

TRANSCENDING THE RUMOURS:  
ERNEST J. BELLOCQ & HIS PORTRAITS OF THE WOMEN OF STORYVILLE

by

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1966 Lee Friedlander bought a series of glass plate negatives from Larry Borenstein, a New Orleans art dealer.<sup>1</sup> The plates were mostly of anonymous prostitutes, taken around 1912 by Ernest J. Bellocq in Storyville, New Orleans' then red light district. Hidden in a piece of furniture, the plates had languished in a junk shop, and were unknown to the public. Friedlander printed the plates and showed them to John Szarkowski, the director of the Museum of Modern Art's Photography Department. Taken with the works, Szarkowski displayed the prints of Bellocq's plates in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) that ran from November 19, 1970 to January 10, 1971. MoMA published an exhibition catalogue in which Friedlander explains how he found out about the plates and the technical aspects of creating the prints, and Szarkowski, using snippets of multiple interviews with people who supposedly knew Bellocq, creates a mythologized version of Bellocq as a person with physical and mental disabilities and hypothesizes that the portraits were for personal use. Save for entries in the United States Census, newspaper articles, and some photographs that bear his name, very few traces of Bellocq's life exist. However, today we do know that he was a successful commercial photographer. With little evidence Szarkowski created a myth of Bellocq as a deformed, asexual outsider who had a high pitched voice and walked like a duck.<sup>23</sup> Although Szarkowski even admitted that "our knowledge of E.J. Bellocq barely transcends the level of rumor," his interpretation was taken as fact without

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<sup>1</sup>Friedlander, *Storyville portraits: photographs from the New Orleans red-light district, circa 1912*, preface.

<sup>2</sup> John Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits : Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), PAGE.

<sup>3</sup>Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, being an authentic, illustrated account of the notorious red-light district*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 59.

being questioned.<sup>4</sup> Szarkowski also had a larger agenda to bring vernacular photography into the canon of art history and so only focused on the subject matter of the photographs, neglecting to consider the cultural value they possess and the economics of the sex industry. Divorced from their original, most likely commercial, reason for being taken and their greater historical significance, the inclusion of Bellocq's Storyville photographs in the Museum of Modern Art show in 1970 and the subsequent exhibition catalogue in which Szarkowski asserted a fictitious interpretation of Bellocq legitimized the portraits of prostitutes to high art status. In this thesis I will argue that the timing and the way in which the works first came to the public created a confining, dominant narrative that has prevailed even with the publication of new research and writings. I will also assert that Bellocq's photographs of the women of Storyville should be interpreted within their historical context and valued not just as art, but as rich artifacts of a marginalized community.

The myth created by Szarkowski has gripped the popular interpretation even with several recent exhibitions and publication of new interpretations. The works were shown in 1996 at the New Orleans Museum of Art with an interpretation by Steven Maklansky, who was at the time curator of photography. Prints of Bellocq's plates that predated Friedlander's came to light and were shown in a 2002 exhibition at the Julie Saul Gallery in New York. During that exhibition a talk about new archival research in Bellocq's life was given by Rex Rose, son of Al Rose who had written a history of Storyville. In 2004 Bellocq's works were shown at the International Center of Photography. Brian Wallis, chief curator, published a brochure which accompanied the exhibition. Wallis acknowledged Szarkowski's

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<sup>4</sup> John Szarkowski, *Looking at photographs; 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, (New York: distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn, 1973), 68.

misrepresentation and proffered that Bellocq's aesthetic was "typical of the commercial illustration of his day" and adhered to a "sentimentalized genre."<sup>5</sup> Although Wallis' argument that the works were commissioned is solid, the great difficulty is the relativity of time, and the fact that we may never know the significance of the images within their original context. The mystery of the works' intended use value continues to grip our interest.

I will investigate the issues surrounding Bellocq's photographs of Storyville women in four chapters that will adhere to the historical progression of the life of the works.<sup>6</sup> In the first chapter I will discuss the time in which the works were created. I will detail Bellocq's biography and discuss the history of Storyville, the New Orleans district to which prostitution was confined and sanctioned from 1897 to 1917. In the second chapter I will describe and interpret the content of the Storyville photographs with an eye to what clues are hidden in them and examine these works in context of their point in history. In the third chapter I will discuss when the works re-emerged and were brought into popular culture by way of Lee Friedlander and John Szarkowski. Then I will address Szarkowski's creation of a myth of Bellocq and the reasons why he interpreted and presented the works as art without considering their social and historical value. I will demonstrate that Szarkowski's analysis is conjecture. Then I will elaborate on the historical compulsion to elevate Bellocq's works to art in order to make sure they would not be interpreted as pornographic. This will lead to a discussion of the art history debate around the naked and the nude. The fourth chapter will discuss work that has been done in the past twenty-five years to bring about a more accurate

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Wallis, "The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq," (New York; Rochester, NY: International Center of Photography ; George Eastman House, 2004), unpaginated.

<sup>6</sup> One of the events that is tangential to my thesis that I will not address is "Pretty Baby," Louis Malle's fictional 1978 film in which one of the characters is based off of Bellocq.

understanding of Bellocq and his Storyville portraits. I will discuss the 1997 edition of the exhibition catalogue, the 1994 New Orleans Museum of Art exhibition of Bellocq's work, other writers interpretations, and Rex Rose's research that attempted to lay to rest the rumor that Bellocq was a person with physical and mental disabilities. The brochure that Brian Wallis published for the 2004 Bellocq exhibition at the International Center of Photography is certainly the richest and most nuanced interpretation available. I will discuss his analysis and recontextualization of Bellocq. I will conclude with a summary of this history and conjecture on the future possibilities of these works as art and as historic artifacts that can enrich our understanding of a very unique time in history and reaffirm how this convergence of interpretations will undoubtedly lead to deeper understanding of the lives of marginalized women at the turn of the century.

## CHAPTER I

Ernest J. Bellocq has been subject to an inordinate amount of speculation. It is important to delineate the facts about his life because much of what has been written about him is untrue. Interest in Bellocq started when the photographs he took of prostitutes in New Orleans' Red Light District were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970. The author gathered the following details of Bellocq's life from government records, historic newspapers, archival collections, and city directories. Bellocq's parents, Paul and Marie S. Aldigé, were married on October 5th of 1872.<sup>7</sup> Their families were both white Creole and were considered successful.<sup>8</sup> Bellocq was born on August 19, 1873. In the 1880 census the Bellocq family was recorded as living at 154 Conti Street, the home of Marie's father—Bellocq was 6 years old, and his younger brother, Leon, was 5 (see figure 1 for map of locations where Bellocq lived and worked). Bellocq was listed in the New Orleans City Directory for the first time in 1892; that year he was 18 and worked as a clerk at his father's company.<sup>9</sup> An 1893 newspaper article mentioned Bellocq as having photographed one of the contestants in a boxing match.<sup>10</sup> Paul died in 1894, and Bellocq and his mother continued living at 154 Conti.<sup>11</sup> Bellocq remained listed in the Directory for the next few years as a

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<sup>7</sup> "Louisiana, Parish Marriages, 1837-1957," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QKJW-JHMG>), Paul Bellocq and Marie S Aldigé, 05 Oct 1872; citing Orleans, Louisiana, United States, various parish courthouses, Louisiana; FHL microfilm 907, 690.

<sup>8</sup> Creole has many different meanings, but the definition I will be using means that a person was born in Louisiana.

<sup>9</sup> *Soards' 1892 Directory*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1892. At the time his father's business was the Bonneze Shoe Co. Ltd.

<sup>10</sup> "McAuliffe Not Deemed Well, But Good Enough," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), section Sporting, September 5, 1892.

<sup>11</sup> In 1895 the building numbering changed, and 154 became 1026.



clerk working for a couple other businesses.<sup>12</sup> In the 1900 census Bellocq and his mother lived in the same house, but with Pauline McCarthy, Marie's sister (see figure 2).<sup>13</sup> The census recorded his profession as a photographer, but the city directory for the same year stated his occupation as a clerk.<sup>14</sup> All addresses associated with Bellocq up until this point listed him as living and working within a small radius. Since he spent most of his life in this limited area it is important to state that Bellocq grew up and spent the first 47 years of his life just two blocks from the city's red light district. This proximity would have made the realities of prostitution and the commercial sex industry visible to Bellocq.

In December of 1891 Bellocq joined the New Orleans Camera Club.<sup>15</sup> In the aforementioned 1893 article about boxing Bellocq is referred to as "a prominent young member of the New Orleans Camera Club."<sup>16</sup> This photographer's social group was important to Bellocq; he even printed it along with his name on the back of his photos (see figure 3). The New Orleans Camera Club met frequently; they held technical demonstrations, gave lectures, discussed the state of photography in New Orleans, and shared their work with each other. Bellocq attended these meetings and socialized with his fellow photographers. An article from 1898 gave a short biography of Bellocq and produced his only known likeness. It was published in *The Owl*, a newspaper for which he took photographs. It announced that

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<sup>12</sup> In 1897 he worked for the Troy Laundry Co. Ltd. at 420 N. Rampart. In 1899 he was listed as a bookkeeper for the Crescent City Cork Works, located at 610 Tchoupitoulas, roughly 15 blocks from his home.

<sup>13</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Schedule No. 1--Population, Enumeration District No. 36, p. 20, 1026 Conti St. Pauline McCarthy, Marie Bellocq, and Ernest Bellocq; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>14</sup> *Soards' 1900 Directory*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1900,

<sup>15</sup> James Karst, "Before Storyville, E.J. Bellocq and the New Orleans Camera Club: Our Times," *The Times Picayune*, December 6, 2015, Nola.com, [http://www.nola.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2015/12/before\\_storyville\\_ej\\_bellocq\\_a.html](http://www.nola.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2015/12/before_storyville_ej_bellocq_a.html)

<sup>16</sup> "McAuliffe Not Deemed Well, But Good Enough," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), section Sporting, September 5, 1892.

Bellocq took “a classical course at the Jesuit College” and “devoted his spare time to the pursuit of Amateur Photography and to-day ranks among the most successful and intelligent amateurs of our city” (see figure 4).<sup>17</sup> Bellocq most likely took up photography while he was still a teenager, in the late 1880s. But it is unclear exactly how Bellocq came to learn photography, whether he only taught himself or had a teacher. The article also states that Bellocq was on the membership committee for the New Orleans Camera Club, so he must have felt comfortable enough to handle new recruits and older members. Bellocq’s copy of Wilson’s Cyclopaedic Photography, a technical manual and encyclopedia, was signed by Bellocq himself on September 16th, 1901.<sup>18</sup> He photographed with an 8x10 camera, but owned many others.<sup>19</sup> While he learned photography he kept working as a clerk, and waited until he had practiced enough to quit his day job.

There is no occupation listed for Bellocq in the 1901 directory. After his mother passed away in 1902 and both his parents were then dead, Bellocq likely inherited some money, permitting him to give up working at other businesses. Financial security would have allowed him to pursue being an independent, commercial photographer outright. This might explain why in the 1902 Directory Bellocq, at 29 years old, was listed as a photographer for the first time (see figure 5).<sup>20</sup> Bellocq’s Aunt Pauline died in May of 1905 and left nearly the entire contents of the 1026 Conti home to Bellocq.<sup>21</sup> The next year he moved to 840 Conti

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<sup>17</sup> “Ernest J. Bellocq.” *The Owl: Official Organ of the Young Men’s Hebrew Association*. 5, no. 6 (May 1898): 9. Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University.

<sup>18</sup> Al Rose Collection, Manuscripts Collection 606, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans 70118.

<sup>19</sup> Including a Bantam Special and a 4x5 Graflex. Mary Gehman, “In Defense of E.J. Bellocq,” *New Orleans*, July 1979, 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Soards’ 1902 Directory*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1902.

<sup>21</sup> “Will of Mrs. McCarthy,” *The Daily Picayune*, May 4, 1905.

Street. 1908 is the first time Bellocq is listed in the business section of directory under photographers, and he also writes his profession as a “commercial photographer” instead of photographer.<sup>22</sup>

What else Bellocq did with his time besides photography is not known. The hard evidence we have of his life are a few mentions in the newspaper and the photographs he took and stamped with his name. This does not give us a deeper understanding as to his personal life outside of his profession. In 1904 he testified as an “expert photographer” in a state border dispute case, showing maps and explaining photographs that he had taken.<sup>23</sup> In 1908 Bellocq appears once again in the newspaper when he was called to be a juror in a murder trial; he was excused because “he was opposed to capital punishment.”<sup>24</sup> From this we can infer that Bellocq was a man of moral conviction. In July of 1908 the *Daily Picayune* Society section reported that he spent the weekend with friends in Waveland, Mississippi.<sup>25</sup> These brief mentions leave us with scant knowledge of Bellocq’s personal life.

As a commercial photographer, Bellocq specialized in “copying and enlarging.”<sup>26</sup> On the billhead of a receipt Bellocq listed his skills as “Views of buildings, interiors, machinery,

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<sup>22</sup> *Soards’ 1908 Directory*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1908. In the 1911 directory, Bellocq pays to have his name bolded, which would have called attention to his name. He continued to have his name bolded on and off, perhaps choosing to do so during years when he was looking for more business.

<sup>23</sup> “Oyster Hearing Is Resumed Here, This Time for Louisiana to Offer Rebuttal Testimony, State Sticks to Claim of Crisis Causing Suit,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), August 26, 1904, Vol. LXVIII No. 215 edition, sec. News.

<sup>24</sup> “Cassanova On Trial For Woman Murder. Jury to Decide Whether He Slewed Annie Lavin, Or If The Girl Cut Her Own Throat.” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA). November 25, 1908, Vol. LXXII No. 306 edition, sec. News.

<sup>25</sup> “Society, Gulf Coast, Waveland,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 19, 1908, Vol. LXXII No. 176 edition, sec. Society.

