“Real fire, this food of Louisiana!”: Food Choice, Consumption, and Class in Colonial Louisiana

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Honours Program in History

University of British Columbia Okanagan

(2017)

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Abstract

Although the cultural backgrounds of its population largely determined food choice in colonial Louisiana (the French generally preferred European foods and resisted indigenous foods), economic resources were equally, if not more important in determining taste. Applying the ideas of Claude Fischler and Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis examines the historical development of a distinct cuisine against both developmental and socioeconomic processes, as the overall development of the colonial economy made bare survival more remote and resource distribution became increasingly hierarchical. This meant, on the one hand, that once merchants firmly established shipping routes, colonial elites could import Roquefort cheese or host lavish parties as a kind of conspicuous consumption. On the other hand, much of the population remained in a precarious state, and could face starvation with a bad turn in the weather. The division between necessity and luxury in food choice reflected class divisions in colonial society. These divisions grew in proportion with the economic development of the colony; this grew from relatively egalitarian conditions when subsistence and necessity were the norm to increasing conspicuous consumption and discursive strategies for marking good and bad taste.
Acknowledgements
It is hard to imagine that this project would have ever been completed without the encouragement and support of my supervisor, Dr. Julien Vernet. Without his enthusiasm from the very beginning, I doubt that I would have become aware of the extent to which I could press this question of food in history. He has guided me in more ways than I think he knows, so I must thank him for his time and patience (even when too many deadlines were pressing at once). I would also like to thank Dr. James Hull taking time out of a busy semester to read a draft copy of this work, and for his input. His questions helped me to focus my work and his encouragement was very kind. Without the digitization efforts of the Louisiana Historical Society, this work would have been much more difficult and lacked much of its primary material, so they also deserve recognition. To my family, for taking an interest in cultures, histories, and places that seem so distant now when I insisted on their importance: thank you. My cousin Jesse Henderson took the time to read a draft of this work and to offer suggestions. Finally, to my partner Natasha, your patience and support have been outstanding throughout this process.
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Introduction: Taste, Culture and Distinction

At once essential to biological life and highly symbolic, food is a multivalent object of historical study. Researchers have analyzed food via nutrition, as a factor in intercultural exchange, and as a marker of group membership or social position. Yet, taking food as a specifically historical object, i.e., an object related to a wider process of change through time, promises unique insight into both food and history. The case of Louisiana’s developing colonial society, for instance, demonstrates how primarily French settlers sought to produce a “new” world in the image of the old but were themselves changed in the process. To emphasize food in this process is to emphasize both the colony’s basic material support and, as a surplus emerged, how colonists distributed food socially, i.e., how the colony fed itself as a whole and how gradations of kind emerged. In Louisiana, colonial society needed to overcome shortages and pressing scarcity before a classed sense of “good taste” could be expressed on the basis of this new prosperity.

Theoretical thinking around food as a social object has followed at least two lines of thought particularly relevant to Louisiana. The first understands food preference as an expression of cultural group belonging, and is associated with anthropological thinkers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Claude Fischler. Fischler further developed some of Lévi-Strauss’ ideas in an influential essay titled “Food, Self, and Identity.” Here, Fischler imagined food choice as an oscillation between “neophobia” and “neophilia,” i.e., between a fear of unknown, potentially poisonous foods, and a dread of monotony. Fischler’s “omnivore’s paradox” (the name he gives to this dilemma), is primarily resolved through culture, whose culinary systems give each food

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1 Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History,” American Historical Review 121, issue 3 (2016): 861-887. Pilcher offers an overview of the most recent developments in food history.
3 Super, “Food and History,” 175. Super asserts that “Separating the strands of food history from other strands of history [does] justice to neither.”
5 Fischler, “Food, Self, and Identity,” 278.
its role for the eater to incorporate as meaning. When the laws of culture are lifted, as in an encounter with foreign cuisine, this leads to neophobia. Roughly corresponding to trends in food history that emphasize cultural group identity, Fischler’s neophobia applies pertinently to the encounter with new foods that occurs in colonialism. The European reception of the potato (an American plant) is illustrative: initially shunned as unhealthy, flatulent and bland, deemed fit only for the rigorous digestion of peasants, it was only after a couple of centuries that this plant, and its easy provision of calories, gained wider acceptance.

Fear of the new, however, only partly explains the pattern of food consumption in the colonial setting. For instance, one of the earliest Europeans in Martinique seems, rather, to have been carried away by neophilia. Jean-Baptiste Labat, monk and culinary enthusiast, prepared and ate virtually everything the island had to offer, including palm worms. He deemed these “very good to eat, and very delicate once one has conquered the repugnance one ordinarily has for eating worms.” Indeed, a kind of love of the new could be associated with gourmandise. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s seminal ode to gourmandise, *The Physiology of Taste*, for instance, includes many extra-ordinary food preparations. The most remarkable of these was to salt a small bird, raw and whole, to hold it by the beak and to chew, where “there will flow from him enough juice to fill your whole mouth, and you will enjoy a taste experience unknown to the common herd.” Nor does Fischler’s theory seem adequate to describe attitudes towards food in the present, at least partly responsible for driving interest in food history, where a plurality of

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cuisines are more often valued for their difference and novelty.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the cultural “neophobic” axis does not appear to cover all food choices. To account for why some members of a given cultural group might seek to consume “the whole edible world” (Brillat-Savarin) while others are resigned to eat potatoes, it is helpful to see culture as internally divided by class.\textsuperscript{12} Pierre Bourdieu’s work in \textit{Distinction} provides a model of these divisions of taste.

For Bourdieu, taste is a component of what he calls “cultural capital” or habitus.\textsuperscript{13} These terms refer to a set of acquired habits, often developed in childhood, which mark an individual as a member of a given class.\textsuperscript{14} For Bourdieu, “Social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is ‘normally’ (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position.”\textsuperscript{15} Habitus relates to social position as both a product of the circumstances that are already given, as in “making a virtue of necessity,” and as reproductive of those circumstances, being the particular charisma of class association and advancement.\textsuperscript{16} Already, this discussion opens countless tangential debates.\textsuperscript{17} Suffice it to say that Bourdieu’s model of distinction differs from earlier models, such as “conspicuous consumption,” by asserting that not all consumption aspires to luxury consumption, that classes have their own positive standards of judgement relative to what is economically possible for them, and that consumer choice is interconnected with other cultural preferences in a system of

\textsuperscript{12} Brillat-Savarin, \textit{Physiology of Taste}, 444.
\textsuperscript{13} I will prefer the term habitus because “cultural capital” has tended to be superseded by “social capital” in the uptake, and has become separated from Bourdieu’s original usage. See Ben Fine, “Social Capital versus Social History,” \textit{Social History} 33, no. 4 (2008): 442-467, doi: 10.1080/03071020802410445.
\textsuperscript{15} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, 373.
\textsuperscript{17} Fine, “Social Capital,” 442-467. See Fine for an overview.
Both Fischler and Bourdieu introduce dynamics of particular conceptual utility when applied to the study of culinary processes in colonial Louisiana. Fischler’s ideas are especially applicable to periods where food resources were scarce, such as in the early colony when colonists confronted “neophobia” with a certain urgency in order to make use of alien foods. Of course, there were less dramatic instances when food choice was simply a matter of preference or cultural familiarity. Thus, when Suzanne Keremy, the “Indian Wife” of a deceased trader in Upper Louisiana, outbid all others in attendance at the auction of her husband’s estate for a jar of maple syrup, it is probably correct to attribute this to cultural preference. In contrast, Bourdieusian dynamics make more sense for periods of growing affluence and social aspiration, when it is possible to exercise a certain “taste of freedom” among a variety of goods. In the later colonial period, distance from the immediate “taste of necessity” which characterized the earlier period became itself a mark of class taste.

Colonial society’s indeterminacy also makes the case for applying Bourdieu’s ideas to Louisiana, where flashes of class “distinction” were in some ways more volatile for being asserted on new soil. This indeterminacy was due in part to economic conditions—“Louisiana

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21 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 180-195. “Taste of necessity” is Bourdieu’s term for lower class taste. Conceptually, cultural capital allows an escape into abstraction, into the aestheticization of choice, and away from material necessity. I use it to understand judgements of taste in later chapters.
was potential,” as one economic historian has put it—and to geopolitical and social remoteness.\(^{23}\) In a colony where one’s name could be “forgotten” at sea and reinvented on the Mississippi, or where currency and financial instruments were notoriously unstable, one’s reputation and reputable behaviour (habitus) were likely highly valued.\(^{24}\) This study aspires to a family resemblance with certain studies focused on metropolitan French society. For instance, Clare Haru Crowston’s *Credit, Fashion, Sex* makes reference to Bourdieu to understand how appearances supported credit practices and “economies of regard” among Old Regime fashion merchants.\(^{25}\) Other influences include Susan Pinkard’s suggestion that 17th Century French trends towards more “natural” food preparations using new vegetables followed the conspicuous consumption habits of a rising class of “gentleman farmers.”\(^{26}\) Historians of food, for their part, have incorporated class and cultural tension into their analyses, although the degree to which they do so varies with the historian and with the object of their study.\(^{27}\) The common thread here, however, is to see consumer choice as a reflection of wider socio-economic dynamics.

This approach also serves to counteract historical narratives of the making of Louisiana’s distinct cuisine that are sometimes mythologized by the cuisine’s place in the state’s tourism


\(^{25}\) Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2013), 13-15. Particularly compelling is her suggestion that Bourdieu’s introduction of nonmaterial forms of capital may in fact not go far enough toward the social when considered in relation to the court politics and personal obligations of the Early Modern French economy.

\(^{26}\) Susan Pinkard, *A Revolution in Taste: The Rise of French Cuisine, 1650-1800* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 60-64, 71-79. Production of certain garden vegetables, according to Pinkard, had a number of prohibitive costs which made their consumption ripe for conspicuous display.

industry, which Marcelle Bienvenu and Carl and Ryan Brasseaux have made efforts to counter. Academic historians working in the field of Louisiana social history, that important backdrop of social dynamics, have also considered food as part of their larger histories, but the present aim is to synthesize these social accounts from a perspective that places food in the foreground as a particularly dynamic social object. From this perspective, the colony grew from a mixture of subsistence provisioning and dependence on food supplies from France to a level of affluence that brought with it an increasing demand for distinction met with luxury imports and judgements on proper taste. This process began in 1699 with early French efforts to establish a crown colony on the Mississippi. Want characterized this colonizing period, which was hardly ameliorated by the private merchant Antoine Crozat who took control of the colony in 1712. Food consumption at this time, whose effect was to weaken colonists’ “neophobia,” will form the subject of chapter 2. Following Crozat’s efforts, the crown granted similar privileges over Louisiana to the Company of the West in 1717 and coupled them with monopolistic interests in diverse sectors of the French economy, including the Banque Générale. This new venture met serious financial setbacks in 1719, following which the company was “reorganized,” and retained fewer privileges until it eventually relieved itself of duties in the colony due to low profits. The evidence that consumption and affluence rose in this period will be the subject of chapter 3. The Company abandoned its claim on Louisiana entirely by 1731, after which the

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30 Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 14.
31 Clark, New Orleans, 34.
33 Clark, New Orleans, 17-20.
French government nominally controlled the colony, but this royal rule was relatively light. In this context, a creole society emerged, whose food ways, along with those of Acadian and Isleños, form the subject of chapter 4. In 1763, France ceded the territory of Louisiana west of the Mississippi (and New Orleans) to Spain. Spanish rule apparently led to few major changes in food consumption habits, which reached a certain maturity in this period, forming the subject of chapter 5.

At the outset, it is perhaps important to note a few omissions: food practices among slaves, Native Americans, and women do not receive as much attention as might be expected. These shortcomings follow from limitations of space in a work of this size, and from the nature of the evidence that it deals with. On “archival power,” Michel-Rolph Trouillot remarks, “Inequalities experienced by the actors lead to uneven historical power in the inscription of traces. Sources built upon these traces in turn privilege some events over others.” These remarks do not excuse the omission, but they nonetheless qualify the decision, against this difficulty, to focus on one group of historical “actors”: European colonial society. Hence, when other actors appear in the following narrative, they appear primarily from the perspective of this group. If other perspectives seem lacking, this will hopefully not detract from the critique and analysis of this particular historical perspective.

