The Long Ride
SECOND EDITION

A collection of student writings based on the events that are part of the long struggle for civil rights and social justice in New Orleans.

SAC
Students at the Center

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A collection of student writings based on the events that are part of the long struggle for civil rights and social justice in New Orleans.

Dedicated to the life, work, and common(unity) of Reggie Lawson
(February 10, 1945–October 21, 2013)

SAC
Students at the Center

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Foreword

Historical Commemoration as Educational Project and Work in Progress

This anthology of student writings on local history emerges from years of community and school collaborations. When the book was originally conceived, the primary collaboration involved the development of the New Orleans Civil Rights Park, a project of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, a community organization located in the Douglass school neighborhood. The activities to develop the park and the collaboration between Douglass High and the community ended after Hurricane Katrina, when Douglass High School closed and Crescent City Peace Alliance lost access to the site at which Homer Plessy was arrested. But the segregation that Plessy challenged is still manifest today, most recently and explosively in the Katrina debacle and in the racial tensions and separate and unequal schooling that continue in public education seven years after Katrina. We hope this book will be a valuable teaching tool in school and community settings and for new teachers and leaders who take the place of elders.

The anthology collects student writings based on the events that are part of the long struggle for civil rights and social justice in New Orleans and the nation. *The Long Ride* spans many years of struggle, acknowledging that real change happens through a complex combination of people, events, and places. Students at the Center (SAC) students developed the writings specifically related to the struggles of the Citizens' Committee against Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890. These citizen activists saw this legal challenge as we do: as part of a much broader struggle for social, racial, and economic justice. For that reason, this anthology also includes student writings that span the entire history of Africans in America and New Orleans.

The purpose of *The Long Ride* is to provide a timeline of New Orleans' struggle up to the present day while taking a closer look at specific events, people, and organizations which inspired our students. Certainly, no one body of work can encompass the total history of African American struggle and achievement, even in just one American city. This anthology proposes to present that struggle as dynamic and ever evolving and includes high school students writing about their experiences in public education in the first decade of the 21st century.

In keeping with the principles that the community is the classroom, that all members of a community should contribute to the education of its youth, and that our history is dynamic, we invite all people who read this anthology to suggest additional topics, write responses to individual writers, and correspond and meet with the New Orleans Public School students and graduates who continue working on the in social and racial justice struggles. Please address any correspondence on these topics to Reggie Lawson or Jim Randels. In that spirit, this 2nd edition of *The Long Ride,* published in 2013, includes a new section on the privatization of public education in New Orleans after Katrina. Selections in this section include not only essays and poems by students but also writings by teachers—new, veteran, and retired—who participated in the "Healing Our City Through Stories" Project, a partnership among Renaissance Project, Students at the Center, and United Teachers of New Orleans (AFT Local 527) through initial funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The 2nd edition also includes throughout the book new writings since 2010 by students in our courses on "Writing the History of Black New Orleans" at McMain and McDonogh 35 through dual enrollment with Bard Early College New Orleans.

UPDATE: Back Cover Addendum

Since Dr. Martin wrote this letter, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the U.S. Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. That fall The Louisiana legislature passed Act 35, establishing new rules for the state to take over academically deficient schools. These new rules only applied to New Orleans. Other schools in the state that were academically deficient were excluded from the takeover.

Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) was mandated to improve the schools and in 2007 Paul Vallas, from Chicago, was appointed superintendent. A major part of the RSD improvement plan was the creation of charter schools and the elimination of non-performing schools. The governor waived provisions of the state charter law requiring input of students, parents, teachers, and neighborhood stakeholders when a school becomes a charter.

Frederick Douglass High School was run by the state's Recovery School District from August 2006 through May 2010, during which time Douglass had three different principals and failed to improve academically.

Superintendent Paul Vallas did not follow suggestions for school improvement put forward by the Douglass Community Coalition and determined that his Douglass High School was unrecoverable. RSD closed Douglass and gave the building over to a national charter school management organization. Students who were enrolled at Douglass in spring 2010 and would have been 11th and 12th grade students in fall 2010 were not allowed to return to the school to make way for the new charter high school.

Paul Vallas has followed a well-traveled pathway from Chicago (his hometown and where he first became involved in education) to Haiti where he worked as an educational consultant, to Chile where he is currently employed as an educational consultant.

Vallas pushes the privatization of public education, which has resulted in New Orleans having the highest percentage of charter schools in the nation and the elimination of all neighborhood high schools. Douglass is closed and the Plessy Park project is dormant.

Only five schools are now under control of the elected Orleans Parish School Board. SAC now works in the only two high schools controlled by Orleans Parish and continues the work of students studying and writing about the history of social struggles in New Orleans.

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PART ONE:
Imagining Africa

Africa: Recovering the Unknown

Adrinda Kelly

When I was in the fourth grade, there was a teacher in my after-school program who all the kids thought was very mean. One day, after Mrs. Johnson had been particularly stern with a student, threatening to take away his recess if he didn't quiet down and finish his homework, one of the other kids sitting next to me leaned over and whispered loudly: "that's why she look like a *African booty-scratcher.*" The students surrounding us at the table heard the comment and burst into laughter. Ms. Johnson, of course, heard it too. And to my astonishment, rather than making a curt rebuttal and sending the obnoxious student to time-out, Ms. Johnson began to cry. I was floored. I don't know what was more puzzling: why the student likened Ms. Johnson's appearance to an "african booty-scratcher" (whatever that is), or why this stupid, silly comment had the power to bring her to tears. Certainly we all understood that the term was intended to be derogatory. That's why we laughed. We had all internalized a value system in which anything African meant ugly, inferior, substandard—not even Ms. Johnson was exempt. But where did this weapon come from and why did we wield it so confidently? Why did it have so much power to hurt?

Africa. Is it a real place? And what do the people there have to do with me? As a young girl, my classmates and I didn't think about Africa often, but when we did, this is what and how we wondered. The truth is there wasn't much a bunch of public school students growing up in one of America's blackest cities (by black, I mean African-*American)* could know about a place that we spent so much time trying to disassociate ourselves from. Africa, to us, was Kunta Kinte, slavery, dark skin and big lips. It was the Zulu parade at Mardi Gras with people in black-face handing out coconuts and beads. It was grass skirts and spears, rhythm and jungle. It was a lie, an embellishment, an embarrassment, a fantasy. And we didn't want it.

But no matter how we felt about Africa, how badly we may have wanted to distance ourselves from its stain, we were not allowed. We were black people, in a Southern city. We had to think about race every time we yelled out our schools' names at a football game—Francis T. Nicholls, John McDonogh, P. G. T. Beauregard—every time the police followed us through Lakeview on our way to bbq on the lakefront, every time we traveled outside of Orleans Parish to go to the bigger Wal Mart, the better shopping mall, the nicer movie theatre. Those of us who were lucky learned to transform our angst about Africa into something closer to appreciation and a lot like love. How did we do it? We learned. We remembered that Egypt was in Africa. We learned about fearless Queen Nzinga and the Mali prince who led the true first expedition to land in the New World, 200 years before Columbus did. We populated our minds with stories about kings and warriors and empires that predated everything we learned in our European History classes. It didn't matter if we'd barely moved past the most obvious clichés. It was a start. Africa was alive to us, and like the students whose writings are presented in this section, we learned to embrace our new imaginings as a kind of birthright.

TIMELINE: 300–1700

Resistance to Slavery In Africa

300

Late 3rd Century

St. Maurice, patron saint of a catholic church in the lower 9th ward of New Orleans, is the first Christian saint to be explicitly represented as African. An officer in the Roman army, St. Maurice encouraged his fellow soldiers to refuse orders to kill local Christians. St. Maurice and his legion were decimated for their refusal to kill civilians and to betray their Christian convictions by sacrificing to Roman gods.

1200

12th Century

During this century the West African Kingdom of Mali develops into a center of learning and scholarship; its major city **Timbuktu** had three universities and over 180 Quranic schools.

1310

1310

Mali Prince **Abu Bakari** led a fleet of 2000 ships setting sail for "America" almost 200 years before the so-called discovery of the new world by Christopher Columbus. These African Muslims (Mandiga) arrived in the Gulf of Mexico and explored the American interior via the Mississippi River, a route which would have taken them past modern-day New Orleans. (from *They Came Before Columbus,* Van Sertima)

1400

Late 14th Century

North African scholar **Ibn Khaldun** publishes two major books: *Kitab al-Ibar,* a history of North Africa, and *Muqaddimah,* a systematic philosophical study of history and society.

1500

15th Century

Portugese become one of the first and most active European countries to explore western Africa, hoping to gain wealth through economic ventures in the spice trade and other areas and eventually leading to wider European exploration and exploitation of Africa, including the brutal slave trade that brought millions of Africans to the Americas.

1528

1528

Estabanico, allegedly first black man to accompany Europeans in expedition to what is present-day United States. Cabeza de Vaca lists Estabanico as one of only four survivors of this expedition of approximately 300 men led by conquistador Panfilo de Narvaez.

1583

1600

1583–1663

Queen Nzinga: A brilliant and courageous stateswoman and military strategist, Queen Nzinga fought Portuguese slavers in the Angola region of Africa in the 17th century. She became known for her guerilla tactics and fearless leadership. Modern-day revolutionaries in Angola, inspired by Queen Nzinga, launched a lengthy guerilla campaign that ultimately led to Angola's independence from Portugal on November 11, 1975.

1635

1635

Africans who survived the wreck of two slave ships off the coast of St. Vincent in the Caribbean are welcomed by natives to these islands. These Amerindian and African people intermingled to form the group now located in southern Central America known as the **Garifuna** people.

1685

1685

Ganga Zumba, African king who led a maroon colony in Brazil, dies.

1698

1698

1700

Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, is sent by France to set up colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River in hopes of beating the British and Spanish in controlling this all-important geographical, economic, and political location. During this first expedition to the mouth of the Mississippi, Iberville records in his journal the discovery of **free blacks in the region almost 20 years before the founding of New Orleans** based upon information by native informants of a black, Spanish-speaking maroon colony about 10 days travel to the North-Northwest of the mouth of the Mississippi River: "At this settlement there were only Negroes with their families. [The Indian informant] reports them to be rather numerous and leads us to believe that the Negroes at this settlement did not welcome any white Spaniard; and when white ones came, the blacks drove them off without speaking to them." (Sublette, 39)

PART ONE:
Imagining Africa

My Africa

Queen Nzinga

Maria Hernandez

She was the ruler of the throne
and Queen of the unknown,
because she was tired of seeing her sisters' and brothers' blood
as their bodies were dragged through the mud
and then put into slave ships
where they would eternally hear whips
crack at their backs.

She used the power of her crown to reunite the land.
She disappeared and came back with a new army at hand.
She was believed dead
after they put a ransom on her head.
This time she returned with another kingdom earned.
She kept the Portuguese at bay, even though she was away,

And I am sad to say that today
this is all I know of a great African woman
who was once so long ago called Queen Nzinga.

I know that this little bit of information has conjured
upon your imagination a picture.

And because of this picture, anyone who reads this
will become curious
and will want to know more.
But as for me, I am a little bit furious
that I never heard of Queen Nzinga before.

Queen Nzinga

Rodneka Shelbia

I never back down from a fight, but sometimes my feelings can get me down. Every waking moment of the day for I don't know how long I've been feeling like I'm crying on the inside. I wonder if that's what made Queen Nzinga so ready to just go up against the bad treatment.

The Portuguese came to her Angola region of Africa and tried to take over. She got tired of it, and I don't blame her. When I'm crying on the inside, I only *feel* like I'm walking in chains. Her people were actually being chained. The Portuguese wanted to enslave her and her people and treated them like dogs.

Queen Nzinga was one of a kind and still is. She was more than just a female soldier who wanted to fight. She was a military leader who started out with a plan. She got her people together and stopped them from going against each other. She fought. When I say fought, I mean she fought. She fought to where the Portuguese were willing to offer her money and power and all that good stuff to get her to stop. But she didn't accept it. The Portuguese continued to want to enslave her people and control her land, so she turned it all down.

When the Portuguese wouldn't leave her land and her people alone, she didn't stop. She came up with another strategy. I don't see how she did it. What a strong black woman! Truly I look up to her. I am worried about a few feelings, but she had to worry about much more. She had lives in her hands, not to mention her own. If that was me, I probably would have just let it be and left the Portuguese to their ways. But Queen Nzinga kept moving and striving.

At one point she went away and faked her death. The Portuguese thought everything was finally all good for them. They didn't expect her to come back, but she did. And she came back strong, with her army of strong standing black males and females. What a fight she put up! So strong. Funny, I can't remember her ever being mentioned to me in all my years of school.

Now my tears are falling not because I'm mad or sad but because I am amazed at her strength and proud to know that just how she got over that big old mountain I can get over this little old hill.

The Beat Goes On

Cabriole Brooks

It was beautiful the way they beat me,

the way my body swayed as I danced with the lash.

On the sea, in the midst of nowhere, I held fast to an identity that was slowly being erased.

I never stopped dancing even when the other bodies decayed or were washed away in the shark-infested waters.

I lay as still as I could next to my African brothers and sisters.

We prayed to Yemenya and Oshun for deliverance and strength.

We were all so weak in body,

but our faith was strong.

Our hearts beat in synchronized rhythm,

dancing still, prone to a sound that the white men would never be able to hear or

take away.

And so we danced a beat our homeland would never witness—

the Kofis, Afuas, Cinques, Azingas, Nandis, Abduls, Aminas, Chakas, Dedans, and I.

With bent backs, lice-infected hair, reddened eyes, and skin plagued with sores, we stood in spirit

as tall and proud as the blazing sun ruling the ocean.

Some of our people would perish, but we as a nation had vowed never to die.

The whip would not stop us

neither would the repeated brutal rapes of our women.

And so the dance played on.

Our struggle to survive and maintain dignity in the face of total hate was the score

for the song,

the song that for years we would recall and sing with tear-rimmed eyes.

The pain of remembering better, unchained times became our companion in the ship's bowels,

chafing and soothing the furrows in our wrists and ankles, the rot in our gut.

Monopoly and capitalism brought us to this unknown destination,

a moment in history that would last centuries

and be viewed as the beginning of the greatest injustice of all time.

At the bottom of Jesus, Black Boy, Brotherhood, and African Glory,

the truth was not what it seemed, even the ship names lying to us.

Our hearts hurt more than our dehydrated bodies, wrinkling like raisins,

bodies that for months were covered with human feces, vomit, blood, and parasitic bugs,

bodies braced for the ongoing threat of scurvy.

So, for money that never touched our hands we danced a sad, mournful dance,

a jig that was neither intentional nor rewarding.

But we did it, mainly to survive,

because for some reason the hope buried deep inside our captive bodies just wouldn't fade away.

The hope was a part of us that could not be divided.

Our ancestors watched over us, reminding us that the Sankufa bird would always be there.

So it was beautiful the way they beat me,

the way my blackness swayed as I danced with the lash,

but what was even more beautiful in the end was the way I beat them.

And still the beat goes on.

My Name is Akin

Kirsten Chambers

My name is Akin. Many others in my tribe, including me, have been free our whole lives. We have been living here in Gambia for many years. Life was good. We had good crops, our families were together, and we made a living together. But one day our beautiful lives took a turn for the worse. Many white men, and some other African tribes who were helping them, came and took about 300 of my people. We had always heard about the others who had been captured, but we never thought we'd be added to the story.

When we arrived to this big boat that looked like a house that floats on the water, there was a word on it. The word was L'Annibal. This giant ship would now be our home. The next morning I awoke to the sound of gunfire. The white men and the Africans were fighting. I think the Africans were trying to keep us in our home. I heard one man say it was too many of them, so we had to leave for our trans-Atlantic voyage now. In the next few minutes we were moving. I later learned that the floating house is called a ship.

On the way to our next destination, which was unknown, I began talking to the members of my tribe about taking down the white men and taking over the ship. After all, it was more of us than them. My family and I planned to take over, when the ship stopped moving.

The day the ship halted in Haiti, we were good and ready to start our war. I arose from my bench and asked everyone to put their war faces on; this was our day of freedom. Akin meant Warrior, Hero, and Brave man, and I was going to live up to each one. But gunfire again ruined my thoughts and scared everyone back to their seats. The gunfire went on for a while. The next thing we knew Haitian men were aboard the ship unchaining us, sending us to a new life of freedom.

PART TWO: Resistance to Enslavement

Writing, Education, and Resistance

Jim Randels

In 1998, Students at the Center (SAC) produced its first book of writings by students. The collection of writings commemorated the largest slave revolt in the United States, the one that happened in New Orleans in 1811.

Why would a first book written by high school students be about a remote time period? Why not focus on more traditional teen concerns such as dating or popular culture or relationships with friends and parents? The answer arises from the rich history of New Orleans and from the SAC style of work.

First off, the idea for the book did not come initially from students but rather from a community-based organization, the African American History Alliance of Louisiana (AAHAL). One of AAHAL's primary programs is an annual commemoration of the 1811 Slave Revolt. AAHAL had published a thoroughly documented and readable book, *On to New Orleans*, about the revolt. As part of the annual commemorations, our students had studied this book, entered essay contests, and written and performed plays about this important local and national event.

The revolt resonated with our students for a number of other reasons. Probably most important is that as young people in the middle teenage years, they were emerging from and experiencing their own developmental stage of resistance. And they lived in a city that, while it does not experience slavery in the old way, still grumbled and groaned with the effects of slavery and ongoing oppression. They knew of schools and neighborhoods for the "haves" and the "have-nots." They had stood on the streets and caught trinkets thrown from above by the ruling class at Mardi Gras. And they had lived various forms of resistance to these realities. They knew the "resistance" exhibited at Mardi Gras by Black Indians who sew their own costumes rather than having some tailor do it for them. Our students knew that these Mardi Gras Indians followed their own routes, practiced in their own corner bars, and passed down traditions that honor the history of resistance in New Orleans that goes way back before 1811.

The writings in this section carry on this spirit of resistance, but this time in an educational setting. Here are students telling the stories of their ancestors, suggesting the entry points that make history come alive for them and make the struggles of previous generations make sense and provide direction. Here are students taking control of their education by reclaiming their history.

These young writers bring a sensibility to their writing that makes it impossible for someone else to write. Their youth leads them to explore issues important to their lives through the historical situations they have studied. Danielle Joseph, in "Phillip's Story," explores themes that come up in high school classes that place student thinking and experiences at the center of the curriculum: How to deal with separation from family members? What does it mean to protect our family members from danger? What does it mean to leave home? Adrinda Kelly's "Resistance" examines issues of culture and identity and of the connection between politics and relationships. All of these writings, because they are written by teens, provide "hooks" to engage youth in serious study.

And the fact that these writers are from New Orleans is also important. In "Bruised," Cabriolle Brooks knows what it's like to breathe her hometown's thick air and to burst in anticipation of the first Creole tomato of the season. She also knows the disturbing underbelly and steep price of our city's sensual pleasures.

Taken as a whole, the writings in this section also illustrate values and ways of thinking that are in line with the resistance to enslavement period in New Orleans. Most of the writings deal with the key event of this era in New Orleans, the 1811 revolt. But the writings also show an understanding that this event did not happen in isolation. Brandy Brown's meditation on Baukman Dutty is appropriate, because the New Orleans area received a surge of immigrants from Haiti just after people of African descent there formed a nation out of slave revolts and maroon colonies. And Ashley Jones' "Juan Malo" and Fred Thompson's "First Hand" honor the maroon colonies in the New Orleans area that carried on resistance to enslavement throughout the second half of the 18th century and the early 19th century.

Just as Charles Deslondes and other 1811 revolutionaries from Haiti looked back to Africans in Haiti such as Baukman Dutty to inspire their own actions, so does a teen writer such as Anastasia McGee look to young writers from the New Orleans Public Schools who went before her for inspiration. In "Connecting with Maroon Colonies," Anastasia describes learning about maroon colonies and reading the writings of Adrinda Kelly, an SAC graduate whom Anastasia never met and who preceded Anastasia in SAC by seven years. In turn, these readings helped Anastasia understand and make her decision to remain in a neighborhood public high school to struggle for good education for all her peers.

TIMELINE: 1700–1861

Resistance to Enslavement/Oppression

1718

1718

1720

New Orleans founded by the French under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville.

1720's

First enslaved Africans arrive in Louisiana; resistance begins immediately—even in Africa and on the ships.

1724

March, 1724

Black Codes (laws to govern Africans in Louisiana) implemented.

1726

1726

Three runaway enslaved Africans attack and severely injure **Louis Congo.** Congo was a formerly enslaved African hired by the French government to be executioner and torturer in order to suppress any resistance by enslaved Africans. The French gave Louis Congo his freedom in exchange for this work.

1729

May 26, 1729

L'Annibal, a slave ship bound for Louisiana with 300 captured/enslaved Africans, was waiting at the mouth of the Gambia River to begin the journey across the Atlantic when enslaved Africans revolted, seizing weapons and part of the ship as they waged battle against the crew. The Africans were eventually subdued, but revolts continued throughout the voyage. On July 16, in the port of Caye St. Louis in St. Domingue (now Haiti), a port official recommended that the ship simply sell its enslaved Africans in St. Domingue, load its cargo holds with sugar, and return to France. As a result of the resistance of enslaved Africans, this slave ship never made it to Louisiana.

November, 1729

Africans in Louisiana join forces with the Natchez to massacre 250 settlers at Fort Rosalie (later named the city of Natchez) in a land dispute. At the time, the Fort Rosalie population consisted of 200 French men, 82 French women, and 150 French children along with 280 enslaved Africans. The Natchez people attacked the French settlers after they secured the support of the enslaved Africans.

1730

1758

1758

Mackandal, a maroon leader who plotted to kill all the whites in Haiti by poisoning the water, is executed by being burned alive. His life and execution helped inspire the successful African revolt in Haiti at the turn of the century, which led to the establishment of America's first black republic and the Americas' first full democracy.

1770

1770's–1784

Maroon colony leader Juan Malo helps build a community of self-liberated enslaved Africans all over the New Orleans area and particularly in present-day St. Bernard Parish. These colonies harvest cypress to make and sell furniture and use the profits to purchase guns to use in liberating their fellow enslaved Africans. In 1784 government spies finally capture and execute Malo.

1791

1791–1804

The Haitian Revolution leads to the establishment of the first black republic in the Americas world and the Americas' first full democracy. Boukman Dutty, a Voudon priest and leader of maroon colonies in St. Dominigue, led an early revolt that formed an important precursor to the Haitian Revolution. Toussaint L'Ouverture, an ex-slave and the eventual leader of the Haitian Revolution, went head to head with all the major world powers and military leaders of his era in a conflict of politics, diplomacy, and power. Dessalines, a prominent general in Touissant's revolutionary army, became president of the republic after Touissant's capture and death at the hands of the French.

1795

April, 1795

A large number of enslaved Africans are arrested for plotting and working to overthrow their "masters" and the system of enslavement. They organized their work primarily from the estate of Julien Poydras, a prominent Louisiana slave owner.

Late 1790's

Homer Plessy's paternal grandfather, white Frenchman **Germain Plessy**, joins his brother Dominique in fleeing to New Orleans to escape the Haitian Revolution. During the late 1790's and first decade of 1800's and first few years of the 1800's, thousands of Frenchmen arrive in New Orleans with their slaves to escape the Haitian Revolution. This migration has a profound effect on the language, culture, politics, and future of New Orleans , essentially doubling its population.

Charles Deslondes arrives in New Orleans as the Frenchman who enslaves him escapes the Haitian Revolution.

1800

1804

1811

January, 1811

1811 Slave Revolt in New Orleans and surrounding area includes **Charles Deslondes** among its leaders and is the largest revolt of enslaved Africans in U.S. history. Important features of this revolt include a) military/political objective to make New Orleans a liberated zone—nation even—for people of African descent in America, and b) a coordinated, well-planned strategy that included participants all along River Road and in New Orleans proper linked by drivers and skilled laborers as well as maroon colony networks in the swamps between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain.

1812

1812

Louisiana's Battalion of Free People of Color is the only military group in the United States with officers of color. Both Andrew Jackson and the Louisiana Legislature recognized the patriotism and bravery of these soldiers following their participation in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. According to many reports (see the opening chapter of Rudolphe Desdunes' *Our People and Our History*), this praise rang hollow to free people of color in New Orleans. The third stanza from **Hipppolyte Castra's** poem **"The Campaign of 1814-15,"** sums up their sentiment:

Arriving upon the field of battle,
I fought like a brave warrior;
Neither the bullets nor the shrapnel,
Could ever fill me with fear.
I fought with great valor
With the hope of serving my country,
Not thinking that for recompense
I would be the object of scorn.

1830

1830's

Maria Stewart, whose "voice" was silenced after three years of public discourse, was one of the first women writers/speakers in America (early 1830's). Stewart was a friend and colleague of David Walker (murdered in 1831 for anti-slavery book he wrote), and felt called by God and colleagues to speak out against slavery even though she was a woman and such discourse was discouraged.

Public education system in New Orleans established. This system receives broad-based government and community (albeit segregated) support and is responsible for launching **public library system** in New Orleans, which is initially housed within the public schools.

Les Cenelles (edited by **Armand Lanusse**), a collection of poetry by free people of color in New Orleans, becomes the first published anthology of poetry in New Orleans and of African American writers in the United States.

1840

1848

1848

Couvent School, the first high quality and well organized school for free black children in New Orleans, opens. Funds to operate the school came from Marie Couvent, a free African woman who donated funds in 1837 to the Catholic church to establish a school for black children.

The *Common School Journal*, a national education publication published by Horace Mann, reports on the success of Couvent school in receiving operation funds from the Louisiana legislature. This appropriation probably represents the first governmental funding in the South for black education.

1849

November 15, 1849

Rudolphe Lucien Desdunes, who would later become historian, political writer, and Citizens' Committee member, is born to Jeremiah Desdunes (who had left Haiti during that country's revolution) and Henrietta Desdunes, a native of Cuba.

1850

1850

Census shows high level of education and skill among free blacks in New Orleans, classifying 80–85% of them as skilled workers, clerks, teachers, and medical doctors. This tradition of economic independence and education is a factor in the challenge by the Citizens' Committee to Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890.

1857

1857

Dred Scott Decision by U. S. Supreme Court denies citizenship to all residents of African descent in America.

PART TWO: Resistance to Enslavement

The Ones Whose Courage Helped Inspire

Juan Malo, St. Malo

Ashley Jones

Malo the Visionary:

In 1774, Juan Malo buried his ax in the first cypress tree of Gaillardiland, saying,

"Malheur au blanc qui passera ces bornes."

("Woe to the white who would pass this boundary.")

This boundary was the Louisiana swamps, where the ghostly white fog clung stubbornly to the roots of the old cypress trees,

their long trunks like guardians

looking over the swamp's creatures.

He looked around this dead swamp, standing motionless like a picture.

Amongst the moss-covered trees, he envisioned his maroon colonies,

using the grayish mist of fog

and the ancient faces of the cypress to keep enemies away.

He could see his band, men and women,

painting a rainbow of yellows, reds, and mahoganies on the swamp's living canvass.

No longer slaves, men with masters and laws to break their backs and spirits,

instead he saw fine craftsmen shaping cypress into sturdy chairs to sit the elderly and tables to sit their wives and little children.

Malo looked upon the house decks of his mind and saw the women no longer the "mules of the world," talking without bending and breaking or cutting or pulling, but laughing and living a free life.

Freedom buzzed in his ear like swamp mosquitoes,

Dripped from his mind like cypress blood.

The ax like a dagger in the cypress heart set the boundary of freedom, and so he said,

"Woe to the white who would pass this boundary."

Baukman Dutty

Brandy Brown

With every big event in history, a series of people, organizations, and/or incidents have started the ball rolling. Nothing of significance in history has just magically appeared. We often learn about one famous person or event and hear no mention of the supporting and contributing figures. For example, when we study the Haitian Revolution at the turn of the 19th Century, we learn about Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Louisiana Purchase but hear nothing about Baukman Dutty and much less the unnamed people who supported his revolutionary action.

Baukman Dutty was one of the contributing factors to the Haitian Revolution. In the years before 1796 and the start of the Haitian Revolution, Baukman gave hope to many enslaved Africans and struck fear in the hearts of white slave owners. Sold from Jamaica, Baukman eventually settled on the Clement plantation, where he worked as a driver and coachman. This work enabled him to travel to different plantations and contact other revolutionary-minded enslaved Africans. Baukman then killed his master and ran away into the hills, living as a maroon. He wanted to start a revolution and spent years planning it and training his forces.

In 1791, his plan was to be put into action. But before that could happen, Baukman's army was attacked, and he was beheaded. However, instead of suppressing the maroons' change-seeking spirit, his death strengthened their resolve. He was adored by the enslaved Africans and honored as a legendary figure who represented their hopes for freedom.

Baukman Dutty's story is not in many history books nor is his name a household name, as it should be. But he died a beloved martyr of his people and a man whom all people who respect freedom and democracy should love.

Me? Haiti?

Juliana Ratliff

I never knew how ignorant I really am to New Orleans' history and my ancestry until the day I had an encounter with my friend. I noticed that on her Facebook she noted that she's from Port Au Prince, Haiti (this was way before the earthquake of 2009 happened). I asked her why she has that on there, when she's not from there. She went on to explain that she and her mother had a conversation one night about where we come from and how New Orleans became to be so diverse. She found out that her ancestry (and probably a lot of mine too) actually goes back to Haiti. I wondered how this could happen. All this time I thought the only reason blacks were in New Orleans and even America was because of the slaves that came from Africa. This was the first time I had ever consciously heard anything about the Haitian Revolution and its connection to my home New Orleans.

The Haitian Revolution was a really big thing for blacks in the 19th century in New Orleans. Reading the book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* revealed the whole connection to the Haitian Revolution to me. I had no idea that we were so strongly rooted with the Haitians. The first time I'm really remembering anything about this culture is by the recent earthquake. I know that's probably sad, but I say better late than never.

The Haitian Revolution of 1804 established the second republic in the Western Hemisphere and the first led by blacks. When they came to New Orleans, the free people of color and the Europeans often brought slaves with them. The Haitian population grew in New Orleans because of this. They now made up over 50 percent of the population. They migrated in large numbers and basically made New Orleans' French-speaking population double. When I learned this, it made me understand the reason why there was so much news coverage in New Orleans of people looking for their family members in Haiti after the big quake recently. I was trying to figure out how come we have so many New Orleanians who have a family tree that traces back to Haiti. The Haitians brought not only 3,102 freed people of color, but they also brought 3,226 enslaved Africans also. So I can only infer that our large Haitian population came from those people reproducing. And in the last part of first decade of 1800's the New Orleans' population pretty much doubled with the addition of Haitians to the city. When they came to New Orleans, the Haitian refugees added to both its French-speaking mixed race population and African population. This helps explain to me one more reason why we're so deeply rooted in French culture also.

Before I knew all of this information, I was under the impression that all of our colored people were solely slaves from Africa who migrated on their own and multiplied. It's funny how today New Orleans is considered a Caucasian city (saying that that race runs this city), but the Haitians and Africans started the city basically. It's funny how we can come from such a deeply rooted colored background to a fairly strong Caucasian population. I would think back in the day, just because there were a lot of coloreds down here that many whites wouldn't have wanted to come anyway. Then again if I think about this situation from an imperialistic point of view, I can say that the whites were going to want to come down here regardless, so they could control the ports and take credit for running one of the most important cities in America. To digress, I'm just happy I know more about the place I call home. My friend Marche really opened my eyes to this topic, and I'm glad she did. It's not a good thing to boast about your history when you don't even know what it really contains. For a moment I felt all of my ignorance hit me. I feel bad that this is a subject that was so neglected within my education. I wish I had learned more. History, especially your personal history, should be very important to you. The Haitian Revolution could've actually shaped the young African-American female I am now. Those people suffered a great deal to come and settle here and make a pathway for me. The slaves who came from Africa did that also; it's just that it's not said what the Haitians did also. They contributed a great deal to the black population of New Orleans. This bit of history really helped me understand my roots a little bit more. I encourage more New Orleanians to learn of the Haitian Revolution and spread the history.

The Criminals of New Orleans

Huy Nguyen

Gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes: People with these occupations, if they can even be classified as such, are stereotypically dirty, cheating lowlifes who only care about themselves. And some of them pretty much are. But what if I told you that because of them a city was developed? What if I told you that because of them, settlements in the swamplands started forming? Because of them trees were chopped and made into lumber, and houses were built in the marshlands? Not only that these gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes constructed our city, but many African slaves who were also sent in by the French built our city? These slaves weren't dirty lowlifes. They had families, houses and land. They were forced to come over to work on plantations all due to the French. What if I told you that Africans who were enslaved by oppressed ones are the main reasons that we have a good agricultural system? That all these African slaves, gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes contributed greatly to the construction of the "Big Easy," the "Crescent City," the place many Saints fans, including myself, call home? That this home is the home for many minorities like me? This place welcomed my elders, settling their homes and lives after hardships in their homeland. What if African slaves, gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes were the backbone to the formation of New Orleans?

You would probably take in everything I told you, process it through your mind, and look at me with confused eyes and a small smile on your face, thinking everything I told you about how New Orleans came to be was a joke. But in actuality, African slaves made New Orleans. They settled in the swamplands. They chopped trees, made them into lumber, and built homes in the marshlands. They developed the agricultural techniques. Without them, we wouldn't have rice plantations or even sugar cane plantations. They are the reason why New Orleans exists. Without them, these New Orleanians probably wouldn't go crazy if the Saints didn't exist. They probably wouldn't know about Tracy Porter making the momentum-changing interception in Super Bowl 44. Or even how tourists were thankful for multi-cultural food like yakamien or gumbo. African slaves—along with European gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes—made New Orleans.

In the 17th century, during the colonizing of "The New World" under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, La Nouvelle-Orléans was founded. Word of this was sent back to France, and the government saw this as an opportunity to clear its jail ceils. Jail ceils in France were over crowded with criminals such as gamblers, robbers, and prostitutes. The criminals were ordered out of France and were put on a ship to colonize the newly acquired French territory, La Nouvelle-Orléans.

Later on, they sent Africans from the Congo and Senegambia regions of Africa, the Caribbean and many other places into New Orleans. The colonial oppressors enslaved them to work on fields of plantations. When they escaped, these maroons settled in swamplands to hide from their masters. They developed a style of living for us, the style of houses like these shotgun houses that are now in New Orleans and can also be seen in Africa. These Africans brought will to survive any hardship and to resist any injustice. They showed New Orleans how to control our crops with our humid seasons. These people, who were from another place that didn't know how to read or write the English language, built our city up.

The criminals and slaves settled in and lived off the land. They made houses. They planted red beans. They boiled crawfish. Their presence in these swamplands played an essential role in how New Orleans came to be. It might be hard to believe, but facts are facts. It's strange how the world works, isn't it?

Congo Square and All of its Glory

David Tran

New Orleans is a city that's full of history. Named after Phillipe II, Duc d'Orleans, Regent of France, New Orleans is famous for its music (jazz), cuisine, and even some of its famous residents (Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.) What many people don't know is actually one of the most phenomenal things about the great city.

During the 18th century, many slave owners in Louisiana allowed their property a day off, something that would be considered unheard of, even in today's society where all of our knowledge is available from text books. The activities that occurred at Congo Square aren't published in any of the text books that I've ever studied for that matter, but the activities performed by these slaves at Congo Square were almost magical.

The tradition of allowing slaves a day to enrich their heritage and retain it was very major when the activities were still going on. The slaves would gather at what is now Louis Armstrong Park in a large open space, and they would set up market to sell and buy goods that they produced to make some extra money. Then the people would sing, dance, and play music (which was very rare for African Americans because their music was suppressed in the Protestant states.) When the Haitian Revolution began, immigration of refugees (some of which brought slaves) helped to reinforce the African traditions in New Orleans.

Congo Square today isn't what it used to be. Now it is simply Louis Armstrong Park. Many of the residents of New Orleans aren't even aware of the mystical events that occurred at the square, but when I walk through the park, I can feel them. I feel like I was living at that time, and I get that good Sunday feeling that I always feel on Sundays. The word Sunday itself denotes a good feeling in my mind, and I'm sure Sundays were very much appreciated by the slaves back in the 18th century.

Although activity in the Square isn't as prominent today, there are still music festivals, community gatherings, protest marches, and drum circles that go on where these slaves used to enjoy their "day off." New Orleans is still, at least faintly, an African city of resistance.

For The Enslaved Artisans

Jennifer Le

"In New Orleans, you can easily see, and feel, that slavery wasn't so long ago."

—Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*

Plenty of houses in New Orleans go as far as back as before the Civil War. Those old, ancient buildings and houses that stand in the streets of New Orleans were made from the bare hands of those enslaved artisans, with the income from slaves' labor. Anyone walking downtown will always become attracted because of those buildings, houses, and mansions that are valuable and antique-like. The architecture and builders of these buildings make New Orleans even more unique. It never occurred to me that slaves skilled at architecture and building crafts worked to construct houses and buildings in New Orleans. They were even the ones who actually built the White House in Washington.

Little did I know, walking those streets of downtown New Orleans in the French Quarter bedazzled with historical shelters, that my eyes would open with gratitude towards the slaves who were actually the hands that built New Orleans. There are stories that I've read while reviewing the history of some houses of New Orleans. The Lalaurie House for example is considered the most haunting and frightening in the French Quarter on Royal Street. Back in 1832, Dr. Louis Lalaurie and his wife Delphine Lalaurie owned their Creole mansion. They were rich and well known for their business affairs and style. Their three-story house had been made for grand events and occasions. It was built with mahogany doors that were hand-carved with flowers and human faces, chandeliers, European china, etc. The Lalauries had it all, even the slaves.

The house was attended by a dozen slaves. They were treated with cruelty by Madame Lalaurie. She never treated them as human. They would be chained to the fireplace in the kitchen, where they would prepare dinner. Others would be handled brutally and worse. The mysterious, scary thing is, some slaves would just disappear and people would not know how or why. Some neighbors would find the actions of what Madame Lalaurie was doing: chasing slaves with a whip, replacing slaves with no explanation, and being responsible for their deaths and burying them in the yard.

The trauma eventually started rumors, and the Lalauries started to do badly in business. She would be avoided, her party invitations were declined, and dinners were ignored. Then, karma bit her worse. A fire broke out in her kitchen which may have been started by the cook who was mistreated by Madame Lalaurie. After the fire, it was discovered about her barred attic, which was creepy and horrifying. Firefighters found slaves chained to the wall, and human body parts and heads were lying around in that attic. It's awful, sick, and disgusting.

Places built by slaves became their place of death. The slaves were being mistreated in the very building they built with their own hands. Where is the recognition? The clock on display in the Louisiana State Museum designed by Valsin Marmillion was built by the hands of slave ironworkers. I would not have known all my life, if I hadn't taken the time to learn behind

the scenes of artisans. Marcus Christian, in *Negro Ironworkers of Louisiana* comments, "For almost the entire life of the colony, slaves, free Negroes, and free people of color had practically monopolized the labor situation." I see and understand how far the labor and the labor treatment went. I vision it like a never ending "labor boom."

These slaves didn't deserve to become enslaved and to work with no credit or compensation. Not many streets are even named or honored by an African American or anything. I feel that it's unfair and not right that these people built these buildings and ended up dead in what they built for these people who were cruel and gave nothing back, maybe not even a thank you. I thank these slaves for their part in the creation of New Orleans, and I will never forget the stories behind their hard work and hardship.

Gustave

Cabriole Brooks

For twenty-one years I watched your eyes,
watched the way they twinkled with promise, stared with admiration, and burned with proud superiority.
For twenty-one years I listened to the confusing language that materialized from your pale pinkish lips.
You were my master and I your faithful pet.
Dependent on you for my every breath, my life hung in the power of your white hands
which fed me religiously every day,
every month,
every night

nothing but stale and spoiling untruth.
For twenty-one years I sat by your
side and listened to you rave and rant
about just how intelligent and quick-witted I was
how proud and grateful you were to have
such a dedicated and alert slave.
Many times you said that my endearment to you would earn me my freedom,

you know, a nice place in the woods
where I could build my own oak tree shack
and eat my own backyard garden scraps.

But for twenty-one years you still said
No,

maybe later when you're a little older,
time will tell, we'll see

who knows.

But for twenty-one years you still
denied me. I asked time and time again,
but my inquiries never quite received
the answer I sought.

After that I could never trust any more

a white man's words, for they had
enticed me and my lost soul to believe
that freedom could be free,
that the cost could be less if the labor was more.

For twenty-one years I waited patiently
for a verdict in my favor,
but it always eluded me.

So I decided to move on and search for my
own identity.

I left my master, would no longer be
his pet, his slave.

I needed to breathe far away from
the smoke and brimstone that my
hell for so long had made.
For twenty-one years I tried to win
a battle I never should have fought,
learn lessons that were unintentionally taught.

Twenty-one long years: that's what it

took for me to finally shake the hands of
liberty's African destiny.

Philip's Story

Danielle Joseph

I could hear dogs barking and growling behind us. The dogs reminded me of the lions in the story from the big black book the Reverend read from on Sunday mornings, our only day of rest. The story was about a boy named Daniel and his three friends, how they were thrown into a lions' den for disobeying the king. With the dogs barking at us, I felt like Daniel must have felt when the lions started licking their chops, scared 'cause there was no way he could escape and no turning back for me.

"Boy stop day-dreaming, we got to move," said Mama.

So me and my mama ran through the muddy water with sticks in our hands to fight off any snakes or alligators. We kept going until we couldn't hear the dogs or the slave catchers with their horses.

I looked into my mama's eyes and asked her, "Why we got to leave? Master, he was good to us?"

I never saw Mama look like that at me, like she could beat me and cry at the same time.

"Son I know that you and Master Trepagnier were fond of each other, but it is wrong no matter how we are treated for him to own us. Master promised your Uncle that he would give him his freedom one day, but he never did. It broke my heart to see him treat my baby brother like an animal passing food to him under his table. I saw Master trying to treat you like Gustave. I'll die before I watch him do that to my baby. Gustave promised me before he left that he would help me get you back to Haiti, and that's what I'm going to do."

She was very quiet after that, so I kept her hand in mine: her hand, rough on the inside and smooth on the outside. The old folks always said her hands were like iron, strong and they would never break. Those hands beat me, loved me, and protected me.

Some of the older house slaves tried to warn her against going to meet Uncle Gustave in the swamp. Gustave ran away when I was a baby 'cause Master would not set him free like he promised Gustave when he was a little boy. The old folks said they warned him against believing that white man's lie, but poor Gustave really believed Master Trepagnier would free him. We were heading up to Ormond Plantation to meet Gustave. Me and Mama had been walking for four nights and sleeping in the trees during the day. Mama and I would take turns sleeping and praying that no one would find us.

I heard whistling that sounded like a bird chirping. I asked Mama if she heard it, to make sure I wasn't losing my mind, 'cause I knew birds didn't sing at night. Mama said, "Shut up boy they might hear you." We hid behind a wide tree and held our breath. I heard something moving in the swamp—sounded like it was running towards our tree. I saw a man with a white shirt on; his face was black, dark as the night. I saw his eyes and white shirt first. Then he walked over to our tree, the one we were hiding behind. The tree that was our refuge brought

a smile to this man's dark face. He grabbed Mama from the tree and asked her what she was doing, 'cause if she was trying to hide, he spotted her far off with that white head rag on her head.

Mama started crying, "Gustave, Gustave." She wrapped her arms around him, and they stood there like that for a very long time. I was surprised and scared at the same time. Mama looked down at me and said, "Give your uncle a hug and kiss." That man with the face dark as the night came over and picked me up. I bit him on his arm. He started laughing, so I bit him harder. Mama slapped me and told me to stop. Gustave kept on laughing, "Leave that boy alone. He don't know me. He's trying to protect you girl, so don't hit him." I think he really thought it was funny, but I didn't 'cause I was scared.

I looked at his face, and he looked just like Mama. I had always heard Mama tell stories about her brother, and there he was standing in front of me. Uncle Gustave was tall, and he had strong arms. He looked like he could have carried me and Mama at the same time.

Gustave told Mama where to find a group of maroons that he lived with near Bayou St. John. They were going to be waiting for us. Gustave said that someone would meet us behind the Destrehan Plantation to take us there. When we got supplies from the maroons near Bayou St. John, we were to leave with a group of runaway slaves on a boat from New Orleans to join my family left in Haiti.

My Uncle Gustave kissed me and told me to be good and learn as much as I could. Mama started crying, but Gustave told her to stop and that she would have to stay strong. He gave her some coins and a piece of his shirt, then left. He told Mama he had to go to see Master Trepagnier. He said he was going to help fight.

I often wonder what happened to my uncle—we never saw him again. We met the maroons and in one week were on the boat back to Haiti. Mama cried almost the whole trip. She just held on to that piece of shirt and cried.

I sometimes think about Uncle Gustave and how we made it back to Haiti. I wonder if he really went back to see Master Trepagnier. A few of the slaves who came to Haiti after the Civil War said that my Uncle Gustave was one of the people who led the 1811 Revolt. They said that Master Trepagnier was found cut into little pieces in the big house. Mama would sit around and tell her grandchildren, my children, the story about how we made it back home to Haiti.

I listened to Uncle Gustave and learned to read and learned as much as I could. I teach freed black people from New Orleans to read and write, if they want to learn. That is how we became truly freed people. We were free mind, body, and soul.

PART TWO: Resistance to Enslavement

Call to Arms

Resistance

Adrinda Kelly

I am a child of contemporary America. I nod pleasantly, almost attentively, when militant instructors speak so passionately of the great tragedy of too many millions of dark people. It is a foreign idea to me, this African Eden where the Adams and Eves of my race slashed the sultry air with ivory smiles whiter than the Europeans who would become their oppressors. Yet the story of Africa is no caricature of pagan playfulness. I would like to recount the ten thousand tales of African royalty and bloodline I know exist, but I must relent to a shameful ignorance of my African ancestry. I cannot quote specific examples of African grandeur, yet I can tell you easily of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. I rejoice that George Washington, upstanding father of baby America, maneuvered this nation to adolescence and independence. My heart burns with pain for the Jewish millions subjected to Hitler's maniacal vision.

It is convenient for me to learn these histories, and by knowing no examples of African intellect and accomplishment, it becomes easier to negate my identity and marvel at the lightskinned, light-eyed blacks who are closer to whiteness than I'll ever be. It becomes easy for me to listen to the messengers of African enslavement and disregard the oral histories that survived Emancipation. I am sympathetic to the tales of plantation politics: the castration of millions of black males, submerging them in the phallic fluids of white domination even as black women suffered the seed of their masters, bearing beige babies who were cursed at conception for not being classifiable. I disassociate myself from this genre of black experience in America, fashioning, instead, a definition of blackness that remains sympathetic to slavery, but only in the context of a compassionate observer. I am ashamed of how easily and efficiently a race of people was carried across ocean depths to a "land of liberty" that would hate them. And these people who rejoice in their heritage in an America that has taught me to disgust my blackness want me to be proud of a "cattle race?"

That great white philanthropist and owner of slaves, whom my school honors with its name, must be laughing heartily in his cold closet inching to hell. In an American social system based on the ideal of whiteness—the CEO, the blonde bombshell, the infant's innocent blue eyes—educators are employed to reinforce the isolation of black identity by teaching European histories to black students searching for a cultural identity. In this way black solidarity is disrupted as black people chase tangent ancestries in French and Spanish cultures. These black people don't know the history of Africa and, therefore, have no desire to claim African ancestry. No great benefactor of black people, John McDonogh knew, even then, that miseducation is the greatest divider … and oppressor.

Understand this, slavery is America's bastard and was never homogenous with the black American disposition. It is not in our nature to pay homage to the "great white master" who liberated us from pagan heathenism and enslaved us in the Christian doctrine that called every man brother. Africans were never content to be slaves, and even as our bloodline diluted, Africa's children and grandchildren refused to be domesticated by a religion that preached humility and gratitude in the face of blatant oppression. In this way, religion was used to placate discontented blacks who chafed under the raspy caress of oppression, while satisfying their desire to be part of God's plan for humanity. Yet, the

idea of black subservience to whites as a religious doctrine rooted in *The Bible,* contradicts the fundamental principle of a Christian God. God, according to Christian beliefs, demands exaltation and service from all His creations, and any system, such as slavery, that glorifies man as Lord and master over man incites the rage of a jealous God unwilling to share his omnipotence. Furthermore, assuming that Christianity is rooted in compassion, biblical verses like "created in His own image" and "love thy neighbor" imply that the entire human race is embraced by God and loved by Him equally. Therefore, Christians who seek to serve God through imitation of his Divine love could not justify slavery as a sympathetic institution.

Understand that here, in New Orleans, enslaved people sought refuge in swamps before they would endure another day of dependence and say thank you for the sustenance their bloody hands had provided. Imagine the same hands that cherished a black woman's hips made bloody in the sugar cane fields of master's enterprise. Imagine having to mend those hands, to cradle the broken fingers that made your children, restoring them with your tears and your care. A cycle of brokenness begins that is bitter to the spirit, and it becomes easy to consider death and murder in the connotations of freedom. "Resistance! Resistance!" The chant begins on the lips of Charles Deslondes and then carries to the church and the cabins of the discontented until one after the other begin to steal away, slaves who are stealing themselves from slavery and returning to the camaraderie of black men with a cause.

And when the day came to pillage and plunder like some great avenger, black men again slashed the sultry air with blinding smiles as beautiful as they were deadly. They fitted themselves with firearms and swords and fists and marched in unison to the demand: "Freedom or Death!" They stopped at plantation after plantation, returning a mortal death to the white men who had killed their ancestry and independence daily. Their numbers swelled to five hundred as both men and women joined the battle cry, enlisting each other to be like the Haitian revolutionaries who had won a country in the name of African independence. To be a woman then and have bloody hands sear your hips in a painless lovemaking! To know that this child of insurrection would be your own, no longer having to share your breasts with the greedy pink babies your womb did not remember. This was the reward, and it steeled your soul from remorse. Enough to kill and be judged and know that your babies would own themselves.

"On to New Orleans!" they promised as the sound of a thousand legs marched on. But New Orleans had been mobilized, and the revolutionaries could not penetrate that final barrier to freedom. They were gunned down by a government militia force given orders to slaughter any black it saw. Black men fought bravely and desperately, determined to die resisting. Black women saw their blood spilled and their wombs ached painfully. They cried remorselessly for this last loss and rejoiced in their tears for the return of enslaved souls to the African shore.

And in the end there was death for all who had resisted. White men claimed a victory for slavery, and slaves again encased themselves in the costume

of bondage. But underneath their rags something pulsated and trembled in memory of their brethren. Slaves did not forget Charles Deslonde and his attempt to liberate them. Uprisings sprang up across the nation and whites grew worried because they knew that the "change" sung about in Negro spirituals was imminent. They cowered beneath the prospect of revolution, and in a conspiracy calculated to undermine African-American resistance, the government staged the Civil War and turned to subtler forms of oppression. The education of black students was structured to negate African history, instilling a psychological void that manifests itself in total assimilation into white culture, surrendering blacks to white domination... again.

Almost two centuries later, it is easy for me to distance myself from slavery and the people who endured it. However, slaves did not merely endure oppression. They resisted bondage in uprisings like the 1811 Revolt, culminating with the Civil War and the active abolition of slavery.

I don't know African American History beyond the textbook pantomime of the "kind white master," but I do know this: Charles Deslonde, Nat Turner and others like them mobilized these words into action:

No chains to bear, no scourge we fear;
We conquer, or we perish here.
We conquer or we perish here.

There is no need for me to be ashamed. Slavery was not a passive institution, and mine is not a race of domesticated animals.

Connecting with Maroon Colonies

Anastasia McGee

I became interested in maroon colonies and the 1811 slave revolt when I read "Resistance" an essay by Adrinda Kelly, a McDonogh 35 graduate and Students at the Center participant. One of her essay says:

In New Orleans enslaved people sought refuge in swamps before they would endure another day of dependence. Imagine the same hands that cherished a black woman's hips made bloody in the sugar cane fields of master's enterprise. Imagine having to mend those hands, to cradle the broken fingers that made your children, restoring them with your tears and your care.

When I read these words I connected with maroon colonies, because it made me think of my current situation at my high school. The maroons communicated and stayed with the slaves to help free them. They could have easily left at any given time but chose to stay to help the other hundreds of slaves who were left in bondage and confinement. It made me think about the decisions I could have made to escape oppression at my current neighborhood school like the maroons did, but I resisted some teachers' and students' efforts to try and get me to go to Easton or 35, selective admissions high schools where only certain students fit the criteria. I made the decision to stay at Douglass long before I read anything about the maroons and the history, but reading it made me conscious about my decision, and that is when I started to feel a connection to history.

My decision to remain at Douglass is a struggle, but like the maroons I believe in helping other people in my community and not just myself. Adrinda's essay made me see the connection I had to the maroons. It was only after reading "Resistance" for the fifth or sixth time that I understood the significance of hearing my predecessor's story that she wrote when she was my age.

First Hand

Fred Thompson

Here I am in heaven,
Finally at peace.
Been fightin for freedom from 1726 to 1811.
You don't know who I am or what
I did.
Well sit down; I think I better tell you.

The New World is where it is.
1726 is when it is—
The road to the 1811 revolt of
Freemen,
The end of our people's blood
Being spread upon the land.

I was 10 years old in 1726, when
I heard about it:
Slaves running away then settling
In swamps and staying
So they could break more slaves
Out and take 'em to freedom.

Maroons is what dey was called.
I called 'em revolutionaries!!

In 1729, I was there when Africans and
Natchez warriors defeated the French
And wiped out their colony.
All heaven was breaking loose.

Kept on revoltin because you can't
Kill a people that already consider
They selves dead.

1750, 1762, 1773, 1776—no matter how
Many times they defeated us we kept
On going, fighting for our freedom.

In the 1780's an African leader came
Into the light.
Juan Malo was a maroon, and boy
Did he know how to fight.
Every oppressor who came before him
Went down in seconds of the fight,
Their crimson blood dripping on the
Ground as he went on to the next
Fight.

His followers' numbers grew every day
And kept fightin' day and night.

1784 is when they captured him
and then took his life.

Did the struggle die with him?
NO!!
Another brave African took his place.
There would always be someone to
Take on the leadership!

For how can you be scared if
You have nothing to lose and
Everything to gain?

You can kill a revolutionary, but
You can't kill the revolution.

In 1811 we harnessed fire as our
Weapon and planned to capture
New Orleans,
Calm in the fact the final
Battle was coming.

January is when it happened.
The final battle, the final fight.

My fellow Africans told me to stay
Back and plan, but I forced 'em
To let me fight.

March down the River Road!
On to New Orleans!
Freedom or Death!

That final battle is when I
Lost my life.

I started out a slave and
Died a free man—
Free as a bird in the sky
Free to return to my land,

Calmed in the fact that I knew
My people would be free one day,
Even if it took 400 years time.

Charles Deslonde (from the play *Lower 9 Stories*)

Lower 9 Stories cast (students from Lawless Positive Outreach Leaders and McDonogh 35 Students at the Center)

Charles Deslondes was a leader of the 1811 slave revolt that started near Laplace and gathered more enslaved-Africans-turned-revolutionaries as they marched to New Orleans crying "On to New Orleans!! Freedom or Death!!"

They did not accomplish their final goal of making New Orleans the capitol of an African nation in exile, but we are here to say that their struggle was not in vain. And here, at the foot of Deslondes Street, originally named for the white family who owned him and gained wealth from his labor, we name the street for this noble revolutionary.

We honor Charles and thank him for his steadfast courage. Without his strength and belief in freedom for all, we would not be here today.

Charles Deslondes experienced slavery in two lands, Haiti and America. Charles brought the spirit of revolution to his African brothers and sisters living in Louisiana. Charles Deslondes and his lieutenants were killed in the end and were not allowed to make or leave a written account of their tactics prior to their unjust execution. No doubt Charles cautioned his warriors, his fellow freedom fighters, that the revolution would not be easy but there was hope. And all who fought agreed, with their blood, that they would rather die free than live as slaves.

The revolution will not be easy, but there is hope.

1811 Slave Revolt

Towana Pierre

Each year, the Students at the Center (SAC) program helps commemorate the 1811 Slave Revolt. On January 7 and 8, 2000, a group of SAC class members from Frederick Douglass and McDonogh 35 High Schools performed a play they wrote as part of the commemoration. The students performed the play in an educational celebration for New Orleans Public School students.

The following essay offers Towana Pierre's perspective on the events of the past and their relation to today.

Maybe it wasn't such an unusual sight to see a large number of enslaved African Americans banded together. They'd probably marched militantly on the road to New Orleans with the express purpose of freeing their people before. Yet, no one was quite prepared for the force and organization of their attack. The enslaved Africans didn't have the best weapons by far. Their arsenal included big sticks, garden tools, or anything else they could use as weapons. And they weren't highly trained soldiers. Many of them had just been recruited from the trail of liberated plantations the freedom fighters left behind them. But they had something that no one could take away. They had determination.

It was that determination that led them along that lonely New Orleans road, surrounded by the swamps and bayous of Southern Louisiana. It kept pushing them toward the high walls that enclosed the French Quarter, toward artillery and hope.

Those 500 people represent the best of what black people were, are, and can become. They decided to fight for their freedom, even if failure ensured their deaths. Many of them had heard, seen, or experienced such cruelties as being thrown into cauldrons of boiling sugar or being buried from the neck down and having their faces smeared with syrup to whet the appetites of the ants. They knew of earlier freedom fighters such as Baukman Dutty, who started the Haitian Revolution. They learned from people such as Toussaint L'Overture, a military genius who helped to win the Haitian Revolution. They followed people such as Charles Deslondes, a principal leader in the 1811 Slave Revolt. So, despite the fact that many of them never experienced freedom firsthand, only knowing of it from the wistful longing on the faces of the elders and the defiance of those freshly torn from Africa, they fought with passion.

In some people's eyes the 1811 Slave Revolt was a failure. Its participants were made to walk back to the plantations they came from, where they were beheaded, their heads displayed on poles as a warning to all those foolish enough to follow their lead. But the 1811 Revolt was a prelude to many revolts that lasted long after the War of 1812. Those people did not fight in vain. They were role models for leaders of revolts that followed theirs. And the 1811 revolutionaries should still be considered role models for people today.

As a people, we have been brainwashed into believing slaves were submissive creatures who accepted slavery as their due. Through movies such as *Gone with the Wind* and Shirley Temple films, we've been taught that slaves were happy in the "loving bondage" of their masters who, of course, knew what was best for them. But through the lives of people such as Baukman, Deslondes, and L'Overture, we realize how courageous the slaves were in expressing their dissatisfaction with their situations.

If the 1811 Slave Revolt succeeds at one thing, let it be to teach us the knowledge that we were a courageous and dignified people once upon a time. Let us get back to the point where we can come together to accomplish great things.

Common Ground in 1811

Crystal Carr

I ran toward the house and thought of my position. The voices echoed within my head like the sound of the famous whippoorwill. I had only one decision to make. Noticing my anger and confusion, I stood around the slave cabin to get a better understanding. "Will I get caught?" No. "Will he be mad?" Definitely. These were the challenges a black woman had to face in slavery. Thinking of the other perspective, I listened to my master's voice, for he was nonetheless the symbol of White America, the only America that had been honored ever since it was founded.

"Should I join them?"

"Hate them."

"What, master?"

"Hate them."

"Hate them, hate them" is the sound proceeding from their lips, the same lips that told me to pick their cotton and work in their houses. The lips that told me that they were lovable but the hands that showed me the opposite. These hands beat me, brutalized me to scorn and treated me as an animal. These were the same hands that claimed they were out for my good but punished me for doing good. And now they tell me to hate them.

Well, I can't. I've been hating all of my life, since they told me. I was a field negro, namely Aunt Jemima. I hated it as well as the mulattoes who were privileged to stay in the house. I hated the Natchez Indians before, when my master told me so. In my eyes we were crabs, and I refused to be at the bottom. But that is over now, no more useless hate. I have been touched by love, something greater than Master can ever give me, and that is freedom.

Oh, and you tellin' me to hate them? Hate the very people that freed my family? Hate those that are helping me to accomplish freedom? Hate those who have suffered from your slavery and your constant brainwash of hatred?

No, I do not hate them, the Indian tribes sitting in swamps.

"Look what they did to you," you say. But you did it to me when you paid them to beat us and talked us into beating them.

"You just can't trust them," you say. I can't trust you, because I have now seen the truth. Blacks and Indians both at odds because of your foolish mind games. But this is not so now.

I am going to be free. I am going to be loved. And now as I suit up to join them in the battle of freedom, I will not hate them but destroy the hatred in you. And as we walk together fully armored in the Battlefield of Louisiana and shout, "On to New Orleans," everyone will know that in 1811 the Blacks and the Indians found common ground. Together, we and the Indians must revolt and take hold of freedom.

Freedom Finally Won

Jourdan Riley

I watched her ever so closely. Mama never let us forget how they brought our ancestors here on that dark ship, the Duc de Maine in 1721, shackles on their feet and chains linking their hands, but that was a long time ago.

Now, I'm floating here, but I'm not actually present: A spirit, you might call it, detached from its neck and shoulders. I'm staring at my face and how it's been placed high on this pole. My eyes may be lifeless, but my expression is fearless. I died with such pride. A fight for freedom finally won: A freedom that we all shall once have.

Charles Deslondes told us that it'd be an all out fight for freedom, and though it would not be easy, there was a chance but no guarantee of success. What did I have to lose? Mama was gone, Brothers and Sisters were gone, never knew Father, my own children, all three, sold like items, and finally my husband, beaten to death by Master.

Master expected me to stay, working my life away. I had no one. I was leaving, and Master wasn't going to stop me.

My hair flew in the wind as my head claimed its pole, warning others of the danger and consequences of revolting. As I searched my lifeless, cold eyes, I remembered my tribunal. Judge Moreau Lislet was the judge. I stood, at the hearing of my name being called, Jessamine, only later to hear my charge of insurrection. I was to be executed. My head was to be cut off, only later to be stuck on a pole. That pole was to be placed at the McCarty plantation.

The Prosecutor's face was a blur, but I guess it always was when it only took him three seconds to swing his ax. The only distinct characteristic I remember was that he was one of them. He was no Louis Congo. He was a white man. He was authority.

"Yall are just small black coals in a sea of pearls." That's what Master always said.

A letter never physically written, that will finally be read:

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, do you know we come in different shades of brown? Do you know we can be short, tall, thick, round, small, or skinny: my sistas are everywhere to be found?

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, we are big black diamonds who've been hidden in the pearls for so long.

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, we've done nothing wrong.

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, why are we ridiculed and mistreated because of our looks and our love of freedom?

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, people like you assume that we all must be crooks.

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, I am finally free. You couldn't keep me tied down.

Dear Mr. Prosecutor, have you noticed the look on the head you've cut off? It is an upside down frown.

BRUISED: Creative Transformation

Cabriole Brooks

We failed that night in 1811.

Went looking for a place to rally for our
future, our children, and families.

Decided to meet in the midnight company
Of master Andry's plantation.

In the darkness of night we hid our black
Bodies from the blue and grey eyes that
Continuously tried to blind us from what
We could already see as our destiny.

Behind the slave quarters there was a field,
Property abundantly filled with sugar cane,
White corn, mirliton, collard greens, and
The seasonal creole tomato.

Wanted to take a few tomatoes,
So that we could eat them while commencing to
Decide upon our course of action for the upcoming
March the next day.

Instead of stealing the ripening New Orleans
Tomatoes from their sap-filled greenish vines,

We found hanging limply from the fence
That encircled the highly worshipped produce
Something that belonged to us.

A fruit, seemingly sweet and inviting
Set in mid-air,

Dripping blood-red, seedy juice into the
Palms of our outstretched hands

Which rose up to embrace the gift,
That no longer was ours.

Clear liquid dripping from our dark, shiny faces
Intermingled with the sticky crimson juice

Falling from the long suspending vines,
Baptized us in the sugary sin of wanting to be him.

It put a bitter taste in our mouths, the inability to feel,
Live his dying serenity.

Pulled old Laneu down off the rusty fence
Covered with creole tomatoes.

Head fell and puckered open,
Warm fragrant flesh good enough to eat.

Forbidden fruit, given to us from a descending stalk,
It made us feel useless, like the body of a dead man,
Waiting for his eternity.

Eyes closed and head bowed, we prayed,

Asked and pleaded with our ancestors to help us
Make it through the fight, the struggle, the white lies
And African pain that never quite stopped throbbing
Deep inside our hearts.

Prayed for the souls that had already evaded this ever-
haunting world.

Hoped and dreamed that night, looking at the white stars.
Hoped we'd make it back to the beginning
Hope of the good life, the fried tomatoes
And honey baked ham dreams that
Gramma Anun always talked about when she made
The dishes that the white folks liked, or
Rather needed, in order to feel bigger,
Better, and more important than us.

Never could bring myself to eat anything
With creole tomatoes in it again. Couldn't
Stand the salty taste, the rotten smell,
The reddish look, or the memories.

It's been one hundred and eighty-seven years since,
But I still can't forget its head splitting,
Spilling open the strange fruit made and sold in New Orleans,
Falling lifelessly from the lively green tomato vines that had
Once belonged to us.

Revolutions Throughout the Years

Michal Gray

My grandmother always used to say, "you have to know where you came from to know where you're going," which means you have to know about you and your family's past to know how to handle the future. This is the theme of Langston Hughes' essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." But Hughes takes this notion a bit further by saying that when you don't know your past, you lose some of your identity.

Revolting for the oppressed masses was a way to find freedom from the cruelty and inhumanity of the oppressor. Many slaves did not know the concept of freedom. The few who did knew because they came directly from Africa or came from the Haitian revolt—like Charles DesLondes, one of the leaders of the 1811 revolt. But most had first-hand knowledge mainly of the unfairness of the slave owners. These enslaved Africans learned of freedom through stories told by and about those from Africa and Haiti. Especially influential would have been the story of how enslaved Africans in Haiti established their own nation. This story and many others must have inspired the slaves to obtain freedom.

Back in slavery days, the only way to obtain freedom was through violent revolts. This type of revolt was necessary during this time, because African Americans were ignored or beaten if they spoke about their rights. So they had to take drastic measures that would get them noticed. Even though the consequences for revolting were just as drastic, like placing the severed heads of rebellious slaves on poles to discourage further revolts, the slaves maintained their determination to free themselves and their fellow Africans.

These revolts were carefully thought out. For example, in the 1811 revolt the slaves planned the revolt to start on the plantation that housed the arsenal for the local militia. They also coordinated with fellow Africans fighting for freedom in New Orleans and the network of maroon colonies in the swamps between Lake Pontchartrain and the river. These careful plans were often kept secret from house slaves, because house slaves would go tell the master the plan, and the revolt would end before it began. But out of the revolts that actually took place, most were just small plantation revolts. But some were so well planned and violent that they made history books. The slaves who played a part in these revolts had a sense of identity; as my grandmother would say, "they knew where they came from and where they wanted to go."

The enslaved Africans' plan was to take over their plantation and kill the slave owner and his family, then capture New Orleans and make it the capitol of the New Republic. The enslaved Africans were to take every plantation that was on the way to New Orleans. Though their goal to capture New Orleans was not achieved, it was the largest slave revolt in U. S. history. Slaves selflessly dedicated their lives to pursue the goal of freedom.

Not only did enslaved Africans dedicate their lives to find freedom, but also their descendents who were not slaves also struggled with this battle for freedom. They wanted to speak freely, to be educated, to not be lynched, and to have equal rights with whites. To find a way to fight this battle successfully, they looked back to their past. They realized that they were experiencing a different type

of oppression, and that violent revolts were not necessary. The type of revolt necessary for those times was through literature. By writing their opinions in well-written essays and celebrating every essence of black life in their stories and poems, these writers gained some respect for themselves and some freedom from their oppressors. But they did not gain the freedom they desired.

In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes describes the oppression as wanting to be white because people were not in touch with their past. This type of oppression many did not know how to overcome. But Hughes says to overcome this oppression of identity, just be your natural black self and become somewhat indifferent to the reaction of white people. He expresses this position eloquently when he writes, "We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If whites are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter."

As time went on, many African Americans became accustomed to the ways of unfairness. But then a yearning for freedom and equality rose up in them, as it rose up in their enslaved ancestors. To find a way to obtain freedom, they too looked back to their past. Realizing that violent revolt was not what was needed for that time and that literary revolts only gained them sympathy and respect, they used a different kind of revolt that had a twist of both past revolts. Minorities united together, as slaves had, to fight for freedom by using their words to throw punches. They did this through the many controversial speeches that were given. This type of revolt could not be ignored. Legally, they were successful in getting laws to be made equal.

But despite these different methods, all slaves and their descendents had the same mentality. That mentality is best worded in the motto of the 1811 Revolt: "Freedom or Death." The death was different for each form of oppression. When slaves revolted, their death was a loss of life. But a far worse death awaited their descendents who did not revolt against oppression; Hughes makes clear that they faced a loss of identity. Even though it took years for the slaves and their descendents to gain freedom and each fought against different oppression, each faced the impending doom of death in the form presented to them—and each conquered death.

PART THREE: Unification After Emancipation

The Student Learns. The Student Teaches.

Kalamu ya Salaam

There are many, many ways to teach creative writing, but at the high school level the pedagogy is usually based on developing technical skills with an understandable emphasis on genre, form, grammar and vocabulary. SAC has a different approach.

For us "creative" does not mean simply doing something different or idiosyncratic. Although we certainly do encourage experimentation, we do not believe in arts for arts sake as a guiding principle. We believe in the student as author, i.e. an active thinking person who observes and questions their own existence and the whys and wherefores of the world within which the author lives.

Our goal is to encourage students to become active agents in identifying and analyzing their world, which includes their own dreams and speculations. We do not specifically offer lessons in poetry, fiction, journalism per se. Rather we offer a topic, and the student can choose a genre, an approach. This may seem to limit what a student learns, but our experience is that once we engage the student in the process, not only does the student learn faster, but inevitably the student wants to learn more. There are numerous books that teach form and genre, but few, if any, of those books are written for the average student in a New Orleans public school.

The Long Ride is a major project that calls for student writers to "Imagine" themselves within history and to write from their own perspective about factual events that took place before the student was born. We are fortunate in New Orleans; much of our history is documented. We are unfortunate in that 99% of the documentation is from the perspective of our historic exploiters and oppressors—after all those in power write history not simply to explain themselves but also to justify their actions.

The SAC approach is both deconstructive and reconstructive. We know that the bare facts are not only incomplete and sometimes misleading, we know that the bare facts are selective and thus we encourage not simply a reversal of perspectives, rather we suggest that our students question every historical fact and also, and more importantly, insert themselves into the process of interpreting history. So we break down the written history; we do research and critique what we find; we question what we find and speculate about what is missing; and then we rebuild history using our own perspectives and emotions.

Ask yourself a couple of simple questions: what did it feel like to..., what do you think is missing..., what would you do if... This is not formal history writing but rather creative writing at its best.

This chapter on Reconstruction focuses on a critical period in American history. Neither before nor since have Black people in America had such a rich and engaging connection to and with America; never before were we so fully engaged as human beings in the process of developing American society. During Reconstruction we had more elected leaders, owned more land, had more businesses, etc. than in any other period of our long ride to and through America.

This book, and particularly the work of Maria Hernandez, who is an American born daughter of Cuban parents, is an early example of the SAC approach to combining history and creative writing. From Maria's example, we SAC staff members are learning how to develop a bold and relevant approach to teaching creative writing. Maria learns how to write. We learn how to teach writing. This is the praxis of a liberatory pedagogy.

TIMELINE: 1861–1877
Abolition/Reconstruction/Civil War

1862

March, 1862

Homer Plessy born a free person in New Orleans.

August, 1862

Louisiana Native Guard, black regiments (mostly free people of color) fighting for the Union army, is formed. By November, enlistees fill three full regiments. According to Negro officer **Robert H. Isabelle**, "These men were highly skilled, and in spite of their wealth, their jobs, and their businesses they volunteered to defend the flag of their country and keep Louisiana in the Union." **P. B. S. Pinchback,** who would later become the first black governor of Louisiana, recruited troops and was officer of one of the regiments. In an 1862 speech he declared that fighting with the Louisiana Native Guard was "the only time in my life I have felt anything like Patriotism...." Many members of the Louisiana Native Guard recalled that their families had fought for the U. S. in the War of 1812 (including the Battle of New Orleans). **John P. Bernabe**, on March 11, 1863, declared, "Our great desire is to strike a Blow for the Union therefore we are both willing and Ready to forsake our wives and children and Risk the fortunes of War [.] [A]lthough something new to us we are in hopes that the task will prove no harder to us than it was for our fathers in 1812 and 1815."Citizens' Committee member **C. C. Antoine** served as an officer in the Native Guard, as did **James H. Ingraham** of the Louisiana Equal Rights League. The Louisiana Native Guard was not entirely without fault or contradiction by anti-slavery standards. For instance, **Francis E. Dumas**, a major in the Native Guard, was not only one of the wealthiest black men in the state but also one of its largest slaveholders. Also many white Union officers resented serving alongside black Union officers of the Native Guard. One white Union soldier declared in February 1863 that he opposed slavery but that he could not stomach the black officers of the 'nigger regiment' who were 'like dogs in full dress, ready to dance in the menagerie—would you obey such a fool?'" (Blassinghame, 33-47)

General John W. Phelps, as part of effort to recruit freed blacks as soldiers for the Union Army in Louisiana, organizes schools to teach freed blacks in 1862. U. S. authorities initially oppose such efforts but later during the Civil War, when Lincoln and his generals become more welcoming toward black soldiers, the Union Army in Louisiana organizes every black regiment as a school, establishing the first government-run schools for blacks in New Orleans.

L'Union, a black newspaper demanding liberation, equality, and citizenship for people of African descent, begins publishing in New Orleans.

1863

1863

Free black leaders from New Orleans send a delegation (**Jean-Baptiste Roudanez** and E. Arnold Bertonneau) to Lincoln in Washington, D. C. to protest the Union army's dismissal of all black officers and the more general exclusion of free blacks from civil government in New Orleans. **E. Arnold Bertonneau**, one of the free black delegates, spoke these words later at a dinner in honor of the New Orleans delegation hosted by abolitionists (including William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass) in Boston. He "declared that the delegation's ultimate goal was to change 'the character of the whole people' by sending their children to schools 'to learn the great truth that God "created of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth"—so will caste, founded on prejudice of color, disappear... .:'" (April 13, 1864 *Boston Daily Advertiser* as quoted in the *Liberator*, April 15, 1864 and cited in *Crescent City Schools*)

February 14, 1863

Union General Nathaniel Banks issues orders to replace all black officers with white officers.

1864

1864

Nearly 100 black men from Louisiana, inspired by the National Convention of Colored Men at Syracuse, establish the **Louisiana Equal Rights League**, a state-wide voting rights organization. Led by James H. Ingraham, this organization united urban and rural communities and activists in Louisiana. (*A Nation*, Blassinghame)

March 22, 1864

Union government in Louisiana, under the direction of General Nathaniel Banks (who had been embarrassed nationally as result of the delegation of free black New Orleanians who exposed Banks' firing of all black officers in the Union army in Louisiana), establishes a **Board of Education, under direction of abolitionist Union soldier B. Rush Plumly, to run educational system for blacks in Louisiana**. 130 of the 162 teachers in these schools are from the South, the majority from New Orleans, which had well established system for training its own teachers through the New Orleans public school system's normal schools.

July 23, 1864

New Louisiana Constitution abolishes slavery.

1865

February, 1865

U. S. Congress proposes 13th Amendment (abolishing slavery) to U. S. Constitution.

February 27, 1865

New Orleans Freedmen's Aid Association formed with objectives to "rent and lease plantations, to give loans, and to furnish supplies, education, and useful information to the freedmen. The members of the association also proposed the establishment of a bank, but they did not have enough capital to do so." Each association member paid $20 in dues; members included Aristide Mary (also of Unification Movement of 1870's and Citizens' Committee of 1890's), J. B. Roudanez, co-publisher of the *Tribune,* Oscar J. Dunn. Association also included white members. (Blassinghame—57)

December, 1865

States ratify 13th Amendment to U. S. Constitution.

Ku Klux Klan is founded in Tennessee.

1866

July 30, 1866

Meeting of constitutional convention of Louisiana, with plans to give black males the right to vote, ends in a massacre that leaves scores of black and white supporters of black suffrage dead and wounded, many at the hands of the New Orleans police. (*Louisiana*: *A History* lists 37 dead—three white and 34 black—and 146 wounded—17 white and 119 black.) **A. P. Dostie**, a dentist and member of the constitutional convention who spoke passionately about the need for black suffrage, dies a few days later from wounds suffered in a severe beating by the white mob.

March 2, 1866

U. S. Congress passes 1st Reconstruction Act (over President Johnson's veto) that requires Southern states to ratify the 14th Amendment (giving citizenship and certain rights to African Americans) in order to be readmitted to the United States.

1867

1867

After most Freedmen Bureau schools close in New Orleans, the New Orleans school board attempts to segregate all schools. These efforts ran counter to the state constitution which at the time forbade schools segregated by race. **Edmonia Highgate**, a free black teacher from New York, refused any appointment to a legally segregated school, and the Couvent school leaders refused to discuss the matter with the school board.

Robert Mills Lusher, Louisiana state superintendent of education, sends a circular to the tax assessor of each parish in the state. To persuade them of the importance of assessing and collecting property taxes to pay for public education, he writes, "It is indispensible to the future honor and prosperity of Louisiana, and to the supremacy of the Caucasian race in her councils, that the benefit of a liberal education should be extended to every white child within her limits."

1868

1868

Louisiana population listed as majority people of African descent (364,00 black and 362,000 white).

April, 1868

Louisiana adopts Reconstruction constitution.

June 25, 1868

Louisiana formally readmitted to the United States union.

July, 1868

14th Amendment ratified by the states.

1869

February, 1869

U. S. Congress proposes 15th Amendment, making it illegal to deny the right to vote to any citizen on the basis of race.

1870

1870

15th Amendment is ratified by the states.

1873

April, 1873

Colfax Riot in Grant Parish occurs after election dispute between Republicans and Democrats, igniting a series of election riots which left over 100 African Americans dead.

June 16, 1873

Unification Movement becomes public when it publishes its manifesto calling for unity among and full civil rights for all people of Louisiana. This bi-racial coalition included Democrats and Republicans, 50 blacks and 50 whites on its organizing committee, Jews and Christians, and former Confederate and Union soldiers. At the July 15, 1873 rally to announce the movement, Unification Movement chairman **Issac N. Marks**, a Jewish businessman and chair of the Fire Department's board of commissioners, spoke these words to the large biracial crowd at Exposition Hall: "... [W]e come here tonight to lay upon the altar of our country all of the prejudice of the past, to recognize all citizens of the United States as equals before the law, and we come here tonight to unanimously ratify the manifesto." Almost 2,000 citizens of New Orleans signed in support of the Unification Movement's manifesto. The movement quickly fell apart, however. But it remained an inspiration for later efforts at civil rights, as reflected in Rodolph Desdunes remarks in his 1911 book, *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*: "The movement failed but we have retained the memory of it. If it did not succeed, it was because it was premature." **Homer Plessy**'s stepfather, postal worker **Victor Dupart**, signed the manifesto. Dupart married Homer Plessy's mother when Homer was eight years old and certainly had an influence on Plessy's involvement in social justice and civil rights activism in his adult years. Other organizers of the Unification Movement include New Orleanians **Aristide Mary**, who would later help form the Citizens' Committee to challenge Louisiana's 1890 Separate Car Act, and **Louis Roudanez**, editor of the New Orleans *Tribune*.

