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"To Get Himself Out of Slavery": Escape, Justice, and Honor in the Life of a Colonial French Louisiana Bohemian ("Gypsy")

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Escape, Justice, and Honor in the Life of a Colonial French Louisiana Bohemian ("Gypsy")

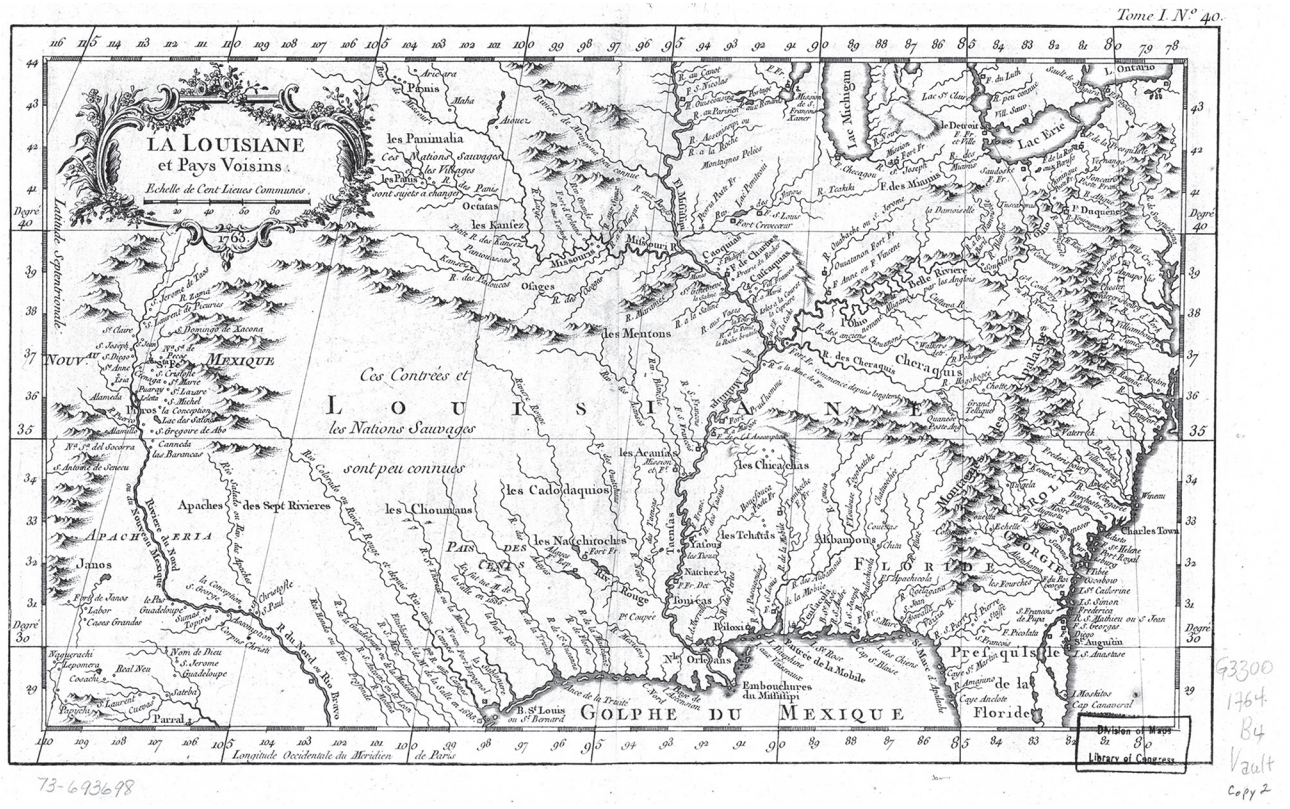
Ann Ostendorf (Spokane, WA)

Introduction

The most recent issue of this journal presents an invaluable collection of case studies that provide insight into the lives of Early Modern Gypsies from across the European continent.[1] This focal issue begins to address two major gaps in the scholarship – archival-based historical studies in the field of Romani Studies and a consideration of the ways Gypsies experienced their lives in Early Modern Europe. Though a few individual scholars (many of whom are featured) have already published significant pieces of scholarship at this intersection, this issue is the first to situate the experiences of diverse European Gypsies from this era alongside each other. Such a juxtaposition will surely lead to new insights and hopefully provide a foundational nexus from which further research will grow. In addition, the turn towards appreciating the possibility of mapping Gypsy voices within Early Modern archival documents has opened new and exciting avenues of inquiry previously rarely considered. As each of these authors show, despite the dearth of ego-documents, the interior landscapes of Early Modern European Gypsies can be teased out of the available records.

The impact of such scholarship could be extended even further with the inclusion of the experiences of Early Modern Gypsies in the colonial Atlantic world. In addition to using archival sources to uncover the experiences of Gypsies on the continent, such sources can also be used to reveal much about the experiences of Gypsies in the colonies. A surprising number of Gypsies experienced life in the colonies of each major European empire. A traditional assumption for this has been that the colonies provided an outlet for the dispersal of undesirable subjects from the home country and that Gypsies fell squarely into the "undesirable" category. Though a handful of scholars have published on Gypsies in the American colonies, none have prioritized interrogating archival documents for what they can reveal about the interior lives of these men and women in this distinctive time and place.[2] How did individual Gypsies experience European empires in the colonies of the Americas? How do their experiences provide new insights into distinctively American diasporic and racialized re-situations? The case study presented here extends the work of the prior focal issue into trans-Atlantic and colonial contexts. This microhistory allows the global phenomena of empire to be understood in some of the ways that individuals actually experienced it.[3] It also reveals much about how Gypsies in particular experienced life in the American colonies. No doubt buried in European and American archives, waiting to be uncovered and considered, are other records of Early Modern Gypsies who lived all or most of their lives in the colonies. Only once these are studied will a more complete presentation of Gypsies' experiences in the colonial Americas and the Early Modern Era be possible.

This case study is built around three documents related to Jean Baptiste "La Chaume" Chevalier, a Bohemian man who lived in the French Louisiana colony in the early 1740s.[4] As a soldier and convict laborer in the nascent colony stationed at the remote Natchez post, who was punished for desertion and later tried for attempted suicide, La Chaume's life provides insight into a diverse array of historical forces experienced during this distinctive time and place. One of these documents, his interrogation, holds particular significance to the historian for presenting the only known description of colonial



1 *Map of Louisiana, 1764. New Orleans and Natchez labeled in the bottom center* (La Louisiane et pays voisins. *From Jacques Nicolas Bellin: Le petit atlas maritime. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division*).

North American life by any Bohemian in his or her own words.[5] Not only do these sources open up the world of French colonial Louisiana from the perspective of one virtually never considered, but they also reveal how La Chaume struggled to situate himself in the distinctively fluid social order of the developing colony. His concern with escape, justice and honor reveal the disconcerting racialized stratifications in violent genesis and hint at his sense of confused desperation when trying to place himself within and conceptually stabilize this uncertain social order.

Scholars using these oral testimonies written down by the Louisiana Superior Council recognize their tremendous significance to uncovering the inner lives of subjugated colonial people. Old Regime courts that had targeted the poor in France (a practice which led to populating Louisiana with criminal exiles) redirected their enforcement once reborn in the colonies towards those most threatening to local interests: the enslaved and the soldiery. This, combined with the absence of newspapers, diaries, and letters, elevate court interrogations' value to the historian hoping for a glimpse of how bound Louisianans gave meaning to their experiences. Though mediated by a clerk (*greffier)*, the court's reliance on confession meant justice required precise and accurate transcription of oral testimony. Individuals used this opportunity to explain themselves, doing more than answering the questions posed. As one scholar describes it, "appearing before the court provided individuals with an unexpected opportunity to narrate their own stories, to digress, to redirect questioning, and to introduce unrelated matters in an area where, commanding full attention, they had to be heard." It appears from the nature of his responses that La Chaume chose to, and was allowed to, discourse as he saw fit with the scribe noting down his words even as they wandered from the query. In the narratives they relate, defendants' "emotional worlds lay at the core of their day-to-day response […] overflowing with personality, character, subjectivity, and humanity in which they seem to quite literally spring to life." Testimony allowed

