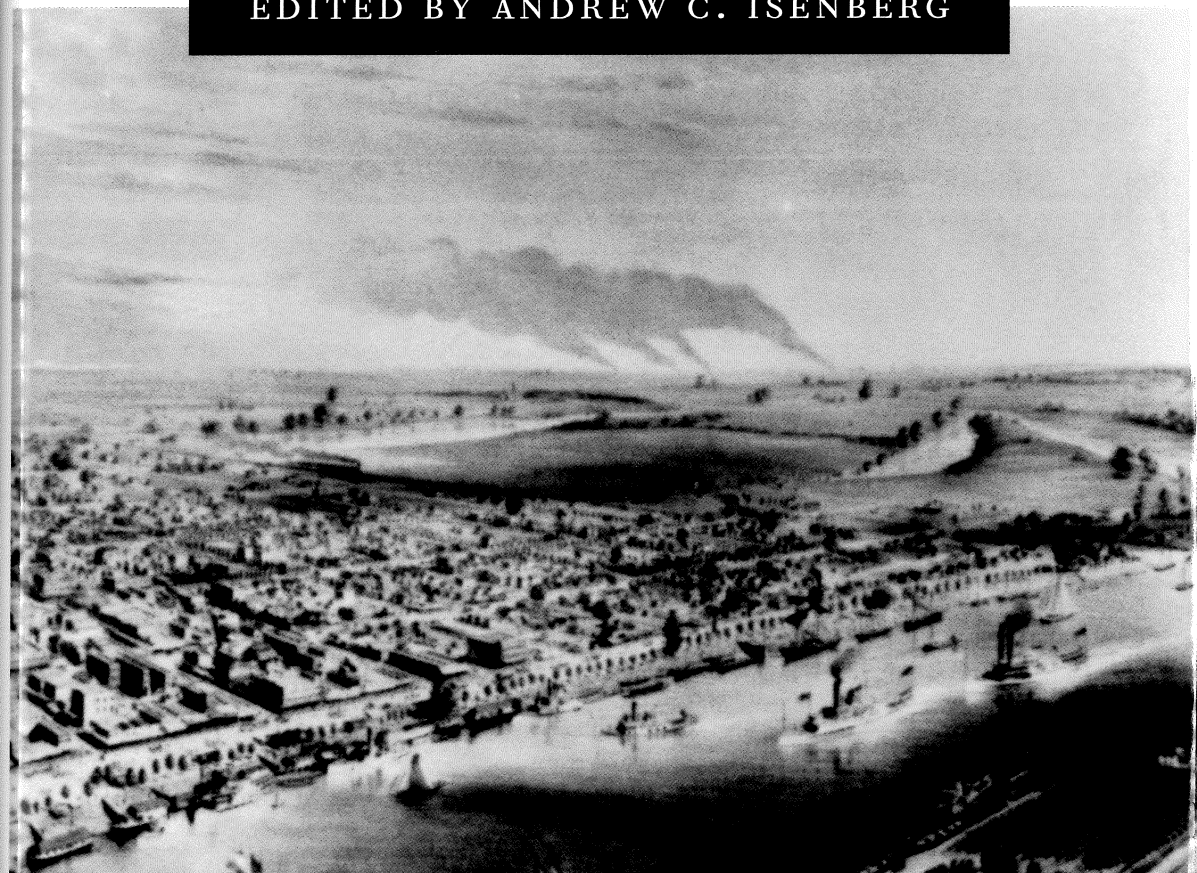


THE NATURE OF CITIES

Culture, Landscape, and Urban Space

EDITED BY ANDREW C. ISENBERG



I

NEW ORLEANS'S PHANTOM
SLAVE INSURRECTION OF 1853

RACIAL ANXIETY, URBAN ECOLOGY, AND
HUMAN BODIES AS PUBLIC SPACES

ARI KELMAN

THE REBELLION

As the cathedral bell on Jackson Square rang out 11 P.M. on 13 June 1853, George Wright, a disheveled *homme libre de couleur* (free man of color) stumbled through the door of New Orleans's police station and demanded to see someone about a matter of great consequence. Wright then related an elaborate plan for a slave insurrection that would begin just hours later, sometime before dawn. The incredulous lieutenant who received the report barely paid attention to the details. Still, because a slave rebellion, no matter how improbable, was serious business, the lieutenant reluctantly summoned the chief of police, Stephen O'Leary. The skeptical chief later recalled that he, too, had listened impatiently at first. Only after Wright offered to bring the police to one of the insurrection's ringleaders did O'Leary seriously consider that the alarming tale could possibly be true, or at least worth investigating.¹

Wright then led the way through New Orleans's streets to the rebellion's headquarters. Police officers later recounted that the man Wright met was "loaded with weapons—a moving arsenal. He had a knife, a cavalry saber, a six-barreled revolver, loaded and capped, a bag of bullets, about a pound of powder, and two boxes of percussion caps." As he was interrogated, the jailed conspirator related a startling story. There were at least twenty-five hundred men, made up of free people of color, slaves, and sympathetic whites, stationed throughout New Orleans. This army of liberation stood ready to occupy the city's arsenals, the heavily fortified U.S. Mint, and other public buildings, all of which would be used as beachheads in the ensuing battles for control of New Orleans. Agents of the conspiracy waiting throughout the city would then torch the town, signaling to an invading force of slaves, thousands strong, poised to descend in a fury upon New Orleans from surrounding plantations. With the gateway to the Mississippi firmly in its

grasp, the rebellion would spread upriver throughout the South, inevitably putting an end to slavery once and for all. (Students of the antebellum era will notice striking parallels with John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, at the time still more than five years in the future.)²

Although Chief O'Leary remained uncertain about the conspiracy's existence, he nonetheless contacted Mayor A. D. Crossman, who, in turn, spread the alarm to the commander of the Southwestern District of the U.S. Army, Major General D. E. Twiggs. With the promise of armed reinforcements ready to come to the city's aid if need be, Crossman and O'Leary then deployed the entire police force to patrol New Orleans's deserted streets, ordered that all people of color seen outdoors be apprehended immediately, and sent word to neighboring plantation owners to be on the lookout for "suspicious characters and for anything unusual among the slaves." With so many safeguards in place, the mayor and police chief hunkered down for the night, which passed without any further incidents.³

