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Lawrence N. Powell. *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable: The 1887 Census Office Report.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008. ix + 207 pp. $18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8071-3319-4.

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The Creole City

When George E. Waring Jr. commissioned New Orleans writer George Washington Cable (1844-1925) to write a history of the city for the tenth census of the United States, it was a brief sketch Waring expected. Cable produced a 313-page manuscript, three times the length of the sketch for Boston and eight times longer than the sketch for Chicago. There were 647 footnotes. The "sketch" was too interesting to cut significantly and all but fourteen pages and the notes were published as part of the tenth census. In it, Cable provided a detailed history of what is perhaps the United States's most European city from its beginnings to 1860, covering immigration and settlement, demography, civil and military institutions, sanitation, and disease, among other subjects, and with a particular (and, for Cable, characteristic) emphasis on Americanization and commerce. Portions of the report were revised and published in book form as *The Creoles of Louisiana* in 1884. In this new edition of the 1887 Census Office Report, Lawrence N. Powell, a professor of history at Tulane University, restores the notes; incorporates the fourteen excised pages; and modernizes here and there to give us, with the exception of a few maps, the complete text of Cable's historical sketch.

Cable, who has been called the first modern writer of the U.S. South, is probably most famous for his short stories collected as *Old Creole Days* (1879) and for the novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), but Cable was prolific, and published a number of novels, including the very good *Dr. Sevier* (1884), *Bonaventure* (1888), and *John March, Southerner* (1894), as well as some of the most progressive essays on civil rights produced by any white man of his generation. In "My Politics," "The Convict Lease System," and "The Freedman's Case in Equity," Cable advocated boldly for the rights of freedmen and lay the responsibility for the corruptions of Reconstruction at the feet of white southerners themselves, who had "turn[ed] … state and county prisons into slavepens," "falsif[ied] … the ballot," and exhibited many other forms of "political intolerance" traceable to their upbringing as slaveholders.[1]

The outrage that Cable's work, both fiction and nonfiction, provoked was intense and sustained. It was not long after this material was published that Cable found it necessary to move his family away from the South. In his substantive and very useful introduction to this volume, Powell explores at some length one of the hottest local controversies aroused by Cable's work, this being the controversy surrounding Cable's representation of the Creoles. It probably bears mentioning that, at the time, the term "Creole," when capitalized, was understood by the parties most involved in the public controversy to refer only to the white descendents of French and Spanish settlers, and that Cable's offenses included suggestions not only that the Creoles were not always descended from the most respectable classes but also that they were not always of exclusively white ancestry. It was Charles Gayarré–the author of *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1847), *Romance of the History of Louisiana* (1848), and *Louisiana: Its Colonial History and Romance* (1851), as well as novels, plays, pamphlets, and articles–who led the charge, and over half of Powell's introduction is devoted to examining Gayarré's rebuke of Cable. Both men were avid students of Louisiana history, but with very different political philosophies and cultural loyalties.

If Gayarré was, like Cable, both historian and romancer, the subject of Gayarré's historical romances (and his romantic historiography) was the civilization of the Creoles while Cable's was that of the Anglo-Americans. In his sketch for the Census Office, Cable was chiefly interested in prospects for social stability in New Orleans, and the question of the Creoles' fitness for American citizenship is the most salient one in the text. Contrasting immigration in New Orleans with immigration in other American cities (Cincinnati, New York, and St. Louis), he writes as follows: "in these cities American thought

prevailed and, more or less inspired the foreign elements as they came in; hence a comparative unity of motive. In New Orleans, on the other hand, American thought was itself not only foreign, but unwelcome, disparaged by the unaspiring and satirical Creole, and often apologized for by the American, who found himself a minority in a combination of social forces, far more frequently in sympathy with European ideas than with the moral energies and the enthusiastic and venturesome enterprise of the New World" (p. 156). This point made, finally, to Cable's apparent satisfaction, he turns his attention to some of the other problems that faced New Orleans, and his historical sketch concludes with a powerful account of the yellow fever epidemic of 1853. Between June and October of that year, there were eleven thousand interments in New Orleans's cemeteries, fully a ninth of the city's population.

Cable's Census Office Report of 1887 is an important and timely document. Over the past decade or so, there has been a flourishing of work on Cable, on New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory, and on Circum-Caribbean and transnational exchange in the Americas, much of it in literary and cultural studies. Although Powell's introduction does not pursue as much as one might wish the implications of this work for his subject, his new edition of *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable* will be of interest to urban historians, to those interested in New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory, to students of American and New World nationalisms, and to literary and cultural historians who will, very quickly, appreciate its significance.

Note

[1]. George Washington Cable, "My Politics," in *The Negro Question: A Selection of Writings on Civil Rights in the South*, ed. Arlin Turner (New York: Norton, 1958), 20.

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