1874

April 27, 1874

The White League is organized in Louisiana to fight against the racial equality policies of the Reconstruction government. At the **Battle of Liberty Place**, White League members kill eleven members of the integrated New Orleans police force.

1875

1875

P. B. S. Pinchback, African American veteran of Louisiana's Native Guard and Lieutenant Governor under Governor Henry Clay Warmouth, becomes governor for 35 days following the impeachment of Warmouth. **Oscar J. Dunn**, an African American and the original Lieutenant Governor under Warmouth, died in office shortly before Warmouth's impeachment.

March, 1875

U. S. Congress passes Civil Rights Act, which declares that all persons, regardless of race, color, or previous condition are entitled to full and equal employment of accommodation. The act was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and was repealed in 1883.

PART THREE: Unification After Emancipation

Prominent Men of Color in New Orleans

QUESTIONS ABOUT AND CRAVINGS FOR HISTORY: The Case of Francis E. Dumas

Rodneka Shelbia

In 1860 Francis E. Dumas was worth a quarter of a million dollars. He spoke five languages, including French and Spanish. He was such a good soldier that his Major General, Benjamin Butler, the leader of union troops in the whole Louisiana, said to him you are a better officer than I am. Dumas was one of Louisiana's bigger slaveholders. I couldn't believe he was a black man.

When I first digested these unbelievable facts about this man, I almost immediately vomited: Some black men are always more than ready to sell us out to help themselves. They refuse to struggle on behalf of their people so we all can be better off. Like when Kunta was captured by his own brother.

You should have seen me trying to swallow the disgusting spit of a black man enslaving his own people. He gets a little bit money and wants to roll with the evil guys.

My teachers saw me struggling and gave me another thought to chew on: maybe he didn't do it to his people but for his people. I was confused, but I thought he was in the Union Army fighting against the Confederates and all, so maybe he owned slaves to help free them—or at least opposed slavery in the long run. Like when folks in England bought Frederick Douglass so he could be free.

Dumas no longer leaves a bad taste in my mouth. In fact I crave more information about guys like him who are willing to risk their fame and fortune for their people.

Chocolate

Maria Hernandez

In September of 1862, Paul Trevigne was a prominent man of color. He taught language in a Catholic school for black children. He also edited a bi-weekly French newspaper, *L'Union*. This newspaper was a clear call for the civil rights of free blacks.

He once wrote a salutatory editorial that said, "We inaugurate today a new era in the south. We proclaim the Declaration of Independence as the basis of our platform … you who aspire to establish true republicanism, democracy without shackles, gather around us and contribute your grain of sand to the construction of the temple of liberty!" *L'Union* pressed for free black suffrage from 1862 into 1863.

Many free blacks believed in Trevigne's point of view. As a result freed blacks chose two delegates to represent them. The delegates were Jean Baptiste Roudanez and Arnold Bertonneau. They both met with Lincoln in Washington.

While they were gone Trevigne printed this "The qualification to vote should be based on the rightful capacity of all native and free born Americans by virtue of their nativity in the country, irrespective of national descent, wealth or intelligence, and that all not free, within the state be immediately enfranchised by the abolition of slavery in the state forever, and by a statute or constitutional provision declaring the absolute equality of all freemen as to their governmental rights."

Paul Trevigne was willing to give his life for black suffrage, but he wasn't the only one. So many people fought and gave their lives for black rights, and it is heartbreaking that most of them will remain anonymous.

The color of my song
For Paul Trevigne and all others like him

Maria Hernandez

Why won't you let me vote?

It's my right, don't you know?

I fought in your war and helped you win.

So why don't you just let me in?

I don't have a virus, and I don't carry a plague.

And for this job, I'm sorry, but I'm way too proud to beg!

I went to school. I'm educated and even a little over qualified.

So why was I pushed aside?

I am proud to be a color that's sweet,

Even if years ago it did mean I had to let you get in under my sheet.

So why won't you just let me vote?

It's my right don't you know?

I fought in your war and helped you win.

So why don't you just let me in?

One of the many who fought for blacks to vote

Maria Hernandez

Dr. A.P. Dostie, born in New York of French-German descent, moved to New Orleans in 1852. He was forced to flee the city in 1861 because he publicly opposed Louisiana joining the Confederate states in seceding from the United States.

He later returned to New Orleans after it was occupied by Union troops and quickly became a strong supporter of Nathaniel P. Banks, a military commander of the Department of the Gulf.

Dostie and Banks were part of the constitutional convention that made a new constitution for Louisiana in 1864. The document abolished slavery—before the United States did. Dostie was one of the supporters of giving blacks the right to vote in the new constitution also, but the convention could not come to agreement on that point. The members did, however, leave open the possibility of the legislature or a reconvened Constitutional Convention to give black suffrage.

In 1866, the forty-five-year old dentist endorsed reconvening the convention to give blacks the right to vote. To rally support for the convention, Dostie and his allies held a rally on July 29, the night before the convention would reconvene. Speaking to a large, predominantly black crowd of supporters, Dostie shouted, "We have got you your freedom. Now will you fight for your votes?"

"We will; we will," the crowd responded and then chanted, "Fight to vote! Fight to vote!" over and over. Dostie encouraged the crowd to come to the Mechanical Institute on Monday to show their support for the convention.

At the end of the march Dostie climbed the steps of City Hall and gave an impromptu speech: "Now friends, go home peaceably, quietly; make no noise; disturb no person; but I learn that there are prowling bands of armed men out to waylay you," Dostie warned. "If you are insulted by any of these bands of men, pay no attention to them. Go home right by them without saying a word to them; but if they strike you," Dostie concluded, "Kill them."

Before the convention Dostie was warned that New Orleans police and white mobs planned to attack delegates to the convention and their supporters. He said, "I know they want to take my life, but I think it is a good cause to die in."

A.P. Dostie was one of the many people who were killed or wounded (37 dead—three white and 34 black—and 146 wounded—17 white and 119 black) in the Race Riot of July 30, 1866. But let this go on record: he was white, and he died so that maybe blacks' voices would be heard and taken into account.

So if you are reading this, don't forget to go vote!!!

The Last Thoughts of a Revolutionary

For the Martyrs of the July 30, 1866 Massacre by police and white mobs of Delegates to and Supporters of Louisiana's Constitutional Convention

Maria Hernandez

My feet are tired.

My mind is weary.

I hear shots fired.

My soul is leaving.

I tried to make a change.

The few that listened are here beside me.

None of us will wrinkle up or come of age.

From this there is no hiding.

Blood flows from me like a river.

I am full of holes but unafraid.

It feels like my shell is getting empty; that's probably why I've started to shiver.

I am paying the ultimate price for saying what I said.

There's Always a Time to Speak Up

Maria Hernandez

On July 30, 1866, Charles Gibbons, a veteran of Louisiana's Native Guards, was in a corner grocery when he overheard two policemen. They were talking about plans to hang A.P. Dostie and Michael Hahn, two of the leaders of Louisiana's Constitutional Convention that was being held later that day.

After hearing of this plan, Gibbons went to warn Dostie. When he got to Dostie's house on 244 Camp Street, Dostie was not home. So Gibbons left a note telling of what he had heard. Later when he went back and found Dostie at home, Gibbons repeated his warning, but Dostie refused to carry his revolver.

Having given his message Gibbons left to join the procession of black army veterans who were going to march to the Mechanics Institute (site of the convention) to demonstrate their support for the meeting. Later that day the convention was cut short, because a large crowd of whites was rioting and killing every and anyone associated with the convention.

The crowd followed Gibbons and his friend. These two men decided to turn around and run backwards so they could see the pellets as they were fired. They succeeded in avoiding being shot a few times, but then Gibbons heard his friend scream, "I am shot, I am dead." Gibbons turned back around and started running. When he reached the corner of Common and Barrone, he saw police from Lafayette Square on their way to the convention.

Gibbons was lucky to escape with his life, because almost every other colored person who was caught between the police and the mob was brutally killed.

When I first read this story, something didn't fit. If the mob was mostly made up of policemen following orders, why would other policemen come to stop them? Unless the only reason no one got out alive was that the policemen who were coming from Common were really coming to make sure that A.P. Dostie and the others were killed. I connected the pieces, and that's just what they looked like to me. Maybe if you connect the pieces too they might look different to you. So why don't you just give it a try?

I Could Never Be Like A.P. Dostie

Maria Hernandez

If to make a stand I had to give my life,
I would quickly stand down and let somebody else make it right.
I speak cowardly I know, but that would be my true choice.
Back then for me to raise my voice
And be heard by the masses
Would mean my and all their asses.
A.P. Dostie stood up to get black suffrage, and I still don't know why
He made the choice to stand up and die.
Times have changed but not that much.
Yeah, you can vote, but I doubt anything would change a whole bunch.
So I guess I could give my life
To make something right, but I'm not prepared to make that sacrifice.

P.B.S. Pinchback the Honorary

Schdawn Copelin

P.B.S. Pinchback, born Pickney Benton Stewart Pinchback, was a freed slave and the son of a Mississippi white planter. Pinchback, a Republican and union soldier, made his way to Louisiana during the civil war, where during the Reconstruction era he was elected Lieutenant Governor and later served as Governor for six weeks. His political career later included election to the House of Representatives and the United States Senate. He is recognized for this as well as more, but this is not why I recognize Pinchback as a contributor to the Reconstruction.

Although Pinchback could pass for white and live as one among them, he chose not to. He used his advantage to further help blacks get equality among the whites. Pinchback's color of course contributed to his achievements that in turn helped us.

Pinchback once served in the Union and soon was the only officer left among all other qualified blacks. This was mainly because of his skin color. Realizing this, he did not want his skin color to determine his rank, so he left.

Although his skin color said otherwise, Pinchback was a true African American. He spent his life contributing to the empowerment of blacks, and I truly respect that. After reading about Pinchback, I asked myself whether or not my skin color determined how far I have gotten and whether or not my achievements are true or flukes. I hope they're not, because I feel as though I earned my achievements, and I want to be accepted for me and not for my pale colored skin and in Pinchback's case smooth hair also.

P.B .S. Pinchback is honorable for this and more and for his involvement in black empowerment and for paving the road for blacks following decades after!

The Unification Movement

Gabrielle Turner

In 1873 a political movement emerged in Louisiana. Co-founded by Aristide Mary, the Unification Movement was a call to action for racial equality and unity in Louisiana. This movement took place during the time when black male citizens had already gained full legal access to the political process.

The 100-member organization consisted of a variety of people: blacks and whites, Jews and Gentiles. They gathered together to put an end to discrimination because of skin color. They believed skin color should have not been a barrier to eat, sit, and live among others.

The Unification Movement disappeared upon the end of Reconstruction, but its legacy lived on in other committees that organized in the post-Reconstruction era. These organizations include the American Citizen's Equal Rights (ACERA) and, in New Orleans, the Citizens' Committee, which Aristide Mary also co-founded. With the same goals in mind these committees worked and suffered for civil rights. Even though the Unification Movement did not last long, it made an important dent in history. The members were eager, determined, and persistent. These qualities were more significant than the movement's longevity.

Unification—Why Not Now?
Taking a lesson from past civil rights leaders might help us with today's crises

Gabrielle Turner

The familiar tune of Otis Redding brings back memories for a lot of the older members in the church. Their heads sway back and forth as he sings, and the lyrics of the song strike me. I've heard this song in television commercials, but on this particular Sunday I think I finally understand what the song means. For me as a Christian and for other Christians, I think we sometimes just sit back and watch people sin and don't say a word, so that sins can almost become acceptable.

But it is not just about being a Christian; there are some issues that should strike at everyone's heart. I often ask myself, how can we sit and watch while our young black men are continually being locked behind bars? How can people afford to sit and watch the tides roll away when our children cannot read nor write because of an inadequate school system?

After reading an article in the *City Business* about why New Orleanians are not outraged because of the fraud and theft in the school system, I came to the conclusion that some of us just don't care. But how can we not care when our children's educations and futures are at stake? I know sometimes it even looks like nothing's going to change and everything still remains the same, but everything will remain the same if we don't realize that we can make a difference as long as we come together.

I know I cannot change conditions on my own, but with the help of others, *we* can.

Unity may not be the only answer, but it is an important one. Unity has been a pillar of social action for generations before us until now. In 1873, for example,1,800 black and white individuals, including Victor and Marcelle Dupart, came together to form a political organization for racial equality in Louisiana called the Unification Movement.

Some of these men later became a part of the Citizens' Committee, which organized a challenge to the segregationist Separate Car Act in 1890. In fact, Homer Plessy, who became famous as the person arrested in 1892 for riding in a white train car in New Orleans, probably heard about the Unification Movement from the Duparts, who were members of his family. He must have learned lessons about the importance of organized, unified action for social justice from them, too.

Now, in 2003, why are we not coming together to fight for the rights of our children to have a good education and a safe place to live? One reason might be that in the last quarter of the 19th century, when Plessy and the Duparts were unifying, their organizations excelled because of their courage and ambition. These people were dedicated and persistent. They were not willing to settle to sit on a separate car to get to the same destination as a white person. To support this work, the Citizen's Committee raised almost $3,000 to pay for legal fees. They were willing to work and suffer to reach their goal.

We as teachers, students and community members must be bold in our efforts to bring a real sense of community and reignite hope and a strong belief that we can and should make a difference. We don't have time to continue just sitting at the dock of the bay.

PART FOUR:
Separate But Equal?

Separate, Bloodied

Jim Randels

1892 proved to be a transformative year in New Orleans history. The contradictions and complexities pervading the biggest historical events of that year were unavoidable. For it was in this year that Homer Plessy was arrested for violating Louisiana's Separate Car Act, even as an integrated strike council prepared to lead a four-day general strike for workers' rights that ended when Gov. Foster took control of New Orleans.

Throughout the 1890's, in New Orleans and in our nation, conflicting ideologies were debated and settled on the streets, often accompanied by bloodshed, around the corner from our houses, on Canal St. where we shopped.

Today our bloodshed is less directly the result of conflicting ideas and values. Relationship disputes, neighborhood turf wars, and boiling anger led to violence then and now. But in the early 21st Century, New Orleanians seldom if ever participate in bloodshed in the streets over which political party controls the senate or the school board. Police may shoot a young black man, but not on the direct orders of company executives or newspaper publishers trying to maintain control of workers or black citizens. These life-or-death struggles now happen with their guiding values and ideas submerged far below the surface, in situations in which who has the power and control over public life is much less of an open question. And these overtly political struggles now happen far away, on the television and on foreign soil.

But in 1892, Homer Plessy and the members of the Citizens' Committee who planned his arrest to challenge the Separate Car Act understood the high stakes they faced. These civil rights activists understood the history of their movement. Elders in the group had participated in Civil War and post-Reconstruction efforts to achieve racial unity, local control of government, black male suffrage, and other forms of equal rights for all citizens. They understood what they had lost since Reconstruction: access to public high school education for black youth, a seat at the decision-making table in state and city government, and protection from a police force which their taxes funded and which lately victimized them.

With such fundamental rights at stake, it is not surprising that clashes over ideas and rights would lead to bloodshed. Workers knew not only of famous national incidents, such as Haymarket in Chicago, but also of local ones. And race was always at play in these explosive incidents. On another September 11, this one taking place in 1881 in New Orleans, the funeral of James Hawkins drew an interracial crowd of labor union members. These people were there to honor Hawkins, a dock worker murdered by police during a strike by approximately 10,000 white and black dock workers, all part of an interracial coalition of unions formed the previous year.

In the spring prior to 1892, eleven Italians had been lynched by a mob, despite the fact that a jury found them innocent of the charges of conspiring to murder police chief David Hennessy. Leading white citizens, advocating for reform of public corruption, encouraged and even participated in this mass lynching, one of the largest in U. S. history. In the years to follow, the violence continued. In 1894, waterfront workers turned on each other, with white workers attacking black workers. And in 1900, racial tensions led publishers of local white newspapers to encourage mobs to seek revenge on black citizens in general, and Robert Charles

in particular, for the killing and wounding of several police officers in a shootout between Charles, a young organizer of back-to-Africa initiatives, and the police.

With the stakes so high and the debates so bloody, the question of who tells these stories and for what purposes is a difficult and important one. The student writings in this section of *The Long Ride* offer important insight into the lessons and ideas students in N. O. in the first decade of the 21st Century take from this history.

In many of the pieces, the students use their writing to explore current teen concerns in light of the history they are studying. Such writing brings an important perspective to the history, making it human and ours. Keva Carr, in her diary of Virginia Banks, imagines the dating relationship between Robert Charles, whose life ended so publicly and dramatically, and Virginia Banks. This young woman's story is, for obvious and good reasons, not part of the historical record. For her own safety, Banks had to disown any sympathetic connection to the notorious Robert Charles. Keva, like most teens, knows of the necessity of keeping some feelings and observations private. That's why she chose the diary form to represent one of the human sides of the Robert Charles story, concentrating on her own experiences with the tension between physical, romantic attractions and political values.

Adrinda Kelly and Gabrielle Turner take similar approaches in their writings in this section, both concentrating on a young girl's perspective on particular historical incidents. In "Waterfalls," Adrinda explores a typical teen concern: how to live and think in the world when your parent is involved in activities that are difficult to justify. And Gabrielle Turner, in "Twelve-Year-Old Talks to Plessy," explores a similar theme of a young person awakening to political consciousness through an encounter with a "big" historical event on the streets of New Orleans and later a conversation with her mother, one of the many regular citizens who are not leaders recorded in history but who created the context out of which famous figures, such as Homer Plessy, could act.

Writings such as the ones by Keva, Adrinda, and Gabrielle offer a picture of historical events that are evolving rather than settled, that have blurry rather than established political lines. But many of the student writers in this section also understand the hard, violent lines of the late 19th century. Allen Powell's "Fury's Carnival" minces no words about his sense of the "correctness" of violent action by Robert Charles in a time of brutal crackdowns on black participation in American democracy. Essays by Rodneka Shelbia and Shantell LaRoche look to the determined, sacrificial actions and stances of Louis Martinet and Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Both young writers long for similar dedication today.

In post-Katrina New Orleans, it's interesting to wonder what actions Martinet, Charles, Plessy, and Dunbar-Nelson would be taking. In what instances do we see black voters in New Orleans losing their political power? Which school board members today are most like Louis Martinet? What decisions about public education in New Orleans are being made against the will of black elected officials? And what are the deep, systemic sources of violence in New Orleans? These are the questions students are beginning to ask. And, as always, their examinations of elders and ancestors in New Orleans should shape and illuminate their responses.

TIMELINE: 1877–1964 *PART ONE*

Struggle for Civil Rights and Development of Black Institutions, Organizations, and Power

1877

April, 1877

U. S. troops pull out of active role in enforcing federal laws concerning civil rights as result of Hayes-Tilden compromise, effectively ending Reconstruction.

Louis Martinet, who would later become publisher of *The Crusader* and legal strategist for the Citizens' Committee, serves as the last black member of the Orleans Parish School Board until the civil rights era of the 1960's, when **Mack Spears** was elected to the school board.

1880

February 12, 1880

The Southwestern Christian Advocate quotes Republican leader and former school board member **Joseph C. Hartzell** on the Bourbon Democrats' (former Confederates) destruction of the local public education system in order to avoid integration and voting rights provisions of the Reconstruction era state constitution:

"To such straits has Bourbon ignorance, stupidity and folly brought the late bountiful system of free schools established and maintained during the existence of a republican form of government.

The minority, now in power of stuffed ballot boxes, and the physical enforcement of their rule in defiance of the laws of the land, have shown themselves incompetent to deal with any great measures of public welfare dictated by enlightened statesmanship. Repudiation of the state debt, destruction of the school system, and the exodus of thousands of her people from misrule, are the manifest results of White League supremacy in Louisiana."

November, 1880

James Garfield, strong supporter of African American rights while a member of U. S. Congress, is elected president.

December, 1880

Cotton Men's Executive Council formed, including white and black unions representing approximately 13,000 workers and all classes of work with cotton on the riverfront. Newspaper accounts from the time describe it as a "solid organization of the labor element embracing every class employed in handling the staple from the time of its reception until it is stored in the ship's hold." This coalition of labor unions and workers led to one of the most successful labor movements in the nation and helped New Orleans develop an economically stable working class. First action, in late January 1881, involves white and black workers striking together to raise by $1/day the wages of black screwmen and sailors, who were paid $1/day less than their white counterparts for the same work.

1881

1881

Orleans Parish School Board ends all public school classes for black students after the sixth grade.

July 2, 1881

President Garfield is shot; he dies on September 19, 1881.

September 11, 1881

Funeral of black union teamster **James Hawkins** draws interracial crowd of 2,000-3,000 people. The several block-long procession included numerous brass bands, each at the lead of different labor unions and civic groups. Five hundred members of the Teamsters' and Loaders' Union, to which Hawkins belonged, led the procession followed by 400 black cotton yardmen. "Marching behind the black mourners, in an unprecedented show of recognition, were 800 white cotton yardmen and screwmen." Hawkins was shot and killed during a scuffle with Police Sergeant Thomas Reynolds during the 10th day of **an interracial strike (10,000 strong) by white and black waterfront workers.**

1883

1883

Facing a severe funding crisis, the Orleans Parish School Board orders its public school teachers to teach only those students who can afford to pay tuition.

October 15, 1883

U. S. Supreme Court declares the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional.

1887

1887

9,000 black and 1,000 white sugar workers form interracial force in Knights of Labor District Assembly 194. These workers conduct major strike for fair wages and working conditions. The strike ends on **November 23, 1887, the Thibodaux Massacre**, which leaves at least 50 black workers dead at the hands of state militia under orders from the governor.

Workers in New Orleans denounce the Thibodaux Massacre through the interracial **Sanctuary District Assembly 102 of the Knights of Labor** and through an ad hoc meeting of over 300 black waterfront workers who elect longshoremen **A. J. Kemp** and **Dr. S. P. Brown** to lead protests of and resolutions against state of Louisiana actions in killing of the sugar cane workers.

1890

1890–1896

Crusader newspaper becomes the first daily black newspaper in the U. S. It served as the communication arm of the Citizens' Committee in its battle against the Separate Car Act.

1891

July 8, 1891

Louisiana State Sen. **Henri Demas** (one of last black legislators of the post-Reconstruction era until the 1960s), gives the following speech (reprinted in *The Crusader*) in the legislative debate over the Separate Car Act:

"Mr. President, when this bill shall have passed it is the last indignity left for you to heap upon us. You have exhausted every indignity, you have inflicted upon us every oppression known to your race, and we have born it with a patience unknown to other races without a single word of resentment; because we desired the security of peace, prosperity, and happiness for all. But the time will and must come in our case, as it has in the history of other races, when we will rise and strike, for our liberties, let the chips fall where they may or the consequences be what they will.

"It is an undeserved stigma upon the Negro. The prosperity of Louisiana depends in a great measure upon his industry and toil. It is to him we owe our vast fields of waving cane; it is to him we are indebted for our broad expanse of fleecy cotton; and to him must be credited our far-reaching acres of wholesome rice. He is the bone and sinew of the agricultural interests of our state; It is by his persistent efforts that our forests have been cleared.

"The Negro in his own humble capacity has been a factor in the progress of this state, and while contending against almost insurmountable obstacles, has steadily elevated himself above the plane of twenty-five years ago. His advancement challenges the admiration of even those who are prejudiced against him, and the highest honors of today being accorded him in the educational institutions of this country."

March 14, 1891

Lynching of 11 Italians (out of 19 who had been charged and acquitted by a jury in the murder of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy) carried out by a New Orleans mob.

Aug 15, 1891

Rudolphe Desdunes, (an original member of the Citizens' Committee to be formed later that year) and a prolific writer for *The Crusader,* responds to a letter from a reader who claimed that challenging the Separate Car Act was a waste of time, a "forlorn hope," in the following words:

"When Toussaint L'Ouverture from a mountain looked down upon the French fleet and exclaimed: France is in San Domingo! he was leading a forlorn hope, for he had forty thousand men to oppose. When later at La Crete-a-Pierrot, Desalines held a lighted torch in his hand near the powder vault, exhorting his comrades to heroic resistance, he was leading a forlorn hope."

Desdunes' reply shows the Citizens' Committee placing themselves in a long line of history, including the Haitian revolution that in large part led to the Louisiana Purchase and to the arrival in New Orleans of Charles Deslondes (1811 Slave Revolt), Rudolphe Desdunes' father, and Homer Plessy's grandfather.

September 1, 1891

Citizens' Committee is formed to combat Louisiana's Separate Car Act.

1892

February 24, 1892

Daniel Desdunes is arrested for riding in a white train car on an interstate trip.

June 7, 1892

Homer Plessy is arrested as part of Citizens' Committee's challenge to the Separate Car Act.

November 8–11, 1892

General Strike in New Orleans starts in a walkout by members of the **Triple Alliance, a coalition of white and black labor unions**. Key issue is right to form a union shop. (May 1892 streetcar strike over workers being able to work in union shop demonstrates prominence of this issue.) Most local unions supported the strike, which was led by the **Workingmen's Amalgamated Council**, an interracial coalition which appointed five strike directors, including **James Porter** of the black longshoremen. According to historian Roger Shugg over 20,000 workers from 42 unions participated in the strike, which shut down much commerce in the city until Gov. Murphy Foster brought in the state militia and assumed control of the city.

1893

May 15, 1893

Aristide Mary of both the Unification Movement and the Citizens' Committee, dies. **Rudolphe Desdunes** writes and publishes pamphlet entitled *Homage Rendu a la Memoire d'Alexandre Aristide Mary decede a la Nouvelle-Orleans, le 15 Mai, 1893, a la age de 70 ans.*

1894

1894

Violent black-white racial conflict breaks out among waterfront workers in 1894 as owners and managers try to drive down costs of labor.

September, 1894

Independent Workingmen's Political Club, an interracial group, organizes itself during a period when most white dock workers have begun advocating for completely segregated electoral and workplace arrangements. Black labor leaders **Alexander Paul** and **Lafayette Tharpe** were among the delegates who named white labor leader **James Leonard** as their congressional candidate. Leonard had been part of the interracial five-member strike committee in 1892. State and city political leaders suppressed the Independent Workingmen's Political Club and in a few short years Leonard would become a leading advocate for total segregation and whites-only craft unionism within the labor movement.

1896

1896

U. S. Supreme Court supports Louisiana's Separate Car Act and segregation in general using "separate but equal" doctrine in *Plessy vs. Ferguson.* Supreme Court Justice **John Harlan** of Kentucky casts the lone dissenting opinion. **Harlan's Dissent** includes the following text:

"But in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved...In my opinion, the judgment this day rendered will, in time, prove to be quite as pernicious as the decision made by this tribunal in the Dred Scott Case...The destinies of the two races, in this country, are indissolubly linked together, and the interests of both require that the common government of all shall not permit the seeds of race hate to be planted under the sanction of law.

"We boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples. But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state of the law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow citizens, our equals before the law. The thin disguise of "equal" accommodations for passengers in railroad coaches will not mislead any one, nor atone for the wrong this day done."

1898

May 12, 1898

New Louisiana Constitution includes grandfather clause giving illiterate whites the vote and implements **poll taxes and literacy tests to deny the vote to black males.**

1900

1900

Orleans Parish School Board votes to **limit public education for black students to grades 1 through 5**, eliminating all middle school public education for black students, who had been denied public high school education earlier in the Jim Crow era.

July, 1900

New Orleans Race Riot ensues when **Robert Charles** becomes involved in a shootout with police. Charles had come to New Orleans from Copiah County in Mississippi and actively passed out literature encouraging blacks to return to Africa.

1901

June, 1901

The **Central Labor Union**, a central labor body composed solely of black trade unions, receives an American Federation of Labor charter. Central Labor Union is formed after the all-white Central Trades and Labor Council refuses to admit black trade unions in 1899. **James Porter** and other black leaders successfully petitioned the AFL for this charter after first attempting to have an integrated central labor body. In 1904 the *United Mine Worker's Journal* estimated membership in New Orleans' 11 black unions at 11,000. In 1902 at the International Longshoreman Association's 11th annual convention, this national union singles out James Porter and the black longshoremen in Louisiana for their exceptional organizing work.

September, 1901

The Central Labor Union (black union federation) and the Central Trades and Labor Council (white union federation) join together in strike for higher wages and equitable work share plans. The strike involved approximately 2,000 black and white longshoreman. The interracial strike committee set up its headquarters in the black Central Labor Union offices.

1902

1902

W. E. B. DuBois' *The Negro Artisan* acknowledges the strength of black trade unions in New Orleans and notes their role in increasing the number of black property owners. Similar studies from the period note that black and white laborers performing the same work received the same wages in unionized industries in New Orleans.

December, 1902

The black **Screwmen's Benevolent Association** requires all 700 of its members to pay poll taxes, which the state used to fund public education. Shortly after, the entire Central Labor Union made the same requirement of its members. The practice continued into the 1930's, when disfranchisement of black voters and destruction of interracial political and labor alliances had been firmly entrenched.

1904

February, 1904

Central Labor Union and **Equal Rights League** (under leadership of black waterfront workers) holds series of mass meetings to protest attempts by Louisiana Republican Party to make its organization all-white. Leaders in this movement included **I. G. Wynn** (president of the black cotton yardmen); **James Porter, J. B. Williams,** and **E. S. Swann** of the black longshoremen; **T. R. Hickerson** of the teamsters and loaders; **Thomas P. Woodland** and **Alonzo Ellis** of the screwmen; and **J. Madison Vance,** attorney for the black unions. At the Chicago national convention of the Republican Party later that year, the national party rejected the all-white delegation and accepted the interracial ("black and tan") delegation's credentials led by black Republican **Walter Cohen**. (Arneson, 186)

1905

1905

Public School Alliance forms to advocate for city's public schools. The organization soon becomes dominated by women, particularly through "cooperative clubs" that form at each public school. The women organized these school-based clubs into **the Presidents' Cooperative Club** and used this organization (along with the newly formed teachers' group, **New Orleans Education Association**) to push for higher quality public education in New Orleans as well as fight for **women's suffrage**. In 1920, the same year that women earned the right to vote in the U.S., President's Cooperative Club leader **Adolph Baumgartner** became the first woman elected to city-wide public office when she earned a seat on the Orleans Parish School Board.

1907

March, 1907

Rudolphe Desdunes writes and publishes pamphlet entitled **A Few Words to Dr. W. E. B. DuBois "With Malice Toward None,"** in which he challenges DuBois characterization of the Southern Negro as uneducated and takes issue with DuBois' praise of Toussaint L'Ouverture (whom Desdunes viewed more as an accommodating opportunist) instead of **Jacques Dessalines**, whom Desdunes regarded as the true revolutionary in Haiti. Desdunes went so far as to call L'Ouverture the Booker T. Washington of Haiti, a phrase sure to irritate DuBois.

1908

1908

The Republican National Convention recognizes the "Lily White" Republican delegation, effectively ending any interracial composition within the Louisiana Republican Party into the latter part of the century.

1909

1909

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded. One of its major goals is the overturn of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and similar decisions that made segregation legal. Ida B. Wells is one of the founding members along with W. E. B. DuBois, who edited NAACP's magazine, *Crisis*, for many years.

Under pressure from black citizens, the school board adds sixth grade for black students, well short of the demand for at least restoring the 6th-8th grade, which had been dropped for black students in the public system in 1900. The board would subsequently add seventh grade for black students in 1913 and eighth grade in 1914.

1910

1910

Orleans Parish School Board votes to hire only white teachers in annex building of Thomy Lafon School, following recently adopted policy to hire only white teachers at any new school. **Reverend Henderson Dunn** leads a group of black citizens who successfully petition the school board to reverse its decision and hire black teachers also.

1911

1911

Publication of *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire (Our People and Our History),* a history of free people of color in New Orleans from the Haitian migrations at the turn of the 19th Century through the Citizens' Committee's stand in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. This history is written by free person of color and lifelong New Orleans resident **Rudolphe Desdunes.**

1917

1917

Alice Dunbar-Nelson, the writer and anti-lynching crusader born and raised in New Orleans and later a nationally prominent author and activist, wrote the following words in the *Journal of Negro History, II:*

"There is no State in the Union, hardly any spot of like size on the globe, where the man of color has lived so intensely, made so much progress, been of such historical importance and yet about whom so comparatively little is known. His history is like the Mardi Gras of the city of New Orleans, beautiful and mysterious and wonderful, but with a serious thought underlying it all. May it be better known to the world some day."

Dunbar-Nelson works in the tradition of other black historians of New Orleans, including **Rudolphe Desdunes**, **Marcus Christian**, and **Keith Medley**.

May 11, 1917

The Colored Educational Alliance petitions the Orleans Parish School Board to improve facilities at existing colored schools and to open new ones. To make its case, the Alliance submits an article from *South Atlantic Quarterly* entitled "Education and Crime Among Negroes" as evidence. The author, Judge Gilbert T. Stephenson, argues that while some statisticians have noted that as "literacy among negroes increased, so did crime," newer findings show that, "the more schooling the negro child gets, the less criminal he is; that, while a little learning may sometimes make him mad, more learning sobers him into a law-abiding citizen."

August 24, 1917

In response to repeated and long-term pressure from the black community, Orleans Parish School Board votes to open **McDonogh 35 High School**, providing the first public high school education for black students since 1881. White parents of the students at McDonogh 13, the school closed and converted to McDonogh 35, complain to OPSB, which defends its decision. The second black high school for black students in the segregated public school system would not open until 1942, when Booker T. Washington High School opens.

1918

1918

The Louisiana Department of Education authorizes a special curriculum exclusively for Blacks. In a 1918 bulletin entitled, " Aims and Needs of the Negro Public Education in Louisiana," state education officials indicate that the curriculum for Blacks will teach students how to perform duties "the world wants done." It was viewed as an attempt to reassure White communities who became apprehensive about expanding school options for Blacks.

Progressive historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips publishes *American Negro Slavery A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime.* Although he criticizes the inefficiency of the slavery system, the book is largely a defense of the institution. In one passage, he assesses the affect on enslaved African Americans by comparing the system of slavery to a school:

"Every plantation of the standard Southern type was, in fact, a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization. Slave youths of special promise, or when special purposes were in view, might be bound as apprentices to craftsmen at a distance... This, rudimentary as it necessarily was, was in fact just what the bulk of the negroes most needed. They were in an alien land, in an essentially slow process of transition from barbarism to civilization. New industrial methods of a simple sort they might learn from precepts and occasional demonstrations; the habits and standards of civilized life they could only acquire in the main through examples reinforced with discipline. These the plantation régime supplied. Each white family served very much the function of a modern social settlement, setting patterns of orderly, well bred conduct which the negroes were encouraged to emulate; and the planters furthermore were vested with a coercive power, salutary in the premises, of which settlement workers are deprived. The very aristocratic nature of the system permitted a vigor of discipline which democracy cannot possess. On the whole the plantations were the best schools yet invented for the mass training of that sort of inert and backward people which the bulk of the American negroes represented. The lack of any regular provision for the discharge of pupils upon the completion of their training was, of course, a cardinal shortcoming which the laws of slavery imposed; but even in view of this, the slave plantation régime, after having wrought the initial and irreparable misfortune of causing the negroes to be imported, did at least as much as any system possible in the period could have done toward adapting the bulk of them to life in a civilized community."

1919

July, 1919

New Orleans delegates (including **Alexander Paul**, **Thomas P. Woodland**, and **Sylvester Peete**) attend the International Longshoreman's Association's Twenty-Fifth National Convention in Galveston, Texas. They join their national, integrated union in passing unanimously a resolution strongly condemning the lynching violence of Red Summer, 1919, when whites across the nation committed widespread racially motivated violence against blacks, largely to ensure that black veterans of World War I and their families remembered "their place" and did not agitate for civil rights and social justice. The resolution calls lynching, which it describes as occurring daily in the southern states, "the greatest menace to civilization" and goes on to support the "fundamental principles of this Government that every man, even the humblest citizen should have a fair and impartial trial." (Arneson, 189)

1920

1920's

New Orleans Branch of NAACP mounts successful campaign against the city's segregated housing statutes. **Alexander Paul**, first vice president of the **Emancipation Celebration League** in 1912 (of which **James Porter** was secretary), served as black labor's representative to the NAACP in its housing discrimination drives.

1923

1923

Valena C. Jones Normal School opens, providing for the first time in the Jim Crow era a free or low-cost teacher training program for black teachers. The school board previously ran, in collaboration with Tulane University, a free public normal school for training teachers, but it was only available to white teachers. In 1915, **Reverend Henderson Dunn** and **Reverend Elijah Jones** had led successful drive to force Orleans Parish School Board to offer a summer program for blacks wanting to train as teachers. **Straight University** donated its facilities and **Alfred P. Lawless** served as first director of the school.

May 31, 1923

Orleans Parish School Board fires **McDonogh 35 teacher James F. Browne** for advocating for social equality of the races in the *New Orleans Bulletin,* a newspaper Browne edited. He wrote "that social equality is freeborn, recognizing no artificial distinction and lives whenever Christ is found." The board, led on this issue by member Alcee Fortier, voted unanimously to fire Browne, observing that "such utterances as Browne had made to persons easily led and deluded would foment trouble of a most serious nature." Black teachers fighting for equal pay in the 1930's recalled Browne's firing as a warning to anyone seeking to challenge board positions.

1925

March 1, 1925

1930

Homer Plessy dies.

PART FOUR:
Separate But Equal?

Organizing for Equality

Post-Reconstruction and Today's Racial Equality

Candice Blossom

In July 1919, five normal African-American teenage boys wanted to find a way to beat the summer heat that soared well into the nineties. They decided to go swimming. They did not head for the black-patronized beach on 25th St. They headed for their own private spot just in between those two beaches. They hopped onto a produce truck driving north and got off at 26th St. They walked quickly, eagerly waiting to jump into the cool water.

Meanwhile, at the 29th St. beach, racial hatred erupted. Some blacks wanted to come to their beach to swim. Curses and threats had frightened them away, but moments later, they returned in larger numbers with rocks. Rock throwing turned into violence and a bloody warfare.

The same five boys continued to swim and play at their own private beach, unaware of the conflict going on just blocks away from them. The boys took it as a game and ducked at each rock thrown. One of the boys was bobbing in and out of the water when his attention was suddenly diverted by one of the other boys. Then, he slowly slid back into the water. He was hit on the forehead by a rock. The other boys tried to save him, but it was too late. Blood came up form the water, and he was dead.

This is just one incident that happened during post-reconstruction. But if we look around today, people are still being judged by the color of their skin. My brother works at a neighborhood grocery store that is in a predominantly African-American area. Before he was hired the manager, a Muslim, would see all different kinds of people come into his store: gangsters, robbers, drunkards, and even drug dealers. The sad part is that most of them were African-American. When my brother began buying things from the store the manager thought that he was just another so-called "black hoodlum." But my brother would go in and put a smile on his face, greet all of the employees, purchase what he wanted, and leave with a warm "goodbye." This lasting impression that my brother gave to the manager and employees made him see that not all African-American males are out in the streets. Because ofhis kindness, the manager offered him a job with a trusting relationship.

I shared this story about my brother to show that the struggle for racial equality still exists. Those boys playing at their own private beach had to suffer the consequences of racial hatred going on then. They were not bothering anyone. They were caught in the middle. Well, so was my brother. But he was able to overcome by his warmth and kindness. We should acknowledge what happened during the post-reconstruction period and try to better ourselves to stop racial inequality.

The Crusader's Fight for Justice
A look back at a daily paper's fight for civil rights

LaQuita Joseph

The Crusader, a Republican newspaper founded by attorney Louis Martinet in 1889, informed people about public issues in articles that spoke out against racial injustice. These stories ranged from reports on a white gang that terrorized the colored Bethlehem Lutheran Church to an incident when a group of laborers were harassed near Oakridge, La, leaving seven workers dead and six wounded.

Although *The Crusader* was a serious paper, it often made its points through grim humor, as in the following report:

"Last week in Fayette County, Ga., eight Negroes were killed and six were wounded. Eight whites were shot, but only one fatally. However deplorable these affrays, it is refreshing to see the Negro defending himself, but he must learn to shoot straight."

The main event that inspired this historic newspaper's fight against the loss of rights, protection, and equality was the signing of the Separate Car Act in 1890. Articles on the fight against this law appeared in virtually every issue.

This Act separated the passengers by race into a certain coach or compartment on the train. If a passenger did not obey this law, he or she would be fined $25.

The Crusader was the first newspaper to voice its opinions about the Separate Car Act. It even published public speeches against the Act such as the July 8, 1890 speech by Henry Demas, one of the Louisiana Senate's last black senators during the period immediately following Reconstruction.

The Crusader was known nationally, and famous public figures such as Albion Tourgee, the lead lawyer in the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case, would often comment on the paper's contributions to the struggle for civil rights. Tourgee wrote these words in a letter to U.S. Sen. William Chandler: "It was *The Crusader* which set on foot the movement to test the constitutionality of the Jim Crow car law."

By 1894 *The Crusader*, still based in New Orleans, become the only black daily paper in the country and the only Republican daily paper in the South. In order to convert *The Crusader* into a daily paper the printers and laborers agreed to work for half pay. The editors worked for free and rotated editorial duties.

These partial wages and voluntary work arrangements were only two of the many sacrifices that were made in order for *The Crusader* to become a daily paper. Publisher Louis Martinet gave up a $1,200 annual stipend for three years to study in Europe. Rutherford B. Hayes, former President of the United States, had nominated Martinet for this prestigious and substantial fellowship on the recommendation of Albion Tourgee and in honor of his work on the newspaper and for civil rights.

Martinet refused the fellowship despite the enormous physical and financial stress caused by his work. He felt his place was with *The Daily Crusader.*

In 1896, following the decision of the U. S. Supreme Court that the Separate Car Act was legal, *The Daily Crusader* ceased publication. It would be almost 60 years of struggle, sacrifice and organizing before the segregation made legal in the Separate Car Act and the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision would be overturned in the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education.*

NORTH STAR CRUSADER: Giving Respect

Dayoka Edmonds

We students often take for granted all that we have. And sometimes we have so little and have so much struggle, that it's hard to think about people who went before us and made things better than they would have been. One group most people never knew about is the African American lawyers that existed in the early years of the civil rights movement. We know about Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, and Martin Luther King, Jr. We also need to know about Louis Martinet, Homer Plessy, and A. P. Tureaud. The cases they dealt with and their activities and businesses are important.

One group working to keep the past flame alive is the Louis Martinet Society. In 1957, in New Orleans, a group of black attorneys started gathering weekly to review and discuss legal case issues. The group was named after Louis Martinet, a civil rights leader, writer, and teacher active in the post-Reconstruction period in New Orleans. Martinet was one of the lawyers who set up and helped with the famous *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case, which the U. S. Supreme Court finally decided against Plessy and Martinet, claiming that separate facilities for black and white people were legal as long as they were equal. It would not be until almost 60 years later, in another famous Supreme Court case called *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, that this concept of separate but equal would change.

Before the end of Reconstruction and the reestablishment of white racist power in the south, Martinet served as a state representative from 1872-3. A year later, he was one of the eight graduates in New Orleans' Straight University's first law class. He used his legal training to coordinate test cases that a committee of African Americans in New Orleans hoped to bring before the Supreme Court to challenge the growing Jim Crow laws.

To help with this drive for equal treatment, he also published and edited *The Daily Crusader,* a newspaper published right here in New Orleans in the 1890's. Here he wrote commentaries warning of the dangers of the separate car act. His newspaper helped with the mass people movement part that was important to this legal struggle. His commentaries urged readers to boycott the rails as long as they kept separate places for black and white.

Nowadays Frederick A. Douglass's school newspaper is entitled *The North Star Crusader.* The name honors the newspaper that Frederick A. Douglass published and edited to combat slavery and Martinet's paper used to fight racism in his time. The student staff of this newspaper hopes to carry on the legacy of Douglass, Martinet, and other freedom fighters with its publication.

ALCIDE LABAT: Imagined Account of an Activist Role Model

Ronnika Lavigne

Young boys always need someone to look up to. As a young boy, I never recognized a positive black male trying to educate the black population, until I heard about Alcide Labat. I met him at Big Momma's funeral. My mom leaned over during the service and said, "Look lil'James, there go Mr. Labat. Watch him carefully child, he go make a good change in city." Mama told me he owned the funeral home we were sitting in, all by himself. I looked at him. He had a glow of refinement, dignity and best of all confidence. I was impressed.

About a week later I was playing on the front porch with some of my friends.

"Lil' James, run down to Mr. Labat's building and give him this package," momma said.

She handed me a big stack of papers wrapped up in a plastic bag. I hopped on my bike and began my journey. I stopped in front of the building, and a cold chill fell over my body. I didn't think I was afraid, so I couldn't explain my body's reaction. I mean it wasn't like this was my first time visiting a funeral home. I opened the back door nervously anticipating the appearance of Mr. Labat, but no one stood before me. I thought that he might have been in the lobby helping a customer. I walked over to the lobby, but still I didn't see him. So then I just decided to let my feet go whichever direction they felt. I walked around quietly, analyzing everything in my sight. There was a little table in the corner of the hallway that my feet chose to stop in front of. On top of the table was a bright yellow flyer. I picked it up, but as soon as my eyes could focus on the words "fighting Jim..."

"James, what are you doing?" Mr. Labat stood above me, and my hands quickly dropped the paper like it was a flaming hot piece of metal. He came towards me with a peaceful smile.

"Next time you think I'm nowhere to be found, check the garage. I hide out there every once in a while," he said. I noticed a group of men leaving out of the garage, saying goodbye to Mr. Labat. One of them asked if I was a "new member" of whatever club they were in. Mr. Labat told him I would be in a few years. I didn't worry to ask what they were talking of. I just decided to do what I came there for.

"James, come back tomorrow at about 12. I have some things I need you to help me with." I handed him the package, said my thank you's and good-bye's, and proceeded to my home.

The next day I began a daily routine that I would follow for a major portion of my life. Every day I went down to the funeral home and helped Mr. Labat. I was too young to deal with the bodies hands on, well at least that was an excuse to cover up my fear. Once he was injecting some embalming fluid into a corpse. She was young, around 15 or 16. Her chocolate skin still looked soft. I wanted to touch her, hoping I would get an electric surge to restart the beat of her heart. I came close to her, analyzing the presence of death. All of a sudden her left hand jumped. I jumped out of her reach and screamed. Mr. Labat told me she was a victim of a violent rape from her mother's employer. From then on I never wanted to be that

close to reality. I just stuck to organizing the chairs, putting fresh water in the flowers, dusting and all the other things Mr. Labat needed me for. But mostly I was always studying for life's big test, that Mr. Labat had some of the answers for.

Every Saturday he would have meetings for his special club. Many men from the neighborhood and many that I'd never seen before gathered in his garage. I thought that this club might have been pretty interesting, but Mr. Labat said I was too young to fully understand. I walked in on a meeting accidentally one day. They were talking about Jim Crow. First I thought they were speaking of a person, so I asked Mr. Labat who they were speaking of, and he explained to me what Jim Crow really was. I didn't really understand why not following the law was so important, but he told me that in enough time I would get the big picture. I enjoyed helping him and learning from him. Like my mother told me to, I watched him, well studied him. His manners, his actions, his overall attitude towards life and the power we all have over our destiny.

One day a new client came in to view the facility. He approached her quietly, humbly, yet with utter confidence. She explained her situation. She was looking for a good service for her husband. She said a white man killed him because of hate and ignorance. The woman's face became dull and blank. Then her eyes began to bleed with clear pain and confusion. Mr. Labat took her into the lobby and sat her down on the couch. I couldn't hear what he told her, but I know he comforted her. He wrapped his arms around her, and she cried until her tears were too tired to fall. All the while he kept his hands around her. He promised her that one day we would be treated fairly as a race, and he would do anything in his power to keep things like this from happening in the future. His words were so sincere, and they possessed a certain kind of strength that I'd never recognized. I respected him and learned from him.

I woke up one Monday morning at around 9 o'clock. I was told the day before that I didn't have to work, because Mr. Labat had special errands to run, and he wouldn't be at the building. I forgot to give him a package that mom set aside for him a few days ago. I figured he hadn't left yet, so I went down to the building. The clouds in the sky hung over my head, almost taunting me with their cold breezes and dark shadows dancing around on the ground. I stopped in front of the building. While I was getting off of my bike, I dropped the package. It looked as though it fell in slow motion, drifting towards the circling dust. As it hit the ground, I heard a loud explosion, and I fell on top of the package. I looked up to see Mr. Labat's building drowning in red, hateful flames. It felt like I went down with the wood collapsing under the violent clouds. I got up and looked at the damage, and I felt scared in the pits of my heart. The paper in the package momma gave me started to fly around. I caught one, and the words printed on it gave me a feeling I would never forget. The name of this "newsletter" was the Tribune. There was a headline at the top that read: "Encouraging the Young to Understand the Importance of Civil Rights." Just by reading these nine words I automatically understood the meaning of the pause in my breath while my brain focused on this headline. From then on I realized why my momma pressured me to watch that inspirational man.

Louis Martinet

Rodneka Shelbia

Lately I've been reading about a lot of men who gave up things that today men die for. Like the $1,200 annual stipend for three years from President Hayes to live in Paris, France that Louis Martinet refused in 1894. At that time his family was in financial stress caused by his work. But he knew his place was with his newspaper.

In 1889 Martinet, a physician and attorney, published a newspaper called *The Crusader* to bring forth issues about inequality and segregation. He didn't have to do it, but someone did, so he stepped to the plate. It was time for change.

On September 5, 1891 The Citizens' Committee, which Martinet was a part of, formed in response to a suggestion by *The Crusader.* This committee had pretty much the same purpose as the newspaper, just a little more action. Like, one thing the Citizens' Committee is known for is challenging the Separate Car Act of 1890.

Members of the Citizens' Committee had been fighting for years. Some had been a part of the Unification Movement, others had raised money to help freed blacks, and many had held government positions. Martinet himself served on the Orleans Parish School Board from 1877 to 1881 and was the last black man to do so until Dr. Mack Spears was elected in 1969.

In 1896 Martinet closed down *The Crusader* but not the mindset of freedom for his people.

Martinet had a choice to go along with the main stream and live a comfortable life. Instead he chose to spend his time fighting for his people.

I admire him for that and am waiting for men of my generation to set aside at least some of their luxuries and step to the plate.

Citizens' Committee

Derrick Scott

A group of New Orleanians, led by Aristide Mary, formed the Citizens' Committee in September, 1891, to fight against segregation in general and in particular the Separate Car Act that Governor Francis Nicholls signed into law on July 10, 1890. The most famous action they took was to organize a legal challenge to this law. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy's arrest on Royal and Press St. was not a solitary action. Numerous fellow members of the Citizens' Committee were there with him and arranged his immediate release from prison while the legal challenge moved forward. The Citizens' Committee raised money to pay lawyers' fees as the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case made its way to the U. S. Supreme Court.

Aristide Mary, a Reconstruction Leader and founder of the Citizen's Committee, was respected so much by his fellow segregation fighters that on his death in 1893, Citizen's Committee member Rudolph Desdunes wrote an 18-page pamphlet honoring his life and work. According to Desdunes, Aristide Mary "never failed to wage combat against all of the attacks which injustice continued to inspire against the rights and dignities of the citizen."

C. C. Antoine, vice president of the Citizen's Committee, was a Louisiana State legislator during the Reconstruction period. He and other black legislators began losing their opportunity to hold political position as Reconstruction ended and segregation laws and customs came into full effect. Antoine experienced the snowball effect of the loss of black political opportunity. By 1890, segregation laws and resulting unequal opportunities were gaining strength. Antoine knew that he could not just sit by and let this growing animal be fed any longer. He helped organize the Citizens' Committee, which wrote in its founding document on September 5, 1891, "We feel that unless promptly checked by the strong power of the courts, the effects of that unconstitutional and malicious measure [the Separate Car Act] will be to encourage open persecution, and increase to a frightful degree, opportunities for crimes and other hardships..."

Excerpt from the Play The Long Ride

Written and performed by students from Drew Elementary, Martin Luther King Extension, Frederick Douglass, and McDonogh 35 in collaboration with Artspot Productions with support from North Star Village, an UrbanHeart Community Learning Center, Griot Smaller Learning Community, Students at the Center, Douglass Community Coalition, Crescent City Peace Alliance, and Algiers/Bywater Weed and Seed.

Citizens' Committee Recruits Homer Plessy

Keva Carr

CHARACTERS:

Aristide Mary
Homer Plessy
Louis Martinet
Rudolph Desdunes

Scene opens with Aristide Mary bringing in Homer Plessy to talk with two other Citizens' Committee members. Purpose of the conversation is to figure out if Plessy wants to be the person who gets arrested.

Aristide Mary: I'm calling this meeting to introduce Homer Plessy. He will be sitting in on our meeting to decide if he'll be the person who gets arrested so we can challenge the Separate Car Act. I have Plessy in mind because his family has been active in the Unification Movement. I know he has some questions for us, so let's get right to it.

Homer Plessy: First of all, I want to say what an honor it is to meet you two—Mr. Martinet and Mr. Desdunes. I really admire your work in *The Crusader* newspaper—the way you're keeping us informed on the issues.

(They shake hands and while shaking hands Martinet speaks.)

Martinet: It's our pleasure. We appreciate your work to increase public education funding.

Plessy: Thanks—and I guess that's what I wonder about. How will me being arrested affect some of my work on education? I'm not sure what riding in a train with white folks has to do with high quality education or just quality of life in general.

Mary: But it is about education. First of all, we have children who follow us. Their lives will be harder, if we don't stand up for what's right. Second, this really is about education. You know what happened in 1877. Reconstruction ended. Federal troops left the South. New Orleans elected a new school board. And two months later, they put an end to integrated schools. And that affects us today. That's why you're having to fight for more funding for the black public schools.

Plessy: I know you're right, but why me?

Desdunes: Two reasons: you're a man with a mission, you're dedicated. And second, you're light-skinned. White folks on the train won't suspect you of challenging the law.

Plessy: Well, I'm willing to do whatever it takes. Ya'll are the elders. I respect you.

Mary: So let's take a vote. All in favor of Plessy representing us in the Separate Car Act to be arrested, raise your hand and say I.

(They all say "I" and shake hands)

Mary: Meeting adjourned.

Homer Plessy in a Mixed Up Time

Demetrious Jones

Homer Plessy was a black man who could pass for white, but he believed in equal rights for all people no matter what their color.

The white man wanted blacks to be separated from whites because he didn't want a black man to take his position. One way to keep blacks separated was passing a law to say that blacks and whites could not ride the same train car. That's what the Louisiana legislature did in 1890. That law was so new that when it was passed, black males who were married to white females couldn't even sit on the same car as their partners. How could you be separated from someone you love?

As you can see, 1892 was a mixed up time. Someone had to do something fast. So this is where the Citizens' Committee came in. This group of people mapped out a plan to challenge the Separate Car Act. They recruited Homer Plessy to get arrested, because they knew he could pass for white and that he didn't have any children to take care of. This was important, because at this time in New Orleans, he could have been killed for disobeying the white man's orders. Mobs were often pulling men out of jail to deliver their own justice.

On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy was at the railroad station conducting himself like a normal person. He took his seat in the white section of the train. The train pulled out of the station. It was moving slowly and then came to a complete stop at the intersection of Royal and Cotton Press Streets. Plessy sat frozen in his seat. A white officer got on the train and asked Plessy if he was a negro. He said he was. So the officer asked him to move to the black section. But Plessy followed the plan and refused to move.

In 1896, Plessy's arrest finally came to a conclusion. Homer Plessy was not happy with this Supreme Court decision, because black and whites were separated but equal. That means blacks could put up black only signs and whites could put up whites only signs.

From that moment on, Plessy, the Citizens' Committee, and every true-hearted New Orleans resident knew it was going to be a long fight for justice and for laws that did not keep one group of people lower than the other.

Twelve Year Old Talks to Plessy

Gabrielle Turner

The date was June 7, 1892. It was a sunny Tuesday afternoon, when mama sent me to make groceries. As I walked down the road I repeated in my mind, "milk, bread, sausage, and sugar," over and over again so I wouldn't forget. My reciting was distracted, when I noticed the bright red train signals blinking on and off. The train was just sitting there, and I knew I had to wait. So I sat down on the ground and made my name out of some rocks.

With my head to the ground, I saw the shiniest pair of shoes walk past me. I knew exactly who it was. It was Mr. Homer. He always had the best looking shoes in the neighborhood, because he was a shoemaker.

Before I looked up I saw another pair of shoes that weren't so nice walking behind Mr. Homer. I looked up and saw Mr. Homer with his hands behind his back and handcuffs tightly on his wrist. The other pair of shoes was a man in a dark blue suit. Mr. Homer looked down at me with a weird expression on his face. He winked his eye at me as he always did, and I watched as they took him away.

I stood there for a while. I was confused. Mr. Homer was the nicest man you could ever meet. He wouldn't hurt anyone. So, why would he be arrested on the train?

The train started to move backwards and then forwards again. I walked to the grocery, and I got the items momma told me to get.

A couple of days later walking home from school, I passed Mrs. Louise's house. Mrs. Louise lived in one of the shotgun houses on my street. All the houses were painted the same color, a dull green, but Mrs. Louise's house was different. She had a little garden next to her step. She always kept some chairs in the alley for when her friends stopped by. She and three other women were sitting on her front porch talking. She leaned back in her old wooden chair with *The Crusader* newspaper in her hand and said, "that man, he was only trying to get us black folk equal treatment."

I was a little girl, only twelve years old, and I didn't quite understand what was going on. I walked along the brick cobblestone sidewalk to get to her porch. I sat on her step listening to them talk about how people in this organization called the Citizens' Committee gathered together to plan to have Mr. Homer arrested.

I stared down at the bricked sidewalk. My eyes fastened to the green sponge-like grass that pushed its way up through the cracks between the bricks. While I continued to listen, I turned to catch Mrs. Louise's eyes, and with my eyes I asked a question "may I?" as I pointed to the newspaper.

Without interrupting her conversation she nodded, and I eased the newspaper from her lap. I read that the man in the dark blue suit was Private Detective Cain. I thought to myself, "why would Mr. Homer, a shoe maker, risk getting arrested?"

Later on that evening after eating supper mama and I sat down on the floor to do some arithmetic. My mind was not on counting how many dirt rocks were on the floor. Instead I wondered why Mr. Homer volunteered to be arrested.

I interrupted mama and asked "why would somebody get arrested on purpose?

"Child what are you talking about?"

I explained to her what I saw two days ago. She began to tell me that she and some other women in her women's club, the Ladies of St. Joseph, had given money to support him getting arrested.

"Why would you do that?"

"You see baby, we cannot eat, shop, sit, or live among white folks, and it is not right. So people in the community rallied together to raise money to pay for the legal fees for Homer Plessy's case."

"What case?"

"Oh child, there is going to be a big case behind this."

"Behind what?"

"Behind us not being able to sit on the same train car as a white person, and we all trying to get to the same place."

"So we breaking the law?"

"Yes."

I never thought I would see the day that mama would say it was alright to break the law. She always taught us to abide by the law. Her motto was always "put it in the hands of the Lord, and he'll take care of it," but not this time. Maybe she thought they were just trying to help the Lord.

She explained to me that things were getting bad. People were dying. Families were starving because they could not get good jobs, to make groceries. She was getting upset, and she started crying. She said, weeping, "we have to do something or we will never get anywhere in this world."

So I guess a lot of folks felt the way that mama did and wanted to see things change. I started to understand why we broke the law. It was for our own good.

"So, what can I do to help?"

"First of all you need to pray. We need prayer. You could also come along to the rallies at the churches and participate and listen. You need to learn all you can about what's going on, but I don't want you to get too involved, because you're just a little girl."

Mama looked at me with a strange smile.

"Child, why do you want to be involved with this?"

"Well, mama you know how I hate to see people, especially colored people, go to jail when they really didn't do anything wrong. You remember when we went by Grandpa Lloyd's house and we saw a man get arrested and beaten because a white woman said he raped her? It's not fair, and I want to help in any way I can, even if it means breaking the law. Because we are breaking the law for a good reason, right mama?"

"Yes, child."

Josephine DeCuir

Cedric Burham

Prior to the Plessy case challenging the Separate Car Act, other lawsuits challenged Jim Crow laws. In 1878, the U. S. Supreme Court denied the right of a black passenger to enter the dining area of a steamship. A unique feature of this case is that the person denied dining car privileges was a woman, Josephine DeCuir of Louisiana. Even though women often had fewer rights than men during this time—including lack of a right to vote until 1920—women still contributed to the battle for civil rights.

A Discussion of *Carnival of Fury* by William Ivy Hair

Adrien McElroy

Carnival of Fury is a work unlike any I have read. Published at the LSU press in 1976, it is a work that expresses the author's commitment to research. In most instances other histories do not cover a specific time period in as much detail as does *Carnival of Fury*.

Though the book itself has moving content, Hair writes in a risky style. Hair writes in a distinct research paper style; such a format can prove to be boring. Hair's strong commitment to his research and somewhat unexposed subject matter, however, salvages the work from being the average yawner. Hair brings life and excitement to the often bland, overly methodical, tedious task of research composition.

This work, unlike many other histories I have read—primarily textbooks—takes a specific focus on an individual, Robert Charles, and probes deeply into his personal history. The work chronicles his life dating back previous to his birth. Hair sites census records, newspapers, and oral histories for information ranging from the number of people in the Charles family to the reason Robert Charles started carrying a firearm.

Hair's chronicle primarily gives the biography of Robert Charles. Hair explains the life and background of Charles, one of many Black Power/Back to Africa martyrs in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Hair explains how Charles developed his genuine contempt for white people and in addition details the happenings during the New Orleans race riots of 1900.

This history is an educational experience. Many portions are sobering and disturbing. One such portion describes a wealthy white man named John Prentice Matthews, known as "Print." Print is very successful at organizing blacks and poor whites into one political coalition. Many conservative Democrats of Copiah County—Robert Charles' birthplace—were threatened by Print's success at unifying the oppressed. These objectors to justice responded with threats of violence toward both Print and members of his coalition. These threats were seemingly hollow to Print. However, Print finds that these threats are not as hollow as he had thought. On election day, November 5, 1883, Print visited the polls to vote. While there, he met an acquaintance, a Democrat, by the name of Ras Wheeler. Print and Ras spoke for a while. In the course of the conversation Ras suggested to Print that Print not vote. Print then got up to record his ballot, and Ras shot him twice in the back with a shotgun. This portion of the book made me realize that in the late 1800's the lynchpin of the white way of life was the oppression of blacks. Giving the poor white man of Copiah County a reason to believe there existed a common strand between himself and a black man totally bucked that system of oppression. Because Print Matthews had and planned to continue assisting in that bucking, Print was eliminated as a threat. The story of Print Matthews' assassination there expresses both extremes of human nature—specifically in whites.

Also sobering are the events occurring in Copiah County beginning on October 25, 1883 and continuing until election day, November 5, 1883. Militant Democrats in Copiah County had nightly processions through the blackest areas of the county. These men proceeded to fire cannons, rifles, shotguns, and pistols both into the air and into people's homes. People were often awakened from their beds, dragged to the street, threatened with hanging, and whipped unmercifully. This procession is unlike any experience I have ever endured. The genuine feeling of helplessness that so often plagued blacks of that era is utterly foreign to me. Sleep is a great refuge for me; to be denied that retreat is cruelest torture to me. I have never felt so helpless as the poor blacks of Copiah County must have felt on those nights.

I was equally disturbed by the chronicle of the race riots in New Orleans in the week following July 24, 1900. For that week any black people found on the street by a white person might as well have considered themselves dead. The mobs were looking for Robert Charles, but any and every black man upon whom they stumbled would do. Dozens of unlucky black men, women, boys, and girls were killed that week, but not before they were beaten, or tortured, or raped. Hate unleashed itself with full fury upon the black people of New Orleans. I have never known fear like that of a woman being raped, or a man being beaten to death, or a child being drenched in dirty fuel oil and set afire. Fear like theirs is utterly alien and unfathomable to me. I hope such fear remains so alien to me. Imagining these disturbing events frightens me more than any event I've experienced: not the blinding injury to my left eye, not being hit by a car, not even being robbed at gunpoint. None of these horrors can compare.

William Ivy Hair is a white man with an obvious commitment to telling the shameful history of his race, as well as the proudest moments. However, in reflection I realized that if not for his shameful past he, individually, may not have been able to write this work. If not for the privilege awarded Mr. Hair through his whiteness and his shameful history, very likely he would not have been able to produce such a time-consuming work. Very likely a black person would not be afforded the resources, education, and time that, on a large scale, are afforded to whites. Because of this common lack of resources for blacks in general, a black person would not have been able to, because of oppression of history, spend that necessary time to produce such a work as *Carnival of Fury*.

Fury's Carnival

Allen Powell

Hate walked on quick feet, and rage followed close behind.
Dark faces shrank back from bright lights and clothed
themselves in shadows.
Brown eyes glowed with fear, and trembling hands grasped
hard bricks.
The silver gleam of deadly butts lit the path of tattered footsteps, and an angry army marched on.

Destruction and death skip hand in hand leaving behind droppings of sorrow and pain.
The undersides of beds become teeming hotels with occupants bathed in slobber and sweat.
Mumbled prayers and tumbling tears mesh together into desperate pleas to God for help.
A god marches the street, a many-headed hydra god, a god bred in fire and rage and sustained by hate.
It searches in the blood and death of many for the face of Robert Charles,
a black man already resting in death's bosom as he runs and runs from hate,
a man who tried to slow his white oppressors.

He was a man and paid the price for it.

Two now rest in death's python grip, because Charles decided it was time for the black caterpillar to fly.

The faint scent of fear clothes his body, and his eyes shine forth the bright light of courage.

The journey of his life is almost over, and now he seeks a few traveling companions.

Fearsome black eyes peer through the dirty windowpanes of a white house on Saratoga St.

The dark eye of a Winchester peeks through a tiny hole in the wall.

A man waits.

The angry army approaches.

The crimson stains on their hands and shirts scream the tale of the trail of death they have left behind.

Death awaits six more travelers on Saratoga St., and the army marches on.

Bullet holes turn house walls into Swiss cheese, and finally a warrior is brought down.

An angry mob is sedated, the blood lust in its heart satisfied by the essence of a man: Robert Charles.

The Diary of Virginia Banks

Keva Carr

The diary of Virginia Banks is a piece of historical fiction based on my imagination and the little information that I learned from the book The Carnival of Fury by William Ivy Hair.

Robert Charles had a shootout with the police in July of 1900. So in order to find him, they tracked down a woman named Virginia Banks, whom many people said was his girlfriend. When they talked to her, she said she was not his girlfriend. That seems like a normal response back then, because they gave Robert Charles this terrible title, and they were so desperate to find him. So if they couldn't find him, maybe this woman thought they would take the closest thing to him, his girlfriend. Maybe she wanted to be safe, and she felt like lying was the only protection she had. In fact, less than 10 years earlier in New Orleans, 11 Italians were lynched by a mob even though a jury found them not guilty. So maybe fear could have pushed this issue as well.

Based on these wonderings, I decided to write a piece about Robert Charles and Virginia Banks from her perspective. I present to you an excerpt from a larger book that is still in progress, but I hope you enjoy what has been finished so far.

The Diary of Virginia Banks

ENTRY ONE:

Many people would like spending their days with little kids running around with paint on their fingers, as their youth is growing in front of their eyes. However, my mind sometimes cannot take it. Being a teacher in this town has its pros, like being able to shift your frustration from your headache into the board of education. Because you do not have to deal with your stress, you can take your mind off it by dealing with kids who could possibly be the future. In addition, it has its cons like slowly growing a migraine as the kids are constantly running around. Another con is the pay being too low, so I work for a woman to earn extra money. She also offers me a place to stay.

ENTRY TWO:

Today I been teaching long and working hard. The date and year says slavery is over, but I do not think this woman Mrs. Cooley knows it, or maybe she does. Right after breaking 100% worth of sweat, I was told to fetch some things from the vegetable stand. I stood in one of the rows, and then the man checked my things. I threw the appropriate amount across my row and rushed out, but before I made it out the door I ran into an encounter with this man I had never seen before, and right then and there I knew this was the first of many, because when you see someone for the first time around here, you start seeing them over and over.

"I don't mean to bother you, but I was wondering if you would like to buy this magazine. It's a very important asset to an even more important project that I'm working on."

Humm, I did not know many blacks who could read, and many blacks that were so smoothly dressed in a vegetable store. I looked at him like a puzzle that I just couldn't figure out, and he looked at me like, "your answer please."

"Well, I can't very well buy something from someone I don't know or buy something that I know absolutely nothing about."

He replied, "Robert Charles, and well miss you can take a look at it if you like."

"I am Virginia, Virginia Banks."

I only looked at the first page, but I saw the impact the writers wanted to have on their readers, the encouragement for blacks to take the furthest steps into making any changes. By changes, I mean running from themselves leaving to form a completely new nation for blacks, which is not the answer. "So this is what you want our people to think about?"

"It's a bit of a change, but it is a change, and we need one don't we?"

"You tell me, what is change, and how big does change have to be for us to run away from our selves in the process of changing. There are a lot of ways to go about changing without running away. Maybe we can talk about it sometime."

"Yeah maybe so. What you say, ma'm? You gon buy? Only 5 cents."

I reached into my old grayish pocket book, and I only had three pennies.

"I wish I could, really, but I have not enough. Maybe you'll catch me next time."

"I hope I do ma'am. You have a nice day."

I came back to Mrs. Cooley's place and whipped up the dinner and told my day to you.

ENTRY THREE:

The phone rang at 7:00 in the morning, and I didn't know whether to answer it or go back to sleep, but it didn't ring three times, and hang up, like usual. It rang ten times, and of course I couldn't sleep with a phone ringing off the hook.

"Hello," I said.

"It's me Ernestine."

"What you want at 7:00 am?"

She said the world was about to show so much unhappiness and go into the fastest depression life had ever seen.

"Why, what has happened that is so terrible?"

"Douglass has died."

"By Douglass, you mean Frederick Douglass, the one who got the *North Star* up and running, the one who was fighting for our rights, for women's rights to vote, the one who's turned things around?"

"So many people are crying, Virginia. I mean the tears are not stopping."

"They'll stop Ernestine, they'll stop"

At school many teachers could not focus. All you saw in the *Crusader* were quotes from people, and Douglass' face on the front page, his accomplishments noted and recognized. Many tears were shed that day, and I know that they will shed for years to come. Me, I was okay. I had my moments. During that day I too drifted off in my own world, wondering how long anyone lives, that the icon we looked to was gone, and who were we to look to now.

ENTRY FOUR:

School was different today. The kids were more troubled than usual, so I decided to teach something they could be interested in. Besides who could resist information that was valuable to their future?

"How equal is separate but equal?"

They all looked at each other pondering about what was I talking about.

"How can true equality exist between two people who are racially segregated?"

They looked at each other once again, and finally a little girl with red bows in her hair matching the same style as the doll that laid on her desk raised her hand and said, "What do you mean Miss Banks?"

Diary, I proceeded to give examples to clear any confusion they might have had with the question. I said, "What if I said that your doll can't play in this playground, that she must play in playground B, the one with poor conditions with the swings, benches, and numerous of other things?" I picked up this toy frog that was laying under my desk. It looked like it had been everywhere except where it was supposed to be. I said, "What if this frog could play in playground, the one with all the working water fountains, nice swings, shiny wooden benches to rest on? Am I treating them fair?" I asked them.

"No."

"Yeah."

A lot of them screamed out answers that we all proceeded in questioning, why or why not it was fair.

"What do you think?" a student asked me.

"Well I have many thoughts about it, and you know just maybe a case is about to happen like this."

"Can you tell us about it Miss Banks, please?"

I told them maybe when more information is said in the newspaper about it. I tell you that was the first breakthrough I had with those kids and maybe my only. I know they are going back to their non-listening ears and speedy legs. I went to Mrs. Cooley's house heading for a nap only because I knew she wasn't home, and I passed her pictures on the wall, wondering where were the faces I had seen in the frames. Possibly they were her children, and just maybe they were dealing with their own lives. I kept polishing her wooden kitchen table repeatedly until I could see my reflection, which is really how Mrs. Cooley liked it. I found that out putting the linen in the cabinet, while she turned her head from right to left looking into her table, and I knew that she was looking at her reflection which made me realize I had to polish until I got it.

ENTRY FIVE:

While drinking my coffee at N- Stops Diner, I heard this old white couple talking about the high rate of black prisoners and how it's sad. They tried to give us people sympathy but not really meaning it. They said it had risen from ten to sixteen percent. "How would they know?" I asked myself. They probably heard someone else say that. Then they started laughing at the situation where many people were sentenced to prison for stealing a pig of the value of one dollar. They laughed as if they were hyenas. They should have been saying that lynchers who were not convicted was so sad. Give them sympathy I said to myself. Make a big deal out of that I screamed to myself.

Then the door swung open, and it was the man trying to sell me the "take a look at things and change them" magazine.

"Miss Banks, right?"

"Yes that's me."

"You mind if I join you?"

"Not at all."

We talked about who we were and what we wanted. "I'm a teacher and I work part time with a woman who offered me living arrangements if I would work for her, and I want my own house someday."

"I work for a company named LNO & T."

"You like it?"

"Every job has its pros and cons."

"What about you?"

"I feel the same way."

"So what you were saying about my magazine?"

"Just that you can't look out for yourself or run away from things. Do you know that Frederick Douglass died?"

"Yeah, I saw in the newspaper."

"Do you know what he said? I'm not free until all my people are free, it's not enough to just free yourselves. I mean wasn't that beautiful?"

"It is, but I just have other thoughts about thinking about yourself, and then thinking about everyone else. Well, I should be going, goodbye Virginia."

"Bye."

He never got around to getting what he came in for, but then maybe he did.

ENTRY SIX:

We enjoyed each other's company, but we had no intention to run into each other again, but life told me otherwise, that you were bound to get a few unexpected things. Today my plans were to let the children run around but then stepped in life. One of the other teachers called me to come out and look at what was going on. We both looked out the window at this white man parading up and down the street with the sign "When is Mardi Gras?" His face was made up of black paint and the appearance of amusement to pass onto others, which is what they did

at that time of year. It gave the newspapers something to write about and the whites something to joke about at their houses and something to possibly pass on to their children.

I backed away from the window and went back to my noisy class with my silence and my plan for the day had gone through after all.

ENTRY SEVEN:

After coming from school I made my mind up that I was going to see the town, well browse through it anyway. I finished my work, and there was nothing left for me to do. I came home and put on my dress, and there I stood in the mirror checking to see was everything in its right place. Then I saw Mrs. Cooley's reflection.

"Where you going?"

"I thought I'd go out and you know just treat myself to dinner or something."

"But you ain't finish in the backyard."

"I thought I had to do that tomorrow."

"You ever heard the saying don't put off tomorrow what you can do today?"

"I heard it."

Oh diary, I wanted to just walk out that door, but I couldn't. Besides she wasn't that bad. She just really liked a clean house. The backyard was filled with trash, and cans, and before I cleaned up, I sat there looking at the mess that needed me, and prayed that something more important out there needed me too.

ENTRY 82:

It's been five years since I met Robert. They're looking for him. They can't find him, which means they're going to be looking for me. I didn't fear him or his words, only the way he made me feel. We didn't have a smooth relationship, but it wasn't a rough one either.

Every time Mrs. Cooley and the rest would leave he would show up. I would still have my apron on, tied around my waist, my hair in a pony tail with an exhausted look on my face. We had a code. Well it was something like a code: That if at night the light was on, he was to wait until it was off, which meant that everyone was asleep, and he could knock on the window and just come in. I wonder if he'll ever knock on the window again.

WATERFALLS: A Tribute to Ida B. Wells

Adrinda Kelly

Rivers flow in Georgia—
meandering magnolia avenues
where saplings stoop to pray
dark saviors to heaven.

In a house behind the shadows
of ornamented trees,
a father sits at his supper.
Peas roll around his tongue.
Bread breaks beneath his fingernails.
He leans back in a chair high enough for God,
as angels scream their lullabies.

Rain falls like bullets against the door.
The house bleeds messages to the father.

Daddies open their parlors to mid-nights,
donning faceless costumes,
just columns of whiteness to stop near their knees
and flutter around the barrels of their hunting guns.

It reminded daughters of spring.
The plantation blossoms prayed for killings
to ornament their avenues.

Rivers flow through Georgia.
When they flood, daddies die.
Puddles blood.
Decorated trees canopy shadows
that serenade daughters' balconies
when magnolias cry green pastures to God.

Alice Dunbar Nelson Biographical Summary

Cedric Burham

Alice Dunbar Nelson was a black sister trying to reconstruct the world she lived in and to make the justice system work for all people, not just blacks. She was born in 1875, two years before the Reconstruction Period ended, to parents who had formerly been enslaved. Back in her day it was much harder to have rights. Enslaved Africans like her parents had to break the law to get an education. She was a teenager and young adult at the height of Post-Reconstruction white terrorism, so she knew of many black men who were unjustly lynched by mobs. One was Theodore Russ, a young black man whom she thought was wrongly convicted of raping a white woman. In her diary she wrote, "The end of Theodore Russ... Life snuffed out at the end of a noose... . How I wish all those who sent him to his fate could swing alongside him." Ms. Nelson used this anger and passion to fight for her people by forming an organization to make the court system more just. She was also involved in the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the League of Colored Republican Women, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Like Homer Plessy, she joined and helped develop organizations that fought injustice.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Shantell LaRoche

"The end of Theodore Russ... Life snuffed out at the end of a noose... How I wish all those who sent him to his fate could swing alongside him."

Alice Dunbar–Nelson wrote these words in her diary in 1930 after Theodore Russ was sentenced to death for raping a white woman. Nelson knew a lot about the case, because she was deeply involved in it. Born in 1875 in New Orleans, Nelson lived through the Post-Reconstruction period and knew of many men who were unjustly lynched by mobs. She believed Russ was falsely accused and fought unsuccessfully to win him a pardon.

I admire Alice Dunbar-Nelson because she fought not just for herself but for others. Over 100 years ago it was a lot harder to fight for your rights than it is now. Back then African Americans such as Dunbar-Nelson had to overcome the fact that it was illegal for their parents to get an education or to vote. In fact, Dunbar-Nelson's mother was born a slave in Opelousas, Louisiana. Even when those rights came along, local laws, customs, and terrorism kept African Americans from gaining the power they needed to fight for justice. Throughout the time of lynchings, she worked to free innocent men.

Dunbar-Nelson seems to have always fought for justice. She did not just stand by when bad things went on. We need more people like this amazing woman today. I know recently I was walking home from school and saw a big crowd of people gathered. As I got closer, I realized it was a couple of kids fighting. Everybody just stood around and watched. This small example goes for bigger issues too, like drugs, poverty, and poor education. Dunbar-Nelson would not just watch things get worse; if she were alive today, she would do something.

When she was living, she spent time pulling other people together to help her. Like many black women of her day, she formed organizations to fight for justice and to make things better for her people. She was a big part of the women's club movement, along with other amazing women from the early 1900's such as Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells. Dunbar-Nelson was involved in the Federation of Colored Women's Club, The League of Colored Republican Women, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Dunbar-Nelson did more than just work with organizations and fight an unjust court system. She also was a great writer who published many books of stories and poems. This is a lot to say for someone whose mother was born a slave. And she used her writing also to help other people. She helped create a progressive black newspaper named the *Advocate* from 1920 to 1922. Dunbar-Nelson even made a living as a writer and lecturer, even though she got her start during a time when women could not even vote. The life of this amazing woman gives young black women like me a great example of what we can do living in our time of even more opportunity than Dunbar-Nelson had.

My Last Name

Shana O'Connor

For years I've heard pieces of the story that supposedly gave me my last name. Before the first time that I was told that I wasn't originally an O'Connor, I believed I was a descendent of the famous first female jurist of the U. S. Supreme Court, Sandra Day. I had also thought of my family as unique to carry a name that wasn't ordinary. However, after finding out how I truly got my last name, I realized I was no different from any other person in America whom justice chose to ignore.