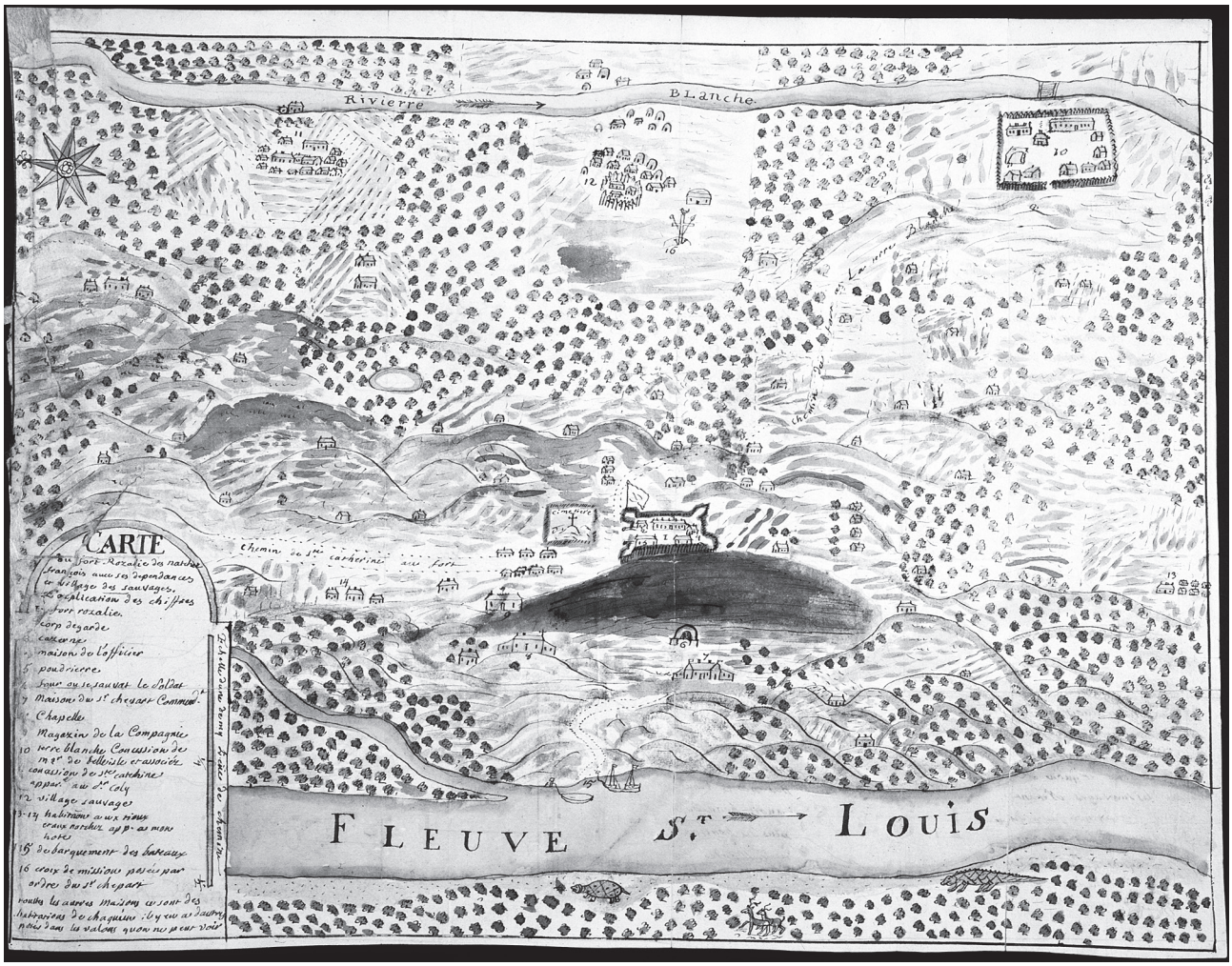
individuals to construct and publicly express their autobiographies, thus revealing to scholars how they understood their lives. When La Chaume spoke before the court he exposed how he experienced, evaluated, and structured his world in ways no other records can.[6]

By his own reckoning, La Chaume was born in the year 1714. Whether in the colonies or in France is not known. He may have been related to two girls who arrived to Louisiana six years later on the ship *Le Tilleul*. Magdelaine Marguerite La Chaume, age seventeen, and Magdelaine La Chaume, age eight, sailed with their mother Claudine de la Roche, who was listed on the ship's manifest under the heading "Women who are accused of being Bohemians,"[7] although their natal connection is mere speculation. Using nicknames as La Chaume did had become a practice common in eighteenth century France that carried over and even took new meaning in the colonies. Nicknames were extensively used by soldiers in Louisiana and it was rare for non-elites in the colonies *not* to have a nickname. Nicknames could be ways of colonial self-fashioning or imposed, in jest or derision, by one's companions. They might even replace a person's surname in official records. Louisiana women might become known by their husbands' nicknames and children could even inherit their father's nickname as their surname.[8]

La Chaume was a soldier (specifically a drummer in the military) in Louisiana by 1741. Around this time he attempted, or at least intended, to desert with some other men. This plot was uncovered while drinking with some soldiers who informed on their plans. As punishment, La Chaume was forced to work for Sieur d'Orgon, commandant at the Natchez garrison. By his own telling, unceasing labor and violent abuse at the hands of d'Orgon characterized this phase of his life. He referred to himself as "a poor man who is in slavery", although his legal status was officially that of a convict laborer (*forçat*). It is likely that his desertion led to this status, although he could have arrived to the colony already sentenced to forced labor and had been serving in the military as a result. In 1743, after a physical altercation with another soldier serving as the cook for d'Orgon, La Chaume's circumstances worsened. D'Orgon violently beat La Chaume and called for a slave to tie him for further punishment. La Chaume then stabbed himself leading d'Orgon to accuse him of attempted suicide. This charge precipitated the trial and the three documents that give us knowledge of La Chaume's life.[9]

Only two other scholars are known to have referenced this case and only one notes La Chaume's Bohemian identity. Neither of these scholars provide extensive analysis of his experiences, but rather use his case alongside numerous other examples as part of larger studies. The first, Cécile Vidal, briefly relates the story of La Chaume's refusal to be punished by a black slave as part of her study of violence against African slaves in eighteenth century Louisiana. She explains his extreme reaction to this threat as evidence of the influence and spread of slavery's violence into relations between the diverse racial, ethnic and status divisions in the colony. Vidal twice calls La Chaume "a gypsy" (though never refers to him by name) but does nothing further with this marker of identity. Vidal again describes the case of La Chaume, this time in more detail, in her recently published book to illustrate the fine line between the enslaved and *forçats* who toiled under the same conditions. The latter, like La Chaume, insisted upon their differential treatment, a theme explored further below. The second scholar, Shannon Lee Dawdy, mentions La Chaume in the context of interracial and inter-status punishment to illustrate the complex and ambiguous racial and status hierarchies that had developed in the Louisiana colony. Dawdy twice refers to La Chaume as "French" and considers him part of "Louisiana's *petits gens*", though she never refers to him as Bohemian or Gypsy.[10]

Though work has been done on Bohemians in eighteenth-century France, scholars rarely situate Bohemian lives within the larger imperial Atlantic world. The foundational research conducted by François de Vaux de Foletier in the 1950s and 1960s laid the groundwork for Early Modern French Bohemian studies. This scholarship has been continued into the twenty-first century most notably by Henriette Asséo. Younger scholars like Jules Admant seem to guarantee that work on the interior lives of Early Modern French Bohemians will continue to develop out of archival interrogation well into the future. Each of these scholars, as well as others not named, make extensive use of archival

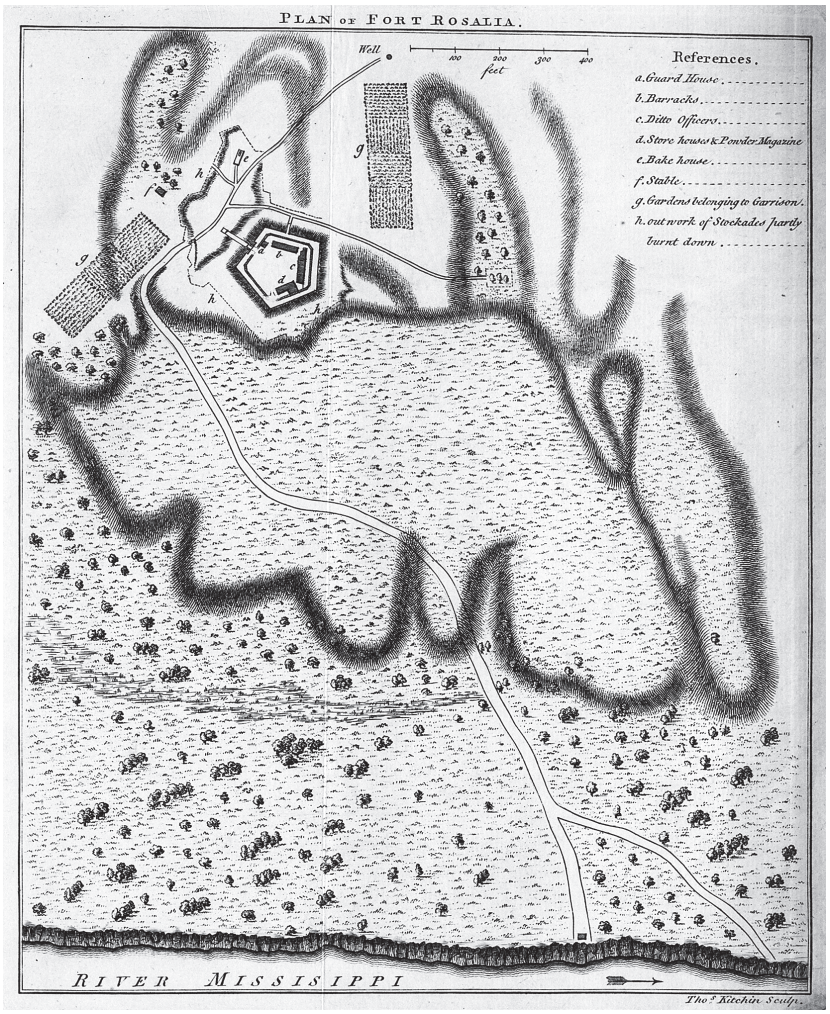


2 Map of Natchez, 1747. The scene of the crime. Carte du Fort Rozalie des Natches françois avec ses dependances et village des sauvages *(Newberry Library, Edward E. Ayer Digital Collection).*

records, including records from criminal trials, to uncover the lived experiences of the diverse communities who fell under the French appellation of "Bohemian". Yet, their work remains of limited significance in contextualizing the life of La Chaume (and the lives of other American Bohemians) due to the drastically different social conditions of the developing French colonies compared with conditions on the European continent. Though each of these scholars mention that French Bohemians found themselves in the colonies, none interrogate the lived experiences of Bohemians in the Americas.[11] We must turn to the colonies to understand their lives further.