By the next morning, it had become clear to many New Orleanians that what was widely being called the "Negro effervescence" had been little more than a hoax, as one journalist raged, a product of the "twisted mind of a deluded" free person of color. Summing up what seemed to be the prevailing mood in the city that day, a merchant wrote in his ledger book that "the matter passed by with little notice as being too foolish or ridiculous for belief—and in a few hours was only mentioned jestingly." The local press, eager to reassure skittish New Orleanians, as well as wary traders and investors throughout the region, did what it could to spread the word that all was well. One article employed rhetoric that was fast becoming familiar as the nation's sectional crisis deepened: "depraved whites who deliberately speculate for dishonest gain upon the ignorance, credibility and excitability of the Negro" incited "insurrections and insubordinations," the *Daily Picayune* suggested. Although today such stories read like collective whistling in the dark, the message then was heartfelt and clear: slaves were happy with their lot; it was outsiders, most likely abolitionists, who poisoned race relations in the South.⁴

Still, despite the press's efforts and the fact that the insurrection never amounted to more than rumors, widespread fears in the city could not be allayed so easily, as talk of the rebellion persisted for months afterward. It seems that New Orleanians remained uneasy that their chattel and the city's free people of color, with help from troublemaking whites, might rise up together against the local slaveocracy. Numbers provide some context for this stubborn paranoia. There were approximately ten thousand *gens* (people) *de couleur libres* living in New Orleans in 1853, accounting for just under 10 percent of the city's population, and a slightly greater number of slaves. Statistics, though, do not entirely account for the lingering worries about the rebellion. Nor do census figures explain why concerned citizens and city

officials continued to demand that free and enslaved people of color not be allowed to walk the streets after dark, that businesses ("Negro grogeries") serving alcohol to *gens de couleur libres* be shuttered immediately, and that all slaves with reputations for violence or even insolence be locked up.⁵

To get to the root of the rumors about the rebellion one must look closely at New Orleans's environmental history. Because the insurrection took place (or, more accurately, did not take place) as a massive yellow fever epidemic hit the city and ultimately killed approximately ten thousand people in just six months, local whites were more sensitive than usual to rumors of racial unrest in New Orleans. As the outbreak—which a leading historian of public health has called the "worst single epidemic ever to strike an American city"⁶—prostrated New Orleans's power structure, white elites feared that members of the city's huge enslaved and free African-American communities could lash out at their oppressors with relative impunity. The pervasive concerns about a slave rebellion in the city thus seem predictable, even justifiable, in retrospect. This essay will argue that the coincidence of the epidemic and phantom insurrection in New Orleans underscores the social implications of urban ecology for the dynamics, depth, and impact of racial anxiety.

More significant than the rumored insurrection itself was the manner in which the city's racial anxiety manifested itself during the summer of 1853. As New Orleanians grappled with the ravages of the epidemic, and struggled to cope with their ongoing concerns about race relations in the city, time and again they focused on corporeal issues, on how bodies were reacting to conditions around them. Whites in the city, especially, became fascinated with the perceived workings of embodied racial and ethnic difference. When disease and panic began transforming social hierarchies in the city, New Orleanians focused on what they thought of as the very nature of blackness and whiteness: phenotypic responses to environmental stimuli, literally the way that bodies changed in the face of illness. Many of these discussions focused on people at work and at rest, as laboring bodies and the thousands of corpses that were yellow fever's most gruesome by-product became focal points for the city's concerns during the summer of 1853. Ultimately, the outbreak and the racial anxiety it prompted altered the urban fabric in New Orleans, emptying some usually crowded landscapes of people, filling others with bodies seemingly out of place, and in the process tampering with the local population's perceptions of the divide between public and private spaces.

THE EPIDEMIC

Three weeks before George Wright walked through the door of New Orleans's police station to announce that the city's people of color would rise up and lead a crusade to crush slavery throughout the South, the first victim

of the great yellow fever epidemic of 1853 succumbed to the disease. Within just a few days of that small tragedy, which passed virtually unnoticed at the time, several more people, all of whom had recently arrived in the city, died of the same cause. By the end of May, alert doctors at New Orleans's Charity Hospital were increasingly alarmed by the sudden influx of patients all sharing similar symptoms: sustained high fevers, debilitating head and body aches, painful sensitivity to light, and, in several instances, jaundice. As a result of this constellation of cases, a group of physicians conferred and decided to perform an autopsy on one of the recently deceased men. What they found in the victim's stomach, "two ounces of the black vomit," confirmed their worst fears. In an era in which yellow fever could be difficult to distinguish from a host of other inscrutable illnesses, the presence of vomit stained by blood was as close to a definitive diagnostic tool as doctors had at their disposal. It seemed that yellow fever was loose in the city.⁷

In the weeks after the fateful autopsy, even as the press denied that an epidemic had gripped New Orleans, several hundred more people died of yellow fever. The disease's presence thus provided a grim backdrop when Chief O'Leary and Mayor Crossman heard news of the proposed slave rebellion. Both men, despite the litany of daily press denials, knew of the epidemic's seriousness because of reports they were receiving from Charity Hospital, and both knew how precarious the situation had become. If New Orleans's people of color rose up with yellow fever already running rampant, the city might never recover. Even if the rebellion failed, news of racial violence, particularly when coupled with rumors of pestilence, would cause a mass exodus from the city, as residents and traders lit out for safer locales. The coincidence of two such dire threats to the social and economic order likely contributed to the gravity with which Crossman and O'Leary treated Wright's story. Still, a question lingers: Why did New Orleanians remain concerned about the insurrection for so long despite the local press's and municipal government's efforts? The answer, again, can be traced to the disease attacking the city, especially because of the odd way yellow fever seemed to behave during the epidemic of 1853. The virus attacked sections of New Orleans previously deemed safe and bodies long thought immune.⁸

Over the previous four decades, major yellow fever epidemics—ones in which more than one hundred people died—had struck New Orleans at least every third year, so the city was used to coping with illness on a grand scale. Consequently, many New Orleanians had accommodated themselves to periodic outbreaks, not just because of past experiences, but also due to a host of medical misconceptions that swirled around yellow fever, urban spaces, and white bodies. Mid-nineteenth-century physicians knew little about yellow fever's origins or mode of transmission, believing that the disease, like other scourges, was spawned by conditions specific to particular locales and transmitted by miasmas, vapors rising from swamps or rotting organic matter.