Supposedly the Roberts, my original family, stayed in a small town located in Tennessee throughout the 1800's. From my understanding it was a very big family all brought up in church and taught to cook very well. My great grandfather Joseph was the youngest and apparently most stubborn. Anyways, when all the other boys in the Roberts family were getting black women to settle down and have children with, Joe wanted something a little different. He had found himself a white girl whom he was so crazy about that he just had to have her.

Eventually after making bold plays at her to express the feelings he had, she obliged and gave into him. But when asked about it, she said she had been raped and that the person responsible was a black boy named Joe. This accusation spread around the town so quickly that every white person in Tennessee wanted to get their hands on Joe. The first thing Joe's father told him to do was run. And though running was something he had no intention of doing, there was absolutely no way he could stay there and live. So after a long time ducking out, Joe decided to leave. But it was a little too late. Two white men had found out where he was hiding and had no intentions of letting him see daylight. So what did he do? He did what I would have done and killed the two men, who had just attempted to beat his cousin to death after they saw him with Joe.

After this occurred, Joe supposedly went home and kissed his family goodbye, not telling them about what had just went down. They asked where he was going, and he simply replied, "To find myself."

Though there were many places for him and his cousin to go, they chose New Orleans, I guess to symbolize his "new" life that they both were excited to start. He knew that by leaving his family in Tennessee after committing such a brutal crime, he would probably never see them again. However, he understood that by staying, his whole family would have been in danger. He also understood that though he would be in another city that it still wouldn't stop the fact that he was a wanted man. This is what forced him to change his last name from Roberts to O'Connor.

My great grandfather eventually settled down with a French woman and had children. To remember his seven siblings whom he would never be able to see again, he named every one of his children after one of them. He later became a minister to finish off his new life the right way. But he never forgot the things or the family he had in his old life.

To this day I wonder about how it would have been if Joe never came to New Orleans and met my great grandma to eventually have my grandfather whom I look up to and think about every day. If it weren't for Joe, my family would be non-existent and the name I am so proud of wouldn't be mine. Knowing that O'Connor isn't my original name makes me want to cherish it, because it signifies the new start of my family and so many others like mine. But it also makes me sad that Joe had to drop the name of his family because of something that didn't go so far. I'm just happy that he was brave enough to go through with it.

PART FIVE:
The Long Struggle for Civil Rights

TIMELINE: 1877–1964 *PART TWO*

Struggle for Civil Rights and Development of Black Institutions, Organizations, and Power.

1927

1927

Marcus Garvey, leader of the **Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.),** is deported from New Orleans. Local headquarters for the Garvey Movement, also known as the Black Star, were located at Liberty Hall on Daneel St. **Stella Hall** and **Beulah McDonogh**, two workers with the local branch of U. N. I. A. who worked at Liberty Hall, inspired the young **Estelle Berryman James** (born 1918), who would in 1934 become General Secretary of the organization and later served U.N.I.A. as long-time Executive Secretary. She married **Dr. Charles Lionel James** in 1952 and moved with him to Chicago, where he served as President General of the U.N.I.A.

1928

1928

New Orleans Federation of Civic Leagues becomes fully organized by wards and takes lead in encouraging blacks to pay poll taxes and register to vote.

1929

October, 1929

Over 2,000 people attend dedication ceremonies for the new three-story brick building for **Valena C. Jones School**. This dedication marked the culmination of ten years of education activism (following in the tradition of Homer Plessy who worked for increased funding for public education for black students in New Orleans) on the part of Jones principal **Fannie C. Williams**, **Dr. Joseph Hardin**, and the **Seventh Ward Civic League**, which not only lobbied for funds for the building but also donated books and $500 for the school library on the first day of school in the new building in September, 1929. (Medley, August 1988)

1931

1931

A. P. Tureaud (1899-1972), attorney for the New Orleans branch of the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), resigns from the local NAACP Executive Committee when that committee replaced Tureaud and other black lawyers with white lawyers in a voter registration case. Tureaud and other young community activists win an Executive Committee election later that year and move the local branch to more aggressive legal action in the battle for civil rights.

1931–1948

Rev. Roger Coleman, with assistance from NAACP Executive Committee member and attorney A. P. Tureaud and the New Orleans Federation of Civic Leagues for which Tureaud served as vice president, wages long-term battle to allow blacks to use the Municipal Auditorium.

1934

1934

Orleans Parish School Board prohibits New Orleans Public Forum from holding any meetings in schools because it had sponsored an integrated forum that included whites and approximately 200 black audience members at Eleanor McMain High School auditorium.

1937

1937

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 527, a black union, becomes one of the first "white-collar" unions in the Jim Crow South. **Edna Cormier**, one of the leaders of this organizing drive for improved teaching and learning conditions in the city's public schools, becomes its first president. AFT Local 527 still exists and is now known as United Teachers of New Orleans following the 1972 "integration" of local 527 by white teachers in New Orleans Public Schools.

1938

1938

Initial meeting of the local chapter of the **Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW)**. One of the attendees is **Virginia Collins**, who would go on to work for SCHW, its educational arm Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), black parent-teacher organizations, and local voter registration and civil rights organizations. She later changed her name to Dara Abubakari and served as the Vice President of the South in the **Republic of New Africa**) the movement for land and nationhood for Black people in "America" established in 1968.

1939

1939

Louisiana Weekly establishes **Community Responsibility Program** with the mission to provide Black New Orleanians a "clear picture of the conditions under which they lived and what they might do to improve them." **Ernest Wright** begins coordinating this series of forums in the summer of 1939, and under his leadership attendance grows immensely.

1939

New Orleans Citizens Committee for Equalizing Educational Opportunities forms to fight for equal pay for black and white teachers in New Orleans Public Schools. **Donald Jones** serves as president of this organization, and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP, establishes **A. P. Tureaud** as the local attorney to work on the case

1940

September, 1940

Insurance agents engaged in talks over wages and working conditions with the four major black insurance companies in New Orleans contact **Ernest Wright** to assist them when talks break down. Under Wright's leadership, the insurance agents follow AFT Local 527 in forming one of the earliest white collar unions in the south, **New Orleans Local of the United Office and Professional Workers—CIO**. These agents were in the same profession as **Homer Plessy**, who became a day laborer and insurance agent when the mechanization of shoe-making forced him to close his cobbler business in the early 1900's.

1940–1950

Through the efforts of voter registration organizations such as the **People's Defense League (PDL)** and the **Ninth Ward Civic and Improvement League**, the number of black voters rises from 400 in 1940 to 26,209 in 1950. By this time the PDL, under leadership of its first president, **Zachary Taylory Ramsey**, has established 26 chapters and approximately 26,000 members throughout Louisiana. **Ida Johnson** led the **PDL's women's division.**

October 7, 1940

Former prize fighter **"Battling Siki"** and dockworker **"Poydras Street Black,"** who had been hired by striking insurance agents to "discourage" strikebreakers, successfully prevent strikebreakers from taking positions with the four major black insurance companies.

December, 1940

New Orleans Local of the United Office and Professional Workers—CIO wins recognition and elects **Zachary Taylor Ramsey** as its first president.

1941

1941

Southern District Federal Court of New York hears case charging racist practices by American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), an organization that collects royalties from broadcasts and performances and distributes proceeds to its members. **Jelly Roll Morton**, the New Orleans jazz composer and piano player from the early 20th Century, had waged a long campaign against this organization (which had only two black musicians among its 200 charter members and did not admit Louis Armstrong until 1939). Morton's well-documented arguments charged that because his songs were played so frequently on the radio, he deserved membership in ASCAP and radio broadcast royalties. When ASCAP denied him membership in 1934, citing its practice of only admitting new members who were nominated and seconded by existing members, Morton went on a campaign to expose ASCAP's racist practices and denial of royalty money to black musicians and writers. Morton died a few months before his case was brought to court. The decades-long struggle for economic and racial justice against ASCAP continued in 1956, when Representative James Roosevelt, to whom Jelly Roll had registered his first complaints about ASCAP practices in the late 1930's, chaired a subcommittee of the U. S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Small Business that investigated the racist abuses of ASCAP. Finally, in 1960 a federal court decree forced ASCAP to revise its practices, inching the organization closer to the racial and economic justice for which Morton had initiated the struggle over 20 years earlier.

June 14, 1941

A. P. Tureaud files lawsuit demanding equal pay for black teachers in New Orleans Public Schools. Teacher **Joseph McKelpin** agreed to be the plaintiff in *Joseph McKelpin vs. Orleans Parish School Board*, which received extensive assistance from the NAACP's Thurgood Marshall and from New Orleans resident and community leader **Daniel E. Byrd, President and Organizer of the NAACP State Conference of Branches, 1939-1947.**

1942

1942

Booker T. Washington High School opens, becoming only the second four-year public high school for black students in the 20th Century in New Orleans.

1946

1946

Daniel E. Byrd and **A. P. Tureaud** of the **NAACP Louisiana Conference of Branches** (for which Byrd served as president and organizer from 1939-1946 and Tureaud served as president from 1946-1949) lead an investigation into the **lynching of black Army veteran John C. Jones** in Minden, Louisiana. These investigators gave names of the lynchers to the U. S. Department of Justice.

1948

1948

Louisiana legislature passes into law a **minimum salary schedule for public school teachers with no disparity between black and white teacher pay**. This law is direct result of parish-by-parish lawsuits filed by the NAACP and lead attorney A. P. Tureaud.

1949

1949–1954

State NAACP led by attorney A. P. Tureaud fight for **equalization of school facilities** in a series of law suits against local school boards, including those in Iberville, St. Landry, Lincoln, and Ouachita parishes.

1950

1950

Desegregation of Louisiana State University's Law School results from case brought by Louisiana's NAACP Inc. Fund and its counsel, lawyer **A. P. Tureaud**, who would be instrumental in forming the **Martinet Society,** an association of black lawyers in New Orleans named after **Louis Martinet**, the lawyer and Citizens' Committee member who designed most of the legal strategy for *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in collaboration with **Albion Tourgee** and published *The Crusader*, the journalistic arm of the Citizens' Committee's fight against Louisiana's 1890 Separate Car Act. Tureaud recruited young black men such as **Revius Ortigue** and **Ernest "Dutch" Morial** to work as lawyers in the civil rights arena.

Early 1950's

Future New Orleans mayor **Maurice "Moon" Landrieu** attends Loyola University Law School and becomes a classmate of the law school's first two black students **Ben Johnson** and **Norman Francis**. His friendship with these two classmates influences his thinking about race and leads him as legislator, administrator, judge, and community leader to support civil rights in New Orleans.

1951

November, 1951

Members of **Ninth Ward Civic and Improvement League**, led by **Leontine Luke**, hold organizing meeting with parents to bring class action law suit to desegregate New Orleans Public Schools. This meeting leads to *Bush vs. Orleans Parish School Board.*

1952

September 5, 1952

Louisiana's NAACP Inc. Fund and lead counsel **A. P. Tureaud** file *Bush vs. Orleans Parish School Board* to end separate and unequal schools in New Orleans. Civil rights leader **Daniel Byrd** had previously warned the school board that, "We are determined to secure absolute equality and nothing less than complete equality is acceptable to our community." (Medley)

1953

1953

United Clubs, comprised of the local musicians' union and four social aid and pleasure clubs, forms to desegregate Municipal Auditorium. **Leonard Burns** of Urban League and NAACP is instrumental in the group's formation. Their first sponsored event at Municipal Auditorium is a fund-raiser ball for United Negro College Fund. The 1954 ball raises $3,200 for United Negro College Fund. City police disturb the ball, objecting to mixed-race dancing.

1950–1962

Despite increased black population and expanded voter registration drives by numerous organizations, including the NAACP, black voter registration rises by only 10,000 in 12 years. Orleans Parish voter registrar used "citizenship" tests and other methods legal under state law at the time to limit black voter registration.

1950–1965

A series of legal cases under direction of A. P. Tureaud and NAACP fight for integration in Louisiana public higher education, trade, and professional schools.

1954

May 7, 1954

African American public school faculty, staff, and students in New Orleans conduct **McDonogh Day Boycott** as one of series of protests against racism and racial inequities in public education in New Orleans.

1954–1955

Contractor **Richard G. Stewart** sued Clark Terrace Unit No. 1, a non-profit public housing corporation, for backing out of a contract after learning that Stewart was black.

1954–1955

McDonogh Day Boycotts organized by coalition that included parents and the black teachers' union. The coalition first protested to Orleans Parish School Board in January, 1954 about the annual May event to honor John McDonogh, benefactor of the New Orleans Public Schools and one of the largest slaveholders and slavetraders in the South. Students from the black schools had to stand in the hot sun until all the white children laid wreaths on the John McDonogh monument at Lafayette Square near City Hall. When the school board refused to act on the petitions from this coalition, local black leaders, including **A. J. Chapital**, a postal employee and president of the local NAACP chapter, took up the cause. Chapital urged **Revius Ortique**, vice president of the Louisiana Council of Labor and a radio broadcaster, to encourage black parents and students to boycott McDonogh Day. Ortique's work to help organize the boycott was his first civil rights activism. Other black leaders who worked on the boycott include civil rights attorney **A. P. Tureaud**, **Rev. A. L. Davis**, and **Leontine Luke**, a Lower Ninth Ward organizer. All but one of the black principals supported the boycott. Luke recalls that "we were very, very angry with her. This black educator lost her status as a leader in the black community as a result of her refusal to support the boycott." (Rogers, 39-40)

1955

September 15, 1955

Rosa Keller, Urban League President, and SCEF Board member **Rabbi Julian Feibleman** lead a delegation to the Orleans Parish School Board to demand that the school system integrate in wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The delegation presented a petition circulated by **James Dombrowski** and signed by 180 citizens of New Orleans, including **Helen Mervis** and **Albert D'Orlando** of the Urban League, asking the school board to develop a plan for desegregation. Keller recalled the angry response from not only the board but also a majority of New Orleanians: "They practically threw us out of the place, and such howling and screaming you never heard... .It was very frightening." The desegregation petition made the next day's newspapers, and Keller and Feibleman were "pariahs for a while after that." They "got sniped at with guns later on and it was very ugly." (Rogers, 44)

1955–1970's

Leontine Goins Luke leads **Ninth Ward Civic and Improvement League**, an organization co-founded by her father, **Rev. Burnell Goins**, a contractor who required all his workers to pay poll taxes.

1956

1956

Veronica Hill, regional Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers and President and one of the founders of **AFT Local 527** (called the League of Classroom Teachers at this time and in 1972 renamed United Teachers of New Orleans after merger with local National Education Association affiliate), heads AFT committee on the integration of local unions and leads successful resolution at AFT's 1956 convention requiring all locals to be fully integrated by January 1, 1958 or lose their charters. AFT Local 353, the all-white AFT local, votes against integration and loses its AFT affiliation along with almost every AFT local in the southern United States.

1956

Louisiana declares the **NAACP illegal** and passes a law to **dismiss any public school teacher who promotes integration.**

1957

1957 & 1961

Carnival Day Blackouts organized by the United Clubs receive support from 75% of the organizations invited to participate and raise an estimated $60,000 for national civil rights efforts in 1957. The 1961 "blackout" was in direct response to actions and statements by Louisiana elected officials who opposed integration, including United States Senator Russell Long, who urged whites to pull their children out of the New Orleans Public Schools. At the 1961 event **Leonard Burns** declared: "We intend to prove to the boys in Baton Rouge that we all stand together and can put as much pressure on them as they can on us."

1957–1960

Rev. A. L. Davis, first black to serve on the N. O. City Council, filed *suit to end racial discrimination on public transit.*

1958

1958

White attorney **John P. Nelson, Jr.** runs for Orleans Parish School Board against incumbent Emile Wagner, a staunch segregationist who vowed to close down the New Orleans Public Schools rather than have them integrated. Nelson wanted to integrate the schools, following the dictates of *Brown vs. Board of Education.* Nelson lost the race but continued to work as a labor lawyer and made his entry into civil rights law in *Lombard vs. Louisiana,* the case based on a black student sit-in at the McCrory's lunch counter.

1959

1959

At a special Louisiana State Legislature session headed by newly elected Governor Jimmie Davis, the state passes a law mandating the arrest and jailing of any federal marshal or judge who assisted in integration efforts. Representative Wellborn Jack of Caddo Parish, speaking on the floor of the legislature in favor of such laws, asked his colleagues: "The white man stole this country from the red man and is the white man going to be a big damn fool and give it to the Black man?" (Medley, "Two, Four, Six, Eight...")

1959–1960

Dryades Street Boycotts are organized by Consumers' League with leadership from numerous individuals and organizations, including **Rev. Avery Alexander, Dr. Raymond Floyd**, and **Dr. Henry Mitchell**. Many youth activists from the **Congress of Racial Equality** (CORE) and other organizations started their activism in these boycotts, including **Oretha Castle Haley**, for whom the portion of Dryades St. where the protests occurred is now named. Oretha Castle first worked with fellow youth leaders and CORE members **Rudy Lombard** and **Jerome Smith** on the picket lines of the Dryades St. Boycotts. Attorneys **Lolis Elie** and **Ernest "Dutch" Morial** (later the city's first black mayor) provided free legal counsel for the Consumers' League.

1959–1961

Liberal whites in New Orleans form **Save Our Schools**, an organization dedicated to integrating the public schools and keeping them open and to changing white opinions about civil rights. **Ann Duglos**, who was also active in the **League of Women Voters**, helped form Save Our School at the urging of integration activists **Rosa Keller** and **Gladys Cahn**.

1960

1960

Robert Collins, Nils Douglass, and **Lolis Elie** commit their new law firm to providing legal representation for CORE activists, working first on *Lombard vs. Louisiana,* the McCrory's sit-in case. They remain the major firm representing civil rights activists throughout the 1960's.

1960

Judge J. Skelly Wright orders the Orleans Parish School Board to produce a desegregation schedule.

1960

McDonogh # 19 Elementary School, one of the two desegregated White schools under Judge Skelly Wrights' court order, was completely boycotted by Whites by the end of the first week of desegregation, although only three Black students had been admitted. The pace of White flight quickened during the next three decades. By 1993, Black students represented 93 percent of the student body.

November 10, 1960

Judge J. Skelly Wright issues a restraining order against a Louisiana State Legislative Committee that came to New Orleans to take over the New Orleans Public Schools and halt the desegregation plan. Judge Wright had previously ordered the New Orleans Public Schools to devise a desegregation plan. When the board refused to comply, Judge Wright declared that the schools would begin desegregation on the 3rd Monday in November.

November 14, 1960

First graders **Gail Etienne, Tessie Prevost**, and **Leona Tate** integrate McDonogh #19 Elementary School on St. Claude Ave., and on the same day, across the Industrial Canal, **Ruby Bridges** becomes the first black child to integrate William Frantz Elementary.

1960

Oretha Castle (who would later be known as Oretha Castle Haley after she married fellow civil rights activist Richard Haley) became involved in activism when she joined the Consumer League's Dryades St. Boycotts while she was a student at Southern University in New Orleans and a worker at Hotel Dieu Hospital. Castle emerged as a founding leader of the **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)**, which started in 1960 and would go on to take lead in direct action and civil disobedience work in New Orleans' 1960's civil rights movement. Oretha Castle actively recruited other young people to CORE, including her sister Doris Castle. In addition to her protest activities, Oretha Castle participated in the **Citizens' Committee**, a coalition of black organizations represented by Lolis Elie and Revius Ortique in negotiations with white merchants and political leaders to end segregation. As an adult Oretha Castle Haley continued as an activist for social justice and civil rights, particularly in the areas of health care and education.

September, 1960

After forming earlier in the year in meetings at the **Dryades St. YMCA,** the local chapter of the **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE),** carries out the first sit-in of the era in New Orleans at the Rampart Street Woolworth's lunch counter. The interracial arrestees were all under 22 years of age and included former Southern University students **Jerome Smith** and **Ruth D'Aspenze**; Tulane students **William Harrell** and **Hugh Murray**; Xavier student **Joyce Taylor**; LSUNO (now UNO) student **William Harper**; and Dillard University student **Archie Allen**. The day after the arrests, in a show of support and solidarity, the local **NAACP Youth Council** picketed in defense of the CORE activists. **St. James A. M. E. Church** donated funds from a special offering to support the CORE activists. Four days after the Woolworth's sit-ins and arrests, four CORE members sat in at McCrory's lunch counter on Canal St. One of the arrestees, local CORE chairperson **Rudy Lombard,** refused bond and gave the following statement: "The issue is clear. Segregation is morally wrong. We must oppose it if we are to live with ourselves."

1961

1961

Coordinating Council of Greater New Orleans (CCGNO) formed as a federation of black organizations to work on voter registration and to alert federal government to voting rights violations in New Orleans.

Summer, 1961

New Orleans **CORE members join the Freedom Rides** in Alabama and Mississippi after many of the initial Freedom Riders end up severely beaten and in jail. **Jerome Smith, Julia Aaron, Sandra Nixon** (SUNO sophomore at time), and **Doris Castle** (17 years old at the time) all refused bail and served 120-day sentences in Mississippi's notorious Parchman Prison and Hinds County Jail. These young people slept on concrete floors and endured other harsh and brutal treatment during their imprisonment. (Medley Nov, 1988)

December, 1961

Upon their release from prison, the **New Orleans CORE Freedom Riders** issue the following statement: "We feel that we must obey the moral dictates of our conscience, thus, we are impelled to denounce and destroy segregation in all its sinister forms. We want no praise for our sacrifices. As personalities we are unimportant, but we are trying to create in our country, a way of life that is conducive to the establishment of brotherhood." (Medley Nov, 1988)

1961–1969

Bryan Poindexter v. Louisiana Financial Assistance Corporation, with A. P. Tureaud as lead attorney, successfully challenges state funding program for segregated schools.

1962

1962–1967

Frank Pania (represented by attorney A. P. Tureaud) successfully sues City of New Orleans to **end segregation at facilities with city permits to sell alcohol.**

1963

Summer, 1963

Youth Voter Crusader Corps formed. This youth arm of the CCGNO, organized with the assistance of **Virginia Collins**, involved more than 300 high school and college students in door-to-door voter registration, resulting in over 1,000 blacks attempting to register to vote by October, 1963. "Less than 350 people were able to register: black high school and college graduates were repeatedly rejected." CCGNO picketed City Hall over the blockage of these citizens trying to register to vote. Collins and many others were arrested more than once as part of these protests.

October, 1963

Police, acting under the authority of the Louisiana Joint Legislative Committee of UnAmerican Activities, arrest **James Dombrowski**, executive director of **Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF)**, and lawyers **Ben Smith** and **Bruce Waltzer**. Smith and Waltzer were arrested at an integrated meeting, sponsored by the **National Lawyers' Guild**, to plan legal defense for Freedom Summer 1964 activities. Segregationist Mississippi Senator James Eastland used his power as chairman of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee to assist in these raids. Papers confiscated in the raid of New Orleans SCEF offices ended up in Mississippi in the possession of Sen. Eastland for use in his subcommittee. Understanding that similar attacks were being carried out against them, the member organizations of the **Coordinating Council of Greater New Orleans** officially protested the police raids on local SCEF offices—where **Virginia Collins** worked. Joining the integrated public protests were the **Louisiana Civil Liberties Union**, the **Rabbinical Council of New Orleans**, and the **First Unitarian Church**.

1964

January, 1964

Orleans Parish Grand Jury indicts Dombrowski, Smith, and Waltzer for their memberships in SCEF and National Lawyers Guild.

1965

April 29, 1965

U. S. Supreme Court rules in favor of Dombrowski and his colleagues in *Dombrowski vs. Pfister*, which charged that the state of Louisiana was violating its citizens' First Amendment rights and the U. S. Constitution and using the state's power and harassment tactics to prevent citizens from working to assert and protect Constitutional rights of black citizens. The three-judge panel from the Federal District Court ruled against the Dombrowski side. In a dissenting opinion in that decision, however, federal district judge **John Minor Wisdom** saw his colleagues' decision as a fundamental attack on the U. S. Constitutional system; Wisdom claimed that the central issue in the case was to determine if the federal courts were obliged "to determine whether a state court proceeding is or is not a disguised effort to maintain the State's unyielding policy of segregation at the expense of the individual citizen's federally guaranteed rights and freedoms."

1967

1967

New Orleans voters reject tax increases to support public schools from 1967-1980, representing 13 years of stagnating local revenues to supplement state funding. Disinvestment in New Orleans public schools continues over the years as a major hindrance to school improvement.

The graduation rate of White students in Louisiana is 68 percent compared to a 42 percent graduation rate for Black students. However, this Black graduation rate is three times greater than it had been only a decade earlier in 1957. Black student promotion and graduation rates were likely improved by the support of Black teachers, who also rose to the proportionate 36 percent in 1967.

1969

April 1969

SUNO students take over school administration demanding improvements in the school.

1970

PART FIVE: The Long Struggle for Civil Rights

Civil Rights Activism in New Orleans

Teacher Fired for Promoting Social Equality

Brittany Thompson

On May 31, 1923, James Fortier and his fellow school board members all stared down at James F. Browne standing in the middle of the floor. They had just finished listening to Browne's argument for social equality of the races. One statement stuck in their minds: "The fact of being white or black [is] merely an artificial distinction."

Fortier, a strong supporter of segregation, wanted to make sure Browne did not remain a teacher at McDonogh 35 High School. The other board members had arrived at the meeting willing to let him remain in the classroom, if he agreed to no longer speak out for social equality. But Browne had to stand up for his beliefs.

How did Browne get in this predicament? He had started a newspaper, *the New Orleans Bulletin*, that argued against the Jim Crow laws of his city and state. In one issue, he argued, "social equality is freeborn, recognizing no artificial distinction and lives wherever Christ is found."

Fortier apparently got a hold of this newspaper, suspended Browne from his teaching job, and wanted to hear what the teacher/activist had to say.

In private, after the hearing and away from James Browne's ears, the board members all agreed with Fortier that "such utterances as Browne has made to persons easily led and deluded would foment trouble of a most serious nature." They voted unanimously to fire him.

This vote was supposed to put fear into the black teachers and convince them that white teachers were superior. But in the next decade the black teachers had formed a union (American Federation of Teachers Local 527) and formed an organization with fellow community members to demand that black teachers be paid the same as white teachers.

IMAGINED CONVERSATION WITH VERONICA HILL: Charter Member of AFT Local 527

Maria Hernandez

Excuse me. Are you Mrs. Hill?

Yes, I'm Mrs. Hill.

Are you Mrs. Veronica Hill?

What did I just say child? Yes, I'm Veronica Hill.

I'm sorry I was just trying to make sure that you are the right person.

What am I the right person for and who are you?

My name is Maria Hernandez, and I just wanted to know if the rumors were true?

If what rumors are true?

That you broke into a school board meeting back in 1937.

That's a long story that I'm willing to tell if you're willing to listen.

Oh, am I willing to listen!

You better come sit down by me, because you'll be here for a while.

Is it okay that I sit here? And can I ask a few questions as you go?

You can sit where ever you want and ask as many questions as you want as long as you're listening.

You don't have to worry about that.

So you know that we broke into the school board meeting, but do you know the history behind that one day.

What history? I thought that you were just acting on a heat of the moment kind of thing like me and my friends usually do.

Well it was something like that, but we never planned to break into the meeting. We just wanted to give them a petition signed by both black and white teachers demanding that whenever white teachers get a pay raise black teachers would get a raise too.

So what you're saying is that white teachers were actually on your side?

As strange as it sounds, yes many of them were on our side on that issue. Some of them even came with us to the school board meeting.

So how did you decide to break into the meeting?

As I said before we just wanted to give them the petition, but when we got there the doors were locked. That's when some one noticed that the iron steps of the fire escape were low enough to climb.

Did you have to break a window to get in or was it open?

Actually, neither—the janitor opened the window for us.

When you got into the building, did you make a big commotion and get arrested or something like that?

All we did was push the petition under the door in the room where they were meeting.

Did you ever get any results to your petition?

The very next day.

Really? What happened?

The policy was passed that every time white teachers got a pay raise, black teachers would get the same pay raise.

So what you're saying is that black and white teachers were getting paid equal salaries?

No, child. You're not listening. The salaries stayed very unequal, but if a two percent pay raise was given to white teachers, black teachers got it too.

Sounds like you got what you wanted.

You think?

Well, you got the raise that you demanded in the petition.

Yes, you're right. But we knew we needed more. That was just the start of forming our own union and demanding equal pay. But that's a story for another day.

Can I come by tomorrow to hear it?

You have a little pushiness to you, don't you?

I've got a lot to learn.

Yes. Come by tomorrow and I'll tell you about Local 527, Joseph McKelpin, A. P. Tureaud, and all of that.

Thank you.

THE FIGHT FOR TEACHER RIGHTS IS A LONG SERIES OF CONNECTED EVENTS: Railroad Track Series 23

Maria Hernandez

In 1938 colored teachers banded together in New Orleans to send a petition to the school board demanding equal pay for both black and white teachers, but it was ignored.

In 1939 they sent for Thurgood Marshall. At his recommendation they formed the New Orleans Citizens Committee for Equalizing Educational Opportunities.

On June 14, 1941 after the community and teachers were organized, A.P. Tureaud filed a lawsuit that was supported by the community. The plaintiff was a black teacher named Joseph Mckelpin

In 1948 the Louisiana legislature passed a law of minimum salary schedule for public school teachers with no disparity between black and white teachers' pay.

As a result of the community and teachers working together, a series of lawsuits challenged Jim Crow in the local school system throughout the 1950's and 1960's. Those were the steps taken in New Orleans leading up to and following *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. Once you band people together, they can't be stopped.

NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM: A History of Struggle Against Racial Discrimination

Wesley Alexander

Public school education during the Jim Crow era was heavily impacted by the oppressive power whites inflicted onto blacks. between blacks and whites. The vision of white superiority and black inferiority influenced the attitudes, regulations, and salaries aimed at teachers in New Orleans. Challenging the authority (the school board) was not easy, partly because convincing its members to reduce their racial tension towards blacks was not accepted nor acknowledged as a key factor in the discrimination of public school education. However, blacks, alongside some whites who felt passionate about education, fought for change.

The problems that blacks faced in education during the Jim Crow era in New Orleans still persist today. The voices of students and teachers are still left unheard and unacknowledged. One of the problems that we wish to voice is the taking over of public schools in New Orleans due to the influx of charter schools. The establishment of charter schools in New Orleans was not publicly done. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the school performance scores that would place public schools in New Orleans into the state-run Recovery School District were raised, allowing them to be easily taken over and chartered. My classmates and I at McMain were not aware that our education was being completely altered by policies praised by Jindal and other decision-makers in politics. We were not aware that there are teachers who are fighting to have their voices heard in hopes of saving our schools. The future of public schools in New Orleans still does not look bright at all. I am afraid because I would hate to see more teachers who are passionate about teaching leave their profession out of complete frustration of being one day replaced by people who are sometimes bargained into teaching as ways of paying off their debts. Chapter 7, "Challenging Authority," of *A Will of Her Own: Sarah Towles Reed and the Pursuit of Democracy in Southern Public Education,* strikes me because the struggle of students and teachers being rightfully acknowledged that exists today is not something new; it has been confronted before by large crowds of people, black and white, who were willing to publicize that the abuse of power wielded by the armed forces, political leaders, and the school board was unjust. This chapter should be closely read if the present struggle can ever be won.

Liberals, people who promote the expansion of free thought and creativity in education, were labeled as evil "communists" post-WWI and much into the 1930s. Many leaders and organizations sought to remove Communism from schools across the United States because they feared that Communism would influence young students to think unconventionally. In other words, the fear of a child coming to see what was actually taking place before him and where he stands in this society was not something people who opposed liberality thought should take place in schools. Those teachers who resisted organizations that tried to remove them from schools joined forces by establishing unions to protect each other.

Unfortunately, teachers had families and needed their jobs. The Red Scare discouraged several teachers from taking a stand against red-baiters. Chapter 7 explains that the implementation of loyalty oaths began in schools as early as 1919, starting with New York. (Parr 118) According to the chapter, "hundreds of teachers refused" to sign these oaths. Signing these oaths meant that they were giving up their freedoms, which were granted by the Constitution. As a result of teacher resistance, teachers were under surveillance and harassed based on suspicion of being Communist. The fear of Communism was projected by the political leaders of this country. Martin Dies, a former Congressmen, argued that the federal government contained "hundreds of left-wingers and radicals who do not believe in our system of private enterprise." (Parr 119) Dies' statement was not factual and could not be immediately justified. Yet, his opinion was still publicized and encouraged citizens to believe that Communism was a threat to their civilization.

Opposition to Communism gradually began to increase in education. "Some states prohibited Communists from teaching in the public schools; others banned teacher's membership in supposedly subversive organizations." (Parr120) This statement illustrates that job discrimination suddenly became legal due to the aspects of WWII and the budding Cold War propagated by politics and the media. In addition to job discrimination, the words of the Constitution were ignored. Freedom of speech was not granted to teachers, if they spoke of the slightest thing to which patriots objected. I still cannot understand why there was so much hatred towards Communism in America. Communists did not align themselves with terrorists to destroy this country. Based on the information presented in this chapter, "Communists put forward a list of demands including unemployment relief, the right of workers to organize, pay for black teachers, and equal treatment of blacks." Communists were human beings who demanded equal rights. How could their demands be characterized as "evil?" I assume that the hatred towards Communism was partly due to the heavy involvement of the black community. Parr states that "Parents of Eleanor McMain High School . . . were particularly upset that approximately two hundred blacks had attended the talk . . . to discuss economic issues." Whites clearly did not approve of the organization of blacks and wished to disable them by removing them from discussions of serious matters that pertained to the entire city of New Orleans. The decision made by School Board President Schaumberg to only allow blacks to lecture at black schools was a racist decision. Therefore, it was also unjust. Why was the influence of racism in America not being investigated instead? Some people who were high on the political ladder in New Orleans voiced their concerns about the School Board President's decision. Emily Blanchard, a member of the New Orleans Council of Parents and Teachers, went as far as describing the school board as "gone Facist." I am aware that Facism is related to a society controlled completely by one dictator. Decisions such as the School Board President's were not rightfully challenged nor

agreed on. This abuse of power displayed should be associated with Facism. No other voice was taken into consideration.

The power of the "patriotic" leaders who opposed Communism in public schools was overbearing. Communists tried to keep Reserve Office Training Corps (ROTC) out of high schools, but they were accused of attempting to "make this country defenseless in case of a national emergency." (Parr 122) The "patriotic" leaders tried to convince the public to believe that allowing the army to enter schools, pulling more young adults into war, was beneficial as far as assuring the safety of the country. "Communists" were aware that people were dying in war because of causes that did not make any sense. Yet, the rejection of ROTC in schools was met with ferocity by people such as former Fortier Principal, John Conniff. Because of Sarah T. Reed's and her sister, Roberta's, affiliation with unions that disapproved of ROTC in schools, John Conniff removed Roberta from Fortier without any reasonable explanation. After giving the school board a good fight, Towles was still sent downtown to teach working class students. The crime that Reed explained was that Conniff never "visited any of her classes, and she had received no explanation for her sudden move." (131)

The principal's decision to move Towles was improperly and immorally executed. Towles served faithfully as a teacher for nearly 30 years, and in return she was rewarded for evident loyalty by being moved across the city because of her affiliation with unions. The actions taken against Towles and Reed by Conniff and the school board were held as a warning to other teachers who were not content with their conditions in the public schools. Manfred Willmer associated Conniff's decision to remove Towles from Fortier with Towles' disapproval of his belief that ROTC should be in their school. As a result, he was easily able to remove Towles by linking her disapproval to the ideas expressed by Communism. Conniff spoke in a vague, convincing language, which expressed that Communism was a threat to Fortier. He said, "the venomous Hydra-head monster, Communism, wherever and whenever it lifts its hideous head to the light of day." People personified Communism and shaped it into a threat to society. When asked why they go to war, soldiers may have merely said, "to fight Communism!" This dissimulation used to brainwash citizens into believing that people such as Reed or Towles harmed the educational system was completely wrong. Conniff obviously had a "bone to pick" with Towles because of her feelings towards ROTC in schools. Parr's chapter says, "One thing it apparently did not mean, as far as Conniff was concerned, was allegiance to a labor union that opposed military training for high school boys and consistently challenged the authority of men in power." I sensed a bit of misogyny in this statement because apparently the voice of women who opposed the presence of the military in schools were not rightfully acknowledged and led to punishment as well. "In a tenure system, it pointed out, transfer was the only means whereby a principal or board could discipline its teachers," and since Reed did note that Conniff never visited Towles' classroom, he obviously removed her from his school because of a personal dissatisfaction.

Frank J. Stitch's statement, "Inasmuch as we are now not at war, I am not aware of the fact that we have any enemies and in any event I do not know what a domestic enemy is," supports my beliefs. Communists were not trying to threaten the country. Communists simply wanted freedom. Violence was inflicted by the armed and police force – not Communists. Why were Communists the ones branded with the insidious characteristics? For example, "A CIO-organized strike by truck drivers in 1938 culminated in violence, massive

arrests of picketers, and more police raids on CIO headquarters." (Parr 125) The only war that was truly taking place was in our country. The enemy came to be the suspicious citizens of America. The presence of Negroes in these strikes was not appreciated by whites. The police superintendent stated that the "agitators" from San Francisco who were sent to "agitate among the Negros and get them to join the CIO . . . would be banished from the city." This man spoke of blacks as if we should be controlled and prohibited to align ourselves with people who supported our demands that were never acknowledged. Anti-Communism was not a route blacks wished to take because patriots were clearly not meant to be black. Resistance is a part of my people's history.

When I think of the issues that surround education today, I have no choice but to relate to this article. New Orleans was a breeding place for strikes and revolts. If those who are fighting for equality in New Orleans today are not aware of this, then they need to be. To know that New Orleans was "where the most incidents of anti-labor violence took place in 1937" inspires me. Yes, I am angered that policemen took illegal measures such as "raids and seizures without warrants, arrests without booking prisoners," but to know that the resistance of people, black and white, who were in union with each other gained the attention of the authority, media, and the political leaders means that these movements were powerful. We can use the strikes of past leaders as models for our own cause. Blacks, whites, Latinos, Asians, young, and old teaming up together to make a difference can be the first step we take towards the merging of our communities. The need for communities is one of the many things we discuss in Students at the Center. SAC is a program that allows people, young and old, of the community to come together as one by voicing what we feel is harming our community through the writings we produce. My English teacher is one of the three co-founders of SAC. Should my teacher be fired because he teaches similar to Sarah T. Reed? A principal ignorantly characterized Reed's teaching as "spending too much class time discussing current problems," but figuring out ways to combine what goes on outside the classroom to what goes on inside it is a skill exemplified by experienced teachers. As a result of Reed's teachings, Fortier's principal said that the pupils became dissatisfied with other classrooms at the school. Maybe the pupils became dissatisfied because they came to see something about what was taking place in Reed's classroom that needed to be done in other classrooms. My classmates and I are dissatisfied with our education as well. Because of radical teachers such as Mr. Randels, we are angered that many of the teachers in our school are not as passionate as he is nor do they wish to truly educate us. We too summoned the desire to have our voices heard.

Some teachers of my high school argue that their desire to teach has diminished because of the different policies they must now follow that interrupt their teaching. However, they should understand that we students are just as frustrated as they are. The abuse of power wielded by the superintendent who demoted Reed's sister, disbanded blacks from lecturing in schools, and created a feeling of inferiority is still being utilized by new decision-makers. We must be the difference. Our voice has to be heard. A selection from *Crescent City Schools* identifies how black leaders and educators took historical stands in the early 1900s in New Orleans. Although they denied their perspective of white supremacy, the school board was not afraid to publicize their deep hatred towards blacks. For example, Harry Knickerbocker and James Brennan "tried to win board support for replacing black teachers with white ones." (Devore and Logsdon, 206.) Why should black teachers be replaced with white teachers? Did whites perceive blacks to be uneducated, inferior to them? A similar event

in the present history of New Orleans occurred that resulted in the removal of many black, veteran teachers who served faithfully as a part of the New Orleans Public School System. They were not fired because they could not teach. Again, almost identical to John Conniff's decision, teachers were fired without any reasonable explanation. The author of *Crescent City Schools* notes that "their motives remained unclear." Basically, Harry Knickerbocker and James Brennan had no accurate reason to wipe out the entire presence of black teachers in public schools. In 1910, attempts were made to erase black teachers, which caught the attention of black leaders who united together to confront the social issues that rose before them. After a successful protest led by Reverend Henderson Dunn, "The board reversed itself and hired black teachers." Unity played a major role in the black community even before the Civil Rights Movement actually began to emerge. It makes me proud to know that blacks in New Orleans took a stand as early as the Jim Crow era. As ways of countering the all-white teachers in public schools, blacks decided that public schools should be staffed with all black teachers. Leaders such as Reverend Elijah Jones were aware of the difference in views shared by whites and blacks. The presence of whites in public schools populated by black children was harmful. The education these children would have received may not have been equal because whites believed that blacks were less than them. After all, blacks were not originally viewed as a whole being according to the Constitution. Tension between blacks and whites in the public school education system led to a battle that was more than about discrimination; it was about race.

Receiving an education was wrongfully based on race. According to Devore and Logsdon, "Black college students had few options in most professions and consequently, the majority of them went into teaching." The career of a teacher was consequential because they faced a great deal of discrimination and limitations. Unlike white teachers, blacks did not always have a training program. Therefore, blacks entered the educational environment unprepared to teach their students. Tulane University only cooperated with white teachers to improve their teaching skills. Today, according to an article, "a diversity deficit," written by Jessica Appelbaum and Jon Berman, only 8 percent of Tulane's population represented black students during the 2010-2011 school year. During the Jim Crow era, black teachers did not easily accept their absence in Tulane University as a disadvantage. "In 1915 the Reverend Mr. Dunn and the Reverend Mr. Jones led a successful campaign to establish a summer normal program for blacks." (Devore and Logsdon 206.) It strikes me that blacks were determined enough to construct strikes and campaigns within the walls of the church. Church served a different purpose than it does today. In addition to worship, the preacher preached about resistance. Campaigns organized by members of the church were successful, earning blacks a school board contribution of up to $500. (Devore and Logsdon 207) Although black teachers were now eligible to provide a quality education to their students, they were still not rightfully paid. For example, in 1920, "a first-year white teacher earned eighty dollars a month; a black teacher with the same qualifications and experience earned seventy dollars." (Devore and Logsdon 207) One cannot convince me to believe that this unbalanced distribution of pay was due to anything but race.

Thurgood Marshall, a well known leader of the Civil Rights movement, traveled to New Orleans to fight for the rights of blacks in education. Thurgood Marshall is one of the most well-known blacks who was active in gaining blacks civil rights. Why is his involvement in my city not discussed in my history class? Reading *Crescent City Schools* has given me a sense of pride in the history of

my city because our determination to demolish white supremacy gained the attention of well-known black leaders. The names of people who petitioned for the school board to acknowledge their reduced pay in New Orleans should be known in my history books too. They contributed to the progress of equality for black teachers in New Orleans. Educators such as James F. Browne were not afraid to voice what his fellow teachers were afraid to say. He described his civic philosophy to the school board as "that social equality is freeborn, recognizing no artificial distinction and lives whenever Christ is found." The school board responded to his statement negatively. Browne was suspended until summoned to explain the meaning of his strong statement. The only way Browne could be reinstated was if he would submit to authority and accept his suppressed status in society. Browne refused to please the school board. He explained to them that he traveled to foreign countries and "Race was never a factor" but an "artificial distinction." His statement reminds me of the different perceptions of race discussed in James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin infers that a black soldier may have felt freer on the grounds of foreign land than he did in America. As expected, out of sheer ignorance the school board dismissed Browne's accusation of white supremacy and terminated him from his career as a teacher. Yes, he was terminated, but he was not terminated because he could not teach. The bold position Browne took should be used as a model for teachers, students, and prominent black leaders in New Orleans, who are not afraid to take a stand no matter the consequence.

The school board continued to poorly approach the issue of salary. However, Thurgood Marshall's presence allowed the issue to be brought forth. He said that the actions of the school board were "completely without foundation." If there was no foundation, then what possibly contributed to their dismissal of the voice of blacks? The answer is quite clear. Thurgood Marshall convinced Judge Wayne Borah to deny the school board's motion to dismiss the salary issue. The school board attempted to silence the complaints of black educators and leaders by proposing limited and gradually implemented offers. Neither Thurgood Marshall nor blacks agreed with the plan to raise the salary of black teachers by twenty percent each year for five years. In my opinion, that does not make any sense at all. Although the salary of black teachers would increase, white teachers would still be paid higher than them. Marshall described the proposal in this way, "I think the plan submitted by the school board stinks. In the first place it takes too long..." After a second offer, a "three-year plan of gradual salary increases" was still dismissed by Thurgood Marshall. The concept of the offer remained the same. Black teachers were still paid less than white teachers. Finally, on September 1, 1942, an agreement was made that the black teachers and Marshall agreed to.

After the hard-fought fight, a study was conducted to investigate education in black public schools. Blacks feared this investigation because they were aware of the racial tactics used by the school board to disable them and their rights. For example, the author says, "Black leaders immediately voiced fears that Alonzo Grace and his staff, who were to make the study, would minimize the problems in the city's black schools, or worse, ignore black education altogether." (Devore and Logsdon 212) If a study was to be conducted, blacks wanted it to be undertaken fairly and accurately. The study showed that "the school system had continuously failed to meet the needs of the black community." The condition of the schools was very poor and barely inhabitable. The conditions are described as "insufficient light, and some of the floors were in bad condition." This description of Lockett School enables me to reflect on the poor conditions of my "historical school."

My school, built in the 1930's, has occasional leaks, broken windows, moldy chalk boards, etc. My school was supposed to be "fixed" for quite some time now, and still the demands of the students and teachers for a better educational facility were never met. Blacks feared that the survey would minimize the conditions of public schools with ignorant statements such as "so much better than most of the other colored schools that, with all its shortcomings, it seems good in comparison." Although whites performed at similar rates to blacks back then, today, the test scores between black and white schools vary dramatically.

In 1934, seventy-five percent of the students who entered eighth grade left school without graduating. I still cannot consume this fact as a part of history. You mean to tell me that my grandmother and other ancestors were not granted an equal education because of the color of their skin? The poor conditions of their schools may have practically driven them out of education. And of course, the fact that before 1917 there was no public high school for blacks and no second black public high school until 1942 also explains the low graduation. My ancestors weren't incapable; they were denied access. After all, "leaky walls and uneven floors" can be very distracting. The researchers said, "without question, these pupils have not been given practice in taking objective tests or in working at top speed for periods as long as forty minutes." In my physics class, my classmates and I can barely keep our eyes on our physics teacher, Ms. Allen, because we are not accustomed to being rightfully taught. Conversing with an attentive teacher who's willing to answer our questions is sadly foreign to us. Today, black teachers should realize that past teachers fought to be trained so that their students could excel. I encourage this because the vision of education has remarkably changed. Some teachers do not even bother to get out of their seats for forty minutes. The desire to teach and the passion to learn is slowly fading away with the past.

When I read statements that describe the investigation of public schools such as, "The report became a source of reference rather than a blueprint for action," I wonder how different education will be in the next 5-10 years. Will the conditions of public schools continue to be ignored? How long will teachers and students fight to have their voices heard and acknowledged? Will the voices of teachers, students, and some administrators be left unheard? Will all attempts of resisting authority suddenly come to a halt? I know that my resistance will never die. I know that the resistance of several public school teachers will not die. Yet, the resistance of some will. An educated black man I once viewed as a mentor insisted, "You should major in English and join Teach for America." I responded fearfully, "Why should I join them?" I knew that joining them would mean that I too would be a part of the mass crowd of overpaid, inexperienced teachers who unknowingly strip veteran teachers of the jobs they once held in their now chartered schools. He appears to have already given up holding onto the resistance summoned in the past. He told me, "Why not join them? Soon, there will be no public school system."

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A. P. Tureaud

Tiffany Morgan

Everybody has heard of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Harriet Tubman. But what about the small people in the background who did big things? No great thing happens without a lot of small people. We should all remember that—especially students who think they can't change things.

One person who is not as well known as he should be is Alexander Pierre Tureaud. He does have a street named after him and a statue right where the street runs into St. Bernard Ave., between Claiborne and N. Galvez. People who drive by that statue should know that A. P. Tureaud was a well-read man who was from New Orleans. He received a law degree from Howard University in 1925. After college, he returned to New Orleans and became an attorney for the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He encouraged many blacks to register and vote.

In addition to all the small things, Tureaud is famous for the 1941 case, *McKelpin v. the Board of Education*. This successful suit forced the school board to pay black teachers the same salary it paid white teachers. This event may not be as famous as Rosa Parks' refusal to sit or Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. But it probably helped black professionals earn the sort of living that pushed them to greater activism and more equal treatment. Tureaud also fought the local school board in 1949. That case, *Bush v. Board of Education,* eventually led to the desegregation of the New Orleans public school system.

These are some of the small steps that were really big and necessary. We don't hear much about these cases today. We should keep digging deeper. There's a long chain of small actions that made the strength of freedom. Without Tureaud's work, where would someone else we never heard of, like Dr. Raphael Cassimere, be in his freedom fight? Dr. Cassimere played his own big, small part in the movement to desegregate buses. As a young boy riding the bus, he decided to turn around an insulting sign that ordered blacks to the back of the bus. He did not want to see the words, "For Colored Patrons Only." From here he became more and more of an activist, leading the youth chapter of the New Orleans NAACP during the integration demonstrations of the 1960's.

Let's learn about and remember all these people. And take our own big, small steps.

A. P. TUREAUD: The Street, The Man, and the Murders

Tiffany Shelling

My mother's side of the family were all raised in the seventh ward. Beginning with her older sister, Sabrina, attending Valena C. Jones became a birthright for the Dean family. Valena C. Jones was one of the first public schools built in New Orleans. Auntie Sabrina, the mother of five boys, remained in the seventh ward all of her life. About five years ago, she moved from Pauger St. to the block of N. Tonti and A. P. Tureaud. Anyone who is familiar with this area has seen the statue of A. P. Tureaud. I have always been interested in knowing exactly what he contributed to New Orleans.

A. P. Tureaud was one of the lawyers for the New Orleans Branch of the NAACP. In 1931, he was replaced by a white attorney. Later that year, he was elected President of the Executive Committee and helped change the association to be much more aggressive in the fight for civil rights. He soon became a well-rounded attorney who worked on many cases against the school board, fighting for things such as equal facilities for black school children and equal pay for black teachers. He contributed a lot to the community and for black teachers in New Orleans.

I bet the families of many of the people who were murdered on this block of A. P. Tureaud didn't know the history behind his name. My Auntie Sabrina is one of these people. Her youngest son, Corey, was murdered two weeks after they moved into the house. There were still moving boxes in the corners of the house that were not opened yet. My cousin's murder made me realize how fully this block of A. P. Tureaud had become a place full of crime. And Corey's death widened my family's eyes to much of the crime in New Orleans. We all wondered could the same guy who killed Corey be the same guy who's killing all of the other people.

How does a man who fought for equality in New Orleans become the namesake for a place infested with crime? His actions were commemorated by an honorary statue and street name. I speak of A. P. Tureaud's background as if it made any difference to today's generation. The people of New Orleans don't care what contributions A. P. Tureaud made to this city, despite how major they are.

J. R. M.

Stephen Gladney

Today I learned an interesting fact about Jelly Roll Morton. I am always interested in reading about jazz musicians, especially because I am an 8th grade public school student in New Orleans who is working to become a jazz musician. So while reading an essay from *The Long Ride*, a book written by New Orleans Public School students who are participating in the Students at the Center writing program, a section on Jelly Roll Morton caught my eye. This New Orleans jazz composer and pianist had a long campaign against A.S.C.A.P. (the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers). He believed that this organization was being racist, for in 1934 it would not let him join, and there were only two black musicians among its 200 charter members. Jelly Roll wanted to join so he could claim his royalties that were due to him because his music was being played on the radio without his consent. But Morton died in 1940, a few months before his case was finally brought to court.

Twenty years later, a federal court forced A.S.C.A.P. to revise its practices, pushing the organization closer to the racial justice that Morton had struggled for.

After reading this, I thought a lot about this world and how jazz musicians fit in and how most people think about them. From what I can tell, many people think that jazz musicians are malevolent drug addicts who mistreat women. I hear these comments and even know where some of it comes from. But I also know there's much more to jazz musicians than the bad things some of them may have done and the great music they've created. I recently read a book that shows all these different complexities: *So What*, a biography of trumpeter Miles Davis that was written by John Szwed. I myself am a jazz musician, and I believe that those people need to see that jazz musicians are more than the negative stereotypes. These musicians are intelligent men and women who strive to master their craft. And they all make history.

So I came up with an idea that may solve this stereotyped classification of jazz musicians. If there were a music education class that could be added on to the band class that is already in public schools, the class could teach young students how their favorite musicians and recording artists are making history, and how they are contributing to making this world a more multi-racial place. My friends and I would like to read and study more about people who are like us—and like we want to be.

Shakespeare Park

Christopher Burton

"...The big difference between you and me in this fight for rights is that I am not afraid to die for a principle and you are."

Mr. Ernest Wright was concluding his speech. His face showed anger as he faced 2,000 people from the podium stand in the center of Shakespeare Park. The air was charged as the people started realizing what Mr. Wright had just said. Many showed disapproval and resentment because he voiced the truth of the majority of the people listening.

Ernest Wright, being a good speaker, did not pause for comment but kept going to drive his nail deeper and deeper. "I am not afraid to go to jail for a principle and you are. What we need is 10,000 unafraid men as members with their money paid who are unafraid to present themselves for jobs to which they are entitled. We can't get anywhere by being afraid. Let's stand in our own shoe leather. Walk ye like men."

Thus concluding, Mr. Wright lowered the loud speaker to chest level and looked over the crowd. His last statement settled into the ears of the gathered crowd. Then there was applause.

The applause resonated through time 64 years to my ears as I stood on the soft grass of Shakespeare Park. I felt the brisk morning air chilling my bones, a reminder of the forgotten and unknown organizers and people. And the park on Sunday empty of all activity.

I AM A DOMESTIC: Naomi Ward

Neika Nicholson

I was glad to see that she had borrowed a book from the library. I thought once she was into her book this woman whose house I clean and whose children I tend would leave me alone. I was wrong. She didn't leave me alone but kept harassing me. She had me clean up the living room. I was dusting the bookcase when I found the book.

"I see you're reading *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. What scene are you on?"

"I'm on the scene when Juliet and Romeo get married in Friar Laurence's cell. How do you know about *Romeo and Juliet?"* asked Mrs. Smith.

"I read it last year, and I really enjoyed it," I replied, glad for some form of conversation other than receiving orders.

Mrs. Smith came from her room into the living room with a surprised look on her face.

"Naomi do you read?"

I looked at her as if she had no sense left in her head.

"Yes I can read."

"When did you learn how to read?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"I've been reading for years," I replied.

Then I walked into the bathroom.

"Are you reading instead of doing your chores?"

Of course I should not have expected a real conversation. In the awkward silence I wondered if jealousy caused her question. As I scrubbed the bathroom tub, I decided not to rock the boat this time. I needed my energy for other battles.

"No ma'am I do my work first. I read only in my free time," I yelled from the bathroom.

I really get tired of her aggravating ways. She's always checking up on me to make sure I'm doing my work. I'm tired of being a domestic. I'm really tired. I don't get paid enough to put up with this. At night I go to my little house and pray to the Lord for me to stick it out. It's the only way I'll get money. Dear Lord please answer my prayer. I'm tired of being a domestic. I really am.

Virginia Collins (also known as Queen Mother Dara Abubakari)

Maria Hernandez

In 1915 Virginia Young Collins was born in Plaquemines Parish just south of New Orleans. In those times they considered her family as "real radical." Her father started off as a porter-embalmer, then a rag man, and ended up as an insurance salesman. He was also a minister and admirer of Marcus Garvey. The young family strongly believed in education. As a result Collins, the eldest of fifteen children, graduated from McDonogh 35 High School and later was educated as a schoolteacher and nurse.

In 1938 Collins became involved in the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), a group of interracial southerners fighting for social, racial, and economic justice. When Collins went to the initial SCHW meeting, she was living in Iberville Parish with her husband. Collins worked as a home demonstration agent. When she visited the homes of white farmers and sharecroppers, she realized that whites were as illiterate as blacks. Through that experience she came to believe that with a higher quality education whites would begin to understand blacks and would stop believing harmful racial myths.

Collins later got involved in the educational branch of the SCHW. She then joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and many other women's organizations and community groups that promoted quality education for black children, political power through the vote, and equal access to public accommodations. One example of her organizing work during the civil rights movement is her assistance with the Youth Voter Crusader Corps. This group, organized in summer 1963 as part of the Citizens Committee of Greater New Orleans, involved more than 300 students doing door-to-door voter registration that resulted in over 1,000 blacks attempting to register to vote by October, 1963. As a parent, Collins continued her father's concern with education and organizing when she became a leader in black parent-teacher associations.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Collins changed her name to Dara Abubakari and became involved with the Republic of New Africa, for which she served as Vice President of the South. As part of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Africa, she continued the struggle for racial and economic justice that she began in her early 20's, now fighting for land and nationhood for Black people in America.

Less Than Equal

De'Yonna Booker

My grandfather sat in the large chair in his living room. His grandchildren, including me, sat around him in amazement, eager to listen to everything he said as if never told before. Every time he would tell his stories about World War II, he would start off slow as if he was hesitant to start. He would look off day dreaming. It seemed to me like the events he was telling were happening all over again. He would even start talking like Johnny, all frustrated and upset, saying:

"Karl, it's just not fair!"

"Yeah, I know Johnny. But you have to give a little in order to get," my grandfather replied.

These two World War II soldiers were friends. Training and fighting together had helped them learn how to talk to each other, to understand each other's moods. Soldier Johnathan Boure', or Johnny as he was often called, was upset because once again white soldiers would not allow black soldiers to eat with them. Lots of times they could not eat at all.

"It's just not fair. They think they're better than the rest of us. I'm fighting this war just like them," said a frustrated Johnny.

"Well you know how things work 'round here. It's nothin' new," Karl tried to explain to his upset friend.

But there was no use. Johnny already knew that what they were doing was wrong. Even though Johnny was a mulatto, who could have passed for white, he was always proud to state that he was black and did not care who knew. He was much lighter than all the other black soldiers, but he still did not want the white soldiers to treat him differently from the other black soldiers. He did not want to be treated much differently from the white soldiers, for that matter. He wanted to be treated as an equal to everyone else.

"Come on Karl, let's go," said Johnny.

"John, where are we gonna go?"

"I don't know. Let's go for a walk. Anywhere but here."

So the two soldiers began to walk. They had been walking for at least ten minutes when Johnny spotted a little girl. She was lying face down in the dirt. Johnny ran over to see if the girl was alive or not.

"Johnny, what are you doing? You could get us killed. I told you we shouldn't wander off like this."

"Karl, she's just a little girl for God's sake. She could be in trouble." Johnny yelled.

"Yeah, but she's the enemy's little girl," replied Karl.

Johnny checked for a pulse. The little girl was still living. As he lifted her head out of the dirt, he could hear her begin to cough.

"Good, that means she's still breathing. Give me your canteen," Johnny said to Karl as he reached in his pocket for his handkerchief.

Johnny wet the handkerchief with the water that was in the canteen. After he wet it, he began to wipe off the little girl's face, hands, and legs. He then gave the little girl the canteen to drink from. As the little girl got up, as if to speak, she turned around and began to run.

"Where'd she go?" asked Karl.

"I don't know," Johnny said, wondering also. Just then as the two men looked up, they saw the little girl. On the side of her, as if she were pulling him along, was a man with similar looks to hers holding Karl's canteen. As the man came to Karl and Johnny, the little girl stopped him. He began to speak, but he started off very slowly.

"Are you the men who helped my daughter?" the man questioned in his heavy accent.

"Uh, Uh, Yeah that was us," Johnny said in amazement.

"Thank you ever so much. How could I repay you?" the man asked.

"Uh, no problem at all," Karl said suspiciously.

"Are you hungry or thirsty?" the man persisted.

"Well, as a matter of fact we are, sir," Johnny said proudly.

"Follow me," the man said.

Karl and Johnny followed the man into what seemed to be a hut. There, they ate and drank as much as they could.

"Well sir, I'm sorry but we have to be going," Karl said.

As Johnny got up, he walked over to the man, shook his hand and said: "Thank you for proving we're equal."

As the two soldiers walked out the modest home, the father just smiled.

My grandfather leaned back in his big chair, looking at each of his grandchildren. He smiled, reminding me of the father in the story. We all climbed up and hugged him. He reached down to pick me up, and I kissed him on his pale skin.

Mary Church Terrell: Birth of an Activist (Inspired by a passage from Paula Giddings' *When and Where I Enter*)

Lydia Hurlston

Mary Church Terrell looked down. "I really don't look as if I'm six months pregnant." Her stomach wasn't showing as much as she thought it should at six months. But she did notice her feet were quite swollen. She started thinking of her life at 29 years old. She wasn't quite happy at where she was in it. Her father wanted her to be a gentlewoman. But Mary was not happy just being pregnant and a housewife. Mary defied the notion of being a gentlewoman. Her marriage and difficult pregnancy had her living a life of a "lady." She didn't like being in the house all day.

There was a knock at her door. She looked down, thinking twice before getting up. Her feet hurt so much. She finally decided to get up. She opened the door. The mail carrier gave her a letter postmarked from Memphis. She thanked him and closed her door. She walked back slowly to her living room and found a comfortable seat. She rested her feet on a stool. She opened the letter, excited to hear news from her hometown.

Mary started reading the letter, and in an instant she put it to her bosom. "Oh, Thomas," she cried out. " What brought this on?" She looked across the room. There it was, the silver oyster fork that Thomas had given to her on her wedding day. She read the rest of the letter. It told her how he got lynched and where. It said he was killed, because he kept his grocery store open despite threats from local whites. The whites didn't want him to stay open, because he took their business.

She planned to name her child, if it was a boy, after Thomas Moss. He helped many people by giving them jobs at his grocery store. She thought of how hard he had to fight to open the store. She wanted her child to fight just as hard for his freedom and dignity. She sat crumpled in the chair but resolved to rise up. She glanced at the oyster fork, the gift from Thomas, and made a pledge that her son's life would be a gift to his memory.

The Negro League Goes Cuban

Ashley Jones

"Look at that boy go!
Running toward second, making it safe with the slide."

"That's some star player. How'd you get him to join the league?"

The thin lips of white owners wonder, sucking on Cuban cigars, looking through the cloud-like smoke at the newly sold black boy, sliding through the haze of dust.

"I told him we were bigger, better; we can make a black hero out of him."

And with every slide home their pockets swelled. Jackie became both a trophy and a target, praised in the midst of hummed baseballs and spitballs stinging his cheek.

And with every slide home, less fortunate black men burned their gloves and caps along with the peanut and cotton candy sellers' red and white sailor caps, refreshment carts and freshly pressed white aprons. Burned them with the hopes they had of helping a league, a business made for and run by them.

Yet, he was and remains our hero. Boy I would have liked to see him play, blue cap snug on his head, black nostrils flaring under the sun, what a sight.

The real sight would have been to see Assata Shakur up there. Her afro sticking through the sides of a blue Dodgers cap, black medallion in the shape of Africa hanging loosely around her neck.

I would have loved to see some white boy spit in her face.

Would she have become a hero if she and her black panther buddies threatened to shut the stadium down, building their own, giving the peanut and the water boy a chance to regain economic status?

Or would she have been beaten and chained to a hospital bed, the way she was in 1971, simply for riding the New Jersey turnpike?

Would she have become Rookie of the Year if she hurled back balls of hate that were thrown at her head?

It's funny how some of our heroes are praised for their silent courage in the face of cruelty and racism, while others are imprisoned and never ever heard of, even though they spend their lives screaming for justice, and often times getting kicked out of the game.

PONTCHARTRAIN PARK 1955: One Woman's Story

Chakara Watson

"They are not going to take care of the property."

— General Public Sentiment in 1955, when Ms. Shirley Watson and her husband, along with many other families of African descent, purchase homes in Pontchartrain Park

"Nothing like this had been done in the country. White People didn't think black people could afford it. [But] They set records on paying mortgages."

— Rosa Keller

"We first heard about Pontchartrain Park from our good friend, Jimmy Coney, around May 1955. He told us all we needed was twenty-five dollars to hold the lot," recalls Shirley Watson, speaking on behalf of herself and her husband Eugene Watson, Jr.

Watson remembers the day she and her husband—my grandmother and grandfather—went to pay the holding fee for the lot their house would be built on. Mr. Watson didn't have the twenty-five dollars at the time, so Mr. Jimmy Coney, whom everyone knows as Uncle Jim, loaned him the money and took him down to the office, then located on Canal Street between Claiborne and Robertson.

Shirley recalls her husband being the one to choose the model of the house that only cost $10,800 with a $840 down payment. The house he chose was on Pauline Drive, the same street Uncle Jim chose. "Ours was the 6300 block, and Uncle Jim's was the 6600 block." Ms. Watson explains that her husband was the one making all the decisions and handling all the business, because she was pregnant with the couple's second child. "At the time if you didn't own a car, and you were pregnant, you didn't travel unless it was absolutely necessary."

After her husband chose the house and finished with the remaining preliminaries, he went to Commercial Credit Company, a place that his father knew well, and borrowed $500 in order to complete the $840 down payment. They already had $100 in their savings account at Hibernia Bank. With the $500, the $100 in the bank, and the weekly income from a longshoreman job, they would have the money by the end of the thirty days.

With a huge smile, Ms. Watson started to recall something she likes to brag about. "When the day came for our loan to be approved, the loan officer, Mr. Julien, whose name I'll never forget, told us that they couldn't approve the loan because we didn't have enough references." At that time they didn't consider paying rent on time, and the only credit they had and paid out was at Universal Furniture.

"My husband was very upset and was storming out of the room, because he didn't feel Mr. Julien's decision was either just or fair. I told Mr. Julien that all we wanted was to be self-sufficient and law-abiding citizens with a nice place to raise our children," says Mr. Watson. In those days, people did not want to rent to anyone if they had children, at least not in a decent home or neighborhood.

"I also told him that if my husband wanted to borrow money to buy a new Cadillac, he would approve the loan. And to me a home was a more sound reason to borrow money." Mr. Julien asked Mr. and Ms. Watson to sit down and proceed with filling out the application for approval. She happily thanked God.

Now that their house was taken care of, they had about five months to pay out the loan and be ready to assume mortgage payments that were only fifty-nine dollars a month for thirty years. Ms. Watson mentions that all of this was possible through the G. I. Bill, because her husband was a Korean War Veteran. And through the ensuing years they earned money through their two main jobs: She was a seamstress at Haspel Bros. Men's Clothing Factory, which no longer exists. Her husband was a stevedore with Waterfront Employers of New Orleans.

They moved into their new home in October of 1955. Ms. Watson was thrilled, because both her and her husband's mothers and fathers were homeowners. But she laughs softly, "That's a story in itself."

Ms. Watson recounts the moment she pulled up to inspect the finished masterpiece located in Pontchartrain Park. "Our house must have been the second smallest model in the neighborhood, but to me it was a mansion. And it was all ours. There we were, proud homeowners." In this neighborhood, that was common. They moved in with their two sons, one a year and a half and the other five months old. Incidentally, Ms. Watson's next door neighbors, Ms. Helen and Mr. George Doyle, were classmates of hers at McDonogh #35 Senior High School. Ms. Watson also recalls that another lady, Maggie, who lived across the street from her, knew her mother. Ms. Watson remembered when she was young and Maggie baby sat and played with her. Coincidentally, two other ladies who attended McDonogh #35 Senior High School with her, Rose Sims and Myrtle Woods, lived across the street from her. And her sister Audrey Shanklin stayed in the third section of Pontchartrain Park built.

Many of those struggling young families were part of the first section to be built in Pontchartrain Park while the other portions were being developed. Ms. Watson remembers that there were no Regional Transit Authority buses in the area at the time. They had to walk a fourth of a mile, across train tracks, and across Leon C. Simon—a main street with lots of traffic—to Camp Leroy Johnson on the lakefront. There they had to catch a bus with the same name, ride to Franklin Avenue and catch the bus there that brought them into the main part of New Orleans.

Smiling happily, because it was unique in 1955, Ms. Watson recalled, "The back of our house faced the levee, France Road and the Industrial Canal."

Other places have also changed over the years, some from their original plans. "SUNO's campus was supposed to be a predominately black-owned shopping center, but Gentilly Woods shopping center put an end to that."

Bethany Methodist Church, of which Ms. Watson is a charter member, was built as the Protestant church for the subdivision. It was supposed to be a Catholic church and school, but the parish diocese ruled against it, since St. Gabriel was so close by. SUNO opened in 1959 and Bethany around the same time.

The chartered members of Bethany Church, including Ms. Watson, met in Cuss Hall at Dillard University and decided to open up Mary Dora Coghill Elementary School in 1960. "My first two sons were among the first pupils," explains Ms. Watson. Joseph M. Betholemy Golf course was built the same year. It was named after the landscaper who designed the course amongst other things.

In 1969, Ms. Watson started and was the director of Pontchartrain Park's first nursery at Bethany Church. She has had five children; the youngest is now 37. She had four boys and one girl. Ironically her daughter was the only girl in the neighborhood at that time with many boys. Now one of her seven granddaughters is the only girl in the neighborhood.

"Since we moved here in 1955, there have been many stories to tell, but then that would be grounds for a book."

Inspired by James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*

Gabrielle Turner

We were in the middle of our weekly Bible study. My sister and I were curled up on the sofa. My dad was sitting in the Queen Anne high back armchair. We were discussing the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The point came up about Jews having nothing to do with Samaritans. My dad lay back in his chair, crossed his long legs over one another, and put his hand on his chin. He started thinking. At that point, I knew it would be a long night, and we would never get back to the story.

Suddenly he uncrossed his legs, and his body stretched forward. His eyes became intense. He pointed to us and said, "you know I hated those people." I heard this story before, and I knew he was talking about white people. My dad wasn't a stone cold racist. He didn't hate every white person who crossed his path. He hated those who he thought were trying to take advantage of him.

My dad grew up in Clayton, in central Louisiana. It was a rural community where lynching and finding dead bodies in ditches were common.

He began to tell us stories that led up to this hatred and anger that had built up in his heart.

"I was walking down the street to the store. I heard this screeching noise. At first I paid no attention to it. On the corner I saw a red convertible swerving around the curve. I saw that the driver was a white man. When I got to the corner, I noticed a red hat in a ditch. The hat looked familiar. My mind was now focused on this hat and not the white man in the red convertible. I went into the store, and I got what I needed. I came out and was walking back home. I noticed a crowd of people at a church across the street from the ditch where I found the hat. I went to see what was going on.

"Mr. Jobie, a good friend of the family, was stretched out on the ground. I then remembered that the hat was his and immediately threw it down. Later on I found out he was killed by a white man for looking at a white woman the wrong way."

I asked my dad why didn't he tell anyone about the white man in the convertible. He replied that he had, and his mother told him to keep quiet. He kept quiet, and this is how he handled things like this.

If I were living when my dad was, I probably would have kept these things to myself too. I would have been too afraid of the supposed Christian KKK policemen. I would not have wanted to be the next body found in a ditch. I couldn't believe how those men could profess Christ and do the horrible things that they did. Just as I thought we were about to close out in prayer, my dad started telling another story about the KKK.

"There was a restaurant called the Chicken Shack Café where the KKK held their meetings. They would speak into intercoms and bullhorns. They could be heard all over the community."

Late at night my dad and his family would be in the living room watching television. They could hear the KKK saying, "you'll niggas aint gon integrate."

This was going on while they were in the process of integrating a school in a town near Clayton called Ferriday.

"After the meeting the KKK rode around the black communities. They did this to intimidate. One night when they were riding around, my cousin came banging on the door yelling, 'the KKK are coming.' My dad, along with other men in the neighborhood, loaded their shot guns and stood on their porches and waited for the clan. After a couple of these episodes the clan stopped."

My dad sat back in his chair with his head hung down. He was filled with emotion. It seemed as though it was hard to share these painful memories, but he did. He wanted us to know how blessed we were and to never take our blessings lightly.

My dad never showed his anger, but it came out in other ways, such as the way he talked and interpreted people's motives. He thought everyone was always trying to get over on him.

He started getting into the black power era. He raised his fist every time he saw one of his black brothers, and they did a handshake that lasted ten minutes. He wore jackets with the black fist that read black power and black is beautiful. I do believe that these sayings are true, and you should take pride in your race. But when you do what my dad did and take it too far, it's wrong. The kind of pride my dad had was a sin. This pride was making him feel as if he was better than the white man.

When he was in the army, he would tell all the black men "stick with the black people. You don't need to be around them, they aint no good."

There was only one power that could change my dad, and it wasn't black or white power but the power of God. He realized that this hate and anger was destructive and evil and would eventually eat him up inside.

Today, my dad is a minister and a completely new person. When I think about the life he once had, I start to shiver. What if he hadn't changed? What kind of person would he be? What kind of person would I be? I got a lot of qualities from my dad. If he still had that hatred in his heart, maybe he would have passed it on to me. So, I'm glad my dad changed not only for himself but also for me.

All on a Carnival Day

Gabrielle Caine

Carnival is one of my best days. I like the Zulu parade most of all, because they throw the most things. I'm not talking about beads. I'm talking about stuffed animals, baby dolls, make-up kits, and coconuts.

I will never forget about one carnival, the year after Hurricane Katrina, when government officials were saying they may not have a carnival season, because there were not enough people back in the city. When I heard that, I started crying like a big baby. I said, "No one is coming back. I will never see my friends. Carnival is no longer my best day." I started thinking about all of that.

Then in my writing class I learned about another carnival day that got me thinking even more. It was in the late 1950's when the city was keeping its Municipal Auditorium segregated. The musicians' union and some social aid and pleasure clubs decided to follow the suggestion of Leonard Burns, who was a member of the NAACP and the Urban League, and do something about this and all the other government segregation. They formed the United Clubs and used their carnival balls and organizations to raise money for civil rights causes and the United Negro College Fund.

From this start in 1953 to the late 1950's, the United Clubs became more aggressive as local, state, and federal officials became more extreme in keeping blacks as less than equal citizens. Russell Long, the U. S. Senator from Louisiana, even encouraged white parents to pull their children out of public schools in New Orleans rather than go to black and white integrated schools.

And that's when the United Clubs did something I'm not sure I'd want to do. They were going to cut out carnival for everyone, blacks and whites. It was going to be a "blackout," meaning no black musicians or marching clubs or even balls with all the tuxedo rentals and gown and flower purchasing that goes with that.

If I was around in 1957 and 1961 when that happened and they tried to let white folks use Municipal Auditorium without letting blacks in, I probably would have been in jail behind protesting. Or I would have put white make-up on and snuck into the balls. But I love carnival no matter if it's a ball, a party, or a parade. I'm glad I don't live in a time when we have to cancel carnival just to get people to act right. But it also makes me wonder if we're just not paying enough attention to when people treat us bad or if we're too busy having fun or if we're just not as unified as the unions, the social aid and pleasure clubs, the carnival organizations, and the civil rights organizations were back then.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Charles Johnson

Jerome Smith strode to the White House in his faded denim overalls. He walked up the White House steps slowly, passing men in suits everywhere, not knowing what to expect or what was going to happen in today's meeting. When he entered the house, he wiped the salty sweat from his forehead with an old handkerchief he had in his pocket. He looked around for James Baldwin, who had set up this meeting with one of the Kennedys. Bystanders may have mistaken him for a child that was lost in the Nile Valley. In reality, though, Smith was simply a young men who felt he should not have to dress any special way to impress government officials.

Baldwin approached Jerome after he was through talking with some congressmen in a room filled with different businessmen who held important positions. Baldwin, a small man with an energetic step and a winking smile, paused to let Smith finish his conversation. Smith had stopped to speak with a white-haired custodian who was sweeping the floor, her back bent forward from years of bending and lifting. Baldwin knew such conversation was important to Jerome, who believed he owed the average worker as much respect—probably more—as he would give to a president or senator. Finally Baldwin and Smith shook hands. Baldwin thanked him for coming to the meeting and asked about the sit-ins and picketing that were still going on in New Orleans and across Louisiana and Mississippi.

Jerome paused suddenly in the conversation. The men in suits caught his eye as if they were a fine chocolate woman with thick thighs. These men caught his eyes because he felt as if he was being watched like a hawk in the sky. Heads turned to see a young man not wearing a suit and tie for an important meeting. But for Jerome, this meeting was no more important than a soap opera that is watched on a daily basis.

Baldwin interrupted Smith's glare and escorted him to the meeting room. Everyone in the waiting area returned to their conversations as Baldwin and Smith walked up the lightly waxed wooden stairs. The meeting took place May 24, 1963. Baldwin organized the meeting because there was a need to discuss black alienation and the role the government should play in making sure America lived up to the words of its democratic promise. He had addressed some of these issues in "Letter from a Region in My Mind," an essay published by *The New Yorker.*

When Baldwin and Smith entered the room filled with congressmen and Attorney General Robert Kennedy (the president's brother), Smith took his seat as if he were at home. In fact, Smith wished he were back in New Orleans. The only reason he had come up north was to see a specialist who could help him deal with the head injury he suffered when he was beaten simply for asking for fair and equal treatment for all citizens.

The meeting continued for a little while. Smith grew more and more impatient with too much polite talking that he knew came against a background of no action. Baldwin, recognizing Smith's impatience, tried to direct the conversation towards Smith. His large, frog-like eyes and his writer's ear for all sides of a situation let him know that the meeting was not working for Smith and that Kennedy better listen soon or not at all. Realizing that Smith had willingly gone through extreme pain for his cause and wanting to prove a point to Kennedy, Baldwin asked Smith if he would consider going to war for his country.

Smith leaped out of his chair and shouted, "Never! Never! Never!" Everyone in the room was stunned and quiet as Jerome picked up the chair he had knocked down. The men had already eyed cautiously the young man with informal dress, intense eyes, and a heavily bandaged head. He actually looked like a soldier hero home from the war. In fact, that's what he was. But instead of fighting for the government in Vietnam, he was fighting for the people in McComb, Mississippi. That was where he had had his head bashed in.

Once he started speaking, Smith did not stop easily. The polite talk had been too much for him, especially given what he had fought through in the Deep South. These men seemed unaware of the situation. They had no sense of urgency. Smith did, though. He raised his voice like someone giving a speech to factory workers, not someone sitting around a conference table. Jerome spoke with anger when he described two white boys and how they beat him.

As the meeting continued to almost three hours, the pacifist, Ghandian Smith interrupted the meeting one last time. He stated in a tired voice that he was nauseated to have been at this meeting. In slow, measured tones, he said that more than the beatings by white racists, this meeting had given him a strong urge to renounce his non-violence. If being beaten, watching co-workers murdered were not enough to move these officials to act, what would?

Smith then directed his comments directly to Robert Kennedy. He questioned Kennedy's manhood. He wondered how his wife could even be with a man who would assume such a position of power and responsibility and not do all in his power to end the terrorism and injustice that raged across our land and was supported by leaders. He claimed that a real man would have himself and his children on the front lines. Instead of sending them to some separate school, they should be right there, learning shoulder to shoulder with poor black children—if not in Mississippi then at least right here in Washington, D. C.

With that Smith left the meeting. Baldwin, listening intently like all good writers do, knew for sure that if justice did not come soon, next time would come fire.