<sup>26</sup> Verso of Howard Memorial Library photograph by Ernest J. Bellocq, Series 1, Box 7, Folder 5, Louisiana Print File, Manuscripts Collection 1081, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans 70118.

etc.,” “Photos for Catalogues,” and “Groups and Flash Lights” (see figure 13).<sup>27</sup> He photographed many buildings, ships, school groups, interiors of rooms, individuals’ portraits, and landscapes. Since his work was documentary in nature and created for utilitarian reasons, most of his work did not stand the test of time. Commercial photography is produced for a specific purpose, such as documenting a new building or showing the students in a class year; therefore the photographer’s identity or vision is not usually valued. This genre of photography does not have “monetary value in today's market,” does not “comply with the coherent progression of styles and technical innovations demanded by photography's art history,” and so it has been devalued.<sup>28</sup> This marginalization of commercial photography helps to explain why so few commercial photographers are included in the canon of the history of photography. When commercial photographers become famous it is often after they have honed their skills for decades and change course to produce work for the sake of art or personal expression. Only after this does their earlier commercial work become valued. It is nearly impossible to know whether Bellocq at all considered himself an artist, especially since he listed himself in the directory as a commercial photographer. However one article from 1903 gives some insight; Bellocq attended a meeting of “the leading photographers of New Orleans” in which they discussed the upcoming St. Louis Exposition, and the fact that the Exposition organizers were “[offering] photography as a fine art.”<sup>29</sup> In this meeting they decided that they wanted to ensure that local New Orleans photographers were represented

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<sup>27</sup> Dated May 1914, the receipt is for one photograph and one duplication, totalling \$3.75. He also places the title of Dr. after his name although whether Bellocq actually attained a doctorate is unknown. Ernest J. Bellocq Billhead, Commercial File, MSS 405, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/3/15133>.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies,” *History of Photography* 24, no. 3 (September 2000), 262.

<sup>29</sup> “Fair Photographers. New Orleans to Be Represented in the St. Louis Show,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 12, 1903.

under the category of “regular photography” in a separate building.<sup>30</sup> This explicit distinction of their work as regular rather than as art gives more weight to the argument that Bellocq may not have considered himself an artist. However, he has been made into an artist by having a discrete body of his work, the Storyville series, exhibited posthumously at the Museum of Modern Art. He belongs to a subcategory of people who were granted the status of an artist after their work was deemed art. Because of this elevation he falls into a category of artists who became known after their death. Bellocq became a famous artist by the inclusion of his work in multiple high art museums, but it is solely the photographs of prostitutes from New Orleans’ red light district that gained him recognition.

The marginalization of commercial photography helps to explain why, excluding the Storyville works, there are only over 60 photographs by Bellocq that have been identified and are in existence today.<sup>31</sup> This is a paltry number for a man who spent his life as a photographer. Rarely are his photographs dated. One such photograph for which we have no date is of the Howard Memorial Library in New Orleans (see figure 11).<sup>32</sup> There are a few that can be confirmed as having been taken on a particular date or year. On February 14th of 1895 Bellocq photographed the Old Parish Prison in the snow (see figure 1). In 1896 he photographed the Jewish Orphan’s Home and the interiors of the Young Men’s Hebrew

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> In my research I came across over 30 photographs (in *The Owl* and the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Annual Reports) which I have never seen printed in any texts written about Bellocq. The concept of “discovering” or “finding” works that were heretofore unknown to contemporary audiences is one which, as an archivist, I have always taken issue.

<sup>32</sup> When researching the history of this building I realized that Bellocq’s photograph was most likely used for the creation of a postcard that depicts the library, figure 12. To my knowledge no one else has made this connection. The only difference between the two images is that there is a man in Bellocq’s print. Bellocq would have easily been able to edit out the man using techniques he employed in other prints. Otherwise the photographs are identical. I believe that Bellocq most likely produced other images of city buildings that were used for postcards, but, in this case, the producer of the postcard did not attribute the photograph to him.

Association building for *The Owl* (see figures 6-9). He took a photograph of Tulane University's Law Building that was included in their 1902 yearbook.<sup>33</sup> In 1903 he photographed a group of students at a Jesuit school in New Orleans.<sup>34</sup> He took photographs for the 1905 and 1907 Annual Reports for the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.<sup>35</sup> In one of these photographs he showed children who lived in the dormitories, but it is not emotionally compelling as the subjects are barely distinguishable in the background of the picture (see figure 10). The subjects of the other photographs we know Bellocq took consist of ships, a portrait of a woman and a baby, a courtyard, houses, an infantry unit, a group of men on a submarine, and others.

During World War I Bellocq registered for the draft. On September 12, 1918 the registrar reported him at 44 years old as being short and stout with gray hair and brown eyes. There is nothing else noted about his physical condition, and no mention of cranial abnormalities.<sup>36</sup> Instead of serving during the war, Bellocq photographed ships for the Foundation Company.<sup>37</sup> In the city directory for 1918 Bellocq listed his office as being on the fourth floor of the Tudor Building, 608 Canal.<sup>38</sup> From 1928 until his death Bellocq lived at

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<sup>33</sup> *Jambalaya*, New Orleans: Tulane University, 1902, PDF, <http://cdm16313.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16313coll6/id/245>, page 130.

<sup>34</sup> This school may have been his alma mater. <http://cdm16313.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16313coll28/id/178> Frank B. Moore, another commercial photographer, took most of the photographs in this yearbook.

<sup>35</sup> The 1905 report is in the Children's Bureau of New Orleans Records, MSS 568, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection. The 1907 report is in the New Orleans Public Library.

<sup>36</sup> Szarkowski stated that Bellocq was hydrocephalic based on the interviewees saying he had an oddly shaped head. Having medical records that do not include any mention of his head shape furthers the argument that these were exaggerations and not based in fact.

<sup>37</sup> William Russell, "William Russells Autobiography (the editors of the Modern Museum didn't even know this was a 'joke.') Ernest J. Bellocq, Photographer" Bellocq Folder Number 7, The William Russell Jazz Files, MSS 536, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/3/533>.

<sup>38</sup> *Soards' 1918 Directory*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1918.

818 Ursulines, eight blocks away from where he grew up. The 1940 census stated that Bellocq was 67 years old and had attended four years of college.<sup>39</sup>

On September 6, 1949 Bellocq accidentally fell and lacerated his scalp while he was leaving the Federal Reserve Bank (see figure 14).<sup>40</sup> He passed away from this injury on October 3, 1949.<sup>41</sup> Bellocq supposedly left an estate of “\$2,141.09 in cash and possessions.”<sup>42</sup> In the inventory of his belongings photographs were “not specifically listed, though there are references to broken photographic equipment and boxes, possibly containing negatives (items 52--54 of inventory)” and some jewelry.<sup>43</sup> These are the verifiable facts of Ernest J. Bellocq’s life, but we know of him today because of events that transpired long after his death.

### *The District*

Prostitution had a long history in New Orleans before the 1897 creation of its most famous red light district, Storyville. Forty years earlier local politicians enacted the 1857 Lorette Ordinance which created four large areas in which prostitution was tolerated. This was the “first comprehensive antiprostitution” action taken by New Orleans.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 1940 U.S. Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Population Schedule, Enumeration District No. 36-129, p. 8, 818 Ursulines St. Ernest Bellocq; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>40</sup> In the section for disease or condition directly leading to death and antecedent causes the coroner reported: “Uremia, edema of the brain, chronic myocarditis, arthritis of the spine, following lacerated wound of the scalp.” This means that Bellocq’s kidneys were failing, he had a long standing heart inflammation, and suffered from bad back pain as a result of arthritis.

<sup>41</sup> Death Certificate for Ernest J. Bellocq, October 3, 1949, City file No. 5589, State of Louisiana. Public Vital Records, The Erbon and Marie Wise Genealogical Library, Louisiana State Archives.

<sup>42</sup> John H. Lawrence, Director of Museum Programs, The Historic New Orleans Collection, e-mail message to the author, September 15, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 3.

Acknowledging that prostitution was a very large part of their economy, the politicians aimed to “regulate rather than suppress prostitution.”<sup>45</sup> The unintended consequence of these boundaries was that it “enabled the practice to thrive throughout the city.”<sup>46</sup> So in 1890 another ordinance was passed to further limit the zone of toleration.<sup>47</sup> It is essential to note that these ordinances did not legalize prostitution; they simply specified areas in which prostitution was and was not policed. Today we wonder why they did not call for the all out cessation of prostitution. The fact is that red light districts and brothels were common in American cities and frontier towns.<sup>48</sup> Although New Orleans is usually singled out as being extremely different culturally, what truly set it apart during this time period was its “location in an otherwise overwhelmingly rural and religiously conservative region, its complex racial history-especially sex across the color line and repeated attempts by municipal authorities to control yet profit from prostitution.”<sup>49</sup> And so the politicians of New Orleans, who often had financial interests in the district, dealt with the rampant prostitution by passing Ordinance No. 13,032 in 1897 that confined prostitution to a neighborhood which became known as Storyville. They again shrunk the geography of where prostitution was tolerated. Most people incorrectly state that the creation of Storyville legalized prostitution in New Orleans, but the language of the Ordinance proves otherwise:

From the first of October 1897 it shall be unlawful for any public prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet situated without the following limits: South side of Customhouse street from Basin to Roberston street, east of Robertson street

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<sup>45</sup> Long, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>48</sup> Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery, Prostitutes in the American West 1865-90*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1985.

<sup>49</sup> Long, 5.



from Customhouse to St. Louis street, south side of St. Louis street from Robertson to Basin Street.<sup>50</sup>

This states that prostitutes were not allowed outside of these boundaries (see figure 1). In order to make sure this was not legally interpreted as sanctioning prostitution they added, “That nothing herein shall be so construed as to authorize any lewd women to occupy a house, room or closet in any portion of the city.”<sup>51</sup> Taking all aspects of commercial sex into account, this industry produced over 10 million dollars a year.<sup>52</sup> The politicians “were not overly concerned with sexual hygiene and social purity, but they were very much attuned to the need to create clearly demarcated spaces for legitimate commerce.”<sup>53</sup> They succeeded in their aim of keeping residential neighborhoods respectable and containing one of the city’s most profitable enterprises.

Within Storyville there were different levels of establishments. The lowest were street level “cribs,” spare one or two room shanties “open around the clock and were used by several prostitutes working in shifts.”<sup>54</sup> The highest were the parlor houses, usually built especially for their purpose, run by a madam, and financed by powerful benefactors, often “reputable” men. The houses were decorated in a Victorian style “to develop an air of elegance, which often turned out rather garish and grotesque.”<sup>55</sup> Bellocq’s photographs were mostly inside the parlor houses, but there are two women who appear to be photographed

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<sup>50</sup> Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 192.

<sup>51</sup> Al Rose, 192.

<sup>52</sup> Al Rose, 31. Adjusted for inflation \$10 million in 1900 would be worth around \$287 million today.

<sup>53</sup> Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Craig L. Foster, “Tarnished Angels: Prostitution in Storyville, New Orleans, 1900-1910,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 31, no. 4 (1990), 394.

<sup>55</sup> Foster, “Tarnished Angels: Prostitution in Storyville, New Orleans, 1900-1910.”

outside cribs (see figures 32, 40 and 41). There was a lot of competition in the district with an estimate of 2,000 women working there.<sup>56</sup>

In order to entice customers and steer them in the direction of their proclivities, guide, known as Blue Books, were published. They delineated names and addresses where customers could find jewesses, “octoroons,” white, and “colored” women.<sup>57</sup> Relatively few of the Blue Books remain because the Comstock Act did not permit “obscene” literature to be sent through the mail so they were primarily distributed and remained in New Orleans (see figure 31).<sup>58</sup>

For 20 years having a geographically restricted commercial sex district was New Orleans’ solution to controlling prostitution. In 1917 the U.S. military closed the district because “open prostitution was prohibited within five miles of any United States military installation.”<sup>59</sup> This had the unintended consequence of landing New Orleans right back where they started; prostitution spread across the entire city. From this summary of New Orleans' infamous red light district, it is evident that Storyville was a commercial market that traded in sex and was “an extreme example of a common trend” in other American cities at

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<sup>56</sup> Al Rose, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The Comstock Act was passed in 1873 to prevent “obscene” materials (including information about abortion as well) being sent through the mail. The text states: “Be it enacted.... That whoever, within the District of Columbia or any of the Territories of the United States... shall sell... or shall offer to sell, or to lend, or to give away, or in any manner to exhibit, or shall otherwise publish or offer to publish in any manner, or shall have in his possession, for any such purpose or purposes, an obscene book, pamphlet, paper, writing, advertisement, circular, print, picture, drawing or other representation, figure, or image on or of paper or other material... he shall be imprisoned at hard labor in the penitentiary for not less than six months nor more than five years for each offense, or fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than two thousand dollars, with costs of court.”

<sup>59</sup> Pamela D. Arceneaux, “Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 28, no. 4 (1987), 397.

the time.<sup>60</sup> Today very little of the District exists because most of Storyville was torn down in the 1930s.

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<sup>60</sup> Landau, 78.

## CHAPTER II

Eighty-nine glass plate negatives comprise what has come to be known as Bellocq's "Storyville series." Eighty-seven of the plates are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>61</sup> In order to gain a better understanding of Bellocq's series I will provide an overview of the series then describe and analyze two of the photographs in detail. I will conclude with my speculation as to the original purpose of the photographs.

Although they are referred to today as a cohesive body of work, the Storyville series was done at different times for different reasons. In fact not all of the plates are even of Storyville. There are six photographs that are of entirely different subject matter: some trees in front of a house; three boys in front of a fountain; piers going into a body of water; and two women in mourning holding a photograph of a man. The remaining two plates are actually photographs of a photograph taken by another New Orleans photographer, John N. Teunisson, of a woman in a white costume with white stockings. Bellocq photographed Teunisson's portrait in order to enlarge it and place it on his wall (see red square in figure 16). The photograph of the decorated wall is one of three images Bellocq took of the interior of his apartment (see figures 16, 17, and 36). Of the photographs that *were* taken in Storyville, three are interiors of parlor houses, and the rest are portraits in which over 30 different women are portrayed, mostly in different locations. Many women are in multiple

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<sup>61</sup> On October 31 of 2016 I met with Elsa Thyss, Photo Conservation Fellow at the Met who is exclusively working on undertaking conservation treatments on the Bellocq negatives. There is much work to be done on them as many of the plates are in multiple pieces. She graciously showed me a few of the plates and Friedlander's collection of related papers. The most exciting discovery was that there are three heretofore uncirculated Bellocq photographs in a letter from Larry Borenstein in which he explained he made prints but had misplaced the plates.

photographs. Because of the variety of subjects and locations, these photographs must have been taken on several dozen trips to the district, probably over some period of time.<sup>62</sup>

One woman is in roughly a dozen photographs. On the back of one of these photographs Al Rose scrawled “Ernest Bellocq’s lady love worked in a house on Iberville Street” (see figures 18 and 19).<sup>63</sup> Whether that claim is true or not will never be known. The majority of the portraits Bellocq took of her are in a traditional studio style with a painted or black backdrop. In the photographs of his apartment walls, this woman appears a total of fifteen times (see figure 17 and purple rectangles in figure 16).<sup>64</sup> This series of portraits does appear to have been made for personal use as they were hung in his own home.