The city's doctors then built dangerous conclusions atop this shaky foundation, suggesting that yellow fever could not spread from one place to another. The disease, in sum, was neither portable nor contagious. So, while New Orleans, surrounded by swamps, dotted with markets where produce decomposed in the sun, and plagued by bad drainage and heavy rain, had to guard against miasmas, yellow fever could at least be expected to have a predictable geography. The disease would strike filthy parts of the city, leaving cleaner spots unscathed.⁹ Other myths, about the interaction of white bodies and the environment, also had consoled longtime residents of New Orleans during past outbreaks and seemed to offer some solace early in the epidemic of 1853. In July, for instance, as the press belatedly admitted that yellow fever had arrived in the city, the *Delta* reported, "attacks of the malady are confined exclusively to strangers." This assertion emerged out of a half-baked notion, drawn from a recipe of equal parts flawed empiricism and cultural conceit, which suggested that Creoles (this protean term will be used here as it was most commonly in mid-nineteenth-century New Orleans, to mean Louisiana-born white citizens) and so-called acclimated people were immune to yellow fever because of prolonged exposure to the local environs. In other words, in 1853, many New Orleanians believed that ties to the Delta's unusual environment fostered immunity to disease by bringing bodies into concert with the city's otherwise hazardous surroundings.¹⁰

There may have been at least some truth lurking behind these otherwise misguided claims. In most yellow fever epidemics, well over half of the people who contracted the disease lived, and, as with other viruses (measles or chicken pox, for example) those who survived were immune for the rest of their lives. The probable explanation for apparent group immunity, thus, was actually that many New Orleanians had weathered a mild bout with the virus—often during childhood in the case of Creoles—though few knew it, as misdiagnoses were common. Blessed with a survivor's immunity, they never sickened as adults, and often lived out their lives certain that cultural superiority and deep roots in the city shielded them from illness.¹¹

Popular belief in Creole immunity and acclimation not only comforted many white New Orleanians during outbreaks but also became pillars of ethnic and class identity. Because health in the face of sickness ostensibly was a product of a body's ties to the environment, immune New Orleanians believed their heartiness provided membership in a privileged social category. Such ideas emerged from and strengthened currents of class conflict and xenophobia in the city. Immune New Orleanians blamed victims of outbreaks for their plight, arguing that the dead and dying had brought sickness on themselves through bad habits or disrespect for the environment. In 1853, for instance, the press noted of immigrants and the working classes: they "congregate in damp and unwholesome places, and what with exposure, neglect and want, become the first victims of an epidemic." Years later,

satirist and social critic George Washington Cable poked fun at Creoles for these attitudes about yellow fever. Cable explained that the Creole “had, and largely retains still, an absurd belief in his entire immunity from attack. When he has it, it is something else. As for strangers—he threw up his palms and eyebrows—nobody asked them to come to New Orleans.” At the time, though, in an era marked by nativism nationwide, epidemics offered environmental justifications for anti-immigrant and class prejudice, and provided immune New Orleanians with a misplaced notion of cultural superiority and false security.¹²

The problem with these theories became clear at the end of July 1853, as more than a thousand people died from yellow fever in the month’s last two weeks. The shocking mortality rate left white observers of all classes and ethnicities terrified and increasingly anxious about their bodies, as the virus shattered time-tested myths in the city. New Orleanians had long counted on what appeared to be yellow fever’s consistent behavior: the disease thrived only in filthy areas, amidst newcomers and the working classes. In 1853, though, yellow fever struck throughout town and cut across the social strata, leading one doctor to note that after “gaining strength by what it fed upon, it began to travel to other and more distant points, to extend its arms, so to speak, in every direction.” Then, the disease seemingly developed new potency, causing an observer to warn that it had “acquired strength to attack those who consider themselves impregnable.” In short, even bodies of Creoles and longtime New Orleanians proved vulnerable to yellow fever in 1853, which challenged the assumptions of some members of these groups about ethnicity and class prerogatives. So oddly did the virus act that a trader wrote: “the nature of the disease is universally admitted to be different from former types.” As fear spread, rumors circulated that the city faced not yellow fever, but the Black Death.¹³

With hindsight and some knowledge of epidemiology as a guide, it is clear that the virus actually behaved normally in 1853, capitalizing on New Orleans’s urban ecology. For example, despite claims to the contrary, yellow fever was contagious; it was transmitted by female *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. When one of these insects took a blood meal—as often as twelve times in a month—from an infected host, she gathered nourishment for her eggs as well as a dose of the virus. Once a carrier, she transmitted the disease each time she fed throughout her life, like a flying dirty needle, randomly infecting unsuspecting victims for as long as two months. Originally from Africa, *Aedes aegypti* came to the Americas as a by-product of the international slave trade, often labeled a kind of “biological revenge” by scholars eager to find morality in the workings of the nonhuman world. New Orleans provided an especially welcoming home for these bugs, because of features of its built environment and climate. Warm temperatures and high humidity suited *Aedes aegypti*, and, over time, the mosquitoes adapted to city life, where

crowds of people provided self-serve buffets. Female *Aedes aegypti* also preferred laying eggs in artificial containers, and through the first half of the nineteenth century, most New Orleanians took drinking water from cisterns “in close proximity” to their homes.¹⁴

Because of these conditions, linked both to the city’s natural and to its built environments, 1853 proved to be a banner year for mosquitoes. In early June, with yellow fever already loose in the streets, writhing clouds of mosquitoes literally darkened the dusk skies above New Orleans. L. H. Webb, a student who found “the mosquitoes troublesome,” confessed to his diary that he spent a week fruitlessly trying to drive them from his home with cigar smoke. After fouling his nest, he gave up and “went to bed considerably nauseated.” Webb’s troubles were relatively common throughout New Orleans, and by the end of the month, journalists were chronicling the infestation in articles printed next to gossip about the conspiracy brewing among the city’s people of color. A writer at the *Daily Delta*, for example, noted, “we have never known the mosquitoes to be half as severe as they are at present.” In a tragic example of historical irony, however, he celebrated the infestation, insisting that pestilence would not visit New Orleans during the coming summer “for the simple reason that Providence does not afflict us with two curses at one and the same time; and, to add yellow fever to the present terrible visitation of mosquitoes, would be too much for human endurance.”¹⁵

So in 1853 yellow fever terrified New Orleanians, partly because they did not know that the disease was contagious or that it was carried by an insect vector. Still more threatening, though, illness was ignoring ostensibly fixed social and spatial boundaries in the city. As yellow fever traveled on *Aedes aegypti*’s wings, it transgressed borders dividing one section of New Orleans from the next. It spread citywide without regard to labels people fixed to urban landscapes: filthy or pure, elite or common, even public or private. Such categories proved meaningless to organisms moving through space constructed not socially, but ecologically. A mosquito might bite an immigrant living in a flophouse near the river, fly a short distance inland to the ornate home of a wealthy Creole merchant, and pass along the virus while taking its next blood meal. When yellow fever traveled through the city in this way, it rendered even the most private spaces public, and, by moving from one person to the next, regardless of a victim’s social standing or ethnicity, did the same to bodies of the people who contracted the disease. As a result, New Orleanians who had always counted themselves immune based on prosperity, breeding, ties to the Delta, or clean living, were shocked when they sickened.