A Soldier's Life in French Colonial Louisiana

Typically considered to have been founded in 1699, the Louisiana colony has universally been considered a violent, chaotic and miserable place to have lived. The colony grew in fits and starts, floundering until the arrival of 7.000 newcomers between 1717 and 1721 first bolstered its European population above 500. Nearly half of these individuals arrived as soldiers or criminal exiles (*forçats)*, the latter being primarily smugglers and deserters although some arrived specifically designated as "Bohemian". The positions of both soldiers and *forçats*, the two statuses La Chaume is known to have occupied, demanded masters in a largely uncontrolled social



3
Natchez Fort Rosalia, 1770. Where La Chaume lived as a soldier. From Philip Pittman: The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division).

setting in an autonomous corner of the globe. As a military enterprise, colonial forces were expected to regulate disruptive forces coming both from without and within. With *émigration forcée*, the success of the Louisiana colony depended on criminals becoming productive colonists. After France effectively abandoned the colony in 1731, few Europeans, barring soldiers, arrived until the Spanish took over in 1769. Setbacks to Louisiana's development in a way France desired included such intertwined factors as the continued power of local tribes, the lack of voluntary French settlers, the disagreeable climate, circum-Caribbean imperial competition, and the French state's disinterest in and inability to control it. The gradual transition from enforced French to enslaved African labor only exacerbated the situation. The violence required to extort labor from unwilling sources of any status category by nearly autonomous civil and military elites has led one historian to term Louisiana's condition as that of "rogue colonialism". This disorderly self-interest concentrated in and emanated from the capital city of New Orleans, established in 1718. It would be here that in 1743 La Chaume was sent to be interrogated for his crime committed further upstream.[12]

Prior to his sojourn to New Orleans, La Chaume was living with a few dozen other soldiers at Natchez, a precarious and isolated outpost about 250 miles upriver from New Orleans. Originally a vibrant tribal commercial hub, contentious colonial growth in the area sparked war leading to the destruction of the first French fort there in 1729, as well as the deaths of 237 French colonists. Among the dead were several Bohemians, including Jean Baptiste Evrard, the first known Bohemian to arrive to the colony, and "the old Woman Chevalier, Bohemian". The decade-long conflict that followed prompted an increase of French troops to supplement allied

tribal forces. La Chaume may have arrived to the colony as part of this military investment had he not already lived there. If so, he would have been part of the multi-national force assembled at the end of 1739 consisting of French troops, Swiss mercenaries, members of multiple Indian nations, and several hundred free and enslaved Africans organized to break the Chickasaw tribe's power in the region. Soon after this operation, La Chaume fled his post.[13] Soldiers like La Chaume appear at the nexus of much colonial violence. They existed to protect the colony from disruptive tribes, uncooperative African slaves, and the competition of enemy empires. Yet the soldiers as often as not transgressed the boundaries they were meant to uphold. They traded with and lived among the Indians, they harassed and fraternized with enslaved Africans, and they deserted (or attempted to desert) to Spanish, Indian, and English settlements. In addition, soldiers begat violence internally amongst themselves. The most common types of crime reported in French Louisiana were those committed by one enlisted soldier against another. These made up over 20 percent of the criminal cases in the extant records. La Chaume's known activities align closely with these generalizations about French colonial Louisiana soldiers. This violence was also directed towards soldiers by others – not just the enemies they were meant to subdue, but also their commanders and other colonial elites. The specific frustrations La Chaume articulated in his testimony help explain why he, and other men like him, so often resorted to force. Men like La Chaume expected old world honor codes to be translated into the colonial situation in ways that, at minimum, guaranteed their former social position. Colonial elites, on the other hand, opportunistically took advantage of the unfettered social order to claim as much power as possible, often to the detriment of those positioned at the bottom. This ignited forceful repercussions among the aggrieved lower orders. La Chaume's geographic and social position almost certainly meant that violence, deprivation, and desperation defined his life.[14]

According to historian Daniel Usner, "in the hierarchy of free workers in colonial Louisiana, private soldiers stood at rock bottom." Only enslaved Africans and forced exile or convict laborers (which La Chaume would become) were positioned below soldiers on the colonial hierarchy. Military discipline and punishment for soldiers paralleled that suffered by slaves. Wages couldn't meet soldiers' costs of living, who had to find other sources of income, steal, or go hungry. In the interior posts, like Natchez, where La Chaume lived, this typically meant trade with the tribes. Soldiers, and even commanders, in these isolated outposts adopted the breechcloths and leggings of the surrounding tribes. This suggested that what made one French had become up for consideration. The lack of supplies and housing provoked one Major to wonder in 1741, if the minister of the marine intended "that the soldiers be made to sleep like dogs." Officers forced soldiers to work for their private gain with no compensation. This forced labor included tending officers' private farms, one of the tasks La Chaume had been sentenced to perform for his commanding officer d'Orgon. The universally wretched conditions Louisiana soldiers suffered were even more precarious in interior posts like Natchez. "Men stationed at remote garrisons were especially vulnerable to severe, and sometimes cruel, treatment by their officers," notes Usner. Another scholar of French colonial Louisiana has concluded more succinctly, "the life of a soldier had no value." The devaluation of their lives made Louisiana soldiers desperate and dangerous.[15]

Complaints about soldiers' profligacy – fighting, drinking but especially desertion – fill the correspondences of officers and administrators. Some decried the "bandits and vagabonds" being recruited for Louisiana through the military. Governor Kerlérec described Louisiana solders in 1757 as "professional deserters", "vicious characters", and "more dangerous to the colony than the enemy himself". Governor Bienville, who had assigned La Chaume after his attempted desertion to labor for d'Orgon, had already proclaimed such sentiments thirty years prior: "It is exceedingly painful for an officer, who is entrusted with the destinies of a colony, to have nothing better to defend her than a band of deserters, of smugglers, and of rogues." Over a dozen mutinous plots led by soldiers show that administrators feared them for good reason. Yet, 42 percent of Louisiana's soldiers between 1727 and 1730 could sign their name (as could La Chaume), which was about the same percentage as in the colony as a whole in 1769. Though some may have been criminals, the

Louisiana soldiery was not completely bereft of education.[16]

Not mere hyperbole, desertion among the troops remained pervasive in the colony. But this can largely be attributed to the "all-pervading corruption, exploitation, and brutality that kept them in desperate want and that made them willing to take any risk to try to escape." Hunger, physical violence, and knowledge of a better life to be had elsewhere prompted hundreds of these young French men to risk their lives on the hope of escape. When La Chaume plotted his liberty, he trod a path well worn by others. In French colonial Louisiana, desertion made up the majority of crimes that did not involve a specific victim (such as moral crimes and crimes against the state). Between 1752 and 1758, 662 soldiers disembarked, 217 died, and 82 deserted. The colony even employed Indian nations to help capture runaway French soldiers. These same Indians were known to hesitate in returning deserters whose punishment often meant torture and death. It is not surprising that soldiers fled to live among the tribes or conspired with slaves to escape their distinctive forms of bondage together. One of the larger of these mutinies involved three New Orleans companies who in 1745 revolted against being served spoiled bread. One of the men involved and who testified, Jean Frederick "La Fontaine", was a member of a local Bohemian family exiled to the colony in 1719. Like La Chaume, La Fontaine served as a drummer in the military. Violent punishment awaited deserters if caught, though rarely as extreme as that carried out in 1757. These suspected mutineers were broken on the wheel, their bodies quartered, and thrown into the trash in front of the troops. More fortunate failed deserters, like La Chaume, merely ended up laboring as convicts, if sometimes for life.[17]