The first photograph that I will explore in detail is commonly referred to as *Nude with a Mask*, but all of the Bellocq photos are untitled (see figure 20). Most of Bellocq’s photographs of naked women show their faces and therefore are identifiable in other photographs. This image is slightly different than the others of naked women because of the mask, and the fact that it is one of the most sexually explicit, but I choose to explain it in detail because it is supposedly the only photograph for which exists an “original” print that may have been made by Bellocq. The second is a portrait of a woman sitting alone looking off into the distance. I selected these two photographs because they represent each of the two

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<sup>62</sup> On average 5 women would work in one brothel. Bellocq probably took these photographs in at least 4 different establishments. The people Friedlander interviewed identified the women in the photographs as prostitutes that they knew and recognized from the district. The photographs can be broken down by type: pose (seated, standing, or laying down), subject’s expression (relaxed, smiling, or staring off into the distance), setting (indoors or outdoors), state of undress (formal dress, in undergarments, or completely naked), whether there was another person in the photograph, and interiors without people.

<sup>63</sup> This might be the Adele that Joe Sanarens mentioned when Lee Friedlander interviewed him, mentioned on page 11 of the the 1970 exhibition catalogue.

<sup>64</sup> I am unsure if she is the same the woman who is in another series of photographs as well. If so that would bring the total count of this one woman up to 29.

groupings into which one can classify the Storyville Series: naked and erotically charged; clothed and seemingly staid.

In *Nude with a Mask* the woman is in an odalisque pose on a chaise lounge with decorative floral patterned fabric. The chaise in the foreground is angled back towards the right. The left frame of the image cuts off the end of the chaise. A solid, carved wooden bed is in the background. There are two pillows on the bed, and the headboard has a reflective quality that shows two light sources. There is a doorway to the right of the bed, and the floor is covered in a plain woven carpet. The woman wears sheer black thigh high stockings that have rolled down slightly and are a little loose. The transparency of the stockings is uneven, giving them a slightly rough look, indicating that they were of lower quality. These few details further the argument that this photograph was created for illicit purposes. Artistic or pictorialist photographs of naked women “strove to eliminate all clues of time and place from his work” whereas “pornographic figures inhabited a furnished world that showed the marks of time.”<sup>65</sup> She is not in a commercial studio, but in a bedroom, where, as a prostitute, she would conduct her business.

The woman’s naked body faces the camera as she is lying on her left side, using her left arm to prop herself up to a slightly more acute angle than the chaise provides. She placed her right arm behind her body so as not to cover her nakedness. She has put her body on display. The woman’s arms, breasts, stomach, pubic hair, and thighs are all exposed for the viewer to leisurely inspect. Bellocq used a flash to illuminate the woman in the dark room,

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<sup>65</sup> Eugene Mirabelli, “Looking and Not Looking: Pornographic and Nude Photography,” *Grand Street* 5, no. 1 (1985): 209.

and her stomach is the brightest area of her body. A ring on the woman's left ring finger catches the light and creates a rectangle of pure white. She smiles broadly showing her teeth. Only slivers of her eyes are visible, but they stare straight into the camera. There is a twinkle, a white dot, in each one that makes it seem as if she is smiling with her eyes as well. This photograph is the most sexually explicit and erotically charged of Bellocq's portraits of naked women. In this photograph the woman squarely displays the most taboo areas of her body and allows the viewer to gaze upon her. The emulsion has cracked and peeled back around the edges, causing a vignetting of the image that frames the subject. This helps to turn the photo into a unique art object rather than a "straight, unmediated" pornographic photo.<sup>66</sup>

The woman is sporting a simple mask that covers her forehead, cheeks and nose.<sup>67</sup> This style of mask was worn in New Orleans during Mardi Gras. A drawing of a woman wearing a similar mask appears in a Blue Book from the same era as when the photograph was taken (see figure 21). The mask obscures the woman's face and connotes a festive or playful occasion. As it covers her face it also strips her of her identity, allowing the viewer to see her as a type, just another nude woman, rather than as an individual. Bellocq created two other photographs of a woman in a mask, but they are very different in composition and mood (see figures 22 and 23). In figure 22 the woman is not in an erotic position. In figure 23 the woman does not make eye contact with the camera.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>67</sup> Masks were also employed in photographs during this time period when photographers were taking nude photographs for artists to use as life studies. Mirabelli points out, "Women who were accustomed to disrobe for a painter prudently hesitated to pose in the same way for the painter's camera. Indeed, a couple of the most haunting early photographs of the unclothed figure are those taken by the painter Thomas Eakins of women in his studio, elegant and enigmatic figures who stand at ease with their faces turned resolutely from us, save for one in a black mask and another in a white blindfold," 202.

In other of Bellocq's Storyville portraits the same women are easily identified in multiple photographs, both naked and clothed. In the case of *Nude with a Mask*, there are only two other photographs which may be the same woman. In the first the face is scratched out, the chaise is gone, the photograph is badly deteriorated, and the ring is not visible (see figure 24). In the second the woman is wearing an undergarment, there is a chair between her and the chaise, and she is wearing shoes (see figure 25). However the same bed is in the background, and the woman is wearing similar thigh high stockings.

What I refer to as possibly an "original" print is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see figure 26). In a statement about the print The Met wrote, "In 1980, this photograph and two other vintage prints were discovered in New Orleans with the effects of Louis Danzig, a former cameraman for Pathé and Movietone News. Although it has not been documented, it is believed that Danzig knew Bellocq and received the prints directly from the photographer."<sup>68</sup> This print is cropped; the woman's body takes up the entire image and is at a sharper angle. The style of printing is much different than Friedlander's approach of printing the full frame of the plate.<sup>69</sup> The photograph was printed with high contrast, but, because of the age and chemical composition of the print, it has discolored to an orange-pinkish hue.<sup>70</sup> The tight cropping, eliminating any superfluous surroundings that are not of the woman, suggests that the purpose of the photograph was to be sexually arousing, a

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<sup>68</sup> "E. J. Bellocq | [Nude with a Mask]." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283262>.

<sup>69</sup> I specifically do not say entirety of the plate because Friedlander removed some of the numbers that Bellocq had written on the plates. The prints that were made during Borenstein and/or Rose's ownership of the plates show these original numbers.

<sup>70</sup> The photograph has also subsequently suffered damage from light exposure. The Metropolitan Museum displayed the photo in an exhibition for some time and only realized that the photograph was changing after it was too late. They no longer exhibit it and rarely take it out.



pornographic image. This “original” print highlights the contrast between the photographs as Friedlander printed them and Bellocq’s possible intention of cropping the images. Friedlander printing the whole frame (as is the style and practice of many modern photographers) may not have been the way in which Bellocq had intended them to be consumed. We can infer that in the cropped “original” the background was an unnecessary distraction from the goal of the photograph—to show an attractive, naked woman in a bedroom.

The second photograph I will describe is of a woman sitting in an armchair surrounded by pillows, looking off into the distance (see figure 27). She is wearing a diaphanous white lace dress in a style that was in fashion in the 1910s. Her dress has been lifted up to show her crossed legs. She wears black stockings that appear to be of slightly better quality. She rests her head on her left arm with one finger touching her temple. Her other arm rests in her lap with her hand in a loose fist. Her gaze appears unfocused. She stares at some place to the left out of the frame, and her expression has a soft quality, as if she is wistfully daydreaming. She is adorned with two bracelets, several rings, and a necklace with a pendant. Obscuring the chair upon which she is seated, over six pillows engulf her; one bears a drawing of a woman, another is of flowers with thorny stems, another is striped, and one says “daisies won’t tell.” To her left is a piece of furniture with a mirror reflecting pictures hanging on the wall of the opposite side of the room.

It appears that the lighting is natural so this photograph would have been taken during the day time. Parlor houses were closed to the public during the day and opened only late at

night. In order to gain entrée, the Madam of the house would have had to have known Bellocq and his business there, otherwise he would have been turned away.

The image appears chaste until we closely inspect the little cards hanging on the wall. They state: “OH! Bébé PLEASE COME;” “OH! DEARIE I GIVE U MUCH PLEASURE;” “DEARIE U ASK FOR MARGUARITE.” These suggestive cards may have functioned as calling cards, advertisements, or tokens that the women gave to their patrons. There is also a ribbon advertising Pabst Blue Ribbon and a pennant that says “Mardi Gras New Orleans (year indecipherable, possibly 1910).” The woman appears incredibly relaxed and at home in this room, which is also in another photograph of two women seated playing cards and drinking champagne (see figure 43). Like other of Bellocq’s more formal, clothed portraits, this photograph could have simply been used as a traditional portrait of the sitter. It is only within their context, having been taken in Storyville, that gives them a greater meaning, more illicit in nature. As Susan Sontag posited, “That they are part of a series is what gives the photographs their integrity, their depth, their meaning.”<sup>71</sup>

One of the most important elements of Bellocq’s Storyville photographs is their unique ability to provide evidence and testify to the conditions of these women’s lives. So rarely do we have primary source material about prostitution that is unadulterated or without a “moral” filter. These photographs are of great importance “since prostitutes left few written records, older scholarship concentrated on public and private movements to control or eliminate prostitution,” using the testimony of the bureaucratic officials that policed the

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Sontag, *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville, the Red-Light District of New Orleans*, (New York: Random House, 1996): 8.

industry.<sup>72</sup> Because of the dearth of a written record by the women themselves “only infrequently do these sources provide the testimony of prostitutes.”<sup>73</sup> Photography allows us to have visual documentation of “the culture and material conditions in which [prostitutes] lived and worked.”<sup>74</sup> Because of the participatory nature of these photographs, Bellocq and the subjects having negotiated their creation, these women co-authored visual evidence that outlasted their now forgotten lives.

Although Bellocq’s photographs of naked women were illegal when they were created because of the Comstock Act and Louisiana’s Act 111 of 1884, we know that this genre was quite common.<sup>75</sup> Pornographic images of women were known as “French pictures,” referring to the fact that they usually were created and manufactured in France. The photographs that Bellocq took in Storyville are in an entirely different style than the schmaltzy studio portraits of naked women or the straightforward images depicting sexual intercourse. Supposedly there were places in New Orleans where you could discreetly buy pornographic images during this time period.<sup>76</sup> In general, lewd photographs were kept

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<sup>72</sup> Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “Archaeologists in the Brothel: ‘Sin City,’ Historical Archaeology and Prostitution,” *Historical Archaeology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 133.

<sup>73</sup> Gilfoyle, 133 and 138.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> Similarly to the Comstock Act, Louisiana’s Act 111 of 1884 stated: “That if any person shall bring or cause to be brought into this State, for sale or exhibition, or shall sell... or having possession thereof, shall knowingly exhibit to another, any indecent pictorial newspaper, tending to debauch the morals or any indecent or obscene book, pamphlet, paper, drawing, lithograph, engraving, daguerreotype, photograph, picture... or shall advertise any of said articles or things for sale, by any form or notice, written or verbal, or shall manufacture, draw or print any of said articles, with intent to sell or expose, or to circulate the same, such person so offending shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction, shall be punished by fine and imprisonment.” It was only in 1973 with the *Miller v. California* decision that obscenity was loosely defined and permitted to circulate more freely.

<sup>76</sup> “Johnny: Well, they were so commonplace; I mean we knew all the people he was taking pictures of. There were a vast number of people there, you know. It was at this time there was a saloon, maybe you’ve heard of this, there was this saloon on South Rampart, and above this saloon was a little room, and in this room were thousands of pictures; they looked like they were made in France, of fornication and anything related to that in all its possible...,” Lee Friedlander and John Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970): 12.

hidden because of their illegal status. For obvious reasons very few of these images have survived.<sup>77</sup> Because of their legal status, it is incredibly rare for photographs of this nature to have the creator's name conclusively identified. Vestiges of Storyville itself are also scarce as Storyville was torn down, and, for a long time, that period was considered a shameful chapter in the city's past. The photographs that Bellocq took in Storyville are exceedingly unique because their provenance was maintained; he kept them in his apartment until he died; and, although the plates changed hands many times after his death, their subsequent owners were passionate about the history of New Orleans and credited Bellocq as the photographs' creator.<sup>78</sup>

The question remains: what was the purpose of the photographs that Bellocq took? A historian of Storyville's Blue Books wrote in 1936, "Some of the more *interesting* guides, undoubtedly were not published in quantity. Some contained a number of nude pictures instead to explain some of the charms of the young women in a more unspeakable manner."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps Bellocq's photographs were used for this purpose. I believe that the majority of the photographs of Storyville women were created for commercial purposes because: Bellocq was a man who made his living as a photographer; the amount of time that the Storyville

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<sup>77</sup> I have spoken with several erotic photography collectors, and they have verified that pornographic photography or images of prostitutes from this time period are incredibly rare. One collector said that in his 50 years collecting photography, he has never come across anything that is analogous to Bellocq's work, adding that he has been surprised since we know that these images were commonplace during their time.

<sup>78</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3. This chain of custody, however, relies on the testimony of a few people who have now passed. Bellocq's authorship of the plates can rightfully be called into question. Larry Borenstein bought them from David Ruiz, and then sold the plates to Lee Friedlander. Borenstein was a major property owner in the French Quarter, is credited with supporting New Orleans Jazz and founding Preservation Hall, a venue where visitors can experience the music. Al Rose, who wrote the first definitive history of Storyville and a friend of Borenstein, was in possession of the plates for some time before Friedlander purchased them.

<sup>79</sup> Semper idem. *The "Blue Book"; a Bibliographical Attempt to Describe the Guide Books to the Houses of Ill Fame in New Orleans as They Were Published There. Together with Some Pertinent and Illuminating Remarks Pertaining to the Establishments and Courtesans as Well as to Harlotry in General in New Orleans*, (New Orleans: Private print, 1936), 74.

works would have taken is considerable; and the fact that they were mostly taken during the day-time suggests that they were commissioned. When these photographs were taken the sex industry in New Orleans was one of the city's greatest revenue sources. There is no evidence to support or deny that Bellocq, a man who made his living as a photographer, did not intend to sell the images. Besides *Nude with a Mask*, the other photographs that Bellocq took of naked women were incredibly straightforward, conventional, and sometimes even out of focus (see figures 32-35). Just a few photographs being out of focus is shocking for a commercial photographer with over a decade of experience. This suggests that he was not the most technically skilled or assiduous. However, he was working in low light environments so the depth of field would have been very narrow and easily, clumsily bumped to the incorrect length. The overall spare quality of the photographs, not including anything more than what was necessary and leaving the surrounding decorations largely in place, shows that he was unconcerned with the surroundings. He had the technical expertise to remove the backgrounds and produce prints that were only the woman's face or body (see figures 15, 16, 37, and 38).<sup>80</sup> It is highly likely that the women themselves or the Madam of a parlor house commissioned these photographs to advertise the women in a guide (such as Lulu White's *New Mahogany Hall*), give or sell to patrons as tokens of remembrance, or use as an indication as being a loyal customer.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> As evidenced in the Teunisson image (figure 15) he reprinted and framed on his wall (figure 16). Figure 37 has been edited to be the vignettted portrait in the blue rectangle in figure 36. In figure 38 a small white triangle to the left of the woman's arm shows that part of the plate has been edited to begin this process of creating a white background.