Perhaps more even than the fast-rising death count, this reworking of private spaces, including elite bodily spaces, prompted panic in late July of 1853. Private places are desirable in cities, in part because they are perceived to be refuges from the bustle and apparent danger of urban living. These spaces are considered relatively safe and subject to individual control rather

than group negotiation. By this definition, bodies are the quintessential private spaces in metropolitan settings. During periods of stress in cities, such as epidemics or rumors of street violence, private spaces become more valuable, particularly if disease or danger supposedly only strikes disorderly or impure landscapes. In such instances control of one's spatial environment can literally mean the difference between life and death. As a result, early in the summer of 1853, wealthy New Orleanians, along with Creoles and the acclimated, relied on the perceived safety of their homes and the impregnability of their bodies, which were supposed to be isolated from the filthiest parts of the city, ostensibly beyond the reach of yellow fever and therefore safe. When circumstances proved otherwise, when yellow fever stripped away some of the features associated with private space, panic ensued.

By late July, spreading fear about the consequences of the outbreak provided the context in which many New Orleanians still fretted about the loyalty of the city's people of color. New Orleans was facing its worst epidemic on record, as yellow fever broke rules it had made over the years; close to fifteen hundred citizens had died and thousands of others had fled the city, leaving streets deserted and markets abandoned; and even Creoles and long-standing New Orleanians worried about their health, as elite white bodies, stricken by a disease usually associated with common people and immigrants, broke down. The city's social, economic, and spatial orders were under attack, as yellow fever killed more people in more districts every day, exacerbating racial anxiety, a part of daily life in New Orleans under the best of circumstances. Adding to the city's fear and sense of vulnerability, and likely one of the major reasons New Orleanians were so concerned about the local communities of color, most doctors believed African Americans were immune to yellow fever, and nothing during the epidemic of 1853 suggested otherwise. In sum, as New Orleans's power structure lay in a shambles, devastated by illness, the city's people of color were healthy and perhaps still hatching plans for a rebellion.¹⁶

YELLOW FEVER, BLACK BODIES

In August 1853, yellow fever inscribed itself deeply onto New Orleans's landscapes and population, further altering the municipal social order and increasing the already high level of racial anxiety in the city. At the time, thousands of sickly citizens bore the disease's signature on their haunted faces: a yellowish tint that caused even friends to back away in horror. As yellow fever reconstituted white bodies in this way, it shifted New Orleanians' senses of themselves and the ways other perceived them. Even mild illness can alter people's perceptions of their bodies. Fever can cause shaking, a cough can make one consider each breath taken into the lungs, and violent

sneezing can punctuate a day. In each case, involuntary muscle movements, which are usually ignored, become manifest and troubling. The sense of corporeal change and related vulnerability in late summer 1853 was far more extreme, as yellow fever literally made white bodies colorful. And in a city like New Orleans, whose complicated racial categories had more in common with parts of Latin America—where subtle shades of color mattered far more than in the typically biracial United States—jaundice thus not only trumpeted a person's grave illness, but also raised questions about the malleability of a victim's race.¹⁷

Consequently, as the epidemic spread throughout August, many New Orleanians became terrified to venture from their homes, which they still considered to be relatively safe private spaces. The healthy hoped to avoid exposure to miasmas in public, and the sick, particularly if they were jaundiced, worried about their standing in the community and therefore often preferred to convalesce or die alone. As a result, many undiscovered corpses rotted in private until the odor of decay alerted wary neighbors to a victim's presence. Then, in a misguided and apparently fruitless effort to mask the cloying smell of death and rid New Orleans of dangerous vapors, the city government only fouled the environment further when it began burning barrels of tar at major intersections. As thick, greasy smoke wafted through the already polluted air, many more people avoided the outdoors, leaving most of the city's public spaces, including the streets, "deserted." With the entire city at a standstill, terrified New Orleanians scanned the papers for death notices, cared for the sick, and prayed that the epidemic might spare them for another day. A. J. Wood, an architect working in the city during the outbreak, wrote: "the faculties are stunned and awed, the senses are oppressed with the deepest gloom. Never have I known such cause for sadness." Another depressed observer, summing up the state of affairs, noted that by the middle of the month, "the whole city was a hospital."¹⁸

This assessment sheds light on conditions in New Orleans in August 1853: death, normally private and sacred, had become public and all too commonplace, as the city grappled with the transformative power of disease, the frailty of white bodies, and the horror of mass mortality. In early August, with countless vectors carrying the yellow fever pathogen throughout New Orleans, and thousands of people hosting the virus, the epidemic had statistical probability on its side, as the likelihood of a mosquito spreading the disease from one person to the next reached its apex. The results were terrifying, even by the standards of 1853. On 1 August, the *Daily Delta* reported that nearly seven hundred people had died from yellow fever the previous week. The next week that number jumped to over one thousand and stayed at least that high for the next month. New Orleanians read the signs of such carnage all around them. As the daily death toll exceeded two hundred in the third week of August, "every awning post" on the city's once busy streets was

“placarded with funeral invitations,” leaving the few remaining pedestrians “melancholy” as they “noticed the names of the dead.” Somber processions, looking like parades gone horribly wrong, carried hundreds of bodies through the gates of New Orleans’s cemeteries. Death had become ubiquitous in the city.¹⁹

In this horrifying setting, although New Orleanians had no idea that yellow fever was contagious, or that mosquitoes served as the virus’s vector, they did understand that a plot for a slave uprising could spread through the city like fire. Whereas mounting a rebellion in the rural South presented nearly insurmountable obstacles—organizing resistance across great distances between plantations was next to impossible—in an urban environment the task was far simpler. The way crowd diseases circulate in cities provides a fair analogy, albeit anachronistic because of the limits of medical knowledge at the time: word of a slave conspiracy could grow geometrically, as each carrier might share knowledge with several other people. The problem for white New Orleanians, already anxious about race and yellow fever, thus became more dire, as a huge free community of color lived side by side with slaves in the city, and many light-skinned African Americans were able to pass for white if they wished. That New Orleans’s waterfront was among the world’s busiest ports made the situation still more frightening, as transients of all races and ethnicities constantly traveled through town, making supervision of local people of color a formidable task. All of which helps explain why, as yellow fever began killing hundreds of white New Orleanians daily in mid-August 1853, the city’s supposedly immune *gens de couleur libres* and slaves could seem as threatening as the epidemic.²⁰

By the middle of August, the only crowded places in New Orleans, besides hospitals, were cemeteries, so-called cities of the dead. Because much of the city lies below sea level and sits atop a high water table, underground burials were mostly impracticable until the turn of the twentieth century. Accordingly, most of New Orleans’s oldest cemeteries are made up of a series of elaborate crypts and tombs where wealthier residents are laid to rest, and row upon row of multitiered vaults, similar to the lockers of a morgue, which are the final resting place for the less affluent. In the summer of 1853, though, there were too few vaults and crypts available for the epidemic’s victims, so corpses were often buried in an effort to limit the production of miasmas. Unfortunately, as the number of victims climbed each day in August, the city’s cemeteries started overflowing, bringing mass death into plain view.

