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## The 'Baby Dolls': Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition

*Kim Marie Vaz*

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**Kim Marie Vaz : The 'Baby Dolls': Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The 'Baby Dolls': Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Gift for Spooky Le StrangeBy EDMy friend Spooky is house

mother to a burlesque troupe called The Billion Dollar Baby Dolls. She got their name from the original baby dolls so i knew she NEEDED this book.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Powerful narrative of survival and multiple layers of meaningBy E. AndesSometimes this work seems a bit academic and overly thorough, but the story of Baby Dolls is so rich, so important, that it sweeps you along and draws you in. This is required reading for anyone interested in the history of turn of the 20th century New Orleans, the origins of jazz and related music, and the multi-layered stories of survival of African Americans, especially women, in the Jim Crow South. Unfortunately, it is as relevant today as it would be in 1916. New Orleans and her culture is something that cannot be understood but can only be embraced. Start here.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Baby DollsBy Claudette Carrida JeffreyA memorable history of the women who launched a Black Women's movement in 1912 New Orleans. The Baby Dolls emerged from the Black red-light District with the intent to prove their self-worth. In their quest for parity, primarily with the male-dominated Zulus and Mardi Gras Indians, the Baby Dolls found their many talents. Some were skilled organizers and planners; others were costumers and seamstresses - all were entertainers and entrepreneurs! They culturally impacted New Orleans's music and dance. Claudette - Napa, CA

One of the first women's organizations to "mask" in a Mardi Gras parade, the "Million Dollar Baby Dolls" redefined the New Orleans carnival tradition. Tracing their origins from Storyville brothels and dance halls to their re-emergence in post-Katrina New Orleans, author Kim Vaz uncovers the fascinating history of the "raddy-walking, shake-dancing, cigar-smoking, money-flinging" ladies that strutted their way into a predominantly male establishment.The Baby Dolls formed around 1912 as an organization for African American women who used their profits from working in New Orleans's red-light district to compete with other black women in their profession on Mardi Gras. Part of this competition involved the tradition of masking in which carnival groups create a collective identity through costuming. Their baby doll costumesshort satin dresses, stockings with garters, and bonnetsset against their bold and provocative public behavior not only exploited stereotypes but also empowered and made visible an otherwise marginalized demographic of women. In addition to their subversive presence at Mardi Gras, the Baby Dolls helped shape the sound of jazz in the city. The Baby Dolls often worked in and patronized dance halls and honky-tonks, where they introduced new dance steps and challenged house musicians to keep up the beat. The entrepreneurial Baby Dolls also sponsored dances with live jazz bands, effectively underwriting the advancement of an art form now inseparable from New Orleans's identity.Over time, the Baby Doll's members diverged as different neighborhoods adopted the tradition. Groups such as the Golden Slipper Club, the Gold Diggers, the Rosebud Social and Pleasure Club, and the Satin Sinners stirred the creative imagination of middle-class Black women and men across New Orleans, from the downtown Trem area to the uptown community of Mahalia Jackson. Vaz follows the Baby Doll phenomenon through one hundred years of photos, articles, and interviews to conclude with the birth of contemporary groups such as the modern day Antoinette K-Doe's Ernie K-Doe Baby Dolls, the New Orleans Society of Dance's Baby Doll Ladies, and the Trem Million Dollar Baby Dolls. Her book celebrates these organizations' crucial contribution to Louisiana's cultural history.

"An important scholarly effort for the history of not only women of color but also all women in the Bayou State and beyond. The anecdotal supplemented with the theoretical helps readers to think through complicated notions of the identity performances of these women." --Journal of Southern HistoryAbout the AuthorKim Marie Vaz is the associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of education at Xavier University of Louisiana. Her area of research is the use of expressive arts as a response to large-group social trauma.