34 Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 195-197. Creole councilors, for instance, tended to operate according to their own prerogatives.
35 The Isleños were a group of Spanish-speaking immigrants recruited from the Canary Islands to settle in Louisiana c. 1777 in response to perceived security threats from the English to Spain’s recently acquired territory; see Gilbert C. Din, The Canary Islanders of Louisiana, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1988), 13-14.
36 Clark, New Orleans, 158-159.
38 For authors who have addressed these other historical groups, see Judith Anne Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa’s Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2009), 100-122; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995), 119-155; Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 191-218.
Chapter 1: The “Taste of Necessity” in Early Louisiana

“No taboo in eating habits stands up to famine.”39 This thesis, originally proposed by historian Fernand Braudel, summarizes the situation in early Louisiana succinctly; under the threat of starvation, colonists’ reservations and long-standing taste preferences dissolved. Taboos fell in this way even as the first reconnaissance expeditions ventured inland from the shore. For instance, in 1700, an expedition to find copper mines went hungry for 22 days after exhausting their supplies, and there were “some who ate wood sap, [and] others the young leaves of vines and shoots of trees.”40 A very fortunate hunter managed to kill a bear, whose flesh one commenter described as “fat as bees [cattle] and very good to eat”; relief finally came when a priest from the Illinois happened upon the group and returned with meat, “a flat kind of cake or pie,” and Spanish wine.41 Although their situation was evidently desperate, the difficulty of finding recognizable food in the wilderness probably arose countless times in this early period for those whose work took them far from the colonial entrepot.42 For instance, André Pénicaut, a carpenter employed to fix boats, later described eating food supplied by indigenous groups and hunting for subsistence on various inland trips, even subsisting through one winter in the Illinois entirely on frozen buffalo.43 According to Pénicaut’s account, this food was cooked simply, either broiled or boiled, and sometimes went unsalted.44

Because such an unsettled lifestyle had no part in the colony envisioned by Pierre Le

39 Braudel, Structures of Everyday Life, 166.
41 McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 39.
42 Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 227-229, 233.
43 McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 49, 43, 40, 34, 151. This latter event is particularly interesting in consideration of taste and revulsion. Pénicaut notes, “In the beginning, for the first two weeks, we had trouble enough getting accustomed to it: we had diarrhea and fever and became so squeamish that we could not taste it; but little by little our bodies became so accustomed to it that after six weeks there was not one of us who did not eat more than ten pounds of it daily and drink four bowls of the broth.”
44 Eg. McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 82, 49.
Moyne Iberville, the founder of Biloxi and the brother of an influential early governor, he made designs to encourage *coureurs des bois* to settle and develop agriculture.\(^{45}\) Similarly, M. Sauvolle, who was then governor, disparaged this group, identifying them as potential criminals and doubting the motives of anyone who would leave their home in Canada “unless it is for not working and depending on no one.”\(^{46}\) That Sauvolle would fail to recognize trappers’ work as work suggests that class interests may have diverged. Those whose futures depended on the success of the colony and the privileges they could continue to derive from it were opposed to those who could acquire their sustenance from indigenous sources and whose prospects looked best with whoever offered the highest prices for furs.\(^{47}\) In particular, Iberville worried about defection to Carolina and hoped that a settled population would diminish this problem.\(^{48}\) Thus, he formulated a plan to recruit “honest families” from France and to support them with “seed grain, clothes, agricultural tools, pigs, and poultry” for their establishment.\(^{49}\) If these early tensions did not manifest themselves as clear strategies of “distinction” in food, it is probably because few in the colony had the means to do so at the time. In fact, Louisiana was increasingly a low financial priority for the crown, which saw it foremost as a strategic post on the Gulf Coast.\(^{50}\) Iberville’s plans for settlement consequently went under-realized, and he had to make compromises. After a series of disastrous agricultural experiments, the colony was itself trading

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\(^{47}\) Giraud, *Reign of Louis XIV*, 244-245, and Marcel Giraud, *Years of Transition, 1715-1717*, vol. 2 of *A History of French Louisiana*, trans. Brian Pearce (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1993), 123-126. At this early stage of the colony, with a population almost too small to require the abstraction of class, it is perhaps advisable to take the concept a bit loosely. That is, it would be an error simply to transplant Old World classes into New World soil without considering newly available economic roles and their dynamics; a clear example of this is, incidentally, the role of *coureur des bois*.

\(^{48}\) Preventing indigenous nations from trading directly with the English was also a concern, Giraud, *Reign of Louis XIV*, 81-82, 92.


for maize, game, poultry, beans, pumpkins and watermelon with its indigenous neighbors by 1702 and, in a cruel twist of fate, several voyageurs who arrived in that same year with plans to settle found that the colony could not accommodate them for lack of food.\textsuperscript{51}

Of these necessary compromises, replacing wheaten bread with maize was probably the hardest to swallow. Only a few provinces in France ate this otherwise poorly regarded grain, and French colonists may have brought their prejudice to Louisiana.\textsuperscript{52} By 1706, Bienville reported that “the men who are in Louisiana are accustoming themselves to eat it [maize], but the women who are for the most part from Paris, eat it reluctance.”\textsuperscript{53} This reluctance accompanied threats to leave the colony: a testament to the seriousness of this neophobia.\textsuperscript{54} Efforts to acquire and raise livestock were similarly unsuccessful. Iberville had hoped to establish a trading relationship with the nearby Spanish colonies, particularly Cuba, whose commerce would include domesticated animals.\textsuperscript{55} Although occasionally French ships provisioned supplies from this trade, it does not appear to have amounted to much because of persistent colonial jealousies and possibly the Spanish Governors’ resentment of unsanctioned trade carried out on the side.\textsuperscript{56} Domesticated animals and their meat remained scarce and expensive, and archaeological evidence from Old Mobile suggests that game and ocean resources made up the bulk of the colony’s meat resources, with a smaller sampling of pig and chicken remains at the site.\textsuperscript{57}

If domestic food production faltered, imports did little better. Ships with supplies from

\textsuperscript{52} Braudel, \textit{Structures of Everyday Life}, 166.
\textsuperscript{53} Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, and Slaves}, 194.
\textsuperscript{54} Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, and Slaves}, 194; Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, 118-119. Usner draws attention to these women’s status as women to account for their attachment to old world foodways, but their status as Parisians is probably equally important because, as Bourdieu notes, cultural capital tends to be distributed geographically around the Capital, ie., Paris. This becomes important when Eurocentric observers viewed Louisiana and its foods as inferior on this account (see chapter 5).
\textsuperscript{55} Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 431.
France arrived less frequently during the War of Spanish Succession, and their cargoes were sometimes spoiled.⁵⁸ These supplies, when they did arrive, often sold at excessively high prices that likely pushed settlers toward indigenous trade as an alternative.⁵⁹ Still, according to a 1706 census, more than half of the civilian population (not including soldiers and government officials) were “in the Pay of and Drawing Rations from the King,” and would have been subject to the unreliability of royal ships.⁶⁰ Those who drew a royal salary were at an additional disadvantage insofar as the high cost of living made their pay relatively worthless; in contrast, uncontracted workers could negotiate wages more proportional to inflated prices.⁶¹ To deal with this situation, soldiers allegedly offered a portion of their rations to their officers in exchange for a period of relief from duty to work for settlers.⁶² The military officers themselves had to resort to unorthodox economic strategies to cope, sometimes pooling their resources in order to trade for food with Veracruz, but their meagre salaries could not even maintain this practice.⁶³

Another strategy, which is the most interesting with regards to taste, involved occasionally sending groups of sailors, soldiers or workers to live among indigenous peoples to ease the colony’s burden.⁶⁴ The native foods which these people then ate were likely far more unusual to them than the occasional maize porridge or bite of venison. André Pénicault, for instance, reported several indigenous foods that he ate throughout his time in Louisiana, including dried smoked meat of bear, buffalo and deer, sagamité, an unidentified grain that grew on reeds, several varieties of fruit (many of which were actually familiar to him), and a bread

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⁵⁸ Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 198; Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 156.
⁵⁹ Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 155-156; Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 37-38.
⁶¹ Giraud, Reign of Louis XIV, 222-223.
⁶³ Giraud, Reign of Louis XIV, 220.
⁶⁴ Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 194.
made of hickory nuts.\textsuperscript{65} It is likely that others shared Pénicaud’s experiences, and they may also have consumed bear oil and grease or persimmon bread.\textsuperscript{66} Despite the strategic use of indigenous foods, a desire for familiar foods did not disappear. Taste for wheat, in particular, continued to drive ill-fated agricultural experiments in 1708–1710, and a diet of maize contributed to animosity within the ranks of soldiers.\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, between 1706 and 1708, tensions arose resembling those that pressed the earlier \textit{coureurs des bois} when officials feared that soldiers would defect to Carolina (an option the English encouraged) owing to their poor living conditions.\textsuperscript{68} Despite popular discontent over the colonial diet, however, incorporation of indigenous foods remained one of the more reliable means of nourishment in the colony.\textsuperscript{69}

Surviving archaeo-botanical evidence from the site included maize cobs, peaches pits, legumes and seeds of wild fruits. Interestingly, analysis of cobs suggested that the colony’s predominant maize varietal was local in origin, and probably sourced from nearby indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{70} This, and Daniel Usner’s analysis of the long continuity and influence of trade networks developed between the colony and indigenous peoples in this period, only makes the importance of local food sources clearer.\textsuperscript{71} Evidently, efforts to overcome the “taste of necessity” did not amount to much.

The major problems that plagued the royal colony continued unabated under the Crozat regime. Supply ships from France still arrived only sporadically and the colony had yet to find

\textsuperscript{65} McWilliams, \textit{Fleur de Lys and Calumet}, 18-19, 48, 66 Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, & Slaves}, 196, 198.  
\textsuperscript{68} Giraud, \textit{Reign of Louis XIV}, 221.  
\textsuperscript{69} Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, & Slaves}, 194-196.  
\textsuperscript{71} Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, & Slaves}, 191-218.
viable commodities for export.\textsuperscript{72} Rather, a stricter defense of monopoly trade under private direction possibly exacerbated these issues.\textsuperscript{73} For instance, when foreign ships arrived with much-needed provisions in 1714 and 1715 the authorities barred them from selling their cargoes.\textsuperscript{74} Crozat’s interests lay with mines and Spanish trade rather than with domestic agriculture, as his instructions to the new governor-general made clear: send one expedition north to look for mines and a second to the Spanish colonies immediately upon arrival.\textsuperscript{75} Concerning the former goal, the hoped-for mineral wealth of Louisiana remained as elusive as it had under Bienville and, apart from deerskins, which were produced more despite the Crozat regime than because of it, colonial production for export failed to take off.\textsuperscript{76} Nor was the Spanish trade particularly successful, for when Crozat’s envoy met with the Governor of Veracruz in 1712 in the hopes of trading for domesticated meat, the Spanish rejected him and instead gave him a few provisions and told him to leave.\textsuperscript{77} The sought-after domesticated meat remained inordinately expensive in Louisiana due to short supply until at least 1716 when authorities fixed the price of beef and veal at a lower price, although this measure does not necessarily imply that they resolved the underlying supply problem.\textsuperscript{78}

The new regime’s failure to secure a stable food supply was likely quite worrisome to the crown because royal instructions to commissary-general Duclos at the time of transfer to Crozat expressed a desire to encourage subsistence in the colony, “in order to supply in part the needs that may arise either through the enterprises of the enemies or because the circumstances do not

\textsuperscript{72} Giraud, \textit{Reign of Louis XIV}, 291-294; although the years immediately following Crozat’s acquisition were promising, two ships arrived with food, it only took another year before the colony was again without reliable shipments. Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 157-158; the main commodities at this time were pelts and lumber.

\textsuperscript{73} Eg. Clark, \textit{New Orleans}, 34.