As New Orleanians faced the widespread spectacle of death and its post-mortem impact in 1853, white bodies became even more public. The Fourth District Cemetery hosted some of the most horrific and oft-discussed calamities. On Friday, 4 August, workers lugged seventy-one corpses to the Fourth District, where six men struggled to keep pace interring bodies. Overwhelmed, the workers finally gave up, leaving forty coffins sitting out in the

heat—daytime highs were in the nineties—and humidity over the weekend. In a scathing exposé, a journalist reported, “the action of the sun, through the frail enclosures, produced a rapid decomposition of the bodies, several of which swelled so as to burst the coffins.” The smell of decay, an “unusually violent and offensive effluvia,” drew people from the surrounding neighborhood to the site of the charnel, and the horrified onlookers reported the awful scene to municipal authorities. In another gruesome instance, the city’s climate, geology, and topography intersected to make more mayhem, as rushed and weary laborers buried scores of coffins beneath only a light sprinkling of soil, “in the manner of potato ridges.” With the first heavy rains they floated back above ground, funereal rafts navigating the city’s streets.²¹

Repelled yet apparently fascinated by these spectacles of public death and mortification, editors at the *Daily Delta* took “a visit to the cemetery” and reported their findings in lurid fashion worthy of the dime novels of the day. As the *Delta*’s writers entered the graveyard, they were appalled to see “several little children engaged in the most joyous merriment, and an old woman vending ice cream to passers-by, who had to hold camphor to their noses to avoid fainting from the odor.” The authors then employed a vast array of adjectives, recounting rows of coffins, clouds of flies circling them, and foul odors in the air. Two days later, a voyeur on the *Daily Crescent* staff outdid his colleague at the *Delta* for macabre detail. In the *Crescent*’s story, the sinister gravediggers made “haste with another morsel contributed to the grand banquet of death”; the lone woman by the gates had multiplied into groups of “old and withered crones and fat huckster women, fretting in their own grease, dispensing ice creams and confection”; and the insects had transformed into swarms of “green bottle-flies that hovered on their merchandise, and that anon buzzed away to drink dainty inhalations from the green and festering corpses.” The decomposition of white bodies had become a public spectacle.²²

Beyond a ghoulish, and perhaps, given the circumstances, understandable fascination with bodily corruption, the stories’ implications were clear: the epidemic had sullied one of the city’s most sacred rituals. This theme was expressed in a detail both papers included in their articles. Due to a shortage of able-bodied white men, it seems that New Orleans’s government, confronted with the prospect of a series of disasters similar to the one taking place at the Fourth District Cemetery, turned to African-American slaves and free people of color to dig graves. The city first deployed convict labor—chain gangs of slaves—to cemeteries requiring assistance. When the epidemic drained that pool of free labor, officials offered the huge sum of five dollars per hour, as well as food and drink, including alcoholic beverages dispensed graveside, for service hauling coffins and interring bodies. Then, in the week leading to 14 August, as more than fifteen hundred people died from yellow fever, still more African Americans were impressed into the

ranks of the gravediggers, while others willingly seized the chance to make relatively large sums of quick cash.²³

Under normal circumstances, gravediggers typically—and often, in service of decorum, intentionally—fall into a vast realm of hidden laborers, people whose work goes unnoticed much of the time. During the epidemic of 1853, though, these jobs and the people doing them were subject to intense scrutiny in New Orleans. In part this was so because death and its attendant rites became a matter of open discourse during the yellow fever outbreak. The intense demand for gravediggers and the grim debacles that resulted from the labor shortage also contributed to popular fascination with these workers and their task. Racial anxiety, though, was a more important factor in spurring the public debates. Funerals in New Orleans were holy events, sanctified and usually segregated rituals that remained private even as they took place in public space. The sight of healthy African Americans burying dead white bodies, including corpses of elite Creoles and individuals thought to have acclimated to the local environs, thus discomfited many New Orleanians, as it proved that yellow fever had overturned even the city's most durable racial hierarchies, not to mention long-standing medical misconceptions.²⁴

Hushed worries about the phantom slave insurrection increased popular anxiety about African-American gravediggers. Still more troubling, people of color were not succumbing to yellow fever (public health workers later estimated that fewer than 150 African Americans had died from yellow fever during the summer of 1853). The presence of unfamiliar African Americans crossing the color line at funerals, therefore, seemed not only profane, but also threatening, as black bodies apparently remained untouched by illness even during the epidemic's darkest days, while whites succumbed in ever greater numbers. Some white mourners found their racial anxieties embodied in the image of African-Americans laboring in cemeteries without shirts, a concession that overseers allowed due to the brutal summer heat. A reporter literally on the graveyard shift at the *Daily Delta* recounted the presence of "half naked negroes" lugging caskets and interring corpses, menacing images for white onlookers who hoped to bury their departed loved ones without being confronted by the robust bodies of the city's people of color.²⁵

Although the papers grudgingly admitted that the African-American laborers "who superintended the burials, observed a proper solemnity and performed their disagreeable duties in a becoming manner," many New Orleanians remained upset by the breakdown in social and spatial segregation at gravesites. This was yet another example of the way the epidemic had upended normal life in the city, these frustrated observers suggested. After all, by August 1853, the epidemic had become so terrible that whites could not even attend to their own dead. Ultimately, though, few people had any choice in the matter. Either African Americans would be allowed—even

encouraged—to bury white bodies for high pay, or corpses would continue to decay in plain view, above ground, further desecrating the dead, spawning more miasmas, and generating additional anxiety in the city. Eventually, many New Orleanians apparently reconciled themselves to this shocking turn of events by acknowledging that digging graves was depressing, taxing, and (supposedly) dangerous. And thus, most onlookers finally agreed, it was inhuman work ideally suited to African Americans who were often thrust into jobs that whites found abhorrent in the city, throughout the South, and nationwide.²⁶

