranoid memory of slave rebellions and the specific character of those uprisings throughout the circum-Caribbean reveal another element of a shared circum-Caribbean Creole identity located in an Afrophobic anxiety.

Cable, in *The Grandissimes* and in his political writings, often critiques Louisiana for this continued reliance on the skeletal remains of the French *Code Noir* and US-sanctioned chattel slavery that undergird Jim Crow in his contemporary Louisiana. Katharine A. Burnett argues that this concern with contemporary human rights abuses “resituate[s] ‘southern’ problems and concerns within a national, then further, a global discussion . . . by tapping into a shared sense of existence as human beings and eliminating the legal and social oppression of black Americans in the South” (23, 26). By expanding a definition, or refining Cable’s understanding of Louisiana as a separate South, an “other” place separate from the US scheme of human rights, Cable reflects not only on the persistent social problems of his contemporary Louisiana, but also on those of other racially segregated communities across the globe, especially the Creole Caribbean. However, even as Cable imagines the possibilities for a more egalitarian execution of human rights, he fails to incorporate characters of color into the “Americanized” New Orleans in any meaningful way. Practically, Cable seems to suggest a benevolent takeover of the South to spread true egalitarianism across the globe. Burnett, in revealing the shared problems between Louisiana and these colonial and emerging postcolonial spaces across the Western Hemisphere, reveals but does not explicitly highlight the ways that the novel’s benevolent understanding of human rights also becomes incorporated into the suite of justifications for US expansion into Creole spaces of the Caribbean.
Instead of offering a positive ending for the oppressed characters of color, Cable prevents their entrance into the “American scheme” of domestic and political polity. As Thomas H. Fick and Eva Gold argue, *The Grandissimes* “category crisis” hints at Cable’s anxiety with the mixture of clear racial binaries for the Americanized New Orleans and problem- atizes this vision of his “benevolent” human rights-based imperialism. Palmyre’s exile, for example, manifests “Cable’s inability or unwilling- ness even to imagine a place for the mulatto within the categories of his culture” and her “exile to France renders Cable’s desire for wholeness, for a nationalism free from the category crisis exemplified by the racially ambiguous and potentially subversive mulatto” (82). Similarly, Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c.’s, death frees the white Honoré from the constant reminder of his father’s indiscretion and provides him with sole proprietorship of the Grandissime Brothers and the remainder of the Grandissime fortune. Even the “white” Agricola Fusilier, who may trace his lineage to the Native American Queen Lufki-Humma, dies after being stabbed by Honoré, f.m.c. Though he vomits white supremacist ideology to his final breath, his mixed-race heritage renders the white supremacist ideology of the Louisiana Creoles he represents ironic and hypocritical. Alternatively, his death conveniently removes another mixed-race character from entering the American scheme. This erasure of mixed-race characters insinuates a troubling acceptance of sexual, romantic, and economic segregation for the potential spaces of US expansion in the Creole Caribbean. Barbara Ladd argues that these mixed-race characters signify for Cable “the repressed history associated with the establishment of the nationalistic United States in the New World” and must be expelled (9). Cable expresses as much, as the white Honoré’s “dark sharer of his name had become a slow-stepping, silent embodiment of reproach” (279). The ejection of these “embodiments of reproach,” the personified emblems of a repressed genetic and historical legacy, by the novel’s close reveals Cable’s potential unwillingness or inability to reconcile this repressed history with the “progressive” US polity and expansion into decidedly non-white, Creole spaces.

If *The Grandissimes* is, according to Cable’s friend and contemporary H. H. Boyesen, a true *Kulturroman* wherein “the struggling forces of opposing civilizations crystalize [sic] and in which they find their enduring monument,” the expulsion of his mixed-race characters rep-
resents the final collapse of the negative, miscegenated elements of Creole culture and its subsumption by those ideologically (or maritally) integrated within the US imperial project (Richardson 2). Most critics interpret this as Cable’s “successful Americanization of the Deep South, centered on the healing rationality of the northern apothecary, at the cost of the expulsion of the history of miscegenation” (Handley 66). Yet Cable’s continual references to the Creole character of this “Franco-Spanish-American” city and its enduring ties to Western, Continental European empire suggest a possibility that the subsumption of Creole New Orleans is an effective practice in the annexation of the Creole Caribbean. This process relies (concerningly) on the expulsion of the “repressed histories” represented in the living products of miscegenation and the establishment of a purely white domestic space (Cable 170).