Down to the River of Dryades and Claiborne Avenues (Jerome Smith)

Towana Pierre

Purple and marigold feathers
Caress brilliantly luminous
Obsidian cheeks.
Beads glitter like precious
Gems on sparkling turquoise
Headdresses.
Majestic white crowns
Reach imperiously to
The heavens.
Wonder-filled eyes peer
From between jean-clad
Legs.
Vibrant colors dance
In hazel pools as
Tootie Montana's
Melodic chants penetrate
Chocolate souls.

Jerome's tiny feet follow along the
Time-worn banks of the
Sultry Mississippi.
Follow down Dryades to fight for integration.
Follow to the ivory guarded
Countertops where pale eyes
Shoot ice-coated daggers.
Follow to the palatial meccas of
Education where the haves prosper
And the have-nots perish.
Follow to teach the children
and make Freedom Summer last for decades.
Follow to keep culture alive
even when concrete swallows trees.
Follow to lead.

Oretha Castle Haley

Tachmonite Butler

When I was a third grader some years ago, they were changing the name of the school I was attending. There was a ballot of three names the students had to choose from. I cannot remember any of the names except the one that won, Oretha Castle Haley. Like most third graders of the time, I didn't know who any of the three people were or what they did to have their name on a school.

Well, be that as it may, I left the school the year of its official name change (the next year). I never again wondered or cared about who Oretha Castle Haley was until one very unusual day many years later, during the middle of my senior year of high school.

I was in my car driving past the school, looking at the building in disgust after being stopped by a red light. I thought to myself, "The Oretha Castle Haley Tigers, what an ugly name." After thinking that, I pulled off in my car, still glancing back at the school.

Upon turning to look ahead, I found myself in an unfamiliar neighborhood. So being the person that I am, I turned the car around to see where I missed my turn. And upon turning the car, I could not drive forward. It was not because I ran out of gas or into a tree or something like that. It was unbelievable that in the middle of the road I saw a group of people that looked like the night's sky. You would not believe how many blacks were marching down the road with the few whites between them looking like the stars in the night. They were holding signs with sayings such as, "You promised an end to racial injustice," and they were holding them proudly—so proudly that I left my car to join them. I've always been an advocate for racial justice in New Orleans, but this time was strange. The shouting and walking had me in a daze as I walked with them, singing the songs and talking with people I didn't know.

So after about an hour or so of walking, we reached our destination, a building that resembled City Hall, except that it was old and it looked like no one had been there for years. Before I could ask, someone said, "It's empty. Now what do we do?" This made the crowd a little restless and uneasy. Just as I began to think things were about to get ugly, this young lady, this magnificent black woman, began to address the crowd. She spoke like a strong, majestic animal, a tiger perhaps, leading others on the hunt. Of her whole speech, I only remember one thing she said, one very important and true point: "What we say together is important… . As long as we are held in economic and political slavery, they [the whites] aren't free either."

I only remember what she said because it held such meaning for me. And at that moment I woke up from my daydream to find myself still next to the school, and the light was green. I rushed home so I could do my report and go to sleep. But while doing my report, which was on a civil rights march in the early 1960's from Shakespeare Park to City Hall, I was alert, especially since for the third time Oretha Castle Haley came into my vision. First was as I stopped next to the school, second was in my daydream as the woman who addressed the crowd, and third as I researched the civil rights movement in New Orleans. And it was then that I made it a point to learn more about Haley, this fighter/warrior for civil rights.

From reading, I found out Oretha Castle Haley was born in 1940 as Oretha Castle. While a student at Southern University of New Orleans, she led boycotts, sit-ins, and other acts of civil disobedience as a leader along with other young people of the New Orleans chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). And it was in this position that she effectively fought for racial justice in New Orleans. And her fight continued for the rest of her life. After graduating from SUNO, she continued as a community activist and leader, fighting for civil rights, quality health care, and fair, community-based education.

I still have much more to learn about Haley's life. Like most of the unsung heroes I know about, books contain too little information for me to learn the whole story. But I do have dreams and elders that can help me. And now I feel proud to see Oretha Castle Haley's name on my old school. I think it's a great way to show appreciation for all the work she has done for blacks—and all people—in New Orleans.

Another Generation of Orethas

Deborah Carey

Can you imagine getting punished and treated like a criminal just trying to make the law equal for all citizens?

She's nervous. A chill runs through her bones as she writes big letters on the protest sign. On the inside she feels doubtful, skeptical because she's worrying about her family's financial support and her social life. She's wondering about where will she begin after she gets fired, because she knows she will. Or if she still has her job, will they treat her differently? Will the screaming mob of wolves and beasts go after her howling? She has mixed up feelings before she takes a stand for her rights.

On September 9, 1960, the New Orleans chapter of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) organized a sit in. The young activists' hearts pounded against their chests as they looked into the eyes of the white demons, as the Black Panthers would call them. They were scared, but bravery also ran through their blood as they sat there. They refused to move from the Woolworth's counter, because they felt as through the law was not equal. The 14th amendment gave them the right to be treated as equals. So something had to be done.

Oretha Castle Haley was associated with the Woolworth's project. Even though she knew she had a strong chance of going to jail, losing her job, and some of her loved ones, she still continued to make a big impact in all our lives. She started a journey and accomplished so much as a black woman.

Now it's up to us. That's when T.W.A comes along: Teens With Attitude. We're an organization that's trying to make things happen and do it big. We also had a protest of our own for a young black male name Jernard Thomas who was shot and killed by fifth district precinct policemen. We can't let them get away with it. And so the new generation picks up where our black sista left off. "Full in effect and coming near you!"

My Grandfather's Pretty Metal

Brittany Dorsey

"Niggers. Go Home," drowned out the sound coming from the radio in my grandfather's car. As he drove his family to its new home on Werner Drive in New Orleans East, white arms holding brown baseball bats and swinging cold, hard black guns in the air was an image my mother had never seen. My grandpa reaching under the seat to show his new neighbors that he had pretty metal too will always be remembered on November 4, 1971, my mother's birthday.

William Butler Yeats, in his poem "The Second Coming," asks: "Have we, like the falconer, lost control of the means to halt our descent into chaos?" Parents are failing in providing my generation the history of our families. Black men are filling the prison system. If they knew what people did back then to ensure freedom and justice for us now, maybe they'd try and take advantage of every opportunity that's been earned for them by men like my grandfather. Maybe they'd vote and get an education.

Knowing that my mom had to go through terrorizing threats by "average" white residents of New Orleans just to have a bigger house in a newer neighborhood is amazing to me. I take pride in the fact that I live in New Orleans East, because it was a place where just one generation ago blacks were not wanted. Now it's predominantly black and is filled with hard-working people just trying to provide a better life for themselves and their families.

What Would Gumbo Be Like Without Variety?

Michael Chancely

This was the oddest restaurant I had ever eaten in.
The food resembled the setting.

Chez Helene was just like my bowl of gumbo.
They were both important parts of N'Awlins' culture.

The seasonings were alive and danced on the tips of your taste buds,
Like the buck-jumpers from Treme who danced 'round Chez Helene every Sunday.

Austin Leslie worked in the kitchen all day to make the gumbo just right,
Just like he worked for so many years to get his own restaurant.

The gumbo was so good, you'd savor every spoon, but it would eventually be gone;
Just like Chez Helene lasted so long, yet it eventually would go away too.

The white rice was served with the black gravy,
Just as the White customers were served with the Black customers.

The ingredients—hot sausage, crabs, and gizzards—were diverse;
Just like the people eating the gumbo.

What would happen if gumbo didn't have so much variety?
What if the black gravy was served after the white rice; if it was served at all?

Hmm...
Maybe it would be like all the other restaurants during the Civil Rights Era.

Mr. Sye and the Monroe Street Bakery

Christopher Burton

Clear glass dominates the store front.
Soft cushioned chairs spray around the display counter for the goods.
The space is wide and open and empty.

The Street is quiet, and the storefront is hot.
The coffee maker and the toaster stand unused.
There's a smell of ...
Not staleness, nor negligence, but of dis-use.

The smoke still rises from the chimney of this place.
Through the doors behind the counter,
Bread still rolls on the delivery truck, but it only goes out the back door.
Steamy crossaints, crunchy French bread worthy of Leidenheimer,
Glistening cinnamon rolls dripping with sugar, and fluffy pound cakes of Blueberry, of Almond.
All made with hand. All made with pride in the old-way.
Delicious scents: Ambrosia. Stifling heat. Buckets of sweat.

Hobbling along, one ankle touching the floor, the baker bakes.
In Business alone, no child to be an heir, the baker waits,
And death will take the good baker, his good goods, and his good store.

Pontchartrain Beach

Britney Winfield

Dear Old Pontchartrain Beach,

It hurts to know we never had a chance to meet. You were shut down in 1984, and I had at least 15 years to go, just to be born and be age four.

Old Pontchartrain Beach couldn't we meet? Was it just bad timing or were you too old for me? You opened in 1931 to only whites. Due to this segregation, African Americans weren't able to meet you until the sixties. Luckily my mom, who enjoyed the rollercoaster, was old enough to get the chance to meet you before you were disowned, but she never knew why you left. Your sand was covered with footprints and water, unlike the lake now, which contains concrete stairs along the coast that people shouldn't walk on. A light house I could never imagine.

Open every day 24/7, you were for all to enjoy, complete with your bathing beach, bath house, beach swimming pool, and an amusement park that was home to a rollercoaster and a kiddie land. O how, I missed out, and if it weren't for a little research, I would have no knowledge of your existence.

O beach, don't you miss the feet that walked all over you? When people acknowledged that you were alive compared to now? Why didn't you tell me that the light house that watched the night swimmers was preserved inside a fence, but where were you located? If you were still here today, I would come to the end of Elysian Fields Avenue and visit every weekend. The Milneburg light house tells it all, as it sits alone behind the University of New Orleans campus.

Were they trying to hide ya'll? Why couldn't you have stayed open? Just because visitors decrease didn't mean you should be closed down or that it was your fault. Maybe that's why when I walk the campus of UNO, there is something I fall in love with as the breeze throws my hair in my face. Yet have I ventured to the back where I look to see the parking lot filled with cars in front of a full lake to see if you are still there. Maybe curiosity never caught my cat. Not only was there a huge beach and amusement park, on this now vacant space, there also stood a stage that left an imprint until this day called Pontchartrain Beach Stage. There people like Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Ray Charles, Nat King Cole, The Neville Brothers and more performed to the audience of beach visitors. If this beach was still stable, the BET SPRING FLING could have came down here, but people don't think about what the future brings. You brought a lot of money into New Orleans, and because they chose to close the swimming pool, visitors decreased, and they have shut you out. Why did they close your swimming pools? Was it because my mom and her friends wanted to swim too? Were the white visitors to your amusement park not as kind and amused as you?

Some may never know you. If there weren't pictures, it would have been hard to believe that Pontchartrain Beach had ever existed. I wonder what else we have lost in this city. If only I'd had a chance to meet you. Next time when I go to UNO, I will have to walk a little further.

Sincerely,

Ruby the Beach Girl

Family Business

Dominique Kelly

As I pass through the streets of New Orleans east, it's hard to catch sight of a black-owned business, if even any are spotted at all. Actually the only black-owned businesses that I can think of are a Sally's Beauty Supply, an urban clothing store, both located on Crowder, and a shoe store on Read. "What ever happened to all the black-owned businesses here, now that I think about it?" This is a question that I ponder often now, "Will these businesses flourish as they once did before hurricane Katrina?"

When I was a young girl, of the ages of 13 and younger, I always would find myself pondering as to how a huge blue and white truck found its way into my grandfather's King of Used Tires shop. The shop was located on Franklin Avenue and so was my grandmother's green house, which I visited quite often. It was maybe two or three houses from the shop. Every time I would visit, I would always go into the shop with my mother to say hello to my Uncle Bill. I would often find myself looking at the truck. It never crossed my mind to ask about it, but as time passed I allowed myself to let the mystery of the truck remain.

On a recent road trip to Florida, my mother was speaking and just so happened to mention the truck and its origin. She stated that my grandfather would play a weekly game of "Tonk" on Fridays with four of his friends. The card games that he would play were high-end games, and he only played with people he knew were good on their money. According to my mother he lost many games and won many games, but on one particular night he hit the "Jackpot." He decided to take the money he won that night and invest it in a red truck. He used this truck to start and carry out a grass-cutting business. It's something, because without any knowledge of gardening, that's the business he decided to go into. He took my two oldest uncles and trained them in this occupation, as he grew knowledgeable of what the job required. This was a trial-and-error business for him. As he acquired more skill, he also acquired more clientele, which included working in areas of the wealthy. This was a seasonal job, indicating slow business during the winter time. He maintained this business for three years, enduring its ups and downs. He used his red truck to start a minor moving business. He moved smaller pieces of furniture, and also at the time still had his grass cutting business, which he did in the summer.

"Your grandmother got into a really bad car accident and got hurt after coming home from work as a maid and could no longer work," said my mother. My grandmother had been in the car with the people she had worked for and decided to sue. She had a broken hip, and her employer did not want to pay her hospital bill. She received the money from the suit. With that money, my grandfather decided to start a full moving service. Again without any knowledge of this business, he depended on his ambition to be successful. He bought the blue and white truck with the money won and could now provide full service to those moving. With moving truck the "James Hawthorne Moving Business" flourished and remained in business for five to six years.

From the money earned in this business he opened the "King of Used Tires" shop. This shop was so successful that it needed a place to store all of its tires. My grandfather decided to park the big blue and white truck for good. My mother stated he ran this shop until the day he died. Learning this of my grandfather made me realize that this is part of the history of black New Orleans. He left a legacy of remembrance, and this is part of my personal history of black New Orleans. This led me to want to know a little more of the business, so I asked my father, who once owned a beauty supply store.

My father went into business with a partner, which in his opinion was the wrong thing to do. He stated that he knew what type of business he wanted to go into, but like my grandfather had no experience. He wanted to open a beauty supply store, based upon the interest he knew women had in their hair. He wanted to see if in any way he could make a profit based on this interest. Not knowing anything about the business, he asked and paid the manager of another beauty supply store to assist him and his partner with starting. The manager showed my father and his partner what was needed to be ordered and whom to order from.

Once they ordered their supplies, which came from Gulfport, Mississippi, they needed to find a location for the store. They picked a location within a strip mall in New Orleans East, next to a beauty salon. My father states that owning a business can be very time-consuming and hard, and you cannot expect to see immediate profits. He also stated that blacks who bought supplies expected to try to compromise on the price of the merchandise, even though his prices were equal or cheaper compared to chains owned by whites or Asians.

The business ended up failing, but he believes that it was due to choice of location. Once the business failed he sold all of his supplies to an Asian female, who was starting out just as my father did. Though my father's business failed, the Asian woman's business lasted up until Hurricane Katrina.

It is estimated that about 8,000 businesses were owned by blacks before Hurricane Katrina and accounted for 40% of the job market. It is stated that 80% of the flood-affected areas were occupied by people of color (thefreelibrary.com). The businesses in these areas were the most affected by the hurricane, and due to the rebuilding process of the city moving so slowly it has negatively affected black businesses.

Flying The Red, The Black and The Green Flag of Liberation

Kalamu ya Salaam

In the Spring of '69 the revolution had smashed full force into Southern University New Orleans. We had taken over the school. Literally. We ran everything. Actually continued the classes and full day-to-day operations. But the nominal administration had no say so.

When we first took over, we didn't simply barricade a building and issue a list of ten demands. No, we were much more sophisticated. We marched into the administration building and one by one ran off the administrators, installed students in their place, and ordered that the school would keep on functioning but with a new and revolutionary leadership.

Two specifics will suffice to illustrate my point. When we went into Dean Bashful's office, he was understandably outraged. He refused to move. So I motioned to a couple of the brothers who literally grabbed the dean and the chair he was in, lifted both from behind the desk and wheeled his ass on out into the corridor, slamming the door shut behind him. We then stationed two stalwarts on duty with orders not to let Bashful back in.

Second, we called the state government in Baton Rouge and told them we had taken over the school and would be in charge until new terms were negotiated and if they didn't believe us, call back in five minutes and we would answer the phone. We had, of course, already commandeered the switchboard. When Baton Rouge called back, we answered with our same list of demands.

Some people thought they would just send in the police and force our hand, but we knew differently. We had already had a major showdown with the police involving literally hundreds of students when we took down the American flag for a second time. A bunch of us were arrested but got out quickly and proceeded to organize a campus that was on fire because the police had gone crazy beating and macing students who weren't even initially involved in the demonstrations.

Our core leadership was not composed of teenagers but rather of veterans who were returning to school on the GI Bill. A number of us had served overseas, some in Viet Nam. By then it was no secret: we were armed and dangerous but also extremely crafty. We didn't flash our guns to the news media, and we had made alliances with many of the faculty who were as opposed to the machinations of the administration as the students were.

Our all-male core leadership had been working together since the fall of 1968, and we kept the circle tight, did not recruit new members. We were wary of people who suddenly wanted to hang with us, in part because we were certain that undercover cops were trying to infiltrate. The Bad Niggers For Regression was more like a family than a political formation, and we kept it that way. Our revolution only lasted two months, so we never had to face major problems of losing leaders over time nor of bringing in new people. Questions, such as recruiting women into the inner circle, never got raised as we careened through those two months at breakneck speed.

Everything was happening so fast and there was so much pressure on us, so many different forces at work both for and against us. We literally had to shape our revolution in the process of making revolution. There was no time off, no time to reflect, meditate and plan. Seems like it was one crisis after another that had to be addressed immediately with no room for error. Under such conditions, people tend to go with what they know, rely on what worked in the past, only trust tried and proven people.

One of the most profound contradictions of revolution is that during a revolution, because events are moving fast and the opposition is fighting fiercely to unseat the revolution, what results is that the revolutionary leadership becomes both conservative and suspicious, unwilling to change itself in any major way and reluctant to admit new people into the core leadership. Of course, the average person lives their life without ever having to direct a revolution.

America was literally on fire and/or smoldering one year after the assassination of Martin Luther King. The winds of revolution were blowing everywhere. You either set sail or hunkered down until the storm passed over. Making a successful revolution is no joke. Indeed, as we quickly found out, overthrowing the old order was easy compared to running a new order. To me, taking over was not our major accomplishment. Our success was in running the school.

Initially we had focused on the lack of resources and the need for capital improvements. For example the library had empty bookshelves. We did not have enough professors to teach the classes we needed. There was no black studies department. We resisted the idea that college was simply supposed to train students to become workers in corporate America. We wanted community development.

Indeed, we did not have detailed demands. The second time we raised our flag of black liberation and the police attacked students and mercilessly beat us down we were prepared to defend ourselves in court, but we did not fully realize that our next step was not simply to take over the school but to run the school.

Running the school demanded we create an administration. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but we chose students other than the core leadership to put in charge of day-to-day operations. Organizing resistance was one thing, maintaining social services a different discipline altogether. For the rest of my life I would be confronted with the contradiction of leading resistance to the status quo and the push for me to become an administrator of a new status quo. At the time I didn't realize that one of the central contradictions all revolutions have to face is how to effect reconstruction after the overthrow of an existing order. We never got a chance to fully address that issue because we were only in charge for two months, April and May of 1969, but what a glorious two months that short time period was.

When the authorities visited the campus, everything seemed normal, but the top administrators knew they were no longer in charge and many of them simply retreated in the face of our forces. One administrator I must mention was the treasurer. I believe his name was Mr. Burns. He took his job ultra-seriously and explained why he wouldn't let us take over his office. He talked about sensitive financial information about each student and also all the financial instruments and what have you.

I remember looking into his eyes and seeing something I had to respect. He knew we had the upper hand, knew that we had evicted Bashful, and also knew,

I'm sure, that he didn't have the force to stop us, but he stood his ground and was ready to take whatever we might dish out to uphold his vow to do his job. We had to respect that. After all, he was not our enemy, even though he was a functionary within a system against which we were waging war.

So we conferred amongst ourselves and came up with a solution. I don't remember how thoroughly we discussed it or whether I thought if we did take over the bursar's office we would have created a major headache for ourselves with the law enforcement officials, who would no doubt be called in if any significant amount of money came up missing. So after a few minutes we returned to Mr. Burns' office and told him we were closing his whole operation down. He could lock up everything, put whatever he needed to put in the safe and after securing whatever sensitive materials, equipment and money he felt necessary, he should lock his inner office and take the keys with him. We weren't going to let him continue running the office, but we wouldn't put anybody in there either. That was the only office on campus we didn't inhabit. We let it go dark.

I think we shook hands on it, maybe not. But I do remember he was one of the few who looked us in the eye without looking away. I didn't see hatred or fear in his eyes, and I hoped we looked the same way to him. I may have some of the details mixed up, but I'm certain that we worked out an agreement. He was a man of honor ready to face whatever for his beliefs, and we in turn were also men of honor even if we were taking over. Our goal was to transform the school, not destroy it.

In the weeks that followed the take over, the school continued to function. We had no argument with the workers at the school, nor with the clerical staff and a number of key people in management. In fact for most of the workers and the faculty, we introduced a measure of freedom to do their jobs as they deemed best. We unleashed the productive force of experienced workers able to make decisions without some chump administrator riding their back. I'm convinced our decisions to safeguard the jobs and positions of the working personnel was another reason things went smoothly.

On one level, if you visited the campus during the take over, things seemed to be ordinary—well, ordinary once you got over the shock of seeing the red, black and green flag of liberation flying high in front the school. Our takeover was an extraordinary achievement. Not only did we keep the baby, we changed the water and kept the bathtub clean. During the whole takeover, on a day-to-day basis SUNO was functioning as well as, if not better than, it ever had.

The fact that operations proceeded at an orderly pace allowed the authorities to claim that we hadn't really taken over. Of course, it didn't matter to us what they said in the newspapers and on television. As long as the flag was flying, it was clear who was really running the school.

Another issue I'm clear about is this: history will not document much about our takeover. The masters never give the full 411 on slave revolts. Indeed, as much as possible they erase the event in the official records. So, I am never surprised when years later scholars, activists and even some progressive historians don't know anything about the SUNO uprising. They never talk about those days when the lion not only ate the hunter but dared other hunters to come up in the jungle.

And, by the way, "jungle" is a loaded term. If we said rain forest, nobody would bat an eye in disgust or immediately imagine wild animals and savages. So not only does the lion never win in the hunter's history books, we also have to put up

with the indignity of our environments being termed a "jungle." But then what would you expect from those who imagine that the "woods" and "forests" are a locus of evil—check European nursery rhymes, check Hollywood movies, indeed, check your own imagination—who lives in the woods?

In many, many ways we were not only in a physical battle, we were more importantly engaged in a propaganda battle. I believe the limited success we actually had was partially due to the fact that for the first time in a long time, the "trains" at SUNO ran on time. We received mad respect from students, faculty and staff for the way we conducted the takeover. We were not into revolution for the hell of it. We were determined to improve our school, and that's what we did.

Others may remember these times differently than I do. They can write their own versions of our common history. Ultimately, what matters most to me is that among the people who were there, the students who participated in the take over, there is general agreement—the spring of 1969, those were the real "good old days."

While everything was cool on the campus, the state had a problem. John McKeithen, who was the reigning governor, had stated often that he was going to return law and order to the campus and that anarchy would not be tolerated. His specific response to our SUNO takeover was that he was not going to negotiate under threats and certainly was not going to visit the campus while student demonstrations were still going on.

McKeithen's grandstanding was irrelevant as far as we were concerned. We had control of the campus and that was that. Then McKeithen made a gross mistake. He scheduled a public appearance in New Orleans at a church located one block off Canal Street in the heart of the downtown business district. We found out about the time and place of McKeithen's speech and trapped him.

Our movement was notorious for our instant demonstrations. We would organize convoys and could mobilize a couple hundred students anywhere in New Orleans literally within fifteen or twenty minutes. McKeithen was speaking in a church that had only two doors: a front door and a side door that fed into an alley which ran along side the church but only opened to the front street address. In other words, if you blocked the street in front the church there was no other way out.

SUNO was located at least six miles away from that church, and there was no direct route from SUNO to the church. McKeithen was to make a brief speech and then be whisked away, or so they thought. By the time McKeithen had concluded his speech we had over three hundred, chanting students in the street blocking his exit from the church.

The authorities were stymied. They didn't want a repeat of the mob scene and wild melee that happened when we were arrested for taking down the American flag. We stood around outside in our usual jovial mood—we had the upper hand and we knew it. We even joked with the undercover cops whom we knew on sight, a couple of them we knew by name.

In a weird way, some of the detectives had a measure of respect for us because we were smart, quick and also fearless. They knew we had guns and that we were smart enough not to make stupid or needlessly provocative moves that would have given the police a chance to wipe us out. So there we were approximately ten-thirty in the morning, the streets full of fired-up SUNO

students and the governor of the state trapped inside a church.

One of the cops asked me, what yall gonna do? I told him that was not the relevant question. The relevant question is what's the governor going to do.

At first there was no direct communication. But all kinds of behind the scenes pressure must have been mounted because shortly somebody from the governor's office came out to "talk." What did we want?

Our position was simple. We were here to see the governor, and we weren't going to talk to anyone else. Period.

After a lot of back and forth which entailed us rejecting one ridiculous proposal after another, they finally relented and said the governor would talk to us. Pick one or two representatives, and we could meet inside the church. No way, Jose. That's not our style. We have open meetings. Everybody had to be able to hear what was going on. The governor had to meet with all of us or none of us.

The church was not big enough, or whatever. OK. Well, the only solution is for the governor to come to SUNO where we had spaces big enough for a public meeting. Agreed. The governor will meet yall at SUNO. No way, Jose. We are going to go to SUNO together.

I remember the tense moments after we allowed the governor to approach the state limousine. McKeithen's big, beefy body guards were dwarfed by the press of students—nothing was going to move unless we said so. When it came time to get into the car, one of the body guards tried to push me aside. I pushed back. And for a moment there was a stand-off. We would not back down. McKeithen nodded at one of the guards, and the guard let two of us get in the back seat next to the governor. And then we crept off as the student body slowly parted to make way for McKeithen going to SUNO.

This was a dangerous moment. I was not worried about being arrested. We formed a caravan on the way back to SUNO. McKeithen to his credit decided it was better to go to SUNO than to have what they surely would have called a riot.

We had already informed the assembled students of what was going on. Our cars had already begun forming up. The governor was not going by himself. Oh, no. We were going to convoy to SUNO.

The ride to SUNO was both quiet and uneventful, and at the same time tense and anxious. None of us knew exactly what the next step was going to be other than the governor was going to speak directly to SUNO students and bringing McKeithen to the campus was a major victory for us. At moments such as those, you have to be able to think quickly in response to the pressures of time and circumstance. We sat side by side in the back seat, each of us silently trying to figure out our next move.

By the time we got to SUNO, the news media had cameras set up, and it was the top of the hour item on all three local networks. McKeithen had vowed he would not negotiate with student protestors, and now he was going to SUNO to speak to the students. The designated meeting spot was the school cafeteria. When we walked in, a mighty cheer rang out.

McKeithen took one look at the stage and balked. He was not going to get on any stage with that flag on it. Everywhere we went, the red, black and green flag of black liberation was displayed. That is how our movement was known, and now that McKeithen was at SUNO, the governor was threatening to leave without speaking because he was not going to share a stage with our flag.

As I remember it, there were three flags on the stage: the American flag, the state of Louisiana flag, and our flag of black liberation. McKeithen looked me in the eye and set his jaw in tense determination. If we wanted him to get on the stage, we would have to remove our flag. It was an obvious face-saving move on his part.

My solution to the conundrum was relatively simple. I said, OK, take all the flags off the stage. No flags. No problem. We outfoxed McKeithen. And that's how Governor McKeithen went to SUNO and agreed to negotiate with the students.

That day he promised there would be negotiations about student demands, and we in turn agreed that once the negotiations started in earnest we would cease demonstrations. All the way through the negotiation process, I kept expecting some sort of trickery, but after close to a week of meetings an agreement was hammered out. Included in the agreement was the right to fly the black flag of liberation on the campus, and that is why today, SUNO is probably the only college or university in the nation where the red, black and green can be raised and flown on its own flag pole in front the school.

There are two flag poles in front the administration building, facing the main avenue that runs in front the school. Alas, it has been years since the red, black and green has flown.

In June of 1969 SUNO closed for the summer, and when it re-opened in the fall, over a thousand students were expelled and not allowed to enroll. Our leadership had court orders restraining us from setting foot on the campus. Nevertheless, none of that stopped the movement. Over the next two years there were more demonstrations, including another take over of the administration building.

The Spring of '69 demonstrations had not been the first nor were they the last. Oretha Castle Haley and other students before us held demonstrations out at SUNO. After us, Earl Picard and another generation of students led major demonstrations. SUNO was full of older than average, working class students. Adults. People who had jobs and children to raise. People whom you could not treat like naïve teenagers. That is the background and the context within which my personal experiences were subsumed.

The SUNO struggle was who I was; everything else was secondary. Everything.

We modeled our movement on what we understood of the liberation struggles then coming to fruition in Africa. I was particularly impressed with Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC in Cape Verde/Guinea Bissau. One of Cabral's clear directives, which I took as a personal maxim, was: "mask no difficulties, tell no lies, claim no easy victories!"

For two months April and May of 1969, SUNO was a liberated zone. We ran a newspaper giving our analysis of things. Held daily meetings with students in the science lecture hall. Allowed any and everyone to speak at the meetings. And in general out-organized our opposition.

One thing we did that was important. We delegated leadership positions far and wide, and not simply to those in our inner circle.

Once someone was put in charge, they were in charge and made all decisions. One of the brothers who ran the school paper was gay. My position was as long as the paper was coming out on time and was well done nobody had anything to say about who should or should not be running the paper. Period.

Forty years later I still run into comrades and fellow students from the SUNO Spring of '69. I don't know most of them personally, but they know who I am and I embrace them, literally, embrace them in celebration for who they are and for their participation when it counted. For many, many people SUNO was a highlight of their life experiences.

Today, when I have these chance encounters, I am always proud. I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of the SUNO struggle. The majority of the lives that were touched were not the uppity-ups, the petit-bourgeoisie in training to become functionaries in the state machinery. No. I'm talking about ordinary street people. We speak with pride and love when we briefly reminisce about the SUNO days.

In the Spring of '69, I had just turned twenty-two. I and most of my comrades were physically fit, mentally quick, and on revolutionary fire. Being the grandson of two preachers, some would say I had inherited the gift of gab, but in that department I was no different than local leaders in black communities and among black students all across America. We all could rap.

Of course, my commitment to writing and theatre was a big plus. I had the ability to utter witty phrases that captured the essence of what we wanted and often mercilessly ridiculed our opponents.

I had a poem I frequently performed during that period. The poem was called "Knuckle-headed Niggers." I would run down a list of deficiencies evidenced by knuckle-heads. People would be falling out laughing. I ended the poem with my fist shot high in the air in a black power salute and urged my audience to do the same. And then, while bouncing my fist against my own head, I would say, "now tap your fist against your head—how does your head sound to you!"

We were determined to be true revolutionaries and not simple-ass, knuckle-heads thinking that revolution was a party. No, people were putting their lives on the line. Some of us, such as my grandfather and Jean Kelly's mother, had actually died during this time period. We weren't just college students playing pranks.

We knew: to play at revolution was to be put down. We were serious, the times were serious. One way or another, change was going to happen. Our goal was to the best of our abilities to direct the changes in our society, and where we lacked the ability to direct, we certainly had the ability to influence.

Our flag was flying, our people were on the move, change was being made. At SUNO, in New Orleans, and all across America, these were difficult and dangerous times and simultaneously was a beautiful era of revolutionary optimism and opportunity. Nineteen sixty-nine, a great time to be alive.

Tuesday Visitor

Judy Demarest

In 1973, the federal courts ordered New Orleans Public Schools to integrate the all-black schools also. Since 1967, black and white high school students had been attending classes together in the city, but mainly the white schools had been desegregated. Most of the traditionally black high schools remained unchanged. In an effort to satisfy the courts, the school system sent white teachers into some all-black high schools. They weren't ready to send white students yet, but they had to show some effort to comply. I was one of those teachers.

On the first day of school, I didn't have a job yet, having just recently moved back to my home town. My father had suggested that I go to the school board office and sit in the waiting room of the teaching personnel office. When a principal called in with a need for a teacher, I might get the position, since I was right there, ready and waiting. It worked! I hadn't been there more than thirty minutes, when the principal of a middle school called to say that one of her assigned new teachers had failed to show up. She needed a white English teacher, and there I was. Before 10:00AM, I was at my new job, in a sixth grade English class in the Desire Housing Project.

Since I was extremely idealistic, I went in expecting to be accepted as I was willing to accept others. I learned quickly that real life didn't work that way. Although the other faculty and staff members were awkwardly polite to me, there was no feeling of warmth. The students looked at me with wonder, and everyone seemed to be speaking a foreign language. I realized almost immediately that no one at that school was going to accept me, let alone respect me, until I earned it. The task was an arduous one, often seeming that I went backwards more than making progress. The challenges were abundant, and the support system was weak at best.

One of the first shocks I encountered was that the faculty restrooms had locked doors, and the administration had no intention of giving the new white teachers any keys. Luckily, I had never been terribly fond of stinky school restrooms, so I had trained my bladder as a teenager to only use the restroom in the morning before school and then hold it until I got home from school at 4PM. On the occasional day when I did have to go during school time, I had to check out of school, get in my car, and drive to the Esso station on Louisa Street several blocks away. Several times, during my second year especially, I became so frustrated with the process, I just went home and didn't return to school for the rest of the day.

Once, I became ill at school, and a neighboring teacher lent me her key to use in the emergency. She was ostracized by others, when they found out she had done so. The following day, she apologetically told me she could never do this again. I understood her position, but felt so disillusioned. Her act of kindness was not perceived as such by her fellow teachers.

The students treated me hesitantly. Like all twelve-year-olds, they tried me from all angles. As a young white teacher in an all black school, I had to struggle to gain their confidence and eventually their respect.

During my second year at Carver, I taught a fourth period class of twenty-eight girls. The administration assured me that it was just a coincidence, not intentionally scheduled that way. One afternoon, a young man from the community came into my class and held me against a wall with a knife at my throat. I was more upset by the reaction of my students than I was by the assault. They knew me. I had been their teacher for several months, but not one of them moved to help me or even to call for help. They just sat in their seats, quieter than I had ever seen them, and watched like I was in a movie. All that was missing was the popcorn! I fought off my attacker, and he ran away. I don't think he had intended to do anything but scare me, but I was furious with those girls. I began screaming at them, before he was out of sight. I ranted and raved at them. I was thinking, "How could they do this to me? What were they thinking? What have these kids seen in their lives, that has made them so desensitized?" I could find no way to relate to their behavior.

A few months later, a similar incident occurred, while the same group of girls sat in my class. Another outsider entered the room, this time wielding a plumber's wrench. He lifted it over his shoulder and swung it at my head. I moved quickly to shield myself with the classroom door. He hit the door with the huge wrench and knocked me down. I lay on the floor, stunned, as my twenty-eight girls chased my attacker down the stairs and into the parking lot, where they caught him and beat him up. Progress...I guess!

At the beginning of my third year at Carver, there was a problem with what we called hijacking. A big boy from the projects would come onto our playground during lunch and "hijack" one of our younger kids. This meant that he would rough up the younger boy a little bit, tell him to bring $5 tomorrow, or he would beat him up worse. This happened to several of our boys, and some of them suffered injuries such as broken ribs or worse, when they failed to bring the demanded money.

Around this same time, I began to receive what I called my Tuesday visitor. He would come into my class at 2:00 on Tuesdays, while I was alone during my planning period. He would threaten me verbally or hit me with his fists, and then he would run away laughing. I had already reported two such incidents to the administration, when on the third Tuesday, a custodian interrupted him as he taunted me with a piece of pipe. My visitor escaped, as usual.

The following afternoon, the assistant principal called me to the office. He informed me that the older boy who had been doing the playground hijackings had been apprehended and was being held in his office. He wanted me to look at him to see if he was also my Tuesday visitor. I went with him into his tiny office, where my visitor sat with Kevin, one of his hijacking victims, and a security guard blocking the only door. I identified him as my intruder, and the administrator left to call the police. Immediately, the boy jumped up and dove out of the small window head first. The guard grabbed for his legs, but the boy squirmed from the officer's grasp and landed on the grass outside. He rolled to his feet and ran to the gates of the campus.

We were all shocked. The guard was embarrassed that he had been out-maneuvered by this kid. He left Kevin and me sitting in the small office, while he went to report the escape. In a few minutes, they re-entered, accompanied by two uniformed police officers. The questioning began.

Kevin offered the boy's name and said that he knew where he stayed. So we all piled into two marked police cruisers, the assistant principal, Kevin, and I in the backseat of the first unit. Of course, Kevin didn't know a last name or an address, but he could show the police where Johnny lived. But first we had to pull over and wait for the Desire Street bus. You see, Kevin only knew how to get to Johnny's house on the bus, and he insisted that we would have to ride the bus. It was the only way! The officers finally convinced him that we could at least follow the bus, rather than ride on it. And that is exactly what we did! Through the project, we followed the bus in the two police cars, stopping at every bus stop, while passengers got on or off the bus. Finally, Kevin pointed to a building, which looked for all the world exactly like each of the others.

"That where he stay," he yelled, and the two cars pulled over to the curb. We all got out of the cars and headed for the building, where a door-less doorway awaited us. "He stay up those steps," Kevin said and pointed the way. Two officers entered the dark stairwell with guns drawn. The other two accompanied our group as we followed.

"Why on earth are we here?" I thought in a panic. At the top of the stairs, Kevin pointed to Johnny's door, and the officer in front banged on it, then kicked it open, yelling, "POLICE!"

The lead officers entered the apartment, their guns pointed at its only current occupants...Johnny's younger sister, cutting school, in bed with an older boy who had dropped out. How embarrassing...for her and for me! Johnny, of course, wasn't home right now.

So a police officer took us all back to school and assured us that they would keep looking for Johnny. And they did, and they actually arrested him a few days later. We learned that he was a fifteen-year-old drop-out with a very lengthy arrest record.

I had requested a transfer to another high school in our parish earlier that year, but had been told, once again, that no positions were available. When Johnny's day in court arrived, all of us were scheduled to testify. The results of his juvenile court hearing seemed fair to me. Johnny would go to the Youth Detention Center at Scotlandville, LA, until his eighteenth birthday, and I would be paid my full salary by the school system "until they found a suitable position" for me "in a safe high school." This court order was issued Friday afternoon, and by Monday morning, the system which had repeatedly denied my transfer requests because it had no positions available, suddenly had three for me to select from. I was driven to Carver in a marked car by a uniformed policeman Tuesday morning to collect my personal belongings and move to Warren Easton, where I had offered to clean up at night if the principal could assure me that I would be safe.

Everything seemed to be going great for me. My new students, an assortment of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian, laughed at me, because I kept my classroom doors locked at all times and called out, "Who's there?" before I opened the door to a knock. They couldn't understand my paranoia, and it took a while for me to learn to feel the sense of security that they enjoyed automatically.

I was feeling pretty comfortable in my new school, which I loved, by the time Thanksgiving holidays arrived. I was making great progress in putting the horror story of that fall behind me. Oh, the resilience of youth! Two days before Thanksgiving, I got up early to spend the day with my mom cooking for the family feast. When I reached the stop sign at the main street running alongside my apartment complex, my foot went all the way to the floor and the car sailed across the busy street. Thank God I didn't hit anyone. Luckily, there was a break in the traffic at that moment. I ran into the curb and the car stalled.

I called my parents' neighbor, who was a mechanic, and he came and got me and the car. He dropped me off at my mom's and assured me that I would have my car back by that evening. The only thing I had to worry about was paying the bill.

The rest of the day went by uneventfully. We prepared the traditional dishes, especially the mirlitons, and I played with my younger brother and sister. It was a fun, relaxing day with my family. When Mr. Jerry brought my car back at 7PM, it was already dark and time for me to go home. I paid the bill, reluctantly parting with my hard-earned money. He told me that it was strange about my brakes. He said that it really looked like my brake line had been cut, but of course, that couldn't be, because who would do that to me?

It was strange, but I didn't belabor the thought. It must have just broken. After all, my car wasn't new. Don't brakes just wear out or something? I got into my car and headed for home, putting the question out of my mind entirely. After parking in my regular spot in the lot, I entered the courtyard which my apartment faced. The strong smell of smoke hit me as I turned the corner of the building, and then I saw the crime scene tape strung in front of my apartment and the one next door.

As I approached my apartment, I realized that all of the doors and windows were open, and the unit next door had obviously burned. Even in the darkness, I could see the severe damage. A guard standing near the burned fence moved to meet me as I hurried towards my home. He asked if I was the resident of apartment 95, and when I answered that I was, he began the story of what had happened here today.

Shortly after I left home that morning, the fire department had responded to a call at apartment 94. The unit was totally engulfed in flames. They were able to control the fire before it spread to the adjacent apartments, but there was heavy smoke and water damage to mine. Unfortunately, the fire obviously had been the result of arson. Someone had intentionally torched the home of my neighbor, a young man who had just moved to New Orleans from England. Everything in his home was lost, and he didn't even know anyone in the U.S. yet. They had no clues as to who had done this or any idea of a motive. Of course, the investigation was only beginning.

The guard called the fire investigator to let him know that I had come home, and he asked me to wait for him, if possible, so that he could ask me some questions. While I waited, I went into my apartment to see the damage. The smell of smoke choked me, and a coating of wet black soot covered everything in my home. The most serious problems were in my bedroom, which shared a common wall with the room where the fire had started. Tears filled my eyes at the smell of the smoke and the horror of the damage. I wondered if I would ever get rid of this stench.

When the investigator from the fire department arrived, he suggested that we sit outside by the pool to get some fresh air. He recommended that all windows and doors be left open over night, and he had the guard place a fan in the bedroom

window, facing outside. He assured me that this would help with the smell.

We sat at a poolside table, and he asked me dozens of questions about things that seemed to be totally irrelevant to the fire. Then he asked if there was any reason I could think of that I might be the intended target. This question startled me. Immediately, I answered, "No," but then asked why he would even ask such a question.

"Ms. Demarest," he said, "as part of our routine initial investigation, we checked the telephone book for your neighbors' listings and yours. Your address is listed as apartment 94 instead of 95. The manager said that you were originally planning to move into that unit, but you changed your mind at the last minute. It's your address, according to the telephone book, that was torched. Again, I ask you, is there anyone who would do this to you?"

As he spoke, I became more and more terrified. I could hardly speak when I tried to respond. I kept hearing Mr. Jerry's words earlier that evening. "It's really strange, but your brake line looks like it was cut. Your brake line looks like it was cut. Looks like it was cut." Finally, I found my voice and told the investigator about the problem with my brakes earlier in the day. His eyes lit up, and he obviously felt that the two incidents were related. He was so pleased that his investigation had a definite direction! I was less than pleased that his new direction was me!

The interview continued, and one of the next questions he asked was about my "enemies." Naturally, I said I didn't have any. Everyone loved me, of course! Everyone except...Johnny. But he was in custody. He couldn't possibly be behind this! The investigator was very interested in the story of my Tuesday visitor. I gave him details about the visits, the threats, and then the court actions. After almost every sentence, I assured him that Johnny couldn't be responsible for the fire. He was in Scotlandville, not even close to New Orleans.

The following day, my idealism took another huge hit. I received the call informing me that Johnny was indeed in New Orleans, on a holiday pass to visit his family. Why? Why wasn't he in jail? He had threatened and injured many people. Why was he visiting his family, in town, and free to cut my brake line and set the fire? I had just begun to feel comfortable...safe...out of danger! Here we go again!

GROWING UP IN NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A Teacher's Perspective From Integration to Afrikan Studies

Cover/Feature Story for *Gambit Weekly* by 1998 Teacher of the Year for New Orleans Public Schools

Jim Randels

My favorite thing about school was always recess. After adding and subtracting, reading stories, and studying maps non-stop all day, I wanted to leave the crowded, enclosed classroom and run in the sun, no matter how exciting or dedicated my teacher was. The vast playground protected me from the demands of the teacher; it gave me room to run and space to scream. The only inhibition I remember from the haven of recess was the depressing knowledge that the insistent, black-handled bell would inevitably call me back to class.

As a teacher, I try to remember the depressing sound of that bell. But its memory is overshadowed by my desire to encourage my students to revise their essays one more time or discuss Frederick Douglass' tribute to his mother in more detail. Recess sometimes seems like a luxury my students and I just cannot afford.

But I need to remember recess. I am fortunate that colleagues and students prod me to keep the concept of simplicity and the practice of relaxation in mind. One recent Friday afternoon, for example, I stood in Jackson Square with Shirley Morris, my colleague at Frederick Douglass Senior High. Shirley has taught Junior English and creative writing at Douglass for 30 years. Squinting into the late October sun that dwarfed St. Louis Cathedral, Shirley remarked, "I wonder what *culture* means to our students."

Her question responded to our morning tour of the Black Arts National Diaspora, Inc. (B. A. N. D.) building on N. Claiborne Ave., the old Standard Life building right behind the Circle Grocery Store. Dr. G. Jeannette Hodge, Mama G, has kept this building alive in the shadow of an interstate that tore down trees and almost destroyed a thriving black business district and culturally rich residential neighborhood. Students at the Center (SAC) students had toured B. A. N. D.'s museum and gallery, discussed its cultural education mission, and shared ideas about oral history and community action with representatives from UNO's Anthropology Department. Two of the morning's speakers stressed the importance of students understanding their culture as a means to improve their education and community. It was in response to these speakers that Shirley asked whether or not our students understood the word culture. In her gracious, unassuming way, she was calling me to recess.

Our students needed no such call. They chatted easily and licked ice cream beneath sheltering oaks. Now in the center of old New Orleans, we were awaiting guides from the African American History Alliance of Louisiana to give us an African-centered tour of the French Quarter, a tour that emphasizes New Orleans' monumental 1811 Slave Revolt.

"Sometimes we forget that our students may not understand concepts we take for granted. I bet *culture's* one of those words we need to stop and sift through with them." I know this does not sound like recess—no thundering feet, excited laughter, or messy hands from a mid-morning snack. But Shirley's question summoned recess in a deeper sense. All of us benefit from stepping back from the routines of our day, from seeing our work from a new perspective.

Shirley's words reminded me of this year's first week of school, my first day at Douglass. My students peered out of the high windows of our beautiful St. Claude Ave. building. Looking at the downtown skyline, I asked them to describe their Bywater neighborhood in relationship to the distant office buildings. Jason, a lanky senior, said, "I've never been there." I appreciated Shirley's call to slow down and consider our students' shared and individual experience, to give them the leisure time to process the new ideas they were receiving.

Shirley asks questions all the time, questions that gently prod and encourage. Shirley taught at Douglass when it was still called Nicholls and when all the students were white. We met five months ago when we learned we would be teaching together in the Students at the Center program at Douglass this year. I love and respect this wise woman who teaches me about our profession every time we share leisure time—which as teachers is seldom.

I look forward to learning more from Shirley this year, my first at Frederick Douglass after teaching for 12 years in two other New Orleans Public Schools: McDonogh 35 and Marion Abramson. Having observed Shirley's classes and listened to her observations about our students and neighborhood, I feel fortunate to have her as a colleague in our writing program. Our conversations and her ability remind me of my father's frequent recollections about public perception of our school system. In his position as Baptist minister and Executive Director of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, he comes in contact with a broad spectrum of New Orleans residents. At a recent banquet honoring teachers, he described how acquaintances frequently brag on the wonderful education their children receive in our city's private schools. He replies that he sent five children through the public school system, and all of them performed well in nationally recognized universities. Hearing my father's story and listening to media reports, I am well aware that many New Orleans residents think a public school is not where they or their children would like to be. But knowing teachers such as Shirley Morris are the rule rather than the exception makes me sad that more of our residents do not fully support our school system by sending their children to public school.

I wish everyone in New Orleans could experience the joy and challenge of exploring the potential present within the unlimited minds, abilities, and yes, even souls of the New Orleans Public School student. And I'm glad for the few moments I can share insights with teachers such as Shirley Morris. Her subtle reminder that teachers must place themselves within the shoes of their students, to walk as they walk, has encouraged me to remember to slow down. It has also caused me to reflect upon the recesses as well as the varied educational experiences I've had as a student and teacher in the New Orleans Public Schools for over 25 years.

MY FIRST RECESS:

The Big Kids March

As a teacher, I am privileged to have powerful learning experiences almost daily in my classroom. Four years ago I sat in a stuffy, windowless McDonogh 35 classroom, studying slave narratives with my Black Studies students. As a way to make these distant texts more accessible, I asked my students to recall situations in which their voices were silenced. Following the standard practice of SAC writing teachers, I took out my notepad too. In the silence, we scribbled, conjuring scenes that would expose and liberate times when we felt embarrassed or oppressed. Through writing with the students, I uncovered my most memorable and previously buried recess.

It was 1968; I was in 3rd grade. As usual, my friends and I were playing football. The Hynes Elementary School yard is vast. Playing fields take up three to four times as much space as the school buildings themselves. Just across the drainage canal, City Park seemed to have spilled over, creating a bountiful playground. In our fantasy world, Johnny Unitas hurled bombs to Lance Alworth.

In the middle of one of our jubilant touchdown celebrations, we vaguely heard a chant sneak up on the horizon. Crawling toward us like fog across a lake, the chant gradually took shape. A group of older boys was marching toward us. They had just turned from behind the classroom building. Their unison chant contrasted with our chaotic little boy play. As their faces slowly became distinguishable, we wondered about their mission. Had one of us offended a big boy? Would all of us pay for being little, for enjoying our game too much?

The chant became clearer. I recognized the tune from my Dad's favorite movie, *How the West Was Won*. I had watched it with him at least three times. I knew the film's signature tune, a marching song for soldiers returning from war: "When Johnny comes marching home again, hoorah, hoorah." The military overtones coupled with the size of the marchers left me uneasy, wishing we could just continue playing. But this spectacle demanded our attention. Failing to pay respect to these older boys would mean trouble for us all.

The columns moved closer. Our heads and shoulders sagged. No one wanted to make eye contact with the big kids. As I studied the soggy field, I began to distinguish the words. They celebrated something, but it was something much more sinister than a group of boys imitating a scene of soldiers returning from the war. No, these older boys were celebrating a death: "Martin Luther King is dead, hoorah, hoorah."

I felt confused. In the world of my parents and my father's church, Dr. King's death was a tragedy. Now the big kids were cheering the assassination. The marching mob intimidated me too much to question their intent. My nine-year-old mind wondered how they could celebrate any death, much less that of a great leader, but I lacked the words and courage to voice my confusion. Mainly I wanted to get back to playing football, to hide in the game.

This sacrilegious second line continued its intrusion upon our playing field. Soon faces became distinguishable. I saw Terry in the front line, the older brother of my best friend Darryl. Darryl and I had always wanted to be like Terry. In the old Lakeview Theater on Harrison Ave., we spent as much time studying Terry and his friends as we did watching *Born Free* or *The Dirty Dozen*.

But in the flash of this chant, I saw Terry completely differently; actually, I stopped really seeing him after that. I recall that my overwhelming response was to hide. I closed my eyes and ran recklessly down field.

Over the years, I repressed the memory of this recess until, as a teacher, I asked my students to recall a moment when their voices were silenced. This writing exercise brought to mind my traumatic moment of silence. It has also led me to worry about similar and different indignities and inequalities that silence my students: Overcrowded classrooms, segregation by ability, a culture that values entertainment more than learning, an economy that demands parents spend more time at work than with their children. The list today seems much longer than when I was a student in public school.

Our mission as teachers—and as a community—should be to place students in situations in which they never feel silenced, in which they can immediately discuss rather than repress the many difficult images they encounter. I applaud numerous groups who are doing this work. St. Mark's Community Center creates learning situations for students in small student-teacher ratios. The Crescent City Peace Alliance and the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies sponsor citywide teen newspapers and monthly talk shows by and for teens. The New Orleans Public Schools involve students actively in an advisory group to the superintendent. Numerous other groups and individuals create spaces that encourage and nurture student voices.

Seeing students and schools from a teacher's perspective often leads me to view schools much more positively than the general public. Sensational stories make headlines and create controversy, sure, but I also know a majority of the students I encounter give me hope for our city's future.

However, when I fear I am becoming too optimistic, I recall the words of Michael Tanner, a 1998 McDonogh 35 graduate who has just emerged from Marine boot camp. Last April, during our class evaluation of a recent forum to discuss teen issues, Michael complained that such events do not give voice to the students who most need it. He claimed that the same handful of student leaders represent the student body in situations such as serving on school superintendent advisory panels, advising conflict resolution programs, and hosting visitors to the school. According to Michael, the students who fight and who feel enraged at our community's neglect and even abuse of them seldom have the opportunity to share their opinions in forums or with school and government officials. Michael advocates small settings with education and city leaders for such students, thus giving them a wider, more powerful audience. He argues that in large schools with large student-teacher ratios, the most needy students seldom have the opportunity to develop communication skills that allow them to speak and write effectively to such officials. I agree.

RECESS IS MORE THAN JUST PLAYING IN THE YARD:
The District Middle School

Police sirens accompanied the close of school bells on my first day in middle school. The next morning, I learned that one of my schoolmates had stabbed another. The attacker had been arrested on attempted murder charges, and the victim was rushed to the hospital.

At Marshall Middle School, which in the early 1970's was named for Confederate war hero P. G. T. Beauregard, I encountered other scenes that would make any parent shudder. During one lunch period, I looked up from the football game in

the dirt field in front of the school. From a second floor window, a seventh grader hurtled cat-like to the ground; he rolled over twice, then bounced to his feet and ran back inside to resume the fight that precipitated his fall. I knew students who were escaping poverty by joining the alternative economy of selling illegal drugs. I also occasionally smelled marijuana when I went to the bathroom—although drug use at this district middle school was miniscule compared to that at the magnet high school I later attended, where I knew many drug consumers and no drug dealers. In the mid-1970's, this privileged school, Benjamin Franklin, had the most National Merit Finalists and the reputation of having the most recreational drug users of any school in the city. Indeed, every school has something to make a parent shudder.

I do know how glad—and proud—I am that my parents insisted that I attend Thurgood Marshall Middle School. They understood that a true commitment to the democratic principles of public education meant sending your children to public schools.

Few of my classmates from Hynes attended Marshall. The ones who lived north of Robert E. Lee were in another junior high school district, but the majority chose not to attend Marshall. My parents, however, believed their children should attend public schools. The fact that more children of African than European descent attended Marshall did not deter them. Nor did the fact that Marshall had a reputation of being "rougher" than Hynes.

My move to a new school environment offered me a new form of "recess." I now recall that school as an opportunity for me to enter a radically different world than my Hynes experience offered. For me, this was a breath of fresh air as exhilarating and important as my recess romps on the football fields at elementary school.

Like all good parents, my folks were patient rather than reactionary. The sensational incidents I still recall from my middle school years may well have led parents to pull their children from Marshall. My parents, however, realized that their children needed to be a full part of the city in which they lived. Their determination to keep me in public school proved to be perhaps the most important influence on my later work as a public school teacher. As a student at Marshall for two years, I learned that the knifing, the cat-like pugilist, and the drug dealing were fairly isolated incidents. Most students, regardless of racial, economic, and family backgrounds, were good kids. The events that would have made headlines were far from the norm. At Marshall I not only received a fine education in the classroom, but I also learned to look beyond the sensational, headline-grabbing stories about education. Ten years later, I left University of Virginia with a Master's degree in English eager to teach in a public school system labeled hopeless by the media. I knew problems existed, but I also knew those problems were only a small part of the story.

I look back to my parents' commitment to public schools now when, as a teacher, I envision ways to improve our public schools. In 1983, I received my student teaching assignment at Walter Cohen High School uptown. One of my father's co-workers who lived in the Cohen neighborhood warned me that I would need a gun to teach at that school. I neither heeded nor needed his advice. Instead I wished then, as I still do, that all parents living in that school's district would send their children to Cohen. Had that happened, Cohen's students would rank near the top rather than the bottom of schools on student achievement test scores. More importantly, all children in the neighborhood would benefit from

an education like the one I received at Marshall, which crossed barriers of race, class, and ability, allowing me to develop educationally in an environment that reflected the true nature of our city's population.

MOUNTAIN RECESS:

A Journey to Albuquerque through Afrika

A line of teenagers trudged up the mountain ahead of me. Camping gear stacked on their backs transformed them into amazing ants, carrying food larger than their bodies. We had met at the New Orleans airport at six o'clock on a muggy May morning. Now, twelve hours later, exhaustion transformed the students' excitement about seeing bears into a step-by-step battle through dusty rocks and thin air.

Lesley Quezergue, a senior and aspiring archeologist, fell into complete disarray. Her sleeping bag dangled from her frame pack, knocking against her calves and tripping her at each step. She tried to calm her labored breathing as one of the guides and I secured her sleeping bag. Although we were far from a classroom, neither of us thought of this as recess. I imagined Lesley secretly hoping for some magic teacher's bell to summon us down the mountain.

The sleeping bag triage lasted long enough for Lesley to speak in more than monosyllabic gasps. Her words assured me that my mission as an Afrikan-centered teacher was successful: "I'm so glad we came here. I feel a real connection with my ancestors. Researching for this trip, rehearsing the play, travelling all day, and now fighting my way up this mountain are nothing compared to the struggles they faced."

At that moment, I was glad to be missing my first Jazz Fest weekend in 16 years. I don't make that statement lightly. I have missed only one of the seven annual festival days in all those years. And on that day I had a 102-degree fever and was exhausted from attending the festival and directing a documentary of festival-goers each morning and evening. Lesley's positive perspective and her classmates' thorough study for this Afrikan and Native American cultural exchange made me content with leaving behind out-of-town guests I had not seen in a year.

In the teepee later that night, clouds drifting among the stars that watched over us, I reflected upon two even more radical breaks in my routine—breaks that led me through Afrika to Albuquerque. Four years ago, I began teaching Black Studies at McDonogh 35. About a year after that, in May 1995, two students and I finalized our funding proposal to create a school-based, community-action-oriented writing program, Students at the Center. Three years of funding from Hibernia National Bank, a private local foundation, and Write to Change—a national literacy advocacy project ends this year. This funding has allowed the program to expand in 1998 from McDonogh 35 to Frederick Douglass Senior High. Teaching Black Studies and creating Students at the Center, along with my education at Thurgood Marshall, have significantly shaped my development as a public school teacher by solidifying a community-centered philosophy of education and creating a small enough student-teacher ratio to carry out this philosophy.

With students snoring heavily around me in the cold mountain air, I recalled the community-centered approach to education that had led my students and me to this mountaintop.

Even before I began teaching Black Studies, I was aware of Afrikan-centered cultural education groups in New Orleans. Charlene Bridges, now a student at the University of New Orleans, wrote as a student in my creative writing class a compelling description of the family atmosphere she enjoyed as a child attending Kwanzaa celebrations and other cultural events. I had seen her dance with Culu, an African dance group, and saw her respectful interactions with loving adults within the Afrikan community.

In 1994, when I began teaching Black Studies, I knew that Afrikan-centered education—and to my thinking then and now any truly effective education—needed a greater concentration on the community than on the individual, an atmosphere Charlene had described so poignantly in her Kwanzaa piece. My growing understanding of Afrikan educational philosophy complemented my teaching experience and my graduate work in education. I embraced an Afrikan concept of education that viewed learning as a seamless process involving not only schools but also community and family leaders. At the same time, the student's education is not for the benefit of the individual—to prepare for a job or to obtain material wealth. Instead education is an on-going process that benefits a localized community. The effectiveness of this concept depends on a close relationship between school and neighborhood.

One way I tried to create such a community was by establishing a book discussion series with Jennifer Turner of Community Book Center. Jennifer's sharp wit, infectious smile, and nurturing hugs greet small groups of students twice a month. We meet with Mama Jennifer and interested adults to discuss novels, poetry, histories, and cultural studies. Parents and students from other schools occasionally join the discussions too. The communal nature of our Saturday discussions with Mama Jennifer epitomizes the openness of Afrikan cultural institutions in New Orleans to the education of youth.

At Community Book Center, students learn that many elders lived through experiences described in books we read. During a discussion of Carter G. Woodson's *The Miseducation of the Negro,* adults and teens compared their educational experiences, enriching the students' reading of the book and their understanding of their own education. Many students also built relationships with the bookstore and adults who frequent it. As a writing and Black Studies teacher, I am able to incorporate these relationships into our course work, thus deepening our study and helping expand community involvement in education.

These discussions built a foundation that prepared my students for their cultural exchange trip to Albuquerque. Students developed stronger interest in family and city history. They understood more fully the connections between past and present struggles for justice. When the African American History Alliance of Louisiana (AAHAL) announced its writing contest commemorating the 1811 Slave Revolt, my students understood this invitation as a call to honor their ancestors and to explore the relationship between past and present struggles for freedom. In addition, the Students at the Center course, with its small class size and flexible curriculum, allowed my students to engage themselves fully in AAHAL's project. In workshop settings throughout November 1997, they developed writing and reading skills through background studies in black revolutions—from maroon colonies in southern Louisiana through the Harlem Renaissance and on to civil rights and black power movements.

One of the many projects that resulted from our study of the 1811 slave revolt was a play written in a collaborative workshop setting by Trennessa Walton,

whose energy is now lighting fires among her Freshman class at Xavier University. The play seeks solutions to violence and rage in our society through its tribute to maroon colonies, the Haitian Independence Revolution, and the cooperation between Afrikans and Native Americans. Students from four public schools then rehearsed throughout the two-week winter break under the direction of Khaia Livers, tireless theater artist who is executive director for the Alliance of Community Theaters, which produces an annual black theater festival in New Orleans.

In early March, I received a phone call from Elizabeth Rhodes, school liaison director for Xavier University's Center for the Advancement of Teaching and promoter of service learning and school partnerships. Elizabeth had organized a cultural exchange trip to Albuquerque Academy and the Laguna Pueblo near Santa Fe. Students from Xavier University and Marshall Middle School were presenting their powerful vignettes on five "persons of peace" in New Orleans. Elizabeth had seen a broadcast of the 1811 Slave Revolt play and felt it would complement well her cultural exchange to New Mexico.

Two months later, with the financial assistance of the New Orleans Public Schools' Africana Studies Department, eight students and I were sleeping in a teepee, recalling wise words from Chief Thundercloud and New Orleans' own Yellow Pocahontas Chief Darryl Montana. Earlier on that May day in Albuquerque, students from New Mexico and New Orleans gathered in a circle at our base camp. Chief Darryl, the spiritual leader of our group, set the tone for our climb up the mountain. He described the many hours he had spent after work each day and on the weekends sewing his suit for Mardi Gras day. For twelve months Darryl had not had a day off. He looked at the students, his soft voice as proud and magnificent as the mountains on the horizon behind him, and explained that he chose this trip as his one week of vacation in the entire year.

Darryl's leadership exemplified the Afrikan-centered education and small, communal settings so central to my teaching philosophy. His remarks, combined with the students' historical study, in-depth writing workshops, and communal study in classes with small student-teacher ratios made it possible for Lesley Quezergue and her classmates to drag themselves up that mountain with joy.

Staying in New Orleans Public Schools

My students still hold book discussions a couple of Saturdays a month at Community Book Center. This fall, the readings supplement work two Students at the Center class members are completing as interns at the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. This innovative internship, the first of its kind for the Corps, is made possible by New Orleans Public Schools through the Africana Studies and Culture Department and its director, Dr. Clyde Robertson.

One Saturday this September, when Jennifer and I were greeting each other in the front of the store just before a discussion of Leland Ferguson's *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800,* I heard a familiar voice from the back of the store.

"Yo, JR—what's up?"

GaBrilla Ballard, a poet of boundless energy who took my creative writing class three years ago, was hustling to the front of the store to grab a book of children's poetry. Her overalls sagged about her, a casual counterpoint to the precise percussion of her beaded braids knocking together as they cascaded down her neck. I smiled, recalling Lesley Quezergue's joy at honoring ancestors as she performed a play and climbed a mountain in Albuquerque last May. GaBrilla was carrying on a tradition. In Community Book Center's back room, she was leading a Saturday art and writing class for children. As a dedicated Afrikan cultural worker, she understands her role of reaching out to younger children and bringing them into a community of education.

I thought at that moment of my own heritage, of my parents. They too raised me to be a part of a community by insisting that we remain part of the public schools. I see a direct line with the emphasis on the community being more important than the individual in my parents' life and Christian teachings. Now admittedly my parents and I often interpret Christianity differently. But I have always thought that for them, just as Jesus chose to walk on earth, to be among "the least of these," so they believed that their children should not be set apart from other children in the city.

Through my twenty-five years of studying and teaching in the city's public schools, I have tried to live up to my parents' ideals and continue their legacy. When I hear proposals to improve education through voucher systems, erasures of school boards, city government takeovers, and other schemes, these plans seem hollow and superficial. I wish more parents and community leaders would work to improve our schools and our economy by totally immersing themselves and their families into our public school system, a system that, despite all its flaws, has powerfully enriched my life and my family. It is an institution that can truly transform our city, provided it receives true and full participation of New Orleans' residents.

PART SIX: Understanding Our Legacy

TIMELINE: 1965–PRESENT

Post-Civil Rights

1951

1961

1961

New Orleans producer and arranger Harold Battiste establishes **All For One (AFO),** the first independent, black, New Orleans jazz recording company, featuring artists such as Ellis Marsalis and Ed Blackwell.

1965

1965

The **Free Southern Theater,** with its mission to bring theater to communities that never had access to it, moves to New Orleans. There, it acted as the cultural arm of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the city's civil rights movement, and was a precursor to Junebug Productions, a cultural organization based in New Orleans.

1968

1968

The **Republic of New Africa** movement is established as a result of a Detroit conference of militant African American nationalists. The group demanded control of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, as well as $400 billion dollars from the government as reparations.These states would constitute the Republic of New Africa. RNA also established **Ahidiana School** in New Orleans teaching awareness, history, and self-sufficiency to black children as part of the independent African school movement.

1969

1970

November 19, 1970

A 24-hour standoff involving numerous guns, over 250 police, and a tank occurs in the Desire Housing Development between local **Black Panther Party** and New Orleans Police Department. The standoff ends with no bloodshed when police retreat. Hundreds of Desire residents, including numerous children, had placed themselves between the Panthers and the police to protect the Panthers.

1971

1971

Dorothy Mae Taylor becomes the first black woman elected to the state House of Representatives and New Orleans City Council, where she introduced and won passage of "Mardi Gras Ordinance" banning segregation within Mardi Gras organizations seeking permits to parade on the streets of New Orleans.

August 7, 1971

Jury in trial of Black Panthers from New Orleans on a range of charges returns unanimous not guilty verdict after deliberating for only 31 minutes.

1951–1967

Oliver Bush v. Orleans Parish School Board, a case originally filed by A. P. Tureaud in 1951 to desegregate the city's public schools, is finally settled in 1967. Tureaud and NAACP fought similar integration cases across Louisiana during (and after) this time period, including cases in St. Helena, Iberville, Lake Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, Tangipahoa, Acadia, Evangeline, Lafourche, Bossier, St. Landry, Caddo, St. Charles, Jefferson Davis, Iberia, St. Martin, Pointe Coupee, Lafayette, West Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge parishes. The original East Baton Rouge case ended in a 1970 out-of-court settlement but still lingered under federal jurisdiction into the 21st Century.

1969–1970

Dana Hubbard v. Fred Tannehill, **President, Louisiana State Board of Education** requires the state of Louisiana to supply African American History textbooks and related materials to public schools.

1972

1972

United Teachers of New Orleans forms when white members of the local affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA) join with the local, predominantly (and historically) black American Federation of Teachers (AFT) local 527 to form one of the most integrated unions in the history of New Orleans. Significant in the twilight of the integration era is that the "white" union entered into the "black" union rather than the AFT affiliate joining the NEA affiliate. The Louisiana Education Association-Louisiana Teacher Association Joint Committee, which included **Daniel E. Byrd** of the NAACP, worked on this merger from 1967-1974. UTNO members selected **Nat LaCour,** president of **American Federation of Teachers Local 527**, as UTNO's president and **Cheryl Epling** of the NEA affiliate as vice president.

1972

At a campaign forum sponsored by the all-White League of Women Voters, Orleans Parish School Board candidates discuss the success of teacher certification tests in eliminating "unqualified" teachers and the need for competency tests in schools to remove social promotion.

1973

1973

Fire engulfs **Upstairs Lounge,** a prominent French Quarter gay bar, and becomes the deadliest fire in the city's long history, killing 32 people. The incident exacerbated the city's homophobia. Some churches refused to allow funerals for the victims, and some parents refused to claim the bodies of their children for burial.

1976

1976

Rose Loving, with her election to the Orleans Parish School Board, becomes the first black woman elected to city-wide public office.

1978

1978

Ernest "Dutch" Morial becomes the first black mayor of New Orleans.

September, 1978

United Teachers of New Orleans holds a strike that includes more than 70% of the teaching force. The strike ends on September 11, after almost two weeks, with the Orleans Parish School Board allocating approximately $6.2 million to fund teacher pay raises.

1979

1979

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond is founded to promote antiracist principles in community organizing, a task in which it is still engaged.

1980

1980

Charles Martin, the retiring school superintendent of New Orleans Public Schools in 1980, cites a lack of community and financial support as the central reason for a multi-million dollar deficit of the school system at the end of his term. Martin remarked to the *Times Picayune* in his final interview, "Having adequate funding does not guarantee quality, but the absence of the dollar ensures inferior education."

1991

1991

Diana Bajoie became the first black woman elected to the Louisiana state senate.

African American History Alliance of Louisiana is established by Leon Waters and Malcolm Suber. The group works to pressure historical and preservation groups in Louisiana and elsewhere to enlarge an awareness of enslaved Africans in tours, museums and other public forums, especially regarding the 1811 Slave Revolt.

Tamborine and Fan Club, a Treme neighborhood community education organization modeled after the Freedom Schools in 1964 in Mississippi, is established. The group, under the direction of Jerome Smith, is active in preserving grass roots New Orleans culture through Mardi Gras Indian work.

1995

1995

Students at the Center, a writing community based in public schools in New Orleans, is designed and founded by McDonogh 35 High School juniors **Erica Decuir** and **Kenyatta Johnson**, in collaboration with their classmates and teachers.

PART SIX: Understanding Our Legacy

Reflecting On Our Heroes

THE COURAGE OF A WOMAN: Maria Stewart (1803-1879)

Maria Hernandez

After her good friend David Walker was killed for circulating a pamphlet condemning slave owners for their evil and hypocrisy, Maria Stewart started an odyssey writing and speaking about the same things. From 1831 to 1834, her essays were published in *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper as well as in her own books. But by 1834, the men in power decided that writing and speaking were not proper roles for women in society. She worked the rest of her life as a school teacher, so we know she was still reaching many people.

Also what she said and wrote has reached a few of our most important African American women and even me in 2004.

I admire that she pushed to have her say and refused to bite her lip while her people were still scared of hearing the whip. Imagine having your best friend killed for writing against white power and then turning around and walking into the fire yourself. Even though she wrote her essays in a humble tone, she had a strong will to be heard; and that is why her words never came out a mumble. She shared stories of other women who spoke out before her.

In her essay, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address" she showed people that women have always stood and said something when it is in dire need of being said. She also said that she was an instrument of God. I guess you can say she had a higher purpose. Maria Stewart saw an opportunity and used it well—by what many of us can tell a great element. That's what she was. Because of her we have Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Charlotte Forten, and many, many more. Reading about her has even made me begin thinking about writing not just about my life and family but also about injustice in society. Today things are very different from the way they were before, and I'd like to think she had something to do with it.

There is no way I can repay you for your deed. All I can say is, "Thank you, Mrs. Stewart, and may you rest in peace."

Harriet Tubman

Brandy Brown

Throughout my years of schooling, Black History month has been my favorite time to learn. I learned about Dr. King most of all, but I would like to have learned more about the women of Black History. I've often wondered what the women were doing while the men made life-changing decisions. Were they unknown, unvoiced, and unremarkable people of no knowledge or importance? I do not believe this, so now I'm learning about Harriet Tubman.

After reading her story, I am appalled. She should be much more than just a flashing light in Black History. She should burn in everyone's mind as the true hero that she is. She has proven to be determined and diligent, especially with the circumstances she faced. Her success is so remarkable that her story has survived for over 100 years. To escape back and forth into slavery must have been the hardest thing ever done, the terror increasing up until the nineteenth time. Harriet brought to freedom more than 300 enslaved Africans. She also served as a Union soldier in the Civil War and was an abolitionist speaker. She did all of this not being able to read and also having a disease that put her to sleep at random.

Harriet Tubman did much more than give a speech or lead a march; she used any means necessary to help her people to freedom. Whether giving abolitionist speeches or holding a gun to the head of a frightened escapee to prevent him from returning to the plantation and endangering the other escapees, she always completed her task. That is why she is called Moses. She did what few other ex-slaves dared to; she went back into slavery.

She was as courageous as any man would have been. In *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*, Tubman says, "I had reasoned dis out in my mind; there was one or two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive."

This bravery and success should make her one of the most honored and celebrated women in Black History. But she is not. She is only mentioned once a year, in the month of February. That is a shame, and something should be done to change it.

Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass

Bruce "Philosophy" Coleman

In the year 2000, we have come a long way. Sometimes I think we have it too easy. We have the chances and opportunity to be something great without the struggle and pain our people went through in the past. Today we can freely read books and learn how to write them. Every day I get on the bus, and I sit in the front. At one time, I would always sit in the back. But for me sitting in the front makes me feel Rosa Parks' spirit bonded in me. Just like when I read and write, I think of the man who once led a minor insurrection against his masters—a young man who fled hungry and hunted to the North, where he was befriended by abolitionists. That man is Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass lived in a time when it was against the law to read and write. He had to steal books from the library and trick the slaver sons into reading, so he could observe and learn. Sometimes I think we have it too easy, with out realizing what went before us. We can't lose our roots, not now; we need to let the spirit of Frederick Douglass live in us, and continue his legacy.

When I read his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, his spirit rises in me like the sun coming over the earth. I feel the struggle that he went through. It makes me realize I need to stop complaining about life and take it the way it is. Either deal with it or make a change—the way Frederick Douglass did. For, we do have it too easy. We need to take a stand, a stand that is stronger then a huge tree. We need to take a stand like a huge tree that can't be cut down. We must have unity. If we want to grow like a strong tree, then we can spread Frederick Douglass' legacy with our leaves. You know the words, together we stand divided we fall.

When I read his autobiography I became stronger and stronger. Can you picture yourself, living in that time? A time when the means of knowing was withheld from you. A time when they parted children from their mothers at an early age. A time when you never had the chance to enjoy your mother's soothing presence, her tender and watchful care. This was Frederick Douglass' life; he was seven years old when his mother died.

In those days, they kept family members separated from each other. His mother walked 12 miles to come see him. This reminds me of the way the system is today. Slavery may be gone in its most obvious form, but it still exists. We are separated by schools. The better, more successful kids go to separate schools from the ones who are having trouble in school. Either from the lack of attention or just didn't have a good foundation. Even though Frederick Douglass saw his mom a few times, that still was a part of his foundation.

"I do not recollect ever seeing my mother by the light of day. She was with me in the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone."

Reading about this makes me appreciate my mom and dad even more, even though we had our bad moments. There were times when I would actually curse my parents out. I got in all kinds of trouble with the law, but despite the disrespect and problems I gave them, they were always there to bail me out. Just like Frederick Douglass' mom was there for him, even though they were on separate plantations. Reading *The Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass* gave me the opportunity to appreciate my life even more.

One day I hope we all can make a change in this world. Let the legacy continue.

When I Think of Education, I Think of Power (for Homer Plessy—Education Activist)

Rodneka Shelbia

When I think of education, I think of power.
If I have power, then I can make change.
Change for the good not for the bad
Not for the money not even for the fame.
Frederick A. Douglass, he was born a slave
On a plantation. He was born and raised.
Books and posters were all he read.
That man had it made
And all he had was his head.
His master's wife taught him to read.
He kept on reading, and you know he succeeded.
He got so smart he brought himself some freedom.
He went up North, and they couldn't believe him.
Wrote a couple of books and shipped to England
To protect himself from the white man's ignorance.
Soon he came back for his people,
Gave some speeches that led to freeing us.
Frederick had an Education
That gave him power.
Because he had power,
He made change,
Change for the good, not for the bad,
Not for the money, not even for the fame.

This Blood

Damien Theodore

This blood, this red painful blood, my blood, my ancestors' blood, our blood.

The blood from that beautiful woman's nose who needed to be beaten just so she could know she was loved.

The blood from that young black brother who tried to be a thug.

The blood that slaves bled while on master's field.

The blood that Johnny bled when he tried to get real.

These drips of blood, drips that will turn into drops, drops that will turn into cups, cups of blood that America has created but once they hear this poem they're going to feel hated.

Cause I'm going to take this blood and turn it into love by pissing out through my pen and creating poetry.

Poetry that will solve my problems and yours, your mama's, your daddy's, your sister's and hers.

Poetry that sometimes makes you wanna sin, then poetry that will make you wanna repent.

Poetry that will make you feel alive.

Poetry, I mean blood, that will make you feel revitalized.

Blood that America created, blood that will beg for Willie Lynch to be reincarnated. Cuz they've gotta do something to this creature that they've created.

But thank you George Bush, thank you David Duke, for you've made this a brighter day.

Thank you constitution, thank you pledge of allegiance. Thank you AmeriKKK.

No more backing that thing up or nigger please cuz my poetry serves as therapy for both you and me.

No more Dr. Korvorkiens or 'Passing the Courvoissier' no more reason to commit suicide, cuz my poetry gives you a reason to wanna live just one more day.

And look at all these people sitting around like they just don't understand, but they better watch out because here comes another educated black man. Damn it America, do you see what you've created? FREDERICK DOUGLASS, MARTIN LUTHER KING, LANGSTON HUGHES, all reincarnated.

Mother Catherine Seals (from the play Lower 9 Stories)

Lower 9 Stories cast (students from Lawless Positive Outreach Leaders and McDonogh 35 Students at the Center)

Mother Catherine Seals led the spiritualist church in the 1920's right here in the lower 9th ward. Once, she was very sick and sought the help of a white woman, a faith healer. But this woman would not help Mother Catherine because of the color of her skin. Thus Mother Catherine healed herself and became the great nurturer and healer of this entire community, founding the Temple of the Innocent Blood, a home where unwed mothers could bear and raise their children.

She is compassion. She is crying tonight because she sees a lot of pain and suffering that has happened in her community since she passed on to heaven. We honor her tonight and ask her to continue to care for us as we tell you our stories, as we tell your stories. Lower 9, don't it sound fine. It gets hard sometimes, but you've got to shine.

When Mother Catherine died in 1930, at 43, a huge thunderstorm throttled the city. "The day of the funeral there were thousands of people," deacon Lastie recalled. "Mother Catherine always said there'd come a day when the sun would shine in the rain... . When the funeral reached the Industrial Canal bridge, the sun broke through, and people started fallin' out on the bridge. People had babies in their arms, and they knew it was prophecy.

"That was a powerful, powerful woman, and she done so much for people."

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.: Remember, Celebrate, Emulate

Adriane Frazier

I remember being in second grade at Patch Elementary in Stuttgart, Germany. Ms. Thompson began the class by explaining that it was Black History month. Clearing her throat, she started to tell a story about a civil rights activist. She said his name was Martin Luther King Jr. She selected me to read aloud a speech that he had written entitled "I Have a Dream."

The words didn't really resonate. How could they? I had spent the majority of my childhood in Europe and had no connection to the Jim Crow south. Sure I was only one of five African Americans in my class, and Ms. Thompson was the only black teacher at my school, but the closest I had ever gotten to any type of "Movement" was putting up yellow ribbons in hope of peace during Desert Storm/Shield. I witnessed families like my own being torn apart by war, unaware that only a few decades earlier families in the South had experienced similar hardships due to racism.