<sup>81</sup> White, Lulu. *New Mahogany Hall*. New Orleans, Louisiana, 1898.  
<http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4585>.

Over twenty of the photographs bear the markings of someone having scratched off part of the emulsion, rendering many of the women without faces (see figures 24, 25, and 39-41). As is the case with everything related to Bellocq, we can only speculate as the motivation. Susan Sontag found these photographs to be “actually painful to look at” because they reminded her of “the meanness and abjection of a prostitute’s life.”<sup>82</sup> It is an easy jump to view the negation of a prostitute’s face by physical removal of emulsion and think of the actual violence and danger of their profession. One argument is that someone else scratched the faces to protect the identity of the women, but as is evidenced in figures 41 and 42, there are instances of the same woman being scratched out in one and identifiable in another. My interpretation is that it was a way of “killing” the negative. Sometimes when a photographer or editor was displeased with the resulting image, they would intentionally harm the negative in order to ensure that it was never printed.<sup>83</sup> If Bellocq was dissatisfied with how a photograph turned out, he could simply ruin it. One instance that supports this theory is the two Teunisson plates that are of the image. In one of the plates the woman’s face is scratched out (see figure 43). The other Bellocq used to create an enlarged and edited prints(see figures 15 and 16). Another option is that the women themselves were displeased with the image and requested that Bellocq destroy them. However, this probably is not the case either. Lee Friedlander said in his interview with Larry Borenstein, “But it happens that those were scratched when it was wet cause the emulsion was peeled over in a way that it would have

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<sup>82</sup> Sontag, 8.

<sup>83</sup> The most famous example of this is Roy Stryker, an economist who was made the director of the Farm Security Administration’s documentary photography program, punching holes in negatives that he did not like. His editing decisions ruined photographs by Marion Post Wolcott, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Carl Mydans, and many other beloved American photographers.

been wet.”<sup>84</sup> If they had been scratched when they were dry the emulsion would have flaked off. Bellocq photographed using the dry plate process so the only time the plates would have been wet was during the development stage. According to Friedlander, Bellocq or whomever developed the plates would have had to scratch the emulsion during the development. The Photography Conservation Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art will be conducting several experiments to determine whether Friedlander was correct.

As to Bellocq’s photographs of interiors, Al Rose wrote that Bellocq “is said to have shot many of the illustrations that appeared in the blue book.”<sup>85</sup> Several of the Blue Books are illustrated with photographs of brothels’ interiors, but they are not credited to any photographer (see figure 28).<sup>86</sup> None of the Blue Books contain the Bellocq photographs that are a part of the Storyville series. In viewing figures 27 and 28, the same style of lighting fixture is used in both rooms. However the first photograph is credited as being in Josie Arlington’s establishment, whereas two of Bellocq’s photographs have been identified as Lulu White’s Mahogany Hall (see figure 29).<sup>87</sup> Bellocq’s interior image depicting a bedroom was identified by Al Rose as being “upstairs at 341 Basin Street when Willie O. Barrera operated this corner” (see figure 30).<sup>88</sup> I find Rose’s claim that Bellocq shot the photographs for the Blue Books to be implausible because the style of images illustrating the interiors of parlor houses in the Blue Books are much different than Bellocq’s other photographs of

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<sup>84</sup> Larry Borenstein, interviewed by Lee Friedlander, 1969, transcript, page 2.

<sup>85</sup> Al Rose Collection.

<sup>86</sup> The only other establishments that advertised interior views are Miss Ray Owen’s “Star Mansion,” Miss Hilma Burt’s, and Tom Anderson’s Annex. The same photographs appear year after year in varying degrees of quality.

<sup>87</sup> There is one image that says it is of Lulu White in the 1901 Blue Book, but scholarship has proven that it is not actually her.

<sup>88</sup> Al Rose Collection.

interior spaces. The artificial lighting in the Blue Book photographs is even and the images are more tightly cropped. Bellocq's other images of interiors, such as the ones in the *The Owl*, the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Annual Reports, and the Storyville series, rely much more heavily on natural light and directed flash photography. His photographs give a much better impression of the overall space of a room and are at a wider angle, giving the spaces more breathing room. However, it is probable that the three interior images of parlor houses that Bellocq took were commissioned to illustrate a guidebook that was in the works or an advertisement that is no longer in existence. In the very least, the Madam of the house would have had to give Bellocq permission to photograph the spaces. Bellocq took these photographs during the daytime with an 8x10 camera. There is no way he could have taken these images surreptitiously when the house was open at night.

Bellocq's photographs remain popular because they are enigmatic, beautiful, and rare. Writers interpreting Bellocq co-opted him to fit into interpretations for their convenience, arguing that he was either a proto-modernist, an ultra-clean realist, an early documentary photographer, or all three. Szarkowski fashioning Bellocq into a caricature and squeezing him into The History of Photography timeline enabled other writers to graft their interpretations onto Bellocq as well. As historians it is our instinctual impulse to classify in order to gain a better understanding and satiate the desire to have Bellocq fit neatly within Art History. In the past 25 years writers commenting on Bellocq's work have made a laudable effort to situate his works within the context of their time. Although this is an important undertaking, Geoffrey Batchen's warning must be heeded; when we are tempted "to see the meanings of objects through a restoration of their original contexts and social



settings (in the case of vernacular photographs, now often lost or, at best, a matter of speculation) ... the presumed intention of the artist is replaced by that of society as a whole.”

<sup>89</sup> He implores that “the critical historian’s task is not to uncover a secret or lost meaning but to articulate the intelligibility for our own time.”<sup>90</sup> This causes a conundrum when faced with Bellocq’s Storyville series. I can only hypothesize about their now unknown temporally specific functions and significances, but not critically explaining their unique origin in order to postulate possible original value also does them a disservice.

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<sup>89</sup> Geoffrey Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies,” 268.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 269.

### CHAPTER III

After Bellocq's death, his negatives were held in David Ruiz's junk shop in New Orleans until Larry Borenstein bought them.<sup>91</sup> Then in 1958 Borenstein showed Lee Friedlander the negatives, and Friedlander purchased them in 1966.<sup>92</sup> His immediate goal was to make prints.<sup>93</sup> Friedlander showed the prints to John Szarkowski, then Curator of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). They agreed to exhibit the works at MoMA and publish an exhibition catalogue. Szarkowski chose 34 images and displayed them in an exhibition from November 19, 1970 to January 10, 1971.<sup>94</sup> From there the exhibition traveled to nine other venues. On January 14, 1971 the exhibition catalogue was made available to the public.

In 1969 Lee Friedlander went to New Orleans to interview people who had known Bellocq during his lifetime. The transcripts of the interviews are in MoMA's archives.<sup>95</sup> Friedlander's intention was to learn more about Bellocq, but a great deal of time had passed

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<sup>91</sup> Borenstein recollected that there were actually roughly 100 plates in Ruiz's possession. Ruiz wanted \$125 for the lot. Borenstein bought the plates over the course of a year, in either 1951 or 1952, paying \$25 at a time. When he finally took possession he recalled that there were actually 97 or 98 plates, but he couldn't remember if they had counted 100 to begin with and Ruiz might have sold a few or whether that was the count all along. Supposedly Joe Sanarens also purchased a few plates from Ruiz.

<sup>92</sup> Lee Friedlander, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970): Preface.

<sup>93</sup> At some point during Borenstein's ownership of the negatives, he had someone make prints from them, most likely Dan Leyrer. They are enlargements and include the original numbers that Bellocq had affixed to the negatives. The negatives were in better condition than so the prints look different than Friedlander's. Borenstein said they he sold maybe 100 of these prints. Al Rose also had prints made and used them in his *Storyville* book. In his personal papers Rose also asserts that he repaired some of the negatives that were broken. The Historic New Orleans Collection, the Hogan Jazz Archive, and the Louisiana Research Center all own prints from this time period. There was also a man who wrote a *Life* Magazine article about Jazz in New Orleans who was interested in using the Bellocq images. He took photographs of the series, but did not use them for the article.

<sup>94</sup> The Museum had an exhibition up at the same time that was called "The Nude: Thirty 20th-Century Drawings" that ran from November 10, 1970 through April 21, 1971.

<sup>95</sup> They are also in the Met's Photo Conservation Lab with the plates and all the other documentation Lee Friedlander had regarding Bellocq.

since his death so the interviewees were mostly acquaintances who had interacted with him at the end of his life. Of the four people involved in the interviews, none of them even knew Bellocq's first name or expressed particularly positive feelings towards Bellocq.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Friedlander was not an adroit interviewer and frequently asked leading questions. Only after the interviews did someone make an attempt to learn facts about Bellocq. Jazz Historian Bill Russell conducted research into Bellocq's life in 1969 and sent his research to Szarkowski.<sup>97</sup> But for some unknown reason Szarkowski did not include any of this information in the exhibition catalogue.<sup>98</sup> Neglecting to publish the evidence that Russell gathered is just one of many instances of Szarkowski intentionally ignoring the mundane facts of Bellocq's life and favoring a fantastical version. Through the text in the exhibition catalogue Szarkowski created a myth by stating that Bellocq was a person who was a fat loner, possibly had irregular sexual desires or was impotent, had hydrocephalus, was standoffish and gruff, and was very short.

Szarkowski's exhibition catalogue was singlehandedly the most damaging event to Bellocq's legacy because the content was accepted as fact when it was actually based on highly subjective opinions. In an introductory statement Szarkowski wrote:

The following discussion never took place as printed here. It is rather a synthesis of four long conversations recorded by Lee Friedlander in 1969, plus

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<sup>96</sup> In November of 1971 Friedlander conducted an interview with Mona MacMurray, a New Orleans Photographer. She was incredibly sympathetic towards Bellocq. Some illuminating quotes from her about Bellocq: "He wasn't rude. He wasn't cold. He wasn't like 'don't talk to me!' It was just he was quiet;" "Nobody knew anything about him;" "These days he'd be normal, but back then he was an odd ball."

<sup>97</sup> Bill Russell sent part of his research to Szarkowski on January 13, 1970, a whole year before the exhibition catalogue came out. In this letter Russell included photographs of Bellocq's 3 homes and even encouraged Szarkowski to use them in the exhibition catalogue.

<sup>98</sup> Bill Russell's research on Bellocq is in the MoMA Archives as well as The Historic New Orleans Collection. There is a detailed timeline which I also confirmed through my research. Lee Friedlander dedicated his introduction in the exhibition catalogue to Bill Russell.

excerpts from a letter from Al Rose to Lee Friedlander dated July 12, 1968. The source materials have been heavily edited, intermixed, and changed in sequence. I believe, however, that the participants meaning have been accurately preserved. Editor's comments are in italics.<sup>99</sup>

However, having read the full transcripts of the interviews, it is evident that Szarkowski chose the most sensational quotes and strung them together in misleading ways. He did not accurately preserve the meanings of the participants. On the first page of the interview transcripts Szarkowski chose passages in which the interviewees say that Bellocq was French, a “hydrocephalic semi-dwarf,” fat, mercilessly teased, and had a high pitched voice.<sup>100</sup> It is true that Bellocq was just over five feet and stout. However he was American. And as demonstrated by the medical histories discussed in the first chapter there were no mention of his head shape in any of his medical records. On the second page the quotes make Bellocq out to be a social pariah who had a chip on his shoulder and never had a conversation unless it was about photography. It would have been helpful for Szarkowski to reiterate that these people did not know Bellocq well, and they weren't close friends who had insights, but had acquaintances proffering subjective observations.

Only one interviewee knew Bellocq better than the others; Joe Sanarens met him in 1938, and they were on friendly terms as Sanarens worked in the photography shops that Bellocq frequented. When Sanarens was sick and had to stay in the hospital, Bellocq visited him.<sup>101</sup> Sanarens was also the only interviewee to visit Bellocq in his home, and Bellocq even showed Sanarens the Storyville series.

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<sup>99</sup> Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*, unpaginated.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> Joe Sanarens, interviewed by Lee Friedlander, 1969, transcript, page 12.

In Szarkowski's interspersed commentary, he continued to weave a fantastical tale of Bellocq.<sup>102</sup> Using poetic language and hollow generalizations, such as "photography has enabled us to explore the richness of that swarming, shifting, four-dimensional continuum that we choose to call reality," Szarkowski's interjections are mere musings.<sup>103</sup> Only once does Szarkowski state that "this is a guess only," but he phrases his viewpoints with certainty, for example: "he was also a man of modest expectations."<sup>104</sup> How could Szarkowski ever have known Bellocq's mindset? There are multiple accounts, in parts of the interviews that were not quoted in the exhibition catalogue, of Bellocq's actions that contradict a modest demeanor. Bellocq wore striking outfits, had his initials engraved on his lenses' metal rims, commissioned custom boxes for his equipment, and sported a large diamond ring.<sup>105</sup> Speculating as to the reason why the photographs were taken Szarkowski conceded that:

It is possible that the Storyville pictures were done as a commercial assignment--perhaps as an equivalent of the standard theatrical publicity portrait, useful to the subject in seeking a position in a better house, or to the house in making its staff known to their potential customers.<sup>106</sup>

But he did not bring up the commercial photography industry again. He also followed that statement by asserting "the pictures themselves suggest that they were not made on assignment, but as a personal adventure" because Bellocq "found [the women] irresistibly compelling."<sup>107</sup> There is no concrete evidence as to how Bellocq personally felt about the women. Once again, Szarkowski represents his conjectures as facts.

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<sup>102</sup> Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Joe Sanarens, interviewed by Lee Friedlander, 1969, transcript, page 13. Johnny Wiggs, interviewed by Lee Friedlander, 1969, transcript, page 9. Mona MacMurray, interviewed by Lee Friedlander, 1971.