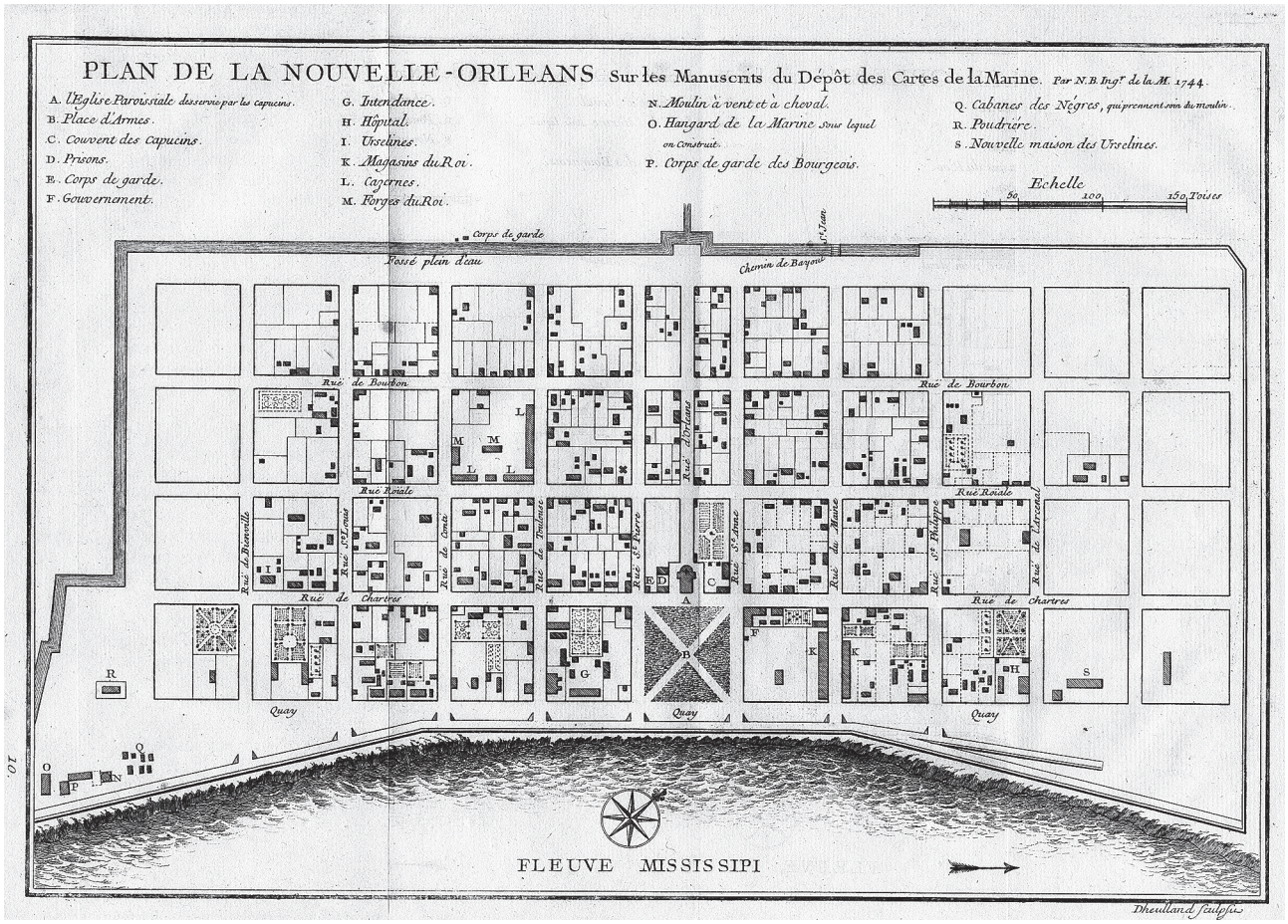
A Bohemian Convict Laborer in Court

The only evidence we have about how La Chaume considered his life as a soldier must be implied from the fact that he considered escaping it. Thus, to understand his experiences we must fill in the edges of it with the larger context as done above. However, the same is not true of his life as a convict. La Chaume himself explains in great detail how his experiences as a convict laborer affected him. His words and actions, traceable in the historical record, bare the interior life of one long-suffering colonial Louisiana Bohemian trying to navigate his place within, and grasp the logic of, an ambiguous colonial order. His sense of injustice spurred by others' disregard for honorable status-appropriate behavior prompted his second attempt to escape, this time with even higher stakes.

On a mid-June afternoon in 1743, the *forçat* La Chaume's situation worsened. When a cook of d'Orgon tried to make La Chaume clean the kitchen, he replied, "it is your duty. I do not have the time. I am loaded with work. I do not have time to eat." La Chaume's resistance resulted in the two men physically fighting, which the cook then reported to d'Orgon. The commandant, who "could not tolerate that such vileness remains unpunished," and "having already been too forgiving towards him" and his "knavish practices", violently punished La Chaume by "hitting him a hundred times with a stick." Further abuse awaited.[18]

Because, as mentioned by d'Orgon in his report of the incident, "no slave was allowed to hit a free man,"[19] Brutal, an aptly named black slave belonging to the colony (*un nègre du Roi*),[20] was called to tie up La Chaume, apparently with the task of physically punishing him even further. That a law intended to control slaves was being applied to him, a *forçat*, via an enslaved African man contained a message not lost on La Chaume. On seeing Brutal arrive, La Chaume cursed all those present, grabbed a knife, and stabbed himself twice in the left breast. Despite heavy bleeding, he quickly recovered from what proved to be mere flesh wounds. La Chaume insisted that he had stabbed himself "to get himself out of slavery" with the hopes of being sent to New Orleans where he would be "treated more humanely". D'Orgon thought otherwise and proceeded to treat La Chaume's action as an attempt of suicide.[21]

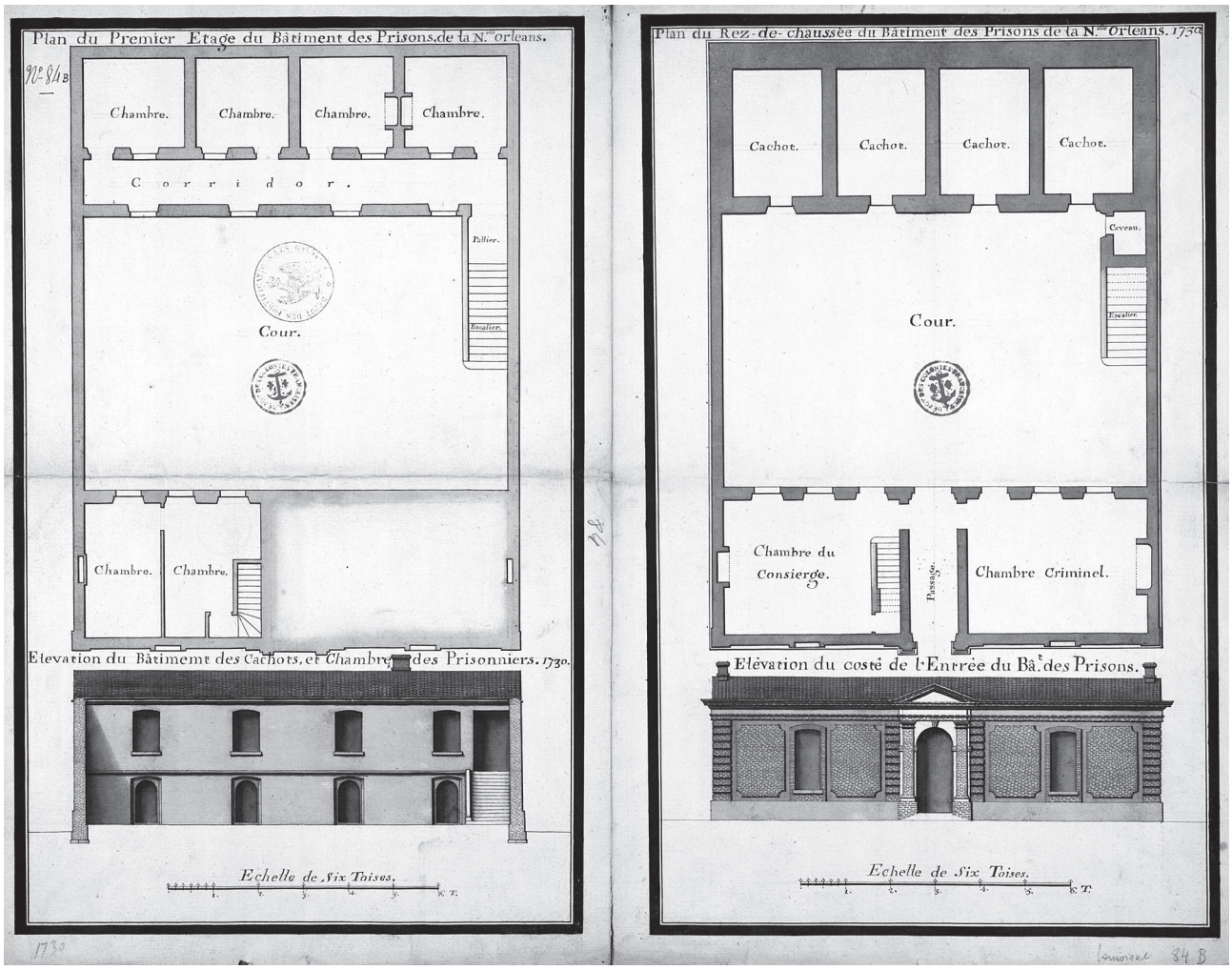
D'Orgon's interpretation of La Chaume's act as attempted suicide, a criminal offense at the time, meant that these matters entered the purview of the criminal justice system as it then existed in French colonial Louisiana. This precipitated La Chaume's transfer to New Orleans, his interrogation by the Superior Council, and the construction of the documents from which we learn about his life. Despite



4 Map of New Orleans, 1744. Shows the location of the prison where La Chaume was held and questioned at letter D. Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans. *(Historic New Orleans Collection, with kind permission).*

this, La Chaume, at multiple points throughout his testimony, insisted that he had *not* attempted suicide. Under questioning he played down the severity of the wounds, even revealing them to the court and noting they were "merely through the skin". He twice remarked "that he was rather drunk when this happened and that he was under the influence of anger," possibly hopeful the court might question his mental state during the act, a reason for acquittal. He could not deny having stabbed himself as there had been a number of witnesses. Rather he explained at three different times during the questioning that he had done so hoping it would lead to his relocation to New Orleans (which it did) and to more humane treatment once away from d'Orgon (the success of which we do not know). La Chaume clearly wanted the court to realize his level of desperation. The violent abuse had reached such a point that he would physically harm himself, and even contrive a suicide attempt, to escape his situation.