In part, expediency and the South's social and racial caste system explain why New Orleanians finally accepted African Americans digging graves during the epidemic. But reputed African-American immunity to yellow fever proved even more compelling for many people, as digging graves seemed a reasonable (and punitive) way to deal with people of color who were not succumbing to disease. Throughout the antebellum era, the South's medical community observed that African Americans rarely contracted yellow fever. Over time, many of the region's physicians began arguing that slaves and *gens de couleur libres* were immune to the disease because of a host of bodily attributes, all ostensibly unique to slaves and free people of color. Dr. Samuel Cartwright, among others, gained fame for studies of the "physical peculiarities of the negro race." Passing over acclimation, Cartwright and his peers posited other sources for African-American immunity, pointing instead to a host of physical, or what they called natural attributes, such as skin pigmentation and an enlarged liver. Cartwright, for instance, wrote, "the difference in the organic or physical characters imprinted by the hand of Nature on the two races" accounted for African-American immunity. Other physicians concurred, arguing that slaves and free people of color were "naturally" immune to the disease, because of both observable corporeal traits and their continent of origin.²⁷

In 1853, these pseudoscientific studies of African-American bodies offered one way for some New Orleanians to cope with their racial anxiety. While New Orleans's Creoles proudly wore their reputed immunity to yellow fever as a badge of honor, African-American resistance to the disease carried social stigma. Because of the theory of acclimation, immunity among Creoles represented permanence in New Orleans. For whites generally, immunity and good health connoted social standing, while New Orleanians typically viewed susceptibility to disease as symptomatic of impurity, transience, and poverty. For slaves and free people of color, though, immunity symbolized ties to the untamed and uncivilized nature found on the "dark continent" of Africa, as well as bodily difference. Cartwright and his colleagues therefore insisted that slaves' and free people of color's "primitive" condition insulated them from disease; that they emitted odd odors which repelled sickness; and that they sweated copiously, flushing yellow fever from their bodies even if

they somehow contracted the disease. Extrapolating wildly, these physicians argued that African Americans were "perfect non-conductors of yellow fever," going so far as to suggest that during the summer months, New Orleans should array a phalanx of slaves along its riverfront, a human levee designed to keep back a flood of pestilence.²⁸

As a way of further placating anxious New Orleanians who felt threatened by the sight of healthy African-Americans burying the city's dead, Cartwright and his cohort conscripted nature into what they deemed a holy war, employing their findings as planks (albeit rotten ones) in the proslavery platform. Practicing what one historian has labeled "states' rights medicine," these quacks drew on environmental determinism as a wellspring for their scientific racism, arguing that "nature" had kindly provided white Southerners with an African-American population immune to yellow fever. Facing off with abolitionists who wrote in Northern antislavery papers such as Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* that the epidemic was the cleansing hand of God, Cartwright sneered and turned such arguments topsy-turvy, noting that "nature scorns to see the aristocracy of the white skin . . . reduced to drudgery under a Southern sun, and has issued her fiat." Capitalizing on the corporeal fears that people had about the origins and racial implications of sunbaths, Cartwright raged that white men, and recent immigrants to New Orleans particularly, who engaged in menial labor "waged war against Nature by making negroes of themselves in laboring in the sun." Nature, the doctor insisted, intended for white bodies to remain white; those who ignored this biological imperative would reap the whirlwind.²⁹

With sectional concerns already a hot topic in New Orleans in the months leading to the epidemic and the phantom slave insurrection, and news of Harriet Beecher Stowe's travels in Europe still plastered across the city's headlines during the outbreak, local slaveholders, many of whom were facing the prospect for the first time that their heritage might not insulate them from illness, likely took particular comfort in Cartwright's theories. Quite soon, editors at the proslavery *Daily Delta*, which catered to the city's Creole elite, joined the chorus of Cartwright's supporters, observing that most of the whites who had succumbed to yellow fever during the epidemic had done "work in the hot noon-day summer's sun, that the negroes ought to do." Embracing a paternalistic argument, the *Delta* claimed, "Negroes who have masters to take care of them, never die with yellow fever. If they do die, it is because they have been practicing the abolition theory." Slavery was not just a necessary evil; it was a positive good. Disloyal slaves, or people of color unlucky enough to be free, were more likely to contract and die from yellow fever. The writer at the *Delta* followed this flawed line of reasoning to its logical dead end, concluding that the epidemic might have been avoided entirely if African Americans had done the city's heavy lifting, as nature intended, leaving whites to work better suited to them.³⁰

The question of whether African Americans were or are immune to yellow fever remains unanswered. Many epidemiologists argue that what appears to be inherent immunity is actually a product of high levels of acquired immunity, somehow akin to a process of acclimation. Other experts insist that prolonged exposure to the disease across generations in Africa, where yellow fever was endemic, yielded genetic resistance. If African-American imperviousness to yellow fever is biologically founded, still other scholars suggest, the disease acted as another kind of biological revenge for the slave trade, laying waste to Euro-Americans while African Americans enjoyed genetic resistance to illness. Ironically, though, this revenge only increased Euro-American hunger for slaves by devastating pools of Native and Euro-American workers in the South, thus supporting the contention of scientific racists like Cartwright and his cohort that "nature" had "formed" African Americans to work in the region's heat and humidity by rendering them immune to yellow fever. Still, though this sounds like a recipe for environmental racism—and it sometimes was—at least during the epidemic of 1853, some African Americans took advantage of their alleged and apparent immunity, challenging New Orleans's social and spatial order as they worked for relatively high pay in public.³¹

"THE NECROPOLIS OF THE SOUTH"

Although many New Orleanians believed that the epidemic had to have reached its zenith with the horrors at the Fourth District Cemetery, the death toll rose still higher throughout August. More than fifteen hundred people were dying weekly by the middle of the month, and the twenty-first became known as the "black day," when approximately three hundred people succumbed to yellow fever. With the "city almost wholly at a stand," and public landscapes empty, morale sank to new depths, and New Orleanians looked to the heavens as they grappled with their frailties. In the month's last week, each of the city's major religious denominations sponsored public prayer meetings. Collectively, supplicants sank to their knees before a God they hoped would be merciful, acknowledging that they had "grievously sinned." Mayor Crossman tried to use the city's pious mood to his advantage when he cast the pestilence not as a failure of government, but as an act of God. He set aside 2 September as a day of fasting and prayer, during which people would "close their stores, offices, shops and public places" in order to placate the "Supreme Being" who had chosen "to lay the heavy hand of Pestilence on" New Orleans. As one cleric suggested when he wrote to the archbishop of New Orleans, "the science of the doctors is powerless against God." The epidemic had undermined people's faith in human agency when compared to the terrible power of the nonhuman world.³²