\textsuperscript{74} Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 158-159.

\textsuperscript{75} McWilliams, \textit{Fleur de Lys and Calumet}, 144.

\textsuperscript{76} Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, & Slaves}, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{77} Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 390; McWilliams, \textit{Fleur de Lys and Calumet}, 144.

\textsuperscript{78} Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 251.
permit us to send any from the kingdom or because there is a shortage.\footnote{Sanders, “Documents Concerning the Crozat Regime,” 604.} This sober advice, apparently intended to prevent repetition of the problems of the earlier regime, was not taken seriously except insofar as charging high prices and paying low rates encouraged settlers to turn away from the company altogether, either by smuggling or trading with indigenous peoples.\footnote{Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, \& Slaves}, 27.} These instructions also recommended recruiting a baker, as a kind of regulatory institution, whose standard bread would supposedly serve to eliminate the soldier’s practice of paying-off officers with their flour ration for the illicit permission to earn a wage on the side.\footnote{Sanders, “Documents Concerning the Crozat Regime,” 601-602.} Archaeological evidence offers further insights into these fringe economic practices. For all the problems Louisiana’s officials faced due to a shortage of specie, which would imply that exports lagged behind imports, archaeological digging revealed an inordinate number of coins.\footnote{Clark, \textit{New Orleans}, 34; Miller \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 104-105.} The Spanish origin of these coins and the likely Spanish origin of many of the ceramics suggest an active, and largely illicit, trade with nearby colonies.\footnote{George W. Shorter, Jr., “Status and Trade at Port Dauphin,” \textit{Historical Archaeology} 36, no. 1 (2002): 135-142.} This, however, should not indicate that smugglers possessed a vast wealth that officials were not privy to; written evidence of widespread privation is simply too significant to ignore.\footnote{Eg. Giraud, \textit{Reign of Louis XIV}, 141-143. More precisely, it seems unlikely that officials were unaware of this trade because they engaged in shady practices themselves. Governor Cadillac, for instance, sought unsuccessfully to engage in legitimate trade with Veracruz, but according to Surrey, he also engaged in illegitimate exchanges as well; Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 389-390; cp. Giraud, \textit{Reign of Louis XIV}, 301.} Rather, this fringe economy was likely a strategic response to official failings, a means of subsistence in spite of official plans.

When Louis XIV died in 1715, a Council of the Navy replaced the former minister Pontchartrain, whose members took an increasing interest in the colony’s potential. This council appointed Marc Antoine Hubert as intendant, whose instructions were essentially to audit the
Crozet regime. On his arrival in 1716, he noted that Louisiana’s residents remained dependent on indigenous trade for subsistence, and he was generally pessimistic about the colony. As noted above, there were many reasons for his pessimism. Louisiana remained mired in economic circumstances that made the “taste of necessity,” and the use of Indigenous food sources general. Indeed, Usner suggests that some may have developed a preference for native foods. At the same time, new food sources were on the horizon for the colony. The first experimental rice planting occurred in 1716, and a Canadian began raising cattle on the Pascagoula River around the same time. Shipments of wheat from the Illinois, which would become steadier in the 1730s, first arrived at the Gulf settlements in 1713 and 1721. Moreover, the beginnings of a large enslaved labour force would arrive in the colony in 1717 and, once agricultural commodities became a source of profit for the masters of this stolen labour, commerce would slowly expand throughout the 18th century. All of these changes, begun under Company rule, would be only so much impetus to social distinction: wheat implies the separation of chaff.

85 Giraud, Years of Transition, 1-10.
86 Giraud, Years of Transition, 129, 132.
87 Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 196.
88 Giraud, Years of Transition, 134-135.
90 Clark, New Orleans, 24-30, 129.
Chapter 2: Conspicuous Consumption under Company Rule

The Company’s promotional imagery for Louisiana depicted a thriving port enjoying what it described as a “perpetual spring” and a bounty of beef, mutton, game, wine, fruit, and wheat, among other pleasures. The trees produced with fruit “of an exquisite taste,” wild poultry was readily domesticated, and each house at New Orleans supposedly came with 120 arpents (41 hectares) of arable land whose produce its proprietor could freely sell at market.91 Of course, such a place did not exist except for in people’s minds and aspirations.92 Images like this appealed to those who would be part of a substantial immigration wave in the 1720s.93 To a population of “no more than three hundred and fifty to four hundred people,” according to a 1718 estimate, joined approximately 7000 white immigrants.94 These arrivals soon met with misery, however, because by 1726 more than half of them were dead of illness or lack of food.95 The Company’s “perpetual spring” should therefore be tempered by accounts like A. Defontaine’s 1726 letter, in which he noted that he could not afford milk and wrote, “I am on broth, I have but one chicken to kill.”96 Another example, this one more loaded with class implications, involved a French cook who, tasked with providing “a luncheon” for the commandant and, lacking food stocks, purchased a meat pie from a group of soldiers. When it the diners discovered that the meat was not in fact goat, but dog, the commandant saved face by

92 Usner, *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves*, 32. Usner notes, for instance, that 119 immigrants were granted land when as many as 2,462 engagés arrived at this time.
93 See “Object Description,” Jollain, *Port du Mississippi*.
The Historic New Orleans Collection, acc. No. 1952.3
saying “that the dogs of that land were worth as much as the deer in France.”97 What nobody noted, however, was whether eating dog was unusual for the soldiers or not. In any case, the soldiers were fortunate that the commandant was in a good mood because, in 1723, a particularly bad year, stricter officials arrested one M. Villeneuve for selling dog meat to the hospital.98 In either case, resorting to dog meat does not suggest a thriving food supply.

Occupying what was perhaps the most precarious position in an already precarious society were the approximately 5700 people brought to the colony as slaves under the Company monopoly. Many colonists and officials saw an enslaved labour force as the only basis for a viable colonial economy, and as the foundation of stable agricultural production.99 This population suffered similar mortality rates as the immigrant white population (about 50%) before 1732 due to illness and poor diet.100 In addition, a “taste of necessity” was promptly associated with this slavery. For instance, in 1718, the Company instructed M. M. Herpin and Du Coulombier to acquire seed rice, slaves with experience in rice culture, and maize from Guinea and Angola.101 They hoped rice would grow well in the wet Gulf Coast environment.102 With the maize, however, they intended to provision the slaves’ Atlantic crossing.103 This choice of grain was probably normative, i.e., an imposition of what the Company thought slaves ought to eat, because, although maize had been in Africa since the 16th century, it was not yet widely

100 Dawdy, *Building The Devil’s Empire*, 7; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves*, 33-34.
incorporated into African diets. Food provisions for slaves were poor even after they disembarked from the ship. For instance, the company initially kept many slaves for a period of corvée labour, and fed them one pound of corn daily. When officials realized this was not enough nourishment for the work they required, they added a half pound of spoiled lard to the diet. The grains maize and rice would henceforth be a regular part of slaves’ diets.

These grains, however, were widely consumed across society, and so in contrast to a hierarchical gradation of bread types that appeared in contemporary Spanish colonies, daily bread did not correlate as strictly to class in Louisiana. Still, daily bread could reflect social hierarchies in subtler ways. Estave inventories, for instance, often list slaves’ rice as unthreshed, and unhulled grain regularly sold for much less than hulled rice. One observer associated the work of grinding rice with enslaved labour. A telling substitution in 1738, moreover, indicated colonists’ preference for bread over rice: in that year good wheat harvests in the Illinois were able to keep the price of rice down in New Orleans despite a shortage of that crop. Later in the century, under a similar shortage of rice, one observer complained that, “we

104 Liza Gijanto, and Sarah Walshaw, “Ceramic Production and Dietary Changes at Juffure, Gambia,” African Archaeological Review 31, issue 2 (2014), 275-277; Carney and Rosomoff, Shadow of Slavery, 55-59; John Atkins, A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies (London: Printed for Caesare Ward and Richard Chandler, 1735), 48-49, https://archive.org/details/voyagetoguineab00atki. I base this generalization on archaeological research conducted at Juffure, Gambia which found few cobs of maize in an 18th century African settlement, and on Judith A. Carney and Richard N. Rosomoff’s argument that maize in Africa was grown almost exclusively as a commodity to satisfy European demand for provisions for the slave trade. Moreover, one English visitor to Guinea does not even mention maize among food crops of the region.
105 Hall, Africans in Colonial Louisiana, 127-128.
106 Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 207.
109 White, Wild Frenchmen, 164.
110 Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 269, 291-292.
feed our servants with bread for want of rice.”

Again, among boatmen, employers preferred to hire black slaves for the job because “white men ... must have French provisions,” which presumably did not include the maize, rice and indigenous provisions that made river navigation cheaper to finance. Slaves’ diets consisted of the cheapest of grains, and the associated “taste of necessity” probably contributed to a subtle food hierarchy in colonial society.

Even for those whose situation was not so precarious, the colony did not live up to its image. Throughout the 1720s, for instance, food supplies fluctuated from year to year despite the cushion that local production of beans, pumpkins, rice, corn, and sweet potatoes provided. Soldiers’ rations could be quite meagre at times: throughout the 1722–24 Natchez conflicts soldiers reportedly received only a little husked rice and had to pay for the oil with which to season it. Officials were always wary of feeding soldiers on bread made entirely of rice, however, because doing so would lead to discontent in the ranks. It was difficult to acquire a taste for “other people’s bread”; one individual complained that bread made of rice and maize “is too heavy to soak in soup of any kind.” Social divisions persisted much as they had in the earlier period between those motivated by self-interest and those whose interest was mediated through the Company. For instance, Banet’s report complained of “common people engaged in a commerce detrimental to the goods of the Colony and even to the interests of the Company,” by which he meant people who rushed to buy provisions when a ship arrived in port only to resell

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115 Surrey, *Commerce of Louisiana*,170.

these goods at a higher price.\textsuperscript{117} Officials therefore issued decrees in 1722 and 1723 making it punishable by a fine of 100 livres to board any supply ship without official permission.\textsuperscript{118} It is unclear what effect this had in securing the food supply, but some form of regulated market was probably necessary in order to avoid chaos.\textsuperscript{119} For instance, in 1724 the residents of New Orleans forcibly seized all of the new German community’s vegetables on a market day, which resulted in a few new guard posts at the marketplace.\textsuperscript{120} One observer with official sympathies expressed the conflict of interest between officials and colonists in 1720 by doubting the value of incoming colonists, “especially since it is noted that a man who was an excellent subject becomes a mediocre subject in America and a mediocre subject becomes very bad…. Some attribute [this] to the food, which does not have the same substance as in Europe.”\textsuperscript{121} Food clearly expressed these social antagonisms.

If it is clear that not all of the colony’s inhabitants enjoyed the bounty depicted in the Company’s promotional imagery, some were nonetheless abler than others to meet these aspirations. Company rule saw a marked increase in the number of ships arriving in the colony: 29 ships arrived in 1720, followed by a low average rate of 6.6 ships per year between 1723 and 1734, which rose again to 18 arrivals in 1735 and 49 arrivals in 1745.\textsuperscript{122} Although ship arrivals are a crude indicator of the volume of trade and historians may disagree on the overall health of Louisiana’s economy (depending on how much importance they attribute to the underground


\textsuperscript{118} Miller, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 166-167.

\textsuperscript{119} High prices, for instance, remained a thorn in the administration’s side for much of the French period; see Miller, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 178, 198-199.

\textsuperscript{120} Giraud, “New Orleans Society,” 355.

\textsuperscript{121} Etat de la Louisiane au mois de juin 1720, in Ser. A1 2592, fol. 95, \textit{Service Historique de L’armée} qtd. in Hall, \textit{Africans in Colonial Lousiana}, 7.