Until recently I was never able to make a connection between my own life and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I had studied King's views on integration and equality, but I was never taught that King lived during a time of war or that he took a stand against the U. S. involvement in Vietnam, even though I could identify with that. Many of the organizations with which King was associated discouraged him from taking public positions on foreign affairs. King spoke openly about his disdain saying, "The Negro must not allow himself to become a victim of the self-serving philosophy of those who manufacture war that the survival of the world is the white man's business alone." Following his anti-war declaration, King was abandoned and consequently labeled a threat by some people who once supported him.

To truly celebrate Dr. King's legacy we must acknowledge both his popular and unpopular decisions and commemorate his life through our own fights for social justice. I know from experience how easy it is to be blinded by one's own good fortunes. It wasn't until I became actively involved with the impoverished community surrounding my inner-city school that my eyes were opened. When I recognized the systemic root of my people's condition, I became angry and saw the need for change.

Realizing the need for change and actually taking action are quite different. Here is where we must emulate Dr. King by giving our time, energy, knowledge and, in his case, our lives for the benefit of the whole.

In an effort to positively affect my community, I volunteer at a school that has been labeled "academically unacceptable." I teach radio production to eighth graders. We discuss oppression, exploitation and stereotypes and use the understanding of these concepts to build foundations for the social commentaries the students write. Now I can give these kids what I was deprived of in second grade: knowledge of the social injustices that cripple us and encouragement to challenge the system.

"How long will prejudice blind the visions of men? How long? Not long! Because no lie can live forever. How long? Not long! Because you shall reap what you sow." Today King's words ring more true to me than ever.

Dr. King Beyond Vietnam

Latasha Barnes

"Fight, fight!" I heard a crowd of people yelling across the street from my home.

"Fight, fight!" I heard the words once again as they lured me forward. I broke through the crowd of people with eager faces and anticipating eyes. In the middle of the crowd were two girls yelling at each other and cursing each other out. I stepped in between them, not caring about the consequences of getting shot, stabbed, or hit.

"Aren't the two of you supposed to be friends?" I asked calmly. They both looked at me, and their heads flew to the ground.

"You're going to let these people that you don't know and who just want to see a fight influence you to fight each other over something I'm sure you both can sit down and talk about?"

An angered voice from the crowd yelled, "Go home and let them fight." But instead we went to my house to talk out their differences.

Some of the people in my neighborhood don't agree with my decision to stop the fight before it started. But that doesn't mean that if I see another fight escalating, I won't stop it. I'm going to stand up for what I believe in and promote nonviolent behavior even if it means I won't have friends in the end, because I know what I'm doing is right. At the time I didn't realize it, but I was imitating what someone else would have done if he were in my shoes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King's hope in his last years was not based on the backing he received from whites or blacks. His hope was grounded almost exclusively upon his faith in God and biblical black traditions. This faith told him to stand up for what's right even if it would cost him his life. Take for instance when he decided to take a stand against the Vietnam War. Although King was slow making a decision, when he did, no one could make him change his mind.

"Now I have decided. I will not be harassed. I will not be silent. And I will be heard," he said to his staff at a retreat.

King's great "Beyond Vietnam" speech, given at Riverside Church in New York exactly one year before his assassination, was heard around the world. His public condemnation of America for its criminal involvement in Vietnam did not begin with the Riverside address, nor did it end there. After he made up his mind, he made the Vietnam War a primary focus in the remaining year of his life.

During the last year of his life, King often found himself alone and isolated. He didn't have the support of his friends and followers in the SCLC and the NAACP. Many other people, including government officials who supported civil rights legislation, told him to keep silent about the war.

The more he was pressured to keep silent, the more forcefully he spoke out against war. "It is just as evil," he proclaimed in a sermon at Ebenezer, "to kill Vietnamese as it is to kill Americans, because they are all God's children."

Even though I just stopped a fight and he was a big time preacher/minister who spoke out on something that affected the whole world, we still have one thing in common: We stood up for what we believe in. Even if we were killed, even if we lost all of our friends, it didn't matter. We did what was right in the sight of God.

LEGACY: In Honor of Tom Dent

Towana Pierre

Honey coated lies slip seamlessly through time's decrepit hands.

Great poets writhe in the void of the gospel, or history, as we know it.

Tom's night dreams flit in the shadow of broken lessons.

His incantations fall hollowly, skimming the bourbon-coated streets of his Danny Barker haunted fantasies.

Enchanted calls of capitalism beckon chocolate hearts, drowning Etheridge's belly song in the silence of a private prison bar slam.

Green grass browns in the shade of yellow balloons. Nothing to phone home about. Just another broken spirit.

Asha Bandele's prayer for the living falls on deaf ears of long-locked warriors whose eyes are glazed over by nature's painkillers. They gaze in blank adoration on token items of the revolution. Kente cloth, How to Get Dreaded Fast manuals, on sale now.

Chancellor Williams reflects on the vision of sun-kissed warriors bathing in the glow of ceremonial fires. Sand invades palatial civilizations with blood-hungry conquerors intent on plundering the earth's womb.

Yet, behind feathered masks of nonchalance, the ancestors live on,

crouching in the crevices of glass-strewn avenues, watching from seemingly sinister skies over neighborhoods set on self-destruction.

The spirits of the old rise in a deafening mantra, trailing silky strands of pride and confidence into our sub consciousness.

And, on the breeze lingers the lone whisper, "Legacy."

Sharing a Life, Passing a Torch

Maria Hernandez

Leatrice Reed got her first job as a kindergarten teacher. She got her job in 1949, the year they decided to put kindergarten in black schools. It's funny, because there were only three people going to school for nursery school and kindergarten certification, and she was one of them. Her job was something of a surprise to everyone, because she had just made twenty.

The first time she went to an American Federation of Teachers Local 527 union meeting was because her close friend, Inola Ferdinand, took her. She enjoyed the meeting but didn't say much, because in those days everything you said was recorded and that scared some people away. Another thing that prevented some teachers from joining was the union dues. Teachers only made $227 a month after taxes were taken out. So it's understandable that some teachers had difficulty paying the $15 a month union dues.

Ms. Leatrice remembers that in those times children who couldn't read on a certain level at a certain grade were held back as many times as needed to reach the level their supposed to be on.

Ms. Leatrice later married Edward Roberts, who was a very active member of the teachers union. Ms. Leatrice decided to stay home and take care of their son, Edward Reed Roberts. She loved staying home with her child, but she made it clear that nothing in her life was about women being subordinate to men. In fact, women ran almost all of the union in those years.

Ms. Leatrice herself is an example of female union leadership. When she retired, she helped establish the retirees chapter for United Teachers of New Orleans.

"Just because you retire doesn't mean you stop being an activist." That's the reason she founded the retiree chapter. Ms. Leatrice and Mr. Edward struggled their whole lives to get teachers the benefits they deserved through the health and welfare fund. They succeeded, but now everything they worked for is on the brink of getting destroyed as the school system considers cutting the Health and Welfare Fund to balance its budget.

"I've done all I can, but before I'm gone I want someone to pass the torch to," Ms. Leatrice said.

That's why I went to see her. I wanted to let her know that we students appreciate her and that there are a few of us who would gladly receive the torch and run with it.

Panthers in Desire

Christopher Burton

In class one day, I learned that the New Orleans chapter of the Black Panthers started in 1970 in the Desire Housing Development. As soon as I heard this, I remembered that my grandmother lived in Desire back then. When I got home, I asked her about those days. She told me two small things about the Panthers and referred me to my great aunt, saying she couldn't remember those long-ago incidents well. My great aunt told me she "blocked out" those memories of the Panthers in Desire.

Since my elders knew so little about this history, I decided to find out about it on my own. I dug into some books, found some facts, and talked to my teachers. From that research, I imagined a conversation between two Desire residents in 1970.

"They've killed Kenneth!"

"Who killed who?"

"The cops killed Kenneth outside Broussard's store on Piety. Right outside Panther Headquarters."

"Was he one of those Black Panthers? Is that why he got killed?"

"Nope. From what I hear he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time when the police opened fire."

"You know who's wrong? The Police. They trying to run out the Panthers when they haven't done nothing wrong."

"You right about that. All the Panthers are for is to get us blacks the land, bread, housing, education, justice, and peace we deserve."

That's what I imagine a conversation would have been like between two residents. I know that hundreds of people crowded around the Panthers in public support and expressed these kinds of views. I'll make sure my children know this history.

Why Panther?

Adriane Frazier

They stood ready to attack,
Were unwilling to go back to cotton pickin
And the required yes suhs and no suhs
of plantation days.

Eyes gleamed when the prey was
spotted in their path.
A myriad of raised fists and picked afros.

They knew they couldn't sit around
and wait for Huey to drop dead,
had to become the hunter or the hunted.

Their slick shiny leather jackets
disguised their demise.
And the blue eyes cringed in fear
as the panthers crept near.

They approached first slowly
And silently, like an undetected gas leak—
And then pounced and landed
softly on their feet.

They pursued the enemy swiftly,
chased them through office buildings
and police stations,
clawing at corruption.
Got picked off by government agencies,
written off as threats to national security.
Society stood silently and watched as the poachers
held up black panther skins dripping with blood.

So now we're told to keep our "eyes on the prize,"
to sell our souls for cheap acceptance.
But reflecting on the loss of black lives,
it's easy too see why they chose... panther.

NEW ORLEANS TEEN PRESERVES CULTURAL LEGACY: An Interview with Brian Nelson

Camerian Williams, editor of *Our Voice* newspaper

In February 2001, an extremely bright and multi-talented young filmmaker and Mardi Gras Big Chief was given the opportunity to present his art at Sundance Film Festival. He is 19 year old Brian Nelson and this is his story. To see videos by Brian and other teens go to www.listenup.org. To learn about student video programs, go to www.novacvideo.org.

Our Voice: So, How did the Mardi Gras Indians get started?

Brian Nelson: In the 1880's, Mardi Gras was one of the many activities that people of African descent were not allowed to participate in. At that time the holiday was modeled after European monarchs, and participants would masquerade around dressed up like white kings and queens. The people of African descent decided to celebrate in their own way, but they decided to dress like Native Americans to pay homage to the tribes that provided sanctuary to them during slavery. As a result of this new form of celebrating, the Mardi Gras Indians were born. Like the natives, Mardi Gras Indians are divided into tribes, and there is a tribal leader for each called the "big chief." The tribe that I am over is called The Guardians of the Flame.

OV: What exactly is it that a Big Chief does?

BN: He is the protector and leader of his community. During Mardi Gras, he is the one that keeps things together. He is a good role model. He watches over his tribe like they are his children. He is the chief!

OV: How long have you been masking Indian?

BN: Since 1989.

OV: How did you get started?

BN: Well, my grandfather, my uncle, and I are the original Guardians of the Flame. A month before he died, my grandfather chose me to carry the torch. I've been Big Chief since November 01, 1998.

OV: What are some of the extraordinary things your job as Big Chief has allowed you to do?

BN: Well, we have performed in Connecticut, New Mexico, Ghana, Malaysia, France, Martinique, and Singapore. I once did a lecture at Yale University, and in November 2000, I was featured in *Gambit Weekly*'s "40 Under 40."

OV: So, what do you do outside of being a tribal leader?

BN: I am a youth producer at New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC). There, we make Pubic Service Announcements, and they are distributed through Listen Up. I am also a student at Delgado, but I plan on transferring after my sophomore year to Dillard. It doesn't really matter what I may do in my spare time, I am always a Mardi Gras Indian first.

OV: Briefly describe some of the work you presented at the Sundance Film Festival.

BN: One was called Media Hype. It was about how the media embellishes the truth about what goes on in black communities. I also did one called Choices. In that one, I used the Mardi Gras Indians and New Orleans Brass Band Music as alternatives to selling drugs and crime. I wanted the youth to know that there are other choices out there.

OV: As a teen, what impacts do you feel you can make on the world around you?

BN: I have the ability to shed a positive light on Mardi Gras Indian Culture and get rid of the negative stereotypes about us.

Also, it is my duty as chief to lead my people into the light. We need to stop placing other peoples' limits on ourselves. We need to start being our true creative selves.

OV: What are your plans for the future?

BN: I plan on finishing college, getting my Bachelors degree in film, going to film school, and becoming an independent filmmaker.

OV: Finally, do you have any advice for your peers?

BN: If you have a goal or craft that you really have a passion for, stick to it. Also, try to say something in your art that you feel might change someone's life for the better.

Grandfather Tribute

Gabrielle Turner

When my dad told me my granddad couldn't read or write, I was shocked.

My granddad, Lloyd Turner, was born and raised in Natchez, Mississippi, where he still lives. He is the only person I know without an elementary or high school education to become a carpenter, raise nine children, and build over seventy houses including his own.

I didn't find this out until one weekend my dad and I went to visit him. We went to church with him on Sunday. The church was really small and surrounded by a lot of trees. There were about 15 people there, including my dad and I. My granddad was sitting in the pulpit, because he's a deacon. When it was time for my granddad to do scripture reading, a lady stood on side of him and read the scripture and he repeated. I asked my dad, "why is he repeating after her?" He told me to be quiet and he would tell me after the service. Because I was so anxious to find out, the service seemed to be taking forever. Finally, church ended. I hopped in my dad's big white truck. Before he could get in the seat good, I asked, "now can you tell me why he was repeating after that lady?" He told me that my grandfather couldn't read. I couldn't believe it. There was silence for the rest of the ride. I was in deep thought. Many questions were going through my mind. Who did his children go to when they needed help with their schoolwork? How can he be a carpenter, if he can't read or write?

I later found out that my granddad understands architect blueprints and can read numbers and to my surprise helped my dad with his schoolwork.

My dad told me he remembers having problems in math.

"I was in about the 3rd grade. I asked my dad what was the difference between inches and feet? He pulled out his ruler that he kept in his pocket. We got on the kitchen floor, and he laid out the ruler and explained it to me."

I know my granddad isn't proud that he can't read or write. I'm not either, but I am proud that he didn't give up. I know along the way there were obstacles in his way, but he got past them. I always thought people who couldn't read or write would have it extra hard trying to make it in the world. I know now that it might be challenging but not impossible.

MY GRANDMA, AN UNKNOWN HISTORIAN: Gilbert Academy

Veronique Dorsey

Growing up, my mom Veronica Downs-Dorsey and grandmother Ruby Downs always had in their minds that I would attend and graduate from McDonogh 35. 35 was the oldest African American public school in New Orleans, and my mom graduated from there, but my grandmother always said, "If Gilbert was open, all of ya'll would've attended there." Numerous times she tells us stories about the school and those who attended Gilbert. Then, I didn't realize how important the history of Gilbert Academy was. It wasn't until we started taking our Bard College class on Black New Orleans, that I realized how important Gilbert was.

The institution is named after Honorary William L. Gilbert, a farmer and businessman, who contributed both financially and in spirit to the education and well being of African Americans in the South. Gilbert Academy was first established as an agricultural and industrial college for recently emancipated Blacks by the Methodist Church in Franklin, Louisiana in 1870. In 1919, the school merged with New Orleans University, and when Straight College merged with New Orleans University to form Dillard University, Gilbert Academy moved on St. Charles Ave. occupying the grounds of New Orleans University. An African-American Methodist Academy on St. Charles Ave.: my grandmother still recalls not being welcomed on St. Charles Ave., and instead of riding the back of the street car, she and her friends would walk from uptown on 3418 First St. to Gilbert. The few times she did ride the street car she said, "We had fun with the screen," referring to the screen that separated the black and white area on the street car. Besides a football field and basketball, tennis and volleyball courts, a boarding home for out-of town girls, and the residence of Mrs. Margaret Davis Bowen, my grandmother's principal and the spirit of Gilbert Academy accented the institution's campus.

My grandmother remembers her principal being stern, but she also describes her as being an intellectual and a good leader. My grandmother always tells a story of when some of her friends skipped school and went to the movies. Mrs. Bowen got word of this, and she went to the theater, turned the lights on and called the roll of all the Gilbert Academy students. They were all embarrassed, but my grandmother always looks back saying Mrs. Bowen knew what was best for them. During her stay she kept classes small to allow personalized instruction and wanted them all to do their best and go to college. Perhaps her dream for Gilbert's alumni persuaded my grandmother and many of her classmates to attend Dillard University and to go on to become successful such as UN Ambassador Andrew Young and poet and author Tom Dent, both a part of the class of 1947 with my grandmother, Mrs. Bowen's last class.

Gilbert was well known. At one point it was the only Louisiana school to hold an "A" rating from the Southern Association of Secondary Schools, and Dillard President Horace Bond praised it as one of the best high schools in the country. The curriculum included three tracks: Commercial, General, and Home Economics, and my grandmother took Home Economics. She said that they took cooking and taught her how to do her make-up. "I was dark, and I didn't want to

always look dark. They taught me how to make myself up to bring my color out by wearing red, and that's why I wear red all the time."

Gilbert Academy had a fine music department, and my grandmother says even though she is not the best singer or musician, they were all taught to appreciate music. Operas, plays, and concerts were often put on at Gilbert. Besides the music program Gilbert had a football team that was city champions in 1939 and also a basketball team, intramural program, swimming, track, and the Letter Squad Pep Squad which my grandmother was a part of. This squad performed at the football games. Gilbert Academy students published their own newspaper, *The Tiger*. There was a May Fair and Mardi Gras ball, and the Spring Fashion Show that the girls of the boarding home put on, where they modeled their own creations.

In 1948, a year after my grandmother graduated, Mrs. Bowen resigned as principal and moved to Atlanta, and Mrs. Annette Dutton was named principal. Shortly after Mrs. Dutton became principal, after the 1949 school year, the Methodist Board of Education announced it would no longer fund Gilbert Academy, and local efforts failed to get funding for Gilbert. Gilbert's property on St. Charles was sold to the Archdiocese of New Orleans for $312, 000, and De La Salle was placed in the sight, a white male high school then. Though that was the end of Gilbert Academy, alumni such as my grandmother have passed down the stories of the institution to my generation, and that's the sole reason why I did this paper, so that the spirit of Gilbert Academy can never die.

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Grandpa's Mardi Gras

Glenicia Welch

"Grandpa what do you love most about New Orleans?"

"What I love or what I used to love?"

"It really do not matter, I just need something to write about for class. Something interesting that will give me a good grade."

He laughed and said, "Girl you just look your mama."

"Well I really do not love too much of nothing about New Orleans any more, besides the Saints. But as a boy my favorite thing about my city that I looked forward to each year was good ole Mardi Gras!"

"Grandpa they still have Mardi Gras every year."

"Not my Mardi Gras," he exclaimed. "Ya see y'all's today Mardi Gras aint nothing how Mardi Gras used to be in my day."

"What do you mean?"

"Look here girl. I am about to take you through the day of ole Mardi Gras, then leave me alone."

"Ok pawpaw."

"Alright, it first start off with the skull and bone gang."

"Who is that?"

"Damn do you know anything girl? The skull and bone gang were men dressed as skeletons. They would creep into our house early Mardi Gras morning and wake us up. My sisters and brothers, including me, would be so scared of dem damn skeletons, but we would look forward to them coming. Ya see they indicated that Mardi Gras was here, and it was time for the festivities to began. After that we would get dressed and go outside to join the crowd. I mean Mardi Gras then was a sight to see! From the Indians, to the skeletons, and the baby dolls."

"Baby dolls! Who were they?"

"Na the babydolls were one of my favorite groups. The baby dolls were a group of men and women that dressed like babies and baby dolls. I mean them men and women would have on pampers, with dollie dresses, nooks in their mouths, bonnets on their heads, and even wigs with booty shoes. It used to be so hilarious to me. Just imagine seeing all these different groups dancing and second lining up the streets. Man from the Zulu float always breaking down to it being hours late, it did not matter because all we was concerned about was letting the good time roll. Boy I tell ya, aint nothing like Mardi Gras when I was a boy. Na all see is people dressed to impress walking around all snobbish."

I hate to admit but my grandpa was right. The Mardi Gras he explained was totally different from what I know as Mardi Gras today. I wonder what happened to all the tradition?

Life for Women in My Family

Iesha J. Simms

Many women in New Orleans worked in factories during the 1950s and 1960s. Brenda Marie Osbey makes reference to some of the many issues of factory working women in "Alberta." This poem describes how her grandmother tells her stories about women working in factories. She describes how women had to work very long hours. The women couldn't see their families like they wanted to because they were always working. Most women had to handle their women problems in the open while working. Some women even gave birth to their children in the factories. These women had absolutely no privacy. I thought about these things, and I wondered if any woman in my family had to go through these particular issues and problems.

I remember some stories that my great-grandmother, my grandmother, and my mother told me about growing up around these particular settings. Even though Big Mom, who is my great-grandmother, and Grammy, who is my grandmother, didn't grow up in New Orleans, they still lived in a small country parish in Louisiana where they experienced some of the same issues that women in New Orleans, where my family would later move, were struggling with.

Big Mom was born in Crowley, Louisiana and raised in Jennings, Louisiana. I can still recall some of the things she used to tell me. Big Mom didn't work in a factory. I believe she didn't have a job at all, well other than stay at home, cook and clean, and take care of the family, which is more than a full-time job by itself. Big Mom wasn't the kind of person who liked saying she disliked people. But she told me that one day this white man ticked her off so badly that she wanted to kill him. One day she was walking to the local market, and this white man told her, "You dirty nigger. Get your ass out my market right now before I call the police on you." Her main problem with growing up in these surroundings was the fact of how people, white people that is, harassed her because of the color of her skin. She wanted to do something to that man so badly, but he wasn't worth spending time in jail for. Even though people made fun of her skin color, she still lived her life orderly, and she didn't let those people get the best of her. Big Mom died January 21, 2009.

My Grammy on the other hand was born in Jennings and later moved to New Orleans once she got married. She said that she can recall getting on a bus looking out the window reading signs that said WHITES ONLY. The water fountains they had to use were so dirty. My grandmother said sometimes she hated leaving out of her house to go to the stores and work. She felt this way because white people hated the fact that African Americans were free people, so they tried to take advantage of them. They didn't get any chance of having people respect them, even when they were on their way to work.

They were also experiencing Jim Crow laws at this time. Grammy also told me about a time when she was going to McNesse College for nursing. While she was there, there was a white teacher who personally walked up to her and told her that she will be lucky if she makes a "B" in his class because he thought that she didn't deserve the privileges of going to college because of her skin color. My grandmother said that she was so hurt inside that she didn't know what to do. But she did say that she didn't let that white man control or stop her from learning what she needed to learn to succeed. My grandmother passed that man's class with a "B." I asked my grandmother how did that make him feel, and she said that he wanted to give her a "C," but since she didn't argue with him, he said that he just let her get what she deserved. My grandmother went into working as a nurse at hospitals and nursing homes. She had patients who took advantage of her because she was black. They used her for simple things like reaching the remote that was on the table right in front of them. They even made her walk to the bathroom and flush the toilet for them.

My mother on the other hand, was born right here in New Orleans. My mom worked at hotels, grocery stores, and come to find out she even had a job at a factory. She worked at the Bunny Bread factory for a couple of years. They worked my mommy so hard at that place. She never experienced any kind of racism other than the fact that the managers always found a way to blame the blacks when there was a problem that occurred. When she worked in the hotels, that's when she really experienced problems. My mom once told me that the guests who stayed in the hotel would call for room service every day just because they knew blacks were maids. If the hotel workers didn't fix the bed the correct way, they would call the managers and tell them that they should disobey any workers' rights and they would expect the maids to get fired right on the spot. My mom never went through this infraction, but she did witness an incident like this.

I am very fortunate that I have the opportunity to listen to four generations of stories in my family. Most people never met their grandparents, and now it's moving on to people not even knowing their parents. Hearing these stories makes me wonder how things would've been if things were the same as they were then than they are now. Many of the stories that the women in my family told me made me cry, because I still can't believe they actually had to go through these things. But now I can say that they have come a mighty long way. Women had no kind of power back in the 1950s and 1960s. They were abused more than the men were abused. Now a woman has power to do anything she wishes, including having the right to vote and run for mayor, governor, or even president.

Hurricane Betsy

Olivia Branch

It was 1965 in New Orleans, when the radio spokesperson announced that a storm was probably headed our way.

Back then no one really took bad weather seriously,

because there really wasn't a good way to get the word to us.

It was later when the spokesperson on the radio announced that

the storm had turned into a hurricane.

After hearing that we turned on the television to watch our favorite weather man,

Nash Roberts.

Everyone listened to Nash the weather man.

He had a white dry erase board and black marker.

He would draw up which way the bad weather was headed.

If he said anything about the weather going in any other direction than near us,

people were so ignorant as to where they would throw a hurricane party.

I asked, "What do you mean by Hurricane Party?"

Well mainly the white folk would all gather at someone's house, drink beers, and wait for the lights to go out.

No one ever really thought about flooding.

It was the night of Hurricane Betsy as I sat in the house with my mother, grand-mother, aunt, and sister.

It sounds kind of funny, but my dad was at work.

Right before a Hurricane was about to hit? I asked.

Yes, he worked at the post-office, which never closes.

It began to drizzle as my sister and I sat in the front room playing the game.

My mother and aunt were in the kitchen filling the flashlight with batteries and stocking the canned goods.

As the night grew darker, so did the rain and the wind.

The lights started to flicker; my knees started to quiver.

I was kind of scared, because I was the youngest in the house,

and I didn't know what to expect.

I noticed the weather started to get really bad,

so I ran to my mother's room and hid under the sheets.

Then our phone started to ring.

My mother answered, not knowing that she was about to get some terrible news.

Hello, yes this Austilia I want to tell you that Peggy has just passed away.

My mother replied, "Did she really? Where is she now?"

My aunt Austilia answered her by saying, "she's right here in the bed."

"Well did you call the police?"

"I did, but they said there's nothing they can do right now because of the hurricane."

They told her to just wrap my Aunt Peggy in a sheet and that they would get there first thing in the morning.

My mother said, "Just because the police are afraid to go out

doesn't mean we have to be."

So we all crammed into the car and headed to my aunt Austilia's house in the ninth ward.

Just because my mother wanted to be the big bad soldier, she made all of us do the same.

As we got closer to the ninth ward we noticed how the streets were flooding terribly.

But that didn't stop my mom.

She took her time riding through the knee-high waters.

My grandmother couldn't believe what she was seeing.

She said, "these are the highest waters I eva saw in a street flood.

I show'd wish we woulda known how bad this weather was gon' be."

So, I said all this to say that technology has advanced since then.

People made a big deal about Katrina, but back then we didn't have forecasts etc.

This modern technology is here to help us; that's why I can say

I didn't have to repeat history again

when Hurricane Katrina hit our streets of New Orleans.

My Grandmother

Arie Sanders

As a little girl I always watched a lot of slave or racist movies, with images of whips on backs, families separated, and fire hoses washing true freedom fighters down the street. When I was asked to write this essay, my mind went straight to that. I thought given the time that my Grandmother grew up in, she would have a story to tell me. As I sat down at my uncle's birthday party, I took time out to ask my grandmother about her past. Little did I know, I was wrong. She didn't have a story like that at all.

She told me that she was born to a family of five, not including her. She had two older brothers and an older sister. She said that her family always got along. She said that she got into arguments with her siblings like any normal family. She gave me a wonderful story of how her older brothers were over protective of her. She told me that they didn't let anyone mess with their little sister. She told me that her sister was like her best friend. They talked to each other about everything. She loved and appreciated that her big sister would let her hang with her and her friends when she was younger, even though she had her own friends from school.

She told me that school was much different back then than it is now. For each grade level they had one teacher. The classrooms were very over crowded. I couldn't believe my ears. I couldn't believe that one teacher taught all of them children. I wouldn't have been able to learn under those conditions. But back in the day children had more discipline than they have today and really had fear of their parents bestowed in them. She said that when she was in school it was called Grammar school, and it went up to the seventh grade. For her, the eighth grade was the start of high school.

The tenth grade was her last grade that she went to because she got married. She was only sixteen, and she got married and moved out of her parents' house. She married my grandfather, George McCraine, whose father was a bigamist, and every time that he got married he would alter the spelling of his last name. My grandparents knew each other since they were toddlers because they lived in the same neighborhood. She said when they first got married, they rented a room in a house. I never heard of anything like that. I've heard of renting a house or an apartment for newlyweds but not just one room.

When I asked her what was her first job, she answered sarcastically Erlene, her first child. She continued naming each child she had in order, saying that every one of them was a different job. She said that my grandfather did not want her to work. I couldn't really imagine my grandmother as a house wife because when I look at her today, she is so independent. She doesn't want anyone to do anything for her; she wants to do it on her own.

She said that my Grandfather was one of the first black salesmen in New Orleans. He was a Dixie beer salesman. The way my grandmother describes his occupation, it sounds like it would be the perfect job for a man who likes to drink, go to clubs, and party. She said the company would give them money to go out to places to drink to try and get people to buy their beer.

She kind of blamed his job for their divorce. She said because he was a salesman, a lot of women chased after him. She thought it was because they thought that salesmen had a lot, and it was those women's goal to get one. I gather that him going to clubs and drinking did not help the situation much at all. I guess he rally was his father's child.

She said that when they got their divorce, they were still friends. They just couldn't be together. She also said that he took care of and remained close with his children. She never had to ask my grandfather for a dime for their children because he would always provide for them.

Once they split up my grandmother had to go out and work for the first time. When I asked her what was her first job, she couldn't remember, so I asked her what was her favorite occupation. She said her favorite job was working in a school's cafeteria. She enjoyed being around the children and the teachers. She made a lot of friends because she never worked in her neighborhood. I asked her if she didn't want to work in her own neighborhood, and she responded that she didn't want to be in the same box all the time. I believed her when she said that because she never keeps still now—even at the age of eighty. She always wants to take a walk to the store and go on senior citizens' functions.

I asked her if she ever had a problem with white people, fishing for a climax in her life story. Gladly, yet sadly to say, she didn't. She said that she never really encountered white people. They stayed in their respective areas, and the black population did the same. This made me think back to school integration and the fact that my school, McMain, was an all-white school when my grandmother was growing up. She didn't have the chance to attend the school I do. Yet from the stories I read, the black schools of that time were very good, despite having less funding than the white schools.

I found what my grandmother said to be shocking. By sitting down talking to her about her past I learned a lot. I really saw how she came to be the woman that she is today. I thought I was going to hear a story like *The Color Purple* or *The Help,* but instead I got a story of pride and independence and of how Alice McCraine got to be the woman she is today.

"Now I wasn't no Rosa Parks, but I was Ester Thompson"

Marleesa Thompson

Grandma moved to New Orleans during the prime of the Civil Rights Movements. The year 1960 involved the Carnival Day Blackout, the Dryades Street Boycotts, and the start of sit ins. Naturally when I asked my Grandma about the civil rights movement, I thought that she would have never-ending stories to tell. Unfortunately her reply was, "I wasn't involved in all that. I worked."

Knowing that my grandmother wasn't an active member of the anti-racist movement disappointed me. She came from a small town in Alabama, which was mainly black. My family often jokes about my grandmother being a house slave, meaning she would probably rat out the runaway slaves because of how much she respects whites.

My grandmother has worked for white people since she came to New Orleans. She would watch their children and clean their homes. She was known as Ester, even to the children. It wasn't until their children had children that she was finally called Ms. Ester. These people grew to love her, but they never looked at her as an equal. She was just a benefit to them. Maybe that's why my grandmother puts white people on a pedestal. She was so used to looking up at them, because in her mind they stood above her. My grandmother even changed her voice when she talked on the phone with them.

Since I was born, I've known these people whom my grandma worked for. I've made it my top priority to show my grandma that I am capable of anything their children can do. It wasn't until Xavier University sent me my scholarship letter, revealing that my college education was paid for, that my grandmother realized the capability of black people. She was overjoyed, because none of the white family's children received scholarships. Hearing the excitement in her voice when she told her employers brought tears to my eyes.

My grandma had been living in the 1950's all her life. Now she is finally being released from the firm grip the past held on her.

"Look at me, child," my Grandma said with sternness in her eyes.

"I'm looking, but I don't see much of nothing," I replied smartly. Shoot, all Grandma ever did was work up under them white folks.

"That's because you're not looking hard enough," she said with her hands pulling my face close to hers.

"I know you wondering why I wasn't involved in the Movement. Baby, I wanted to. Lord knows I did. But I had eight children to raise. I had to make sure that they had a better education than I did. It may have been nothing much to you, but it sure as hell was something to me. I made sure my children went far in life. Now I wasn't no Rosa Parks, but I was Ester Thompson. You will respect me for that."

My grandma may have not been what I thought was a leader, but she built a generation of strong black people. Never once did Grandma tell my mother that she shouldn't go to an all-white nursing school. Never once did she tell my uncle to leave New Orleans for college. Instead, she pushed them further. People like my grandmother were the backbone to the Movement.

"Grandma, I'm sorry I underestimated you. It's just that they don't teach that in the schools. They don't talk about people like you."

"I know baby. I know."

Black Women Working in Factories

Natalie Journee

Throughout the duration of the second semester in my English Bard College class, we have been discussing the lives of African-Americans living and working in New Orleans. In this essay I plan to deal with the issue of women factory workers who worked and/or lived in New Orleans as well as the worker's unions they were members of or helped establish.

"I was thirty-eight-years-old, and you, three months, when I started working in the swatching department at Kenneth Gordon, a men's-clothing factory located in Harahan, LA."

These are the first words of my mother when I asked her to tell me about her experience as a factory worker. She went on to tell me that her main task was to take swatches of material and place them on swatch cards for salesmen to present to potential customers all over the United States. I remember helping my mother swatch one weekend when I was around eleven years old. Her instructions were, "Take a little card and match it with the fabric that has the same number. If the card you're holding is 00112 then look for the fabric with 00112 on it. Then take two little strips of double stick tape and place the card and put the piece of fabric on top." We worked from about eight in the morning to one-thirty that afternoon.

Our working experience was a delight compared to that of Brenda Marie Osbey's grandmother Alberta in the poem "Alberta (Factory Poem/Variation 2)" from *All Saints* by Brenda Marie Osbey. In the poem Osbey first tells about the condition of Solomon factory, specializing in men's suits, where her grandmother worked as a girl.

my grandmother Alberta was a girl when she first saw
women eating small sandwiches
or bread dry-long-so
from the hip-pockets of their dresses
as they stood sewing
because they were given no time for lunch.

While working with my mother that Saturday I had around three breaks to do as I chose, because according to child labor laws I was too young to work anyway. I even got to go to the restroom when I needed to unlike the women in the poem.

women bleeding through triple-layered toweling
afraid to leave their machines…
to wash and change the wadded cloth between their legs
afraid to lose the pay…

If there was a way that the workers could have come together and/or made decisions as to how their working conditions were, such as a union, the workers most likely would have had better experiences, better pay, which may have made them enjoy working. My mom was asked to join the union at Kenneth Gordon. She told me that, "The amount of work I had to do didn't change, and the type of work was okay." I guess that because there was a union established at Kenneth Gordon, the workers never really had a problem.

Ordinary Hero

Gabrielle Turner

"Every time I'd hear his voice I'd run to the television and plop down in front of it. I would take in every word he said. Dr. King was mesmerizing. I didn't always understand what was going on. I knew it was big, important, and exciting. I knew I wanted to be a part of what was going on.

"One cold morning I got up early, threw on some jeans, and caught the Desire bus to Canal Street. I knew that there was a boycott on Canal. There were hundreds of people standing on the neutral ground. I wandered through the crowds and listened to the conversations. I got more excited as the minutes passed. Someone wanted a break. A man beckoned for a replacement. I found myself in the picket lines."

These are the words of my mother. She was taking part in a movement for equality and job opportunities. She was barely out of high school. They were picketing because African Americans could spend their money in stores and restaurants but couldn't sit and have a meal in them. They had menial jobs that paid next to nothing.

My grandfather had one of the better jobs a black man could have in the sixties. He was a postal worker. He watched white men who were often less qualified and equally educated pass him by as they moved up the pay scale. The only difference was that he was black.

A year later my mother found herself at Loyola University. This university was private, prestigious, and practically all white. She later got a good job with the government. These opportunities are what the civil rights workers were working for.

"One morning I walked in my Sociology class late. No one had noticed that I had just arrived. Everyone's focus was on the television. I didn't know what was going on. On television there were a crowd of black men protesting. I soon learned that the police were trying to shut down a program that was led by the Black Panthers in the Desire Project. A young white student turned with his face six inches from mine. He confronted me, saying 'if these men were at work this wouldn't be going on.' I was the only black person in the class, and I was from the Desire Project. Everyone began to demand explanations and make accusations against the protesters. I looked up at the teacher for her to rescue me. She stood at the front of the class with her arms folded and a strange smile on her face. Finally, class ended, and everyone left. I stayed behind in the quiet lonely classroom and cried. I was so upset I went back home."

I could hear in my mom's voice when she was telling me this story that she was hurt and angry. My mom is a very strong person. But a person can only take so much. My mom was very courageous to have been the only black in the class. I know my mother, and even though this was a hard situation to deal with, she wasn't going to let it stop her from doing what she had to do. The incident in the classroom was only the beginning of an unforgettable experience that affected the rest of her life. She finished the story, telling me what happened later that day.

"To make things worse I was about a half a mile from home. On the way home, I was met by a police roadblock. The police said I couldn't take my car any further. I had to walk home. I grabbed my bag and walked six blocks in deep thought. When I reached the grassy courtyard outside of our building, I heard a swishing noise in the grass. I looked down to see a white police officer looking at me from behind an outstretched rifle. He looked at me and then looked away giving me permission to go on. I was incredulous, furious, but for some reason not afraid. I was too angry to be afraid. I walked in my house to the hushed voices of my family telling me to get down because the police were everywhere. The same event that was on the television in the class had escalated."

Later that night, my mom joined hundreds of protesters on the streets outside the Panther building. She said she had mixed feelings. She really didn't support the Black Panthers because of their talk of violence and hatred. They were one of those groups that thought Dr. King's way would never work. But the anger from the experience earlier that day and the sight of tanks, assault weapons, and enough policemen to fight a small war swayed her sympathies.

She is like so many other ordinary people who got caught up in the civil rights movement. She joined in with other unknown heroes and helped out. Today we all reap the benefits.

I am truly grateful for my mother. I think I am the kind of person I am because of her. I am not afraid to take a stand for the things I believe. In my own quiet way, I fight against those things that are wrong.

If no one else sees my mother as a hero, I do.

Why New Orleans?

Jennifer Le

Children, with their curious minds, always question their family's origin. How did you end up here? Where were you from? Of course, I was one of those children, and coming from a family who came from Vietnam adds the spice to my curiosity.

Just a few days ago, I realized that I don't know the whole story about my mom and her family's whereabouts and how they ended up living in New Orleans. I had to call my godmother one day to inform her about my graduation day. I recalled the day when I just thought about my mom's family's journey to Vietnam, and filled with so many questions in my head, I finally asked.

During 1954, my grandpa at that time had two kids. It was also during the time when Vietnam had just started to divide, and my grandpa moved to the South of Vietnam in Phan Thiet. Later in 1966, with nine kids, they all moved to Cam Ranh Bay. Then, in 1975, the communists took over the South.

After three years under communist regime, my grandpa and one of my uncles built a small boat. During the process, everyone in the family had to work as a fisherman or fish lady, including my mom and all of her sisters. They escaped in June 1978. It was hopeless out in the waters of the Pacific Ocean. There was limited food, and there were bad storms. The journey could've ended right there, but luckily after two days, their boat met an oil tanker. They were then transported to Japan, and they stayed for six months until they came to the United States at the end of 1978 in December. New Orleans was the last stop.

Two of my uncles had already stayed in New Orleans from escaping earlier than the family did in 1976. They had an apartment, and the family all stayed together.

"But, why New Orleans in the first place?"

"Because of the weather. The weather and the fishing business. We weren't used to the cold, and New Orleans' temperature was like Vietnam's. We could only stand the hot."

It made total sense. Everything clicked. I was told that the first couple of people who came to New Orleans had spread the word about New Orleans and its adaptable surroundings, and Vietnamese people just came when they found out about it. Not only that, New Orleans of course has a port where it was easier for them to get to the United States.

People from South Vietnam visited the south of U.S. as well as within Louisiana. Now, New Orleans is one of the top cities in the United States with the highest Vietnamese population. It is probably in the top five. I felt so interested and happy because of their choice of New Orleans because of its resemblance in climate to home in Vietnam. There was another reason other than freedom. Summer in Vietnam gets really hot just like New Orleans does. It feels like I've already visited Vietnam, as if I already know how it feels in Vietnam. I think if I ever really visit Vietnam, it shouldn't be too extreme for me to handle the heat, since New Orleans has experienced similar temperatures before.

PART SIX: Understanding Our Legacy

Our Voice, Our Struggle

My Louisiana

Krystal Lagarde

In my neighborhood we all live like family. Every adult wants to see your report card from school. Everyone has to correct you for even one mistake. And no one will forget about that mistake until it is corrected. Children in my neighborhood have many "parents" to answer to.

If I was to go to school and have an argument with the teacher, when I get home my mother will correct me. When I go outside to chill, Mrs. Ellma and Mrs. Heart will tell me not to do that again. When I get around the corner to the store, Mrs. Lelee and Mr. Leonard will correct me and offer to give me a "whupping." I never take them up on their offer.

In my neighborhood, everyone has no other choice but to get along. If two girls who both live in my neighborhood get into a fight or an argument and their parents find out, the girls will have to become friends again before the day is out. When they returned home, their mother would bring them to the other girl's house to discuss the problem and work things out. They would have to sit in the kitchen or living room with each other, while their mothers smoke cigarettes, drink cokes, and discuss the situation.

The two girls will have to listen to their mothers say what the girls should have done, what they should not have done, and what the mothers themselves never would have done. After the situation is resolved and the two girls have apologized, the mothers will say their good nights and go home.

Odel Davis Park is the centerpiece of my neighborhood. All the streets form a square around it. On every block there is a church. My neighborhood has one store and one school. Most of the parents and grown ups all went to this school and grew up together. That's what makes it easy to be so close.

All the teenagers like to sit on the bench across the street from the park by the church to talk, listen to each other's jokes, talk about old times, and rib each other. When it becomes time for everyone to go inside, Mrs. Lelee makes the call. The park and the church's bench are in sight of her back yard. Parents call to ask her to tell their children to come home. She then calls out of the back door for all the teens and children to make their way around the corner to go home.

When it's dinnertime in my neighborhood, we eat whatever my mom, Mrs. Lelee, Mrs. Elma, Mrs. Heart, and Ms. Mary have cooked. On special days and holidays, we have dj's and barbecues on the park.

For Christmas, we meet on the park and pick names for gifts. For Thanksgiving, everyone picks one dish to cook, and we share a meal together. On the 4th of July, the parents buy fireworks, barbecue meats, and boil seafood. Every Easter, we have Easter egg hunts and take pictures with the Easter Bunny on the park. And on weekends we have dj's and just chill on the park.

Just like every other family, my neighborhood has a mother, father, aunts and uncles, a family business, and a family meeting spot for Sunday dinners. Our mother is Mrs. Lelee, and our father is her husband, Mr. Leonard.

My New Orleans

Shelby Hollmon

This is me; this is where I'm from.
I smoked my first blunt with my neighbor's mama after being out all night on New Year's Eve,
Cross the canal,
13 years old, tired from running the streets.
Police 4eva stayed on my block, night and day.
I never had a chance to really cross dat bridge;
Mama didn't have a car.
I had to experience my first beignet at fourteen
And the French quarters. What? I don't even know what they are.
Cross da canal, the lower nine
Restricted from my city, but a neighborhood queen.
This is me; this is where I'm from.

I never learned about our history.
How *slaves* took their *masters* to court
For acts of cruelty.
That's what's up: enslaved and still totin' their rights as people,
Not citizens, but PEOPLE.
Nowhere but here.
Civil rights being fought for and making changes
Simply by riding from state to state.
"they" couldn't handle 'em, and so they bombed.
Oh but did that stop em?
No indeed! Not a New Orleanian!
Robert Charles, minus 27 white people, including the police, equaled respect.
But I never learned about our history.

And It's sad how they hide our stories.

They tell us how the city went in flames but forget that we just getting out the water.

But they were French, and us?

We're black.

They hid how they bombed the hood, My hood, just to keep their precious quarters right.

Disregard the lives, disregard the tides, long as they made sure their quarters thrived.

I didn't know of a poor man who sponsors people in need.

Trips, funerals, for his people—he makes it happen.

But they don't tell us this,

And It's sad how they hide our stories.

But this is my city, and I love it!

Despite all the crimes,

Despite all the lies,

Packing money in our freezers and we still gettin' by.

This is where I'm from,

Though they never teach our history.

This is where I'm from, though they still hide our stories.

This is where I'm from, and it might be eff'd up,

But this is MY city, and I love it!

First Street

Veronique Dorsey

3416 First Street / 3418 First Street was our family home. Whenever anyone was uptown and stopped by that house, they knew they were at home. My great-grandma Emma Dupree and her sister Amy Lee Dupree bought that house in 1933, when they moved down from Baton Rouge. My grandmother was no older than three years old when the house was bought, and family history states the house was bought to be rented out and the money used to put members of the family through school. "First Street," as we call it, had three apartments and later on a house was built in the backyard that added four more apartments.

Our house was one block from our church and surrounded by an African-American community that was close knit. Before the 1990s, when section 8 housing made an influx in the neighborhood, crime was not even an issue, but once the neighborhood began to decline, our house was broken into twice. Nevertheless, we walked to church every Sunday unless the weather was bad and after church on Sundays people would come over and have Sunday dinner: priests, pastors, deacons, ushers, parishioners, everyone came over for dinner on Sundays, but any other day too. With St. Monica, our church, on one side and Stronger Hope Baptist Church on the other side, my grandfather's church, his church members came over also.

The rent money from the house put my grandma through Dillard University and my mom through Xavier University during her undergraduate studies and Southeastern University during her graduate studies. The house income helped with tuition even when my grandfather went on strike with other workers at the chemical plant (he worked at American Cyanamid) while my mom was at Xavier. My grandma always says, "Tuition was always paid, and we always had food to eat" all because of that house. Besides rent, my great-grandmother and grandmother made their famous cakes, petit fours, and punch, and they made suppers whenever someone was in need. The house was the biggest financial provider to all in our family.

Many famous and influential people sat in that house. My grandfather sang background for Sam Cook then made his own male singing group. Besides his friends, my mom's friends would stop by also. One day my grandmother made tuna fish sandwiches and put a case of Chips Ahoy chocolate chip cookies on the table along with a pitcher of homemade lemonade. Big Al Carson, the famous local blues singer, came sat down and laughed and joked with us and besides eating numerous tuna fish sandwiches and drinking lemonade, Big Al ate a whole pack of Chips Ahoy. We were all amazed. When the New Orleans Black Chorale got featured on the news, my mom was taped in the den of 3416 / 3418 First Street playing classical piano. She started her group, the New Orleans Chosen Voices, in that house. Legends such as our cousin Israel Augustine, Moses Hogan, Tommy Dent, and others all at some time passed through 3416 / 3418 First Street.

When my grandfather died in 1996 and great grandmother died in 2001, my grandma was the one left to keep our family house up, which she did until Mother Nature took control on August 29, 2005. The glory days of the house were now over, and my grandmother didn't know what to do with the house because the whole downstairs needed to be gutted due to the 8 ft. of water it took. Yet, the city solved my grandmother's problem by demolishing our family home without giving anyone notice. Post Katrina the city notified us about paying the property tax on it, but no notice was given to anyone about the demolition of the house. The city's failure erased the physical structure of our home, including my baby pictures and my mom's first piano and my grandmother's baby and wedding pictures, but even though the demolition of First Street erased the physical structure forever, the memories of 3416 / 3418 First Street will always be in our minds and on our hearts.

The Story Will Live On

Jon Stevenson

Every Sunday I attended the same church, St. Maria Goretti Catholic Church. And every Sunday it was the same sermon. "Stay in God's good grace. It is unholy for a man to lay with another man; this is not how God wanted it to be." It seemed like that was all they talked about, and they always made me cry, because I didn't want to hurt my loved ones or go to Hell.

One day I heard one of my friends from the club talk about this church that was hot. I asked what exactly was he talking about. He replied the Upstairs Lounge. He said it was a church that didn't judge you and accepted you for who you are. It was really come as you are. So I spent the night by my friend's house and told my mom I was going to be going with his mom and dad to his church, and they would bring me home. I wish I didn't lie to her.

Oh My God...

That service was poppin. The choir was great, and the pastor was awesome. I even met a cute boy who really had something going for himself. After the service that Sunday evening, June 24, 1973, Reverend William Lawson finished his sermon at the Upstairs Lounge (above the Jimani) and was socializing with his mostly gay congregation. Services were held here in the bar each Sunday, because the church lacked the funds for a building of its own. Down at the street level someone opened the door to the narrow passage leading to the lounge, lit a Molotov cocktail and threw it onto the stairs. Then this person shut the door and pad-locked it. I tried to open it, but I couldn't.

The passage was quickly engulfed in flames, but it was contained because the bottom door was locked and the door to the room at the top of the stairs was shut. Then someone opened the door at the top of the stairs. The oxygen-starved fire tore through the room, igniting everything in its path. 29 people died in the next 16 minutes.

20 people escaped through the back and along some roof tops, but most of the patrons were trapped. Many died instantly in the initial flash fire, but some tried escaping through the windows. They were barred. Reverend Lawson was one of the victims, trapped half in and out of the blazing building, lodged between the bars of a window.

I managed to escape but the reverend, my friend and the cute boy didn't. I saw their faces screaming for help. There was nothing I could do but look like a coward. Sometimes I feel responsible, but I knew that God wouldn't leave me. I know that my friend wants this story to be told, and he, along with all 32 who died that day, lives on through this story. The Jimani Lounge, at 141 Chartres Street in New Orleans, was the site of a horrific mass murder. It is now one of the most haunted locations in the French Quarter. And the story will live on.

Algiers 7

Arnold Burks

New Orleans is a city unlike any other in the world. Sure it shares similarities with other places, but you will not find another place that is as diverse as New Orleans. Los Angeles is known for its Hollywood attractions, New York is known for its Broadway plays, and Miami is known for its beautiful beaches. The only thing these cities are missing is a historical influence from another country. New Orleans has just that, and it shows everywhere you go in the city. Our housing projects are, or should I say were, made with French Architectural, although we have a bit more of a Spanish influence. Of course the city is known for its famous cuisine & parades, but there is a side of the city that most visitors don't see, which has just as much influence on our culture as the French Quarter. The violent side of the city is very unfortunate, and it's sad to say, but New Orleans just wouldn't be New Orleans without it. In *The Bible,* it says that God created Earth in seven days. Therefore, the number seven is thought to be the most sacred and divine of all numbers. New Orleans gives everything its own flavor, so I am not surprised that the number seven was given a violent twist by this great city.

One morning my father called my phone as he was on his way to work. He told me to look at the front page of the newspaper before I left for school. It read in bold print, "Former NOPD supervisor admits Katrina cover-up."

"That's great dad, but I still need a topic to interview you about for my essay."

"This is the topic. Have you ever heard of the Algiers Seven?"

I replied no, and he said he would explain when he returned home. When he finally arrived home later that day, he handed me a stack of newspaper articles printed from the Internet. He told me to read these papers and find the link between them and the article from earlier that day. As I read the Internet articles, I realized that they were mainly newspaper clippings from the 1980s. Apparently, seven NOPD officers were tried in court for the murder of an African-American family in the Fischer housing project.

The attorney for the victims of this case was a woman by the name of Mary Howell, and as I glanced at the article that morning I realized she was also the attorney for the victims of the "Danziger Seven" case. This was the link I was searching for, and my dad later confirmed it. He also said that he would tell me about all the corrupted events that ever occurred in New Orleans that the NOPD was involved with.

When I conducted an interview with my father, he began to talk about the murder of a New Orleans police officer that led to a triple murder. Saturday, November 8, 1980, was the day that Officer Gregory Neuport was gunned down in Algiers at 1:15 in the morning, while attempting to search three suspects in an area known for "high levels of illegal narcotics activity." As Neuport searched the suspects, one drew a small caliber revolver, shooting him in the throat. An off-duty officer who "happened" to cross the scene located Neuport's body in a nearby ditch. The NOPD later confirmed that Neuport was patrolling in a one-man squad car, which is usually reserved for writing reports. As to why the

officer approached three men on an unlit street, alone, at one in the morning was up for speculation.

If I were a policeman, and I was patrolling at night while I was alone, the first thing I would do if I stumbled across suspicious activity would be to get on the dispatcher and call for back-up or at least alert officers on duty to stand by. Police last knew of Neuport's whereabouts when he was at the gasoline pump behind police headquarters on S. Broad street at 12:40 a.m. They tried to determine where he went between 12:40 and 1:15, which was the time he was shot. Police also learned from the squad car's odometer that Neuport had traveled twice the distance between the police headquarters and the crime scene since leaving the gas pump. Where he traveled during those 35 minutes before his death was also up for speculation.

November 11, 1980, was the date of Gregory Neuport's burial. There was an article in *The Times-Picayune* about residents of the Fischer housing project reporting harassment from the NOPD. Reports said that plain-clothed officers kicked down doors while waving guns in the air and marched 20 youths "like soldiers" through the projects. One resident quoted an officer saying, "You niggers know who killed that policeman!" Two men reported being taken to a swamp where they were beaten and forced to sign affidavits accusing two other men of the murder of Gregory Neuport.

The two men who were accused, along with a pregnant woman, were gunned down several days later by police. Reports said that police kicked in the door of the house the victims were in, and it was an immediate gun battle. Neighbors denied this story and gave a different account of the incident. They said they heard one of the victims scream, "Please don't shoot!" before hearing three gun shots. The most disturbing fact of this incident was the pregnant woman found shot to death in a bathtub riddled by bullets. Police said she pulled a gun when they shot the other two victims in the living room. The actual guns that the victims were accused of using against the police were reported as being taken from the scene and couldn't be found later that year as evidence in court. This triple murder began to look like a retaliation for the murder of Officer Neuport. This event stirred up a controversy in the Algiers community, and residents began to smell a cover up by the NOPD.

Residents were outraged at the conduct of the NOPD and began to file civil rights violations against several police officers. There were 16 plaintiffs in all, and only three went to prison for violating the rights of civilians. Adding insult to injury, no officers were convicted in the deaths of the three victims who were killed by police. Citizens were outraged and protested against the Morial administration and the NOPD. The community's response contributed to the restructuring of the police force, the resignation of the police superintendent, and a $3.5 million settlement against the city.

I never understood why some of my relatives and close friends told me not to trust the NOPD. I'm not justifying their beliefs, but it's hard to go against them after hearing a story such as the "Algiers Seven."

All Thanks to the Market!

Ngan Vu

One night I was eating dinner with my parents. It was the usual Vietnamese dinner—rice, soup, vegetables, and a main dish. For me, it seemed like an ordinary dinner. However, for my parents it wasn't just any kind of soup or vegetables. It was a special soup made with a rare type of greens that they often ate in Vietnam but not here in America. My mom kept rambling on and on about how good it tastes, how it reminds her of Vietnam, and how valuable it is to find it here. I was wondering how my mom was able to get a hold of this "special vegetable" because many other people probably would love to have this for dinner as well.

"How'd you get this, mom?"

"There was a family that was able to grow it, and your great-aunt saved some in advance for us before it went into the market."

Then I remembered that my great-aunt and great-uncle were the people who helped start the Vietnamese Farmers' Market in New Orleans East. They contributed to the development of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans East by providing an area and a building for the market to take place. The first migration of Vietnamese people in Louisiana was in spring 1975. My great-aunt said that she was part of that migration period. Not until 10 years later did my great-uncle and great-aunt begin the Vietnamese Farmers' Market. I asked my great-aunt why did they begin this market and what made them do it.

"Well your great-uncle and I thought that the community needed a bigger area to sell Vietnamese food. There were many little markets scattered in New Orleans. One vendor might sell Vietnamese produce in one place, and another vendor might sell chicken and ducks in another place. It would be much easier and more convenient for the vendors and shoppers to go to one area. It created unity and a trend. Mostly on Saturday mornings, the vendors bring out their items—garden-picked produce, live chicken and ducks, fresh-caught fish—lay them out and set up their stalls for business. It was very lively and an enjoyable time to go to the market."

This Vietnamese market that started in the mid 80s resembled Vietnam very much. How did it start? The market developed easily due to three reasons: the sub-tropical climate in New Orleans, the proximity to water, and the value of keeping our home culture alive. Imagine seeing live chickens walking around the parking lot as opposed to buying a frozen chicken in the frozen meats department at Wal-Mart. The market was a vital aspect of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans because the community consisted of refugees. They migrated to a new country doing what they could do best—farm and fish. Many of them brought seeds with them and did what they could do to survive. The climate was similar to Vietnam's climate, so the refugees adapted quickly and planted their seeds quickly. They grew green onions, Malabar spinach, daikon, cilantro, mint, Thai basil, and countless Asian vegetables. "Their gardens were a treasured link to the country they had left behind." (Nanette) One of the main places they farmed was behind the levee near the Alcee Fortier Blvd and Dwyer Blvd intersection. This was a very convenient spot to farm because the market

was just down the street on Alcee Fortier Blvd as well. The first Vietnamese immigrants did not own cars or couldn't afford them. Their transportation was mostly by walking. Therefore they walked every day to bring their fresh-picked produce to the market. In order to carry as much as possible by hand, they would carry two baskets full of vegetables or fruits on the two ends of a thick bamboo stick while that stick sat across their shoulder. It looked like hard work, but that was how they transported things in Vietnam. They were able to bring along with them their method and culture to New Orleans because of the market.

I and many other young Vietnamese Americans would often see that image of an elder carrying the baskets with the stick on her shoulder and feel that it was normal. We were made familiar with our Vietnamese culture by just this small but powerful image. Many of us younger generations are losing our identity slowly, and I think the Vietnamese market really puts our culture into perspective. I would not be able to enjoy authentic Vietnamese food with my parents every day, if the market wasn't made available for us to have the correct products to cook with.

The Vietnamese community almost lost this connection to our culture after Hurricane Katrina. Katrina was devastating to everyone in New Orleans, but imagine if it wiped out a whole immigrant community that worked so hard to be created. The Vietnamese community was not going to give that up. We were the first few groups of people that came back and reestablished quicker than the rest of the city. In a way the Vietnamese community made the East running and available for others to come back too. Mr. and Mrs. Khanh were the first to open their market—Minh Khanh—after Hurricane Katrina. They contributed a lot to the development of the Vietnamese community reestablishment in the East. They provided the necessities for returning New Orleanians to rebuild, even if they only had a few bruised tomatoes. Father Vien The Nguyen—the pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church—and our community forced Entergy to provide electricity in our Vietnamese community way before other parts of New Orleans were provided, because the Vietnamese people were so determined to come back and rebuild the community that they had established in the 80s. He gave the community physical light and a spiritual light to hope for the reestablishment, and slowly we rebuilt our Vietnamese community. However that was not the end of Katrina's wrath. The city wanted to dump toxic debris and other harmful wastes in a landfill that was supposed to be located in the East. How can we live with a big trash can in our backyard? How can we farm? How can we not matter as a people living in this area? The city just wanted a quick cheap solution to "rebuilding" New Orleans, but this doesn't come fast and easy. They can't jeopardize others' lives so they can save a few bucks. Thankfully we had leaders such as Father Vien The Nguyen and the non-profit organization Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans also known as VAYLA-NO to protest against this inhumane matter.

"VAYLA-NO was formed in 2006 after Hurricane Katrina as a means to rally the youth to take the lead in organizing efforts to stop the toxic dumping of Hurricane-Katrina related construction debris. Young community leaders

founded VAYLA-NO to reach out to the larger community to create a voice and organize to address the critical needs in the local community.

"This was the first time the youth and elders were able to work together to change the conditions of the community. VAYLA-NO became known as a youth-led, youth organizing and development, community-based organization in New Orleans that is dedicated to empower Vietnamese American and underrepresented youth through services, cultural enrichment, and positive social change." (M. Nguyen)

Not only did we gain a voice after the landfill situation but we gained confidence. The youth and the elders were able to work together making our Vietnamese culture even more noticeable. Minh Nguyen—one of the main leaders of VAYLA—believes that by being a Vietnamese-American, he was more encouraged to establish VAYLA. Being Vietnamese it is harder to get things done, because our culture is considered a minority. Therefore it was frustrating but also inspiring and proud for Minh Nguyen to work with the community through VAYLA. Throughout the years that he has been working with the youth, he saw changes in our "Vietnamese identity." VAYLA is meant for youth to be themselves, so many of us felt more comfortable being Vietnamese in an environment where everyone is comfortable. VAYLA helped us become more proud of our culture through the establishments we've made for the Vietnamese community. We saw a real goal to fight for, and that made us take notice of our culture and the community. After our victory over the landfill situation, we showed that the Vietnamese community in the East had unity and power to withstand natural disasters and man-made disasters. Even when living in FEMA trailers surrounded by gravel, they would keep the Vietnamese traditions alive by putting some soil on there, and soon it would turn into a garden. I can still see the old rusty fence and dried-out land that used to be a tremendously wonderful garden near the Alcee Fortier Blvd and Dywer Blvd intersection today.

It's important to keep the Vietnamese traditions alive, because we are the preservers. If we don't understand or take part in our culture, we will lose it in the next generations. We are on the verge of losing our identity, because many of us are "Americanized" now. Most of my friends can't speak Vietnamese fluently, but we do know the simple and general Vietnamese words. I believe this is because of the Catechism school that our church, Mary Queen of Vietnam, offers for the youth. The first hour of class, we would study our Catholic religion, and in the second hour, we would study the Vietnamese language. This is truly one of the big factors of how I stayed connected with my Vietnamese language.

My family, mostly my parents though, is the biggest factor that helped me stay connected to my culture. For one we mostly ate Vietnamese food for dinner. My friend—Giang Tran—rarely eats Vietnamese food with his family. When he would come over to my house, he would often tell me how lucky I am to be able to eat these kinds of food. His parents barely cook Vietnamese food or speak Vietnamese to him, so my parents sometimes like to tease him about his Vietnamese. They taught him to "moi" before he eats dinner. "Moi" is respectful way of acknowledging the elders that are eating at the table with you, and you must do that before you can eat.

I feel that I am a preserver of my Vietnamese culture, because I am connected in so many ways to my culture—food, church, community, family. Being able to share that with others is the highest achievement in preserving my culture. One of my English mentors—Kalamu ya Salam—told me how to identify myself

in three ways: my color, my culture, and my consciousness. I may be able to see that I am Vietnamese by my skin color, but I don't think that makes me "truly" Vietnamese. I may be able to see that my culture is Vietnamese, because I participate in my church's Annual Vietnamese New Years' Festival, but I don't think that makes me "truly" Vietnamese. I may be able to be conscious of my culture by becoming a preserver, and that "truly" completes me of being Vietnamese. I see my "Vietnamese identity" in those three ways put together. I am proud to say "Toi la nguoi Vietnam," which means I am a Vietnamese person. This sentence matters a lot to me and Vietnamese people all over the world, because we are Vietnamese in other countries other than our home country—Vietnam. This makes the sentence significant to us, because we are trying to show that we feel honored being a Vietnamese person in another country. On the contrary a Vietnamese person living in Vietnam doesn't share the same passion with this sentence, because she is already living in Vietnam. I've watched a Vietnamese show called *Paris by Night*, and the characters' theme in this DVD is "Toi la Nguoi Vietnam." In this DVD, they commend or acknowledge many successful and high achieving Vietnamese people around the world today. Some were famous designers, political leaders (Joseph Cao), famous chefs, and much more. This DVD shows that Vietnamese have pride in their identity to share their achievements as a "Vietnamese" person, not as a regular person living America, Canada, or elsewhere.

We show that we are proud of our Vietnamese ways, because we brought our expertise from our home country to New Orleans as well. New Orleans especially being a seafood city was the perfect place for Vietnamese refugees to continue their fishing expertise that they had in Vietnam. Many of them joined the fishing and shrimping industries when they migrated to New Orleans. Often my friends' fathers weren't home during the fish and shrimp seasons, because their fathers would be offshore working. This was ordinary for us to have 4 out of 10 friends who had fathers who were in the fishing and shrimping industry. This led the Vietnamese Farmers Market to expand even further, because now they sell produce from the fresh grown gardens and fish and shrimp from the Vietnamese fishermen and shrimpers.

With my great-aunt and great-uncle and the help of many Vietnamese farmers, fishermen, and vendors, the market was a success that brought many Vietnamese people to New Orleans. This attraction helped the growth of the Vietnamese population.

My family became part of this Vietnamese population in New Orleans partially because of the market. It was so much like Vietnam that my parents felt comfortable adapting here. Also, my great-uncle was the one who supported us. I remember the first house (more like an empty lot) my family lived in was the top level of his building. The building consisted of two levels—top was our house and bottom was the market. I can't remember much, but the two things I remember most are the French coffee smell in the mornings and nights and the loud market vendors and shoppers who were below us and outside. "Fresh fish! Boat just arrived!" and many other remarks were hollered daily. It was music to my ears. That is why I loved living there. The different people, the strange food, the excitement, the atmosphere were endlessly wild and entertaining. Sometimes my sisters and I would sneak downstairs and out to the market to see what was new that day. I don't remember the market vividly, but I remember the time I got lost there. I was standing right in the center of the market, and the vendors kept waving things at me and trying to sell me stuff. I didn't know what

to do, and they started to scare me. I stood there and cried until the lady who always gave me free sweet potatoes brought me back upstairs. I have forgotten how she looks now, but I would really like to thank her.

I'm really honored to have a family member who helped start the Vietnamese Market in New Orleans and to have the opportunity to live in the growing period of the market and community. This allows me to stay connected to my culture and become a preserver of my Vietnamese traditions. I look up to my elders who established this market and helped the Vietnamese community to grow. I will definitely contribute to the growth of my Vietnamese community and my Vietnamese culture. The developing Vietnamese community, and especially the market, are also attractions to local New Orleanians and tourists. Many well-known restaurants in New Orleans such as *August* and *Luke* get their ingredients from the Vietnamese Farmers' Market. The market provides the people of New Orleans to make Vietnamese food that's an addition to the city's gumbo, and my family is one of the many that can enjoy authentic Vietnamese food for dinner while living in New Orleans and while preserving our culture and identity. All thanks to the market!

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Vietnamese in New Orleans

Minhvan Nguyen

Every day when my mother drives me to school, I can always expect a story or even a complaint. She can nag and nag all day with me in the car. Sometimes, the stories don't even make sense. It's just too hard to listen to her, when I hear the same story over and over again. At times, I just put my headphones on and auto tune her out. On my tired days, I don't want to really hear anything, and occasionally I feel this way. I get really grumpy easily. Her complaints bleed my ears all the time. My mother can talk a lot. When I really listen in a happy mood, all that talking turns into my mom's reminiscing.

When my mom first lived in Vietnam, she told me she was very fortunate. Mom (In Vietnamese):

I used to work every day when I was your age. You spend money like it's nothing. When I was your age, I made money for your grandma, cooked food for the house and always made straight A's. I was even lucky to be in school because plenty of people dropped out and had to get jobs because they were so poor. You are lucky over in America. You don't have to do anything. I give you everything you want. If you want soda and chips, I give you everything. You have a nice house, and you don't even need to work. So don't say anything.

Her words sound longer when she tries to talk in English with her "broken" language. The pauses, the struggle, it is all stuck in her throat. My ears hear the same thing over and over. I just can't tell how much she needs to talk to me about everything or even anything. I know how much she wants me to grow into a fine young lady. She stresses about everything. The white hairs on her head grow longer each day. When I think about how much I really appreciate my mom, it makes me want to listen to her. When I find that I do listen, her stories can be appealing to my ears. Sometimes I can't even tell when I'm the bad child or even if her expectations are too high for me. The stress of carrying on your family's responsibilities is much easier said than done. Sometimes I wish I could talk to my grandmother to find out if this is real or not, but she has Alzheimer's. Her memories are blurry, but the image of the man she loves never left her. If only I could meet my grandfather....

As soon as my mother continued to talk, she ended up on her adventure to America.

When my mother first came to America, there wasn't really anything to look forward to. She left the country by force while her daddy stayed back with her brother. Coming over to the United States, she left with my grandmother and her other brother and sisters.

When we left, Bac Long, Bac Duong, and Di Nga took a trip with Ba. Ong couldn't leave with us. There were only enough tickets for five people, and if he went, then we would be separated. Cau Khanh stayed back and took care of Ong. If he left anyways, then our three houses would be nothing. He had to stay back and take care of everything we had in Vietnam.

It would be hard for me to leave my items behind during Hurricane Katrina, but imagining being forced to leave my father back hurts even more.

When my mother kept talking, she started to talk about her experience with immigration. I asked her, "Ma, where did you stay when you first came to town?" She told me how the church helped out the people a lot. They gave food and little things that helped the people living in the area. In the small community of Woodlawn, she first lived in a relief program that was part of a Catholic Church. It is actually my neighborhood's church today. There was a house right next door to the church where people slept after their escape from Vietnam. Having one bag with all their belongings, it was a tight spot to have your own space. People tried to get back on their feet. The church could even be the sponsor of other people too. The church fundraised money to send it back to people in Vietnam. Sending money to Vietnam opened the doors, so another person could buy a ticket to come over.

I would never expect the church to be one of the reasons why Vietnamese got through their lives coming from Vietnam because I know for one fact that many Vietnamese are Buddhist. On a political level, the Catholic Church is all about being Anti-Communist. "In a Communist government, it demands the abolition of both Religion and the Absolute Morality founded upon Religion...The Church has rejected the totalitarian and atheistic ideologies associated in modem times with 'communism' or 'socialism.' She has likewise refused to accept, in the practice of 'capitalism,' individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the marketplace over human labor..." (APOSTOLICA Cf. CA 10; 13; 44.)

The church provided my mom with a place to live for maybe a couple months or so. It was a good start in America. Some people didn't have places to stay. I find that the little things really have to matter when you have nothing to look forward to. "It was hard finding a job and starting a new life," my mom said. She had to save up money to bring the rest of the family over. It took long years, but when they finally had the money, my mom sponsored my uncle, Cau Khanh. He left my grandfather. My grandfather felt that he was going to pass away soon anyways. He decided to stay back due to his old age. He didn't want to travel through all that trouble and find that something might go wrong. The only memory that I have with him is the picture that hangs on my wall. I really don't know what kind of man he was, but I know he chose the right decision to stay back. He died about a year later....

The Vietnamese people had to stick together too. My mother told me about how they helped each other out with the language and even how they had to take the citizen tests. She told me that when Vietnamese people came over to the United States, many Vietnamese people who already lived in the United States would help the new immigrants. Everyone had each other's backs. When the Vietnamese immigrants had to take the citizen's test, they had translators. These immigrants who already live in the United States translated for new immigrants the answers to pass the test, but now everything is different. They have tests that are in Vietnamese. This sort of reminds me of about how my English teacher, Mr. Randels, talked about in class about maroons, (who were runaway slaves) sticking together and fighting for what is right for them.

It was hard for the maroons too. They traveled in groups to help each other out, so many of them could leave. They had to sneak out and try to find ways to escape. "Runaway slaves hid out for weeks, months, and even years on or behind their masters' estates without being detected or apprehended...It was already dark, and all the maroons easily escaped..." (Hall, 207)

After escaping, the maroons had their own clan and within the clan, they would produce lumber and sell it back to the people. This provided them with money to

get guns and fight for what's right. In Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's book, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, she explains that big lumber companies bought lumber from maroons. The government officials questioned many people to stop buying items from the maroons, so they wouldn't grow and become powerful. They had to create their own system. "Captain Bienvenu questioned Pedro and Juan Bautista to find out if they worked in the woods preparing lumber for Bonne's mill and were paid by Bonne for their work, saying that he heard a rumor that Bonne produced, brought, and retained maroons to be used at his own place... ." (Hall, 210)

These maroons traveled in large groups to start fires or even rebel back. They led through many fights. They even came back to kill their slave owners. Not only did they stick together, but they were oppressed and had to leave one place to start a new life. It was similar to my mother's situation with Vietnam. My mother and her family even had to devise a plan, a plan to escape safely. She stuck together with her people in order to get through her life in the United States.

Even now, Vietnamese communities have stuck together. There are many communities in New Orleans. As a Vietnamese living in New Orleans, we have settled our food, culture, and traditions here. We celebrate our traditions of New Years within the community that people from all over Louisiana enjoy. It is a really good experience because we show people a different view of the world instead of the "Americanization" life. It has been going on for many years. Even Katrina didn't knock down our tradition. Our history is still living on, and it makes us more comfortable. It became natural to struggle together as a whole.

It was hard learning English and how you were like an alien to this new world. Vietnamese immigrants took years to get back on their feet. They relied on each other for survival. When they felt like they could live independently from the church, people soon left the church and bought their own houses. After years, this program started to fade because people didn't need its help any more. At that time, everyone was really in need, and when people had to get back on their feet, the church really helped them. It only lasted for about a couple years when my mom came over from Vietnam.

It is my neighborhood church now, and I know it isn't very rich like other churches I have been to. Something so small like a church can make a difference. With all this in mind, New Orleans seems to be comfortable with the Catholic Church. Having history noted in my mind, the dominant religion in South Louisiana is Catholic. When the Creoles came over, they created their own church. They shared their cultural experiences with people, and it caused other people to open their own communities and churches. Like they say, New Orleans is a big pot of gumbo
(It is so full of flavor!)

People have been coming over to Louisiana over years and years. I also notice how the Louisiana population has a large percentage of Vietnamese. There is a sizeable population of Vietnamese in Louisiana and Texas, mainly around the Gulf Coast as well in California. (ADVAMEG INC.) Why would people want to live in Louisiana? There are many things that are similar to Vietnam and Louisiana that I find to attract people. The climate is one of the major reasons. The French have influenced both Louisiana and Vietnam. Does that colonization affect our decisions on where to live? Or did we just want to go to Louisiana for wealth and a new beginning? Or even is it maybe how the Catholic Church helped us out so much. These questions wander in my head as I listen to my mother's words. Maybe they just wanted to love something that could be a reminder of their home in some way.

The weather was one of the main points that really attracted Vietnamese to Louisiana. The climate of Louisiana has a relatively constant semitropical climate. Rainfall and humidity decrease, and daily temperature variations increase, with distance from the Gulf of Mexico. (ADVAMEG INC.) Vietnam usually consists of rainfall and humidity, or totally dry throughout the year. It can get really hot, but it also has a cooler temperature during winter. This reminds me exactly of New Orleans. To me, New Orleans weather can get really hot to a point where I feel like I'm about to faint in school. In the winter, it can become really dry or even really moist. I find that Vietnam is very similar to Louisiana.

My mom tells me how hard it always was in the United States. This usually irritates me. I don't like her bragging in my face about how perfect of a child she was. I was just a child who was born and grew up in the United States. I don't know any better. Why did she want to go to New Orleans in the first place? The graph below shows the increase of Immigrants to Louisiana. As you can see, the increase of immigrants started in 1970, and it rose up dramatically around 1990-2000.

The graph above shows about 23,325 people spoke Vietnamese in 2000. Imagine it was back in the late 1900s when Vietnamese immigration increased due to communism in Vietnam. Immigrants from Vietnam accounted for almost one-eighth (13.1%) of the total immigration population of Louisiana. To me, that's a very huge number! My mom talks about how everyone always wants to come over to the United States. It was like a big dream to them. Choosing Louisiana was a good choice for her. My mother loves New Orleans. She said that when she visited other states, she didn't really like them. She doesn't enjoy the cold up north like Washington or anything. California was too expensive to own a house in her eyes. In Texas, it was too crowded, and she found Louisiana just right. I feel that connection with my mother from that point. I love New Orleans as much as she does. I want to raise my family in New Orleans despite what negativity people say about New Orleans.

Speakers of Foreign Languages

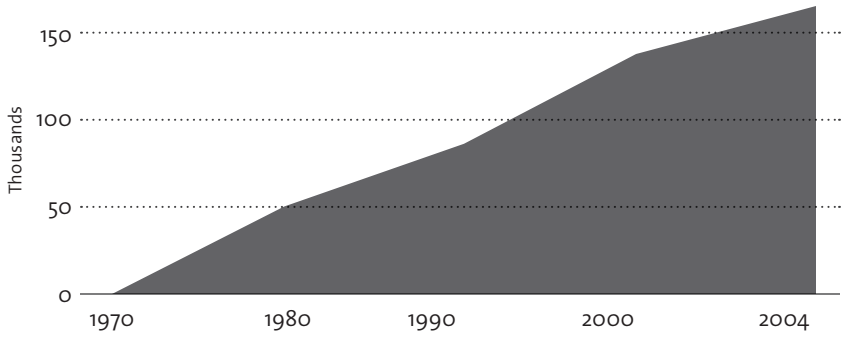
At home in Louisiana in the 200 Census

French	179,746
Spanish	105,190
Vietnamese	23,325
Cajun	14,355
German	8,045
Arabic	5,490
Chinese	4,540
French Creole	4,470
Italian	3,730
Tagalog	3,335

Source: Census Bureau Report: Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years and Over, April 2004

Louisiana

Growth in Post–1970 Foreign Stock



Census Bureau data and Fogel est. *Fair '04*

Doing this research project really made me know more about my country. For me as a Vietnamese person, I am trying to learn who I am really. Even though I have never been in Vietnam or know how it feels to live there, I am my own kind of Vietnamese. Through time, I will progress better and know who I am as a person. Taking little steps like practicing the culture, the language, eating the food, and learning things that are relevant to my history grows me into a Vietnamese person.

I try to practice my language, but sometimes my friends laugh at me. I do try my best to learn Vietnamese, because when I was a kid, I used to take Vietnamese classes through my church. Born within this culture, I find that it makes me unique. I get to know or have a connection with other Vietnamese people around me. I view myself as a Vietnamese, and I know that I am still trying to find who I am. Growing up and being Vietnamese it means a lot to me. I view things differently from people, and I even celebrate things other people wouldn't. Having a Vietnamese nationality, I also have a stronger connection with my mother. I really can't identify myself into words, but being a Vietnamese, I am proud to say that I am hard-working and determined to do what I have to do.

I find that living in New Orleans showed me a big perspective of Vietnam. There are so many reasons why Vietnamese move to Louisiana. The Catholic Church helped out the Vietnamese community. Even now, there are a large amount of Vietnamese communities circulating in churches. For example, St. Joseph Mission, (which is my church now) I still attend it, and I live about five minutes away from it. People on the east bank live very close to Mary Queen of Vietnam Church. On the east bank, Versailles, there is a very traditional Vietnamese market. When I heard of Ngan Vu's essay on the Market, named "All Thanks to the Market!," it made me realize that New Orleans is like Vietnam.

This Vietnamese market that started in the mid 80s resembled Vietnam very much. Imagine seeing live chicken walking around the parking lot as opposed to buying a frozen chicken in the frozen meats department at Wal-Mart. The market was a vital aspect of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans because the community consisted of refugees.... With my great-aunt and great-uncle and the help of many Vietnamese farmers, fishermen, and vendors, the market was a success that brought many Vietnamese people to New Orleans. It is an attraction that helped the growth of the Vietnamese population... (Vu)

They have a big organization, and it continues to grow every year. The weather of New Orleans is very similar to Vietnam. Also, the large population of Vietnamese continues to grow in Louisiana. It is not as large as back then, but it is still a good percentage. In 2008, we have about 1.8% Vietnamese population in Louisiana, compared to the state next to us, Mississippi; it only has 0.8% of Vietnamese population. Even today we have the first Vietnamese congressman in the United States, Joseph Cao. He is also from New Orleans! I remember when this happened, other Vietnamese candidates ran for office, just like Cindi Nguyen who ran for District E. This makes it more attractive to Vietnamese. Having all this shows that there are doors for Vietnamese people in the United States.