Cable’s climax for the final assimilation of the Creole identity occurs at the marriages of Honoré Grandissime to Aurore Nancanou and Joseph Frowenfeld to Clotilde Nancanou. The slow, creeping actualization of these marriages seems to also embody the gradual assimilation of Creole Louisiana into the cultural dominion of the US. Amy Kaplan suggests: “The idea of the nation as home . . . is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’” (1). The change of the domestic space of the Creoles becomes a visible analogue of the general change of Creole character. The Nancanous’ home, 19 rue Bienville, is decidedly Creole in character and represents the decadence of Creole culture that is at once beautiful, but also unsustainable:

Neatness, order, excellence, are prevalent qualities in all the details of the main house’s inward garniture. The furniture is old-fashioned, rich, French, imported. The carpets, if not new, are not cheap, either. Bits of crystal and silver, visible here and there, are as bright as they are antiquated; and one or two portraits, and the picture of Our Lady of Many Sorrows, are passably good productions. The brass work, of which there is much, is brilliantly burnished, and the front room is bright and cheery. (62-63)

The luxuriance of the Nancanou home is an obvious symbol of their high class and social standing, but covers up the ironic fact that their incredible debt threatens the dissolution of the Nancanou estate. When the Nancanous move to an apartment above Frowenfeld’s new store,
however, “neither Aurora nor Clotilde made any waste of their sudden acquisitions.” Instead, “they furnished their rooms with much beauty at moderate cost, and their salon with artistic, not extravagant, elegance . . . but, being discreet in all other directions, they agreed upon one bold outlay—a volante” (286; emphasis added). They have seemingly adopted a new frugality to replace bold extravagance. This occurs as they continue to bind themselves closer to Grandissime and Frowenfeld through legal and economic steps towards a more permanent union. As the Nancanous become more “American” in eschewing decorative excess for a more careful but elegant modesty, they begin the slow process of assimilation to Grandissime and Frowenfeld’s American tastes. In a sense, Cable allegorizes the political “courtship” of the United States and the Louisiana territory itself that slowly transitioned towards a new legal and economic Union, but one that is geared towards the cultural and social mores benefitting the courting male figure in each union.

In a broader political sense, Cable notes the slow progress of an American “higher civilization” in ameliorating its enculturated savagery, further revealing his understanding of a Caribbean Franco-Spanish culture. Following the lynching of Clemence by some of the Grandissime family, Cable writes that “under the gentler influences of a higher civilization, their old Spanish-colonial ferocity was gradually absorbed by the growth of better traits” (329). Though Cable narratively interjects that “almost all the savagery” haunting his contemporary Louisiana must “be laid at the door of the Américain,” a Francization of American, “the old Spanish-colonial ferocity” of “The Creole character has been diluted and sweetened” by its contact with “gentler influences” (329-30). Cable’s foregrounding of the Spanish-French-American charter culture of New Orleans, especially the “old Spanish-colonial” invokes the very real political presence of the Spanish empire in his contemporary Caribbean. By the time of the novel’s serialization, the largest imperial holdings in the Caribbean belonged to the Spanish Empire, which still dominated Cuba and Puerto Rico. The Dominican Republic, a former Spanish colony, was entertaining the thought of annexation within the United States. The “dilute[ion] and sweeten[ing]” of the Spanish character of New Orleans suggest an awareness of the largely Spanish political, religious, and linguistic culture of the Creole Caribbean and interjects the positive influence that US “higher culture” might have or may already be having upon “the old Spanish-colonial” region that invites annexation and union. The recalcitrance of the
French element, one that is responsible for “all the savagery that can justly be charged” seems to rely on the negative codes ascribed to the Haitian Revolution that is “un fléau pour l’humanité.” As the representative of the last major Caribbean foothold of the French Empire, the Haitian’s change from French to “Américain” by “savage” means allows Cable to push the Haitian annexation project somewhat further into the future, prioritizing the dilution and sweetening of the Spanish elements before this haunting “shadow of the Ethiopian.” While the annexation of the French-American element might be more difficult, it is nonetheless possible under continued, benevolent, “gentler influences.”

The Grandissimes never directly invokes the Caribbean as a distinct cultural sphere; however, indirect references to Louisiana’s essential Creole character rhetorically and ideologically tied to a larger Caribbean cultural sphere in their shared anxieties, racial codes, and repressed histories suggest that Cable’s imaginary reach extends beyond the US South and into the Caribbean. Just as he reimagines a moment of US imperial expansion within the continental US and idealizes the climactic harmony of that annexation, so too does he project a similar possibility of positive, if one-sided, union with the other Caribbean colonial or postcolonial societies for an audience contemporarily mindful of imperial growth in the region. In a sense, the US is not so much an “invader” in Cable’s mind as it is a bachelor willing and able to subdue the most coquettish of nations. As Greeson notes in Our South, Cable’s Americans, when compared “Against the colonial hybridity of his Creoles,” “appear homogenous, coherent—natural imperial masters” (267). Even if these potential US states, like the coquettish Aurora, tell America “No!” they really mean: “clasp [me] to [your] bosom” (Cable 339). These colonial hybrids desire the strong embrace of the natural American master, even if they protest. Through this depiction, Cable projects an imperialist discourse on a New Orleans Creole culture that also pierces through to the broader Creole Caribbean and imagines them as willing possibilities for US economic and political expansion. This exploration also reveals the potential genre conventions of defeated slave revolt discourse and what the sensationalized diegetic choices may imply on a social and cultural level. Similarly, an analysis of these textual afterlives across the Caribbean and the Atlantic that often span linguistic and cultural barriers could yield more imaginative connections to enrich the transatlantic, circum-Caribbean readings of other writers of
the US South and the ways they imagine or project empire towards potential subjects or citizens under the “passionate southern sky.”

Works Cited


“The American Invader”