<sup>106</sup> Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville portraits*, 13. This exact passage was also a part of the wall text that was on display during the exhibition.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

In editing the exhibition catalogue Szarkowski established the absurd narrative about Bellocq's life. Although he admitted that "our knowledge of E.J. Bellocq barely transcends the level of rumor," Szarkowski's commentary and heavily modified interviews were taken as fact without being questioned.<sup>108</sup> Szarkowski did not even attempt to situate the photographs within their historical context, neglected to include Russell's research on Bellocq, and did not learn about the culture of Storyville.

One of the main reasons for Szarkowski's negligence is that he had other, more pressing agendas. During his tenure at MoMA, one of his crusades was to elevate the medium of photography as a whole, making sure that commercial and vernacular photographs were held in the same esteem as fine art photography. Unfortunately, this led to a highly subjective opinion, not based on primary sources, becoming *the* narrative about Bellocq that continues to circulate decades later. A single man's viewpoint that turns into the historical record is all too common. Subsequent academic, critical, and popular writers who repeated Szarkowski's interpretation of Bellocq as the truth consist of Al Rose, Patrick Roegiers, Susan Sontag, Martha Rosler, Eugenia Parry, and many more.<sup>109</sup> The spread of misinformation has a snowball effect as seen here by these writers not questioning the veracity of what Szarkowski published. This led to the majority of what was published about Bellocq to be a repetition of these mistruths. Here one must engage in Adrienne Rich's practice of re-envisioning in order to expose and question patriarchally determined

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<sup>108</sup> John Szarkowski, *Looking at photographs; 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Jorge Lewinski, Mollie LeVeque, Phil Oppenheim, Dennis Gaffney, Gilbert King, Janis Kelly, and many more.

narratives. Szarkowski was an able-bodied white male in a position of authority and power othering people who lived on the margins of society.

There was only one writer, Mary Gehman, who published a different, more sympathetic account of Bellocq in a local magazine nine years after the exhibition catalogue. She wrote that he was “as normal as the other lonely elderly people who roamed Canal Street.”<sup>110</sup> Using Joe Sanarens’ memories she humanized Bellocq by describing his daily routine of making the rounds at the local camera shops and taking naps at the train station. Her more objective approach further highlights Szarkowski’s inability to acknowledge and account for his own biases which led to a baseless interpretation. What other writers accepted as fact was actually Szarkowski’s shoddily constructed myth.

Since the women portrayed in Bellocq’s Storyville photographs were often posing without clothes or in their undergarments, these photographs, seen in their time, would have been considered pornographic and illegal. So how were they able to be displayed as art in a Museum over 50 years after their creation? The propriety of images has always been hotly debated.<sup>111</sup> In order to determine and sanction what was in poor taste and what was appropriate art historians created a false opposition between the naked and the nude. Works that realistically depicted people without clothes were deemed naked portrayals whereas morally edifying and objectified depictions came to be referred to as nudes. Many art historians have engaged in the debate, attempting to tease out propriety and artists’

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Gehman, “In Defense of E.J. Bellocq,” *New Orleans*, July 1979.

<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that this debate has been determined from a western, eurocentric perspective. Especially since art history as a discipline has primarily dealt with the western and european conceptions of the naked and the nude, treating non-western depictions of the unclothed body as entirely different because of their historical status as being outside the canon, not part of the dominant narrative.

intentions, explaining what they posit as the differences between the sensual, the erotic, the overtly sexual, and the pornographic, and whether or not these genres qualify as art.

Kenneth Clark took on the debate in his seminal book *The Nude; a Study in Ideal Form* in which he praised antiquity and classical depictions of the human body as perfecting an otherwise inharmonious physical reality. He stated that the naked human body is embarrassing, vulnerable, and shameful; whereas the nude is an idealized, artistic form to be celebrated. Clark almost exclusively discussed classical painting and sculpture, but he made one judgment about photography. He found that even though photographers have “every advantage” when photographing a person without clothes, being “free to pose and light her in conformity with their notions of beauty” and “can tone down and accentuate by retouching,” their results are ultimately “hardly ever satisfactory to those whose eyes have grown accustomed to the harmonious simplifications of antiquity.”<sup>112</sup> In Clark’s conception Bellocq’s photographs are undoubtedly *not* “nude” works of art. On the potential for nude works to be erotic Clark stated, “No nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling, even though it be only the faintest shadow - and if it does not do so, it is bad art and false morals.”<sup>113</sup> However, in this book, he does not specifically address pornography, works that were made with the sole intention of being arousing.

Over two decades later, in *Ways of Seeing* the critic John Berger stated:

To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order

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<sup>112</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude; a Study in Ideal Form*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): 27.

<sup>113</sup> Clark, 8.



to become nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.”<sup>114</sup>

Unlike Clark, Berger takes into account that the model is a person with reflexive understanding of their actions and the ability to understand others’ perceptions of themselves even though they are being objectified. Berger acknowledges that models have agency, proffering, “She is offering up her femininity as the surveyed” and “this nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings or demands.”<sup>115</sup> In the Bellocq photographs the women’s expressions are confident and appear to be genuine. However, as prostitutes, the women were accustomed to the necessity of being the surveyed, having to perform in order to keep their business solvent, so the authenticity of their captured expressions is impossible to know with certainty. It is undeniable that the women are conscious that they have placed their bodies on display, that they are fully aware of its potential in the sexual economy of prostitution, and they may have used these photographs to either commodify themselves or be objectified by others in order to succeed in their business. In displaying their naked bodies these women advertised their sexuality and their availability through the commercial sex industry. When the photographs are interpreted in their historical context, it is clear that Bellocq’s works were sexually explicit, falling within the naked category even though they were subsequently interpreted as nudes.

More recent scholars have continued to unpack why such importance has been placed on the female nude. One of the reasons why the medium of photography does not fit

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<sup>114</sup> John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 1973): 54.

<sup>115</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 55 and 52.

comfortably in the naked/nude debate is because, in a way, it sparked the discussion. Kelly Dennis stated that “photographic pornography plays an unacknowledged role in the debate between painting and photography in the nineteenth century. Photographic nudes, shockingly immediate rather than distantly idealized, disrupted the aura of the painted nude” because of “the indexical representation in photography.”<sup>116</sup> The invention of the medium of photography was one of the reasons critics were spurred to articulate when and how naked women should be considered art and when their depiction should be shunned by society as inappropriate. Abigail Solomon-Godeau explained that

the photographic nude inevitably disrupts these structures of containment and idealization, disrupts, in short, the propriety of the nude. What the painter elided, the photographer showed: not just pubic hair, but dirty feet, and, perhaps most disturbingly, the face of the real woman, often including her direct and charmless gaze. The look of these women is rarely the inviting, compliant expression that signals complicity between the desiring subject and the object of desire.<sup>117</sup>

Photography’s destabilization caused the need to delineate opposites, the high art nude on one end and explicit pornography on the other. In her essay “The Female Nude: Pornography, Art, and Sexuality,” Lynda Nead clarified why this subject matter was so contested by stating:

pornography may be defined as any representation that achieves a certain degree of sexual explicitness, art has to be protected from being engulfed by pornography in order to maintain its position as the opposition to pornography. In other words, through a process of mutual definition, the two categories keep each other and the whole system in place.<sup>118</sup>

The naked/nude classification is the keystone of this debate, a weighing of aesthetics and achievement of intention, caught between what is culturally valued as art versus what is

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<sup>116</sup> Kelly Dennis, *Art/porn: A History of Seeing and Touching*, (New York: Berg, 2009), 62 and 96.

<sup>117</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Legs of the Countess,” *October* 39 (1986): 98.

<sup>118</sup> Lynda Nead, “The Female Nude: Pornography, Art, and Sexuality,” *Signs* 15, no. 2 (Winter, 1990): 325-6.

morally condemned as obscene. This is why Nead asserted that “high art had to be maintained as an edifying, moral, and privileged form of cultural consumption.”<sup>119</sup> I have demonstrated that in academic writings the female nude as a subject has been highly contested and is a product of the environment in which it is interpreted.

If Bellocq had intended to circulate these images as pornography or was hired by his subjects to create them, he would not have been alone. Pornographic images were commonplace in Storyville. They were also produced and available for purchase throughout New Orleans.<sup>120</sup> Historian Al Rose stated that there was “good money” to be made so “dozens, perhaps hundreds, of photographers gravitated to Storyville over the years, just as they did to the red-light districts of... other large cities, in search of uninhibited models.”<sup>121</sup> Some prostitutes did have their picture taken to give or sell to customers for advertising purposes or as mementos.<sup>122</sup> However, being able to say whether or not that was the situation in the case of Bellocq’s work is nearly impossible. Getting a firm grasp on illicit photographs of naked women as a genre is exceedingly difficult because as Linda Williams pointed out, “most of these images, until very recently, have circulated only underground and have been incriminating to their owners and producers, [so] we know almost nothing of their production and use.”<sup>123</sup> Because of their taboo subject matter and their unwholesome reason for creation,

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<sup>119</sup> Nead, 328.

<sup>120</sup> In the *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* of 1911, on page 23, they refer to a case of two men arrested for “exhibiting obscene postal cards in their stores on Canal Street.”

<sup>121</sup> Al Rose, 60.

<sup>122</sup> The book *Photographs of Red Light Ladies 1865-1920* by Jay Moynahan is the only publication I have found that solely deals with photographs of American prostitutes. This book however is of exceedingly poor scholarship, completely lacking citations. It is unfortunately a trend in writing about prostitution and pornography. He reproduced many Bellocq images without crediting them. Bellocq’s images are also reproduced without credit in *Fille de Joie*.

<sup>123</sup> Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible,”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 28.

“few of the images have undergone comprehensive study to determine the period and location from which they originate, nor the political, social and commercial implications of the creation.”<sup>124</sup> Contributing to this complicated genre is also the fact that the majority of prostitutes are anonymous to history. As Alecia Long stated prostitution “history has too often been either overlooked or portrayed in a manner that, when not actually insulting, has been stilted, stereotypical, and woefully incomplete.”<sup>125</sup> So it remains today that photographs such as the ones Bellocq produced are doubly challenging to find, identify, and nearly impossible to firmly establish their provenance.

There are a multitude of reasons why Szarkowski was able to interpret Bellocq’s photographs of unclothed women as art and not as pornography. Skillful interpretation has to be done in order to elevate a photograph of a naked person into a nude. Szarkowski’s privileged status allowed him to determine the narrative of Bellocq’s work and life without difficulty. David Freedberg argued that, “what is realistic is ugly and vulgar. Art is beautiful and high. The photograph is realistic; it is vulgar; it elicits natural and realistic responses. In art, nudity is beautiful and ideal; in the photograph (unless it has acquired the status of art), it is ugly and therefore provocative.”<sup>126</sup> Including Bellocq’s Storyville work in an elite cultural institution brought the photographs to high art status. MoMA also had an exhibition up at the same time that was called “The Nude: Thirty 20th-Century Drawings,” further establishing their ability to categorically determine what was an acceptable nude. In a position of

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<sup>124</sup> James Crump, “Archiving Sexuality : The Photographic Collection of the Kinsey Institute,” In *Harms Way: Lust & Madness, Murder & Mayhem : A Book of Photographs*, edited by Joel-Peter Witkin. Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms Publishers, 1994.

<sup>125</sup> Long, xiii.

<sup>126</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 353.

authority Szarkowski was able to proffer his myth of Bellocq as a deformed outsider, and others clung to it rather than try to truly understand the photographs within their original historical context. As has been proven that task is exceedingly difficult because we will never know why Bellocq took these photographs or how they were used. Devoid of their context they were able to be re-interpreted, and unfortunately we will never know the true significance of the images.

The Bellocq works are also unique in that they were discovered as individual glass plates. Freedberg asserted that “photography is reproductive; art is unique.”<sup>127</sup> Even though the medium is photography, Friedlander’s laborious process of printing the plates and tightly controlling their dissemination and means of production elevated these works to art.<sup>128</sup> Since an accepted fine art photographer created the prints, they were able to achieve status as unique works of art, transcending their genre.

Another way Szarkowski was able to interpret Bellocq’s work as art was because seeing prostitutes depicted as art in museums was nothing new. Hollis Clayson found that using prostitutes as the subject for artworks was a cliché mainstay of painters.<sup>129</sup> In paintings that used prostitutes as models, the women were portrayed directly, on display and

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 355.

<sup>128</sup> Friedlander “found [he] could not use [his] conventional method of printing, as the plates did not seem to respond well to bromide paper. The tonal range was too limited even on the softest grade. Some research led [him] to a printing technique popular around the turn of the century called P.O.P. (Printing Out Paper), which has an inherent self-masking quality. In this method the plates were exposed to the P.O.P. by indirect sunlight for anywhere from three hours to seven days, depending on the plate’s density and the quality of the daylight. The paper was then given a toning bath of the gold chloride type. Fixing and washing were done in the usual manner but with greater care, in that the P.O.P. emulsion is especially fragile. This method, pursued with patience and elbow grease, provided [him] with a full set of eighty-nine prints which satisfied [his] idea of what the prints should look like. Since [he had] never seen any prints made by Bellocq himself, [he] was forced to use [his] own taste in printing, which [he hopes] has not perverted Bellocq’s intentions.” *Preface* to the exhibition catalogue.

<sup>129</sup> Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003.

performing for men; the women were not only available as models but also available sexually. Because there was ambiguity as to the use value of Bellocq's photographs, their status as art needed to be established in order to discourage any base interpretation.

Szarkowski had to "[juggle...] aesthetic and moral criteria in order to justify one category of representation and to invalidate another."<sup>130</sup> A major convenience of interpreting images of prostitutes as art objects is that it allows us to consider the image aesthetically instead of having to worry about these women as people or confront the fact that their lives were difficult and dangerous.

Szarkowski's interpretation sentimentalized the photographs. His assertion that they did not belong in the category of pornography was hinged on the fact that there were others who created "dirty" pictures. Szarkowski concluded that Bellocq "loved women" and photographed them with such care possibly because Bellocq "was in conventional terms impotent."<sup>131</sup> Asserting that Bellocq was physically deformed and sterile (without *any* basis in fact) was another device to enable his interpretation of them as nudes. The conclusion he drew was that the creator was impotent and undesirable so the photographs could have been created immaculately. Al Rose also argued along similar lines when he stated, "there is no evidence that he ever took a pornographic picture, and every evidence, in the pictures we possess, that he would have been temperamentally incapable of doing so."<sup>132</sup> Szarkowski would have also known that "arousal by image (whether pornographic or not) only occurs in context: in the context of the individual beholder's conditioning, and, as it were, of his

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<sup>130</sup> Nead, 332.

<sup>131</sup> Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville portraits*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> Al Rose, 60.

preparation for seeing the arousing, erotic, or pornographic image.”<sup>133</sup> Since he was able to determine the narrative, he did not create a titillating context.