\textsuperscript{122} Dawdy, \textit{Building the Devil’s Empire}, 118.
economy), these arrivals at least indicate that channels existed for bringing luxury consumables to the colony.\footnote{Eg. Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 107, 134; cp. Clark, New Orleans, 45-47.} For instance, in 1725, a ship reportedly sold its cargo of “wine, flour, cheese and beer;” and another sold soap and wine.\footnote{Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 167.} Cheese importation is particularly interesting because it suggests demand for a distinct element of the French diet, which demand subsistence-level dairying and an early domestic dairy trade begun in 1723 otherwise satisfied.\footnote{Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 86; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 264.} However, many of these ships operated outside of the official monopoly, and the precise details of their commerce may have gone unrecorded as a result.\footnote{Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 116-117.} Officials complained of (in N. M. Miller’s words) “prodigious quantities of trumpery” brought to Louisiana for sale in cargoes or on persons, and in 1732 a French merchant struggled to sell his cargo because “In most things ... the supply was already adequate.”\footnote{Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 167.}

Just as a wider variety of consumer items were becoming available in the colony, a few observers made judgements of taste. Whereas André Pénicaut, whose narrative spanned 1698-1721, was particularly interested in recording the abundance and quantity of wild food in his early accounts, later observers such as Lt. Dumont, Marie Hachard, and Le Page Du Pratz almost always commented on the taste or quality of wild game and plants. For instance, Pénicaut wrote enthusiastically, “We ... killed a prodigious quantity of wild geese ... which are once again bigger than the geese we have in France. We took there also such an abundance of fish and of oysters ... that the crews of the two ships became upset from over-indulgence.”\footnote{McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 3, see also 10, 12, 15, 27, 28, passim.} Of this large species of goose, Du Pratz said simply, “Its flesh is excellent,” and, whereas Du Pratz thought buffalo “would have graced the table of a prince,” Pénicaut emphasized how he had killed a great
Pénicaud’s ethnographic observations were also attentive to quantity over quality:

“The observation I have made about the savages is that, however abundant their provisions may be, they do not overindulge themselves, but eat only what they need.”

This distinction between quantity and quality recalls a point made by Bourdieu, “which J. F. Engel’s law merely records,” that it is distance from necessity which frees higher classes to concern themselves with “form,” purity and lightness, while lower classes are left to the crude but necessary consideration of value density. In this regard, Pénicaud’s class position as a ship carpenter may have played as much a part in his attention to quantity as the general conditions of scarcity in the early colony.

At the same time, the social positions of Dumont, Hachard and Du Pratz likely contributed to their perceptions of taste. Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny was the young son of a well-connected French family of lawyers, who sponsored his efforts to “advance [himself] and make [his] fortune in this new land.” Hachard was an Ursuline, and hints in Marie’s letters, such as the family’s concern for genealogy and their connection to various religious orders and Rouennais merchants, implies the family’s social position. According to Emily Clark, because the dowry for marrying one’s daughter to Christ was less than that for social climbing through marriage, the convent was “a respectable, affordable alternative to families seeking to preserve social standing without diluting their patrimony.” The Hachard family seems to have therefore been modestly endowed in economic capital, but nonetheless

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129 Du Pratz, History, 188, 273; McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 12.
130 McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 19.
131 Bourdieu, Distinction, 172-174, 197.
132 McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, xxx.
133 de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 3, 129.
134 Marie-Madelaine Hachard, Relation du voyage des dames religieuses Ursulines de Rouen, a la Nouvello Orleans (Rouen: Antoine Le Prevost, 1728), 18, 77-78, http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32213991j. Note that this document has unusual pagination near the end; actual pagination is used.
concerned with social capital and respectability. Du Pratz, for his part, mentioned very little of life prior to Louisiana. Some have suggested that he was born in Holland, and Du Pratz himself claimed to have taken a *cours de mathématique*, which qualified him as an architect and engineer.\(^\text{136}\) These social backgrounds, it seems, were enough to secure all three a kind of middle position in the colony’s social order. That is, they were not among the 155 “French Servants,” the 42 “Forced Immigrants,” the 13 “Femmes de Force” (forced female immigrants), the minor company employees, or the various merchants and artisans of lesser means appearing in the 1722 census of New Orleans. Nor were they on par with Bienville, who reportedly owned 34 slaves and 24 cattle, or with the other privileged Company employees and officials of comparable means.\(^\text{137}\) To the extent that slaveholding indicated material position, as Shannon Lee Dawdy suggests that it did, Du Pratz would appear to have been the most affluent of the three; when he first arrived to stake his land, he purchased a Chitimacha slave, “who could dress our victuals,” and later referred to “my slaves” without specifying their number.\(^\text{138}\) Dumont however, more than Hachard or Du Pratz, aspired to the habitus of high society, although all three apparently enjoyed a certain privilege as reflected by their judgements on taste.

For instance, when some soldiers had managed to kill two buffalo after an expedition to Baton Rouge, Dumont wrote that the meat “was portioned out to every dish in the company, though you need have no doubt that we reserved the best bits for ourselves.”\(^\text{139}\) Dumont’s taste was thus refined enough to recognize the “best bits,” and he ostensibly felt deserving of this luxury. Du Pratz, for his part, lived at Natchez, far from the urban society of New Orleans, where he still found opportunities to exercise his sense of taste. Christopher Morris, for instance,

\(^\text{137}\) Ditchy, “Early Census Tables,” 214-220.
\(^\text{139}\) de Montigny, *Lieutenant Dumont*, 151.
characterizes Du Pratz’s story of a buffalo hunt, in which he offered unsolicited cooking advice to his indigenous guides, as a presumptuous attempt by a European to change indigenous preferences for cow (i.e., female buffalo) meat.\textsuperscript{140} Du Pratz suggested that by eating the bull’s hump, removing its testicles immediately, or eating only fresh meat, the male buffalo would become palatable. According to Morris, however, Du Pratz’s recommendations went mostly unheeded.\textsuperscript{141} Even Marie Hachard exercised her taste towards buffalo, considering it “better than the beef and mutton that you eat in Rouen.”\textsuperscript{142}

From these three accounts, it is possible to sketch a general inventory of the foods available in the colony at this time. Hachard, for instance, ate eggs, milk, pineapples (“the most excellent of all the fruits”), apples, figs, chocolate, coffee, pecans, cashews, buffalo, deer, swans, geese, wild turkey, chocolate, hares, a variety of wildfowl, catfish (“an excellent fish”), jelly, and fruit confits. Her Ursuline convent’s daily fare consisted of “rice in milk, little wild beans, meat & fish,” all washed down with beer.\textsuperscript{143} A merely partial sample of Du Pratz’s encyclopedic description of foods would have to include bear oil (used as a substitute for olive oil), sagamité (a kind of maize porridge), parched corn meal mixed with milk chocolate, a maize beer, a distilled maize brandy, rice (“of a very agreeable taste”), melons (“infinitely finer than in the countries from whence they have their name”), “all sorts of garden plants and greens,” oranges, olives, hickory nuts, mushrooms, strawberries (“of an excellent flavour”), wildcat, buffalo, and an enormous variety of wildfowl.\textsuperscript{144} He also noted that Native Americans made bread from

\textsuperscript{140} Christopher Morris, ““How to Prepare Buffalo, and Other Things the French Taught Indians about Nature,”” in French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005), 34-35. For the relevant section of Du Pratz, see Du Pratz, History, 138.
\textsuperscript{141} Morris, “How to Prepare Buffalo,” 35.
\textsuperscript{142} Hachard, 77
\textsuperscript{143} Hachard, Relation du voyage, 25-26, 28, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{144} Du Pratz, History, 185, 227, 228, 230, 233, 236, 237, 252, 254, 263, 272-276.
plaquemines (persimmons), which they traded to the French.\textsuperscript{145} When assessing these new foods, he often made comparisons to French standards of taste. An effort to grow olives in the colony, for instance, yielded fruits that “were as good as those of Provence.”\textsuperscript{146} Likewise, fried cakes of hickory nuts were “as good as those of almonds.”\textsuperscript{147} Not to be outdone, Dumont described a variety of game, wildfowl, fish and wild plants.\textsuperscript{148} For instance, “gaspergou” (\textit{Sciaenops ocellatus}) (a fish still eaten in Louisiana cuisine) was “the best of the river,” brill could “be cooked up into a fine fricassee or sometimes even a good soup,” and crawfish was abundant and “like those in France when they are cooked.”\textsuperscript{149} Dumont described the technique for making steamed rice bread, a method that could also apply to a half-corn, half-wheaten bread.\textsuperscript{150} He also described a number of wild herbs, wild mushrooms, cane sprouts (“you could not say whether it was asparagus”), and wild berries, “from which excellent jams are made,” and Dumont even reported alligators being eaten.\textsuperscript{151} While local markets could supply a surprising number of these foods, the chocolate and coffee described by Hachard must have been imported, thus attesting to the existence of a wider commerce in these crops.\textsuperscript{152}

These observers occasionally witnessed the improvisational strategies of the lower classes. For instance, Du Pratz noted that “Sailors and other such people” used the inner bark of the “toothache tree,” to substitute pepper.\textsuperscript{153} Spices were generally becoming cheaper in Europe

\textsuperscript{145} Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 223.
\textsuperscript{146} Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 236.
\textsuperscript{147} Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 237.
\textsuperscript{148} Dumont repeats much of what is in the other sources, so this list is left partial to avoid redundancy.
\textsuperscript{149} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 372-373.
\textsuperscript{150} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 382-383.
\textsuperscript{151} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 387-389.
\textsuperscript{152} Coffee and cocoa probably arrived via Spanish traders or from the French Caribbean, Miller, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 369-372, 393.
\textsuperscript{153} Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 245.
at this time, but this may not have been the case in the colony.\textsuperscript{154} In other instances, Louisiana’s lower classes could enter a kind of partnership with officials or higher-ranking officers in pursuit of their own interests. Dumont found that the caretaker of the fort at New Biloxi, for instance, had eight barrels of flour that “belonged to the commandant, who was storing [them] there to sell to the highest bidder.”\textsuperscript{155} Until Dumont confiscated this flour in his effort to expose “pains and injustices,” however, the poor caretaker had been able to draw from the stashed supply for his own bread.\textsuperscript{156} A “valet” who worked for Dumont took up another strategy. Employed to hunt wildfowl for their suppers of lard, flour, peas and beans, Dumont regarded their relationship as a perfect contract, “although I was his master, we lived ... like two comrades.”\textsuperscript{157} Yet, it was Dumont who ultimately held rank (and the larger stock of flour), and it is likely that the “valet” would have had few alternative sources of adequate provisions.\textsuperscript{158}

These three accounts, however, are most interesting for the distinctions and categories of judgement they express. Hachard was particularly fascinating in this regard. In France, she was averse to ostentatious displays of wealth: “After Paris we dined at Versailles ... I thought often of closing my eyes to mortify [chasten] myself.”\textsuperscript{159} Dinners at the court of Louis XV were particularly lavish and Hachard likely turned away out of humility and chastity.\textsuperscript{160} Her eyes were entirely open to luxury in Louisiana, however, reporting to her father that:

The luxury in this City makes it so one does not distinguish anyone, all is of an equal magnificence; the majority are reduced to living with their family with but Sagamité,

\textsuperscript{154} Braudel, \textit{Everyday Life}, 222-223.
\textsuperscript{155} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 145.
\textsuperscript{156} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 71, 145.
\textsuperscript{157} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 145.
\textsuperscript{158} de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 145. Soldiers often dealt with poor rations, cruel commanders, and delayed pay in a hostile environment; see Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, & Slaves} 224-227.
\textsuperscript{159} Hachard, \textit{Relation du voyage}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{160} For an example of lavish dining at Versaille, see Pinkard, \textit{Revolution in Taste}, 150-151.
which is a kind of porridge & are clothed in fabrics of velvet or damask covered in ribbons ... in sum, the devil possesses a large empire here.\textsuperscript{161} Although, in this passage, Hachard notes that colonists were “reduced” to eating \textit{sagamité}, she notes earlier, “the people of all Louisiana find this good to eat.”\textsuperscript{162} Certainly, Du Pratz thought that the dish, when prepared with his favourite Bison grease, “surpassed the best dish in France,” but Hachard held Louisianans in disdain for eating it and did not explicitly mention eating maize herself.\textsuperscript{163} Much like the earlier generation of settlers, then, perhaps Hachard’s neophobia and Eurocentrism coloured her attitude toward this grain and those who ate it. For instance, Hachard found the “\textit{politesse}” of a creole dining companion in Saint-Domingue impressive; she wrote, “one would not take her for anything other than a Parisian.”\textsuperscript{164} Du Pratz, for his part, made clear that he understood the difference between taste as a means of distinction and taste as innate preference (Bourdieu v. Fischler) when he wrote: “The Pheasant is the most beautiful bird.... Their rarity, in my opinion, makes them more esteemed than they deserve. I would at any time prefer a slice off the fillet of a buffalo to any pheasant.”\textsuperscript{165}

