A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth Century New Orleans.

**Name(s):**
- Clark, Emily Suzanne, author
- Corrigan, John, professor directing dissertation
- Kirby, David, university representative
- Porterfield, Amanda, committee member
- Kavka, Martin, committee member
- McVicar, Michael, committee member

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**Abstract/Description:**

This study focuses on the practice of Spiritualism among a group of Afro-creole men from 1858 until 1877 in New Orleans. It contends that Spiritualism was the process in which these Afro-creoles envisioned the proper social, political, and religious ordering of the material world. Communicating with the world of the wise spirits offered the Cercle Harmonique a forum for airing their political grievances and for imagining a more egalitarian world. Many of their messages focused on what the spirits called "the Idea," a concept which meant humanitarian progress, equality, egalitarianism, brotherhood, and harmony. Championing the Idea, Spiritualism mediated the social and political changes experienced by Afro-creoles in the late antebellum and post-Civil War world. The messages the Cercle Harmonique received from the spirit world--and the spirits who sent them--mediated the changes to the New Orleans social, political, religious, and cultural climate. From a close reading of their séance records and noting the spiritual network into which they placed themselves, this study maps the Afro-creoles' social, political, and religious worlds.
themselves, this study maps the Afro-creoles’ social, political, racial, and religious goals. Concurrently, the project also illuminates how the Cercle Harmonique understood New Orleanian and American society and politics and the hierarchical Catholic institution to be limiting humanity’s progress. Tyrannical leaders, corrupt power, and white supremacy worked against the Idea. However, through their séances the Cercle Harmonique connected with an idealized society, and while that idealized society existed apart from the Spiritualists, their communication provided the Afro-creoles with republican ideology to combat politically destructive forces on earth.

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Advisory Committee: John Corrigan, Professor Directing Dissertation; David Kirby, University Representative; Amanda Porterfield, Committee Member; Martin Kavka, Committee Member; Michael McVicar, Committee Member.

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