Emily Landau offers another possible explanation as to why Szarkowski did not interpret the work as pornographic: “scholarship on photography, even when focused on erotic images, most often stops short of analyzing photographs produced specifically for pornographic pleasure. And, analyses of pornography often focus on the nexus of exploitation and pleasure, misogyny and desire, not necessarily on the photography itself.”<sup>134</sup> Szarkowski focused on the aesthetic, rather than the content. As Susan Sontag observed Bellocq’s works “affirmed current taste: the low-life material; the near mythic provenance (Storyville); the informal, anti-art look,” further enabling the legitimacy of Szarkowski’s interpretation.<sup>135</sup>

Szarkowski made Bellocq’s work in high art “nudes.” which are societally sanctioned because “historically, high culture has provided a space for a viable form of sexual representation: that which is aestheticized, contained.”<sup>136</sup> The story that Szarkowski wove about Bellocq and his work is a denial of the greater circumstances of the time and context in which they were created. It was unsurprising that he interpreted them as such because, as Nead pointed out, the female nude is a product of a patriarchal society obsessed with

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<sup>133</sup> Freedberg, 352.

<sup>134</sup> Landau, 139.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Sontag, “Introduction,” *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville, the Red-Light District of New Orleans*,” (New York: Random House, 1996): 7.

<sup>136</sup> Nead, 328.

“possession, power, and subordination”—all qualities and capabilities that Szarkowski possessed.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Nead, 326.



## CHAPTER IV

In 1996 Steven Maklansky exhibited Bellocq's work at the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA). This exhibition featured other works by Bellocq of children at communion from the New Orleans Archdiocese Archives that had recently come to light. Unfortunately NOMA's archives are virtually nonexistent. I was not able to find or procure a single brochure or statement about the exhibition in their "archives." The only testimony from Maklansky I secured was from a televised interview, in which he stated:

One of the thing that distinguishes this work from pornography--most of us can agree it's not pornography--is that in pornography, the person behind the camera is in complete control he's making the decisions or she's making the decisions about a pose: "lift your leg," "show me this, show me that." It's objectifying the person in front of the lens. There does seem to be a rapport at work when you look at Bellocq's photographs. It seems that the women are part of this dance that, as sitters, they're able to make some of the choices about how they want to define themselves in front of the camera whether it's clothed or unclothed. And to a certain extent with the poses as well.<sup>138</sup>

Unfortunately Maklansky expresses a very unnuanced understanding of pornography, assuming that it is not participatory, the creators are only forceful or dictatorial, and denies that subjects have individual agency. As has been proven, when it comes to pornography, it is acceptable to rely on tropes, be dismissive, and not critically delve into pornography as a diverse field with varied approaches. Without any further documentation from the exhibition it is currently impossible to know if Maklansky did any further research into Bellocq's life or wrote about the women with consideration to the realities of their circumstances. This exhibition inspired author Eric Bookhardt to analyze Bellocq's works as "intensely

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<sup>138</sup> Steven Maklansky, "Review of Storyville & E.J. Bellocq Exhibition at New Orleans Museum of Art." Interviewed by Jeff Duhé. *Louisiana: The State We're In*, Louisiana Public Broadcasting video, 28:30. Filmed October 4, 1996. Uploaded September 21, 2016. <https://vimeo.com/183664067>.

psychological by any standard, revealing not only a glimpse into his subjects' inner lives and dreams, but also something that is touchingly human, of parochial yet universal resonance."<sup>139</sup>

After the NOMA show closed, the catalogue from the 1970 exhibition was reprinted with an introduction by Susan Sontag. It is only since Szarkowski's exhibition that we have seen the rise of a cultural history of pornography and sex work that is more nuanced and critical.<sup>140</sup> I had hoped that in 1996 Sontag would have filled this role. But not all writers employ critical frameworks that recognize the intersection of different systems of oppression.<sup>141</sup> Sontag primarily focused on the surface. She stated, "I am a woman and, unlike many men who look at these pictures, find nothing romantic about prostitution."<sup>142</sup> It is not necessary to approve of or sentimentalize commercial sex in order to explain the realities of women who worked on the margins of society and whose professional work is continually devalued and denigrated. Somewhat to this point Sontag continued, "the part of the subject I do take pleasure in is the beauty and forthright presence of many of the women, photographed in their homely circumstances that affirm both sensuality and domestic ease, and the tangibility of their vanished world."<sup>143</sup> Actually delving into the realities of the commercial sex industry Alecia Long wrote, "Resorting to prostitution in the nineteenth century was the result of severely constrained economic choices and opportunities for women, especially

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<sup>139</sup> Eric Bookhardt, "E. J. Bellocq, New Orleans Museum of Art," *Art Papers* 20, no. 6. (November/December, 1996): 51.

<sup>140</sup> Williams, 9.

<sup>141</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.  
doi:10.2307/1229039.

<sup>142</sup> Sontag, 8.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

those who were members of immigrant groups, despised racial groups (African Americans in particular), or the working class.”<sup>144</sup> Shouldn't that be a call to even more rigorously understand and explicate their lives and conditions? It is negligent to simply describe the surface of a picture and your emotional reactions. Sontag's observations that the women were “inmates of a brothel,” wearing “comical” clothes, “diminished, even foiled, by her nudity,” posing as a “game,” “wholesome-looking country women” profoundly disappointed me as her subjective observations continued the practice of disenfranchising and belittling prostitutes.<sup>145</sup> These women made difficult choices in order to survive. Would Sontag rather them become nuns or find a husband? The body stocking Sontag finds so funny was part of a skilled performance act (see figure 44).<sup>146</sup> Their nakedness is part of their profession, not recreation. Acting, posing, and posturing was necessary to be successful and survive, not a game. If Sontag is using country as a synonym for naïve and wholesome as virtuous, it is her moralistic somersault to personally feel better about the women by ascribing tired descriptions to their looks and restore them from what she obviously sees as their “fallen” state.

In response to the new edition of the exhibition catalogue Laura Letinsky wrote an inciteful review that picks apart Sontag's interpretation and also eloquently breaks down why Szarkowski created his myth of Bellocq stating:

If Bellocq was an ordinary guy who aspired to make pretty pictures akin to others of his day, then these pictures might be for visual titillation ... and therefore not permitted in the realm of high art. But, as evidence of a physically handicapped artist able to transcend his sexual limitations by

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<sup>144</sup> Long, 7.

<sup>145</sup> Sontag, 8.

<sup>146</sup> “By the 1880s female performers routinely appeared in tights or body stockings, kicked up their skirts, showed their legs...” Long, 74. During a show body stockings helped simulate a sexual act without full-on nudity. See also Martin Steven's discussion in *French postcards : album of vintage erotica*.

photographically consummating his loves, these pictures are granted art-legitimacy.<sup>147</sup>

Letinsky and other writers, such as Janet Malcolm and David Bowman, continued to skillfully pull apart the reasons behind the works initial interpretation.

In 2001 an exhibition of Bellocq's Storyville series was displayed at the Julie Saul Gallery. The photographs were from the collection of Rex Rose, son of the Storyville historian, Al Rose. The prints exhibited pre-dated Friedlander's ownership of the plates and were enlargements. Rex published an article about Bellocq's life based on an extraordinary amount of archival research.<sup>148</sup> He looked at the primary documents of Bellocq's bank and hospital records.<sup>149</sup> This exhibition and Rex's article prompted new writers to reconsider Bellocq. Summarizing Rex Rose's research, Vicki Goldberg wrote:

Bellocq was certainly short, 5 feet or 5-foot-2 in his 70's, no doubt a couple of inches taller when young, at a time when people were shorter anyway. His forehead was high but no cranial abnormalities were mentioned on his death report. He was stooped. The Storyville prostitutes clearly trusted him to an unusual degree. He was senile late in life but quite sane enough earlier to earn a living at various jobs and then as a photographer.

Delineating the exaggerations in detail is necessary, especially since other writers continue to repeat Szarkowski's narrative.

The International Center of Photography exhibited Bellocq's work in 2004. Brian Wallis, curator, wrote a brochure that explained his interpretation of Bellocq's Storyville works as images with "remarkable candor" of women who had "unidealized bodies,"

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<sup>147</sup> Laura Letinsky, "Bellocq (Book Review)," *New Art Examiner* 24 (May 1997): 60.

<sup>148</sup> Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq." *Exquisite Corpse - A Journal of Letters and Life*," [https://web.archive.org/web/20160402005116/http://www.corpse.org/archives/issue\\_10/gallery/bellocq/index.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20160402005116/http://www.corpse.org/archives/issue_10/gallery/bellocq/index.htm)

<sup>149</sup> Since my research was self-funded and this is not a dissertation I was not able to track down these records.

displaying themselves in poses that “seem more self-consciously assertive than erotic.”<sup>150</sup> He published the fact that Szarkowski’s myth of Bellocq was a lie when he stated that “Szarkowski invented a skewed portrait of the photographer based on limited information.”<sup>151</sup>

Wallis also argued that the Storyville portraits were most likely commissioned:

Although Szarkowski maintains that Bellocq took them as personal photos, it seems more probable, given the nature of Bellocq’s business, that these photographs were intended as some sort of commercial speculation or assignment. It is possible that they may have been portraits commissioned by the sitters or that they may have been nude poses for “artists” or for other connoisseurs of soft-core pornography. More likely, though, is the prospect that these images were intended to illustrate a Blue Book.<sup>152</sup>

Providing the women with this level of agency had yet to be fully explored. He also explored the works as “a rare portrayal of the everyday lives of working class American prostitutes” who “were simply laborers in a marginalized and denigrated sex industry driven by rapid industrialization and urbanization.”<sup>153</sup> Having a reputable art historian publish a serious analysis of Bellocq’s work within its historical context was long overdue.

Further analysis of the Storyville series needs to occur. There is much more to explore, such as deeply analyzing the works to help us understand the lives of marginalized women at the turn of the century, traces the origins of the clothing and undergarments the women wore to a manufacturer’s catalogue, possibly identify the parlor houses by the wallpaper in the background of the photographs, and establish which cameras he used for his

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<sup>150</sup>Wallis, “The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq,” 2004.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

various assignments and whether any of them can conclusively be tied to the one used for the Storyville series. Many other avenues of inquiry are yet to be examined.

## CONCLUSION

Bellocq's Storyville series was first exhibited to the public in a way that never would have occurred when they were created. Because of the way Szarkowski conceptualized these portraits as one group, he created a false understanding that they all served the same purpose, Bellocq's own personal pleasure. His speculative overgeneralizations harmed the way these works were interpreted by the public and subsequent writers. Szarkowski's myth will continue to be repeated until another monograph concerning Bellocq is published.

In this thesis I have put forward a more objective interpretation of Bellocq and better situated his work within their historical contexts. In conducting extensive research about Bellocq I put forward a more comprehensive narrative about his life. I brought to light several series of works (YMHA, Jewish Orphans' Home, and LSPCC) that had previously been unaccounted for. In providing greater historical context to the Storyville series I argued that these works would have been interpreted as pornography during their time. I demonstrated that the narrative that Szarkowski established in the exhibition catalogue was an exaggerated account, not based in facts. He used his position as a power broker in order to place Bellocq within his proto-modernist photography timeline to further his vernacular photography agenda. I also demonstrated that this process elevated the Storyville series to the status of art and Bellocq to the class of canonized commercial photographers. Accounting for the exhibitions and research of the past 25 years, I showed that much work to dispel the misconceptions about Bellocq has already been done, and that future writers have much more to discover about Bellocq.

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## APPENDIX A: FIGURES

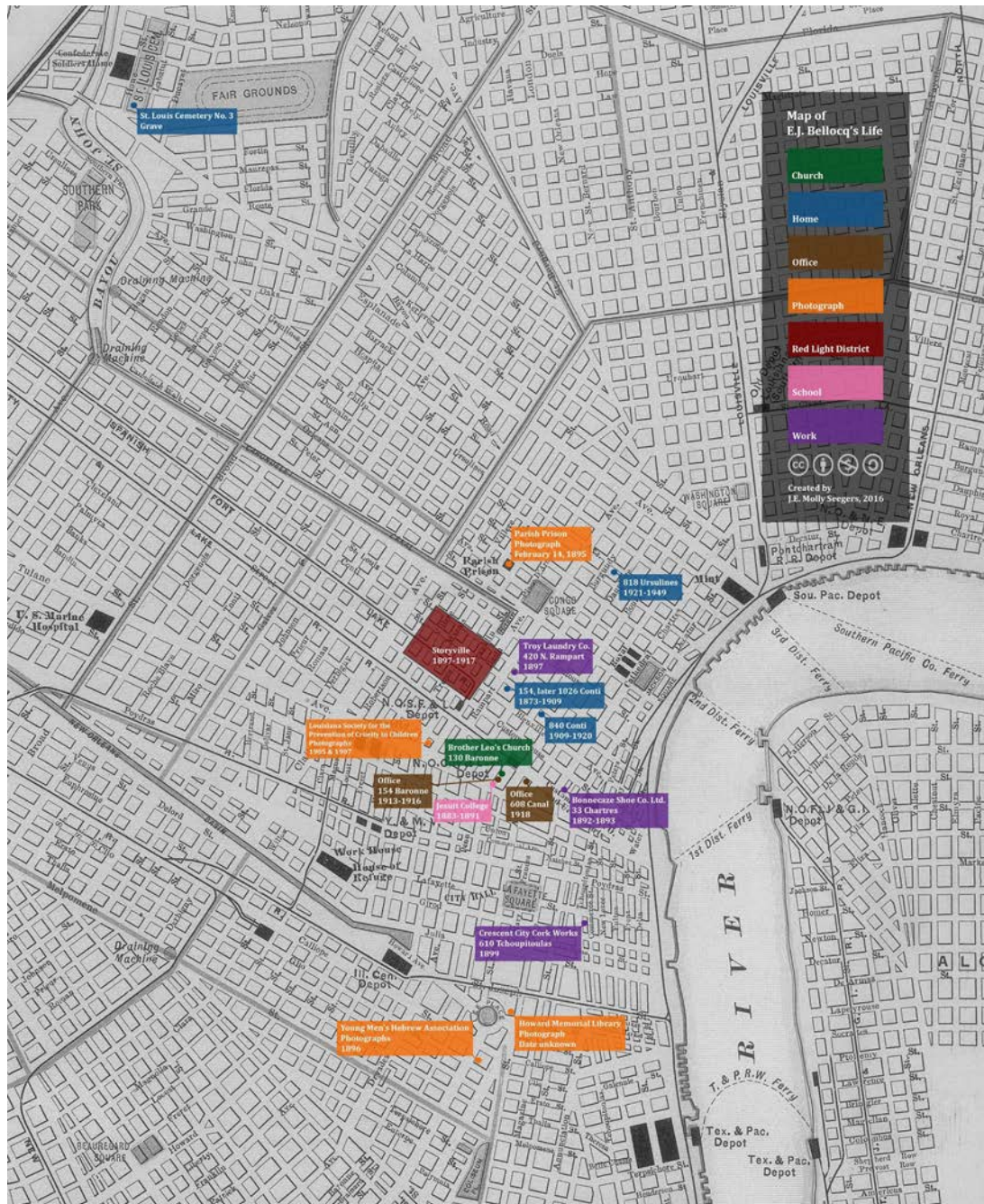


Figure 1. Map of Bellocq's known locations created by the author (map reflects 1903 geography).<sup>154</sup>

<sup>154</sup> "New Orleans," Rand McNally and Company, 1903, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/38p96w>.