There's a lot to love in Louisiana. It is almost like Vietnam. My mom loves Vietnam, and I don't think she is the only one. Reading Andrew Lam's book, *Perfume Dreams*, he describes his mother, almost like mine in a way. "She sees herself simply as a Vietnamese living in exile. She resists America as much as she can though she knows too well. She of sad-ending fairy tales, in her golden years, reluctantly concedes that she may have lost this battle with America..." (Lam, 8) Even Andrew Lam's mom keeps her tradition in the United States. My mom's home country is always in her heart. It's not just my mom who loves Vietnam but my dad he loves Vietnam too! He is always talks about visiting Vietnam again, but since he's busy with work he never gets the chance.

My mom's stories comparing Louisiana to Vietnam showed me a lot. My mom taught me to always think of my country, and living in New Orleans reminds me all about my homeland, even if I never visited it. I hope one day I will journey to Vietnam. I want to see the real deal: The beautiful mixed urban and rural area, with lots of great scenery with lakes, rivers, and plains located in Vietnam. I'm glad my mom moved to New Orleans. It makes me closer to Vietnam. It will grow me into a better Vietnamese person. I feel that being Vietnamese I have a lot in front of me. It shows me that it is okay to be different. Growing up in New Orleans, I am glad to say that I'm a proud Vietnamese. With all these Vietnamese people coming over to New Orleans, it added a collection of history to New Orleans.

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Who Knows What's Under the Ground?

Diarra McCormick

Eight years ago, I attended Robert Russa Moton Elementary School. I was in the third grade. One day I had a terrible stomachache during library class. My stomach churned, and it felt like my intestines were balling up to make a fist. This was one Monday I didn't feel like reading. As the weeks passed, I had a series of stomachaches on Mondays. I always wondered why my stomach would go into turmoil on Mondays. It really scared me.

Three years later, all kinds of toxins were discovered by workers who were trying to fix the school's pipes under the ground. Some were known to cause cancer. Yes, Moton was built on toxic waste. After the state's ecologists performed many tests on the soil, it was confirmed that that area used to be a landfill—the Agriculture St. Landfill to be exact. All people living in the Press Park and Gordon Plaza areas were informed that their homes were built on toxic waste. The community was outraged.

Moton had to close down because of the toxins. My siblings and I had to go to a new school. During this whole ordeal, I finally made the connection. In third grade at Moton, we had to go to the library every Monday for reading. The library was where most of the toxins were found. That's why I had tormenting stomachaches.

I got flashbacks to the 3rd grade Monday illness from watching this film called *Slavery's Buried Past*. In this film, bones were found by workers digging to build a new federal building in New York City. The bones were those of African slaves. This finding proved that there was slavery in the North, not just the South. Africans from all over poured into Manhattan and wanted a ceremony for their ancestors. But the Caucasian people still wanted their building. The buried Africans were from Ghana and lived there about 300 years ago. One of the burial plots, Burial 101, had a symbol that resembled a heart. The lead archaeologist, Michael Blakey, had a hunch that it was not really a heart though. He discovered through research that it was an African symbol of resistance.

The Agriculture Street Landfill community faced a different kind of buried past but used a similar approach of resistance when the buried evil was discovered. When the toxins were discovered, members immediately contacted the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), but they wouldn't listen. Instead they accused us of knowing that our homes were built on toxic waste. We tried to involve the media but were unsuccessful. So we decided to fight back like the Africans who came to New York after the burial ground was discovered. These Africans wanted to save their ancestors' bones and demanded a ceremony for them.

We protested all over the city. We held meetings in the community center every Thursday and requested Representative William Jefferson to be there. He never showed. He would always send representatives. Since he never came to New Orleans, we took a trip to Washington, D. C. to discuss the matter in person. We went to Congress and talked to the senators about our situation. We had a rally. We got support from passersby on the street who read our signs. It all went well, but we still did not get justice.

Finally, on the news one Sunday night, a representative from the EPA stated that instead of buying us out or giving us money to move, they were going to dig two feet into the ground and put clean soil on top. Everyone was furious. We felt it made more sense to move us off of the toxic ground. Despite our continued protests, they started digging in Press Park about a month after the announcement.

As residents of Gordon Park Plaza, we decided to stand up to the EPA and to not let them dig on our property. So far, the EPA has not started digging yet. But we are not going out without a fight. My family and I managed to move. We hated to leave our neighborhood, but it looked like a disgrace. When I see Press Park, it makes me think of the men digging in New York when they found the bones. But moving did not change us. We still attended the meetings on Thursdays. We still protest with them. We are still helping the others with the struggle. Just as the Africans today returned to reclaim their ancestors' bones in New York, my family has remained part of the struggle. We still have that heart, that sign of resistance.

Visiting My Great-Grandmother in New Mexico, A Place Her Feet Never Touched

Lesley Quezergue

Going to New Mexico with Students at the Center and Xavier University's Center for the Advancement of Teaching was a very exciting opportunity for me. I have always loved to travel. I can recall when I was a little girl always waking up on the weekends awaiting the long drive or the trip that my parents had prepared for us that time. I am still that way at eighteen years of age. Whenever the opportunity is presented, I always reach for it, even if I do not fully understand the nature of it.

Well, naturally that was my attitude about going to New Mexico. "Lesley, you have an opportunity to travel to New Mexico," my teacher explained. My instant reply was, "okay." After later and further explanation, I learned that this trip would be a culture exchange between a group of young African-Americans from New Orleans and a few Native tribes in New Mexico. I immediately knew that trip would be enjoyable.

I went home and stared at the picture of the elderly, gray-haired woman with the black streak down the middle that hangs on my dresser. This woman was my great-grandmother, and word is that she was a Native American. That was the word. However, it was never followed by detailed stories of her beliefs nor of her ancestry. Immediately I looked toward this trip as a chance to link together the missing pieces of the knowledge of my ancestry. I realized that I would never fully figure out the ways of my great-grandmother, but I knew that the Native Americans, just like African-Americans, are tied together by a common cause, and that there are many similarities across the different tribes.

Living in New Orleans has instilled in me and many others respect of and loyalty to—but little knowledge of—Native Americans. Between the Mardi Gras Indians and Indian-named streets in the 9th ward, New Orleanians feel closeness to the Natives, and they really do not understand why. I hold this as truth, because there is no predominately black community that one can enter and not receive this vibe. We definitely did not become this way due to the training of our beloved history books. If we leave it up to history books, we see pained pictures of savages and cannibals and receive a false knowledge of everything that they stood for and their contributions to this country.

Well there is a something that rests in the hearts of the African-Americans in this community that has yet to be unleashed. Like the life of my great-grandmother, there are stories that are hidden and untold, but a spirit that will never be denied.

Before reaching New Mexico, our mission in life was to unfold the mystery behind this peculiar relationship with a group of people who have practically diminished from our city. Through research, some of the puzzle was solved, and light was shed on the connection between African- Americans and Native Americans in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Like Africans here in America, the Natives have had a horrible past due to the exploration and exploitation of the Europeans. The land that they loved and lived on was taken away from them, and they too were enslaved. I have always known about these terrible encounters, but I was never familiar with those that occurred in my own state. While reading, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, I have learned that upon arrival to the Americas, the Africans felt immediate closeness with the Natives. They did not speak the same languages, and they were not familiar with each other, but there were similarities in their ethics, and they were both victims of the same situation: Slavery.

So in knowing this, the book explains that the "Indians," particularly the Natchez and the Chickasaw, as well as the Africans, particularly the Bambara, would together run away and form independent colonies in the swamps of Louisiana. They would steal food as well as ammunition to help them survive. Once this was accomplished, the French would basically give up hope of recapturing them without the help of an insider, because the Natives knew the land too well.

New measures were taken. The French tried to persuade the Natives to capture all runaways. But the maroons, true heroes and freedom fighters such as Juan Malo, resisted. And their resistance was not in a savage way, but in a way that involved a complete economy and specific plans for liberation. The economy included harvesting and selling cypress from the swamps for ship builders. The maroons were also skilled cabinet-makers. And the maroons were dedicated freedom fighters. The 1811 Slave Revolt, which involved enslaved and free Africans and Native Americans from above, below, and within New Orleans, was a well-planned struggle to establish an independent nation.

The trip to New Mexico showed me Native Americans making similar plans for continued liberation. The Laguna people teach their children culture and history, not just book knowledge. They have abandoned uranium mining as an evil imposed by greedy corporations and instead have built their own economy out of quality education and restoration of historic homes. I felt solidarity with and inspiration from these fellow freedom fighters in New Mexico. And though I learned no particular story about my great grandmother, I felt a kinship to her struggle and vowed to honor her legacy in my study and work by pursuing careers and interests that do not violate her spirit or the land she loved.

What's Worth Fighting For

Vinnessia Shelbia

People often fight over their pride, hurt feelings, and relatives. From all of the fights I ever had, I can't remember what any of them was about. All of the fights I had were when I was in elementary school. When you think about it, fighting without direction or purpose doesn't solve anything. To me, it just lets you release anger.

Often people fight because they feel disrespected, and they think other people will start to take advantage of them if they don't defend their pride or whatever. But I don't think you should fight so easily over something like that. Other times you see couples fighting because of misunderstandings or just because they feel hurt, like when one person in the relationship decides to move on without fully discussing it with his or her mate. Personally, I wouldn't fight over something like that. To me, it's just not that serious.

You should fight for things that go beyond just you, like when Oretha Castle Haley fought for civil rights and Assata Shakur fought for power for oppressed people. Assata was an active member of the Black Panther Party in New York and New Jersey. She joined the black power movement as a teenager. She was accused of being in a shootout, then imprisoned and sentenced with life. But she escaped.

The things that our ancestors fought for are the things that I believe are worth fighting for. Things such as freedom, that's worth fighting for. Women have been fighting for freedom for Africans in America as long ago as the 18th century, when Queen Nzinga fought to prevent the Portuguese from enslaving Africans in the Angola and Congo regions. In the 19th Century Maria Stewart fought for women's voices to be heard, and Harriet Tubman fought to abolish slavery.

Freedom and what's right are worth fighting for. If the fighting won't change something for a group of people, then it's probably not a worthwhile fight.

Review Essay on Carter G. Woodson's *The Mis-Education Of The Negro*

Bruce "Philosophy" Coleman

"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go with out being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary."

That is a quote from Carter G. Woodson's book, *The Mis-Education Of The Negro*. This book was written in 1933, over sixty plus year ago. I found that this book relates so much to what is still going on today. I believe our minds are being controlled, through television, media, school, and through publications. Through television, the media shows that we are killing and doing other negative things. It doesn't show us doing positive things. It does not seek out organizations and people doing good—just the sensational few doing bad. Why don't we see the Fred Hampton Youth Education Committee or Students at the Center or Urban Youth Against Violence on the news? The Fred Hampton group honors the life of a young man who helped start free breakfast programs and build black power in Chicago. The Fred Hampton Youth Education Committee currently does a residency at John McDonogh Senior High School through which members spend at least one day a week helping with the same class each visit.

Woodson's book shows the danger of neglecting the story and history of black people. This book can definitely make you realize someone is controlling, or trying to control, our thinking. This book definitely makes me realize that some one is trying to control our thinking toward our fellow sisters. My mom controlled my thinking in a positive way. She always told me not to have sex until marriage and it worked; I'm still a virgin at the present age of 18.

However this is not the case for some. Videos on T.V., magazines, and other resources control some people's thinking by promoting sisters as just being this sexual object, instead of a Queen. Woodson's book focuses clearly on how school education is built to control minority thinking and keep the oppressor on a rise.

"History shows that it does not matter who is in power...those who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights or privileges in the end than they had in the beginning."

The author of more than sixteen books, Woodson clearly knows what he's talking about. Dr. Woodson, born 1875 and died in 1950, is an African American historian and educator. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. He also was the founder and editor of the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*. *The Mis-Education Of The Negro* is his most well-known book today.

In this book Woodson explains that the education that black people received was not for their benefit, but more for the oppressor's benefit. The preface lets you know who Woodson is.

"Herein are recorded not opinions but the reflections of one who for forty years has participated in the education of the black, brown, yellow and white races in both hemispheres and in tropical and temperate regions." This is not some guy who does not know what he's talking about. He has traveled around the world to observe and study the special systems set up by private agencies and governments to educate the native in their colonies and dependencies. These travels help him understand the education and mis-education of his people.

"He has been educated in the sense that persons directed a certain way are more easily controlled, or as Ovid remarked, 'In time the bull is brought to bear the yoke.' The Negro in this start continues as a child. He is restricted in his sphere to small things, and with these he becomes satisfied."

You can find that quote in chapter 11. It seems the main purpose of this book is to let us see how we are mis-guided through a school education and through a system that has given the race such false ideals. It also shows how black people are not taught about their true place in history. They are educated to continue creating economic wealth for others and to see themselves as inferior. Lack of resources, overcrowded classes, narrow curriculums, and separation from community-based education are some of the things that make this mis-education a reality.

It's not all someone else's fault. Woodson is a great example of a real black man taking matters into his own hands. Too often I find my people not looking at the big picture. I want to build organizations too. One such organization is "Power is Numbers." Through that I want to build businesses in the community so we can rise again. And not businesses for some fake black power that other people in power use to keep us blind to the whole picture. We need businesses and power that know about our full history as Woodson describes it.

From reading the book I thought I may have been educated like that, like I was inferior and at best should just take care of myself. But my vision is too strong to believe it. However, not all but a lot of people don't even consider themselves in college. Some prefer just looking at the short-term goal, a job.

I tell these people that I know older people who regret they didn't go straight to college, so they had to work hard for someone else's company. Some people don't see beyond their own "hood." The way the world is today with videos showing women, gold, cars, etc., people so often lose themselves in materialism. I don't know. Maybe it's one of the easiest goals, easier than going to college and becoming bigger in life. That's why I found that quote to be so true. It's good to have things, but if we are restricted to small things, we will be satisfied. This is another part of the mis-education. And schools that are not working well and lack of opportunity for good jobs, for jobs that are more than tourist industry and still "slave" labor, make it easy to keep looking at small things. People who have bigger dreams probably won't want these kind of jobs, and where would that leave our city's main industry? I refer this book to all who don't see it like that—stop being blinded!

This is what a professor said of a Negro college in chapter 13. "Why do you emphasize the special study of the Negro? Why is it necessary to give the race special attention in the press, on the rostrum, or in the schoolroom? This idea of projecting the Negro into the foreground does the race much harm by singing continually of his woes and problems and thus alienating the public which desires to give its attention to other things." If I was living in back in 1933, when this book was published, I would have knocked that guy out.

It is unbelievable how a race (black race) taught others; now we are taught by those who were once taught by us. This book can really get your nerves steaming up, but that's how it is when you read and learn. Take that burned up anger and channel it into doing something positive. For I believe a book carries a soul in it, and when we read it, we gain a psychic link with people who went before us and their experience.

Let's change the mis-education. Let's give our children the education to break the psychological chain of slavery and replenish with common sense. In the truth of the book, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, I finally got more of the education I never had. Now it is your turn, to turn the pages of this and other books until you get a good education.

NOT MUCH CHOICE: From College Prep High School to Military Training

Brandy Brown

I am very proud of my ability to do well in school. All of my life my grades have been the one thing that lifted me above many of my peers. When I got accepted to McDonogh 35 Senior High School, a school for students who are high achievers, I felt like my life was moving along the right track. I got in because of my grades and test scores. Most of my middle school classmates do not score well on tests and simply went to their district school.

Supposedly the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision made all schools equal. I don't believe that is the case. If all schools were truly equal, students at district schools would have the same opportunities I do. They'd have classmates always talking about when the ACT test is, how best to prepare for it, and what college they plan to attend. The irony of my situation is that despite my ability to graduate from McDonogh 35, I'm facing the same financial obstacle as my neighborhood peers. This situation teaches me that our society separates youth in many ways. I went to a high school that separated me from my peers and created inequality in that way. At the same time, I am separate from youth who are born into better economic situations.

I am now in my senior year, and of all the things I could be doing with my education, I am going to the Army. I know that is not meant for me, a 35 student, to go into the Army. Most district schools have JROTC; McDonogh 35, and most of the other city-wide access public schools, do not have JROTC. We have programs designed to steer students directly toward college. I do want to travel the world and meet different people, but the main reason that I'm going to the Army is to get money for college.

Why am I not going straight to college? Because I can't afford it. I did qualify for TOPS, a state program that offers tuition to state colleges based on a student's ACT score and high school transcript, but that still isn't enough. My economic background is stamped with WELFARE. I will be unable to stay at home because of financial and situational reasons. The only income in my home is my brother's SSI check for his epilepsy. My mother cannot work, because she has to take care of my brother. Many students work full or part time while in college. But this means they cannot focus and often drop or flunk out of school. When I studied this issue in my class, we discovered that over 50% of students who fit my profile do not finish college once they begin. I do not want to be one of these college dropouts.

I have been filtered out from thousands of students and given a "higher" education. But being separated from underachievers did not help at all. We still have equal fates, lives of low standards and never having enough. If I were middle class, I would be living the American dream. But since I'm not wealthy, the beauty of America is not for me. I am definitely not equal in opportunity to the rich and middle class people in this country. Hard work should be rewarded equally among all people. I feel as if because I don't have money, I'm not good enough to have a good life. I believe that the only way to obtain a good life is to go to the army. If America were truly the land of opportunity, I would have the same opportunities as everyone else, including the wealthy.

Separate But Equal

Crystal Carr

"It is only temporary. It shall not be long. It is only temporary." The words echoed through my head as I walked through the halls of Frederick Douglass for the first time. The walls were falling. The floor was coming up, and many of the windows had been broken. Puzzled, I marched toward my first period class in order to find a familiar face.

Frederick Douglass was not the most intellectually stimulating school or even the most fun. My years at Douglass can only be described as a reality check to my innocent mind. Douglass taught me that everything is not peaches and cream in the 'hood; it taught me how hard it is to survive. This school, my district school, also showed me how to connect with others from my neighborhood at a greater level. My year at Douglass brought many smiles and many tears, yet in the midst of it all I still survived.

The books there were torn, written in, and abused. I thought, "who could learn without good books?" I wondered if adults in the community and people who make policies that affect our students knew about these conditions. I don't think they did. Most were blinded.

I had my eyes opened and my mind filled in some classes there, despite the lack of books. In my SAC writing class, taught by Ms. Patterson, we learned lots about black people and community. One of the most memorable things she said was, "This is not a school but a learning community and in order to bring scores up, we must focus on community." The books we read, the essays we wrote, the critical thinking we developed were all part of movement and community building. My classmates and I wrote a play, *Inhaling Brutality, Exhaling Peace*, that we performed not only at our school and in a neighborhood church but also for teacher training workshops, a national conference on youth leadership and the arts, and the Centers for Disease Control. We read essays and stories by writers such as James Baldwin and Edwidge Danticat. We wrote about these stories in relationship to our own lives and adapted them to the play we developed.

Although it may be a surprise to most people who only look at the scores and the sensational stories that the media covers, I learned a lot at Douglass. The teachers taught me things ranging from how to survive in the streets to how to honor my culture. I applied this knowledge and skill to my life.

McDonogh 35, the city-wide access school to which I earned admission as a 10th grade student, is quite different. This school doesn't have off campus lunch or anything I would call fun. It is a lot of work. Getting into McDonogh 35 and staying there in my sophomore year was pretty easy. Now in my junior year I am learning the importance of knowledge. Most teachers are so busy preparing us for tests that they only teach us what to think. My English teacher, Mr. Ogle, is like Ms. Patterson; he teaches me how to think. He makes me question many things and gives me a deeper desire for learning. In his class, it isn't learn this or learn that but realize this and confront that.

At McDonogh 35, however, I am also taught to stay away from the community. Our purpose is increasing our knowledge, not interacting with the community that surrounds the school. The only time we really spend in the neighborhood is

during fire alarms or on our way in and out of school. Even though I have been attending McDonogh 35 for two years, I know none of the names or the faces of those who stay around the school. Ever since one of our McDonogh 35 students was injured in the leg, everyone has been too scared for us to even set foot in the neighborhood. I now wonder how things might have been different, if we had interacted more with the neighborhood residents, even started a community non-violence program together.

This situation reminds me of the section of Barbara Ransby's biography of Ella Baker that we just finished discussing as part of our study of the 50th anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the 40th anniversary of the freedom schools in Mississippi. Shaw University, where Ella Baker attended high school and college, actually forbade its students from interacting with the black residents of Raleigh, North Carolina. This rule created a separation that Ella Baker later fought against in her civil rights and black power work.

I miss my community-based learning and home at Douglass. Yet I also love the education I receive at McDonogh 35. I feel stuck between the two. I do not want to go back to Douglass, but I don't want to stay at 35. Sometimes I wish the students and visions of the two schools were not so separate. I wish 35 was more like Douglass and Douglass was more like 35.

Who Am I?

Anastasia McGee

Are schools still separate? How are students separated? Does this separation contribute to unequal education? These are questions that many people fail to recognize or acknowledge.

I lived in Baton Rouge, LA for nine years of my public school experience. My parents didn't believe in Catholic schools, but they did make sure I enrolled in a magnet school. My experience in the magnet school was great. At Baton Rouge High, where I went for 9th grade, we didn't have to wear uniforms like the district students at that school did; our regular clothing immediately distinguished us form the "normies."

Capitol Middle Magnet was also a school that had both district and magnet programs within it. If you met the requirements for the magnet program, you received admission. If you lived in the neighborhood, you went there also. I didn't live anywhere near Capitol Middle. In fact, if traffic was heavy, it would take an hour to get to my house from my school.

Teachers, counselors and even the administrators would try to separate the magnet students from the neighborhood students. When assemblies were held, some of the magnet students would sit on the stage with whomever was conducting the assembly. I was one of them. At lunch, we had a separate table. We sat apart in the middle table with some of our teachers. Sometimes when teachers saw my friends and I talking to someone outside of the magnet, they would tell us later, "Don't be mediocre." It didn't take long before I agreed with what was being said.

My friends and I would walk in the hall in a group of five and occasionally eyeball anyone who wasn't a part of the so-called "smart" group. Girls would write unmentionable things about us in the bathroom and start all kinds of absurd rumors; the one that really brought it home to me was the one about my friend Faith being pregnant. I just shook it off, called them ignorant, and went on about my business. I always remember Ms. Mills' final words to us on the last day of her class: "Don't be mediocre. You all are not the average students. Stick together. All of you will go to Baton Rouge High."

Just a few days ago a girl proposed a question to me. She asked, "Why do you think you're better than everybody else?"

I couldn't give her a reason—well, not a good one. The more thought I gave this question, I found my answer. It's not that I think I'm better than everyone else. It's just that when you're immersed in a certain type of education and environment, it's hard to adapt to a new one. I'm used to being separated and set apart. I have had a hard time adjusting to Douglass kids smoking in the halls, walking the halls, and not even attending school. It's not that these things are foreign to me. It's just that in Baton Rouge I could and would always remove myself. But here at Douglass there's no magnet program to secure me from the problems and issues I have to encounter on a daily basis. Sometimes and often I wish I was somewhere else. Then I wouldn't have to deal with it. And other times I wish I had the strength or mentality to deal with it. I cannot help who I am

and what I do. I don't mean to be a threat to anyone or intentionally insult their intelligence, but that was (and still is in some ways) the way I educated myself.

I tell my friends from Baton Rouge to this day that if we weren't in the magnet program, we probably wouldn't be friends because of the invisible line between us and the "normies." I want so badly to break this cycle of separation—and inequality—but before I do, I'll have to search long and hard for the answer to the question, "Who am I?"

Public Means for Everyone

Sadiq Watson

This year is the 50th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case that overturned the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision, which stated that public institutions could be separate but equal. This ruling forced schools to be desegregated. I often wonder if it helped here in the New Orleans public school system, because we are still separated. The poor or poorly educated students cannot go to schools with reputations for high achievers, which goes against the spirit of *Brown*, and now it is happening among our own race.

Almost all of the white students left public schools. They flocked to private, parochial, and religious schools. Or they moved out of New Orleans, or they set up special public schools with selective admissions. The abandonment of public schools and the separation of students continues to grow.

When I look at it, separation is wrong, but it is common practice. People want to be on top, which will always leave someone on the bottom. Like I said, did *Brown* make a difference? The students in the "better" public schools do just enough to stay there, like me. I got a "B" in biology and earned the comment "it is an abomination that he does not have an 'A'" on my report card. I think that students will do just enough to be better than the next, not really trying to strive for anything.

The Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board* is true: we can't have separate but equal public institutions. Public means for everyone. But what is also true is that the actual conditions that the *Brown* decision tried to change did not change. *Brown* makes sense; it just doesn't exist in the city where I live.

Changing Schools and Learning to Respect Myself

Tachmonite Butler

I sat in class looking at the wide range of maroon and white shirts, khaki skirts and pants, and brown or black loafers. It was my first day at McDonogh 35, a selective admissions public school, and my fifth period teacher was about to teach.

I remember thinking, "Man, I don't belong here. All these students look like they know what is about to happen. This teacher looks like she is going to be hard. Man, I can't do this. What have I gotten myself into? This school is way too much for a former Douglass student like me."

I closed my eyes and saw myself in my white shirt and blue pants from the year before, my 10th grade year.

I also began to recall the first time I went from a district to a magnet school. That had to be the worst experience I ever had with school or education. The students didn't like me at the new school. And it seemed to me that no matter how smart I became, to those snobs I was always an underachiever. The worst part is that the students did so much to make me feel like an underachiever that I gave up. I began to feel like I had no place with them. And that was all they wanted, because they all thought that I didn't deserve to be at that school with them. And since then I thought all magnet schools were better and more advanced than district schools.

So then you may ask why did I try again to move from a district to a magnet school after my 10th grade year? And my answer is that my parents and family said they wanted me to be a part of a school with a "better chance for your success." I wanted to leave, because I didn't want to hurt my family or have them hurt me. But now when I think about Douglass, my old district school, I realize it helped me overcome the psychological pain left from my middle magnet school and prepared me to deal with the stress and inferiority I was sure I would feel at McDonogh 35.

The students at Douglass may not be the hardest working group of people you will ever meet. But they inspired me to learn, to achieve. They brought an energy with them that says, "I know I am smart. But I still know there is room for improvement." And they never made me feel small.

To tell you the truth, my 10th grade year I had no school to go to. I had not taken the required admission tests and procedures for the city-wide schools, and my family had just moved again. In the middle of the first semester, Douglass took me on as a student. The teachers taught me as much as I was willing to learn, and they and my classmates healed my psychological/academic wounds. The Douglass community brought me up to believe that I could achieve, which brings me back to that first day at McDonogh 35 with all the maroon and khaki clothes and the hard-looking 5th period teacher about to begin class.

The first question she asked as she started to teach, I answered with my eyes closed. And my image of me in a white shirt and blue pants changed as the white shirt became khaki. I opened my eyes and answered another question, then more—this time out loud.

As the stream of questions came to an end, someone asked me what school I came from. And I responded, "Douglass." It was then I began to feel like my humiliation at the hands of the "higher achieving" magnet school students would begin again. Students who felt they were smarter than me would intimidate me again, make me feel that I didn't belong. After all, 35 claims to educate "the best and the brightest."

But my new classmates did not intimidate or humiliate me. Nobody seemed to care about that. I learned later, however, that they were surprised at my ability to answer the teacher's questions. I read an early draft of this essay, written a month before my graduation from 35, to the classmates in my writing class. Asia Brumfield recalled being in that fifth period class and being shocked that a student from Douglass knew so much. Rather than intimidate me, she was impressed by me.

My first day in that 5th period class was like my first day at Douglass. The only thing my classmates wanted to do was make the new guy feel welcome.

I Don't Want to Go to That School

Kirsten Theodore

"Why can't I go to Douglass, Auntie Nise?"

"Because it's not the school for you."

"What do you mean not the school for me?"

"Look I'm not about to explain myself to you. You're just not going."

"Damien and Shannon went. And Damien's already finished two years of college successfully. Why cant I go?"

"They didn't have options, and you have two, so I'm choosing one for you."

"So what. What's the difference between Douglass and Signature? Can you answer that?"

"Signature is better."

"How do you know? There's no proof. Douglass has had ups and downs and you judge it, but you don't know anything about that experimental school that's been open less than a year, and you're ready to send me there."

"Yep."

I was in eighth grade when we had that conversation, and I still remember it like it happened this morning. To people like my Aunt, who had never been there and just looked at the test scores, Douglass didn't have much to offer. But I wanted to go there for several reasons: 1) My cousin and sister went there and always came home excited about their writing class or the journalism club or the choir. 2) Douglass was only a hop skip and a jump away from my house. And most of all 3) I had spent most of my afternoons in an after-school program called Urban Heart that was set up and run by the community, teachers, and high school students like my cousin.

Urban Heart is also where I discovered that I wanted to be a teacher at Douglass. I wanted so much to be a part of the Douglass family, but it was ripped away from me when I was sucked into Signature High.

At this "choice" school my dream to be a teacher slowly faded, because the majority of my teachers told me I was crazy for settling for something so low and I shouldn't want to help students who give up on themselves and would end up selling dope. I kept wondering how my Auntie could think Signature was better than Douglass when all Signature did was put down people like me.

For my tenth grade year my Auntie dragged me back to Signature, but that was cut short because of Hurricane Katrina. We evacuated to Copperas Cove, Texas, where I went to school with all the high school age students in that town for over a year.

When we returned to New Orleans in October, 2006, a couple of months into my 11th grade year, one of the only open schools with space for students was Frederick Douglass. So now it was my Auntie who didn't have a choice. My whole world lit up when I found out that I'd be going to Douglass, my dream school.

Like most things in New Orleans, however, Douglass had changed after the storm. Now the state, which had never run a school, much less a school system, before, had taken over Douglass. Only five teachers who taught at Douglass before Katrina were left. About half of the teachers were uncertified and teaching for the first time. And there were security guards everywhere. In fact, at the beginning of the school year there were more security guards than there were certified teachers. Even my favorite part of the day, whether I was in Texas or Louisiana, at a "choice" school or a neighborhood school—I'm talking about lunchtime—even that was a disappointment. When I got to the cafeteria, the lines were longer than I had ever seen, even in my imagination of Great Depression bread lines. I didn't even eat lunch that day, because they ran out. But I became happy I didn't, when I found out that all students were receiving were ice sandwiches that would freeze your throat when you try to swallow.

Despite all those ways that the state takeover has made Douglass worse than when I dreamed of going there, I'm actually happy to get out my bed every morning to learn from the half of my teachers who are certified. These veterans of neighborhood public schools in New Orleans are always there to help me where I lack. If it wasn't for Ms. Adams, I would not know that Huey P. Long and Claiborne were governors, not roads. Ms. Haines taught me not only what a parenthetical citation is but how to blend many sources and stories together into a unified essay. And Mr. Randels, the same writing teacher with Students at the Center who taught my cousin Damien six years ago, has trained me to go to the elementary school across the street, the one where Urban Heart used to be, and lead writing workshops for 7th and 8th graders with my fellow Students at the Center members.

Best of all, being at my neighborhood school has me back on track with a vision and purpose for my education. Once again I want to become a teacher, and I'm really glad to be in a school that supports me in this vision rather than looking down on me for it.

Why Our Government Does Not Create Equal Schools

Vinnessia Shelbia

When I was in elementary school, we would sing this song:

Knowledge is power. I know what I know.
The more you learn, the further you go.
If you get an education, you'll be taking a stand,
Because knowledge is power; grab it while you can.

Back then, I was just singing the song because it had a nice ring to it. Now I feel the song is only half true. Knowledge is power, and the more you learn the further you go. But black people can only go so far.

Growing up as a young black girl, I have come to realize that the public education system is not balanced equal. Dominant white schools get committed teachers and lots of resources. Blacks, on the other hand, get just the opposite. One way we keep an unequal education system is because policy-makers just pacify the situation rather than going to the root cause. They give us a few schools that attract the best students. They take care of the black "high achievers," and don't worry about the rest of the students.

This situation makes students like me feel hopeless. It belittles black people's futures—not all but a lot of them. Career options become limited, because students get tired and don't want to go to college and further their educations. So they wind up working low-paying jobs. This pattern is exactly why black people have poor education, so that a few rich businesses will always have low-wage workers available.

I don't see many white people doing janitor work, cleaning rooms at hotels, washing dishes, or working in industrial laundries. Mostly people of color hold these jobs. Poor education causes this inequality. If black people were highly educated, then we wouldn't want or need these types of jobs. But the government systems clearly do not want to create equal schools for all citizens, so some of us end up cleaning up after the ones who went to good schools.

If a Kid Could Run for President

Anastasia McGee

Would a kid ever run for president?
The thought of it sounds cool.
I believe I could do a better job
At funding scholarships and renovating our schools.

I would campaign against Catholic schools before adults tell me, "it's so late,"
Because we all know that those schools were only made to separate
Not educate

I would immediately send the soldiers home
To their loved ones and family
Only to try and save them from
What could have been a tragedy.

I would always acknowledge our youth
Who are so often not heard.
I would spend less time in Congress meeting
And more time in cafes listening to spoken word.

If all these things would come to pass,
Everything would be so clear, so evident
I think the world would be a better place,
If a kid could run for president.

Zenobia's Definition of Black Artists

Zenobia Thompson

INTRODUCTION

Being a Black artist is something from the soul, whether it's poetry or arts. My meaning of Black is something that uplifts the blackness of soul. It is not the color of your hair or skin but the color of your soul. Black is not the imitation of a person's life. Black can be very intelligent and sophisticated. Black can be bold, strong, and beautiful. Black is a very important situation because we came out of slavery and bonded together. For this reason, it is a powerful statement. Just being black and an artist meant a lot to a society that was split between black and white.

DEFINITIONS

Black dictionary version- 1. destitute of light or incapable of reflecting it. 2. Having very dark skin and usually dark hair and eyes. 3. Soiled with dirt, foul. 4. Dismal, gloomy, or forbidding, like darkness. 5. Destitute of moral light or goodness; wicked.

Black- of the color of pitch 2. Designating or of any of the dark-skinned traditional inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa. 3. Totally without light; in complete darkness. 4. Without cream, milk, etc. 5. soiled, dirty. 6. Wearing black clothing. 7. Evil, wicked, harmful. 8. Disgraceful. 9. Full of sorrow or suffering; sad; dismal; gloomy.

If that's all they can come up with, I can do better than that.

Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud.
See me in the crowd, never acting wild,
persistent in my style.
I am Black. I live black. I be Black.
My soul is black.
And never looking back, because I'm Black.

While white people had all the privileges and opportunities to do anything they wanted, Black people just had their pride, dignity, and soul. It was then, in the late 60's, they had a Black Arts Movement.

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

It was the movement when black people started to let their heart and soul speak out, no matter what the consequences. They just let their mind flow with their soul. Black people wanted to do the things that white people did, but in a different way. They wanted to do black poetry, black arts, black music, black playwrights, everything.

It was said that, "Black power is, in fact, a synthesis of all the nationalistic ideas embedded within the double consciousness of Black America. But it has no specific meaning." Sometimes referred to as "the artistic sister of the Black Power Movement," it stands as the single most controversial moment in the history of African American Literature.

Not to be racist, but that's how it was back then.

AHIDIANA

The Black Arts Movement also involved a school called Ahidiana. It was a Pan-Afrikan organization based in New Orleans, LA. The purpose of Ahidiana was, "to strive for and maintain the national liberation of Afrikan-American people by working increasingly for the unification, liberation, and independence of Afrikan -American people."

It involved the Black Arts Movement, because people from the community gave you education, and to let children learn for free. It gave people the right to speak up for what they wanted in life. The school gave youth the opportunity to learn and study the history of our black leaders.

MY EDUCATION

My education was not like that. I went to McDonogh #15 Creative Arts Magnet School, located in the French Quarters. I was taught everything I needed to know, all the way until the seventh grade. That year I had a Fresh teacher, meaning she just came out of college. She was pretty cool, until the children would not listen to her. She would yell at them, but they still did not listen, so she would stop teaching.

When I went to the eighth grade, junior high, I knew some things, but not what I was supposed to know. My biggest problem was math—Algebra. I was not taught that and also English. I wish I knew the things I know now back then; I would have been more persistent in my education.

I am that Black artist.

Schools in New Orleans

Alexandra Lear

On my Easter break I visited my older cousins who moved to Maryland after the hurricane. As soon as the plane landed the first thing I said was, "It's cold as hell out here. Did Maryland get the message that it was spring?" Everything we passed on our way to their apartment was so beautiful but so different. I remember one day we were driving up the street, and I asked my cousin-in-law Rick: "What university are we passing?" My younger cousin, who lived in Maryland all his life, looked at me like I was crazy. He asked me if I knew what a school looked like. Rick interrupted him and told me it was a high school. I was shocked. It wasn't just a big building. It was a campus. They had the biggest buildings I had ever seen. It had a gym building, an outdoor pool, a tennis court, a football field, and a media center. I was amazed! Then I asked if it was a private school. He told me, "No, it is a public school." Public?

I knew the schools out there were better than the ones where I lived, but damn. I'm from New Orleans, and I don't know of one school with all of those features, especially not a public school like the one we passed in Maryland. My school is one old building that was run-down before and after the hurricane. It was awful. Rick told me that all the schools out there didn't look like the one I saw. He told me it was one of the newer buildings and most of the old ones in different areas look mostly like the ones in New Orleans.

Rick then told me his views on the history of education between the school I saw and the schools I'm familiar with in New Orleans. He started off by using my grandparents as an example. My grandfather dropped out of school in the sixth grade when his father died and had to get a job to support his mother and two sisters; my grandmother only finished high school, got married to my grandfather, and started having children. I know at that time schools were still segregated, but Rick told me the schools built for black children weren't adequate for any child's education.

Little did I know, that both my grandparents went to a school in New Orleans built by African Americans, in an African American community, for African Americans. It was called Valena C. Jones, after a black educator. The school was built because at that time there were no schools that were in good condition for African American children. Knowing that there were no good schools, African American leaders got together with the community to build a school. In 1929, Valena C. Jones was completed. The community raised their own money and built the school by themselves. The state and the city government had nothing to do with the building of the school.

My mom is the one who told me all those stories. She told me when she was younger all the parents wanted their children to go to Jones Elementary, but everyone couldn't get in. She told me my grandparents split them up into two groups of four and sent some to Jones and some to Craig, which was another public school for African American children built around the same time as Jones.

My Easter break was a blast. I learned new things about my family history and the history of public schools. School was important to people back in the day, but it was African Americans against the rest of the city. I now feel like nothing

has changed. The education system has not changed. Public schools are still not adequate. Yes we have more of them, but they are not in the same condition as they were in the 1920's. A hurricane has passed, and the school still looks old and run down. I can't tell what are new damages and what are old damages. On the other hand some selective admissions public schools and well-funded charters got new buildings, renovated old ones, and took over underachieving public schools that didn't get much damage and made the school look better than it ever did before.

And now that I go to Douglass every day to work with my fellow Students at the Center writers there, the inequalities slap me in the face regularly. On the way home, I often pass by NOCCA Riverfront, a state-run arts school that is public but also has a lot of private donations like so many schools now in New Orleans. This campus has many buildings and state-of-the-art equipment, just like the high school I saw in Maryland over spring break. And what's most ironic is that it's built where Homer Plessy got on a train in 1892 to challenge Louisiana's Separate Car Act. Just like separate but equal didn't work then, it's still not working now. Maybe it's like back in the 1920's. Neither our government nor our well-off citizens are going to make sure that everyone has great facilities. Maybe we need to build our own schools again, just like they did with Jones Elementary in 1929.

NEW ORLEANS: African and Vietnamese

Thao Nguyen

My first impression of New Orleans wasn't any different from places I had traveled to before when I first stepped on its land. New Orleans looked normal in most aspects. Though I'm not a bit similar to it, my conscience told me not to be a stranger to this new city . 'Round the neighborhood I walked, through neglect. Deliberately I viewed its attentive features. Houses with roofs on top, framed by wood not brick, owned by the mixed race neighborhoods. For a moment I paused, for the awareness enraptured my mind. I came to realize New Orleans is different.

I and them, the family that had spent ten years with me, together we finally arrived to where we all believed would be ten times more peaceful than Miss Saigon, since we were now free from the hand of the Vietcong. Experiencing a strong base of Vietnamese people relieved our homesickness. Mindless was my youth. I literally thought that this might be it, the perfect life—the guaranteed protection of citizens and their rights, freedom of speech, government financial aid, and last but not least my personal favorite the Air Conditioner.

Distracted with all the greatness that was presented, I was incautious: Incautious of the danger within this disguised community. As my mind and my self cycled around this disfigured world, my grandma rescued me from this hypnotic state with her horrifying yet most realistic stories. If I don't remember it wrong, I was alone with grandma in the kitchen after a long day of school. She naturally started the conversation. I sighed for a bit thinking that "here we go again, another smart talk." Nevertheless, it was totally different this time. This time it wasn't just an ordinary story or a common sense, boring talk, but it was a thoughtful warning along with some critical stories that I still have in mind.

"Whatever you do, don't pull the trigger on the B, 'bastards' (referring to the black greatly), 'cause once the target is you, you cannot escape. And you never ever let your guard down on Viet people. They can be more dangerous than the B's I told you about. Viet people here are not the Viet you think you know. Don't make a fool of yourself by involving in any kind of relationship, 'cause even a family member of yours can betray you."

My mind was battling with its knowledge and at the same time putting grandma's words in storage. Maybe my grandma just exaggerated the whole thing, having experienced it once and assuming that the same thing would happen to others too. Because I am a rock-headed-mind kind of person who doesn't usually believe in what other people say, I wanted my grandma to give proof to her words. So I asked in the best, presentable manner. "So grandma, what makes you think that the Viet people here are dangerous?"

"Trust me child, I know it all," she responded passionately trying to educate her slow-minded grandchild. "Listen to me well as I tell you, my child, these stories, and then you tell me the answer to your question."

There we continued the conversation as grandma told her stories. For the first time I thought that listening to someone talking was more entertaining than listening to music. I opened the gate to my ears widely, afraid to miss a word. The first story was about a Vietnamese grandma who killed her infant grandchild

by putting the child in a dry cleaner and letting the machine do the rest to the child. Why? Because the child was unfortunately born disabled.

The second story was about a Viet husband who burned his wife due to an argument they had. He was mindless of his action at the time without knowing the unbearable anguish that his wife had undergone after the incident. Recently I saw the wife at church. Her face was of course disfigured, but it pleased me to look at her be able to go back living her life though it's not and can never be at its original state.

"Whewww," I sighed helplessly. First a grandma killed her grandchild. Then a husband burned his wife. What can possibly come next: a father rapes his child? These stories hold nothing but the truth, the truth that everyone can be your enemy beside yourself and God. But somehow I can't still have total trust in this moral lesson, because what was being received by my cheeky eyes completely opposed the lesson. At school, on the street, at the mall, every where I go, outside and inside the Versailles community, I see young teens involved in a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, even when they're younger than me. Viet or black doesn't make an exception. The youthful relationships that I know of have never been able to extend to a half year period. Young girls who are not fully grown are pregnant, having to miss out weeks of school instruction when the delivery time draws near. Couples give birth to so many children that it disables them from educating their individual child properly. Everyone seems to be tangled in the surrounding of love. If it's really true what my grandma said, why are these people just in such a rush loving one another? I'm sure that they're not dumb to put their own lives at stake. Or is it just New Orleanians to be exact who act this way, due to the non-logical order living and low standard societal stature?

As I come to master more of the history line of New Orleans, I begin to question more about the state of New Orleans: Are the city residents being influenced by their city's past, a past in which New Orleans was unexpectedly one of the hottest exile spots for thieves, prostitutes, empty-pocket gamblers, and unsuccessful businessmen to start off a brand new life away from the control of their home central government? This is not an impossible aspect to direct our ideas to, going back to the origin of New Orleans to find the cause of its current corrupt state.

New Orleans was first occupied by the French as a colony. The government was in need of settlers to start family life on the land. Of course the French troops were one of the groups that made it to the list not as a voluntary work force, but rather they were on duty to protect the settlers from the invasion of the native tribes. Added to the list were groups of people whom the government thought that their presence in France was doing nothing but harming the French community. According to Ned Sublette in *The World That Made New Orleans* "the forces included '160 prostitutes and 96 teenaged debauchees', from Paris's La Salpetriere house of correction for women; by 1721, this group had come to constitute 21 percent of the colony's female population." That was how these most unwanted people came in place. What can possibly be the best portrait that can depict a community that began with a high percentage of societal villains?

The region would definitely often have a high criminal state. Furthermore since the number of bad villains dominated the educated group, the status of the community of course would be influenced greatly by the dominant group.

Looking at the present time, the past has seemed to prove itself as the bedrock of today's society, especially in New Orleans city. Gang violence breaks out here and there at downtown, 9th ward, and N.O. East. Death approaches teens so often in the city that it irritates and numbs people when hearing it on the news. The high set criminal record makes New Orleans known as the ghetto city. When the word "ghetto" is being mentioned, the first thing would pop in a person's mind is a chocolate figure, and it doesn't obtain any good meaning to it.

Though the companions of King Louis of France, or so we're told, were the first group to make settlement in New Orleans, the African slaves were actually the ones who did most of the labor work leading to the civilization of the city. The African Americans showed their resistance by creating their own culture, and New Orleans was selected to be the place to make it happen. There's a close connection between New Orleans and the African Americans, for in the early 1700's slaves were brought from Africa and were sold at the city's French Quarter. New Orleans upholds a long history of African Americans, and their colorful cultures are the main factor that maintains the harmony between different races in the city presently. On well-known holidays such as Mardi Gras, you will see Asian, African, and Caucasian, and whites excitedly catching beads and dancing to the music within the friendliest atmosphere that you can hardly see elsewhere. "Anglo-American slavery was designed to erase African American history but African Americans made their own history, and in New Orleans, history parades down the street." (Sublette)

I am too as part of New Orleans trying to think of all its greatness to give compliments about. I come to notice that it's easier for me to list out the bad sides of New Orleans than the good sides. Regardless of the fact that you can find the most friendly and talented people here, New Orleans has always been one of the cities that has the highest crime record, highest percentage of high school drop-outs , greatest number of students receiving low scores below the standard on national tests, a great number of citizens who are unemployed or depending on state welfare, gang violence, teens' usage of illegal drugs, and worst of all underage sex involvement that leads to unwanted abortion or delivery. The societal relationship between New Orleanians is the main factor that contributes to the continuous operation with the society base ground. A group of believers turn people into their followers with their oratory skill. A friend convinces his friend to give him a hand with smuggling drugs in return for a big profit. A mother who's a big-time gambler has her child to believe that gambling is the shortcut to the wonder world. The influence of individual and group are untraceable and indefinable in the simplest terms. My grandma might think that it's possible for her to save me from the influence by making sure that I set my boundary from these bad guys. These influences are little atoms that travel through the thinnest lines of the earth's atmosphere, and wherever they go, it's too untouchable to stop from getting to you. It's a great aura that attracts people.

But avoiding the danger and believing too much in stereotypes is never the best strategy to stay in the safety center line nor does it enrich one's knowledge. I must therefore go out and face big society, not the community itself, and learn how to confront it like a native man. New Orleans and its people might be truly a dangerous race of mortals, but if I forever stick to the philosophy of my grandma and only allow my self to stick to the safety zone for another half century,

eventually I'll be in the danger zone instead, being forever an inexperienced girl who never gets the chance to experience the world herself beside the world that she was told about.

Most of the African Americans I know of and hang around with are so friendly and full of jokes that it definitely makes you feel comfortable being around them. In another word they are the mood-makers that you need to at least talk to once in a while in order to truly experience what fun really is. If my grandma saw me at the place I'm at now,"I'm inexperienced" she would think. If she was to attend McMain High School where students blend in an interracial integration, where students are more than happy to share the good deeds they do to convince the younger students not to have sex or use drugs, where the faculty and staff and students have an unlimited desire to help out those who are in need as happened when we assisted the family of the McMain student who died of violence, the student who was left with nothing beside her burned house, and the Haitians who were left as outcasts after God sent his message to them by a thunderous earthquake. If she was to be a member of the Mustang choir where her granddaughter is respectably received by the black members, who accept her for who she is, then "I'm being pessimistic" she must think. If she was able to read *Men We Love, Men We Hate* published by the SAC students and staff and written about the bad and good contributions of men belonging to both the past and present, she should realize that "African people and their descendants ain't such a mess at all." My grandma might have seen it all, all that is bad and good about the community she lives in, but there's still a bigger world outside Versailles that she still doesn't know fully enough to make any judgment about. Grandma might know of the death of the infant, the burning of the woman, but the world still is larger than she thinks it is, and there's plenty more, more of horrors and adventures and goodness and culture that it can more than gladly offer her.

I Was Listening

Anastasia McGee

For anyone who thinks history is a bunch of boring events that took place a long time ago, a trip to a city just a few hundred miles away can change perceptions forever.

When I think about history, I begin to develop an image of a teacher standing in front of the classroom lecturing about different events that took place before my time. The sound of the white chalk screeching on the black board while I'm sitting at my desk grinding my sensitive teeth because the sound of the chalk on the black board is really annoying me. I begin to drift off in my own little world, thinking about what I'm going to do after school. My eyes can't stop looking at the clock. "11:44, please hurry up and come. I can't wait to get out of this classroom."

History has never been one of my favorite subjects, because I thought it had no significance at all. These events happened before I was born, so why waste time learning about things I had no control over? I can't go back in time and change slavery. I can't go back in time and issue African Americans the right to vote. So why waste time learning things from the past, when I am living in the present?

Every day lectures, readings, and writings about history were really getting on my nerves!

On March 20, 2003, I was fortunate that my civics teacher, Ms. Blackmon, invited me to go on a civil rights tour with Dillard University. She said this could be the beginning of many scholarships. She said the Dillard alumni are sponsoring students to participate in the tour. I was really excited. "Wow, a scholarship, a free trip and college students sound like a winner to me."

I along with Mrs. Blackmon and Dillard students along with the Dillard alumni departed from New Orleans at 10:30 that night. I was really excited. I was sitting on Dixie land tour bus with my portable listening player. To my right sat Fred a sophomore at Dillard. In front of us sat Christi and Ashley and in back was Trejavion, Omar, Jeremy, and two other guys. We became acquainted when we first boarded the bus. Trejavion asked if we would like to play a game of UNO. We took him up on that offer. After 6 or 7 games of UNO I began to get restless and decided to go to sleep with my head against the window and my ear phones on my ear.

At about 5:30 that morning we arrived in Selma, Alabama after breakfast at Shoneys. We visited Martin Luther king's church and the site where Rosa Parks was arrested, and there is a memorial outside of the Rosa Parks Museum. When we were crossing over the Charles Pettis Bridge, all I could hear was crying from the older people and some hymning a familiar song "aint gon let no body turn me round." I couldn't believe I was walking across the same bridge as Dr. King. Everyone was overwhelmed with joy, and deep inside I was filled with joy also.

That weekend was an eye-opening experience for me. I learned about the bombing of the church. In fact we even went to service at First Baptist Church on Sunday morning where the bombing took place. In the church there is a big picture of the four little girls, and by the way, I cried some more. By the end of our

journey I was all cried out. I mean, there was so much my teacher never taught me. Or did she? Maybe when my head was down on my desk or when I was passing notes to my friends? Or just not listening at all?

The Monday I returned back to school I was sitting in Mr. Cooper's science class listening to a lecture about the electronic configuration and how to get the atomic mass and so forth. I was listening somewhat to what was being said, but for the most part I was reflecting on my trip to Alabama. 10:05 the bell rang. I was headed to the 3rd floor, to room 320 my civics class. Today the lecture was about the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis. I pulled out a pen from the blue Jansport book sack and a binder filled with lose leaf paper. I yawned silently, still tired from my trip. We arrived at Dillard University on Sunday night at 12:30. I began to take notes. I began to write outlines. My ears were open, my eyes were awake, my brain was ticking: I was listening.

WHEN DOES IT STOP?: The Post-Katrina Poor

Vinnessia Shelbia

The orange, little-squared fence runs up and down Canal Street with support from the orange and white cones that help it stay up. New Orleans has a new beat, and there's nothing jazzy about it. It's more the sound of construction.

In my head I wonder, "What are they trying to fix?" Is it the sidewalks or another problem beneath the sidewalks? Who's paying for this, and why isn't more important stuff being worked on? Maybe there's something I missed. Or maybe they are fixing the streets so people will have nice places to live. Because there's nowhere else to live. Rent is too high. New Orleans used to be a place where poor people could survive. My family and I were poor before Katrina, and we were making ends meet. We no longer even have the ends.

My sister Angela is in a housing program that will pay her rent for about six months. You probably think that this is an opportunity for her to save money. Well think again, and think hard and long. She has to pay her bills and help my mother when needed. Angela has no room to save, so it is back to square one after the six months, back to being homeless. Tell me what construction company do I call to fix this problem?

The Beat Goes On

Demetria White

Flipping through the pages of an old family scrapbook, I see pages filled with past Mardi Gras snapshots. There are old, discolored pictures of Mardi Gras Indians and a section filled with people dressed as clowns. I didn't know any of these faces and began to wonder why they were in my family's scrapbook.

Flipping back to the section with the unknown clowns, I asked, "Daddy, who are these people?"

He let out a few chuckles and replied, "This is your family."

"Okay... ," I said, giving him that tell-me-more look.

"Meat, this was a long time ago, before you were even thought of. One Mardi Gras, me and your momma made those clown suits for all the kids in the family."

He lifted the plastic cover and removed a few pictures from the pages.

"You see. There is Dexter, Vincent, Nelly, Angel, and Lika. Look, there is Nettie and your momma and Vanessa. That was one of the best Mardi Gras's ever. Boy, did it take some time to make those suits, but we did it for those children. They loved it. Little L and D clowns walking the streets of New Orleans... ."

As my daddy began reminiscing on that Mardi Gras, I began to flip the pages. As I flipped through, my dad abruptly placed his hand on a picture of a man wearing an orange Indian suit. His mouth was wide open like a roaring lion. Both hands were raised, and one foot was lifted. It was sort of scary looking. A sudden outburst came from the left.

"Fi ya ya, who got that fiya... Aaaaaaaaa! Wild boy coming through. Make way. Make way."

My dad began saying these chants and moving his arms like he was at a tribal ceremony.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"Girl, that's me. You can't tell? I'm wild boy, 7th ward wild boy!"

As he danced and chanted, I laughed hysterically. He really looked like a true Navajo Indian, like he should be dancing around a campfire worshipping Mother Earth. My daddy went on to tell me how he masked for the Downtown Indians with Tootie Montana. He said the most exciting part was roaming the streets of the 7th ward tapping his tambourine and chanting.

As I watched my dad put on his show, I received a small history lesson. I learned that black folks began to mask Indian as a way of honoring folks who were native to the Louisiana and New Orleans area, and in the 18th century assisted enslaved Africans who had escaped and were working as the original freedom fighters, conducting slave revolts and establishing independent black communities and preserving African cultural traditions, all with some assistance from Native Americans.

As my daddy traveled down memory lane, this scrapbook came alive. He brought the pictures to life by telling the stories and reliving every moment.

Looking through the scrapbook with my daddy was very important to me. Even though my pedigree doesn't trace back to maroon colony leader Juan Malo or the NAACP's attorney A. P. Tureaud, I realized the importance of Mardi Gras to our family—and the importance of us honoring our ancestors who fought for freedom and those who helped them. It was a beat that could be found in every family member. The excitement, the culture, the atmosphere, everything about Mardi Gras throbs in our souls. The beat is so strong. If you walk past that scrapbook today, you might be able to hear it. "Fi ya ya!"

Indian Queen

Tanisha LaCaze

It had been a long day of sewing and mending. The time was around 12:00. The sun tucked itself beneath the stars for its annual nap. Sitting at the sewing machine she was tired, and her hands ached from sewing together a head piece for her blue Indian suit. She hadn't had much sleep lately, so she lay her head down on the desk next to her sewing machine and closed her eyes. Some time had passed, and she awoke to find herself in a teepee.

Confused, she looked around, hoping to find an explanation as to why she was inside a teepee and not at her house. She heard the sounds of people chanting and peeked outside to see what was going on. A large fire flashed hot oranges and yellows and red flames. With many people who seemed to be wearing Indian customs circling around, it could be seen in her eyes. Out the corner of her eyes she saw a little old lady sitting alone outside next to a large teepee. She cautiously walked over to the lady and asked, "WHERE AM I?" The old lady simply smiled at her and said, "HOME."

We Should Not Forget

Wesley Alexander

"Parents of Eleanor McMain High School students and some members of the board were particularly upset that approximately two hundred blacks had attended the talk sponsored by the New Orleans Public Forum, an organization founded in 1934 by business and professional men to discuss economic issues. The board unhesitatingly prohibited the organization from conducting any more talks in a public school building."

This event took place in my school, our school, Eleanor McMain Secondary School. If you are not aware of this, then as a fellow Mustang I have no problem informing you. There was actually a time when blacks were not allowed to step foot into the auditorium of our school. Voicing our thoughts, displaying the rights we are granted as citizens, or projecting the fact that we are all equal was prohibited in Eleanor McMain if you were not white. Imagine if you could not sing, dance, recite poetry, or act on the stage of our auditorium because of the color of your skin, the texture of your hair, or the language you spoke. How would you feel? Your feelings would be hurt, wouldn't they? Now, imagine how the two hundred blacks felt when they were restricted from displaying their talent of moving an audience with their powerful voices.

These brave blacks were no different than the whites who deplored their presence in McMain. Meetings that discussed important issues, which pertained to New Orleans, our city, a city that was practically built by black slaves during Spanish New Orleans, was viewed as something in which blacks should not participate. However, blacks did not accept defeat, and their resistant movements throughout New Orleans led to the integration of McMain, opening the doors of our school to many students, representing different minority groups, who desired an education. We present students and teachers of McMain should not forget that.

In the very auditorium of our school we have created our own historical traditions. Each year, the Asian American and African American clubs host their programs for the entire student body to witness. These two programs were established and are operated by the African and Asian American students of our student body. In 1934, hosting a program that gave recognition to the culture of us students was not possible. During the Jim Crow era, discrimination against people of color was difficult to challenge. After several strikes and campaigns that were often disbanded by violence inflicted by the armed and police force, blacks earned many rights they were not formerly granted. For example, Thurgood Marshall's successful case against the school board earned equal pay for black teachers. Also, Homer Plessy's act of civil disobedience led to *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which diminished the legalized racial barriers constructed in public transportation. Challenging authority through resistance is a part of the history of our city and the history of our school. Each time we recognize the culture of our school we should not forget that we are given the right to enter our auditorium because our past leaders believed in the importance of equality.

I hope the cracks, occasional leaks, broken windows, and holes in the ceilings of our school no longer remind us that Eleanor McMain Secondary School is historical. New Orleans was the breeding place for the Civil Rights Movement, and a part of that breeding occurred in my school, our school, Eleanor McMain Secondary School's auditorium. Memorable events such as our award ceremony and the famous "crossover ceremony," the day of becoming a senior that every junior anticipates, are not the only honors we receive. Standing on the stage that former black leaders courageously stood on is the greatest honor. Two hundred blacks voiced their thoughts toward a crowd of upset white teachers and students who once attended McMain. African, Asian, and Latin American students are now given the freedom to stand on the stage of the auditorium to share our talent with proud teachers and students without fearing ever being told to step down.

The attitude of our school towards each other has remarkably changed for the better. If those two hundred blacks never took a stand, we would not be Mustangs. Therefore, they must not be forgotten. Their resistance will always be a part our school's history. We should not forget that.

My Roots

Raechelle R. Green

"Where do I come from?" is the question that I ask frequently.

Four grandparents who share genes with me:

Doll Baby, Lupo, Alma, and Herman.

These are the people who made me this person.

My MawMaw, or should I say Doll Baby,

She is the dark-skinned woman who keeps the fire in me.

Coming from Mississippi to New Orleans,

It was hard trying to work and raise young women and men.

Worked for those who had her taking care of one of their own

When she had five kids to care of at home.

Traveling from the Florida Projects to St. Charles Ave. just to make $5 a week,

I think of her as strong and far from being weak.

Cleaning two homes instead of one

And still had time to raise two daughters and three sons.

* * *

But nobody could play with Alma.

See her, this my light skinned grandma.

She from uptown, 3rd ward is where she from around.

She said that was her turf, her stomping ground.

Working for the Le Pavilion for over 25 years, thinking of her job almost brought me to tears.

This is the lady who could pass for white with a black woman's soul.

Yeah she high yellow, maybe because she creole.

* * *

Four kids made from love with a man.

That was my PawPaw Charles, or as they call him Herman. He's from uptown too.

I wish I could've seen them grow old together, so I could see love being true.

A Booker T. Washington Lion, look at his alma mater closed and the community is dying.

Later he worked as a Merchant Seaman, off shore.
Lack of health security he was killed by cancer for sure.
My family members say my dimples remind them of him the greatest.
This is one of my features that is my favorite and strongest.
* * *
Then here comes Lupo, my funny grandpa.
He's not my blood, but he's still my pawpaw.
He started driving trucks at 18, fresh out of Mississippi.
He been had his eye on Doll Baby from their hometown.
When she grew up and grew out, the urge grew stronger now.
Y'all know this old man still drives these trucks.
We tried to make him retire, but there was no luck.
In all my grandparents, they all have someone to love
With exception of PawPaw Charles above.
They have shown me it is okay to get a little mud on your pumps or boots.
They are me, and my growing roots.

Grandparents Who've Raised Me

Briane Perkins

Strict rules, teenage blues

Damn why must I go through the same thing you went through!

The cycle repeats, and I'm just like Mema used to be.

Adopted but spoiled as hell

And everyone knew not to step in my path.

The nice girl who doesn't play by the rules

But yet has to abide by her grandparents' rules.

As I sat getting information from my grandparents about their past, I noticed how much I'm just like my grandmother and the least bit like my grandfather. My grandma is one of nine children but was not raised with any of them. She was partially brought up in the seventh ward, where she lived with her two adoptive parents' in a one-bedroom house. Up until the age of 13 she slept in a twin bed right next to her parents' bed in their small compact house. Then she began sleeping on the sofa bed in the living room. At the age of 15 they moved to California for a year then back to New Orleans. As a child her parents were very strict. She had to clean base boards, doors, windows, and plenty more. I guess that's where she learned it from, her parents. Now I'm stuck cleaning base boards and windows. She had to wash clothes by hand and hang them on the clothes line, even though they had a washer and dryer. I'm just glad she didn't inherit that bright idea as well. My grandma was the type who always hung with her boyfriend despite what females said about her. She says that was her way of avoiding mess, but just like any other teen who consistently hangs with her boyfriend, she was having sex.

Sixteen and pregnant with my mom was her reality, and her mom did not let that fly by. When she gave birth, she had to find a job. Too bad that didn't fit her fancy. At seventeen she worked at a fast food joint called Kentucky Fried Chicken. For how long? A day! Her boss told her to mop the floors and stay at work until 10pm, which she said was the latest time that food places stayed open back then. I guess that is no comparison to some of my classmates' grandparents' bosses who made them lick the floor they cleaned. Still to her in her mind, she was not about to have it. I honestly wonder why: her own damn momma was worse than that. But she did it. She stayed till 10 and mopped the floor, but the next day she ain't even go back. I hate to admit that that's not the worst part of it. Her next job was not until she was 19. She worked at Gaylord's, a fashion store, as a cashier, and by that time she was pregnant with her second child. Mortified by the thought of having another child and being unprepared for it, she tried to do a self abortion. Just like the women in Brenda Marie Osbey's poem "Alberta," she swallowed quinine pills and castor oil. I'm guessing it was not enough because I'm texting my uncle, her second child, as I'm writing this.

For seven months she stood working for what felt like endless hours as a cashier. Then she quit. After two failed attempts of working in the sales business with food and attire, she came to the realization that that was not the field of work

that interested her. From there on she still, on and off, worked in the medical field. Twenty-four marked the age when she began working her third job as a transcriptionist. If you ask me, I would not even count that as a job, but I guess even if you are working for four hours at a place, it's a job right?

This by far is the funniest thing my grandmother told me she did in the past. She said, "I got a job as a transcriptionist, a person who records the doctor's operations on a patient, and I walked into the office and no other transcriptionist was there." I had an appalled look upon my face, thinking about the fact that she was in a psych hospital. She continued, "I saw all the tapes popping up that I had to listen to and write what they said, and I thought to myself I could not do it. When I went on my lunch break, I went and never came back." I burst into laughter as I thought about all the jobs she stayed at for a day or less.

At 32 she went back to college after having to drop out to focus on her kids and the many other problems in her life. In 2008 I witnessed her graduate with her bachelor degree in general studies at the age of 40, but surprisingly she was not the oldest one in her class. Now about ten years later she works as a medical coder for Ocshner hospital, from the comfort of her own home.

Worked hard from young,

He was the asthmatic one.

Everyone picked on the poor little fellow, who was forbidden to pick the chickens' feathers.

On the total opposite of New Orleans, the country section by the name of Bridge City, lived my grandfather. One of eleven children, his childhood wasn't the least bit luxurious. Sharing a small house with about 12 other people excluding him self was not all he became accustomed to. He had to share the same bath water with his siblings as they took a bath one by one in their number three tub, or more known as the big bucket tub, with boiled water from the sink. He also learned to value everything he had, because it wasn't just given to him. His mother had too many children for that; he had to work for what he wanted.

At 12 he began cutting grass after school to buy things like electronics to enjoy in his spare time. From then on he had a job after high school at a lighting and cabinet store until he graduated. After that for six years he worked at a plant nursery. For 31 years he worked at the legendary Charity Hospital as Captain and assistant chief for the police department. Still to this day he is known as chief around New Orleans by the people who knew his position at the hospital. During Katrina we had to stay in the hospital because he was assistant chief, and while he went out making sure the perimeters of the hospital were safe, my sister, grandmother, and I stayed in an office room. Anyways that's another story within itself.

My grandpa never went to college, but in his days that was normal. He merely entered the police department at Charity as a regular officer. Back then it was a thing called being in the right place at the right time, and because of that all he had to do was go to police academy for a few months, and he was running things.

Now education is everything. I imagine that's why my grandparents are so hard on me to do my best. With him believing you have to work for everything you want, and her bringing her strict rules from the past into her own house, can you guys imagine the difference between my life and the life I would be living if I were living with my parents like you? I ask them if they think they are being too hard on me and what they think I would be like if I were raised with my mother minus the situation at hand.

I'm one of five children, and I basically raised my younger siblings. Not because I had to but because I had a motherly aspect in my body. I like helping out, and I like taking care of my baby brother especially. My papa said with my attitude and without their discipline I would be argumentative with my parents. My grandma agreed. Then she added her two cents. She said she didn't think I would be as responsible because I started out too responsible, taking care of my siblings and all. Then they both said I probably would have no structure, because parents of this time would rather be their children's friends rather than their parents. That comment in my opinion could set a whole new overview to differences in living with parents and grandparents for anybody.

I listen to my peers and see that they don't have as many structured rules as I do. I realized that their parents rarely care because they want to party themselves. My peers' parents know how to have fun, and they want their kids to have fun as well. My grandparents are a lot older. They want to stay inside all day and relax. They want me to do the same thing, all while I want to have fun.

My grandma always comes up with these stories about how she experienced some of the things I'm going through now, and how she is only telling me things so that I don't have to experience them. Some part of me wants to be saved from the misery and is grateful for her telling me what to do, but another part of me wants to go through my days and learn on my own. I feel as though you don't really thoroughly learn things until you learn them first hand. My grandmother doesn't really understand that. She just wants to save her kids from doing the wrong thing and from being hurt. Who can really blame her though? No one wants her children hurt when she can prevent them from being hurt.

My grandma makes rules like I have to be in for 11:00, and I have to clean the house every Saturday. It's not like I really want to be out all to the wee hours of the night anyways, but there is something about the feeling of knowing you don't have to continue to look at the time to make sure you leave on time. That's the kind of attitude my peers have when we are out, and I don't want to be like them, but I want to enjoy myself as well. My grandpa is a little more relaxed when it comes to rules. I partially think it's because he allows the women to run the household to a certain extent, and partially I think it's because he is oblivious to some of the games teens run. There's nothing really to say about him. He has input in every situation, but it's more of a grandma rules. My grandfather mostly believes in working hard for what you want in life.

I feel as though I have more guidance with the way my grandparents raise me. They show me all the paths of life through the experiences they have had and what they see happening in life now. Even though it is hard being raised with my grandparents, I am so grateful they took me under their wings and nurtured me and guided me.

Gun Point

Shabliy Clemons

The time in which darkness falls,
Dwells in the land,
Takes its hold on earth,
Wrapping a cloak called night around our ankles,
And tripping our feet from underneath us.
I heard that the things that happen in the dark will surely
Come to the light.
I can't imagine the feeling of a cold barrel,

Pointed against my temple.
Digging' into the flesh of their skin,
While chills pressed against my own.

My grandfather,
Pops dubbed his nickname,
Had this thing pressed against his head,
Chills and shivers,
Cold metal,
The threat of death.
It's dangerous being out at night.
It's a thrill,
But, work is what you do.
Being a taxi driver for the most part of twenty-so years,
Being in the dark.

Yet, he stood out,
Because he was as bright as the headlights that surrounded him.
Milky skin,
Grayish-blue eyes.
A white male taxi driver.
But there he was,
Gun pointed against his skull.
"Give me your stuff."
"Give me your stuff."

He told me that he was driving that night,
On Chef,
When a group of men got into his taxi.

What happens in the night,
Will surely come to the light.

"They were just young people,"
He said to me as I sat on the bed opposite of him,
"Going to the club."

The cold barrel aimed against his head.

"Then they got out, and said,
'Give me your stuff.
Give me your stuff.'"

It was dark, and he was working.
"They had a gun, and a group of them were with that man."
My grandfather has this little shudder in his voice,
"And I laughed."

I sat there blinking, confused.

"You laughed?"

"Yeah," he laughed again.
"They just put their gun down and said, 'You're a cool dude, huh?'"

It was dark,
He was a taxi driver.
And a, "Cool dude."
He wasn't scared, didn't fear the metal or the death,
Or the people, or the dangers that come
From driving a taxi at night.
And when he laughed, I couldn't help but to laugh
With him.

VIETNAMESE DIASPORA: Sacrifice For A Better Future

Luan Vo

It's been 12 years since we left Vietnam for America. The majority of my life has been in the states, so it's natural to call this place home. For my mom and dad, it's a different story. Born and raised in Vietnam, they knew the real Vietnamese traditions and values. "Through blood and sweat, hard work will always pay off." That's what they always tell me when I am having trouble with something. I am their first priority in life. I feel blessed to have them. As I grow older, I have questions in my head that wonder how they felt leaving their parents behind. What's their reaction? How did they handle everything? I know I would feel highly upset, if I had to leave my parents for another country.

Recently, I read a story in my Students at the Center English class called "Two Grandmothers" by Olive Senior. It's about a girl's past with her two grandmothers, Grandma Del and Towser. What was it like with my parents' parents? I can't remember anything about my grandparents except for very blurry sceneries in my dreams. Like one time, I dreamt of feeding some fishes with my maternal grandpa. I woke up and immediately told my mom. She said that it happened and was surprised I even remembered. It made her tear up. My parents gave up a lot of things for me. My parents gave up having their parents see me growing up. They left all their siblings and friends behind to come to America. They restarted their lives to give me a better life. The sacrifices they made for me are priceless. It is my motivation to do my best in everything I put my mind into.

Feeling very guilty of my "crime" one day, I asked my mom (since I don't talk to my dad much) how she felt leaving her parents. I think I was nine at the time. Upon asking, she looked at me and then looked at the Buddha statue. Tears were slowly dripping from her desperate eyes. She got herself together and started speaking. For the first few minutes, she was mumbling because she couldn't get the words out of her mouth. I remember telling her to let her emotions out. "Cry all you want mom. Nobody is watching except me," I said. After a while, she cooled down and unraveled her hidden feelings. Her words made my heart ache. I can't believe what she went through in her head.

"I miss them so much. It was the hardest in the beginning. I went through so many jobs when I first came to America. Each time I got fired because of my inefficiency in English, I cried in bed wishing I had my parents to comfort me. Sometimes, I wish I was a little girl again. The protection, the happiness, the assurance of my parents, I wish I can have it back even for just a day or an hour or for a few minutes."

There are more, but my hands won't let me type them all. It's too personal. After she spoke, I felt my face. Tears were dripping without me noticing. My mom took a tissue to wipe my eyes, and I did the same for her. To reassure her that everything was going to be okay, I told her that she had good parents who knew how to raise their children correctly. She asked me how I know that. I pointed my finger at myself. Look at me mom. I will grow up to be successful to show you

that all your hard work paid off. I told her that she made her parents proud. That's why they were able to let go of her. With that, my mom grabbed me and hugged me. At that moment, I knew what the word family meant. To give up things for the one you love, to love them unconditionally, to care for them through their glorious to worst days, that's family in my mind. I LOVE MY PARENTS! I ALSO LOVE MY GRANDPARENTS! Family means NOBODY gets left behind or forgotten.

Jasper and Iola

Wesley Alexander

My grandfather died when my mother was only five years old. My grandmother died when I was nine years old. While sitting at the kitchen table, remembering I had to write this essay, I asked myself, "How can I possibly write about two people I don't know?" Since my mother and I have not been on good terms lately, I decided to approach her with this very question as a way of coming to our own resolution of understanding each other.

I burst into my mother's bedroom, still pondering my next essay. She was lying in her bed, watching "the stories" again. I cannot understand why she enjoys watching that nonsense so heavily. I then relied on the vague memory of my grandmother. My grandmother watched the stories at my house ever since my mother had taken her in after she suffered a stroke. This Miner memory allowed me to understand my mother's inherited habit.

"Mama, I'm doing a paper for my English class that involves my grandparents' lives and their working conditions. So, I need your help."

It took every muscle in my body to motion my lips to say those words. I was still upset with my mother, but not talking to her would have only created more tension. Her attention suddenly was directed towards me as I stood before her. She appeared to be startled that I would ask her about my grandparents, partly because of the confused look present on her face. We blankly stared at each other for about a minute or so, and smiled. I knew the silence between us would be temporary.

"Well, what do you want to know?" she asked.

"Anything – whatever you think I need to know," I responded anxiously.

My imagination is one of my many gifts. Each time I'm told a story, I immediately paint every detail in my mind as my ears intake each word. I pictured the life of my grandparents as their daughter spoke to me. My great grandfather and great grandmother attempted several times to have children, but each attempt ended tragically. Miraculously, my grandmother's entry into the world was a success, and their final attempt at giving birth.

My grandmother, Iola Dorothy, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on July 22, 1921. She was from Hollygrove, just like me. She was a very nice and quiet young lady and always went to church every Sunday. Although she was one of the few fortunate residents of Hollygrove, her pursuit of an education was discontinued after she completed her sophomore year in high school. During her time, African Americans who managed to stay in school that long accomplished a great deal in grasping an education. I know she would have been proud to see me walk across the stage in May for my graduation.

At a fairly young age, my mother was engaged to a biracial man by the name of Louis DeSalle. He probably was Creole. I remember my mother showing me an old picture of a mixed man with good hair. She told me, "This man was supposed to be your grandfather. Your auntie always told my mama how we would all have good hair if she would have married him." Then she laughed and said, "but then you probably wouldn't be here huh?" Louis DeSalle was an established

carpenter who promised my grandmother, if she married him, he would build them a beautiful home. How could she turn him down? Her life was promised to be a classic of Walt Disney's fiction movies. My great grandmother was more in love with him than my grandmother. Even in those days, marrying a successful man was a prized possession, and what woman desired a child with nappy hair? Yet, my grandmother chose a different life.

Jasper Miner, the oldest of thirteen kids, was born and raised in New Iberia, Louisiana. He was a friend of trouble and was what the ladies called a "player." Each time I attend a funeral, family reunion, or wedding, I would get the same reaction from my country cousins. "He looks just like uncle shoe pick."

I was annoyed by their comments, but to them they were compliments. Whoever knew my grandfather would always smile each time they saw me. "He has his eyes, and that head."

My mother always tells me how my oldest aunt (who died from diabetes), would always tell my grandmother, "I bet we got a damn brother out here somewhere!" She went as far as ripping up a picture of my grandfather and an unknown woman, causing my grandmother to burst into tears. Maybe I do have an uncle or uncles? Well, that's another untold story.

Jasper was a fine carpenter. He was an educated man and had plenty of employees who worked for him. Ironically, he too was engaged to a young woman. Shortly after he proposed to her, he traveled down to New Orleans to work on a few houses. He had not been in the city for barely two days when he laid eyes on Iola Dorothy. They were what Shakespeare might characterize as "star-crossed lovers." Iola and Jasper represented two different worlds. Jasper grew up being the man of the house, assisting his mother in taking care of his younger siblings. Iola, on the other hand, was the only child and always kept to herself. Iola's mother was very protective of her, considerably due to Iola being her only child, which is why Iola was never exposed to the wrong crowd. However, Walt Disney's movie would soon take an alternate twist.

After only being engaged for six days with their partners, Iola Dorothy and Jasper Miner married each other. Despite her mother's disapproval (cursing Jasper out, refusing to accept him, etc), Iola went along and married the man of her mother's nightmare. Jasper did not promise Iola a beautifully built home, but he did provide a roof over their head in the Calliope Projects. My grandmother cried when they moved in, but my grandfather assured her that everything would be okay. He promised he would take great care of her. Their decision to move into the projects together infuriated Iola's mother. Jasper was not the respectful Louis DeSalle, and Iola's mother reminded him of that each and every day.

"Wesley, my grandmother and my daddy stayed fighting."

"You mean arguing, right?"

My mother laughed and said, "No, they were swinging."

The birth of my two oldest aunts and my mother slowly reduced tension between my grandfather and grandmother. While traveling home with my newborn mother from the hospital, Jasper asked Iola, "Girl, where the hell you stole that white baby from?" She began to cry, and he laughed and implied that it was a joke. Their personalities grew in sync as they built their family together, creating a memory each day.

While my grandfather worked during the day, my grandmother was a housewife and took care of her three daughters. One day, when my grandmother grew tired of staying inside, she went out to get a job. She was hired at Touro Hospital, most likely as a janitor or some low level job available to blacks. Apparently, Iola forgot to mention her job to Jasper, who waited for her when she came home late from work on her first day.

"Your Grandpaw was crazy. Are you sure you want me to continue?"

"Yes, mama," I said.

The story was interesting; I had to hear more.

Jasper took Iola's uniform and ripped it to shreds. "No woman of mine will work as long as I am!" he yelled to her. Taking care of the family was Jasper's task – a father's obligation. My grandmother did not question my grandfather's actions. Therefore, she always did whatever she could to sustain their relationship and family.

My grandfather was a heavy smoker and drinker. After my great grandmother's death, her reasons for disliking my grandfather worsened. In the year 1966, Jasper Miner died of cirrhosis of the liver and lung cancer. My grandmother's trouble maker finally lost his game, and she was left with no choice but to assume the role of being the head of the household.

My grandmother desired to fulfill my grandfather's wish of enrolling my mother and her sisters into Catholic schools. My oldest aunt was the reincarnation of my grandfather. When she had enough, she meant it. She told my grandmother that she refused to go back to Xavier Prep for her senior year. My grandmother was heartbroken, but in addition to my aunt's disapproval, she could no longer afford to pay the costly tuition. As a result, she fulfilled part of her husband's wish by having each of her daughters graduate from Booker T. Washington High School (which is now closed down and boarded up.)

