The Socio-cultural Construction of Race and Gender in New Orleans, 1896-1945

My project with the Newcomb College Institute is a research project on the social construction of race and gender in the colored Creole community of New Orleans from 1896-1945. The culmination of this research will be a WordPress blog. My main research interests are how the Creole community formed after 1896’s Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling and what impact that ruling had on civil rights organizing in future years. I intend to organize this information on a blog. I will provide a brief summary of a topic pertaining to the Creole community and will then give the reader a primary source that illustrates the concept discussed. I will also post questions as a way to prompt the reader to critically analyze the sources and their relationship to the development of the Creole community.

The purpose of my research is to give students and researchers a background on Creole history and guide them on the right path if they wish to pursue further research. I want to challenge the reader’s notions about race as inherent or biological. I want to force the reader to think critically about the way race has been constructed throughout history and potentially change his or her view about history. The blog will help the reader discover the intersections between race and gender. I will also gain the experience of working with WordPress.

In the process of researching this topic, I consulted numerous professors in the History department as well as staff in the Collat lab. I visited research centers across town, including Tulane’s Amistad Center, Tulane’s Louisiana Research Collection, the New Orleans Public Library, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the University of New Orleans Library’s Special Collections and the Xavier University Library’s Special Collections. I perused through dozens of primary documents, including manuscripts, letters, organizational minutes, and speeches, and consulted secondary sources (generally nonfiction works and dissertations) as background information.

My main challenge with this project was finding primary sources. I had trouble finding writings by Creole women about their involvement in civil rights organizations. Though the source I ended up using was pertinent to the topic, it did not fit in as closely with the topic as other sources did.

I am in the process of editing my blog posts. I have five primary sources and am looking for pictures to post on the site. The blog will be completed in early May.