Whether La Chaume's case was of an actual or contrived suicide attempt (or something else entirely),[22] the French state took suicide seriously. In eighteenth-century France the punishment for attempted suicide was death and, according to one historian, "the punishment for successful suicide was, if possible, even worse." As a crime more serious than murder it required even more gruesome deterrents. The Ordinance of 1670 allowed for criminal proceedings to be held against the body or memory of one who had committed suicide. After a posthumous trial and confiscation of property, the body of a convicted suicide was dragged face down through the street, hanged by the feet, and disposed of in the trash. Despite royal declarations reiterating this punishment in 1712 and 1736, the French populace seems to have shifted their own judgments about suicide from a sinful criminal act to a choice made by men (and they usually were men) "out of despair of some sort", who had suffered illness or

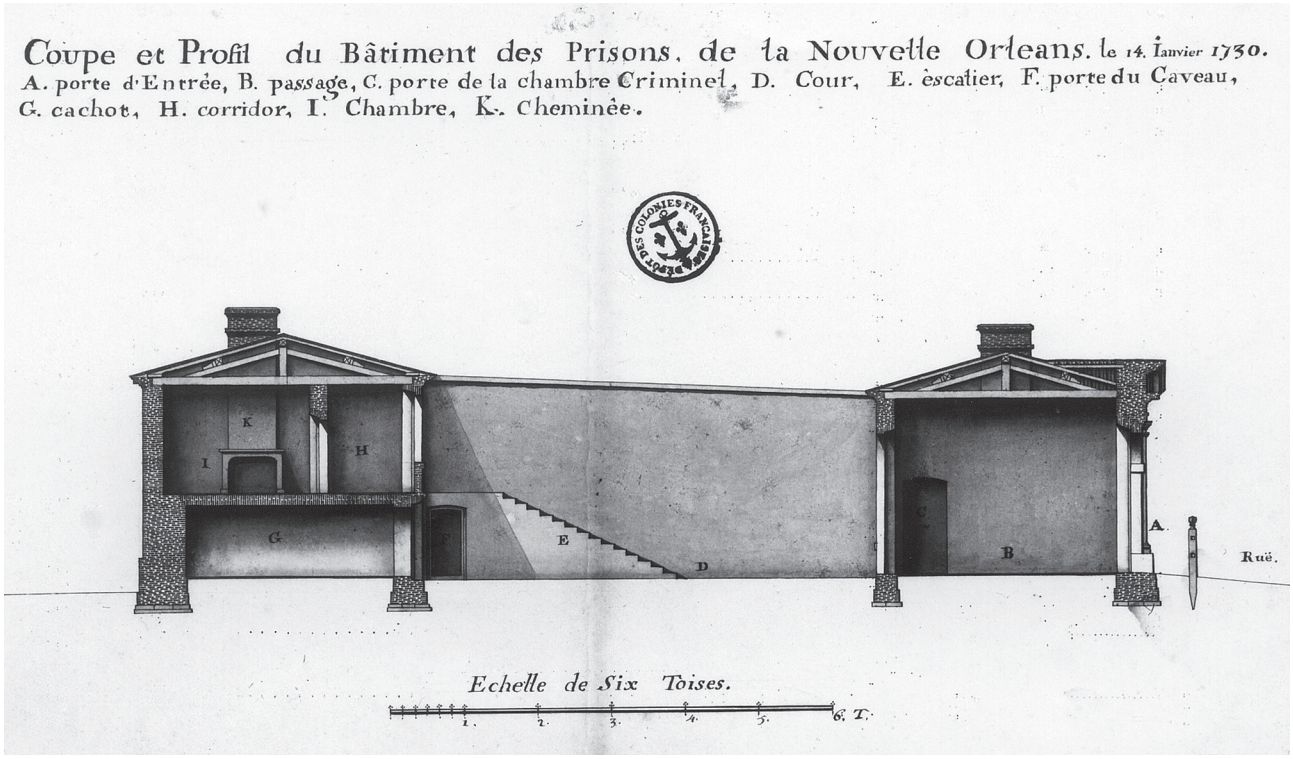


5 Prison Buildings, New Orleans, 1730. The prison where La Chaume was held and questioned.
Plans for a New Orleans prison and front and rear elevations and floorplan for the New Orleans prison
(Colonial Records Collection, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, with kind permission).

personal reversals and were more deserving of pity than punishment.[23]

Because no scholarly literature considers suicide in the French colonies, it is difficult to contextualize either the accusations levied against La Chaume or how La Chaume may have considered the complex meanings attached to suicide as he calculated his "escape from slavery". But like other actions deemed criminal in the American colonies, suicide can be linked to constructions of race and the racialization of individuals.[24] The peculiar realities of colonial Louisiana complicate our speculations. Because of the difficulty of populating and securing the colony, Louisiana officials may have acted on suicide in a way that differed from French law. French colonial administrators exercised autonomous ad hoc authority virtually writing their own criminal code to serve elite colonial interests over French imperial ones.[25] Though Louisiana administrators remained occupied with keeping their colonists alive, since soldiers' lives held so little value, and since La Chaume was already a proven troublemaker, he could easily have been made an exemplary case to forestall others hoping to escape their misery by their own hand. How La Chaume fared in his own case of attempted suicide remains unknown. He could have been held to the letter of the French law, or he could have benefited (or suffered) from the Superior Council's interests.[26]

The creation of the three documents mentioning La Chaume resulted from d'Orgon's interpretation of La Chaume attempting suicide. The first document,



6 Prison Buildings, New Orleans, 1730. Cross-section
(Colonial Records Collection, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, with kind permission).

a report describing the incidents at Natchez (*procès verbal*), was drawn up on June 18, 1743, seemingly the day the events occurred. Eleven men, including the cook, d'Orgon, and two corporals who could only leave their mark, signed the document. They requested that the governor and *commissaire-ordonnateur*, the colony's co-leaders to whom the report was addressed, "order what is just". Justice involved sending La Chaume from Natchez to New Orleans. Once in the capital, the *procureur general* created the second document related to La Chaume, dated July 6, 1743. His petition to the Superior Council (the colony's semi-autonomous judicial and legislative body) recounted some of the above events and asked that "Jan Baptiste Chevalier La Chaume boheme", accused of attempting to commit suicide, be questioned on the facts of the *procès verbal* following examination by the surgeon. On that same afternoon, a counselor of the Superior Council began the interrogation, recorded in the third document, by asking La Chaume his name, age, professed faith and residence. He answered, "Jean Baptiste Chevalier, aged twenty-nine, of the Roman Catholic and apostolic religion, of the Bohemian people (*de nation Boheme*)".[27] Nine more questions followed.

When asked why he was in jail in New Orleans when he should be in Natchez, La Chaume insolently replied that "he was sent there by d'Orgon." When asked to elaborate, La Chaume spilled out a string of accusations against d'Orgon's "cruel" treatment and temperament. He described moving constantly between house and field "having no rest either during the day or at night." After coming in from the field he would set the table and serve d'Orgon's dinner then return to planting tobacco only to come back indoors and "prepare Mr. d'Orgon's room and bed." In between, d'Orgon "incessantly beat him and [did] not allow him the time to cook for himself," although La Chaume's term of service included compensation in food. La Chaume claimed he "worked as a mercenary for him in the field," and he expected the recompense he was due.[28] In addition, though "always having served Mr. d'Orgon as well as he could, Mr. d'Orgon would accuse him when something got lost of having taken it." The court following up on this point, asking whether he

had robbed anyone at Natchez, to which La Chaume tersely remarked "no".
Before being dismissed the court questioned La Chaume about others who could testify. Though the court asked whether he referred as witnesses those who had seen what had happened at Natchez (presumably those who signed the original report), he overrode their suggestion with his own. He instead suggested that the detachment who had brought him to New Orleans should serve as witnesses. He evidently doubted the stories d'Orgon, the cook, and certain others might tell the court, while he trusted that these soldiers might corroborate his claims. They could "explain how he behaved and whether he ever did wrong to anyone while he was at the Natchez." His questioning ended with this plea. Unfortunately for La Chaume, he was not on trial for his behavior towards others, but rather his behavior towards himself.
In between these introductory and concluding enquiries, the court asked him five other questions focused on three themes: his desertion, his fight with the cook, and discerning if he had attempted suicide. On these three themes La Chaume narrates extensively. In his testimony, which will be unpacked further below, it is clear that La Chaume hoped to make three main points: he had not attempted suicide, d'Orgon was a violently abusive commander and master, and using a slave to punish him was an egregiously offensive act. In examining how he addressed these questions and placing his responses in the context of colonial circumstances, images of La Chaume's interior life surface. In the violent, unsettled and reprobate colony his concerns with escape, justice and honor express a noticeable logic.