"That's it, mama?" I asked. I didn't realize how much time had passed while reliving the memories of my grandparents' past. We had not conversed with each other that long in almost a month. Listening to my mother and catching her brief smiles as she traveled back in time with me was pleasing. Jasper Miner and Iola Dorothy are long gone from the world, but their presence is forever imprinted in the stories told by my mother, and now, one day revisited by me.

"Save our Shipyard"

Jade O'Conner

The Avondale shipyard has been around for seventy years and has become the largest private employer in Louisiana. The shipyard is home to more than 4,500 American workers, who are now in jeopardy of losing their jobs.

Now you ask what does this mean to my community and me? Well first off, it shouldn't mean anything because it shouldn't be happening. But since the reality is thousands of workers will lose their jobs, it means that the Parish in which I reside, Orleans Parish, will have a drastic economic downfall. Property value will go down because of the hundreds of empty houses that will be left because of the layoff, it means prices will go up at grocery stores to subsidize the money being lost from workers who cannot afford to shop there as much or at all, and most of all it means families will lose their source of income.

Among the employees of the Avondale shipyard there are workers who are married. In those cases not only will their families be losing one paycheck, they will lose two. So now there are multiple families having to pay rent and utilities, buy groceries, and purchase the basic necessities for life with no source of income. Firing these people is just like kicking them out to live under the Claiborne Bridge to be homeless with "will work for food" signs. Not only is it ruining their lives, but it's also damaging our economy.

Why close down a shipyard that has made so many accomplishments, one of which is being the FIRST United States shipyard to build double hull tankers? Why not sell it to another company? Why not keep the revenue and employment here, so we all may benefit? Why turn our backs on these workers? Why, why we ask? It's because this corporation is so avid and gluttonous that keeping out competitors is more important to it than the welfare of the diligent, dedicated and hard-working individuals, most of whom have stood by them for over a decade.

This means so much to me because when I start my career, I don't want to invest my time and energy into a company that will turn around and betray me for a dollar, leaving me indigent. I don't want my peers to have to leave school because their parents' trade is no longer available in this state and they don't have a way to buy the basic necessities to survive. How are young people like myself supposed to grow up and be functioning members of society, if we see such failures as the closing of the Avondale Shipyard? This is a prime example of why there are so many young people on the streets today. They believe "the streets" care more about them than the companies they or their families may work for. Everybody wants a place they can call home.

If no one else cares for humanity enough to speak up and not remain in silence, I will along side the other workers of the Avondale Shipyard. These workers and their families need a voice for their home, and that voice needs to be heard.

United we stand so that we may never fall.

Ode to City Park

Jim Randels

Since Katrina, folks have gone crazy caring for you.
For the first two or three post-K years, every Saturday trucks and cars and energetic pedestrians would converge with lawn mowers and weed wackers and rakes and edgers.
You accepted the cacophony of fumes and motors and flying grass.

Trees have been planted to replace the ones ripped down by the 120 mile plus winds.
Benches have been bolted down for we humans to sit and watch the trees we planted.
Reeds and brush, the hiding places and homes for the 28.5 varieties of ducks that waddle and paddle and graze through your lagoons and meadows and pathways, have been cleared so we humans can see your ducks better—but not with rifle sights. No—just with our curiosity.

You used to let the spring and hurricane winds prune your trees. Now trucks with bucket cranes that can rise to the top of your oaks' four-story height carry men with saws to make your falling branches and limbs less messy and wild. Efficient, loud machines grind these pruned pieces to pulp.

You aren't just seasoned. You are old. You welcome all who come, who twist you to their purposes.

You tolerate the signs that commemorate the wealthy men who claimed to own you and donate you. You let fade into smooth cement the signs from New Deal workers who laced you up with streets and bridges. You graciously open yourself to weddings and artists and children and runners.

And you remember before humans were clearing space for themselves and caring for you that earlier time that no one marks. When walking through you was less easy, you welcomed maroons who stole themselves to freedom and steeled themselves for revolution.

The Mis-Education of Our Youth

Majeda Abdul-Jabbaar

I believe that the majority of the things that we learn in school will be forgotten by graduation and never applied to our lives. We have seven classes a day, but for what? All we need is history, math, science, and English. The remaining classes are an indirect attempt to keep us "rebels" out of trouble. There are no classes that actually nurture our development within the path of our chosen or fluctuating career choice. Therefore, we must take it upon ourselves to research, study, or gain experience within our possible career options.

If I only learned one thing during all of my years of school in history classes, I've learned that history will always repeat itself. There will always be war, depression, oppression, and slavery beyond the Constitution. Only we the people have the power to cease this seemingly perpetuated cycle. Teachers fail to tell us this because they figure that if we attain some sense of power, then we will rebel. If/when we rebel, individuals that were once considered figures of authority will become insignificant.

There is no way that math beyond basic math is applicable to my life. My dream is not to be a scientist, mathematician, or an engineer. With that being said, how could I possibly benefit from finding the square root of a triangle?

I believe that high school should prepare students for college by helping them select a major and providing them with a few classes that pertain to that major. If this matter has been thought of, it has most likely remained as a thought while students are bathing in their own oblivion. I believe that our instructors are paid for getting us to conform to the American way of life in hopes of us becoming good, law-abiding, flag-waving citizens.

Fortunately in my Students at the Center writing class, I have learned more about my history and the history of my city than I have ever learned in all of the history classes that I've ever taken. According to an article by Dr. Barbara Ferguson at the *Research on Reforms* web site, charter schools in New Orleans have the right to expel a student for something as simple as having five or more absences or tardies. Instead of attempting to investigate this problem that most likely extends out of the child's home and into the classroom, they would rather expel the student. These students are only wrongfully expelled so that the school's performance score will increase, along with the number of crimes involving the youth. It seems as if our leaders disregard this matter into the abyss of dereliction and simply turn their heads when they witness wrongdoings such as these. How can we possibly move forward if we fail to acknowledge the present?

The fact that our senator, Mary Landrieu who represents New Orleans with pride and dignity, promoted New Orleans schools as a national model is quite appalling. Now in my opinion, any dumb ass with blinders on can see that New Orleans schools should *NOT* be recognized as a national model for schools to refer to. In fact, they need to be remodeled. It is a shame that our own leaders seem to be blinded by what actually occurs in our city and deaf to the people's thoughts and opinions.

Events that have taken place in the past that have benefited us in the present are barely spoken of. The McDonogh Day Boycott was a protest conducted by

African-American faculty, staff, and students of Orleans Parish schools. This event took place on May 7, 1954. This protest basically revolved around the separate ceremonies between blacks and whites held to honor the late John McDonogh. I wonder if the people who participated in this boycott were not brave enough to do so, then who would? Apparently, this day is no longer acknowledged because for every May 7th that I can recall, there has been no recognition in the media about the McDonogh Day Boycott. If there has been, then I must have been living under a rock in Bikini Bottom all of my life.

Although we are not informed by our instructors, the media, or our leaders about our past, it is our job to make ourselves more knowledgable of where we came from. Not just as New Orleanians or African-Americans, but as the entire human race. We must cease total dependence upon our leaders because they seem to know nothing more than what we do. In my opinion, in order to know where you're going, you must know where you came from.

Raising a Ruling Class

Christopher Burton

When I think about education in the United States, I envision the days of royalty and peasants in Europe. Education evokes images in my mind of times when few people were called scholars and most of the scholars were royalty. If you were born a peasant, you were stereotyped. Peasants worked all the lowest paying, least prestigious jobs, because they were not "capable" of learning how to do anything else. If you were born into royalty, you were also stereotyped. Royalty held the highest paying, most prestigious jobs, because this class of people had the opportunity to learn.

Although the United States of America is a democracy, I see some startling similarities when I look at education in Europe's distant past and in America today. Yes, I know that the states of the U.S. have provided free public school education, but how was it possible that in 2002 the graduation rate is 68.2%? The obvious comments would be "Those kids who failed were just not smart enough" or "motivated enough" or "capable enough." Let us not use these excuses.

A case study by the National Institution on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment gives observations on the intentional "ability grouping and tracking" in the United States public schools:

In seventh and eighth grade, ability groups involve more than different levels of learning in the same subject. In general, instruction in low-track classes tends to deal with simplified topics and focuses on rote skills. . . . Classes and tracks are labeled in terms of performance levels of the students—such as advanced, average, or remedial--. . . The resulting groups or tracks. . . form a hierarchy within schools with the most academic or the most advanced tracks considered to be the "top."

In my schooling in the New Orleans Public School system, I have found no disagreements with this assessment. I have been the recipient of special attention. From pre-k up to the 2nd grade, the special attention I received was because of my speech problem, overly large ears, and big feet, which got me teased constantly. The next year, I earned slightly better grades than the rest of the class and was still teased a good bit. Though I only received better grades because I could remember lessons better and was the quiet kid (which passes for good behavior), I was put on the "student of the week" board often and received special prizes. My 3rd grade teacher had a student desk beside her own, and it was reserved for the teacher's pet, a student who did well academically and behaved well during a previous week. I had that coveted spot many a week. I remember that one day the teacher decided to buy me some food from McDonald's, because I was such a good student.

I spent the first month of my 4th grade year at Medard H. Nelson Elementary and the rest at Oretha Castle Haley Elementary. This is when I first noticed the difference in the quality of education I was receiving. When I was at Nelson, every day we were reading, writing, listening, doing math, or doing science in a disciplined environment. The level of work that my 4th grade class at Haley did was not on the same level as the work I did at Nelson. At Haley, I was put in the gifted program and received an itinerant resource teacher. This, added on to my speech therapy classes, was a lot of help directed just at me.

At the awards ceremony in my 5th grade year, I received four awards. Every time I went up to receive one, the audience booed. I was thoroughly ashamed, as my grandmother, grandfather, and sister watched on.

Now that I'm older, I don't blame the parents, relatives, and students at the ceremony for booing. Even if all of them did not know it at the time, they were being cheated. Their loved ones were not given the opportunity to receive the education I received. Being put into the gifted program and then allowed additional help in the form of an itinerant resource teacher (because I was hearing impaired) made the gap that was once small, wide. The gap was wide enough so that the parents, relatives, and friends hoping that their child received an award were right to boo me every time I received one.

Throughout my middle and high school years, I steadily became more aware of this trend of inequity.

I attended the lowest ranked high school in the state of Louisiana. Located in the city of New Orleans, Frederick A. Douglass is my alma mater. It is the only high school I enrolled in, and I'm proud to have spent my four years there.

I was strongly discouraged from attending Douglass. Out of my 8th grade class, three of the top students, including my sister and I, went to Douglass. The rest went to all the best public schools and private schools in the city. They were influenced by parents, friends and teachers to separate themselves from other students. They were taught to see themselves as better than a low-performing student.

In my last two years of high school, I tried to give back by tutoring my peers who wanted do better academically. Unfortunately, about the time I started to tutor, most of the students were so far behind that I worried my efforts were useless. At Douglass, a majority of the students were on the low-track and not expected to end up with anything more than a job at Burger King, an early grave, or a prison sentence.

Coming from Douglass, I think that I have a legitimate say about what should be done to improve the public schools now that Katrina has opened room for change.

This system of tracking and ability grouping is the main cause of the education crisis in U.S. public schools. It is designed to divide people into highly educated groups and lowly educated groups. It is a system that does not expect every child to reach the same level and is not very democratic in its nature. And thus it is the major reason for the crisis in education. If the states of America want more than the average of 68.2% of their public school students graduating from high school on time, then there must be steps to eliminate tracking and ability grouping in public schools.

As Dr. Robert P. Moses, author of *Radical Equations,* founder of the Algebra Project and long-time Civil Rights activist says, our country will have no real democracy or equality until the government recognizes that "all the children *in* the country are children *of* the country." I will expand on Dr. Moses' statement. Every person in this country must treat every child in this country as a sapling that needs to be nurtured and cared for. We need to recognize that all young people should have the setting that makes them able to grow to their fullest height in the future.

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Appreciating the Education I Have!

Ivyanne London

We have covered many topics this quarter in my English III SAC class, and the ones that I was interested in that I would like to talk about explore the themes of fighting for what you believe is right and taking control of your life, writings about when people stood up for what they believed in. Many different people did this, but in different ways. I have had ups and down in my educational experience, but mostly ups. I have had a very successful education making straight A's since the 2nd grade. It has been full of great memories and of meeting new people. I haven't had as much of a struggle as Maria Hernandez, whom I talk about later on, but I have had my downfalls where I am pressured to always strive for A's which can be extremely stressful at times. Since all my peers look up to me to do the best, I can't give them anything less than the best. I don't want to feel like a failure, so my fight and struggle is to be the best that I can be every day and strive to make those A's.

Paulo Freire's "The Banking Concept of Education" isn't about any one fighting, but he does teach us that we need to further look into our education and see that we aren't receiving information like we think we are. He calls it the banking concept, in which the teachers just deposit information into us and fill us with stuff. We don't communicate with the teacher. We receive information, memorize it, and repeat it. I never looked at education from this point of view, and when I did, I realized that I was a part of it. I learned that I wasn't really "smart," but I memorized everything for tests, used that information, and then discarded it when I no longer needed it. I never inquired about what I was being "taught." Since I thought the teachers just followed a certain curriculum and they were the ones with the degrees and certifications, I just thought they knew what they were doing, but I guess not. Some teachers' techniques make me question if all my years of being a student have gone to waste. Am I really learning? So now after learning about this ideal concept, I'm more aware of education and tend to look deep and question everything that I am given, like in my Law Studies class. We write questions every day, look up the answers, and have a 5-question test every Tuesday on the information we memorized. The same routine happens every week. Now I question the things we look up in the textbook and try to gain a better understanding of them. I read the text carefully, look at the real-life examples that are given in the book, and ask the teacher when I become stuck. I am taking control in my understanding of the lessons and not just depositing information that is unnecessary.

Maria Hernandez, in her essay "Worse Than Those Six Days in the Dome," describes fighting for her school, Frederick Douglass, to remain open, because the state was trying to close it down. She and some of her friends were getting other students, parents, and the community together to start this campaign, "Quality Education as a Civil Right." They soon received attention for more than just a school where criminals went, the impression you would get of the school if you just based it on the news reports. As Maria states, the media was only reporting the bad that happens, but not when students from Douglass and McDonogh 35 won first place in the Louisiana Press Association Awards—against professional journalists—for a series of writings on the 50th anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education,* no local media outlets would report that story. Then Katrina hit,

and Douglass just went downhill. When she returned, she still fought for that equal education as the students at the selective admission schools received, because she didn't think it was right that the two schools that were open that housed 80% of the community were selective admission schools. They needed a place where normal children like her could attend school and not be shut out of education when they are the ones who needed the most attention. She was fighting for the equal opportunity to receive the attention that the other "good" schools were receiving.

I never looked at schooling as selective admission vs. open admission. Pre-Katrina I was attending McMain, to which I was selected after I applied. I also applied for Thurgood Marshall and Lusher, but my heart was set on McMain, because that is my mother and aunt's alma mater, so I wanted to follow the path and do the same. You were picked to get in, but I didn't think it was that hard to get in, because much of my elementary school class was right along with me for my first week of 7th grade. I don't believe that selective admission is bad, even though it is a public school, because you want the students who are going to change the schools for the better, raising standardized test scores, making a good name for the school, and also representing the school in a positive way. I think another step that could have been involved in picking students is interviews to see what the student is about and not just based on her scores and report cards. I would rather have students making B's and C's with a great and wonderful attitude than someone making straight A's who always has a bad attitude and is a trouble maker. But I also understand where Maria is coming from, because it is wrong for the schools to be picky in the time New Orleans was in a crisis at its lowest point.

A peer of Maria's Christopher Burton, in his essay "Rebuilding New Orleans, Redoing Education," writes about how he was one of those students who was very bright and received much attention, which bothered many of his classmates. He got booed at his school ceremony and started to realize that he was getting all the attention, and the students who really needed the attention were being ignored and weren't getting the help they needed to receive. "The public schools need to be public in the absolute sense of the word," he writes, meaning that we say public schools, but within those schools only a few are really given that attention that would make them succeed and get a good education, because they believe they are brighter students, but the children that the administration and teachers believe won't succeed, they tend to throw them on the back burner and not give them as much attention. He figured this wasn't right and decided to go to the neighborhood school, Frederick Douglass, along with his sister. He is another student who has come back to improve education at his alma mater and for other community schools that aren't receiving any attention at all. He is fighting for something that he strongly believes in and won't give up until there is justice and things are fixed.

The enslaved African Americans of the 1811 Slave Revolt were not fighting for a good education like Maria and Christopher but were fighting for the right to be free and have control over their lives. They used their drive and determination to rebel against the plantation owners and overthrow slavery. No one could break the strength that these few hundred enslaved people had, and even though they weren't well trained nor had the best weapons, they came together at a time when they couldn't take any more and just all said enough is enough. I'm happy that I was able to learn about such an event that took place in a city that I was born and raised in. This revolt was one of the largest enslaved persons' uprisings

in the history of the USA, involving over 500 people. This marked a historic moment in New Orleans history. I'm very shocked to know that this is my first time hearing about this event in all of my 16 years of living in New Orleans, LA.

These stories have inspired me to always strongly believe in my morals and values. If I believe that something needs to bring about change, then go for it, but do it the right way. I won't charge at anyone with weapons and rebel against the school board or anything, but I will use my knowledge and experiences along with my peers to fix any problem that we may face. I will keep these stories in mind whenever I may encounter a problem or something that needs to be changed. They have inspired me to never give up and always believe.

The Swinging Doors

Tariean King

Stuck up, bourgie bitch, uppity hoe: their facial expressions said it all. My people, black people, were giving me a terrible vibe. They let the clothes and the people I was walking with make them judgmental. They didn't know that I was only walking with the lawyers beside me because I was volunteering. They didn't know about the nights when I would have to get my balls cut out my head for the metal detectors. They didn't know about the walk my grandmother and I took to go see him. They didn't know that I sat on that hard bench outside the side entrance of the jail in the humid atmosphere of New Orleans while the mosquitos tore my legs up every Tuesday. They didn't know that I went through the same procedure of getting everything checked in like I was about to go see a violent animal like they did when or if they visited their loved ones. They didn't know about the recitals he missed. They didn't know how I cried my eyes out on my kindergarten graduation when he wasn't there. They didn't know how it felt when everybody was at my grandmother's funeral except him. They didn't know how he was always in this damn building, that I hated , that I despised with a passion during most of my childhood. They didn't know how I felt when children at school would tell me stories about their fathers, and all I could say was "my daddy in jail." They didn't know how I would wake up out my sleep to pray for God to let him out of jail, on the nights I would fall asleep. They didn't know. They didn't know that I was a child whose father was absent due to incarceration, and it was okay that they didn't.

I could tell by the look in their eyes they thought I was affiliated with the legal system, but if only they knew I was just a volunteer at Rome, Rome & Butler, a law firm. If only they knew that I was 18 years old, and I was just trying to get the feel of what practicing criminal justice would be like. If only they knew that I sat in those same seats, and waited to see what the judge would say about my daddy. If only they knew, I had gone through the same thing. They looked at me as if they despised me. I couldn't figure out why. Even though I wasn't what they thought, shouldn't they be happy that I was doing something good and not negative? Was it that they thought I was well-off? Did the Remy in my head, the cheap dress from the thrift store along with the $9.00 sandals I had on fool them? The only expensive thing was the Remy in my head. I had spent $200 to have straight hair like the Europeans. After reading Assata's autobiography I had a different opinion on what beauty was. The longer I stood in the courtroom the more my conscience got to me. I felt as if I owed somebody an explanation. I wanted to tell every white person in the room, the only reason why I had the hair in my head that looked like theirs was because I was waiting on my big nappy bush to get a little bigger and not because I wanted to be anything like them. I know it was my conscience because I'm quite sure that they were not worrying about my black ass. The black people in the room may have thought other wise, but the lawyers, judges, etc. knew that I didn't have a career in the legal system.

Ms. Kristen was telling me about what was going on, but my attention was somewhere else. The prisoners had entered the room. Orange suits, chained by the wrists, waist, and ankles. My eyes filled with tears. The prisoners were most likely doing time for something that could have been avoided, and the thought that there were African Americans males in the streets following their footsteps

made my body shiver. It seemed as if the majority of African American males that were free were only years, months, maybe even days away from landing in jail. When I saw the orange suits, I had a memory. I thought about one of my father's trial days. He looked so mad, I had to do something. I never was one to follow rules, so I ran behind the swinging doors and screamed daddy. My family couldn't catch me, so I was able to give him a kiss. That's when I learned that I could not go behind the swinging doors. My family kept telling me about the damn rules; but I was trying to tell them that he was obviously mad about something. They said that the "important people" were the only people who could go behind the swinging doors, and it felt as if the black people in the stands felt the same way.

I agreed that only important people should go behind the swinging doors, but not to the extent of my family. What about the people who fought for Civil Rights and went to jail? The law applied also to activists. Were activists not important? What about Homer Plessy? He was a member of the New Orleans' Citizens' Committee that organized challenges to segregation laws. He deliberately violated Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890. People fundraised and saved money for him to go behind those swinging doors, not as a lawyer, a judge, a prosecutor but as a "criminal." He did not have the privilege to sit in the "important people" section, but he had the privilege and still has the honor of being someone who made a difference for African Americans. He did not settle for blacks living in second class. He did not settle for blacks not being able to sit on the same train car as a white person. He did not accept the fact that blacks were living a hard life, only because of the color of their skin. So he, along with others, fought. I am not a judge, lawyer, prosecutor or anybody associated with the legal system, but I am important, just like Plessy and every other person who fought for change and every other person who struggled.

I told Ms. Kristen how I felt about the damn locks they put on the prisoners. She was cool, but I couldn't use the tone and the language I wanted to use, so I simply said, "Those locks always get to me. The same locks that you see on gates, bikes, material things are on human beings, and that gets under my skin." She said "I know." I also told her that I hated the fact that blacks were always the majority. She shook her head again, and said, "I know." I turned my head and let the tears run. I wondered if she really felt how I felt about incarceration. I began questioning myself. We had nothing in common. She went to private school. Her father was an attorney. They owned their own law firm. Were her feelings about incarceration real? Did she really care? If so, I wondered how long it took for her skin to get thick enough to take everything in. But I decided to put our differences to the side and make the most of the opportunity to learn about the legal system and incarceration.

In May 2012 the New Orleans daily newspaper, *The Times Picayune* published a series on Louisiana Incarceration. As I looked at the prisoners in the courtroom, I wondered what their talents were. I wondered were they ever traded between parishes. I wondered if any Sheriffs had ever called to see if the prison had some heads to fill up their bunks. The tears kept falling. It is a financial advantage to

the state when people are incarcerated. It's free labor, and the system has money all tied up into it. This is where the long prison sentences come in at. The sad thing is while the system looks at humans who make mistakes as "criminals" as moneymakers, you have children like me who are missing their loved ones. "Louisiana is the world's prison capital. The state imprisons more of its people, per head, than any of its U.S. counterparts. First among Americans means first in the world. Louisiana's incarceration rate is nearly five times Iran's, 13 times China's and 20 times Germany's. " (Chang, *Times Picayune*) I wondered how long were the prisoners in the courtroom sentences and how long had they been incarcerated. My thoughts turned to the phrase "You do the crime, you do the time." When I was younger, I never looked at my daddy's actions that led to him going to prison as crime. It was more like a survival decision. I knew that if he didn't do the things that he did, that I would be visiting his grave and not the jail. In some aspects, this made having to sit on the bench and having my grandmother rub the stinky alcohol on my legs okay with me. But now, people commit crimes and go to jail. People aren't incarcerated to learn from their "mistakes" but are incarcerated because "The hidden engine behind the state's well-oiled prison machine is cold, hard cash. A majority of Louisiana inmates are housed in for-profit facilities, which must be supplied with a constant influx of human beings or a $182 million industry will go bankrupt." (Chang, *Times Picayune*) This means that prisons need prisoners. A prison is a business. One in 86 Louisianans are behind bars. The long life sentences that people receive are due to advantage of the prison business. This is part of the reason why it was so painful to watch the prisoners. One choice, one decision, had landed them a job in a business they knew nothing about. It was a painful thing to watch, and I found it even more painful that people, black and low income whites, who were sitting behind me, judging me, most likely didn't know anything about the business of mass incarceration. I wanted them to know that they were important, they were important to me, because they were the people who kept me determined to fight to make a change, just like Plessy did, and where they sat in the courtroom didn't mean a damn thing.

Plessy wouldn't have been able to accomplish anything without the support of the community. They worked together, as one: Blacks, some whites, creoles, etc. Plessy could pass for white himself, but he cared about the community. It was the community who raised money to have him sent to jail. The people who were sitting behind me, judging me, black and white, were a part of my community, and I appreciated them for just that. I took no offense to the negative vibe and the looks that were given to me, because I understood. I respected the looks, because I understood their feelings about the legal system. I understood their frustrations mentally, physically, and financially. Having a loved one in jail is no easy burden: the lawyer fees, being separated from the person, taking off from work, missing out on money to attend their trial, wondering when it could be rescheduled, etc. I understood. I knew from experience what it felt like to sit on the opposite side of the swinging doors—the side where people who have jobs and not careers sit at, while people with incomes of at least $65,000 annually walk through the swinging doors on the other side. The swinging doors had two different classes on each side. This is what made people feel not so important. Since I was able to relate, whether they knew it or not I was able to accept the "Stuck up, bourgie bitch, uppity hoe" looks I was given.

PART SEVEN:
Public Education in New Orleans During the Post-Katrina Privatization Era

Introduction

Erica DeCuir, Co-Founder of Students at the Center and Faculty Member at Georgia State University

On the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, I attended a university forum in Atlanta ostensibly organized to examine educational reform in post-Katrina New Orleans. The organizers, New Schools for New Orleans, characterized themselves as school reform advocates leading bold school improvement initiatives in the city. They presented an emotional pseudo-documentary using the juxtaposition of pre-Katrina street crime and chronic underachievement to justify a state takeover of public schools. In closing, they asked audience members to move, with urgency, to New Orleans to teach as a part of their pursuit for justice, reminiscent of a 19th century civilizing mission to East Africa. This university forum, billed as a commemorative event to Hurricane Katrina and the promise of rebuilding New Orleans, was actually a recruiting fair for charter school operators, administrators, and teachers to staff the new Recovery School District (RSD).

In post-Katrina New Orleans, the Recovery School District (RSD) symbolizes the neoliberal educational agenda. The RSD originated before Katrina as a special, state-run school district to oversee academically deficient schools, but its power grew abundantly when the state legislature gift-wrapped most New Orleans public schools to its jurisdiction after the storm. Neoliberalism in education embodies some of the central tenets of standards, testing, and accountability, but draws upon free enterprise to formulate a market solution to problems in education: privatize it. Neoliberals argue that true accountability rests with the private sector, where businesses compete to produce the best product for the taxpayer while maximizing profit for entrepreneurs.

Couched in lofty terms of progress, accountability, or social justice, the neoliberal agenda found favor in Louisiana where a conservative White majority had long abandoned the predominantly-Black Orleans Parish School Board. This abandonment was fully realized in the transfer of over a hundred New Orleans public schools to the RSD, who in turn chartered these schools to corporations allowed to profit from public coffers as long as test scores are up. However, as the writings in this section indicate, the social costs of privatizing public education in New Orleans do not fit neatly with profit motives.

The writings in this section examine the social implications of market-driven educational reform.

They reveal layers of structural oppression in New Orleans only worsened by privatization schemes currently underway. Here, students and teachers grapple with a commodification of education that divorces schools from communities, teachers from teaching, and students from each other.

Teachers offer a critical look at the communal impact of school privatization that damages the city's efforts to rebuild and prosper. Judy E. Demarest's essay, "Rebuilding New Orleans," is a testament to the nearly eight thousand school personnel summarily fired only weeks after Hurricane Katrina.

Judy's desperation to rebuild her life in New Orleans is hampered by the non-hiring of veteran teachers because charter school profits increase when two inexperienced, lower-paid teachers can be hired at the cost of one experienced, higher-paid veteran. Julie Wedding's "Used to be a Teacher" is a poetic illustration of the various jobs that many veteran teachers are forced to take if they wish to remain in the city. If New Orleans educators are not found in California, Georgia, or Tennessee public schools, they are seen working in retail or restaurants around the city.

The anonymous teacher who wrote, "The Bottom Line: A Dire Civil Rights Crisis," situates the displacement and non-hiring of New Orleans' veteran teachers into a larger historical context. The author discusses the firing of New Orleans' educators as an assault on the Black middle class and their political power. The absence of these educators hampers the economic and political vitality of Black neighborhoods and shifted local control of schools from Black to White, overnight.

Cost-cutting measures employed by charter schools discriminate against pre-Katrina New Orleans teachers in favor of post-Katrina temporary teachers recruited from college events like the one I witnessed in Atlanta. These new teachers are often trained to deliver scripted, standardized lesson plans Callie Thuma describes in her essay, "On Cloning, Compliments, and the Question of Administrative Support." Here, Callie questions if the particular style of automated teaching, so common in New Orleans charter schools, is worthy of praise. The synchronicity of scripted lessons leads her to debate the quality of learning and the emptiness of teaching in post-Katrina New Orleans. Her principal would like to clone her, and metaphorically he can; high turnover rates make it necessary to constantly recruit replacement teachers like Callie. In Sam Gordon's "Who Will Be Left to Hug?," he describes the emotional toll on younger students impacted by the constant cycle of new and newer teachers. He exposes the economic benefits of a cheap, inexperienced labor force, but sheds light on the added instability this hiring practice creates in schools.

Student writings in this section are much more interested in the long-term effects market-driven policies will have on their neighborhood schools and communities. A particular concern is the practice of selective-admission policies that siphon high-achieving students away from their peers. In "Honoring Community," Ashley Jones explains how these policies divide families from seeing each other as one community in the struggle for quality education for all. Selective admissions policies create a false impression of academic progress in the high performing schools and an atmosphere of low expectations in the lower-performing schools. As Jade Fleury indicates in her essay, "I Don't Know Why You Care So Much," students quickly internalize the hierarchy of schooling and their place on the academic continuum.

Most importantly, these students reveal how lackluster school resources—so integral to the struggle for quality education pre-Katrina—continue to halt progress in public schools post-Katrina. Ariel Estwick's essay, "My Transition with Education after Katrina," uncovers severe disinvestment in extra-curricular activities and opportunities viewed as too costly by charter school operators. Advanced courses, sports, student clubs, and even field trips are often sacrificed as liabilities that decrease profit margins. If a charter school operator

is unsuccessful, the school is targeted for closure, but where can students go if other charter schools won't accept them? School privatization ushers in school choice for parents but extends that same privilege to charter schools who can admit or deny students according to their needs. Maria Hernandez's essay, "Worse Than Six Days in the Dome," explains how school closures limit school options rather than increasing them.

Together, these writings present a complex educational system unfolding in post-Katrina New Orleans. They give voice to the larger, social ramifications of the neoliberal agenda as seen through the eyes of students and teachers on the front line. Hopefully, their experiences will inspire the New Orleans Diaspora to continue the struggle homeward so Bobcats can roam, Eagles can fly, and Roneagles can soar, once again.

TIMELINE: 2005–PRESENT

Post-Katrina Privatization of Public Education

Partially adapted from "Dismantling a Community" published in 2006 by Center for Community Change in collaboration with Students at the Center

2005

Spring 2005

State-appointed auditor finds no loss or misspending of federal Title I funds, determining that at least $69 million of the $69.6 million of Title I funds called into question by U.S. Department of Education were properly expended. Local media widely report the investigation but barely report the exoneration finding of the state auditor.

Summer 2005

Reports from Louisiana Department of Education show that 88 of the approximately 120 public schools in New Orleans met growth targets set by state accountability system and 93 of the schools showed growth over the previous year's school performance scores.

August 18, 2005

New Orleans Public Schools open for the 2005-06 school year with approximately 63,000 students in slightly over 120 schools.

August 29, 2005

Category 5 Hurricane Katrina hits the central Gulf Coast and subsequent failures of federal levees and flood walls as well as overflowing of Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (commercial shipping channel from Industrial Canal in Eastern New Orleans to Gulf of Mexico) leads to flooding of majority of the city.

September 7, 2005

Heritage Foundation recommendations represent growing application of privatization as a key goal and strategy in rebuilding New Orleans, as represented in these quotes from the organization's web memo entitled "From Tragedy to Triumph: Principled Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities":

"In general, tools such as tax credits and voucher programs, which allow individuals and families to direct funds, should by utilized to encourage private sector innovation and sensitivity to individual needs and preferences."

"Private vision, not bureaucracy, must be the engine to rebuild...The critical need now is to encourage investors and entrepreneurs to seek new opportunities within these cities...."

Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, published in 2007, would give fuller context of ways proponents of this emphasis on privatization and unfettered free markets were always looking for opportunities such as New Orleans in aftermath of Katrina presented to privatize public entities and thus were ready in the days after Katrina to promote this free market, individualized agenda.

September 12, 2005

While New Orleans residents in most of the city have been forced to leave and not allowed to return, The Education Industry Association, which represents corporate interests such as textbook companies and corporate school contractors, sends a letter to its members: "Defining moments in history are often recognized with aid of hindsight. Looking backward in time, events and opportunities always come into sharper focus. The challenge is to see these moments in real time and to act decisively. Katrina, and her swath of destruction, can be one of those defining moments in the history of the education industry. Our actions or inactions will leave an indelible mark in the minds of our customers, including students, families, and schools; the media, and elected officials..." (Education Industry Association, "Katrina—a Defining Moment for the Education Industry," September 12, 2005, http://www.educationindustry.org/tier.asp?bid=40

September 13, 2005

Letter from Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings requests "$2.4 billion in federal funding to help schools affected by Hurricane Katrina." Picard's communication includes language that LDOE, not individual school districts, should receive the federal funds and includes a specific request for "more than $622 million for salaries and more than $155 million for benefits for out-of-work school employees." The letter specifically cites, as state of Florida did in 2004 hurricane devastation, the need to "pay out-of-work teachers 'mainly to assist in retaining staff for when the schools reopened.'"

Rather than use these funds to pay teachers working and in good standing when Hurricane Katrina hit, as did other universities and school systems in the Gulf region, Orleans Parish School Board would place its teachers and staff on "disaster leave without pay" and eventually terminate them, having never paid these school personnel from these and other funds dedicated to that purpose.

September 14, 2005

U. S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, in a letter to state school chiefs, calls charter schools "uniquely equipped" to serve students displaced by Katrina and announces waiving of some federal restrictions on charter schools in New Orleans

September 15, 2005

Orleans Parish School Board places its 7,500 employees on "disaster leave without pay" despite federal funding intended to maintain teaching workforce and despite communications from state superintendent Cecil Picard for funds for this purpose.

At this same meeting, acting superintendent of New Orleans Public Schools Dr. Ora Watson presents a plan to open 13 schools in Algiers in the fall of 2005. The school board votes against this plan.

In June 20, 2012 ruling in wrongful termination lawsuit, Judge Ethel Simms Julien, ruling in favor of the educators and against the school board and state defendants, would call this designation a "fictional" one with no basis in state law or school board policy and contracts.

September 30, 2005

Secretary Spellings announces a U.S. Department of Education grant of $20.9 million to Louisiana for the establishment and opening of charter schools.

October 7, 2005

The Orleans Parish School Board votes 4-2 to convert all 13 schools in Algiers (on the west bank of New Orleans which did not flood) into charter schools. Unlike regular public schools, they are not required to admit any additional students once they reach their stated capacity.

The charter application for these 13 schools specifically states that employees of the Algiers Charter School District cannot be members of the teachers union or considered employees of the New Orleans Public Schools. (Catherine Gerwertz, "New Orleans Adopts Plan for Charters," *Education Week*, October 19, 2006)

October 14, 2005

A civil court judge in New Orleans orders the school board to stop its plans for a charter district in Algiers, agreeing that the Board acted without providing the opportunity for public comment, as required.

October 28, 2005

OPSB meets and votes again to open 13 west bank schools as charters, this time having met public comment requirements. The Algiers Charter School Association did not exist at this point, nor did any board for running these charter schools. Orleans Parish School Board members served simultaneously as the initial board for these 13 charter schools.

The board also votes to open seven schools (one already a charter and six conversions to charters) on the east bank, including turning over the Alcee Fortier High School building, one of the few buildings that did not flood, to Lusher, a selective admission school that would add high school grades to its existing elementary and middle school students. Students who had been enrolled at Fortier when Hurricane Katrina hit are essentially barred from attending their school.

In the face of concern that the growing number of charter schools might attempt to "cream" their student bodies, the school board passes a resolution requiring each board-approved charter to accept a minimum of 10% students with disabilities and a minimum of 20% low-income students (prior to Katrina, 20% of New Orleans public school students were in special education and 75% were eligible for free and reduced meals). However, conceding that it would be unrealistic to expect compliance with these regulations, the resolution allows schools to waive these requirements until New Orleans is "fully repopulated."

November 28, 2005

Benjamin Franklin Elementary Math and Science School becomes the first public school in the city to open since Katrina. Previously a selective admission school, Franklin Elementary opens now without restriction for any elementary schools who are back in the city.

Franklin remains open in admissions in the years following Katrina, as does the previously open admissions Bethune Elementary School. These two non-charter, public, open admission schools directly run by the local school board consistently post the highest student performance scores of any elementary schools in the city, except for a handful of highly selective admission charter schools.

November 30, 2005

State legislature passes Act 35, with over 3/4 of New Orleans legislators voting against it. Act 35 changes, for Orleans Parish public schools only, the guidelines that place schools in the state-run Recovery School District. The school performance score that places schools in the Recovery School District changes from 60 to 87.5, the average school performance score for all schools in the state. Prior to Act 35 five New Orleans public schools were in the Recovery School District. After Act 35, 107 of the city's public schools were placed in the Recovery School District.

December 9, 2005

Orleans Parish School Board votes to fire all teachers and other employees of the New Orleans Public Schools. Rather than send letters to each teacher and employee, over 90% of whom the school system has updated addresses for, Alvarez and Marsal, the company now managing New Orleans Public Schools for the state, simply issues a press release announcing the terminations.

Following various delays because of these and other disputed processes, the school board votes on February 15, 2006 to fire 7,500 of its teachers and employees effective March 24, 2006.

2006

January 28, 2006

Civil rights attorney Tracie Washington files lawsuit against those in control of city schools for denying access to education to young people in New Orleans. 13 students are named in the suit, including one with autism.

On the same day, New Orleans Public Schools officials present to state officials a list of 170 students who have been turned away from state-controlled schools in New Orleans. The emerging concern that the city's charter schools are filled to capacity and that not enough non-charter, guaranteed-access schools are available leads to increasing calls for the state's Recovery School District to open more of the schools it controls.

Walter L. Cohen High School is opened by the Recovery School District later in the spring, but the local school district continues throughout the spring to maintain a growing list of students denied access to public education in the city.

Spring 2006

Repeated requests—continuing in the subsequent four years—of the Recovery School District and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide additional school building for students to attend the high-performing, open-admissions Franklin Elementary School are denied.

March 2006

Douglass Community Coalition finalizes, after numerous planning meetings, its recommendations for design of school curriculum, instruction, community involvement, and values for opening of school.

March 24, 2006

7,500 teachers and employees of New Orleans Public Schools are fired, despite all being in good standing in terms of all performance reviews and state certifications.

April 20, 2006

The state enters into a contract with Teach for America for $468,468 to train and place 125 TFA corps members. This contract is awarded despite the fact that thousands of certified, experienced OPSB teachers are available for employment and have current contact information on file with OPSB and its manager, Alvarez & Marsal.

June 7, 2006

Douglass Community Coalition, Crescent City Peace Alliance, Students at the Center, and United Teachers of New Orleans continue annual commemoration of **Plessy Day.**

June 12, 2006

U. S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announces additional $24 million for charter schools in Louisiana.

June 14, 2006

The Recovery School District, now under direction of Paul Vallas, an accountant by training and superintendent through waiver of state requirements to be superintendent, announces that it must postpone the opening of RSD schools for the 2006-07 school year.

Summer 2006

Andover Bread Loaf Writing Workshop collaborates with United Teachers of New Orleans (AFT Local 527) and New Orleans Public Schools to fund at least five teachers per year (continuing through 2012) to participate in intensive summer graduate courses with the Bread Loaf Graduate School of English.

2006-07 School Year

53 schools, four run directly by the locally elected school board, are open in New Orleans.

21 different entities operate these schools.

The number of governing entities and schools will increase in the coming years.

2007

Summer 2007

Algebra Project, Andover Bread Loaf Writing Workshop, Students at the Center, and New Orleans Public Schools resume summer workshop series for teachers in planning and designing lesson units and pedagogy using writing and student experience to develop learning across the curriculum.

2008

2008

Bard Early College New Orleans begins to offer dual enrollment courses in collaboration with New Orleans Public Schools, partnering with Students at the Center at McDonogh 35 and McMain High Schools to offer multiple courses per year and adding to writings produced for Students at the Center books including *Who Am I?* and *The Long Ride*.

United Teachers of New Orleans (AFT Local 527) expands a series of professional development opportunities for all teachers in New Orleans in partnership with many schools and school districts, including the Strategies for Student Success and Educational Research and Development programs through which teachers train to lead workshops in their school sites. An additional feature of the series is monthly writing workshops led by Students at the Center and open to all teachers, high school students, and community members who choose to attend.

2010

January, 28 2010

Invited as an expert on education reform and introduced as the architect of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) and the Recovery School District (RSD), New Orleans business executive Leslie Jacobs gives sworn testimony to the Charter Revision Commission of Jacksonville, Florida. In her testimony, she says,

"We decided to take the failing schools away from the school district, and it was really modeled after Chapter 11 bankruptcy. So when we took that school away from the school district and put it into the Recovery School District -- and I just have to emphasize, this is recovery from academic failure and was in existence before Katrina.

"In taking it away, you strip the school from that school board. And in doing that, the local policies go away, the collective bargaining agreement [with the teachers' union] goes away, the people go away, though they have the right to be interviewed and kept if the new operator of that school so chooses. And so out comes the building, the students, and the money and a fresh start.

"...[O]ur mayor has an incredibly low approval rating right now. I think major leaders that were there in Katrina all have untreated posttraumatic stress, and they have all gone crazy. Seriously, I mean, there has been fallout — y'all probably thought that we — I think every surrounding parish now has like somebody in jail.

"There are still people in the minority community angry that we took over the schools and that we disenfranchised them, and I don't think anything we say or do will change that."

2010

United Teachers of New Orleans partners with **the Renaissance Project** and Students at the Center to develop the Healing a City Through Stories project, with support from racial healing portfolio of the Kellogg Foundation, to bring together new teachers, veteran teachers, retired teachers, students, and community members to discuss effects of race on education and student learning. This monthly series continues and as of 2011 and continuing to the present includes writing workshops that developed many of the essays by teachers in *The Long Ride* and early career teacher mentor groups in collaboration with the **New Teachers Roundtable.**

April 8, 2010

In an article published by British Broadcasting Corporation, Paul Vallas, Recovery School District superintendent and mentor to U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, gives this quote that underscores the increasing emphasis on cost-cutting rather than highest quality education. This value system of the bottom line over high quality education pervades post-Katrina changes in public education in New Orleans and across the nation: **"I don't want the majority of my staff to work more than 10 years. The cost of sustaining those individuals becomes so enormous," says Paul Vallas.**

August 5, 2010

Hundreds of Filipino guestworkers lured to teach in Louisiana public schools were cheated out of tens of thousands of dollars and forced into exploitative contracts by an international trafficking ring run by labor contractors, according to a class action lawsuit filed August 5 by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and Covington & Burling LLP.

"For more than two years, we have been working toward this moment," said Louisiana Federation of Teachers President Steve Monaghan. "The practices described in this lawsuit are disgusting, unacceptable and, frankly, un-American. We are very pleased to have the SPLC and Covington & Burling as partners in the pursuit of justice for these teachers and to put an end to these abuses."

Ingrid Cruz, one of the Filipino teachers, said she and the other teachers were deceived into selling property, resigning from jobs, borrowing money and leaving behind children and friends in search of a more secure future. "We were herded into a path, a slowly constricting path, where the moment you feel the suspicion that something is not right, you're already way past the point of no return," Cruz said. She added that the teachers consider Louisiana their home and have a strong commitment to the state's children.

On April 28, 2011, 19th Judicial District Judge Janice Clark affirmed the April 14, 2010 ruling by Louisiana Workforce Commission ordering repayment of an estimated $1.8 million in illegally charged placement fees for approximately 350 Filipino teachers working primarily in East Baton Rouge, Jefferson Parish, and Recovery School District.

September 2010

Honduran President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo Sosa visits New Orleans. Sosa has come to power as a result of a 2009 military coup. The politically powerful Honduran teachers' union had opposed him in his prior bid to win the presidency democratically. The purpose of his trip to New Orleans is to learn from Tulane President Scott Cowen and Mayor Mitch Landrieu. The three sign a memorandum of understanding, pledging to work together on healthcare, student exchange and public education. Cowen tells a reporter, "We have a lot of experience in rebuilding public school systems here in New Orleans. We'll figure out what will work for them in terms of building their public education system... and serve as advisers for them." To the same reporter, Sosa aide Mayra Pineda says, "We've had a huge problem with teachers' unions... Charter schools are certainly one option to try to solve the union situation."

November 2010

The alumni associations of two schools along the Esplanade Avenue Corridor (John McDonogh Senior High School and Joseph S. Clark Senior High School), along with teachers and alumni and students from those two schools and McDonogh 35, form the **Coalition for Community Schools** (CCS). The coalition is formed in response to threats of takeover by charter school operators at Clark and McDonogh. The group's mission is to: "1) bring together stakeholders in high school education, 2) develop a model of working across schools in geographic proximity to provide high quality education to all students in our neighborhoods, 3) advocate for local governance of schools that is democratic and inclusive of all stakeholders." UTNO signs a memorandum of understanding with the coalition, pledging its support for all activities related to the CCS mission. Representatives from four other high schools in process of converting to or being forced to convert to charters without significant stakeholder input participate in the coalition in the coming months.

December 9, 2010

State Board of Education approves attorney and Louisiana State Superintendent Paul Pastorek's (who like RSD superintendents Paul Vallas, John White—who would later succeed Pastorek as state superintendent, and Patrick Dobard would have to have the state board waive state requirements for being superintendent) plan for delaying return of public schools from state control to local control. Act 35 of November 2005 had required by the end of five years a plan by the state superintendent for the return of schools to local control.

As of July, 2012, no RSD schools have been returned to local control, including Martin Behrman Elementary School, which now exceeds the state average school performance and has secured vote of faculty, staff, parents, and administrators as well as petitions from local community members and organizations to return to the governance of the Orleans Parish School Board.

And at the same December, 2010 meeting of the state board of education, charter proposals by high school alumni groups and their allies are denied. All such charter proposals by alumni groups will be denied in December, 2011 and were denied in December, 2009.

2011

April 2011

Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of dispossession and defiance from New Orleans, a book published in 2010 by Teachers College Press of Columbia University and co-authored by and partially about Students at the Center—the New Orleans public school-based writing program begun in 1996—is one of three books awarded "Honorary Mention" for "Outstanding Contribution to the Field" by Division B: Curriculum Studies of the **American Educational Research Association.**

Summer 2011

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and United Teachers of New Orleans deepen and expand their partnership to develop anti-racist organizers and organizations in public education and other arenas that affect students and their families.

August 5, 2011

New Orleans Police Department officers are found guilty of killing two citizens and violating their civil rights and those of other citizens shot by police on the **Danziger Bridge** in New Orleans on September 4, 2005, just days after Hurricane Katrina. **Seventeen-year-old James "J.J." Brissette,** one of the two men killed by police on Danziger Bridge, had been a Douglass High School and Students at the Center classmate of many of the student authors in *The Long Ride* who had also been conducting a weekly demonstration in the months prior to Katrina asking for investigation of and suspension for the officers involved in shooting and killing of 25-year-old Jenard Thomas on March 27, 2005. The Danziger Bridge incident is one of several involving police killings of citizens, many of which have resulted in similar convictions for the officers involved.

December 15, 2011

The Recovery School District hosts a community meeting at **L.B. Landry High School**. The district has proposed a plan to move the students, faculty and staff of a charter school, the O. Perry Walker College and Career Preparatory High School, into the Landry campus. The RSD proposes to replace the Landry administration with the Walker administration, with preference for teaching positions given to Walker teachers. The proposal also renames the school Algiers Tech High at Landry. After Hurricane Katrina, the Landry alumni and community fought for the construction of a brand-new, state-of-the-art, $54 million campus. The school reopened in the fall of 2010 under the governance of the Recovery School District. In only its third semester of operation since reopening, the district casts the school as a failing school, despite state laws that prevent such designations for schools with fewer than two consecutive years of data. At the meeting, community members and alumni voice their indignation and frustration at the RSD's proposal. People who knew **Dr. Lord Beaconsfield Landry** testify to his importance to the community he served as a doctor for many years. One after another, they rise to speak and tell RSD Superintendent John White and Deputy Superintendent Patrick Dobard that they will not allow the name of the school to change. They make it clear that they resent the forced imposition of a historically white school on their historically black campus.

2012

Spring 2012

According to the letter grade system adopted by the Louisiana Department of Education, at the end of the 2011-12 school year, after seven years of running over 80% of public schools in New Orleans:

100 percent of the 15 state-run RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a "D" or "F";

79 percent of the 42 charter RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a "D" or "F";

Of the RSD students attending state-run schools with letter grades, 100 percent or 5,422, are attending schools that received "D" or "F";

Of the RSD students attending charter schools with letter grades, 76 percent or 15,040 are attending schools that received "D" or "F."

April 19, 2012

Alumni of George Washington Carver Senior High School begin a daily picket protest in front of the school. They are joined by members of the community. They are protesting the hiring of a new principal. Despite years of active advocacy and dialogue with the RSD, the alumni and community were not consulted about the hiring of the new principal. He has no experience as a principal and no administrative certification. They have shown up in numbers, vowing to prevent him from setting foot on campus. Their signs read "Hands Off Carver! We Demand Respect!" The new principal does not show up that day, despite having announced to the staff the prior day that we would be coming to evaluate them on the 19th. The picket protest continues until the end of the school year, on June 1. During that time, the new principal only made one attempt to enter the campus during the school day. On that day, May 11, despite the fact that the RSD called the police and six squad cars arrived, a group of committed alumni and community members nonviolently prevented him from entering the campus.

April 2012

Louisiana State legislature passes legislation allowing public dollars allocated for running local public schools to be used for vouchers. The same legislation includes no accountability plan for the schools receiving vouchers and an expansion to non-profit organizations of entities that can authorize charter schools in the state.

Large portions of this legislation continue the drive by educational entrepreneurs and investment managers to use virtual, on-line schools and courses for profit-making in public education. For instance, Lee Fang's November 17, 2011 article, "Selling Schools Out," published in *The Nation*, cites one study that estimates "that revenues from the K-12 online learning industry will grow by 43 percent between 2010 and 2015, with revenues reaching $24.4 billion." Fang's essay also reports on the connections between a number of former elected officials and school leaders who now advise investors on ways to change laws to support profit-making and privatization in public education. The following quote from Feng's article describes some of the movement behind passage of **Act 2 in the 2012 session of the Louisiana State Legislature.**

"While most education reform advocates cloak their goals in the rhetoric of "putting children first," the conceit was less evident at a conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, earlier this year [2011].

"Standing at the lectern of Arizona State University's SkySong conference center in April, investment banker Michael Moe exuded confidence as he kicked off his second annual confab of education startup companies and venture capitalists. A press packet cited reports that rapid changes in education could unlock "immense potential for entrepreneurs." "This education issue," Moe declared, "there's not a bigger problem or bigger opportunity in my estimation."

"...Moe's conference marked a watershed moment in school privatization. His first "Education Innovation Summit," held last year, attracted about 370 people and fifty-five presenting companies. This year, his conference hosted more than 560 people and 100 companies, and featured luminaries like former DC Mayor Adrian Fenty and former New York City schools chancellor Joel Klein, now an education executive at News Corporation, a recent high-powered entrant into the for-profit education field. Klein is just one of many former school officials to cash out. Fenty now consults for Rosetta Stone, a language company seeking to expand into the growing K-12 market.

"As Moe ticked through the various reasons education is the next big "undercapitalized" sector of the economy, like healthcare in the 1990s, he also read through a list of notable venture investment firms that recently completed deals relating to the education-technology sector, including Sequoia and Benchmark Capital. Kleiner Perkins, a major venture capital firm and one of the first to back Amazon.com and Google, is now investing in education technology, Moe noted.

"The press release for Moe's education summit promised attendees a chance to meet a set of experts who have "cracked the code" in overcoming "systemic resistance to change." Fenty, still recovering from his loss in the DC Democratic primary, urged attendees to stand up to the teachers union "bully." Jonathan Hage, CEO of Charter Schools USA, likened the conflict to war, according to a summary posted on the conference website. "There's an air game," said Hage, "but there's also a ground game going on." "Investors are going to have to support" candidates and "push back against the pushback." Carlos Watson, a former cable news host now working as an investment banker for Goldman Sachs specializing in for-profit education, guided a conversation dedicated simply to the politics of reform.

"Sponsors of the event ranged from various education reform groups funded by hedge-fund managers, like the nonprofit Education Reform Now, to ABS Capital, a private equity firm with a stake in education-technology companies like Teachscape. At smaller breakout sessions, education enterprises made their pitches to potential investors."

(http://www.theinvestigativefund.org/investigations/corporateaccountability/1580/?page=entire)

June 20, 2012

Judge Ethel Simms Julien, following a 17-day bench trial in summer, 2011, rules that teachers and other Orleans Parish School Board employees were **wrongfully terminated** in the months following August 29, 2005.

July 26, 2012

The Capital Roundtable hosts "An ENCORE Conference for Middle-Market Private Equity and Mezzanine Investors and Lendors" entitled "Private Equity Investing in For-Profit Education Companies: Middle-Market Investors are Finding Lots of Profitable High-Growth Segments." Announcement of the conference at the Capital Roundtable web site includes the following:

"Education is now the second largest market in the U.S., valued at $1.3 trillion. So while an industry of this size will always be scrutinized by regulators, the most onerous recent changes are likely over, and investors should face an easier climate down the road. And while eventual passage is not guaranteed, **several pieces of legislation favoring the for-profit industry have been proposed in Congress.**

"In the K-12 space, the **federal "Race To The Top" initiative has enabled a growing level of privatization in the K-12 segment,** and rewarding districts for embracing alternative models, technological advances, and locally-based criteria.

"Schools in these states have more flexibility in how they spend federal funds to benefit students, which **benefits for-profit companies** focusing on high-quality programs and services." (Recovered July 14, 2012 at http://www.capitalroundtablemail.com/masterclass/For-Profit-Education-Private-Equity-Conference-2012.html?utm_source=rtlist&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=1834-education-and-training-companies&utm_content=For-Profit-Education-Companies-PE-Conference-Im-Chairing-Youre-Invited&tag=mailing4)

Summer 2012

98% of parents say no to vouchers as only 2% of students and their families eligible for vouchers under Louisiana's new, sweeping voucher plan choose to apply for the program.

PART SEVEN: Public Education in New Orleans During the Post-Katrina Privatization Era

After the Storm

Ashley Jones

Riding in the back seat of a packed car, watching the trees and birds and the sky whiz by me like the snapshots one sees before dying, I begin to think about life after this storm. We've been through them before, most of the time preferring to huddle together on the living room floor around dancing candlelight, and sleep it off. However, we knew this one was going to be impossible to slumber through. We had to leave.

Before I could think about the man I called Cookie Monster, whose auto parts store was on the corner of the block I grew up on in Pigeon Town or the shop on Leondias where I first got my hair straight-combed, I thought about them. Their faces come back to me like a favorite song forgotten or an old lover's face. Their laughter echoes in my mind, and I see their grinning teeth, shining in spite of their mournful eyes, eyes that tell the truth about the pain and confusion in their lives. Their giggles strangle and stifle cries of hopelessness.

Before I thought about the place I used to get my chicken sandwiches from on Freret St. or Ms. Sadie the iceberg lady right off of LaSalle St in the 3rd, I saw Maria and Rodneka, Earlnika, Keva, and Daniel. I thought about Douglass High School and the gloomy hallways that always made me feel that I was in a scary movie or something. I wondered what would be next for them, no longer having Students at the Center (SAC). I thought about the schools they may be forced to go to, those cold, stiff rooms where the real world never becomes part of the lesson plan. Where kids like me and nameless others grow irritated when we think of the real world waiting to suck us up in a vortex just right outside.

Revisiting the halls of Douglas in my mind, I never knew how much these kids meant to me. And although I have always been grateful to SAC, I finally realize the saving grace it has been. So many times I've walked these dusky halls and felt that I had just entered the walls of an abandoned ship stacked high with forgotten treasure. I size up the bounty of pliable, young bodies and make note of the exuberant brilliance of their eyes and their hair and their mouths, and I think, Why hasn't anyone claimed this treasure, this fountain of youth, this elixir of life!?"

I watch these students watch me skip through the halls, and I wonder if they know how much like them I am. I wonder if they can see the confused and hostile child tucked away behind the ruffles of my bohemian skirts. Maybe when they look into my eyes, they come face to face with a young person once so afraid of my own power that I refused to read pieces in class and spent many nights dreading the next day. More than seeing me as a college graduate or the quiet girl with the camera skills, I want them to see my transformation and the roles they, along with SAC play in my continuing growth.

We drove and drove that August day, ahead of the storm. But my head never left my home.

Worse Than Those Six Days in the Dome

Maria Hernandez

When Katrina hit New Orleans, I was two weeks into my senior year at Frederick Douglass Senior High School. My friends and I were frantically trying to keep the school from closing. Our school was one of the lowest ranking schools in the district, so the state, using its accountability plan, was trying to shut it down or take it over. We were running a campaign called Quality Education as a Civil Right, doing our part in this one-year-old national campaign by continuing the work we had been doing at Douglass: involving more parents and students and community members in working together to improve the school and to demand all the resources we needed to do that.

Through our work, a lot of people were *finally* looking at our school as more than just a place where criminals are reared, which is the impression you'd get if all you knew were news reports. They always ran to the school to report a fight, but no one said anything when my classmates placed first in a competition against professional journalists for a series they wrote on public education at the 50th Anniversary of *Brown vs. Board Education*.

In the midst of all this, I was extremely bummed out. I was bored of walking the same old halls and knowing everybody that walked by. I was ready for a change.

I got more than I bargained for when Katrina hit.

So far I've had to start my senior year three times at three different schools in three different cities. All of these changes happened within one month. From Douglass in New Orleans to Telequa outside of Muscogee, and from Telequa to Union in Tulsa. Now after everything is said and done, I miss the high school that was supposed to be my alma mater. I'm afraid to get my class ring, because we might just move again, and I'd be stuck.

Looking back on the last few days of August, I still can't believe we spent six days in the Superdome, the stadium that housed thousands of hurricane victims, without knowing if my dad was dead or alive. We had to sneak out of the Superdome and swim past corpses and bayou animals to find him. I sliced my leg in the process of avoiding a dead woman floating.

We found my dad, and my uncle, who was with him in the old neighborhood. They had survived by swimming from roof to roof. It was a relief to find all of them okay, but there's nothing worse than walking into your 'hood and not recognizing it: Water waist deep, the stores all looted, or in the process of being looted. I couldn't help but let tears fall. It just cut deep to know that my home was the new Atlantis.

They say home is where the heart is. So I guess my heart is 20,000 leagues under the sea. That would be a good explanation for the emptiness that comes through my chest and expands to my body and words. It's hard to keep going and pushing when you don't even know if what you're looking for is still there.

Everything feels uncertain, including my education. Nobody knows the procedures and regulations of what to do with my grades and my units. They're not sure which credits will transfer and whether I can graduate on time, even though in New Orleans, I only needed three courses.

This uncertainty that's strangling me is also undermining Douglass, the school my friends and I were fighting to make better. When we gathered for a weekend reunion on October 8th and 9th, we learned that all the New Orleans Public Schools would become charter schools this year. We had been fighting to improve from within neighborhood schools that don't have selective admissions. Now, with all schools being charters, no one will have the choice of truly public, neighborhood-based education.

Worse than that, the only public high schools open on the east bank of the city, where the hurricane hit the hardest and where probably over 80% of the population, my family and all of my friends lived, have selective admission criteria. How can these decision makers open two high schools on the east bank, but none for common folk like me, who either can't get into or don't want to get into selective admission high schools?

I've lost my home, my friends, and my school. I'm always on the verge of tears. The public officials who are supposed to be looking out for my education have failed me even worse than the ones who abandoned me in the Superdome. My family and friends have food and water and the kindness of strangers. But we still don't have control of our lives, and we're still being abandoned by local, state, and federal officials.

It's the middle of October, and I'm in the same situation I was before Katrina: but now I'm fighting to reopen Douglass and other neighborhood high schools in New Orleans, and to provide quality education for people like me.

Veteran Teacher in and Graduate and Parent/Grandparent of New Orleans Public Schools Responds to *Gambit Weekly* Interview Request, Fall 2005

Jim Randels

1. What should be New Orleans' top three priorities at the outset of the rebuilding process?

   New Orleans' top three priorities should be to a) reopen the public schools as soon as possible, b) develop the neighborhood public schools as key part of community hubs through which all sectors of society work, providing low-income housing and health clinics, and c) make the history and rebuilding of New Orleans the lens through which all students develop academic skills and take ownership of their city.

2. What elements of the "old" New Orleans must be preserved or brought back?

   New Orleans most important asset is its "blackness." That's the root of our creativity and culture, our gift to the world through jazz, gumbo, Mardi Gras Indians, and social aid and pleasure clubs. That's been the backbone of our sense of justice and our greatest unity, as expressed in the 1866 Constitutional Convention for black suffrage, the Citizens' Committee's challenge to the Separate Car Act in 1892, the formation of American Federation of Teachers Local 527 in 1937 to fight for quality public education and equal pay for black teachers, and the development of world-renowned arts education programs.

3. What mistakes must we avoid in rebuilding New Orleans?

   We must own up to the vast inequalities and disunities, rooted in racism and economic class divisions, that we have allowed to grow in New Orleans. The most obvious manifestation of this, in addition to the shameful images broadcast to the world in the days following Katrina, is our education systems. We have separate schools—even within our public school system—for the "haves" and the "have nots," for the students who have demonstrated prior success in school and those who have not. We must eliminate disunity and separatism in education; the neighborhood public school, without selective admission requirements, is the one public institution where all citizens and families should come together.

I Don't Know Why You Care So Much

Jade Fleury

"Jade, I don't know why you care so much anyway."

"Umm could it be you're my boyfriend and I care and I know you're too smart to be going to a stupid school like John Mac?"

"Man look, all I'm trying to do is graduate. And you know we're not going to be doing any work, so I might as well go to the Mac and make it easier on myself."

"Whatever Keith, that's all on you."

Getting into minor arguments about where my ex-boyfriend, Keith, should go to school after Hurricane Katrina was not uncommon. He had his idea of what he thought would be best for him, and I had mine. These ideas were never the same. He'd often tell me why he should go to John Mac versus going to McMain. "Man look, if I go to McMain, I'm bound to get put out anyway. I don't fool with nobody who goes there, and I'm not trying to do no work. So it'd just make more sense for me to go to the Mac."

After hearing those similar words after every argument, I began to keep my mouth shut, but not my ears. I would always hear him say how much fun he'd have at school, how all of his friends were going and that he couldn't wait for school to start. But never did it seem to cross his mind that he'd get a better education if he went to McMain. Or maybe it did, but he was more concerned about having fun. Or could it have been that he never had intentions of going to college, so going to a school like McMain that would look good on applications to college didn't matter. I often wondered why his mother didn't push him to go to a better school. She, just like me, knew her son was capable of the work. But never did she step in to say, "Keith should go to a better school than John McDonogh."

Besides, many people of my generation could care less what high school they attend. What are they to do? They don't have adamant parents pushing them to do better, and most of their peers feel the same as they do. Should we continue to go on and forget about other young people like Keith?

Being around my ex-boyfriend and other close friends, who also like Keith chose to go to the lower performing schools that are not based on "choice" and are now run by the state after Katrina, has made me realize that as long as the school system provides them with two very different atmospheres, there will always be segregation within New Orleans school system. Continuing to keep us apart is slowly destroying the gender relationships between us. For example, in my Students at the Center writing class at McMain we learned that out of the 7 females in the class, only 1 of them would consider dating a male from McMain. It's obvious something is missing. Why is it we'd rather date a guy from John Mac or Sarah T. Reed? The separation is making many females like myself stray away from the males that we attend school with, slowly tearing apart our social networks and future families.

Who's to say I can't benefit from Keith? Perhaps he knows something I don't, or vice versa. We should be able to collectively put our ideas together and help one another. Bringing us together will then show the system that it is very possible for both Keith and I to attend school together and learn. Who knows? Maybe the adamancy I posses about school will rub off on people like Keith and motivate them to do better. If this is so, why are we developing more and more separate schools and school systems and not more neighborhood schools that the whole diversity of young people in a neighborhood attend.

When will Keith and I learn together in the same school? What system of schools will make that choice possible?

Plans and Principles for Rebuilding Community Schools in New Orleans:

Douglass Community Coalition Model, Spring 2006

During the Spring of 2006, Students at the Center (SAC) and the Douglass Community Coalition (DCC) are concentrating their educational efforts in providing resources and support to the public secondary schools that are run by the New Orleans Public Schools and that offer open admissions to all New Orleans youth, regardless of their prior academic performance. These educational efforts are in the context of broader community-based work of the DCC, with special emphasis on linking school and community development.

Our temporary move to a new, more populated part of the city has offered new learning opportunities for all of us. DCC's main education work is at McMain Unified Secondary School, the first of two public, open admissions, secondary schools opened by the New Orleans Public Schools. Through funding from the Open Society Institute and the Vanguard Foundation, Students at the Center (SAC), a school-based writing program that is a member of DCC, offers three classes at McMain: English IV, Writing Lab, and Free Enterprise. In addition, SAC staff offers three independent study courses—one in Louisiana and American History, another in Introductory Physical Science, and a final in writing—to middle school students at McMain whose families are interested in developing community-school initiatives in the downtown areas of New Orleans.

This essay reflects upon lessons we have learned and strategies we have developed in the months since Katrina hit New Orleans and in continuity with work we were already doing at Frederick Douglass Senior High School and the neighborhood in which it is located.

Becoming Family at Post-Katrina New Orleans Public Schools

In February, 2006, about four weeks after the opening of McMain Unified Secondary School in New Orleans, seniors in an English class experienced a tense moment.

Male students from Fortier High School, a pre-Katrina neighborhood public school with no selective admissions criteria, complained that females from McMain looked upon them as too inferior and "thuggish." The Fortier students asserted that they were as smart and capable and worthy of social attention as any males from academically "high-performing" public schools, such as McMain.

The female students from McMain registered their own complaints, claiming that the neighborhood school male students unjustly perceived McMain students as stuck up.

These perceptions come from a long history, repeated in too many neighborhoods in New Orleans. McMain and Fortier, two uptown New Orleans Public Schools, have experienced a long, complex relationship. In the 1930's, McMain opened as a high school for girls, just six blocks from Fortier, the all-male public school for this neighborhood. When schools became co-ed, McMain became the junior high for all students in the neighborhood and Fortier served senior high school students.

In the 1960's, Fortier was considered one of the premiere high schools in the city. Its proximity to Tulane and Loyola Universities and the presence of children of these faculty members in the public school enhanced Fortier's reputation and performance. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Fortier population began to change. First white families and in the second half of the 1970's middle class families of all races began to leave the school. Teachers, families, and school district administrators seeking a racially integrated, high performing school expanded McMain to a high school with selective admissions. By 1980, McMain had emerged as the most racially integrated campus in the city.

During this same time period, Fortier's academic status began to decline. In an era of constantly changing school district leadership throughout the last part of the 1990's up until 2005, no sustained, systemic use of differentiated resources, curriculum, or instructional strategies emerged to address inequities in student outcomes or access to the highest quality education.

In November, 2005, the Louisiana state legislature voted to have the state take over all public schools in Orleans Parish that performed at or below the state school performance level. As a result, schools such as McMain that had selective admissions remained under the local school district control. 103 of the New Orleans Public Schools' 122 schools went under the control of the state recovery district.

It is in this historical context that students from Fortier and McMain found themselves together in classroom spaces where they had to confront their social and academic realities and differences. Their response to this initially uncomfortable situation represents the most important resource and hope for building a high quality public school system that will be the envy of the nation.

First, the students acknowledged their assumptions, anger, and discomfort. Second, they took the time to listen to each other and to understand perspectives and experiences different than their own. Finally, they decided to act and think together, as family members:

- They would respect and support each other's pre-Katrina home schools. This meant, for instance, new students respecting old traditions and the welcome to all students at McMain. It also meant becoming aware of the loss of the Fortier building to a highly selective and highly resourced charter school that would not welcome students who previously attended Fortier.
- They would not only speak up about difficulties they were facing but also find ways to build their own capacity to support each other. For instance, students helped each other not give up on the daunting task of retrieving transcripts from schools they previously attended and completing college applications even when those records and other family documents were not available.

- They would take responsibility to mentor in social and academic areas the younger students at their school. They took this task so seriously that, in the initial meeting of this mentoring group, comprised of students from multiple "pre-Katrina" schools, they agreed that building their school community and assisting younger students was so important that other concerns such as how to plan a prom or establish graduation dates would not even become part of the agenda of this organization.

The willingness of these students to take on their civic responsibility by direct engagement within the public school rather than abandoning their peers in order to take care of themselves made SAC and DCC feel at home. This approach mirrored the courageous work that students and families at Douglass were embarking upon before Katrina hit New Orleans. We continue to believe that students who attend the public schools are the greatest resource for transforming those schools in equitable and sustainable ways.

Background and Context of the Douglass Community Coalition

The challenges facing public education in New Orleans since Katrina are more daunting than they were before the Hurricane. Major change and uncertainty under severe time constraints and with a displaced population comprise the new landscape of public education in New Orleans. Since the storm, the whirlwind of decisions and pronouncements are dizzying. In September, the state superintendent of education announced that all public schools in New Orleans should become charters. In October, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) supported this position, decreeing that charter schools will be the only form of public education available to residents of New Orleans. At that time, the only high schools scheduled to open on the east bank of New Orleans were two highly selective admissions high schools (one formed since the hurricane). In November, the state legislature voted to take over all New Orleans Public Schools that performed at or below the state average in 2004-05. And also in November, the New Orleans Public Schools finally announced that it would open two open admissions schools on the east bank (Ben Franklin Elementary on November 28 and McMain Secondary School on January 9).

In response to these circumstances, a group of teachers, parents, students, and community organizations that had been working in the neighborhoods that Douglass High School and Drew Elementary served have been meeting since October, 2005. Most of us have hoped to continue working in the context of neighborhood public schools. We believe that democracy in America demands this option of public education. Our initial work was to plan for ways we could continue a) supporting our students who have been displaced by Katrina and b) working in our neighborhood public schools once they reopened.

Through our planning sessions, we have developed our primary goal: to assist in making public education rooted in neighborhoods available to students on the east bank in schools that 1) have no selective admission requirements, 2) honor the collective bargaining agreement of AFT Local 527, and 3) are part of a public school system that plans and fights for equitable and high quality education for all students. The following principles and practices reflect the vision and work we are pursuing.

Principles DCC Will Follow to Develop Neighborhood School Planning and Community Centers with Educational Components Linked to Public Schools

1. Build on working partnerships and coalitions that existed prior to Katrina.
2. Work toward neighborhood-based schools, drawing their student population from attendance boundaries and with no selective admission criteria.
3. Build public school systems and attempt to be part of such systems. So any charter would need that as its ultimate goal. The chartering would be provisional and under dire circumstances: a) as a result of the inability of the current school system to open immediately and/or b) to develop innovative approaches to education that will help improve the whole public school system.
4. Ensure that teachers and other staff can participate in a collective bargaining agreement, preferably with United Teachers of New Orleans—UTNO (American Federation of Teachers Local 527).*
5. Welcome to our work "sister" schools, programs, and organizations that share our principles.

Curriculum, Instruction, and School Design Principles

The following principles suggest the school model DCC prefers, again in keeping with approaches to education that people working in the two primary organizations from which we will build our school were already working:

- Students should start with what they know to learn what they don't know. And students should start with where they're at to get to where they want to go.
- Students (and their families) are resources to improve their education, not problems to be solved.
- The community is the classroom, and education is for liberation. Students should be meeting educational standards through studying the history of New Orleans and participating in its planning and rebuilding.
- Students should produce knowledge and share their original work through public outreach and education, artistic expression, and direct participation in improving their education and their communities.
- Education is for community development as much as it is for individual achievement. And the pedagogy that flows from this is group rather than individual based.

Educational Principles in Practice: Sample Pathways

To accomplish the principles listed above, the Douglass/Drew Public School will continue and expand upon the following programs that were already in place or in development at Douglass and Drew.

1. **Use Students at the Center (SAC) elective writing courses as training grounds for high school students to a) work as mentors in writing to their peers and to younger students in the neighborhood and b) contribute to projects intended to improve their schools and communities.** This approach is described in various places, including the UrbanHeart 21st Century Community Learning Center and Smaller Learning Communities at McDonogh 35 and Douglass proposals, both of which were funded by U. S. Department of Education.

2. **Implement Algebra Project, Inc. curriculum, pedagogy, and program designs for mathematics instruction.** The AP, Inc. approach is not only compatible to the principles laid out above, but it also has received significant support/recognition in national circles, including the National Science Foundation.

3. **Develop interdisciplinary curricula and learning projects that a) follow the state standards and benchmarks and b) develop lessons and units through the perspective of the history and rebuilding of New Orleans.** Two projects at Douglass that existed prior to Katrina will continue and also serve as models for this type of work:

    a. *New Orleans/Plessy Civil Rights Park* is an educational park located near Douglass at the site where Homer Plessy was arrested in 1892 as part of the Citizens' Committee's challenge to the state's Separate Car Act. Crescent City Peace Alliance has been planning and producing the park, with visual artist John Scott as the lead designer/artist and Douglass SAC students as the lead writers and researchers. Douglass (and McDonogh 35) SAC students have produced a book on the history of struggles for civil and human rights in New Orleans. As part of social studies curriculum at Douglass and its neighborhood feeder schools, this park and book will serve as key instructional materials. In addition, students will be able to contribute to the ongoing development of the park and related instructional materials, allowing us to fulfill the principles of students learning by doing/participating and of students as resources to improve their communities.

    b. *Creole Cottage Program* has existed in other New Orleans Public Schools and was in the planning stages at Douglass. Through this program, students learn math, business, social studies and other subjects as they work to rebuild homes in New Orleans. This learning by doing program is especially important given the current situation in New Orleans.

Our teachers will follow similar principles in designing their courses and helping students meet learning objectives outlined by the state. For instance, chemistry and biology students will study air and soil quality in post-Katrina New Orleans and environmental science students will study wetlands, flood plains, and levee systems. Social studies, language arts, and arts classes will examine the history and role of social aid and pleasure clubs in New Orleans, learning from members of such organizations and hypothesizing about and assisting in the continued work of these organizations in post-Katrina New Orleans.

4. **Integrate arts and culture into the curriculum and pedagogy of the school. We understand that especially in an open admissions school, our students will have a great range of learning styles.** We also know that arts and culture are major contributions that New Orleans has made to the world. Our curriculum and pedagogy will emphasize arts and culture, building on the prior work of SAC, Douglass Academy of Creative Arts, and Douglass Crossroads Project.

5. **Build Community School principles and practices into all aspects of the school.** We hope to locate government offices, housing resources, social service agencies, health services, small businesses, public health agencies, higher education, and community organizations in the school building and to develop reciprocal relationships between these community resources and the students, staff, and curriculum of the school. In Fall, 2005, meetings to develop school improvement and reform strategies, the following priorities emerged.

   a. *Establish school as site for research and treatment of respiratory difficulties that may emerge in post-Katrina New Orleans.* Science and other courses will use the science, research, biology, and treatment of airborne toxins, potable water, and other health issues as material through which to learn science.

   b. *Establish local government office (or resource office to support residents in interactions with local, state, and federal officials) in school* to provide range of services and educational opportunities, ranging from permits for construction and small businesses to democratic participation in policy making. Social studies and other curriculum areas will use these government offices as tools in teaching civics, government, American History, and other academic skills and material.

   c. *Develop support systems for local economy,* including continuation of work to develop downtown markets using local growers and development of food service for students and staff using neighborhood caterers.

   d. *Open offices for neighborhood organizations in the school building,* including in addition to organizations working on this project (Crescent City Peace Alliance, ACORN, St. Claude Merchants Association, Renaissance Project, New Orleans Algebra Project, and Students at the Center) other groups finding their way back to New Orleans.

   e. *Envision and develop students as resources to improve their neighborhoods and the quality of education of their peers and younger students.* One example of this work is Reciprocal Teaching (RT), a scientifically researched model that Douglass students and graduates have used previously. RT fits the philosophy our community/school development team has adopted in terms of perceiving reading comprehension as a fundamental skill, valuing socially constructed approaches to learning, and positioning learners to control the process of their learning. RT practice of using reading as a consequential task rather than an isolated activity as well as our experiences with it at Douglass form the basis for our decision to link the RT reading students do to preparation for arts performances, productions, and exhibitions.

(* AFT Local 527 is an important bastion of democracy in New Orleans historically and currently. We believe that all workers should have significant say in the quality of teaching and learning conditions at their schools and in their compensation for such work. In 1937, when AFT Local 527 formed, it was fighting for equal pay for black teachers. In 1972, when UTNO formed, AFT Local 527 represented perhaps the only organization in the south that became integrated by accepting white teachers into what had been an all-black organization. And when Katrina hit, the members of UTNO were the single largest group of black college-educated homeowners in New Orleans; rebuilding the city without this group would be unjust. The homes owned by UTNO members were in the Gentilly, East New Orleans, and Lower 9th ward neighborhoods, among the hardest hit by flooding. Douglass Students at the Center students working on the New Orleans Civil Rights Park have recognized importance of this history. See essays by Maria Hernandez on AFT Local 527 history at www.strom.clemson.edu/teams/literacy/sac.)

Does Anybody Know?

Katrena Jackson-Ndang

On Saturday, July 15, 2006, at about 1:00 P.M., dark clouds gathered and lightning and thunderbolts filled the New Orleans sky. One hour later the sky opened and dropped buckets of rain on the city. But neither dark clouds, thunderbolts, or rain could not keep eager students, faculty, staff and parents from gathering at Southern Oaks Plantation, to celebrate the end of the school year for Lawless High School.

Alfred Lawless High School, the only public high school in the Lower Ninth Ward (below the Industrial Canal), was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. For the first time in the school's 42-year history there was no ring ceremony, no prom, no homecoming, no winter formal, no sweetheart ball and no graduation. So the July 15 celebration represented many different milestones. For some people this was a Lawless Family Reunion. It was a graduation for the class of 2006. For the class of 2007, this was a Junior Prom. The classes of 1986 and 1996 took this as their class reunion, and for 20 of the 68 faculty and staff members, this was a retirement party. For those going back to distant places like California, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas, it was a *bon voyage* party. But sadly for many others gathered there, it was a memorial for the four Lawless loved ones who died during the storm.

This celebration was for the Lawless Family, but the sentiments of the whole city were felt in that room. For you see, there are so many parallels between what happened in the city in general and what happened to Lawless and New Orleans Public Schools in particular. Lawless lost four family members due to the storm, while the city lost more than 1,500 family members. The school district, which had more than 100 schools before the storm, lost all of its schools except for four as a result of a state take over of public schools in Orleans Parish. Charter schools became the buzzword for what was needed to reform the school system in New Orleans. Even schools that were already exemplary became charter schools.