Yet, it was Dumont who most embodied social distinction. As Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher point out, Dumont aspired to the ideal of “\textit{honnête homme},” a model for behaviour among the “rising bourgeoisie” of which his family was a part that carried connotations of refinement of the senses.\textsuperscript{166} Dumont was fond of gardening, but he did not grow the calorically dense foods one might expect if food supplies were scarce. Rather, he grew lettuce and shallots, and went through pains to acquire a vinaigrette: “Finally, I thought to take some of the water, or

\begin{footnotes}
\item[163] Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 138; cp. Hachard, \textit{Relation du voyage}, 26, 37, 76-78. She probably did eat maize at some point, but she was much more likely to report eating rice.
\item[164] Hachard, \textit{Relation du voyage}, 45.
\item[165] Du Pratz, \textit{History}, 277.
\item[166] de Montigny, \textit{Lieutenant Dumont}, 16; Flandrin, \textit{Food}, 364.
\end{footnotes}
rather syrup, from an oak tree, which, after sitting out in the sun, gave us a very strong, good vinegar—for cold foods, at least...”¹⁶⁷ When he became sick with fever, he also ate “good salad” and “a nice plate of curdled milk” in an effort to remedy himself.¹⁶⁸ Dumont’s self-portrayal was reminiscent of an earlier literature idealizing a simple, yet refined judgement of taste.¹⁶⁹ Pierre de Ronsard’s ode to salad, in particular, described two friends who collected wild greens to dress with vinegar and olive oil, taking pains to note the health properties of each plant.¹⁷⁰ Although Dumont made a medicine of his food, he did not refer to humoral medicine as would have been common in a prior century.¹⁷¹ Rather, Dumont’s medicine was much more akin, for instance, to John Evelyn’s 1699 treatise on salads advising which plants would bring health or prevent illness.¹⁷²

Dumont’s misfortunes also illustrate the other side of consumption and reputation. After insulting Bienville, Dumont soon found himself imprisoned and demoted: “on the outside.”¹⁷³ This fall from grace manifested itself as a change of uniform and a change of diet, which Dumont struggled to reverse.¹⁷⁴ Dumont wrote, “I had no food except what I could obtain on credit. I was owed money, but no one wanted to pay me, even as they tried to keep me alive by offering me the rations of a soldier.”¹⁷⁵ Dumont remained on soldier’s rations through the regulating charity of others, whereas if he had been able simply to draw on his dues he may have been able to consume his way out of social exile. This possibility should not be underestimated;

¹⁶⁷ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 189,191.
¹⁶⁸ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 170.
¹⁶⁹ Wheaton, Savouring the Past, 219.
¹⁷⁰ Wheaton, Savouring the Past, 62-64.
¹⁷¹ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 170; Flandrin, Food, 418-420.
¹⁷² de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 170, see also 387; Pinkard, Revolution in Taste, 68-69, 145. In contrast to Galenic medicine, which saw disease as an internal imbalance, Dumont’s understanding was more like Paracelscian medicine insofar as he understood his fever as coming from without.
¹⁷³ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 175.
¹⁷⁴ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 171-180.
¹⁷⁵ de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 175.
Dumont petitioned the Superior Council to reinstate him as an officer, but “the council simply wrote that they had ruled against [him] because [he] was living like a vagrant.” His situation grew more precarious when his landlady began to doubt his ability to supply the house with rations, and looming homelessness would have been another impoverishment to Dumont’s prestige. He only managed to climb out this predicament by coercing a signature at sword-point from the royal lieutenant on an order for “one barrel of flour, one jug of eau-de-vie, and one hundred twenty pounds of lard” from the warehouse, which satisfied his landlady. He then went above the superior council to make his case directly to royal commissioners from France—now wearing an officer’s uniform that he had also attained at sword-point.

These three cases illustrate the importance of consumption and habitus for social standing in Louisiana, but they are far from representative of the highest or lowest rungs of the colonial ladder. These authors were not among those who drew great privileges from the Company, having received large grants of good land and exemption from a standard head tax on enslaved labour; they were not part of that class that would eventually, form what was creole high society through a variety of strategic marriages between old and new families. Conversely, nearer the lower rung was Phillipe Haineau, a planter at Pointe Coupée who had settled under Company direction. At the time of his death in 1743, his entire kitchen consisted of an old frying pan, a sauce pan, a spit, a couple of pots and kettles, some old pewter plates, “Indian porringers,” a barrel of flour, some pepper, twenty-four barrels of corn, two barrels of beans, and whatever

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could be gotten from his livestock.¹⁸¹ These two divergent levels of consumption and the three middling positions sketched above reflected an unequal society.

Chapter Three: Creolization, Acadians, and Isleños

A surviving account of one of Governor Kélerec’s banquets, in all its lavishness, gives an idea of the degree of luxury consumption pursued in the period of Crown rule by colonial elites. Kélerec reportedly served “An infinity of dishes,” decorated with “all that is capable of heightening the magnificence of a meal,” to a well-heeled crowd of 200 local residents, and followed this up with an hour-long fireworks show lasting until midnight.\textsuperscript{182} At another banquet, “two founts of wine ran all night, one for the soldiers, the other for the inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{183} Conspicuous consumption aside, this was a rather direct example of class segregation. The account noted further that “good taste, good manners, and opulence” were the order of the day in Louisiana, and judged the colony to be a closer relative of Paris than some French provincial cities.\textsuperscript{184} This was surely a compliment, but such comparisons with metropolitan France went to the conflicted heart of creole distinction strategies of this period.

Shannon Lee Dawdy’s creolization model would expect Louisiana’s creole society and its material culture to develop in three stages in relation to metropolitan France. In “transplantation,” the first generation primarily strives to reproduce French material practices, and the second generation begins incorporating unfamiliar native resources. In “ethnic acculturation,” later generations piece old and new cultural forms together into a more concrete and “somewhat conservative” creole identity that subsumes new arrivals. Finally, in “hybridization,” a developed culture relaxes the rigidity of earlier creole identity to

\textsuperscript{183} Villiers du Terrage, \textit{Les dernières années}, 45. Segregation of soldiers from the general public in the consumption of alcohol was also practiced in the regulation of taverns; see Henry P. Dart, “Cabarets of New Orleans in the French Colonial Period,” \textit{Louisiana Historical Quarterly} 19, no. 3 (1936): 582.
\textsuperscript{184} Villiers du Terrage, \textit{Les dernières années}, 46.
accommodate and incorporate parallel cultural patterns.\textsuperscript{185} This conceptual grid clearly meshes with some (not all) of the historical processes in preceding chapters, but it is most helpful for considering how creole identity developed generationally and in tension with Old World material culture. Temporally, the period of Crown rule (1731-1762) relates to creolization phases of “transplantation” and “ethnic acculturation.”\textsuperscript{186} Hence, the consolidated meaning of “creole” was at stake in the evaluation of goods and customs imported from France and the local products of a budding colonial economy.\textsuperscript{187} These dynamics found expression in a kind of creole terroir in 1744, described by Miller, according to which “At this time all, especially fine, domestic products were labeled in the shops with the word ‘creole.’”\textsuperscript{188} Processes of domestic production grew along with trade in this period, and shipping manifests record the availability of more imported foods and luxury goods.\textsuperscript{189} Both domestic production and sea-born commerce were sources on which creole consumption could draw.

Local “creole” food production and associated agricultural processes had begun in earlier years but came to fruition after 1732, and well-supplied markets were the record of their success.\textsuperscript{190} For instance, German settlers, whom many regarded as crucial agricultural suppliers of New Orleans, supplied the city with poultry, dairy, cheese, and other produce by 1732, and by


\textsuperscript{186} Dawdy, “Cultural Change,” 110.


\textsuperscript{188} Miller, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 272.

\textsuperscript{189} Clark, \textit{New Orleans}, 50-53, 76-78, 82n4; Surrey, \textit{Commerce of Louisiana}, 179-181, 206-207; Dawdy, \textit{Building the Devil's Empire}, 118. I do not want to give the impression that Crown Rule was a miraculous economic boon. More accurately, France was minimally involved in Louisiana, and flooding and warfare frequently interrupted growth. Despite this, there was some movement, and the connection between colonial production and importation consisted in the fact that shippers would bring goods for sale and return with colonial production. This production needed to be profitable to entice traders, which it often was not, but subsidies from the Crown and the Company (still) helped to make it profitable.

\textsuperscript{190} Clark, \textit{New Orleans}, 52.
1744 they reportedly sold “fine apples, peaches, pears, figs, sweet potatoes, melons of all kinds, artichokes, large cabbages, salad plants, [and] herbs.” Merchants also supplied city markets with almonds, oranges, lemons, pumpkins, watermelons, cabbages, beans, rice, peas, and potatoes at this time. This produce came from a number of smaller farms that emerged in New Orleans’ “hinterland” to supply staple foods (mostly corn and rice), and from some of the larger plantations that grew food in addition to the primary cash crops. Indigo plantations, for instance, tended to raise cattle for sale to New Orleans, which contributed to the city’s growing meat supply, along with cattle-raising efforts at Natchitoches and Mobile. Developments in the Illinois region also provided New Orleans and various hinterland forts with meat and, significantly, a domestic flour supply after 1730. This flour supply was not always regular and did not always meet total demand, but a number of bumper crops in the early 1730s were enough to make Governor Bienville particularly enthusiastic. Pirogues continued to send flour down the Mississippi throughout much of the period of French Rule. Harvests were only particularly bad in 1738 and 1742, but were otherwise quite successful; a “mythical” harvest in 1748 even supposedly yielded an amazing 800,000 livres of surplus flour.

Expansion of domestic agriculture, however, was not without its problems. These included flooding, bad weather, crop disease, and an attack by the Natchez, all of which put

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192 Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 272.
193 Clark, New Orleans, 52-54.
194 Clark, New Orleans, 56-57; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 255-258.
197 Ekberg, French Roots, 220-221.
agriculture on shaky foundations in the French period. Beginning in 1748, for instance, disease spread through the colony’s cattle population over three years, greatly reducing the supply of cattle. During the subsequent meat shortage, the Superior Council tried a cattle-poaching case whose transcript details some rather desperate material conditions. André and Doré stood accused of killing their neighbor Dupré’s cattle. André denied the charge, saying, “for two months nothing had entered their residence but a little salted meat.” When investigators found a “knuckle of fresh beef” simmering in the soup nearby, however, André’s story fell apart. His wife nonetheless tried to help by demonstrating “that there was only cabbage in the pot.” The case offers few details of André’s social position or income, but two things are clear: when meat was scarce it was at least plausible that someone might make a soup entirely of cabbage, and cattle-owners, conversely, were willing to go to great lengths to defend their herds. This case thus existed in a context of other cattle-killing cases reflecting anxieties over cattle ownership and theft.

