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# BOOK NEWS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***The “Baby Dolls”: Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition***  
*Kim Marie Vaz Uncovers the Fascinating History of Baby Doll Masking*

**Baton Rouge**—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 Marie Vaz uncovers the history of the “raddy-walking, shake-dancing, cigar-smoking, money-flinging” ladies who 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 prostitutes on Mardi Gras. Part of this event involved the tradition of masking, in which carnival groups create a collective identity through costuming. Their baby doll costumes—short satin dresses, stockings with garters, and bonnets—set against a bold and provocative public behavior not only exploited stereotypes but also empowered and made visible an otherwise marginalized female demographic.

Vaz follows the Baby Doll phenomenon through one hundred years with photos, articles, and interviews and concludes with the birth of contemporary groups such as Antoinette K-Doe’s Ernie K-Doe Baby Dolls, the New Orleans Society of Dance’s Baby Doll Ladies, and the Tremé Million Dollar Baby Dolls. Her book emphasizes these organizations’ crucial contribution to Louisiana’s cultural history.

**Kim 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.

January 18, 2013

216 pages, 6 1/8 x 9 1/4, 37 halftones

978-0-8071-5070-2

Paper \$22.95, ebook available

LSU Press Paperback Original

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