The Interior Life of La Chaume

La Chaume's overlapping concerns with escape, justice and honor emerge from his testimony. This is especially evident when his words are considered alongside of the violently enforced racialized statuses of French colonial Louisiana. During his several expressions of a basic desire to escape his circumstances, La Chaume exposes a finely tuned perception of status, honor, and justice at odds with the colonial realities surrounding him.

La Chaume expressed a noticeable disregard for the injustice of being forced into convict labor while reflecting on how he had merely planned, but never executed, his first escape attempt via desertion. In addition to his resulting decline in status, from a soldier to a *forçat*, he was violently punished for merely considering flight. D'Orgon "who did not want to sanction his soldiers, went after his body and had him cruelly chastised for this plan" even though it "had not been realized." This status decline gave d'Orgon a power over his person different from other soldiers – a power which La Chaume appears to have recognized as legitimate. At one point in the interrogation, La Chaume suggested that though d'Orgon was overly tyrannical, had d'Orgon himself administered the corporal punishment, instead of calling Brutal to dispense it for him, La Chaume never would have stabbed himself. "To be ordered by a negro rather than him," as La Chaume put it, was an outrageous affront to his honor. A man of d'Orgon's standing should have known better than to flout this racialized status line.
La Chaume's second escape attempt, via stabbing himself, seems to have had several precipitating factors. D'Orgon "cruelly treated" him to an extent that was unbecoming to the commandant's position. His litany of grievances against his master reveal La Chaume's hopelessness: "Witnessing his bad temper every day, exposed to his anger […] not giving him one day of respite, even for Easter. […] making him work from morning to night without allowing him a moment of rest." The tenor of these complaints also explains La Chaume's original explanation for his act as an attempt "to get himself out from slavery". Witnessing enslaved laborers all around him, La Chaume would have recognized his experiences for what they were, even if his legal status implied his distinctiveness from the enslaved. And, had he actually intended to take his own life (despite his protestations to the contrary), he may have considered an escape from slavery in this way to be an honorable act. Some eighteenth-century Europeans, like some enslaved West Africans in the Americas, believed voluntary death could be an honorable choice under certain circumstances, despite religious and secular attempts to attach dishonor to suicide. Witnesses had claimed that immediately after stabbing himself La Chaume had not only remarked of his intention

to escape slavery, but "that he had only done what honorable men had done before him." When questioned directly on the point, however, La Chaume could not remember making this claim.[29]

Then there was the cook, who had both verbally and physically abused him and had also acted outside his station. La Chaume found this man's actions especially offensive. He "could not suffer" the cook's mistreatment "whereupon he took revenge […] seeing that he was abused in this way by a man who had no authority over him." The thin line separating the "freedom" of a cook in the military from the "slavery" of a *forçat* like himself made the cook's transgression of that line all the more distasteful. To heap on further humiliation, d'Orgon recognized his heightened sensitivity to these small status divisions and used La Chaume's own sense of justice to humiliate him even further. By claiming him to be a "slave" who lacked the right to hit a "free man" as justification for further punishment, d'Orgon attacked La Chaume's ego as much as his body.

What are we to make of the irregular usage of the terms "slave", "*forçat*", and "mercenary" to refer to La Chaume in these documents? When not referring to La Chaume by name as was most common, (he is referred to as "La Chaume" on eight occasions and by his full name once) the authors of the court documents only ever call him "a *forçat*". However, on two of the three occasions when La Chaume expresses his own status he does so as one in slavery ("*esclavage*"); in the third instance he calls himself a mercenary ("*mercenaire*") "working in the field" for d'Orgon. This inconsistency can be explained by the fact that while La Chaume occupied the particular legal category of *forçat* he experienced this status as that of enslavement, even as he was guaranteed minimal compensation for his service, in the form of food, as befit a mercenary. One particular circumstance when La Chaume's status is considered in the documents explains how both La Chaume's and official vocabulary could be accurate and more clearly illustrates the precarious ambiguity of La Chaume's actual position. When justifying why he called Brutal to the scene, d'Orgon explains the appropriateness of punishing "the *forçat*" in this way because no "slave" was allowed to hit "a free man". It appears from this seemingly contradictory statement that d'Orgon was applying section twenty-eight of Louisiana's slave code, the *Code Noir*, to La Chaume. It states: "And as to the excesses and acts of violence which slaves commit against free persons, we wish that they be severely punished, even by death if it is necessary."[30]

No known Louisiana law code dealt specifically with *forçats* the way the *Code Noir* did for the enslaved. Imported in revised form from *Saint Domingue* in 1724, this comprehensive piece of legislation governed all aspects of the enslaved's lives and dictated the relationship between slaves and everyone else in the colony. *Forçats*, on the other hand, existed in a gray area that exposed them to the summary treatment of their masters. It appears that some overseers, like d'Orgon, found it appropriate to apply the *Code Noir* to *forçats*. Although legally the two statuses remained distinct, in practice the individual experience of each status differed only minimally. For both groups, virtually unregulated labor and harsh discipline characterized their condition, hence La Chaume's insistence on his experience of enslavement.[31]

The uncertain application of these two status terms exemplify elite attempts to simultaneously level and divide "the most dangerous elements of the lower orders – enslaved Africans and Frenchmen serving in the colony under their own degree of servitude (*forçat*, *engagé*, soldier)". And local elites like d'Orgon might opportunistically mobilize race in ways that benefitted themselves regardless of the laws of empire. One way this had been accomplished was through a "black-on-white penal strategy", the last known instance of which La Chaume had escaped. Yet by the 1740's there was also a "movement toward a greater articulation of racial categories", which La Chaume seems to have internalized.[32] La Chaume's frustrations illustrate one man's experience of living through these intersecting trends.

The immediate cause of La Chaume's self-harm was the threat of punishment by Brutal, an African slave. To two separate questions, one about his suicide and another about the fight, he narrated the events with the palpable sense of an honorable man being treated disgracefully. He first related how, "when he heard d'Orgon wanted to have him tied by a negro this is what led him to despair as he had not deserved nor should he be mistreated by a negro". He later again explained how when d'Orgon "called a

negro named Brutal in order to have him tied, which compelled him with anger to see himself tied by a negro", he acted to "free himself of Mr. d'Orgon". Clearly who administered his punishment mattered. The inhumanity La Chaume complained about from d'Orgon stemmed not just from his violence, but from using a black slave to administer it.

What exactly awaited La Chaume had Brutal managed to perform his task? It is possible that Brutal, as his name implied, was a colonial enforcer, brought in to dole out extreme forms of violence with such a reputation that even his entering the room might precipitate self-harm. La Chaume may have known exactly the fate that awaited him had he surrendered himself to Brutal. The colonial Louisiana government had deployed this racialized status-crossing punishment many times before. But from the way La Chaume explained his position, his grievance was clearly about more than just facing further physical punishment. That a Roman Catholic, Bohemian, former soldier in the French Louisiana militia could be disciplined by an African slave was an act of such injustice that escaping by any means necessary immediately rushed to the forefront of La Chaume's mind when confronted with that reality.[33]

This race and status crossing even further evidenced d'Orgon's extreme degradation to La Chaume. Calling for Brutal to punish him was merely the last in a long list of dishonorable actions those of higher status had subjected him to. Too many men had betrayed their virtue which justified their privilege in La Chaume's mind. Well before the incidents involving the cook and Brutal he had attempted supplications to others in positions to help. He had previously taken his complaints about d'Orgon's violence to two local gentlemen who had advised him to be patient, certain that his miserable treatment would not last. Now La Chaume was once again hoping to find principled men, this time in New Orleans, who might help him escape the many injustices he had faced while at Natchez.

La Chaume knew he might be near, but he should never be at the bottom of the colonial social hierarchy. Although he felt like he was "in slavery", even as a *forçat* he knew himself to be a "free man" and not a "black slave". This distinction mattered to him. And, it may have mattered to him even more because of the downward trajectory of his social condition. He moved from a soldier to one punished for desertion and given to work for another man – a man whom he recognized as having certain (although not complete) rights over his body. He also knew that his current condition did not give all men the right to treat him as they willed. This is seen in his ferocious responses to both the cook and to Brutal. These two men might be separated from him in the colonial hierarchy, but it was only by a matter of degrees. He had to be sure to defend his social position and he did this by demanding particular types of treatment by particular people. D'Orgon might have had the right to tie him, but a black slave did not. D'Orgon had the right to control his labor, but the cook did not. La Chaume even conceded that D'Orgon might have had the right to physical power over his body (if only to a certain degree) but so too did La Chaume control his own physical body as a man of honor.

In addition to La Chaume, many other Louisiana Bohemians have left evidence of their presence in French, Spanish, and American archives. La Chaume is not the only Bohemian to have served in the Louisiana colonial military. He is not the only Louisiana Bohemian to have struggled with the region's racialized social order. And, he is certainly not the only Bohemian who suffered violence and dislocation due to French imperial policies in the colonies. These men and women await scholars compelled to narrate Bohemian experiences of this distinctive time and place. Only then can we begin to construct a fuller story of the imperial state, the diasporic Atlantic, and the racialized colonial world. A more expansive archival interrogation stands to enhance our understanding of Early Modern Gypsy experiences and provide all Romani Studies scholars a more complete base from which to build. Future historians of Early Modern Europe and the colonial Americas will do well to continue with this work.