Overseas imports, that other element of creole consumption, expanded after 1732 despite the interruptions of warfare and being limited to what would survive a transatlantic voyage. Increases in Atlantic shipping were due to local initiatives, which sometimes involved smuggling, and to Minister of the Marine Maurepas’ encouragement of the New Orleans trade with subsidies of 40 livres per ton of goods supplied to New Orleans and his patronage of the Rasteau family of merchants in securing tariff exemptions and profitable government freight

198 Clark, New Orleans, 46.
199 Clark, New Orleans, 57; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 258-259.
202 See also Cruzat, “Superior Council,” 246, 250; Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 209-210; Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 251.
203 The War of Austrian Succession (1744-1748) and the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) both affected Louisiana shipping in the Caribbean because of threats of ship seizure; see Clark, New Orleans, 46-49.
contracts. French merchants, however, recognizing the unprofitability of Louisiana’s bulky raw commodities (lumber, pitch, tobacco), tried to sell as much as possible in the French Caribbean while still selling enough in Louisiana to collect the subsidy; this drove up prices and led much of Louisiana’s commerce with France to be mediated through Caribbean ports. The most commonly shipped goods were wheat flour, wine, and brandy. One 1747 inventory in particular listed all of the goods “actually sold in Louisiana,” including wine (88 tons), brandy, brandied fruit, capers, olives, anchovies, salt pork, butter, olive oil, goose thighs, ham, salt beef, and various consumer goods and sundries. Another ship brought an even larger variety in that same year, adding vinegar, lard, ham, salt, beef, prunes, and limes to the colonial warehouses. One shipment from La Rochelle in the 1750s included “Roquefort cheese ... beaver bound with gold, assorted silk stockings, and mantelets” on order for the head clerk of the Superior Council. Although this cheese must have been fully blue after crossing the Tropic of Cancer, such were the ends people were willing to go for a distinctive taste.

Alcohol was comparably easier to ship, and made up a large part of imports. Wine and liquor consumption in the colony reached the “astonishingly large” rate of 416 pints per capita per year. Taverns were highly regulated, and were ostensibly the only place that a person could purchase alcohol; enforcement, however, remained a problem. These regulations, furthermore, enforced segregation by class and race. For instance, a 1717 ordinance forbade selling brandy to “Indians and slaves,” a 1746 regulation again forbade taverns from selling

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204 Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 135-137; Clark, New Orleans, 68-73.
205 Clark, New Orleans, 135-137.
206 Clark, New Orleans, 136.
207 Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 206.
208 Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 207.
210 Clark, New Orleans, 61; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 183.
211 Dart, “Cabarets in New Orleans,” 581; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 277.
alcohol to slaves, and a 1751 ordinance forbade the same to soldiers, “Indians and Negroes.” A 1763 petition presented a classed view of liquor distribution, distinguishing between wealth producers and “vagabonds” operating unauthorized taverns and “increase[ing] the cost of living, they are the first at the markets and are consumers instead of creators.”212 This unproductive class was further accused of “adulterat[ing] the liquors they sell” and of inciting slaves to steal from their masters.213 In other cases, colonists applied high standards of judgement to the wines imported to the colony. In 1733, for instance, a Bordelais ship was unable to sell its wine because New Orleans already had a sufficient supply of higher quality wine. The captain decided to wait for supply of the competing wine to dwindle, but just as he was ready to sell another ship arrived with more high-quality wine.214 Louisianans in fact enjoyed Bordeaux wines so much that when Spanish merchants tried to replace them with Spanish wines, colonists were appalled.215

Available cookware offers indirect evidence of how emerging creoles may have combined these raw materials into complete dishes. One particularly wealthy former agent for the Company of the Indies, Sieur Jean Baptiste Prevost, even owned a cookbook, “le cuizinier [sic] royal trois volumes,” which provides substantial evidence of the dishes that may have appeared on his table.216 Prevost’s enslaved chef Almensor may have cooked, for instance, “rôties en maigre,” substituting catfish for carp, chopping the fish with wild chervil in lieu of parsley, with salt from the “crystal salt cellar,” and with almonds and lemons from the market, and finally mashing it all in the “marble mortar,” all according to the recipe. He may then have

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214 Miller, *Commerce of Louisiana*, 181-182.  
cooked the dish in any of six iron or two copper casseroles, and served it on bread made from rice or Illinois wheat. Perhaps he also served the occasional bowl of “Potage de Tortües en gras,” a soup that would later become associated with Louisiana cuisine. Many of Prevost’s neighbours had kitchens just as well equipped as his, including soup-tureens, fish kettles, braziers, saucepans, pie pans, preserve pans, dripping pans, china salad dishes, frying pans, spits, strainers, bean spoons, and more. With such an array of pots and pans, affluent creoles were fully capable of recreating the multi-course meals described in contemporary cookbooks.

An elite group of creole planters were likely the only few to know such affluence, which would be out of reach to newly arrived Acadian and Isleño immigrants who settled in a number of waves in the latter half of the 18th century. Both groups faced scarcity upon their arrival, just as earlier colonists had, and traditional cuisines bent under this necessity. In 1766, the Acadian Jean-Baptiste Semer wrote a letter from Attakapas to his father that would convince the dispersed Acadians of the settlement possibilities of Louisiana. This letter, however, was not altogether positive. The French colonial government was providing Acadians with enough “flour, hardtack, hulled rice, and salt pork and beef” for six months, and Semer wrote that

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217 Price, “Sieur Jean Baptiste Prevost,” 426-429, 451; François Massialot, Le nouveau cuisinier royal et bourgeois..., vol. 2 (Paris: Claude Prudhomme, 1734), 316-317, https://archive.org/details/lenouveaucuisin00unkngoog; Miller, Commerce of Louisiana, 272; de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 387. Both Hachard and Dumont confused catfish with carp; see Hachard, Relation du voyage, 7, and de Montigny, Lieutenant Dumont, 373n1. This scenario is entirely speculative but it is also entirely possible. Every element could be found in Louisiana, although the actual recipe is a bit more complicated than what is depicted here.


222 Brasseaux, New Acadia, 60.
“Wheat from France, corn and rice, sweet potatoes, giraumont, pistachios, all kinds of vegetables, flax, cotton,” were all planted, except that “We lack only people to cultivate it.” And there’s the rub: the settlers at Attakapas were so stricken with illness that they could not even harvest their crops. A kind of provisional support continued under Spanish governor Ulloa until, in 1768, a group of Creole traders joined by Acadians who were upset over their allocated settlement areas ran him out of the colony. The re-assertion of Spanish control after this rebellion attempted appeasement in two ways: Spanish officials conceded to Acadians some mobility in selecting settlement sites, and, for the powerful Creole planter class, they offered a number of influential political positions. This led to a series of conflicts between Acadians and Creoles in which, according to Brasseaux, the elite Creoles, riding their new political influence, sought to impose a neo-aristocratic hierarchy over the Acadians.

By the 1770s, the first Acadians were modifying their agriculture in conformity with the new environment; the “Wheat from France” and soupe de la toussaint disappeared, and in their place came corn bread and soupe de maïs. Deviating from a marked earlier preference for salted pork, Acadians’ diets came to include some of the many local game resources. Over time, through intensive labour and with profits earned from smuggling, they built up orchards and stocks of domesticated hogs and cattle. The immediate material difference in cuisine

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225 Brasseux, New Acadia, 73-75, 79-80, 87-88
227 This is an abridged version of an argument that Carl Brasseaux makes in many of his books; see Brasseaux, New Acadia, 167-169; and Carl A. Brasseaux, French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer on Francophone Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005), 34-35.
228 Brasseux, New Acadia, 127, 134. Soup de toussaint was a common soup in Acadia made of turnips and cabbage, which were more difficult to grow in Louisiana.
229 Brasseux, New Acadia, 133, 135; Bienvenu, Brasseaux, and Brasseaux, Stir the Pot, 21.
between the Creoles and the Acadians, however, was in pots and pans. A typical Acadian kitchen, in contrast to the opulent wares of the Sieur Prevost, contained only a cauldron for boiling and a frying pan that occasionally doubled as a baking vessel. In other respects, the Acadian “one pot meal,” was not substantially different from other foods at the time; according to Bienvenu, Brasseaux and Brasseaux, “no travellers visiting Cajun country between 1765 and 1900 found local cuisine in any way unusual.” Indeed, criticism of the Acadians’ food by Louis Judice, a “self-styled protector of Creole privileges,” was far from the disgust of neophobia; rather, class prejudice animated this criticism. Judice noted that Acadians ate maize and used it “to fatten hogs that they sell.” However, “if the settlers put their minds to it,” he wrote, they could grow wheat by knocking dew from the stalks every morning to dispel rust; never mind that Judice had himself “harvested fifty barrels of corn per arpent” with much less effort. The implication was that Judice did not regard Acadians as culturally other, but rather, at a remove from “necessity” (Bourdieu), he seemed to display a disregard for the high costs of labour involved in his agricultural recommendations. Others repeated a similar accusation of laziness hindering agricultural progress at other times in Louisiana’s history.

Another group to arrive in Louisiana in the last quarter of the 18th century were the Isleños from the Spanish Canary Islands. The Isleños initially faced conditions of bitter scarcity

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231 Brasseaux, New Acadia, 133-136; Bienvenu, Brasseaux, and Brasseaux, Stir the Pot, 19.
232 Bienvenu, Brasseaux, and Brasseaux, Stir the Pot, 23. This is part of the book’s larger argument that “Cajun cuisine,” as we know it, “is a product of the twentieth century,” and shares an affinity with many of Brasseaux’s arguments that Cajun imaginary is subject to a variety of distortions due commodification in the tourist industry. The exception to this is gumbo, which appeared in this period and will be examined more thoroughly below.
233 Brasseaux, New Acadia, 170.
235 Eg. Hachard, Relation du voyage, 28; Berquin Duvallon, Vue de la colonie espagnole du Mississippi, ou des provinces de la Louisiane et Floride Occidentale. (Paris: Imprimerie Expédition, 1803), 112; Din, Canary Islanders, 36.
that reduced taste to a matter of necessity. With Louisiana under Spanish authority, the new government conceived a strategic settlement plan as a buffer against English encroachment; hence, immigrants and particularly immigrant soldiers were in high demand.\textsuperscript{236} Isleños subsequently negotiated for an impressive array of provisions for their Atlantic trip, including aromatic herbs and two daily meals.\textsuperscript{237} Conditions, however, quickly deteriorated. Already in Santa Cruz, awaiting departure, disease and scarcity were felt, and the Gomeran families were reportedly most in need for lack of “\textit{pan de Gelecho},” a common local food.\textsuperscript{238} In Louisiana, strategic considerations meant that Spanish officials were not particularly sensitive to the fertility of lands settled by Isleños.\textsuperscript{239} Poor agricultural returns, raids by native groups, and disease all crippled Isleño settlement efforts.\textsuperscript{240} As Antonio Rodriguez and Paul E. Hoffman have demonstrated, although the colonial government offered food and equipment assistance for Galveztown settlers, they failed to supply even the minimum “recommended” allocation of 200 pesos in provisions per year per family.\textsuperscript{241} These meagre supplies, agricultural efforts to grow “corn, rice, beans, potatoes, flax, and even wheat,” and a few medicinal supplies of “wine, honey, oil, vinegar, aguardiente, and chickens” represented an even lesser variety than was originally included in the supply contracts for the immigration ships.\textsuperscript{242} The Isleño diet even lacked the traditional staples of peas and rice, which the settlers had to provision from

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{236} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 12-15.
\bibitem{237} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 17-18.
\bibitem{238} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 19-20.
\bibitem{239} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 43.
\bibitem{240} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 32-37.
\bibitem{242} Din, \textit{Canary Islanders}, 18, 32-33. For the Atlantic crossing, Isleños expected to receive two meals per day, meat or fish at breakfast and potage in the evening, and ships were supposed to be stocked with “salted fish, peas, garbanzos, rice, barley, potatoes, olive oil, ... eggs, onions, garlic, pumpkins, ches, olives, honey, dried fruit, sugar, wine, coffee, tea, and chocolate.” Sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens also lived aboard the ships for meat.
\end{thebibliography}
elsewhere. Such setbacks were much more likely to turn the Isleños to the “taste of necessity,” i.e., crude but necessary food consumption, than to the kind of elaborate cuisine practiced in Creole kitchens. For instance, about 20 years after first settlement, an observer noted that Isleños were only “occupied with gardening and some other minor objects of consumption.”

Both the Cajuns and the Isleños therefore faced the forced choice of adapting to local economic and environmental constraints, often under distressing conditions. Although these groups more recently possess rich food traditions, few would enjoy this luxury in the early Acadian or Isleño settlements. Writing in 1804, C. C. Robin noted that the Acadian’s principle foods were “rice, maize flours, some species of beans, melons, in the season, pumpkins, beef and salted pork and poultry.” These foods, however, were not exceptionally different from what Robin described for the rest of Louisiana.