LOCATION.		NAME of each person whose place of abode on June 1, 1900, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Indicate every person living on June 1, 1900. (Over 15 years, born since June 1, 1900.)	RELATION. Relationship of each person to the head of the family.  Enter name first, then the given name and middle initial, if any.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.					NATIVITY.			CITIZENSHIP.			OCCUPATION, TRADE, OR PROFESSION				
IN CITY.	IN RURAL DISTRICT.			DATE OF BIRTH. Month. Year.	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY. Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	NUMBER OF YEARS RESIDED IN THIS PLACE.	NUMBER OF YEARS IN MILITARY SERVICE.	Place of birth of this person.	Place of birth of Father of this person.	Place of birth of Mother of this person.	Year of immigration to the United States. If born in this country, enter "None".	Year of naturalization in the United States. If born in this country, enter "None".	Year of declaration of intention.	Year of naturalization in the United States.	OCCUPATION.	MONTHS NOT EMPLOYED.			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1026-377	544	M. McCarthy	Head	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Louisiana	France	France					
		Bellocq Marie	Wife	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Louisiana	France	France					
		Ernest	Son	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Louisiana	Louisiana	Louisiana					Photographer

Figure 2. Detail of the 1900 Census.<sup>155</sup>



Figure 3. Stamp on the back of a photograph owned by Dr. Stanley Burns.

<sup>155</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Schedule No. 1--Population, Enumeration District No. 36, p. 20, 1026 Conti St. Pauline McCarthy, Marie Bellocq, and Ernest Bellocq; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

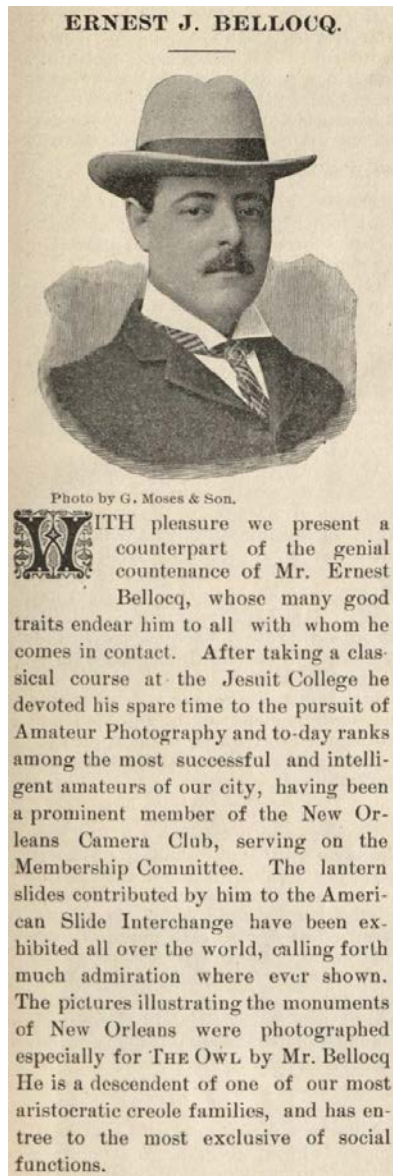


Figure 4. Article about Ernest Bellocq in *The Owl*.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>156</sup> "Ernest J. Bellocq," *The Owl: Official Organ of the Young Men's Hebrew Association*. 5, no. 6 (May 1898): 9, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University.

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 BOTH PHONES 239.

Bell Julius, lab. r. 1024 Calliope  
 Bell J. H. mngr. Cudahy Packing Co. foot  
 of Calliope  
 Bell J. Walter, carp. r. 4315 Tchoupitoulas  
 Bell Laura Miss, r. 2042 Prytania  
 Bell Levi, lab. r. 525 Marais  
 Bell L. Sidney, clk. La. Car Service Assn.  
 818 Common  
 Bell Marie Mrs. boarding. 1934 Canal

Bellamore Theodore, with N. Bellamore, r.  
 309 Royal  
 Bellande Joseph, r. 803 Baronne  
 Bellanger Jean A. machinist, r. 2230 Marais  
 Bellanger Julia Miss, r. 829 N. Prieur  
 Bellangio Joseph, shoemaker, r. 910 Bur-  
 gundy  
 Bellau Eugene J. grainer, r. 819 Touro  
 Bellau Victor J., salesman gents' furng.  
 dept: **GODCHAUX'S**, Canal and  
 Chartres, r. 219 S. Galvez  
 Bellebonny John, shoemaker, 3005 Bur-  
 gundy  
 Bellerino Francisco, lab. r. 620 Fourth  
 Bellevills School (girls), Miss Alice M.  
 Harte, prin. 816 Pelican av.  
 Bellis Joseph, sailor, r. 2620 Euphrosine  
 Bellocq Anna C. Mrs. r. 1428 Dauphine  
**Bellocq Ernest J. photographer, r. 1026**  
**Conti**  
 Bellocq Henry, clk. r. 1507 Spain

Figure 5. Detail of the Soards' 1902 Directory.

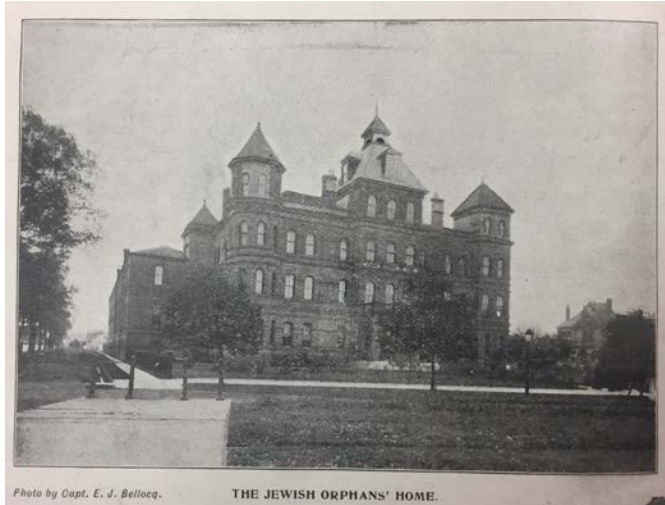


Figure 6. *The Jewish Orphans' Home*, photograph by E.J. Bellocq published in *The Owl*.<sup>157</sup>



Figure 7. *The Dormitory*, interior of the Jewish Orphans' Home, photograph by E.J. Bellocq published in *The Owl*.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> "1854-1897. The Jewish Orphans' Home of New Orleans." *The Owl* 3, no. 2 (January, 1897): 18-21.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

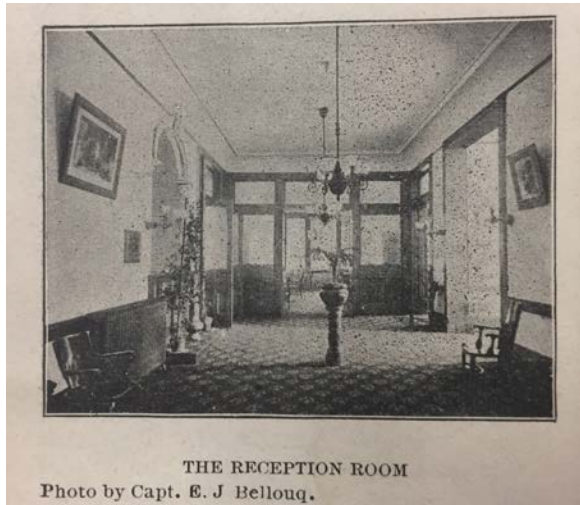


Figure 8. *The Reception Room*, interior of the Young Men's Hebrew Association building, photograph by E.J. Bellocq published in *The Owl*.<sup>159</sup>

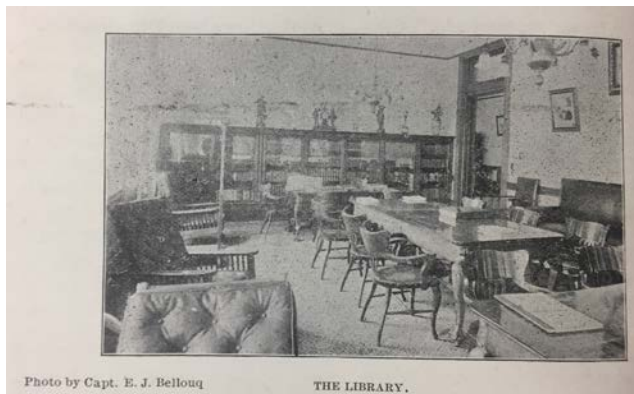


Figure 9. *The Library*, interior of the Young Men's Hebrew Association building, photograph by E.J. Bellocq published in *The Owl*.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> "The Interior -- A Sketch of the Various Rooms and their Furnishings." *The Owl* 3, no. 1 (December, 1896): 12-15.

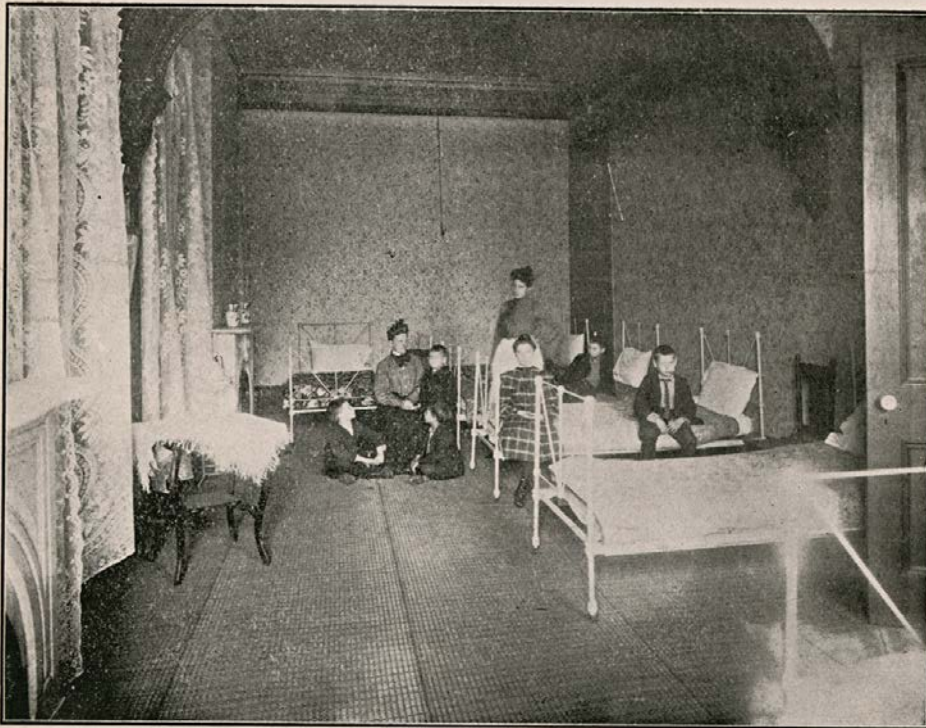
<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

LABOR LAWS.  
EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN.

ACT 43, 1886—p. 55.

An Act to regulate the employment of children, young persons and women in certain cases.

Section 1. CHILDREN IN FACTORIES, Etc.—That no boy under the age of twelve years, and no girl under the age of



LA. SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN. Photo by Bellocq  
ONE OF THE DORMITORIES.

Figure 10. Photo by Bellocq in the 1905 Annual Report, Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Children's Bureau of New Orleans Records, MSS 568, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 11. Ernest J. Bellocq's Photograph of Howard Memorial Library.<sup>162</sup>

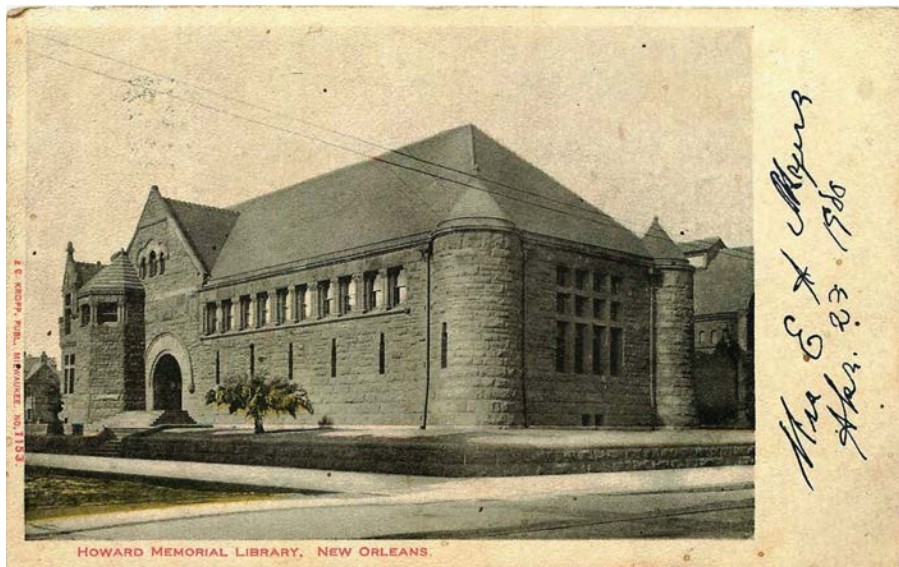


Figure 12. Postcard of Howard Memorial Library.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Louisiana Print File, Manuscripts Collection 1081, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans 70118.

<sup>163</sup> Jackson, Mark. "Library Postcards: 1906 Howard Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana." *Library Postcards*, May 3, 2014.

<http://librarypostcards.blogspot.com/2014/05/1906-howard-memorial-library-new.html>.