Following the public prayers, the weekly death toll began declining. Some New Orleanians believed that their pleas had been answered by a kindly deity, but it is more likely that the outbreak receded for epidemiological and environmental reasons. Based on the number of deaths reported in the city by mid-September, yellow fever had killed at least eight thousand people during the summer of 1853. Even assuming a remarkably high ratio of deaths to recoveries, it is likely that at least sixteen thousand more people had contracted and survived the virus during the epidemic, leaving those individuals immune to future attacks. After accounting for the vast horde of migrants who fled the city—one source guessed that only seventy-five thousand people, or about half of New Orleans's regular population, had remained through the summer—and the portion of the city's population that had acquired immunity during previous epidemics, it is fair to conclude that by September the available reservoir of hosts for yellow fever had begun evaporating. With autumn's approach, the virus's vector, too, began disappearing. In mid-September, temperatures in the city fell into the fifties, and the cooler weather limited the remaining mosquitoes' efficiency as disease couriers. The result was fewer than one thousand deaths for the month: a fearful total in past epidemics, but cause for celebration in 1853.³³

In September's second week, when only four hundred people died from yellow fever, many New Orleanians considered how the city might best recover from the epidemic and the rumored slave insurrection. The first order of business for the commercial community was rehabilitating New Orleans's battered public image, a process that yielded a number of wild claims, including shrill denials that pestilence had struck the city hard and further hollow assertions about the benevolence of local slaveholders. As historian Conevery Bolton Valencius argues, locations can become associated with illness, a damaging reputation that lingers long after an epidemic's end. Even prior to 1853, wary onlookers had called New Orleans a "wet graveyard," "the necropolis of the South," or, as one tourist put it after visiting the city, "the head-quarters of Death." Many local businesspeople believed that these perceptions had limited New Orleans's economic growth. As a result, the city's commercial community had tried to spread the word that yellow fever had released its grip on New Orleans. Even while admitting that the city was "sometimes overtaken with epidemics," these boosters had insisted that New Orleans did "not suffer in a fair and liberal comparison, in respect to public health, with many others reputed to be more healthy."³⁴

Over time, projecting the image that New Orleans was healthy had become a matter of civic duty. Admitting that yellow fever had returned to the city, therefore, struck a blow against commerce, against growth, and against progress. In the epidemic's aftermath, Dr. Morton Dowler noted that "commerce is King and it is no more permitted to any physician to report cases of fever . . . than to foretell and encompass the King's death." Dowler

also raged that "the influences exist, in this city, which prevent the actual state of public health, during the summer months, so far as yellow fever is concerned, from being known to the people." Although nearly ten thousand fatalities from yellow fever certainly complicated ongoing efforts at maintaining an official silence, they did not entirely stop them. In the autumn of 1853, New Orleans's papers published a steady stream of stories suggesting that "all signs of the late pestilence have been obliterated," and that "there is scarcely a visible mark or scar left by the epidemic." Even after a cholera outbreak killed more than six hundred people late in the fall, the press still claimed that "no prudent or temperate person need entertain any doubt but that at the present time he can abide in New Orleans as safely and healthily as anywhere in the Union."³⁵

The press used similar rhetoric in its efforts to quiet lingering discussions about rebellious slaves in the city. As soon as the morning after George Wright spoke to Chief O'Leary, many businesspeople and the editors who relied on them for advertising revenue had tried to keep talk of the insurrection quiet. As with word of yellow fever, though, news of racial violence traveled quickly and threatened commerce as it made its way up the Mississippi. To counter such developments, the city papers promised, "there is nothing in history to equal the peaceable submission of the African slaves to the paternal government of the whites in the Southern States of this Union." The rebellion, the press insisted, was a farce. Still, the chatter had echoed through the summer, and with the epidemic's end, the *Daily Picayune* redoubled its efforts, excoriating London's papers for pandering to British abolitionists with a series about the fear of insurrection that was gripping New Orleans. The *Daily Delta* went further, clinging to the idea that slavery accounted for a low mortality rate among the city's people of color: "we refer to the conclusion in favor of slavery, deducible from the exemption of our blacks from the attacks of a fever which seizes nineteen-twentieths of our white population." Creole immunity and acclimation might have faltered, but at least kindly masters had kept their slaves safe, the *Delta* suggested. New Orleans thus had nothing to fear from chattel slaves, grateful to their owners for protection from illness. In this regard, at least, little had changed in the city.³⁶

Still, in 1853, racial anxiety spawned a rebellion in New Orleans, a phantom slave insurrection that terrified many of the city's residents for six months. Worries about disloyal slaves had less to do with the particulars of a foiled plot or the long odds of its success and more to do with the nature of urban ecology and the transformative properties of epidemic illness. That yellow fever attacked white New Orleanians who counted themselves immune to disease overturned enduring assumptions in the city about urban spaces, ethnicity, and class privilege. That the virus then turned white New Orleanians into people of color, if only briefly, while sparing slaves and *gens de couleur libres*, played into popular fears about the plasticity of racial identity

and the city's social castes. Bodies of all kinds, usually the most private of spaces, could host organisms that moved throughout New Orleans from one person and place to the next without regard for issues of class, cultural heritage, or cleanliness. People, New Orleanians learned to their horror, could become public spaces, their bodies as subject to reworking, contestation, and negotiation as a community park, marketplace, or waterfront.

NOTES

1. *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 15, 16 June 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 June 1853.
2. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 June 1853. See also: *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 14 June 1853; *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, 19 June 1853.
3. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 16 June 1853. See also: L. H. Webb Diaries, entry for 14 June 1853, in Louisiana State Museum, Record Group 49; New Orleans Office of the Mayor, Letter Books, 1811-1920, entries for 14 June 1853, in New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans City Archives Collection, Record Group AA 511.
4. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 June 1853; *ibid.*, 16 June 1853; L. H. Webb Diaries, entry for 14 June 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 June 1853.
5. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 June 1853. See also: John Blasingame, *Black New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 1, 9; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 14-18, 20, 22 June 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14-16, 18, 22, 25 June 1853; *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, 19 June 1853; New Orleans Office of the Mayor, Letter Books, 1811-1920, entries for 14, 16, 22, 29 June 1853, in New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans City Archives Collection, Record Group AA 511; Robert C. Reinders, *End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1964), p. 23.
6. John Duffy, *Sword of Pestilence* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. vii.
7. Quote from *Report of the Sanitary Commission of New Orleans on the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853* (New Orleans: Picayune Office, 1854), p. 22. See also: "Health, Mortality, Etc.," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 10 (September 1853): 275.
8. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19, 21, 23 June 1853; B. Dowler, "On the Necropolis of New Orleans," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 7 (November 1850): 277; M. Morton Dowler, "On the Reported Causes of Yellow Fever and the So Called Sanitary Measures of the Day," *ibid.*, 11 (July 1854): 44; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 6 October 1853; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 22 June 1853; "History and Incidents of the Plague in New Orleans," *Harpers* 7 (November 1853): 797; E. D. Fenner, *History of the Epidemic Yellow Fever at New Orleans, La., in 1853* (New York: Hall, Clayton, & Co., Printers, 1854), p. 4; New Orleans Office of the Mayor, Letter Books, 1811-1920, entries for June 1-7, 1853, in New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans City Archives Collection, Record Group AA 511.
9. Jo Ann Carrigan, *Saffron Scourge* (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1994), pp. 33, 55; Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick,

N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 3-23; Charles Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 297.

10. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 22 July 1853. See also: Samuel A. Cartwright, "Review of the Meteorology, Vital Statistics, and Hygiene of the State of Louisiana," *New Orleans Medical Society Journal* 8 (September 1851): 238-49; Suzanne E. Hatty and James Hatty, *The Disordered Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 43; K. David Patterson, "Yellow Fever Epidemics and Mortality in the United States, 1693-1905," *Social Science and Medicine* 34 (1992): 863; Joseph E. Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), p. 135.

11. Patterson, "Yellow Fever Epidemics and Mortality in the United States, 1693-1905," p. 863.

12. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 July 1853; George Washington Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 292. See also: John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 5-13; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary* (New York: Beacon Press, 1997), pp. 11-32.

13. Quotes from "Health, Mortality, Etc.," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 10 (September 1853): 275; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 25 July 1853; Zachary Robertson to Decius Beebe, 27 July 1853, Beebe Family Papers, Louisiana State Museum Historical Center, Record Group 46. See also *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 1 August 1853.

14. Quotes from Patterson, "Yellow Fever Epidemics and Mortality in the United States, 1693-1905," p. 863; *Report of the Sanitary Commission of New Orleans on the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853*, p. 354. See also: A. N. Clements, *The Physiology of Mosquitoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 302; Jack C. Jones, "The Feeding Behavior of Mosquitoes," *Scientific American*, no. 238 (June 1978): 138; Lawrence Lacey and Bruce Orr, "The Role of Biological Control of Mosquitoes in Integrated Vector Control," *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 50, suppl. (1994): 107; P. F. Mattingly, *The Biology of Mosquito-Borne Disease* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 21-24; Jean Slosek, "Aedes Aegypti Mosquitoes in the Americas: A Review of Their Interactions with the Human Population," *Social Science Medicine* 23 (1986): 252.

15. Quotes from L. H. Webb Diaries, 1, 6 June 1853; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 29 June 1853. See also *ibid.*, 16 June 1853.

16. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 July 1853; *New Orleans Bee*, 29 July 1853.

17. Coneverey Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 1-14, 53-84; Jennifer Michel Spear, "'Whiteness and the Purity of Blood': Race, Sexuality, and Social Order in Colonial Louisiana" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1999), pp. 1-54, 101-54, 195-224.

18. Quotes from William Robinson, *Diary of a Samaritan* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1860), p. 161; Thomas Keelah Wharton Diary, entry for 22 August 1853, in Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library; Robinson, *Diary of a Samaritan*, p. 150.

19. Quotes from Zachary Robertson to Decius Beebe, 27 July 1853, Beebe Family Papers, Louisiana State Museum Historical Center, Record Group 46. See also *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 1, 8 August 1853.

20. Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 50–154.

21. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 8 August 1853; “The Plague in the Southwest,” *De Bow’s Review of the Southern and Western States*, n.s. 15, no. 1 (December 1853): 619.

22. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 9 August 1853; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 11 August 1853.

23. *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 9 August 1853; Fenner, *History of the Epidemic Yellow Fever*, p. 38.

24. Fenner, *History of the Epidemic Yellow Fever*, p. 38; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 9 August, 1 September 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 28 August 1853.

25. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 1 September 1853. See also *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 4, 11–13, 17, 24, 28 August 1853.

26. Quote from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 1 September 1853. See also Blasingame, *Black New Orleans*, pp. 1–27.

27. Quotes from Samuel A. Cartwright, “Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 7 (May 1851): 201 and 187 respectively; A. Hester, M.D., “Medical History of Two Epidemic Yellow Fevers,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 7 (July 1850): 82; and J. C. Nott, “The Epidemic of Yellow Fever in Mobile in 1853,” *ibid.*, 10 (March 1854): 577.

28. Quotes from Hester, “Medical History of Two Epidemic Yellow Fevers,” p. 82; Samuel A. Cartwright, “Prevention of Yellow Fever,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 10 (November 1853): 316.

29. Quotes from Marie Louise Marshall, “Samuel A. Cartwright and States’ Rights Medicine,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 93 (August 1940): 75; Cartwright, “Prevention of Yellow Fever,” p. 312; Cartwright, “Review of the Meteorology, Vital Statistics, and Hygiene of the State of Louisiana,” p. 246. See also: *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 23 September 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 29 September 1853.

30. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 14 August 1853. See also *ibid.*, 5, 23 June, 28 July, 15 September 1853.

31. Quote from Hester, “Medical History of Two Epidemic Yellow Fevers,” p. 82. See also: Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, “Black Yellow Fever Immunities, Innate and Acquired, as Revealed in the American South,” *Social Science History* 1 (Summer 1977): 420; K. David Patterson, “Disease Environments of the Antebellum South,” in *Science and Medicine in the Old South*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Todd Savitt (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 164.

32. Quotes from *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 23 August 1853; *New Orleans Price Current and Daily Intelligencer*, 27 August 1853; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 24 August 1853; Proclamation of the Mayoralty of New Orleans, 30 August 1853, in New Orleans Office of the Mayor, Letter Books 1811–1920, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans City Archives Collection; Edward E. Legendre to Archbishop Anthony Blanc, 11 August 1853, in Correspondence Collection, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. See also: Fenner, *History of the Epidemic Yellow Fever at New Orleans*, p. 38; Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 19.

33. “Meteorological Register for New Orleans,” in *Report of the Sanitary Commission of New Orleans on the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853*, unpaginated table; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 26 September 1853; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 1 October 1853.

34. Quotes from B. Dowler, “On the Necropolis of New Orleans,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 7 (November 1850): 277; Henry Tudor, *Narrative of a Tour of North America*, vol. 2 (London: James Duncan, 1834), p. 64; “Health of the City,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 8 (July 1851): 135. See also: Conevery Bolton Valencius, “The Geography of Health and the Making of the American West,” in *Medical Geography in Historical Perspective*, ed. Nicolaas Rupke (London: The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL, 2000), pp. 122–27; *New Orleans Bee*, 19 September 1853.

35. Quotes from M. Morton Dowler, “On the Reported Causes of Yellow Fever and the So Called Sanitary Measures of the Day,” p. 44; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 6 October, 26 November, 25 November 1853.

36. Quotes from *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, 19 June, 23 September 1853. See also *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 29 September 1853.