Dawdy’s creolization theory, particularly in its “ethnic acculturation” phase, anticipates a process whereby the developed creole cultural and marketing system begins to subsume new groups into its fold. This was likely the situation faced by new arrivals: entering a stable economic structure, settlement was less a question of negotiating unfamiliar territory, but instead involved the negotiation of established socio-economic constraints. Food choice and judgements of taste at this time followed a similar trajectory, with fewer instances of outright disgust at unfamiliar foods (neophobia) and more synthetic judgements of food and negotiations of its place within society. The maturation of creole identity and associated market processes likely contributed to this change.

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243 Din, *Canary Islanders*, 32.
244 Duvallon, *Vue de la colonie*, 252.
246 Robin, *Voyages*, vol. 3, 40-44.
Chapter Four: Food “to satisfy sensuality”

There are many indications that Louisiana’s “creolized” food system matured under the colony’s new Spanish rulers. For one, Spanish control introduced few major disruptions in the continuity of colonial diets. There was little political impetus to change. After Louisianans had rebelled against Spanish rule, fearing the effects of commercial regulation and subordination within the larger Spanish mercantile system, the Spanish response was remarkably conciliatory; Spanish governors opened Louisiana trade to France and the French West Indies in 1776 and “made frequent exceptions and allowances” for commerce. Based on continuities in faunal remains of wild species at colonial sites, Dawdy suggests that even if Spanish settlers had other preferences, their ability to meet these preferences was contingent on the majority Creole market’s ability to supply them. Immigration in the Spanish period was so intense, however, that Creoles may not have in fact constituted a majority. Rather, observed continuities in consumption habits and material culture probably attest more to the strength of “creolization” in its second phase, where “New immigrants quickly embrace the material identity of one of the dominant ethnic groups and leave behind Old World ways more quickly than the first generation.”

Indeed, culturally, French remained the primary language of Louisiana throughout Spanish Rule and, as far as one observer saw it, the Spanish had maintained all prior “laws, forms, and manners.” Moreover, Louisianans had traded with nearby Spanish colonies for food and Spanish silver, legally or not,

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248 Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 116-119; Clark, New Orlean, 221-223.
250 For instance, in the entire Spanish period, the population of New Orleans increased by a factor of nine. Many of these immigrants were Acadian, Isleño, or American; see Kimberly Hanger, “Household and Community Structure among the Free Population of Spanish New Orleans, 1778” Louisiana History 30, no. 1 (1989): 64; Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 109-110, 112.
251 Dawdy, “Cultural Change,” 111.
throughout the century, and it would have been difficult for Spain to alter this pattern. At the supply level, according to Daniel H. Usner, Jr., at the end of the century a more stable and stratified “agricultural export economy” gradually came to undermine an earlier food provisioning system that had relied on indigenous and black suppliers. These suppliers had provided various herbs, game, and vegetables (notably sassafras and okra) to New Orleans’ markets. After the 1760s, indigenous and enslaved vendors maintained a reduced presence in the marketplace, subject to legal restrictions and licensing, and the market stalls of New Orleans became much more regularized. The reduced role of indigenous and enslaved vendors was, therefore, the result of efforts to regulate food marketing, and, insofar as these groups would be less in a position to inject their tastes into market supply, it may have contributed to homogenization in taste.

Archaeological sites in New Orleans also suggest continuity between periods of French and Spanish occupation. The St. John’s Legacy site, for instance, was an inn managed by a French innkeeper until the 1770s, when a Spanish captain purchased the property. Animal remains left by both occupants included a variety of wild fish (catfish, sheepshead, etc.), game, and domesticated animals in common. The Spanish occupants made more use of wild food

253 Clark, New Orleans, 140-148, 223-224; Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 109-115; Surrey, Commerce of Louisiana, 388-406, 431-442. The balance of this trade was often in favour of French merchants since Spanish smugglers were often interested in purchasing French luxury goods, leaving Spanish silver as payment. After 1776, French traders became again the dominant presence in Louisiana and continued to import French goods.
255 Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 210-214.
257 Dawdy, “Cultural Change,” 111. Recall Dawdy’s creolization phase of “ethnic acculturation,” as discussed in ch. 4.
258 Scott and Dawdy, “Colonial and Creole Diets,” 98.
resources than did the earlier French occupants, but the Spanish occupants were likely more affluent than the latter; therefore, wild consumption did not necessarily indicate lower class status.\textsuperscript{260} Furthermore, although prior archaeological work linked “large blue catfish and large red-eared turtles” species with typically ethnic French settlements in the region, both of these species were found in the ethnic Spanish deposit, and turtle was absent from the French site.\textsuperscript{261} Therefore, the authors interpret the presence of wild species in the Spanish context as evidence of the creolization process and not of cultural difference per se.\textsuperscript{262} Similar remains of wild species were found at urban (New Orleans) and rural archaeological sites from this period.\textsuperscript{263}

If the established economic patterns kept food choice relatively stable through regime change, Spanish officials did not seek to force a change in diet. Examples of Spanish regulation concerning food included a “Proclamation Fixing Prices” in 1769 and 1777 (the same document was issued twice) “because of the abuses committed by the monopolies” charging high prices for agricultural products.\textsuperscript{264} To enforce such policies, however, officials constructed a city market that had the advantage of mandating all economic activity under one roof for oversight.\textsuperscript{265} In other respects, the food on this price list was unexceptional. It included many commonplace provisions (rice, corn, meat, etc.) and “French domestic duck,” suggesting a certain continuity of taste.\textsuperscript{266} Curiously, fish fell into two classes and two price-points: “ordinary fish like meuil,

\textsuperscript{262} Scott and Dawdy, “Colonial and Creole Diets,” 107.
\textsuperscript{265} Sauder, “Public Market System,” 432-433.
\textsuperscript{266} Kinnaird, Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 240.
casburgots, etc.” and “choice fish like bass, red fish, etc.” The distinction between types of fish suggests two standards of taste: one luxury and one common.

Beyond mere raw ingredients, there is evidence that creole cuisine, i.e., the combination of raw ingredients and the cultural meaning assigned to food, also persisted. In 1802, for instance, Berquin Duvallon evaluated the tastes of Louisiana’s French, Spanish and American populations, and concluded that Americans ate “salted and spiced meats, and [drank] spirituous liquors ... with little moderation”; the French were somewhere in the middle but nearer the Spanish; and the “sober” Spanish ate “simple foods which they flavour but with garlic.” Curiously, the more disruptive diet for this observer was the American; towards the end of the century, growing numbers of American merchants and settlers lived in Louisiana, and it is possible (likely even) that this had some effect on diet.

Moreover, if the example of Don Joseph de Pontalba is representative, Spanish officials continued the French practice of using official connections to import rare items of luxury. In 1792 for instance, de Pontalba wrote that he would try to have a wafer iron, a tool for making thin biscuits, made as a gift for a Madam Herrera on behalf of ex-governor of Louisiana Don Estevan Miro. Miro later sent de Pontalba pineapples and preserved aniseed from Havana, and de Pontalba’s wife sent strawberries, ducks, seeds, and flowers to accompany the Herrera’s wafer iron. Their interaction seems to illustrate a larger practice of gift exchange among the upper classes as a means of securing obligations and status. Even Pierre Clément de Laussat, the French representative who oversaw the Louisiana Purchase, wrote of returning “a social courtesy” to a Spanish commander via conspicuous

267 Kinnaird, Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 240.
268 Duvallon, Vue de la colonie, 89. The French and Spanish also apparently shared a taste for olive oil which the Anglo-Americans did not; see C. C. Robin, Voyages, vol. 2, 90.
consumption at a banquet.\textsuperscript{272} Luxury consumption, it seems, continued to serve a social purpose under the Spanish.

Where the Spanish did mandate diet, it was over what could be served at the colony’s various taverns, inns, and billiard parlors. For instance, taverns could serve only “bread, butter, cheese, salad, oysters, sausages, and radishes,” and, in drinks, they could serve only wine, brandy, and rum.\textsuperscript{273} Inns could serve meals, but were also restricted in drinks to wine and liquor, whereas billiard parlors could serve only beer and cider.\textsuperscript{274} Spanish and French tastes ostensibly clashed over wine. For instance, governor Ulloa passed commercial restrictions on Bordeaux wine, and the surrogate Spanish wines were widely disdained by the population.\textsuperscript{275} A group of malcontents supposedly threatened Ulloa with departure from the colony over this issue, but bad taste coincided with politics: when Ulloa retorted, “His Majesty ... would never regard as good subjects those who were so only for Bordeaux wine,” the French Creoles abandoned demands for wine and turned instead to a critique of Spanish finances and government.\textsuperscript{276} Taste for wine, in this case, combined with the political commitments of conflicting classes. On one level, it is possible to view the creoles’ distaste for Spanish wine as simple neophobia; on another level, Bordeaux wine was a potent symbol of the creole class’ anxieties over Spanish rule because it was an item in the colony’s illicit trade with Spanish smugglers, a trade threatened by Ulloa.\textsuperscript{277} That taste for wine effectively became an outlet for expressing politico-economic anxieties

\textsuperscript{273} Holmes, “Spanish Regulation of Taverns,” 480.
\textsuperscript{274} Holmes, “Spanish Regulation of Taverns,” 480.
\textsuperscript{275} Holmes, “Spanish Regulation of Taverns,” 490.
\textsuperscript{276} Kinnaird, \textit{Spain in the Mississippi Valley}, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{277} Dawdy, \textit{Building the Devil’s Empire}, 113;
reveals how much was often at stake in the contest of taste. In 1767, for instance, M. Pagès encountered a kind of “blackened fish,” which was charred in such a manner as to preserve it. Rather than reject this novelty outright, however, Pagès purchased the fish from its indigenous vendors, and seemed to regard it as a kind of curiosity. Berquin Duvallon, a French visitor to Louisiana in the early 1800s, tended positively to assess foods that would likely have been foreign to him, such as the “soft and sweet” jassemier fruit and the “particular and even appetising taste” of sassafras powder. These neophillic assessments were broadly reminiscent of Brillat-Savarin’s gourmandise, which was also developing around this time.

Observers’ comments pertaining to class were even more interesting. For instance, Duvallon regarded Creoles as “issued, almost all, of parents of base extraction, who had come searching for fortune,” and was often critical of colonists’ lifestyles. He wrote, “a country of this nature is not made to know ... luxury, which ... is a mortal poison for those regions that

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278 Indeed, the incident recalls Bourdieu’s concept of multiple forms of “capital,” each of which will be more effective in a given situation; in this case, the Creoles attempted to convert cultural capital into political capital in an effort to secure, ultimately, economic capital; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 103-108.
279 For instance, Berquin Duvallon was only in the colony for a year before he printed his account the following year in 1803; Duvallon, *Vue de la colonie*, see front matter.
280 Pagès, *Voyages*, 19. This description is reminiscent of contemporary “blackened” fish recipes.
282 Duvallon, *Vue de la colonie*, 113.
284 Duvallon, *Vue de la colonie*, 205.
nature has condemned to mediocrity.” This attitude coloured Duvallon’s judgements of food and taste. He disparaged the banquets of New Orleans, saying, “One must not seek, besides, neither refinement of taste in the plates and in the drinks, nor clever arrangement in the disposition of the banquet.” The colony’s fruit did not “flatter the eye or the tongue,” garden herbs in the colony were “raw, bland, and, as it were, watery,” and what he thought was the most highly esteemed creole fish, the Casse-Burgau, “without being entirely disagreeable, [was] nonetheless dry and leathery.”