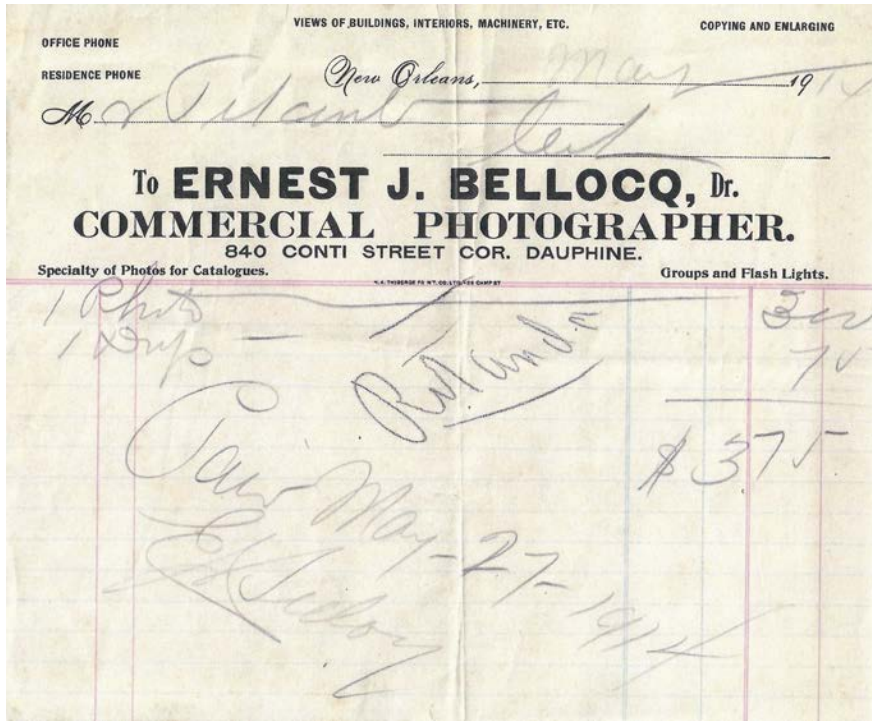


Figure 13. Billhead, Courtesy of the The Historic New Orleans Collection.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Ernest J. Bellocq Billhead, Commercial File, MSS 405, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection. <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/3/15133>



**STATE OF LOUISIANA**  
**CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**

CITY No. **5 589**  
FILE No.

**IMPORTANT! This is a Permanent Record. Use Typewriter or Ink.**

**PERSONAL DATA OF DECEASED**

1a. **First Name of Deceased** *Belloq, Ernest* 1b. **Right Name** 1c. **Second Name** 2a. **Month Day Year Hour** *10-3-49 23*  
**DATE OF DEATH:** *10-3-49*

3. **Sex - Male or Female** *male* 4. **Color or Race** *W* 5. **Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced** *Single* 6a. **Name of Husband or Wife** 6b. **Age**

7. **Date of Birth of Deceased** *Mar. 15, 1893* 8. **Age of Deceased** *56* 9a. **Birthplace (City or town)** *New Orleans* 9b. **(State or Foreign Country)** *Louisiana*

10a. **Usual Occupation (life kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired)** *Retired Photographer* 10b. **Kind of Industry or Business** 11. **Was deceased ever in U.S. Armed Forces? (Yes, no, or unknown) (If yes, give war or dates of service)**

**PLACE OF DEATH**

12a. **City or Town - (If outside corporate limits write RURAL)** *New Orleans* 12b. **Parish and Ward No.** *Orleans - 4th* 12c. **Length of Stay in New Orleans** *4 months*

12d. **Name of Hospital or Institution (if not in hospital or institution give street address or location)** *New Orleans Hospital* 12e. **Length of Stay in Hospital or Institution**

**USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED**

13a. **City or Town - (If outside corporate limits write RURAL)** *New Orleans* 13b. **Parish and Ward No.** *Orleans* 13c. **State** *La.*

13d. **Street Address - (If rural give location)** *818 Ursuline St.* 14. **City of what Country.** *U.S.A.*

**PARENTS**

15a. **Name of Father** *Paul Belloq* 15b. **Birthplace of Father** *New Orleans* 15c. **Maiden Name of Mother** *Marie Adige* 15d. **Birthplace of Mother** *New Orleans*

**INFORMANT'S CERTIFICATION**

I certify that the above stated information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

17a. **Signature of Informant** *Ernest J. Lapoyne* 17b. **Date of Signature** *10-3-49*

**CAUSE OF DEATH**

18. **Disease or Condition Directly Leading to Death\* (a)** *Uremia, edema of the brain* **Interval Between Onset and Death**

**Antecedent Causes** *Chronic myocarditis, arthritis of the spine, following lacerated wound of the scalp.*

**Diseases or conditions, if any, giving rise to the above cause (a) stating the underlying cause last.** *Due to (b) of the spine, following lacerated wound of the scalp.*

**II. Other Significant Conditions** *Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death.*

19a. **Date of Operation** 19b. **Major Findings of Operation** *CORONER'S OFFICE* 20. **Autopsy**  Yes  No **IV**

**DEATHS DUE TO EXTERNAL VIOLENCE**

21a. **Accident, Suicide, or Homicide (Specify)** *Under investigation* 21b. **Place of Injury (e.g., in or about home, factory, office bldg., etc.)** *Federal Reserve Bank, N.O. Orleans La.*

21c. **Time (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) (Min.)** *9-6-49 M.* 21d. **How injury occurred?** *Fell while leaning on Bldg.*

**PHYSICIAN'S CERTIFICATION**

22. I certify that I attended the deceased, From To and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above.

23. **Signature of Physician** *C. Green Colman* 23b. **Date of Signature** *10-4-49*

**FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S CERTIFICATION**

24a. **Burial . . . . . ( ) Date Thereof** *10-4-49* 24b. **Name of Cemetery or Crematory** *St. Louis No. 3* 24c. **Location (City, town, or parish)** *New Orleans* 24d. **Signature of Funeral Director** *Albert C. Dupich*

**BURIAL TRANSIT PERMIT**

25. **Partial Transit Permit Number** *41606* 26. **Parish of Issue** *Orleans* 27. **Date of Issue** *10-4-49* 28. **Signature of Local Registrar** *W. H. Campbell*

Bks. 12-48 PHS 16-A (Rev.) **LOUISIANA STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, DEPT. OF HEALTH**

ATTEST *MAV 2 1950* *48 (over)* **OCT 4 - 1949** *W. H. Campbell*

Figure 14. Belloq's Death Certificate.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Death Certificate for Ernest J. Belloq, October 3, 1949, City file No. 5589, State of Louisiana. Public Vital Records, The Erbon and Marie Wise Genealogical Library, Louisiana State Archives.



Figure 15. John N. Teunisson photograph tacked up on a wall then photographed by E.J. Bellocq. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 16. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Photograph in the collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA).



Figure 17. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 18. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq.<sup>166</sup>

Ernest Bellocq's lady love  
worked in a house on Sherville St.

Figure 19. Written by Al Rose on the verso of figure 18.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Al Rose Collection.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



Figure 20. *Untitled* or [*Nude with a mask*] by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 21. Advertisement for a French Ball from the 1911 or 1912 Blue Book depicting a woman wearing a simple mask.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>168</sup> *Blue Book*, New Orleans: n.p., 1911 or 1912, <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/28809>.



Figure 22. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.





Figure 23. *Untitled (Seated Prostitute Wearing a Mask)* by Ernest J. Bellocq. In the collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> <https://noma.org/collection/untitled-seated-prostitute-wearing-a-mask/>

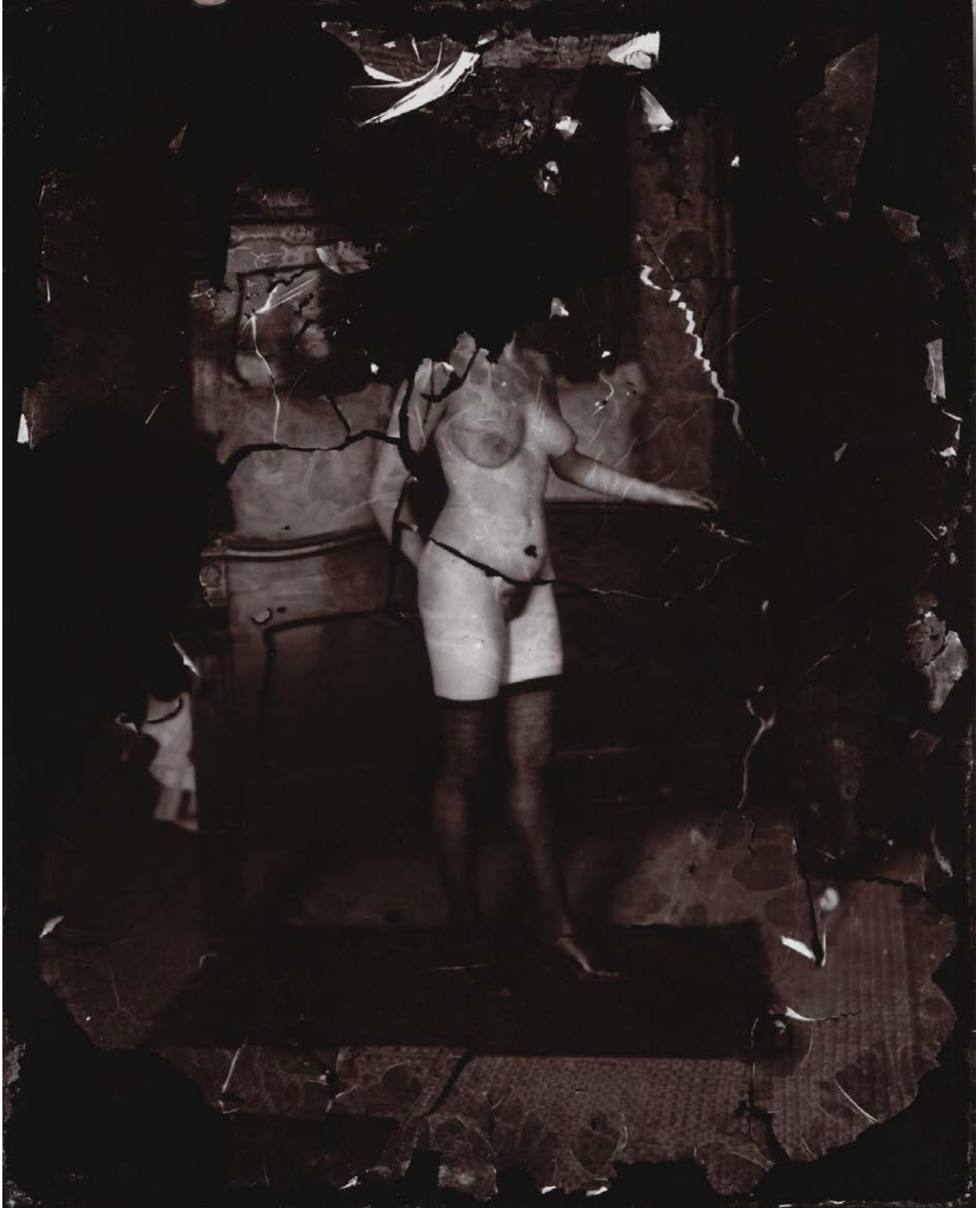


Figure 24. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 25. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Al Rose Collection.



Figure 26. *[Nude with a mask]* by Ernest J. Belloccq. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 27. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



A corner in Miss Arlington's apartment, 225 Basin Street, Oil Paintings, Bric-a-brac and etc., in same said to cost over \$5,000.

Figure 28. Illustration from 1903 Blue Book.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>171</sup> *Blue Book*, New Orleans: n.p., 1903, <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4581>.



Figure 29. Ernest J. Bellocq's photograph of the interior of Lulu White's Mahogany Hall. In the collection of The Historic New Orleans Collection.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/1/21813>



Figure 30. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Photograph of a room in Willie O. Barrera's establishment.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Al Rose Collection.





## This Book--Not Mailable

To know a thing or two, and know it direct, go through this little book and read it carefully, and then when you go on a "lark" you'll know "who is who" and the best place to spend your time and money.

Read all the "Ads." as all the best houses are advertised, and are known as the "Cream of Society."

Names in capitals are Landladies. "W" in front of name means White; "C" stands for colored, and "Oct." for octoroon.

The contents of this book are facts, and not dreams from a "hop joint."

You will now find the boundary of the Tenderloin District, commonly called Anderson County or Storyville: North side Customhouse Street to South side St. Louis, and East side North Basin to West side North Robertson Streets.

This is the boundary in which the lewd women are compelled to live according to law.

Yours,

BILLY NEWS.

Sixth Edition.

Figure 31. Warning in the beginning of a Blue Book.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>174</sup> *Blue Book*, New Orleans: n.p., 1905, <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4577>.



Figure 32. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 33. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 34. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 35. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Al Rose Collection.



Figure 36. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 37. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 38. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.





Figure 39. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 40. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Al Rose Collection.



Figure 41. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq.<sup>177</sup>



Figure 42. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. In the collection of The Historic New Orleans Collection.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Al Rose Collection.

<sup>178</sup> <http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/1/21810>



Figure 43. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Author cropped and skewed because this image was taken at an angle to prevent reflective glare from the mylar sleeve.)



Figure 43. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. Printed by Lee Friedlander. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 44. *Untitled* by Ernest J. Bellocq. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## APPENDIX B: EXHIBITION CHRONOLOGY

A list of exhibitions that primarily contained works by Ernest J. Bellocq—by no means complete.

### 1970s

- 1970-1971 - Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
- Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana
- University of Minnesota, University Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Memphis State University, E. H. Little Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee
- Rice University, Houston, Texas
- University of California, Art Museum, Berkeley, California
- Witte Memorial Museum, San Antonio, Texas
- University of Utah, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Museum of Art, Providence, Rhode Island
- Skidmore College, Hathorn Gallery, Saratoga Springs, New York
- 1977 - Light Gallery, New York, New York

### 1980s

- 1982 - Robert Freidus Gallery, New York, New York
- 1982 - Douglas Kenyon Gallery, New York, New York
- 1982 - Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, Oregon
- 1986 - Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1988 - Galerie J.J. Donguy, Paris, France

### 1990s

- 1991 - Lawrence Miller Gallery, New York, New York
- 1996 - New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana

### 2000s

- 2001-2002 - Julie Saul Gallery, New York, New York
- 2002- The Photographer's Gallery, London, England
- 2004-2005 - International Center of Photography, New York, New York
- 2005 - Galerie Thomas Zanger, Cologne, Germany
- 2008 - Simon Frasier University Gallery, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada
- 2016 - The R.W. Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, Louisiana