Annotations

1 See the eight articles in the special thematic issue: 'Gypsies' in Early Modern Europe, in Frühneuzeit-Info 30 (2019), pp. 5–116. I use the word "Gypsy" as an umbrella term to describe diverse European people historically referred to as *cigano/a*, *gitano/a*, *tsingani*, *bohémien*, Egyptian, (and variants thereof) among others.

2 For scholarship on Gypsies in the American colonies, see Adolfo Coelho: Os Ciganos de Portugal. Com um estudo sobre o calão, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional 1892; Bill Donovan: Changing Perceptions of Social Deviance. Gypsies in Early Modern Portugal and Brazil, in: Journal of Social History 26, 1 (1992), pp. 33–53; Elisa Maria Lopes da Costa: Contributos Ciganos para o povoamento do Brasil (séculos XVI–XIX), in: Arquipélago: História 9 (2005), pp. 153–182; Martin Fotta: The Figure of the Gypsy (*Cigano*) as a Signpost for Crises of the Social Hierarchy (Bahia, 1590s–1900s), in: International Review of Social History (2019), pp. 1–27, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859019000713 (accessed January 15, 2020); Antonio Gómez Alfaro. La Polémica sobre la deportación de los Gitanos a las colonias de América, in: Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos 386 (1982), pp. 308–336; Antonio Gómez Alfaro/ Elisa Maria Lopes da Costa/Sharon Sillers Floate: Deportaciones de Gitanos, Madrid: Centre de recherches tsiganes 1999; Manuel Martínez Martínez: Los gitanos y la prohibición de pasar a las Indias españolas, in: Revista de la CECEL. Expediciones y pasajeros a Indias 10 (2010), pp. 71–90; Ann Ostendorf: 'An Egiptian and noe Xtian Woman'. Gypsy Identity and Race Law in Early America, in: Journal of Gypsy Studies 1 (2017), pp. 5–15; Ann Ostendorf: Contextualizing American Gypsies. Experiencing Criminality in the Colonial Chesapeake, in: Maryland Historical Magazine 113, 2 (2018), pp. 192–222.

3 Lara Putnam: To Study the Fragments/Whole. Microhistory and the Atlantic World, in: Journal of Social History 39, 3 (2006), pp. 615–630. For a similar example, but from a more contemporary transnational perspective, see Adéle Sutre: 'They Give a History of Wandering Over the World.' A Romani Clan's Transnational Movement in the Early 20th Century, in: Quaderni Storici 49, 2 (2014), pp. 471–498.

4 United States, New Orleans, Louisiana Historical Center (LHC), Louisiana Colonial Judicial Records of the French Superior Council (1714–1769) (FSC), "Report" (or, *procès verbal*), June 18, 1743 and "Petition", and "Interrogation", July 6, 1743. These three documents are digitized here: http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/5740, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/5757, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/5758. I'd like to thank Marina Drake for her assistance translating these documents. "Bohemian" (and variations of it) is the French word used for "Gypsy" in this era and will be employed throughout this article. "Boheme" is the word La Chaume used to refer to himself, as well as the word used by the colony's *procureur general* to refer to La Chaume. For a list of these variations, see François de Vaux de Foletier: Gypsy Captains in Provence and the Rhone Valley in the 16th and 17th Centuries, in: Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society 41 (1962), pp. 3–10, here p. 4. I will call Jean Baptiste Chevalier by his nickname "La Chaume", (meaning straw, thatch, stubble, or whiskers), which was likely a reference to his facial hair.

5 There are currently no known primary sources presenting the Gypsy voice from the English North American colonies. For a *Gitana* voice from the Spanish American colonies, see Mariana Sabino-Salazar: El proceso inquisitorial a Maria de la Concepción de nación Gitana 1668–1680, in: Neyra Patricia Alvarado Solís (ed.): Nombrar y circular, "gitanos" entre Europa y las Américas. Innovación, creatividad y resistencia, Colegio de San Luis (forthcoming).

6 Sophie White: Voices of the Enslaved. Love, Labor and Longing in French Louisiana, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2019, ebook, introduction, (first quotation at note 20, second quotation at note 6); Cécile Vidal: Private and State Violence Against African Slaves in Lower Louisiana During the French Period, 1699–1769, in: John Smolenski/ Thomas J. Humphrey (eds.): New World Orders. Violence, Sanctions, and Authority in the Colonial Americas, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2005, pp. 92–110, here p. 94; Cécile Vidal: Caribbean New Orleans. Empire, Race and the Making of a Slave Society, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2019, pp. 38–41.

7 LHC, FSC (note 4), "Interrogation", July 6, 1743; United States, Houston, Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research, Archives d'Outre Mer, Colonies (AC), Passenger Lists from France to the Colonies, 1716–1830, F5B 44, Dunkerque, "Le Tilleul", May 20–21, 1720. For a transcription, see Albert J. Robichaux: German Coast Families. European Origins and Settlement in Colonial Louisiana, Rayne: Hebert Publications 1997, pp. 432–435. The heading clearly states the words "*femmes*" and "*Bohemiennes*", but the word in between is somewhat obscured. It may also read "Women who have become Bohemians."

8 Shannon Lee Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire. French Colonial New Orleans, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press 2008, pp. 164–166.

9 Unless otherwise noted all references to La Chaume's life come from the three court records cited in note 4.

10 Vidal: Private and State Violence (note 6), p. 96; Vidal: Caribbean New Orleans (note 6), pp. 312–313; Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 199–200.

11 François de Vaux de Foletier: La Déclaration de 1682 Contre les Bohémiens son Application en Languedoc, in: Études Tsiganes 1 (1957), pp. 2–10; François de Vaux de Foletier: La Vie Quotidienne d'un Groupe Bohémien en Forez au Début de XVIII[e] Siécle, in: Études Tsiganes 1 (1960), pp. 22–26; François de Vaux de Foletier: Les Tsiganes dans l'ancienne France, Paris: Connaissance du Monde 1961, pp. 151, 176, 179; François de Vaux de Foletier: La Grande Rafle des Bohémiens du Pays Basque Sous Le Consulat, in: Études de Tsiganes 1 (1968), pp. 13–22, here p. 15; François de Vaux de Foletier: Le Monde des Tsiganes, Paris: Berger-Levrault 1983, p. 22; Henriette Asséo: Marginalité et exclusion. Le traitement administratif des Bohémiens, in: Robert Mandrou (ed.): Problémes socio-culturels en France au XVII[e] siècle, Paris: Éditions Klincksieck 1974, pp. 9–87; Henriette Asséo: Visibilité et identité flottante. Les 'Bohémiens' ou 'Egyptiens' (Tsiganes) dans la France de l'Ancien Régime, in: Historein 2 (2000), pp. 109–122; Henriette Asséo: 'Bohesmiens du Royaume.' L'insediamento dinastico dei 'Capitaines Égyptiens' nella Francia di Antico Regime (1550–1660), in: Quaderni Storici 146 (2014), pp. 439–470; Jules Admant: L'existence régionale de la 'nation bohémienne'. Les Bohémiens lorrains à la fin de l'Ancien Régime (XVII[e]–XVIII[e] siècles), Droit: Université de Bourgogne 2015, pp. 499–514; Jules Admant: Les Bohémiens et leurs juges en Lorraine au XVIII[e] siècle, in: Revue Transversales du Centre Georges Chevrier 8 (2016), http://tristan.u-bourgogne.fr/CGC/publications/Transversales/Entre_confrontation_reconnaissance_rejet/J_Admant.html (accessed January 15, 2020). Specific page numbers in this note refer to mentions of Bohemians in the Americas.

12 Danial H. Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy. The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1992, pp. 32–43; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall: Africans in Colonial Louisiana. The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1992, pp. 5–8, 60; Thomas N. Ingersoll: Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans. The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718–1819, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press 1999, pp. 3–33; Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 4–12, 150–153, 208–217; Vidal: Caribbean New Orleans (note 6), 13–19. For Bohemian arrivals see, AC (note 7), "Le Tilleul", May 20–21, 1720. For a detailed study of Louisiana's founding see, Marcel Giraud: Histoire de la Louisiane française, 5 vols., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1953–1974.

13 Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves (note 12), pp. 48, 65–76, 81–85, 225; Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), p. 79. For a list of those killed at Natchez, including those labeled as Bohemians, see: AC (note 7), C13A, Correspondence from Louisiana and France 1678–1819, 12:57–58, List of Persons Massacred at Natchez, November 28, 1729. This list is published as "Letter from Father Philibert", in: Dunbar Rowland/A. G. Sanders (eds.): Mississippi Provincial Archives, Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History 1932, vol. 1, pp. 124–125. Rowland and Sanders translate this as "La Vieille, Bohemian Knight", and note that "There appears to be come mistake here ... If not a proper name, La Vieille means 'the old woman.'" I believe the entry was intended to express "The old Woman Chevalier, Bohemian", since this individual was tallied as a woman on the original chart that denoted the victims by gender. Her relation to La Chaume, if any, is not known. For Evrard's arrival, see: AC (note 7), G1 464, St. Louis Passenger List, 1722. For more on Natchez, see: George Edward Milne: Natchez Country. Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana, Athens: University of Georgia Press 2015; Sophie White: Massacre, Mardi Gras, and Torture in Early New Orleans, in: The William and Mary Quarterly 70, 3 (2013): pp. 497–538.