In contrast to Duvallon, C. C. Robin was a far more sympathetic witness. Robin, for instance, made efforts to defend creole foods from the distaste of metropolitan opinion. He also blamed the underdevelopment of rice agriculture on the “default of [trade] outlets,” excessively low prices, and “a mistaken policy, [enacted] under the pretext of helping the poor.” Here Robin perhaps borrowed a page from the Physiocrats, who held that agriculture was the basis of wealth and that government should not fix grain prices so low as to discourage farmers from producing grain. This attitude inflected Robin’s perception of the Acadians, whom he regarded as “Bonnes gens!” and simply victims of capricious government; in particular, he felt that the “too ordinary obstructions under the Spanish regime” drove Acadian ranchers to supposed “indolence” in “preventing them from exporting their foodstuffs.” Like Robin, Duvallon thought the Acadians lazy, but, unlike Robin, he did not fault the Spanish regime for

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285 Duvallon, Vue de la colonie, 204, 277.
286 Duvallon, Vue de la colonie, 297.
287 Duvallon, Vue de la colonie, 112-114. Incidentally, Duvallon seems to have been misinformed, since Casse-Burgau only appeared on the list of “ordinary fish” on the Spanish price list; cp. Kinnaird, Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 240.
289 Robin, Voyages, vol. 2, 235. The policy Robin refers to seems to be the price-fixing policies of the Spanish.
being unable “to change their natural laziness.”\textsuperscript{292} The charge of “laziness” depends on normative assumptions about what others ought to be doing: more sympathetic, Robin nonetheless thought that the Acadians ought to produce a surplus, while Duvallon more overtly blamed the “miserable” lot of the Acadians on their “natural” incapacity produce more than they needed. \textsuperscript{293} This left them, he said, “living miserably in their petty plantations, and limiting all their needs to cultivating maize, raising … pork, and making children,” as if reproduction were somehow contemptible.\textsuperscript{294}

Apart from these abstractions and judgements, food remained a basic material necessity that was more widely available in the colony. Still, not everything was equally available. Meat, for instance, because of its cheapness at six \textit{sous} per pound, was the common food of all: “On every table one serves little pieces of bread and large pieces of meat: that which the children of these people consume would frighten a European.”\textsuperscript{295} In contrast, “three or four onions, [or] three or four turnips … cost six \textit{sous} … it [took] three to four times more for a plate of spinach… Vegetables [were] not found but on the tables of the rich.”\textsuperscript{296} Duvallon also mentioned that food in the colony was particularly expensive.\textsuperscript{297} Corn, on the other hand, was “general among the poor and among the rich.”\textsuperscript{298} It could be eaten as a porridge mixed with “gombo,” as \textit{petit gru}, (like grits), as \textit{sagamité}, as \textit{cassant} (a fermented porridge served sweetened), as cornbread, as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{292} Duvallon, \textit{Vue de la Colonie}, 250-251.
\item \textsuperscript{293} Robin, \textit{Voyages}, vol. 1, 206; Robin \textit{Voyages}, vol. 2, 241; Duvallon, \textit{Vue de la Colonie}, 250, 157-159. The more complicated motivations of re-uniting a diaspora were foreign to both authors, and the aspirations of Acadians to imitate creole society, which often meant the acquisition of slaves, was at odds with Robin’s abolitionist stance; cp. Brasseaux, \textit{New Acadia}, 80-82, 192-197.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Duvallon, \textit{Vue de la Colonie}, 251.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Robin, \textit{Voyages}, vol. 2, 79. Meat was comparatively scarce in Europe after the 16\textsuperscript{th} century; cp. Braudel, \textit{Everyday Life}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Robin, \textit{Voyages}, vol. 2, 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{297} Duvallon, \textit{Vue de la Colonie}, 42. Interestingly, Duvallon noted that rental rates were significantly higher near the rivers due to their access to trade.
\item \textsuperscript{298} Robin, \textit{Voyages}, vol. 3, 40-42;
\end{itemize}
corn biscuits, as bread mixed with white flour, as *farine froide* (a roasted and nixtamalized corn flour that could be eaten cold or hot), or as roasted young cobs. 299 All this variety of preparation techniques, “which accommodates itself to every stomach,” reflected this grain’s lasting importance for the colonial diet. 300 If Louisianans had at times poorly regarded maize and associated it with necessity, its persistence reflected just how strong the formation of a particular taste could be, even if it was no longer “necessary” as such. (This recalls Bourdieu, who writes, “The specific effect of the taste of necessity … is most clearly seen when it is, in some sense, operating out of phase, having survived the disappearance of the conditions which produced it,” as, for instance, with an individual who has climbed the social ranks only to find that their new lifestyle does not quite fit. 301) By the end of the century, the threat of starvation no longer loomed so near overhead: meat and maize, at least, were reportedly widely available to all, yet luxury consumption provided for the symbolic nourishment of those who aspired to more.

Residents of New Orleans and its hinterland apparently consumed the following imports in great quantity, if only “to satisfy sensuality”:

Vinegar, liquor, sausages, *potbans* of anchovies, pickles, *confit* fruit in *eau-de-vie*, such as peaches, apricots, prunes, dried fruits, figs, almonds, raisins, and particularly prunes; we also bring our cheeses here, but the heat that ruins them most often, hinders the great expansion of this branch of commerce: vermicellis and pastas of this sort are also traded greatly. 302

Merchants had imported many of these goods since the 1730s, but trade channels were now more

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300 Robin, *Voyages*, vol. 3, 41.
301 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 375-376, 103-104.
regular. The cornucopia of taste also incorporated local dishes, the most remarkable example of which was gumbo. Pierre Laussat, the French prefect in 1803, hosted a banquet where, “As a local touch, twenty-four gumbos were served, six or eight of which were sea turtle,” accompanied by Bavarian sweets and dainties. Even Duvalon admitted that sassafras, a crucial and distinct ingredient in gumbo, “reduced to powder, thrown and mixed into a rich bouillon, a few moments before one serves it, gives it a particular and even appetizing taste.” With this dish, the tastes of luxury and of necessity converged; according to the American Dr. John Sibley, “it is the food of every Body for Dinner & Supper,” and Robin recorded the sharing of “gombo” during Acadian merrymaking. Louisianans continued to consume wild game, but, no longer for mere subsistence, Creoles also took up hunting as good sport. Even Laussat’s excitement after a country meal conjures images of Creole food: “How much pepper! What highly seasoned food! But especially how much pepper! Real fire, this food of Louisiana!”

Yet this fire was also the fire of conflict. For all the lavish consumption of the Creoles and other colonial elites, not all shared in this experience. Most visible was the distinction between Creoles and Acadians. Dr. Sibley, an American who travelled up the Mississippi enjoying the hospitality of strangers, made this distinction all too clear in his description of Creole versus Acadian households. In the home of M. Destrehan, a notable Creole and innovative sugar planter, “The Table was elegantly set, and a variety of Dishes of Meat, Sassages, Hashes, Stews, Sallads, Vegetables & with Handsome plate, Silver forks, Spoons, etc.

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303 For instance, 124 ships arrived in New Orleans in 1786 and 181 ships arrived in 1801; see Clark, New Orleans, 228, 248.
304 Laussat, Memoir, 86.
305 Duvalon, Vue de la colonie, 113; Robin, Voyage, vol. 3, 361.
307 Laussat, Memoir, 69-70. Travellers might also have taken up hunting for subsistence to supplement poor rations; see Pagès, Voyage, 35.
308 Laussat, Memoir, 68.
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a Variety of Wines, but none but Claret was touched. The old Gentleman placed me next himself, a Clean Napkin to every plate, he politely helped all at Table and Envited [sic] every one to drink, setting the example himselfe.” 309 The next evening, another home served him “sassages, eggs, meats, Sallads [sic], etc,” but the following evening, at the Acadian home of John White, “good livers but not wealthey,” his supper was not recorded; he only wrote that White was “Hospitable.” 310

This is the difficulty of a history of cuisine that is aware of class: whereas in early Louisiana strange foods and alien tastes drew the greatest comment, diaries were now more often the record of luxury. Diarists were less likely to note the “taste of necessity.” In other words, accounts like Pénicaut’s, which memorably recorded his chewing frozen Buffalo halfway to Illinois after it had been boiled and, on a good day, salted, were no longer exceptional enough to warrant recording. 311 Instead, John White’s Acadian supper, if it was like most other Acadian suppers, consisted of perhaps a soup flavoured with salt pork and maybe some cornbread, but, according to Carl A. Brasseaux, this can only be conjectural because “no late-eighteenth-century description of Acadian cuisine exists.” 312 Hence, in late colonial Louisiana, taste was much more a means of distinguishing oneself from others; those others at the bottom against whom “good taste” sought to define itself were devalued in the process.

311 McWilliams, Fleur de Lys and Calumet, 82, 49.
312 Brasseaux, New Acadia, 135.
Conclusion

Behind Louisiana’s changing narratives of taste, from those stressing bare consumption to those stressing luxury or abstract taste, it is possible to see impressions of a changing society. For instance, Du Pratz’s encyclopedic catalogue of edible wild plants and animals, as a contextual product of the deer pelt trade, buffalo hunting, and exploration, would perhaps seem out-of-place in a late 18th century Mississippi hinterland which was now characterized by an increasing number of export-oriented farms. This changing society, insofar as it offered some the opportunity to acquire wealth and power, also offered the impetus and opportunity to escape the “taste of necessity.” Individuals might express such efforts in increasing conspicuous consumption and abstract judgements on “good” taste. Opportunities, however, were dispersed unevenly throughout a society that had changed much since French settlers and their administrators first hazarded to found a colony in an alien environment. The “taste of necessity” was more or less general in these early years when wheat failed to grow and supplies from France were unreliable. In this environment, the necessary confrontation with alien tastes had lasting effects on creole diet. In some sense, “necessity” cleared away the old inherited tastes. For instance, the consumption of maize and the appreciation of creole recipes like gumbo were widespread across all levels of society by the end of the century. Other foods were not so evenly distributed; whereas the “taste of necessity” had been relatively egalitarian when precarious subsistence was the norm, later economic development encouraged conspicuous consumption and discursive strategies for marking good and bad taste.

313 Du Pratz, History, 30-35, 138, 225-291; Clark, New Orleans, 30, 202. According to Clark, “The economic regime of these areas changed radically during this period as immigrants from the newly formed United States of America swarmed into both the Upper and Lower Mississippi valleys. In the Upper Valley, farming encroached steadily upon the fur industry, dominant since the coming of the Europeans, ultimately transforming the area into one of small grain and livestock farms dependent upon the waterways for access to a market.”

On the one hand, then, Louisiana’s cuisine had matured: it had developed a number of distinctive elements and recipes. On the other hand, the conflicts and complexities of the society that this cuisine reflected would be enough to ensure that this maturation was an ongoing and incomplete process. For instance, the end of Louisiana’s colonial period offers plenty of opportunities for speculation on how the social forces at play might have continued to shape this cuisine. In the prefect M. Laussat’s patriotic displays of food, ranging from a champagne toast to “the French Republic and to Bonaparte” to displays of “local” Louisiana gumbo alongside “Bavarian sweets,” it is possible to imagine inklings of Louisiana’s cuisine being taken up as a symbolic part of Napoleonic imperial pretensions.\(^{315}\) Might patriotic Parisians have spooned up gumbos made of the finest ingredients as a conspicuous display of imperial grandeur? Of course, the Louisiana Purchase would interrupt such possibilities. After the territory became part of the United States, a number of Americans and their governors came to New Orleans. This influx sparked a completely new cultural conflict between, now, the Francophone Creoles and the Americans who struggled to impose the English language and other American customs.\(^{316}\) Might the Creoles not have wanted to assert their felt social and cultural superiority through food in competition with this new group? If they did so, they would likely continue the pattern established in the prior century. Between Lieutenant Dumont’s early meal of wildfowl, peas and beans all cooked in lard and an 1801 visitor’s meal “consisting of [a] great variety of dishes of the best kind and well cooked,” Louisiana cuisine developed in the long interplay of necessity and luxury that was likely to continue in the years to come.\(^{317}\) Ultimately, however, what the history of food in colonial Louisiana demonstrates is how, in a critical sense, what goes into the

\(^{315}\) Laussat, *Memoir*, 81, 86.


pot is far more than just a combination of haphazard ingredients; rather, the cooking pot represents a whole combination of social codes and social relations.
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