14 Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 12, 212. This statistic is exclusive of the missing court martial records.

15 Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves (note 12), pp. 222–226, 236 (first quotation p. 225, second quotation p. 222, third quotation p. 226); Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), p. 143; Sophie White: Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians. Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2012, pp. 211, 225–226; Hall: Africans in Colonial Louisiana (note 12), p. 21 (fourth quotation).

16 Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves (note 12), pp. 224 (first quotation), 227 (second quotation); Hall: Africans in Colonial Louisiana (note 12), p. 20 (third quotation); Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 57, 206.

17 Hall: Africans in Colonial Louisiana (note 12), 20–24, 146–147, (quotation p. 20); Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 206, 209–210, 296n29; Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves (note 12), 222–223, 227, 239–243; Heloise H. Cruzat (trans.): Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana, in: Louisiana Historical Quarterly 14 (1931): 263–267; AC (note 7), F5B 44, "Le Tilleul", May 20–21, 1720. La Fontaine (#300 on *Le*

Tilleul roles) begins a list of nine men referred to as Bohemian, or related to others referred to as Bohemian, in Louisiana records. Several other Louisiana military drummers were members of families referred to as Bohemian in colonial records. La Chaume's term of labor is not known, but many *forçats* in Louisiana were serving life terms.

18 The details and quotations used throughout this section come from LHC FSC (note 4), "Report" and "Interrogation".

19 This seems to be in reference to the Louisiana *Code Noir* and will be discussed more below.

20 Noting that Brutal was "*un nègre du Roi*" is significant because Native Americans were held as slaves and blacks could be free. That Brutal belonged to the King means he worked for the colonial state rather than an individual colonist. This black on white punishment will be considered further below.

21 In addition to controlling the labor of soldiers and *forçats*, d'Orgon, a Parisian native, owned at least one Indian slave. For his nativity see, United States, New Orleans, Tulane University Digital Library, Marriage Certificate, April 26, 1753, https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane:12421. For his slave ownership see, LHC, FSC (note 4), August 17, 1745, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/6734 and August 18, 1745, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/6736 (accessed January 15, 2020). For his military service see, Carl A. Brasseaux: France's Forgotten Legion. Service Records of French Military and Administrative Personnel Stationed in the Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast Region, 1699–1769, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2000.

22 Another possibility is that d'Orgon and the other officers made the most of La Chaume stabbing himself and named his action "attempted suicide" as a way to have him legally executed.

23 Jeffrey Merrick: Patterns and Prosecutions of Suicide in Eighteenth-Century Paris, in: Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques 16, 1 (1989), pp. 1–53, here pp. 3, 4 (first quotation), 7, 14 (second quotation); Julius R. Ruff: Crime Justice and Public Order in Old Regime France. The Sénéchaussées of Liboume and Bazas, 1696–1789, London/New York: Routledge 2016 (reprint); London: Croom Helm 1984, p. 70; Lisa Lieberman: Romanticism and the Culture of Suicide in Nineteenth-Century France, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 33, 3 (1991), pp. 611–629, here p. 617; Jeffrey R. Watt (ed.): From Sin to Insanity. Suicide in Early Modern Europe, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2004, p. 7; Richard Bell: We Shall be No More. Suicide and Self Government in the Newly United States, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press 2012. Nine years after La Chaume's case the Louisiana Superior Council followed the necessary protocol required by the Ordinance of 1670 against a soldier who had successfully committed suicide, but whose body has been secreted away. The court negated the *procureur general's* original recommendation, deciding he had not been of sound mind, and rehabilitated his good name. LHC, FSC (note 4), April 21, 1752, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/8440, May 6, 1752, http://lacolonialdocs.org/document/8449, (accessed January 15, 2020).

24 Marc A. Hetzman: Fatal Differences. Suicide, Race, and Forced Labor in the Americas, in: The American Historical Review 122, 2 (2017), pp. 317–345, here pp. 318–321. There is a small literature on suicide among the enslaved in the Americas. See, Terri L. Snyder: The Power to Die. Slavery and Suicide in British North America, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2015.

25 Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 196–197, 204.

26 That no records survive related to the outcome of La Chaume's case is not surprising. French Louisiana criminal case records have been poorly preserved with only remnants remaining of those brought before the Superior Council. Ibid., pp. 207–208, 300n58, 300n62.

27 For a description of how the colonial government and justice systems worked, see Hans W. Baade: Marriage Contracts in French and Spanish Louisiana. A Study in Notarial Jurisprudence, in: Tulane Law Review 53 (1978), pp. 3–92, here pp. 7–13; Derek N. Kerr: Petty Felony, Slave Defiance, and Frontier Villainy. Crime and Criminal Justice in Spanish Louisiana, 1770–1803, New York: Garland Publishing 1993; Jerry Micelle: From Law Court to Local Government. Metamorphosis of the Superior Council of French Louisiana, in: Glenn R. Conrad (ed.): The French Experience in Louisiana, Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies 1995, pp. 408–424; Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), pp. 189–208; White: Voices of the Enslaved (note 6), Chapter 1. The word "nation" underwent significant change in the eighteenth century but did not carry the same connotations in 1740 that it does today. It might better be defined as "people of a region" or "people with shared character". Frederic W. Langley/Brian J. Levy (comps.): Old French-English Dictionary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, s.v. "nacion"; Pierre Richelet: Dictionnaire françois, Genève: 1679, s.v. "nation" https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k509323/f647.image (accessed January 15, 2020); Denis Diderot/Jean le Rond d'Alembert (comp.): Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc. Robert Morrissey/Glenn Roe

(eds.): University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project 2016, s.v. "nation", http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/ (accessed January 15, 2020); R. Anthony Lodge: French. From Dialect to Standard, New York: Routledge 1993, pp. 209, 213; R. D. Grillo: Dominant Languages. Languages and Hierarchy in Britain and France, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, pp. 22–23; Colette Beaune: La notion de nation en France au moyen âge, in: Communications 45 (1987), pp. 101–116, here p. 101.

28 At this time the word "mercenary" meant a person paid to serve or work and did not necessary carry any military connotations as it does today. Richelet: Dictionnaire françois (note 26), s.v. "mercenaire"; Diderot: Encyclopédie (note 26), s.v. "mercenaire".

29 For associations of honor/dishonor with suicide, see Evelyne Luef/Riika Miettinen: Fear and Loathing. Suicide and the Treatment of the Corpse in Early Modern Austria and Sweden, in: Frühneuzeit-Info 23 (2013), pp. 105–119, here p. 112; David Lederer: The Dishonorable Dead. Elite and Popular Perceptions of Suicide in Early Modern Germany, in: Sibylle Backmann, et. al. (eds.): Ehrkonzepte in Der Frühen Neuzeit: Identitäten Und Abgrenzungen, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1989, pp. 349–365; Michael MacDonald/Terence R. Murphy: Sleepless Souls. Suicide in Early Modern England, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, pp. 97–98, 183–186, 276, 283; Georges Minois: History of Suicide. Voluntary Death in Western Culture, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999, pp. 9, 38–42, 64–65, 79–80, 103–108, 188, 326; Vincent Brown: The Reaper's Garden. Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008, p. 132; Terri Snyder: Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America, in: The Journal of American History 97, 1 (2010), pp. 43–59, here p. 43.

30 Vernon Palmer: Though the Codes Darkly. Slave Law and Civil Law in Louisiana, Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, 2012, p. 179. For more on the *Code Noir* see White: Voices of the Enslaved (note 6), Chapter 1. La Chaume almost certainly would have been aware of this code and witnessed its application. In the year before his own trial, a runaway slave being housed at the Natchez fort violently attacked a soldier there. The slave was tried and found guilty under this section of the *Code Noir*, although his death sentence was commuted to maiming and flogging. LHC, FSC (note 4), January 9, 13, 16 and 20, 1742; Usner: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves (note 12), p. 238; Hall: Africans in Colonial Louisiana (note 12), p. 149; Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), p. 201.

31 While slavery was by definition a life status, some Louisiana slaves did gain their freedom; *forçats'* terms varied, though some served for life. Both groups' labor terms could be bought, sold, and rented, although enslavement implied an embodied chattel status, while criminal servitude was the result of a criminalized action. The biggest difference between the two came with the inherited status of slavery; criminal servitude merely affected an individual as a result of that individual's action, it was not transmitted to progeny. Finally, the French reserved the official status of slavery only for those with a known African or Native American ancestor. Dawdy: Building the Devil's Empire (note 8), p. 296 n. 29.

32 Ibid., pp. 200–201.

33 In 1725 Louisiana officials freed the African slave Louis Congo to serve as the colonial executioner. Until at least the late 1730s he served in this role administering torture and diverse death sentences to convicted Europeans, Indians and Africans. Shannon Lee Dawdy: The Burden of Louis Congo and the Evolution of Savagery in Colonial Louisiana, in: Steven Pierce/Anapama Rao (eds.): Discipline and the Other Body. Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism, Durham: University of North Carolina Press 2006, pp. 67–89.

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