Pushed by the state, the school district terminated more than 4,000 educators. Twenty Lawless faculty and staff members were among the 2,000 educators forced to retire. I am among the 20 retirees from Lawless, and I can say, like many others, I was not ready to retire, but was forced to in order to maintain some semblance of benefits and peace of mind. I am highly qualified according to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), because I continually upgraded myself in my content area. In fact, I was lead teacher on a U. S. Department of Education grant to the New Orleans Public Schools to improve the teaching of American History. This massive termination of educators caused the current shortage of qualified teachers. Furthermore, New Orleans lost at least 8,000 people who were part of its middle-class tax base. In other words, at least 4,000 highly qualified educators will educate children in other states and districts, because they have been denied jobs in the new charter schools and the State Recovery School District (RSD).

Many highly qualified educators are not working in the new charter schools and the Recovery School District, because these districts are using unfair tactics to undermine the professionalism and the respect of veteran teachers. The test that these districts administer is an insult to the profession of teaching. Orleans Parish is the only district in which such tests take place. In any other school district, the state deems its certification system, which includes the national praxis exam, a good measure for hiring teachers. I worry that these new schools only want to hire teachers who have never taught before. They want to hire inexperienced teachers so that they can pay them little or no money and also so that they can treat them like sharecroppers or better still like slaves with no rights and no input or say about what happens in the schools.

For three hours on July 15 the Alfred Lawless High School family forgot about the troubles of Hurricane-ravaged New Orleans and concentrated on the school's happier days and memories. In fact, someone had a flashback and began to shout the Pythian (the school mascot) victory yell: "L- A- W- L- E- S- S, BUCK 'EM' UP, BUCK 'EM' UP, PYTHIANS, BUCK 'EM' UP!" The victory yell symbolized an end to the festivities for this year, but not to the spirit of the school and the family. The festivities are over for this year, but the questions remain. What's next for Lawless and all the other public schools in the district? Does anybody know? What's next for the highly qualified, unemployed, displaced educators? Does anybody know? Does anybody care?

Honoring Community

Ashley Jones

In the summer of 2005 I had the rare privilege to see an ancient community working together to make themselves stronger. In this community -- where people sit in a circle on the floor -- there were expert hunters, farmers, and medicine men. Each person had a skill to share, and in the event that the medicine man was absent, people did not die, because everyone was taught the healing properties of certain herbs and plants.

This ancient community was part of a play by students from Fredrick Douglass and Chalmette High Schools, both schools in neighborhoods severely devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Chalmette, a predominantly white high school, is in St. Bernard Parish, just across the parish line from Douglass, the all-black New Orleans public school where I was working. As part of the State of the Nation program, a project of the Douglass Community Coalition led by coalition member Artspot Productions, these students dealt with the problem of inequities of public education, specifically starting with the New Orleans public school system.

In the six weeks that we convened to create this play, a group of black and white students -- who wouldn't otherwise be affiliated with each other -- became a community. I've seen them with my own eyes, learning from each other's strengths and each one growing stronger themselves. As much as it made me happy to see this utopia of learning and understanding and community development, it was also heart crushing. Because in the real world -- a world where the individual is more important than the group -- this type of community learning would not be awaiting them at their respective schools, unless they were able to be a part of a program such as Students at the Center, a school-based writing program that links community to school and develops youth voices and leadership.

I know of no other program that encourages students to learn through their own experiences, which means that everyone can be a teacher in his or her own way. How well you do in the class is not dependent on your grades or whether or not you can pass a test, but on how well you can connect your experiences to the current events, policies and decisions that affect your life. Students at the Center equips each student with the ability to be leaders in their own schools and communities.

In the wake of hurricane Katrina, the students from Chalmette and Douglass high schools have both suffered devastating losses to their communities. The good thing is that all of us who care about New Orleans and the surrounding parishes have the opportunity to learn from the SAC community. We can make our school system reflect true equality and community cooperation that could generate significant economic and technological growth as well as great self–reliance and sufficiency.

One of the first and most critical steps to having a public school system that works for each student is to break down the barriers that divide communities. These barriers include selective admissions schools that have the ability to design their student body based on admissions test scores or simply self-selection by students, their families, and their teachers.

Separating students who can achieve on certain levels from those who may not be able to achieve on those levels hurts and weakens *all* students. Instead of creating a system that allows students from the same neighborhood with varying degrees of knowledge to learn and help each other be better students, these selective admission schools rip vital human resources from their own communities while discriminating against others. But these "others" are also vital human resources.

I know this because I attended McDonogh #35, a selective admissions school. Yet my relatives and friends in my own community attended Carver, Booker T. Washington High, and Douglass High Schools, all of which are considered low-performing schools. Although I didn't initially understand some of my family's resentment of the high school I chose to attend, somehow I did feel like I was a part of the abandonment of not just those in my family but in my community. I understood that my education was somewhat better than theirs, but why? Whenever I walked into my cousin Eddie's room when he was doing homework, he would stop immediately and throw his books aside. I knew he was having trouble because his mommy told me so. Even though we were cousins, for some strange reason the fact that he attended Carver and I McDonogh # 35 made it hard for him to come to me for help even when I was clearly offering my services.

Imagine if all of the medicine men, all of the hunters, musicians and farmers decided to create their own communities, excluding or rarely dealing with those with other skills? They would notice that their communities would become gravely destitute as musicians realize they know nothing about hunting, the hunters can't heal the sick, and the medicine men starve to death because they know not how to cook. The ancients understood one thing we fail to realize: you can't be a community by yourself. And even if you find a group of people who are just as smart as you, or can play an instrument just as fine as you can, there are skills that the group lacks and desperately needs.

If we are serious about creating a better New Orleans and we understand that a better school system is an important factor in that, then we know what we have to do. There is only one way to eliminate low-performing schools for good: Get rid of those schools that separate and destroy the potential of community.

The vision that we created through the State of the Nation play last summer was a vision of community. So when a student is trying to decide whether to attend Easton or Douglass, the determining factor should be as frivolous as liking the color of the uniform. It should not be a choice to abandon your whole community to better yourself.

Transitioning to Public Schools Post Katrina

Wesley Alexander

Who am I? Who will I become? These are the questions that linger in my thoughts each day. When I feel as if I'm one step closer to discovering who I am, I'm constantly forced back to the place where my life began: New Orleans, Louisiana.

I was born and raised in New Orleans in a house of five consisting of my mother, three sisters and myself. Being the only boy, I struggled to relate to anyone within my family because no one was like me – a male. As a child, my father was never around. My attention was focused more on cartoons than broader issues that surrounded me, such as my father's absence.

When I began school, I immediately became attached to the environment. I didn't have many friends, but school became my best friend. I loved the idea of young minds being instilled with knowledge. My favorite subject in school has always been English. Whenever my 1st grade teacher asked us students to read, I would always raise my hand high in the air waving anxiously as if I was stranded on a remote island trying to get the attention of the rescuer. Reading evoked my imagination, and in a way still does. My eyes transform words on a page into visual places, things, and people. Every word, every page, and every book is another journey that awaits my eager mind to embark. By the time I entered 2nd grade, I was reading on the 6th grade level.

When my teachers presented the famous question, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" my answer never remained the same. "A firefighter. A cartoonist. Wait, no, I want to be a wrestler!" Then finally, I decided I wanted to become the person who asked me such a general question. "I want to be a teacher when I grow up," I said, with an assuring smile on my face as I stared deeply into my 5th grade teacher's eyes. "Wesley, that's a wonderful idea!" Ms. Johnson said. However, when she asked me, "why did you decide to become a teacher?" I wasn't quite able to give her a reasonable explanation; I simply didn't know, at the time.

I couldn't wait to begin my 6th grade year at New Orleans Charter Middle School. My 5th grade teacher, Ms. Johnson, encouraged my mother that the school would be a great opportunity for me because "the education was taken seriously there." I didn't quite understand why Ms. Johnson didn't want me to continue my learning at my elementary school. Sadly, before I could truly appreciate my new education, hurricane Katrina struck the city in August of 2005. As my family and I sat together in the home of some relatives in Port Arthur, Texas, watching CNN, it felt as if I was witnessing one of my horror books becoming a reality. After seeing tragedies such as my home being destroyed, lifeless bodies, and stranded people, it was then that I became aware of broader issues that surrounded me.

Life in Texas wasn't a fairytale. Those reports on the news showed Texans referring to me and my people of New Orleans as "refugees" were very untrue. I didn't know what a refugee was at the time, but after being told, "You need to go back where you belong. Texas isn't your home!" I knew exactly what a refugee was: unwanted and left without the slightest sense of hospitality. Although I never did have many friends, after being shunned by several of my classmates in Texas, I wished I did have someone I could call a friend. Education in Texas was very different from education in New Orleans. When I entered my

classroom on the first day, I barely knew what my teacher's lesson was about in my mathematics class. When I told him what we were on back in New Orleans, he looked at me with a clear sign of sympathy, and it seemed as if he felt guilty for everything I was going through. He told me softly, "You're almost a month behind." Now that I am recapping my life shortly after Hurricane Katrina I realize that I was a month behind because I did not enroll back into school until mid September. I still performed well in school surprisingly in spite of the bitter remarks of my fellow classmates. However, school was the last thing on my mind – I wanted to return home, to the place where I truly did belong.

On my last day of school in Texas, my mother picked me up from school and said, "we're leaving."

"We're leaving? This soon?" I asked with utter curiosity.

She gave me a look I had never seen before. Her eyes were tense and focused on mine – I knew instantly she meant what she said. My mother grew tired of the living conditions we were enduring in Texas. She was degraded from a home owner to a resident of what was considered "the projects." When we moved in the Gulf Breeze apartments and stepped foot into our apartment, I was offended that such a place infested with roaches and graffiti of gang symbols on the door was given such a persuasive name. I never experienced this in the city Texans stereotyped as "the city of murders and thugs." That one experience is one of many that ignited a fire within my mother to return her family to New Orleans. Although we lost everything, she still managed to find hope to rebuild a new home with new memories to forever hold onto.

It took a while for my family and me to adapt to New Orleans. What once was familiar to us was now a distant thought forever in the back of our minds. Despite the challenges we faced, we knew we had to move on. The first step my mother took was to rebuild our home. The first step I took was to continue my education. New Orleans Charter Middle School was practically abandoned. My mother had spent over $300 dollars for me to attend the school I was highly recommended to and just in the blink of an eye, it no longer existed. Till this day I still am not aware of what my mother's money may have contributed to or who kept and used it. Obviously, $300 did not contribute to my education, because my schoolmates and I were only students of New Orleans Charter Middle School for less than two weeks. Ironically, I had no choice but to attend my elementary school, Lafayette Academy, which was now a chartered school and offered middle school because no other school in my parish was open.

My first day at Lafayette was a total shock to me – it was no longer my school; it was foreign to me. New paint. New Teachers. New Principal. Practically everything was new, except for some familiar faces of students I knew prior to Hurricane Katrina. The school was heavily promoted during orientation, which took place at some fancy hall. The people who ran our school showed us a video of how successful charter schools were run across the country. Perfect kids could be seen on a big projector with their perfect smiles as if they were receiving the perfect education. The teachers worked closely with the students, and they were almost in sync with each other. However, Lafayette Academy was nothing like that. One of the odd things I noticed most at school were the teachers. They were all young, very young. I wasn't accustomed to being taught by someone who was younger than my oldest sister.

I still remember my seventh grade teacher. She was supposedly just my math teacher (the only subject she originally taught), but then she discovered that

she had to teach social studies and science. I began to realize that something was wrong when she spent more of her time burying her face in lesson plans than acknowledging the curious faces of us students. I began to hate school. My classmates began to feel the same too. We grew tired of this school. Whatever happened to the promised education we saw on the screens at orientation? Where were those smiling children? We never saw those people who conducted orientation ever again as well. We decided to confront her as a class. Before we could even complain to her, she broke down in tears and exclaimed to us that she was just in her first year of teaching and was attending graduate school simultaneously. I thought to myself, what has happened to my city? Luckily, I only attended Lafayette Academy during my seventh grade year. The older teachers of Lafayette Academy encouraged many of us students to enroll in the two Orleans Parish Schools, Eleanor McMain Secondary and McDonogh 35 Senior High School. They were visibly upset with the way our education was handled in a charter school. Our last year as seventh graders happened to be their last year as teachers of Lafayette Academy as well.

Years later, after my eighth grade year in middle school at McMain, I entered high school with one goal – to graduate. For many African Americans in New Orleans, graduating is a big accomplishment, and graduating from college means greatness. With the poor conditions we face, in and outside school, these goals easily become difficult achievement. While progressing through the years in high school, I have come across great teachers, and I've also come across teachers who abandoned my classmates and I during the school year for what were unknown reasons at the time (most likely health or funding issues.) Although, I never came across the teacher I desire to be, my answer still remained the same.

Now, I'm currently a senior at Eleanor McMain, and I'm pleased to say that I'm proud of my origins. I know who I am. I'm a young African American male who was a victim of the aftermaths of Hurricane Katrina. Yet, I still managed to rebuild myself along with the city. Through my AP English class, I'm a part of Students at the Center (SAC), an organization which allows young minds such as my own to take part in projects and issues within our community that can improve education in public schools. When I ask myself who will I be? I still cannot give an accurate answer to that. As a result of Hurricane Katrina, I learned that my views of life can be changed in a matter of minutes.

I wrote the first version of this essay the summer before my last year in high school. A lot has changed since then, but I still remain a proud graduate of an Orleans Parish Public School. I am thankful that those teachers who saw something valuable in each and every one of us students of Lafayette Academy encouraged us to further our education as students of Orleans Parish Public Schools. Before I attended McMain I wanted to meet the teacher I desired to be. I wanted a teacher to push me. Someone to motivate me to pursue every dream I desired to make a reality.

Being a student at McMain is a gift I'll always remember. I do not know where would I be had I not been under the guidance of Jim Randels or Kalamu ya Salaam, the two educators and Students at the Center co-directors who operate the AP English classes of Eleanor McMain Secondary and McDonogh 35. In their classroom, better yet, in the circle, talks of the Saints, updates on the Mustang football team's constant success, "$2 Dress Down Days," were never more important than course and life issues we discussed. Along with our teachers, we students culminated the importance of learning we believed was lost.

Each time the bell rang to go to the next class, it was almost impossible for me to pull myself up out of my seat. My body was melted to my chair due to the heated discussions Kalamu would always erupt after each reading. Mr. Randels' insightful analysis of literature inspires me. I want to be able to reach his level of understanding one day.

I appreciate my teachers, because they were not afraid to teach us. Informing us of not only what was going on inside the classroom but the outside world. We brought people of world history to life: Amilcar Cabral, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and of course, my most favorite, James Baldwin. Jim and Kalamu are the first and only teachers to revive my desire to be educated after Hurricane Katrina. The presence of SAC can only be found in an Orleans Parish Public School. I hope more students will continue to be proud of that.

Visit to the Principal's Office

Callie Thuma

He's out of class again.
Non-compliant.
Stood in the doorway, refused to take a seat.
Says the other third grade kids were messing with him.

After the usual
"Keep-your-Focus-on-College"
lecture
Principal pauses.
Do you believe if you work hard, you can get whatever you want?

The boy shakes his head.

Another pause.

Thank you for your honesty,
Principal says, but I respectfully disagree.

Hard work gets us places.
If we all work hard and be nice enough
then the flood lines will fade, the levees will seal themselves up,
and your family can finally come home
from Houston
where they've been since
three days in hell on a rooftop.
When you were four years old.

Who Will be Left to Hug?

Sam Gordon

A version of this piece was originally published May 13th, 2012 at www.re-writingthenarrative.blogspot.com

One thing I love about young kids is that they haven't learned to be adults yet. They haven't learned when to run and when to walk, when to whisper and when to shout, when to play and when to settle down. My favorite thing that they haven't learned yet is not to hug everybody all the time.

Kayla hugs everybody all the time. Saying Kayla hugs is like saying lions purr. This little lady could suffocate you if she were any older than six, and for now she's just a highly effective tourniquet.

Her approach is devious. She'll walk up to you slowly with her arms at her sides or folded behind her back, smile open wide and eyes scrunched closed with the effort of using so many facial muscles at once. Then she'll pounce, lifting her arms and throwing them around whatever part of your body she can reach. If you're standing tall that's probably your hips, and if you're short or bent over she will go straight for your neck. Then she'll just hang, giggling hysterically until you tell her to please get off for the seventh or eighth time.

Once recess starts it's usually not more than a minute or two before she locks in on her favorite target: my right leg. Recently she's taken to swinging her arms around my thigh and crisscrossing her legs around my ankles, forming a pretzel out of her body. We make a game out of it. "Uh oh, is that a Kayla on my leg? Where did it come from? How am I going to get it off?!" I'll shake my leg, lift it, or jump up a couple times in a feigned effort to remove her. Finally I'll pretend to give up and start walking around with her still hanging on. She never gets tired of this. She never gets tired ever, really.

I met Kayla after I accepted an Americorps position to teach and work in the garden at her school. I was fresh off of an experience that had shown me how a garden could have a positive impact on peoples' lives, and I wanted to continue that work somehow.

In my final year of college, just before my move to New Orleans, I volunteered at a community garden in a low-security women's prison. For three hours every Sunday morning several other students and I would enter what often felt like a different world. In this prison the women didn't open a door unless it was unlocked for them. They woke up when told, ate when served, and stayed as long as their sentences dictated. At all times they were under someone else's control, on someone else's schedule, and were treated as if they were incapable of making decisions for themselves.

For three hours on Sunday mornings in the garden, these women were allowed to make some choices. They could decide whether to bury squash seeds in the ground or patch up irrigation, whether to prune grapevines or harvest tomatoes. One of the women I worked with had the idea to grow tomatoes upside down in five-gallon paint buckets, so we did that. At the end of every session we would harvest some fruits and vegetables to munch on, and everyone's work contributed to our snack.

It can be easy to forget your worth as a human when the place where you live is called a "corrections facility," and you are the thing that's supposedly being

corrected. The prison garden was a good reminder to the women involved of their own capacity for compassion, positivity, and personal growth. I think of one woman in particular, Karen, who was in for repeated drunk driving convictions. She and I began at the garden around the same time and I remember her having the vigor of a person who was ready to kick a bad habit but hadn't yet confronted how hard it would be.

Her real test came on Sunday February 21st, 2011, her parole date. Everyone in the garden waved goodbye to her as she passed by us on her way out. As her mother and daughter waited for her outside, Karen was informed by prison officials that her sentence had been miscalculated and she actually had an additional six months left to serve. Devastated didn't begin to describe how she or any of us felt as she unexpectedly returned to the garden that day.

Over the next six months she turned to the garden for companionship, healing, and peace. She was released in August of 2011 and has been sober ever since. Karen readily volunteers that the garden was where she found her resolve in those last six months, and her strength to stay sober ever since. She and the garden taught me that personal relationships and meaningful, tangible work have the power to transform lives.

I moved to New Orleans in August of 2011, just a few months after graduating from college. I had visited the city several times with my family since Katrina to volunteer with a rebuilding organization, and over the years the city really grew on me. I had never met people who had such depth of connection to a place, nor had I experienced it myself. I admired them for it. I felt that New Orleans was a place where I could be happy, and where I could find meaningful work.

I didn't expect to end up in a school, much less an elementary school, but it felt like a worthwhile next step. If a garden could have such profound effects on grown women who'd dealt with physical abuse, chronic neglect, drug and alcohol addiction, or some combination of those things, I wondered what it could do for young people. I wondered about those who struggled with math and writing but maybe could take care of a seedling. I wondered about those from communities with high rates of violence, poverty and incarceration. Maybe a garden could help them imagine a different future for themselves, a future with choices.

And so I met Kayla. She seems like a pretty happy kid. She's lucky to be part of a really exceptional classroom led by a really exceptional first-year teacher. The whole circumstance is really exceptional; classroom teachers tell me it usually takes at least a year just to feel comfortable, and at least a few more before you really start to approach your potential.

The growth of a teacher parallels the growth of a garden in many ways. The hardest part is breaking ground. Uncultivated earth starts out compacted, low in nutrients, and vulnerable to pests. A young garden needs time and nurturing to develop fertile soil. Over time roots sink to break up the ground, beneficial organisms move in, and a healthy and resilient ecosystem develops. A mature

garden, stewarded properly, can repel crop-hungry pests, cycle nutrients, and grow some pretty remarkable fruits and vegetables.

Like gardens young teachers struggle at first, but nurturing from mentors and school leaders can help them grow. As teachers mature they develop systems for discipline, time management, classroom structure, and how to build relationships with their students. A dedicated and experienced teacher can do wonders with students, and even though many people struggle with schoolwork, I'd bet most could think of a teacher who had a big impact on their life.

Most of the classroom teachers at our school have fewer than 5 years teaching experience, meaning they're just beginning to approach their potential as educators. Many are doing a really incredible job with their students despite limited experience. Several have already bloomed into great educators in this layperson's judgment, and others will undoubtedly do so in a few years' time.

Unfortunately, almost none of them will be around to benefit Kayla and her classmates.

Many of them have no intent of making a career out of teaching. Only a few hold teaching degrees and most entered classrooms with no more than a few weeks of training through alternative certification programs like Teach for America, TeachNOLA and The New Teacher Project. And my school isn't unique. Most public schools in New Orleans today have a faculty with a similar makeup. In a faculty like that, you'd be hard-pressed to find an experienced teacher to act as a mentor for younger teachers.

Out of the 15 classroom teachers in our elementary school, fewer than half will be returning to their classroom next year. A couple intend to stay with the school in different capacities, but most are leaving to teach elsewhere, go to grad school, or find another career. It's an extremely high rate of turnover but it's not unprecedented in New Orleans public charter schools, the type of school responsible for educating nearly 80% of the city's students.[1]

Many of the people who teach at my school end up working 70- or 80-hour weeks with regularity. Those kinds of hours are not unusual for teachers dedicated to their craft, but for people who don't plan to teach long-term it's enough to push them over the edge after a year or two. For many young educators in New Orleans, teaching is not a career *choice* so much as a career *move*.

The gardener in me cringes at the parallels between education reform in New Orleans and agriculture in the United States. If you've ever been on a large-scale farm in places like Iowa, Mississippi, or Georgia, you've seen what bad soil looks like: it's gray and slips readily between the cracks in your fingers. That's because there's nothing in it. No organic matter to hold it together, no microorganisms to repel pests, no nutrients to feed crops. On farms like these, soil is no more than a medium for holding crops in place. Most of the crops needs are met using outside inputs: fertilizers and pesticides derived from petroleum that are also toxic to most forms of life. Farms like these don't develop sustainable ecological systems, and will always rely heavily on outside inputs made from non-renewable resources. And maybe that's all right, but what happens when the inputs become unreliable or scarce?

1 Armao, Jo-Ann. "The Big Easy's School Revolution." *The Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2012. Web. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-big-easys-school-revolution/2012/04/27/gIQAS4bDmT_story.html>.

Since Katrina the school system in New Orleans has relied heavily on inexperienced non-local people to teach for a few years before they become exhausted or simply move on. Like those large-scale farms, this kind of system will always rely on outside inputs, never developing into a something that's self-sustaining and resilient. If schools here continue to rely heavily on people without roots in New Orleans, what happens when the next hurricane comes and uproots them? Or what if the opposite happens? Right now New Orleans is a trendy place for young college graduates to move, but what about when the post-Katrina luster wears off?

It's not as if there aren't experienced educators around who do have roots here. After Katrina the Louisiana state legislature passed Act 35, a law that essentially allowed the state-level Recovery School District to assume control of over 100 public schools from the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). The School Board chose to reorganize what was left of the district: a decision that would include firing every single district employee in New Orleans. On November 30th, 2005, about 7,000 people – teachers, administrators, and support staff – were unjustly terminated from their jobs.

At that time Kayla was still about a year away from being born, but already many of her potential teachers had just lost their livelihood, many while still displaced from Katrina. People who had been teaching in New Orleans for decades were forced from their jobs, health insurance and pensions, all without due process. This district re-structuring had the additional effect of nullifying the collective bargaining agreement between New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) and United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), the local teachers' union and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) affiliate.[2]

So why fire thousands of veteran teachers and replace them with younger, less experienced counterparts? It makes sense in the context of a school reform movement that draws heavily on the language and concepts of economics: market-based school competition, entrepreneurialism, and consumer choice. Since Katrina, struggling schools in New Orleans don't receive additional support to turn themselves around; instead they get closed down and replaced with new management, new teachers, and even new students.

It's not hard to figure out why an economic mindset favors new teachers. They're an awful lot cheaper, for one thing. High teacher turnover also makes it extremely difficult to gain and sustain union membership. Without a union to represent them, teachers have no ability to bargain collectively to demand fair salaries and benefits. Young teachers who leave after a few years don't need pensions, pay raises, or family health insurance plans.

Young teachers also make sense for charter school philosophies that emphasize data collection, frequent and ongoing professional development, school-wide culture and behavior systems, and following the latest trends in curriculum development. It's much easier to have a teacher buy in to an instructional system when they haven't had years to develop their own pedagogy. It's even easier when their only background in education is six weeks of intensive training that orients them to work in that particular system.

The school reform movement justifies these practices by citing gains in student achievement, but the numbers they cite aren't black-and-white. Many schools

2 Buras, Kristen L. "Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism: On the Spatial Politics of Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Educational Review* 81.2 (2011): 296-330. Print.

in New Orleans have seen their overall test scores rise, but those scores don't necessarily account for students who transfer, drop out, or gain exemption from testing. Even if test scores were improving unequivocally it wouldn't be clear if it were for pedagogical reasons or because schools in New Orleans have significantly more money and resources pouring into them now than in any time in their history.

Then there are factors related to school reform that go unmeasured entirely. How much time and how many resources go towards teachers who won't impact the long-term success of their school, or any school for that matter? How much pressure is put on administrators that have to train and acclimate a new and inexperienced group of teachers year after year? What does it mean that veteran teachers have no place in many schools? What are the long-term effects on New Orleans of a teaching workforce that's overwhelmingly young, highly educated, unmarried, and white, culturally if not racially? What are the effects of the unequal allocation of resources among all public schools, charter or otherwise, in the city?

The school reform has had serious racial and economic consequences, especially in New Orleans. Before Katrina public school employees formed a large portion of the black middle class in the city and teaching was one path to upward class mobility. Salaries and benefits that once supported local black families now belong to cohorts of teachers that cycle in and out of town every few years. For all its emphasis on measurement and accountability, the reform movement seems to have glossed over consequences that occur outside of the classroom.

Then there are the effects on students: what's the emotional toll on them to see new faces every year at school? What does it mean for them if none of the grownups they've ever known through school have believed in them for more than a couple years at a time?

I can only guess at what kind of effect this turnover-based system might have on them. I've tried considering what my schooling would have felt like if every year a quarter or half of the faculty left and was replaced. I think it wouldn't have been so bad since I got a new teacher every grade anyway. Would I really have noticed that much?

And then I consider that I had a mom and a dad at home every day for 18 years to make me dinner and ask how my day was; to take me to the movies or baseball practice on weekends; to hug me when I felt lonely or overwhelmed. Even without consistency at school, I'm certain my emotional and developmental needs would have been met at home. I was fortunate that my family was always financially stable, and that my parents had jobs that allowed them to be at home when I was.

I don't know the home situations of many of my students, but it's clear that more than a handful don't have their needs fully met at home. It's not to fault their parents – by virtue of being black and from New Orleans many of my students and their families live amidst generational poverty, political neglect, and violence, both structural and physical. Raising a child to be well adjusted and successful is extremely difficult no matter what, and even more challenging in such circumstances. For many children in New Orleans there's a need for schools that fill the gaps that history and society have created.

In a school like mine where teachers' roots run shallow and turnover is so rampant, I wonder what difference a garden can really make. It's not as if a

garden on its own magically transforms lives; it's about what develops around it and within it. The prison garden was so significant because it brought people from totally disparate lives together to do a productive activity. Karen didn't need a garden. She needed to develop coping mechanisms that didn't involve substances. She needed to know that people could love her even when she had trouble loving herself. The garden was the medium, not the message.

A garden can only do so much if the message of school reform sounds something like, "higher test scores above all else." Academic success is only one part of what children need. They need consistent and long-term caring from the adults in their lives. They need families and communities that are in a position to support emotional and physical well-being. If school reform were really about improving students' lives, wouldn't it matter what happens to the people that care for them? People like the 7,000 public school employees fired after Katrina, many of who were teachers, parents or both? Wouldn't it make sense to develop and retain diligent and dedicated teachers, and not just for a few years?

Schools need to double as communities in order to fully meet children's needs, and communities need time and continuity to develop. I tip my hat to my school and its leaders for understanding this, but what we accomplish as a school is limited by the culture of testing and high teacher turnover that school reform has wrought in New Orleans.

Schools before Katrina definitely struggled, teachers and alumni tell me, but at least they were neighborhood-based. Roots grew deep, so even though the school system was underfunded and understaffed at least the community aspect of it was sustainable. Teachers formed a crucial and ongoing part of the web of relationships that helped raise children, both inside and outside of school, sometimes even taking on the roles of parents.

By and large, that's no longer the case, and not just because of the influx of new teachers. Reformers insist that parents deserve a choice of where to send their kids to school, no matter where in the city a school is located. Some parents have chosen to bus their kids across town to a school of their choice. Far more parents have been forced to bus their kids across town because their child was denied enrollment at the school of their choice, for reasons that range from random chance to deliberate exclusion.

In the test-driven and economics-minded logic of education reform, there's no room for the idea of a neighborhood school. There's very little room for veteran educators, and the room is getting smaller as more and more public schools are replaced with reform-minded charters. As the room gets filled with wads of data and test results, children's emotional and developmental needs get crowded out. The arts and playtime get dumped out the window to make space for more math and ELA. The more that young, out-of-town teachers enter the hallways, the more that families and communities get crowded out. When the needs of business and industry push into the classroom, where will the needs of students go?

Where will Kayla's needs go?

I don't want her to go to a school where suddenly one year *everyone* decides to leave, and the next year she doesn't recognize any of the adults. I don't want her to miss her 10th high school reunion because the school she used to attend

was shut down by the Recovery School District. I don't want her to think that her value is in any way measured by how she performs on the battery of standardized tests that await her. I don't want her to think that she can't be a teacher because she's black and from New Orleans, or that certain people must not have anything to teach her because they're not young, white and from somewhere else.

I want her to grow up happy and supported at school. I want her to pursue her passions and talents even if they're not measureable outcomes of her education. I want her to have an exceptional teacher again next year, and for them to know her a while. I'm glad that our school can offer her a garden, but I also want us to be able to offer her consistency and continuity.

In just a few years Kayla will be tall enough to hug her teachers above the waist. She'll be strong enough to really do some damage but wise enough and kind enough to know when to ease up. Someday she will probably learn, as most children do, not to hug everybody all the time.

Let it not happen so soon, though. Let it not be because all her favorite targets have gone away and been replaced by new names and faces, new legs and waists. Let her always find solace in the contours of a familiar body of a teacher who loves her.

Let her stay a kid, for at least a little while longer.

Watershed Education

Billie Dolce

"Watershed!!" Webster defines watershed as a crucial turning point affecting action and opinion. Certainly Katrina qualifies as the watershed event in the history of public education in New Orleans as well as in my teaching career pre/post Katrina.

I had been teaching 31 years by the fall of 2005. During my tenure at Colton Middle School, I enjoyed having a productive professional relationship with the students, parents, principals, veteran and new teachers. While teaching at Colton I became Teacher of the Year, an award I didn't take lightly. I formed many functional and long-lasting relationships, which also aided me in becoming a lead teacher. This position allowed me the opportunity to participate on the committee that interviewed prospective teachers/staff for our school. It was most rewarding to not only influence students and their parents but also the new personnel coming into our school. Our staff, which was composed of over 60 % veterans, had over the years become a family. Subsequently, when the TFA (Teach for America) teachers began to come into our family, we took them under our wing. We not only assisted them with discipline, techniques/strategies of teaching and learning but also the culture of the school, students, and this city. This was done by inviting the TFAs, who were usually white and not from here, to our African-American events. Birthday parties, weddings, baby showers, Christmas parties and even our Carnival balls were some of the events. In return, the TFAs shared their experiences with us, thus enriching our shared educational and cultural environment. Our thoughts were that this would help them to understand and become comfortable with the culture of their students, coworkers, and the city. Those TFA teachers who stayed became a part of our Colton family in every way. Some of them were on their second and third year of teaching at Colton when Katrina came. Respect, understanding, collaboration, and friendships had been developed. Tragically, all of our hard-earned progress was gobbled up by the murky waters of Katrina. Unfortunately, after the storm many of our veteran teachers were being replaced by TFA personnel.

The climate of the reestablished schools, school systems, new schools as well as the relationship between veteran teachers and the TFAs had been damaged. It was a relationship of us versus them. Fire us and replace us with them. This was not good for a school that had a staff of 90% TFAs, 10% veterans, and a climate of fear based on a fire-at-will mentality. And now I understand that most of the new charter schools have this same ratio, making it virtually impossible for these new, young, white teachers to learn from lifelong black residents of New Orleans, like my TFA colleagues did at Colton before Katrina.

As a veteran teacher who had been forced into retirement I chose to continue to lend my expertise and services through volunteering. I volunteered at two schools, each one having two different kinds of schools sharing the same site and facilities. My experiences at these schools were an eye opener as I observed their educational and social climate. After teaching in a school for many years where we taught manners and respect, the norms in these schools run by educators new to our city was quite the opposite. There was a coldness and fear that permeated the halls of these schools. One school (Livingston Middle)

where I volunteered shared its school site with a new school (Miller & McCoy). I could not believe the charter school's students and teachers were instructed to not associate nor talk to the state-run school staff and students. This was told to the Livingston students and staff by their students who were neighborhood friends of some of Miller & McCoy's students. I could not believe what I was hearing, so I had to find out for myself if this was true. On my way out of the building that same day I encountered the principal of Miller & McCoy. With a smile on my face I spoke, "Good afternoon." To my dismay there was no reply, no eye contact, nothing. I interpreted his lack of response as him being unfamiliar with our cultural milieu. Still not satisfied, I had to see if the children would in fact not speak. The very next day I saw two neatly dressed boys coming my way. Once again, with a smile on my face, I said, "Hello gentlemen." One of the boys speaking just above a whisper while looking around said, "Hello! We are not supposed to talk to any of you." I just stood there shocked and confused as they quickly walked away. Had all of our social and cultural values been washed away by the storm or by the newcomers, I wondered.

How could an educator put these kinds of restrictions on these students' young impressionable minds, I pondered. Probably, some of the same children before the storm were being taught how to speak when spoken to and how to return a simple greeting. It seems as if all that existed in our schools' social climate before the storm was being erased, washed away, or being untaught by the new educators in charge, even a response to a simple hello.

Watershed, truly a crucial turning point.

Used to be a Teacher

Julie Wedding

She stands out among the employees
that linger in the long rows of the Lowes plant department.
She is always on the move,
plucking the random dead leaf,
adjusting rows of plants to allow more room for life,
checking for water,
giving nourishment to the weak,
constantly coaxing plants to grow and bloom
to make the world a better place.

She is good at this job because
she was once better at another.

Ms. Pat was a second grade teacher,
until she was fired after the storm.

He knows everyone's name who walks into the bar,
and if you're new, he'll know yours before the second round.
He keeps his bar immaculate,
fruit fresh and stocked,
bottles dusted,
coasters handy, in neat stacks,
the bar shined to a polish just waiting for wet rings from crystal cold glass.
His jokes are tempered, tainted by his past--
"Attendance is always good here!"

Sam used to be a teacher too.

She obsesses about law school,
always studying or on her way to,
but I see her so much more now.
We meet for a drink and dinner,
laugh at her free time.
"I have a job I can finish now!"
She sighs and says, "I don't know how you do it."
and
"Are you sure you have a job next year?"
She claims that last surplus was the best thing
that could have happened to her.

Debra was a teacher too.

He slings illegal DVDs,
in the Sav-a-Lot parking lot.
Uses his booming coach voice
to drive up business now,
instead of rushing young people around the track.
Drives a better truck now
and has more time to run with his old team,
in the old neighborhood, around the old school,
his body grown leaner,
his pockets fuller.

He used to be the Coach at Douglass,
but the job is as gone
as the school from the neighborhood,
as gone as neighborhood children from neighborhood schools,
as equality from education.

His mascot was massacred to silence.
Have you ever heard a Bobcat cry?

It is clear as black and white
The line of elders walking into the night of their career
Stark
Obvious
The line of young saviors stepping into the light
History repeats
Where white tells black
Hip to Lip
How to stand submissive in line

They are everywhere,
these educator evacuees.
Privatization refugees
rewriting their future,
forced to leave behind students,
and hallways,
and a life shaped by bells,
forced to leave their students' futures
in the hands of young well-intentioned fools
from out of town.

I watch our teachers forge ahead
on their new career paths,
achieving and resting,
trying to convince us all that
they are better off,
they are happy,
they are glad to be free from
the stress of the school system.

I'm tempted sometime to join them,
so exhausted
by the battle I find myself in:
I wanted to be a teacher,
not a soldier.
I wanted to attend Prom and Homecoming,
not community protests and funerals.
I wanted to open doors in young minds,
not watch schools shut their doors forever.
I just wanted to worry about bulletin boards and report cards,
instead of the impact of Shock Capitalism
and the frontline fight of the destruction of public education.
And though my chalk is stronger than most guns,
sometimes I'm tempted
because I am just so tired.

Yet I keep on keeping on,
though those, the ex-pat educators,
keep making claims that their new life is
better,
easier,
happier,
because I doubt it.

I doubt their claims of happiness
to have left it all behind,
because
when you meet them for the first time,
they always say,
in a mixture of pride and regret,
"I used to be a teacher."

My Transition with Education after Katrina

Ariel Estwick

The infamous Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on August 25th, 2005. Luckily, that Sunday, my family and I evacuated the city. For some, this was probably the worst event to ever touch their lives. For me, it was the best. As a result of our evacuation, I was exposed to so many things I had never seen before such as snow, marshmallow popcorn balls and hayrides. But the most memorable thing I was exposed to was the educational system of Omaha, Nebraska.

Throughout my life I have attended four different middle schools, three different high schools, and lived in five different cites with four different relatives, mostly without having prior notice. Until the age of 13, I had taken education as a joke, and it has been an ordeal of adversity to do otherwise. Going to class was not a priority, but hangin' in the hall with friends was. During that time, it was difficult for me to maintain a positive attitude and focus toward school. It seemed as though there was not a reward for hard work, and grades were just alphabets. The New Orleans Public School System was a mess, simply put. The buildings were decently kept by janitorial staff but were littered with graffiti and trash from apathetic students. Desks, tables, walls and whatever else one could think of were vandalized and almost never replaced or restored. Classes were on average a ratio of 1 teacher to 30 students and textbooks were in ample supply but very outdated. Most students would sit around in the drab cafeteria or hang in the insipid halls during classes. In those classes, teachers would not take the time to cater to a single student. If not able to keep up with the class's pace, they would leave a student behind but who could blame them? I know I would do the same if forced to work in such a rampant environment. Some teachers even gave up and either transferred out of the district or sat there at their desk giving simple book work, for those of us who wanted to, to try and teach ourselves. Once a teacher left there would be a substitute in place which, for students, meant a place to party. Lunch was horrible, though better than now. The food tasted like glue, the milk was soured more often than not, and there were no facilities in which to purchase anything else. These challenges are the key components for my current GPA of 2.05, which is a total misrepresentation of my true worth. In all, the New Orleans Public School System was already in dire need of a reform, which is the cause of my previous behavior.

All of that changed when I began to attend school at Lewis and Clark Junior High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Those environments taught me to be the person who I am today: a person with dreams, goals and ambitions. As a matter of fact, I remember my first day at Lewis and Clark. Approaching on the shipshape yellow school bus, I could see that the building was clean: free of graffiti and litter of all kinds. From corner to corner, the campus was delightfully landscaped with delicate flowers and trees succumbing to the bite of the fall frost. The inside of the school was beautiful as well. There were many exhibits of school spirit shown with eye-catching banners, gleaming trophy cases and vivid murals that seemed to almost come to life before you. Students were able to wear regular clothes, but most donned a school tee-shirt from one of the various activities held. Everyone moved swiftly to class as soon as the bell rang, which I had never seen before in New Orleans. Classes usually had a ratio of 2 teachers to 20

students. When in class people not only raised their hands to answer a question, which I was totally shocked at, but also to speak. The challenging curriculum flowed smoothly throughout the school year in all classes, even those with substitutes. The text books were within a two- to three-year range of publishing date, and there was a different variety of courses and teams to be in and on. Sexual Education, Team sports, Yoga, Aerobics, Chinese, Trap shooting and Mock Trial are only a few of those that I came across. The lunches were the absolute best! They were always fresh and piping hot, not to mention, healthy; but even better than the lunches were the teachers. They were great, to say the least. They all got really personal and helped each student as an individual not as just a body of students to bark at. A teacher who really helped me to grow as a person during my short stint there was my eighth grade chorus teacher, Mrs. Green. She understood that I had not received the education of my peers but that I was just as capable and destined to be great. Any student coming up through such a school system with teachers like Mrs. Green is guaranteed to be a pretty well-rounded person.

Recently, after almost two years in Nebraska, I came back home to New Orleans and the Recovery School District for my junior and senior year. That was when my mother explained to me that after graduation I would be faced with even more challenges. She also said that I would then be held responsible for my own actions and accountable for my own stability. Basically, I have my entire life ahead of me, and this time it's in my hands, so I better do the right thing. After this realization, I was consumed by the thoughts of achieving stability. This is when I went to work. It is now the fall semester of 2009, and I am on the Principals' Honor Roll with A GPA of 3.6. In addition to keeping up with all of my school work, I have sought out tutors to improve my ACT score of 24 and SAT score of 1560. Also, I have joined a few clubs, such as: the Newspaper, Debate team and cheerleading (all of which keep me very busy but are all useful in learning to balance things in life).

But as I was busy achieving I began to once again notice the everlasting, pitiful situation around me. In 2006, my freshman year of high school, NOPS had been reduced from 122 to just 5 locally run schools. The rest, including Sarah T. Reed, my current high school had been taken over by the state-run RSD or Charter schools. When I returned to this new public school situation in New Orleans two years later, I found myself to be very unmotivated and apathetic, just as before. Not only I, but no one I knew, cared about class because of the oppressive educational environment in which students are not motivated or encouraged but instead share the mentality that just getting by is good enough. Until this day, it is still the same, although I am back to my more hardworking self, after being back in Nebraska. Budgeting issues such as high administration and out-of-town consultant salaries are limiting school efficiency. Teachers, as well as materials, are in high demand and low supply. There are not enough text books, calculators, packets of chalk, etc. But there is an ample supply of unused computers in most classrooms. Those classrooms usually have about thirty students or more with only one teacher. There are only the basic P.E. Health classes, and extracurricular activities are limited to sports such as Basketball,

Football and other basic sports. The curriculum is so far behind compared to that of other schools across the nation that students in regular class settings are not getting what they need to prepare for college. My fellow classmates moan and groan in agony simply because they have to write on a topic with a minimum of two pages in length. The effect of such disruptions is that those who want a decent learning experience have to compete with classmates for the instructor's attention. There are no real disciplinary actions in place. This lack of authority has lead to bathrooms and other areas of the school being covered from eye to eye with graffiti. The facilities also lack necessary elements such as toilet paper and/or soap because of the students as well as janitors. Lunch is so watered down and stretched out it is sad. I once even bit into a hot dog and ended up with a mouth full of mold. And recently new coming students are being set to graduate in three years which will greatly downgrade the worth of a diploma from here and also release immature persons into a cruel world too early. (Can you say naive freshman and all night partying equals college drop outs?) Although New Orleans schools were never quite up to par, the bar is now lower.

In conclusion, while growing up in New Orleans, especially during my teenage years, I have faced a lot of educational ups and downs. It was not until I attended school in Nebraska that I fully comprehended the short-comings of my education in New Orleans. This leads me to believe that environment affects a young person's perspective in such dramatic ways that it can alter any chances of success in life. As for the school districts, the Recovery School District is even worse off than the New Orleans Public School District and should use Omaha Public Schools or maybe even a better district as a model for reform so that there may be a chance for other young minds to make a turnaround such as I did. My experiences in Nebraska taught me not to settle for the status quo or to be held back by any school district's poor educational standards. It is my goal to not let those past circumstances and low GPA deter me from achieving my ambitions; hopefully these ambitions will be attained at a university where I feel I can live, learn and flourish, regardless of any obstacles that might cross my path.

The Incident

Hannah Price

My students and I sat at the blue, moon-shaped table by the one window in the room. I sat in a tiny chair made for people their size, my knees bent up to my chest because of the lack of space between the seat and the floor, which caused me physical discomfort to match my mental state.

It begins a few weeks before "the incident," which is what I have come to call it. The truth is it began way before that, before either my student or I were born, with an institution of white-on-black hatred that has thrived in this country long before we came into the picture. But I thought I was past all this. Not in a post-racial-Obama-is-President kind of way, but in an enlightened-white-anti-racist kind of way. Having studied Critical Race theory, Sociology and Africana Studies in college, clearly I was equipped to enter a public school system and classroom of all students of color, wasn't I? That's what Teach for America told me anyway. That is the arrogance that they endowed me with and that I ran with. That I and hundreds of others pretty similar to me were just the people to touch a few lives and potentially be "transformational teachers," because we were told there were currently none of these in New Orleans. I would later find out this was not true through my involvement with the local union and many veteran teachers who had been fired to make room for me. But even their knowledge, understanding and mentorship would not be enough to save me from my white naïve self that I thought I had left in high school.

Despite what Teach for America says, teaching actually is very hard. That may sound trite but from what I understood through their training, teaching is a mathematical formula in which you plug a young bright-eyed idealistic white teacher and some poor students of color and, voila! You have solved the ills this country has been struggling with for centuries! But in actuality, this white college educated girl for whom everything has come easy, who is well versed in intellectualizing racism, was not culturally competent enough to deal with even the most basic aspects of what goes on in a classroom of 30 black early elementary students. So many barriers were in the way of me having relationships with my students, especially all the deficiencies I am told they have. "Deficits" is a word that I have heard many times in Teach for America and at my school to describe students. They are full of deficits both academic and behavioral. I am their great white hope to save them from themselves and their community. The word white is not used because the language of this institution is mostly colorblind. And if I do not take this viewpoint that I can and will save black students and make them walk in a straight silent line, then I have low expectations.

This is where the story actually begins. I am sitting at the table with a pull-out group of 7 or 8 students, and it is near the end of the extended school day when we are all completely exhausted. When I get exhausted, I just want to put my head down and hear silence. However when young kids get exhausted, they just get more wound up and want to move and yell and run. So that is pretty much the reality of many early childhood teachers at the end of extended school days in New Orleans –– thanks to the brilliant (insert sarcastic tone) idea the state run school board had to make us all stay for even longer to make up for so many students' "deficits."

We're all at this table, and I want to go home and go to sleep and not get up for weeks. The dehumanizing militaristic relationship I am set up to have with my students, initiated by racist institutions and the individual problematic policies of my school, has driven me here, not just to the point of wanting to quit but into depression and a self-deprecating view of myself that I didn't know was possible. I had always been sheltered from and never been brave enough to recognize racism in my own life and acknowledge the ways I participate in the oppressive system as a white person and the ways it alienates and dehumanizes me. Remember, I believed I was an enlightened white person. I only thought about racism in an impersonal academic way before teaching black students. But there I was at that blue small-person sized table ready to walk out and quit while my students used markers and left caps on the floor and pretty much did whatever they wanted because both they and I were through with schooling that day.

While thinking of what a bad person and teacher I was and ignoring the chaos of the room and willing time to pass faster so I could get to my depressed bed laying, I noticed him eying me goofily every few seconds. I quickly realized he was drawing a portrait of me. Despite what the narrative says about our relationship, he's the one that saved me. Supposedly I, the adult, save the child. I, the "good" white teacher know more and save the "bad" black student. The narrative that I've seen in so many white savior films says I show him the unconditional love that he *supposedly* doesn't get at home, and he goes on to live a wonderful life thanks only to me. But *he* is the one who saved *me*. Seeing me through his eyes in such a loving way brought me to tears. He showed me that despite my worst flaws, I was still worth something. If it weren't for him, I'd probably still be in my bed. I wish I still had that portrait.

Now "the incident." A few weeks after the life-saving drawing, at the end of an extended day near the end of the extended school year, I heard rumors that this portrait-drawing student had weed in his pocket. So taking cues from the many episodes of *Law and Order* that I have watched, I pulled him into the interrogation room—I mean the teacher's lounge. I sat him down and initiated a dehumanized structural relationship of good white cop and bad black criminal. I chose this relationship instead of the loving and personal relationship he initiated with me through his innocent drawing. I had a chance to be a teacher who puts students first and serves them instead of systems, but I chose not to. Part of it is the power trip that getting students to do what I say makes me feel. I didn't recognize it at the time, and it is particularly shameful to me because in New Orleans I have spent so much time complaining about the racism of the police department and the criminal justice system. However I played the role impeccably. Maybe I would make a great cop, if teaching doesn't work out."So do you know why you're here?" is the overused line I confidently open with. He shakes his head. I pull a few more one-liners from cop shows that are guaranteed to work every time, and sure enough he pulls out his "joint," and lighter. This action demonstrates the ripe potential relationship based on trust and best interests my student and I could have. He loved and trusted me and showed me through his actions on numerous occasions, including this one. His drawing. His revelation of an innocent mistake. The "joint" was rolled out of computer paper—probably that I had printed an assignment on. It was filled with some green substance that I assumed was weed, and it had been partially burned at the end. It was evident that either this student or one with a similar lack of dexterity attempted to roll it. At that moment I didn't see him, I just saw a black boy with drugs. I make eye contact with the other white teacher in the room and indicate my shock with my wide eyes. I mouth, "what should I do?" He tells me, "you've got to report it."

Instead of using what I know about the ways systems in this country criminalize young black males, instead of recognizing the reality of weed in both the black and white communities and with this knowledge assuming the best about my student and handling this in a loving way, I turned his ass in. I acted in a quick and naïve way. I followed the rules because they have always worked for me. Of course they have! They were created to maintain *my* best interest. That's what those of us who are white must learn, take to heart and put into practice: the rules and laws that we understand are not what we need to follow to act in the best interest of our students. Though in the end he was not expelled and this incident at such a young age did not go on his permanent record, it could have. My thoughtless action performed out of ignorance and negative assumptions had the potential to label him forever and put him on a track that could lead to far more serious consequences.

On that day, I chose to protect myself and to maintain the racist system instead of help my student and be the anti-racist teacher I claim to aspire to. And the turmoil I felt after turning him in to the administration made it evident that this is not the kind of teacher or person I want to be, that I have been learning how to be through my mentors at the teacher's union. I let them down, and I let him down. He had my back on one of the most depressing days of my life. He loved me unconditionally and assumed the best about me despite all the yelling and timeouts I had put him in. Then, he makes a mistake and I throw him under the bus. I didn't have his back, and for that I am ashamed.

He was unofficially suspended for the last few weeks of school, but I saw him on the last day. He ran up to me and gave me a long warm hug—the kind that only young children can give when they are at the perfect height with their arms tightly wrapped around my waist. He and I closed our eyes and stood there for what felt like five minutes. I fought back tears, and he told me that he had had a wonderful time in Texas while he was out of school with no semblance of hurt because of the way I mishandled "the incident." He held no grudge against me. Neither did his family. They were just thrilled he had passed and was moving on to the next grade. He still had that adorable toothless grin despite my mistake that could have taken it away forever. And it is for him that I write this in the hopes that others won't make the same stupid mistake as me.

Guns ‘n Schools

Jim Randels

One

“I’d carry a gun, if I was going to teach there.” That’s what one of my dad’s friends, a graduate of Cohen and lifelong resident of that neighborhood himself, said when he heard I’d be student teaching at his alma mater. He doesn’t know that I’ve never touched a gun.

“We’ve quit sending our student teachers to schools like Cohen.” That’s what my major professor said in the late spring of 1983 when I was preparing for the last stage of my teacher preparation, a semester of student teaching.

“My UNO education professors said they don’t send student teachers to neighborhood high schools any more. In fact, in class they’ve discouraged us from even teaching in the public schools.” That’s what one of my Douglass High faculty colleagues said a year and a half ago. She lives in the Cohen High School neighborhood.

* * * * * *

Two

My head was swimming in September, 1983, back when school started AFTER Labor Day. Five different waves of 30 or so students would crash toward me for about an hour each. There was an hour break in there somewhere.

“Try to get to know these young people. Respect them. Give them a chance to tell and write their stories.” I kept telling myself.

* * * * * *

Three

After a week or two, I began to see smaller groups within each wave. In one class there were maybe some athletes and some musicians. In another some clowns and some studious folks.

Toward the end of the first month, 4th period got a new student. He was taller, stronger, older. Had a sort of fixed scowl on his face.

He sat in the back, with a group of 3 or 4 guys who were basically non-descript. They didn’t identify with any group. They struggled to do their work.

When the older guy joined them, they started joking and talking more than working.

I had begun traveling from group to group as part of my teaching method. Trying to give them time to work in class and space to learn from each other. Trying to vary the pace and the activity of the class.

I knelt next to the new student’s desk. Asked him if he’d help out with these young guys in his group putting more energy to their writing and reading. “I respect that,” he replied, and the group buckled down the rest of the period.

The bell rang and there was the usual flurry of activity: last-minute questions, the new wave coming in and clamoring for me to read this or sign that.

"Mr. Randels, can I tell you something?" Derrick asked as he passed my desk on his way to the next class.

"Sure."

"You know that guy you talked to in our group?"

"Mike?"

"Yes."

"What about him?"

"I just thought you should know that he got kicked out of his old school for pulling a gun on a teacher."

* * * * * *

Four

I don't know where teachers would be without sabbaticals. I'd have never gone to Cohen and would have had no one to process all this teacher development at Cohen with if Louis Rodrigue, a veteran teacher at Cohen, hadn't taken a sabbatical and studied at UNO the year before. I was teaching in his classes at Cohen. The UNO professors would have been clueless, absent.

* * * * * *

Five

By October, I was seeing and knowing individual students better and better.

* * * * * *

Six

Zachary loved the white tiger at Audobon Zoo. He was writing poems about it, using the tiger as a metaphor for himself. I brought in some fables about tigers, and he struggled through reading them in his small group, never in front of the class.

Sometime in October Zachary became despondent, quit working. He wasn't disruptive like his cousin who was always coming in class late, screaming and grabbing his dick. It would have been easy to just let Zachary slide. But like I said, I had begun seeing and knowing students a little, so after class I asked him what was up.

"Nothing."

* * * * * *

Seven

About six days later, I asked Zachary for the third time what was going on. This was way pre-SAC days. It would have been impossible to build dialogue with him as part of class work. There were just too many students.

"Hey, Zachary."

He paused on his way past my desk.

"I can tell something's on your mind. It's cool if you don't want to talk about it. But if you do, feel free."

* * * * * *

Eight

Probably it was the next day. I finished collecting work and saying goodbye. The students had moved on to first lunch. In the back, though, Zachary was still in his seat.

"I'm ready to talk."

"Ok, let me just put these papers away."

I settled in the desk next to Zachary.

"See this?" he asked, pulling his shirt up to reveal a handgun tucked beneath his belt buckle.

"Yea."

"That's what's been on my mind."

"What do you mean?"

"I need to shoot somebody."

"Who do you need to shoot?

"Someone who stays across the courtyard."

"What happened?"

"He asked if he could borrow my bike. I let him, told him to be back in an hour. He didn't bring it back for three days. When he did, everybody laughed at me.

"That doesn't sound worth shooting him."

"You don't know what it's like where I live. Someone will always be coming after me if they think I'm weak."

We kept talking for a while and once or twice the next couple of days. I remember asking something about who'd win if he shot the guy and ended up in jail for life or something. Zachary talked about being torn about what to do.

* * * * * *

Nine

I didn't put anything about Zachary and the gun in my teaching journals. I didn't even talk to Mr. Rodrigue about it. I'm sure I knew that I was supposed to report it. I also knew that Zachary had trusted me. And I knew that UNO folks and the police would see a young black man with a gun, not a young black man with a mind and a story.

* * * * * *

Ten

A couple of days later, Zachary waited in his desk after class again.

"I got rid of the gun. I'm not going to use it."

* * * * * *

Eleven

When I was asked to tell a story about an experience with a gun as part of a group of teachers and students exploring ways to understand violence and promote peace, my encounter with Zachary was the first thing that came to mind.

As I think about that story and where I was and what I was doing then—and now, I think about UNO's education school in all of its current taking over of schools and since way back then choosing not to engage all students and schools in our city. I think they contribute much more to violence for much less reason than Zachary did, even if he had decided to use the gun.

* * * * * *

Twelve

There's a violence that doesn't have to be aggressive or even physical. It involves forcing your will and your way, not listening to folks other than you, assuming positions of power and not doing it responsibly.

In post-Katrina New Orleans, people ask me what's so bad about charter schools and universities running them. In these dialogues, I can't help recalling that in fall 2004, University of New Orleans was granted a charter by the state to run Capdau, a middle school labeled academically unacceptable. The number of special education students plummeted from about 20% to much less than 5%. Enrollment dropped in half. Less than 20 students who had been enrolled in the "failing" Capdau during 2003-04 school year were enrolled in the new, UNO-chartered Capdau.

There's a violence going on in New Orleans. It's clean and pretty and respectable. Not messy like murder. Not hard like handguns. But it hurts, bad.

Wonder Moments

Callie Thuma

For this baby asleep on mother's breast, laughter oblivious and free.
Toys, books, food, blankets, iPad touch screen delight.

We need to teach our students that stealing is wrong.
We must control any temptation in their environment,
even if it's a colorful eraser they brought from home.

Meanwhile, kids in Uptowns around the world grow up with soft
touch, glowing electric, multitudes of objects to cherish
and discard. Organic cotton, chemical free vocabularies
pouring thousands of delicious words
into receptive brains.
Smooth tiles, germ and rodent-free nurseries of quiet ocean bird sounds,
and "Baby aren't you beautiful!"
with your clear blue-eyed, blond fuzz, Pampers ™ plump cheeks.
It's amazing how safe and blessed you are.
It's amazing how little you want.

The only problems are my questions:

1. Why would I steal if I had more than I could ever need? And,
2. Those who write the rules have been winning for a long time,
   so why should I play by them?

What about our children?
Roach rash, bellyache, and lead-poisoned playground.
Mouths agape with yells, devour up the fists that struck your mother.
Run away and rock yourself
into another continent.

But we're still supposed to teach you to play by the Uptown rules?
And be *nice* about it.
Because we don't say that at this school.
We don't act that way here.
I don't care what you do at home.
Swallow it right back up
and look to me as your example.
What was good for me must be good for you.

Rebuilding New Orleans

Judy E. Demarest

I stand in front of a classroom filled with eleventh graders. I've been here thousands of times in my life, but not in Memphis, Tennessee. What am I doing here? How could I possibly have ended up here? I'm a New Orleans girl. I've been teaching at the same school on Canal Street for about thirty years, teaching New Orleans kids. Now they say there are no kids in New Orleans. My school and my home are both lost to the flood waters that swallowed my city after Hurricane Katrina, a few weeks ago.

I remember telling a student who was considering majoring in education that it is a safe career choice. There will always be kids who need to be taught. There will always be schools to teach in. You will never get rich, but you will be rewarded by the lives you touch and especially by the "AHA moments," times when you seem to reach a particularly unreachable student.

I have lost my house and been fired from the job at the school that has been my second home. I am totally homeless, facing a room full of teenagers who can't possibly imagine the baggage I carry. How could they fire every teacher in Orleans Parish? Isn't that illegal? We have contracts! How can I start over in a new city, with a completely different culture, no possessions, only the clothes I wore to evacuate and a few things I have received from the Red Cross or bought at Walmart since then. I have none of my treasured teaching materials! How can I be expected to teach Hawthorne without my photos of the house where he lived and the Salem Witch Trials Museum? I don't even have my *Scarlet Letter* tee shirt to wear on the day I introduce the first American novel to my class.

It is not only the stuff that I mourn though. As I stand before the class, I can't stop thinking that I really don't belong here. A voice in my head repeats the words, "Go home and rebuild."

"Rebuild what?" I think, allowing my thoughts to stray from the lesson I am teaching. At the end of that first day, I walk into the principal's office, resign from my new job, apologizing profusely because I should be grateful to have a job at all, and vow to proceed headlong into the ominous task of rebuilding New Orleans.

Only two weeks later, I find myself riding into New Orleans on Interstate 10 with one of my former students, who has an all access pass to the heavily guarded city because of his job with a major construction company. The entire city is grey. There is not a person, animal, insect, or plant alive as far as I can see. After passing through the exit, blocked by armed soldiers in a huge tank, we enter my New Orleans East neighborhood, and I see my devastated home for the first time. What hasn't been ruined by the major wind damage to the roof, followed by the rising water the following day, has been destroyed by the creeping mold which has grown rampantly during the weeks citizens were not allowed to return to our homes.

I probably should not be terribly surprised by my reaction. My horror is predictable, but tears do not come until I see my collection of yearbooks from my life at Warren Easton Fundamental Senior High School. I find them on their shelf of honor, swollen from the flood and consumed by the mold. There is a book for every year from 1976 until 2004. None of these treasured volumes can be salvaged. My tears turn to sobs.

Our next stop is Warren Easton itself. There it stands on deserted world famous Canal Street, grey, moldy, and lonely. On the front door hangs a filthy band uniform, the only sign of life. We look for the tree that we planted last year as a memorial to Brian's close friend, Aaron, who died of cancer several days after graduation. It is gone, along with the bronze plaque that Brian had lovingly placed in concrete at the base of the tree. We assume that the doors are locked, get back into his truck, and drive away. How long will it be before Easton is again filled with the sound of teenagers at work and play? How long before students wear those band uniforms and march through the streets of New Orleans? Will it ever happen? More tears...many more tears!

I am able to be back in the city, because I will be working with Lakelawn Metairie Funeral Home, which had been my part-time job, pre-Katrina. There are thousands of dead bodies in freezer trucks which need to be buried, and I will be helping to arrange burials. Eventually, they provide me with a FEMA trailer, which is placed in the cemetery, and it is there that I live for over eight months. The funeral home is also destroyed, so we set up shop in trailers disguised quite nicely as a temporary funeral home. During this time, a fellow employee contacts a friend at a Catholic high school and arranges for me to return to teaching. I am thrilled!

This high school is on the west bank, and was undamaged, so they were able to reopen quite soon after the storm. They have been enjoying tremendous praise in the media, because they have opened their doors to students whose schools are not functioning this year. I eagerly accept the position, although I will not have my own classroom, and will have to carry all of my teaching materials with me from room to room throughout the day, and will have to teach a different level of English each period of the day. I want to be a part of providing education to the students of New Orleans. I am proud to participate.

I only last a couple of weeks. It isn't because of the inconvenient situation I am placed in. I could have dealt with that. What I can't accept is the fact that I am teaching the "other boys." All students who came from other schools are separated from the real students! They have separate classes, cannot play sports, and cannot even participate in intramural sports programs. I am horrified and begin advocating for the "other boys." My words fall mostly on deaf ears. I succeed only in getting an "other boys" team in the flag football program, a team which did remarkably well! I resign after only a short time, agreeing to help Mary Laurie to reopen O. Perry Walker High School in Algiers, which will be a part of the Algiers Charter Schools system. I am rebuilding New Orleans!

In the meantime, I attend every meeting of the Orleans Parish School Board, begging for them to prioritize the reopening of Warren Easton, the oldest public high school in the state of Louisiana. I am frequently alone at these meetings, or accompanied by a few displaced seniors, or an occasional former faculty member. One day, while teaching at Walker, I am called out of the classroom to attend a school board meeting which is in progress. They are about to sell the Warren Easton building to someone to turn it into condominiums. I leave school, with the support and cheerleading of my principal, who happens to be an Easton alumnus. I beg for the school to be preserved for its original purpose, and after a very close vote, the building is not sold.

I have a close relationship with the Rotary Club of New Orleans, because I have been the sponsor of the Interact Club at Warren Easton for many years. I approach them at their first post-Katrina meeting in a hallway at a local hotel

on a Wednesday afternoon in November. I have a letter I have written, begging them to use their influence in the business community to help to reopen the school. I pass out copies to those gathered, and amid many tears, seek their support. I have no idea of the tremendous outpouring which will result from these pleas. Rotarians from around the world will rally to support my cause, sending truckloads of building supplies, textbooks, library books, art and school supplies, and anything else you could possibly imagine. They come from other states and countries and spend time in the hot building without electricity or running water, helping to build science labs, scraping, painting, and doing whatever they can to make the reopening of the school a reality. I gather students and alumni to serve them lunches and to participate in tasks we are capable of doing.

During the summer of 2006, I spend my days sitting in front of the school in the heat, with applications for enrollment. Alumni, mainly dads who are back in the city without their families, hit their brakes as they drive past the school, calling out, "Is that you, Ms. D? You getting Easton back?" They are so excited to be able to bring their families home. That cannot happen if there are no schools for their children. The alumni who have become the charter foundation are not confident that we will have enough students to reopen, but I know we can get the kids! I am rebuilding New Orleans.

Two days before Easton is scheduled to open for the 2006 school year, we are in crisis. There is no running water in the building, and despite the countless pleas and demands to the many contacts and connections of the charter foundation members, the water had not been turned on. We may not be able to open on time. I sit on Canal Street in front of the school, collecting applications and documentation. A Sewerage and Water Board truck stops on the corner by the flagpole, and a man with a huge beard climbs down, calling out to me. "Ms. D, it's me, Erkel!" Erkel is not his name, but a nickname I gave him years ago in school when his pants were sagging. He runs over and lifts me to spin me around, saying, "Easton's gonna reopen, huh?"

"Erkel," I reply as he places me roughly back on my feet, "we surely hope so, but there is no running water in the building. I was hoping your truck was coming to fix it."

"No running water? When they were gonna knock down that hospital across the street, they sent me over here to disconnect the water. You mean they never turned it back on? It was supposed to be for the day." In mid-sentence he runs to the side of the building and reappears a moment later. "Water's on! Need anything else, Ms. D?" Erkel and I are rebuilding Warren Easton.

In August of 2006, against all odds and with the help of Rotary, we welcome our students to a "new" era in the history of Warren Easton High School. Through a welcome tunnel formed by Rotarians, faculty, staff, and members of the charter foundation, the students enter, for their first day at Warren Easton Charter Senior High School. The principal of Easton pre-Katrina, Mr. Ed, has warned me that I should not trust the charter schools, but he never explained why. I greet the students with pride and a love that has been on hold, waiting for this moment!

The excitement is short-lived, although I continue to work on behalf of my beloved school. Daily, I realize that this new school is not the old one. It is not the family atmosphere that we had built through tradition. It has become a business venture, with focus on dollar signs and test scores, with young people who are taking a back seat, as they are there only to make these numerical milestones

happen. Time and again, I remember Mr. Ed's words of distrust. I begin to understand his mistrust and to develop my own.

For example, I had written a college writing course several years before the storm and had been teaching it with wonderful results. Almost every student who took the class was placed in regular college English rather than remedial, which had not been the case earlier. The new Easton administration can't afford to offer that class, and our students suffer. There are few consequences for misbehavior, because we can't afford to lose a student, because it will mess up our budget. One student, who has remarkably high test scores, has been involved in a string of fights on campus and is never removed from the school, because she makes our standardized test scores and school performance score look good. Who cares if she hurts someone? She fights her way through four years of high school and graduates with honors. The numbers are what matters!

At the end of the third year of Warren Easton Charter School, I am selected by the faculty as the teacher of the year. This is announced on the loud speaker one afternoon during the close of school announcements, and then never mentioned again. The teacher of the year for the previous years was honored with flowers and a check from the foundation. I am never acknowledged beyond that announcement. Instead, in May of 2009, I am told that my contract will not be renewed for the following school year. My "value did not outweigh my liability." I didn't even know what that meant, but was told by the teachers' union attorney that the school can hire two and one-half teachers for the price of me, because I have too much experience. So much for the safe career of teaching!

In the fall of 2009, I find myself teaching at New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School. It is so foreign, yet so familiar. It is not long before I realize that their promises of support and consequences for students are theoretical, at best. I am teaching English III, American Literature, as usual, but my tried and true methods are not respected or accepted. I must teach according to the instructions of a woman who has never been in the classroom as a teacher and whose only claim to qualification is that she has home-schooled her own children. She is telling me to rewrite lesson plans after the week has long passed! I am livid at her obvious lack of knowledge and waste of my time. At the end of the year, I am once again told that my contract will not be renewed. I refuse to accept it this time and press on with the principal to give me some role in the school for the following school year. After two months, she finally offers me a contract with an annual salary of $17,000 (instead of the $56,000 I was earning), and I will be a part-time employee, serving as the community service coordinator. She does not expect me to accept this offer, but I shock her by telling her that I will. After all, I am rebuilding New Orleans. What better way is there than to teach students to be community-minded and to give back?

In an office slightly larger than a closet, I dive right in to my new position. I am very lonely all day in the office without students. I miss the classroom, but I have a front row seat to the workings of the school, because I am situated in the main office. What an eye-opening experience! It is worse than I thought. I spend more hours in the school than most of the full time employees. They hire a few of those inexpensive, uncertified, recent college graduates in my place, and we're off!

As I sponsor community service projects, coordinate registration for ACT and SAT, and design motivational bulletin boards, there is a parade of English III teachers. Four different first year teachers take a turn teaching the class I had taught for a lifetime. After each one is fired or resigns, students ask why I am

not their teacher. After all, I am right there in the building, able and certainly willing. But instead of returning me to the classroom, another inexperienced young person is hired to give it a whirl.

During Christmas holidays, the principal is fired, and on the first morning of school in January, the new principal fires me! I had never been fired from a job in my life, and now, in less than two years, it is happening for the third time, if you don't count the blanket firing of all of the teachers in the parish after the storm. She explains that it is not personal. After all, she has never even met me. The school merely cannot afford me, since I am not a necessity. I refuse to leave and tell her that I will work for free until she can find the funds to pay me. The faculty is shocked by my boldness, but I must stand up for what I believe in. This school has no band, no choir, no football, baseball, or soccer team…only a basketball team, about which the administration complains incessantly, because it costs money. The students have so little in extra-curricular activities. After so many years, I know that those are things that kids need to become well-rounded individuals. If I leave, they won't even have the community service program I offer, and that is not an option for me. How can we rebuild New Orleans, if we do not rebuild its youth?

In just a few days, the money is found to pay my meager salary, and I continue my program. At the end of the school year, I am asked to teach two or three classes the next year. I will be starting a school choir and in fulfillment of a lifelong dream, I will be teaching a class on community service. I enter the 2011-12 school year with such hopes for the school and my new classes! It doesn't last long though. The course, which comes to be called "social concerns," was originally designed for 12 to 15 students. Like all electives, this class and the choir class become dumping grounds. Students who have absolutely no interest in being there are scheduled into both classes, because there are no other electives available. The social concerns class grows to almost thirty students, and promises to split it into two sections go unfulfilled.

I have taught choir many times in the past and am accustomed to this phenomenon. At one point I had eighty-seven students in my sixth period beginning choir class at Warren Easton. I can manage, but I have to start from scratch this time. There is no tradition upon which to build. I have my work cut out for me.

In addition to this challenge, there are the on-going problems with lack of continuity and consequences. For the second year in a row since I arrived, the students have returned to school in the fall and met a faculty which is more than 50% new teachers. It is like a revolving door. These youngsters who have experienced Katrina, and the massive changes in their lives which have resulted, cry out for continuity, and the school is not providing this for them. I can remember that at Warren Easton, I taught the children, nieces, and nephews of former students. There was a tradition that money could not buy. Thus the sense of family prevailed for years and years. SciHIGH is making no effort to provide continuity to these children, some of whom are not even living with their parents because of Katrina issues. Some are actually living on their own, just so that they can go to school here in New Orleans.

Lack of consequences for students continues to be a major problem. Students are routinely verbally reprimanded and then told that everything will be alright. Once I enforce the no-texting-in-class rule, and the student will not surrender her phone. When I report her to the dean of students, she just changes her

schedule, so that she is no longer in my class, "to prevent further problems." Of course, the girl boasted that she did not have to give up her phone, and she got out of my class. This is not an isolated incident. It is amazing to me that students are being regularly taught these unrealistic expectations, which will cause them severe problems in the real world!

My social concerns class is focusing on several societal issues, including the criminal justice system. We have read the trial transcript of a young man who was accused and convicted of murdering another teen at a sweet sixteen party. The investigator from the Innocence Project Louisiana has met with the class and presented the new evidence in the case, which proves that he is innocent. The man has been at Angola for eighteen years for a crime he did not commit. When we ask permission to attend a hearing for his case, I am told that we cannot go, because students would miss "meaningful instruction." Evidently, the instruction in my class is not seen as meaningful.

When I ask permission to take my students on a field trip to visit the Angola Prison, I receive the same response. I ask permission to take them on a school holiday, and the permission is granted. Surely, they do not expect me to succeed in making that a reality. Students will not go on a holiday. However, not only do the students go, but the warden of the prison calls me personally, because he is so impressed by this fact! The tour is one of the most powerful experiences of their lives. The administration and I don't seem to have the same definition of "meaningful instruction."

At the end of this school year, once again we are facing more than 50% turnover in the faculty. I am one of those who will not be returning. It is not my choice, but I have been told, "You require autonomy and that is what makes you a fantastic teacher. We don't have room for that here." This time I am giving up. I don't feel good about it, but after the recent educational reforms by the state legislature and the changes in teacher retirement, I really have no choice. I continue worrying about the students. Actually, I worry more and more every day. What do the students have to look forward to? Scripted lessons, limited real-world experiences, and precious few extra-curricular activities are not the answer. Perhaps they are the answer to the budget problems the schools face, but the developmental problems which result will prove to be much more expensive in the long run.

The faculty of the predominantly black school is more than 90% white, and they are mostly from the northern states. While most of these young transplants are fascinated by the cultural novelty they find in New Orleans, they face a challenge in learning to understand their students. Many are teaching out of their area of expertise, and most have no intention of doing more than their "time." This is not an isolated situation! In conversations with other teachers in New Orleans, and even in surrounding parishes and coastal counties, this is the trend.

The teaching profession cannot survive, when the majority of those in the classrooms are not there because they want to teach. They are there as a kind of military service, where they are able to teach in urban schools for two years and get a substantial portion of their student loans forgiven. When you combine the salary paid by the charter school or school system with the federal money given them through the sponsoring programs and the forgiven student loans, these uncertified, inexperienced young adults, most of whom have no intention of teaching as a career, are receiving considerably more pay than the

teachers who come to stay! Then when they leave after their two years, going on to law, medical, or pharmacy school, which was their original intention, they merely sign a form saying that they will not be teaching in the state of Louisiana, and they receive a refund of all of their contributions to the teacher retirement system. As this portion of the "teaching" community continues to grow larger each year, the retirement system is shrinking, offering little chance of retirement for the precious few individuals who intend to make teaching a career. One of my former students received a large scholarship to Loyola University, but was unable to accept it, because he wants to be a fourth grade teacher, and Loyola no longer offers elementary education as a major.

My interest in rebuilding New Orleans remains strong. I sincerely believe that a major key to this endeavor is the educational system. Until we make students the priority, and stop converting schools into business experiments, that task is going to be unsuccessful. I will no longer be in the classroom, but I am certain that I will continue to participate in the education of the citizens of New Orleans. I will be following a different path to the same destination!

Philosopher Stone

Maria Hernandez

My sophomore year at Doug I realized what the missing ingredient to my philosopher stone was. It would be no simple task to attain it, but in two short years it would be mine. Once I had my stone I could transmute the scars from my past into the keys for a brand new future. The only thing standing between me and my greatest accomplishment was me. I hated school with a passion and would barely go. I refused to be on time for a class. If the teacher complained too much, I would just not show up for a week or maybe two. That all changed in one day. I walked into a writing class that looked more like a special ed class. All fifteen desks in the class were in a circle in the middle of the room. All I could think of was "damn, they must really be crazy if they think I'ma stay in here for a whole hour." And yet fifteen minutes went by, and still there I was. After about 30 minutes Rodneka read a piece about the domino theory of violence. As she read, I wrote, and when I was done writing, I put my pen down and was ready to leave. But, before I could close my tablet, I was coaxed into reading my poetry out loud. Something I had never even considered. Yet, I read and was shocked to know that everyone liked what I had written. Instead of getting criticized, I was given pointers on how to better my writing.

That year I found peace going into Mr. Randels' and Kalamu's class that I had never known. Now I could put my pen to paper and release all the pain and rage that I always kept trapped inside me. I saw a new positive potential in myself that I had no idea was there. So different from how I was used to unleashing what was bothering me, using my hands when it became too much to handle. It was they who taught me how to use my favorite tools in completely different ways but to the same means. Now my hands weren't just blunt objects; they were true weapons of mass destruction. I was finally on my way. Sometimes struggling, but they were always there to keep me on track like Apollo pulling the sun high into the sky. They showed me that I could warm my cold dark world with my own light. Who would have thought that my light would soon be extinguished by a flood of rushing water so strong that it not only snuffed me out, it blasted me all the way to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

For years all I could do was try and reach for that last ingredient to complete my philosopher stone, but, no matter how hard I tried, I always failed. I even bowed my head and held my tongue when a principal in Tulsa said he would make my life a living hell at his school for fighting one of his white students. I was quiet for so long that I lost my pen and didn't even care enough to notice when or why. I was so desperate to be heard but had no way of expressing myself any more. The only voice that I ever had dried up like ink on paper the day I decided to exchange my pen for nothing. The anger and pain soon returned, and I began to lash out again at strangers and family alike. I lost myself for three long years. I drank, smoked, and partied every day. The sun would rise and set, and I wouldn't even acknowledge it. Man, when I was sober, I hated the person staring back at me from the world behind the mirror, because in that reflection I saw my alcoholic father looking back at me. I found that I could lie to others with my eyes, but I always saw the real me, the true me drowning in a sea of bitterness. As long as I was with the crowd, I could pretend to be happy, and no one would know any different.

It was like this new person had taken root in me and was thriving so easily that it took over in no time like a creeper vine takes over a tree and suffocates it by blocking out the sun. I even picked up two new nick-names: La Mariposa, which means "the butterfly," because I was quick to whip out my butterfly knife on a rival gang member. The name became notorious. I was someone to fear. My other alias was La Diabla Boracha which roughly translates to "The Drunk Devil Girl." That name came from my friends. They said you could see the evil in my eyes when I drank, and, even worse, that you could feel it emanating from my body when I got mad. This new disturbing person I became was not even a dim bar room reflection of who I was before the great storm of '05. I suffered immensely on the inside, mourning the Maria that was, as Carlos Santana said, "on the corner, thinking of ways to make it better." I would replay days, months, and years over and over trying to figure out what went wrong. How had I gone from trying to get my chain-smoking mom to quit smoking to actually sitting next to her lighting a new ciggy from the ciggy she was smoking? Still, I didn't care to stop myself or help myself until the day of reckoning came.

That day a good five or six months ago, I realized that I was no longer leading my younger siblings in the right direction. I used to wake them up early to make sure they got to school on time. I even began leading by example my senior year at Douglass in '05, their freshmen year there. I was on time for every class and miraculously I hadn't missed a day yet. I was working not double- but triple-time to walk tall as long as I could remember into my childhood. I did my best to lead them and show them how to do things right, but suddenly I became that bad influence kids should be kept away from. They watched me skip classes to go to parties. They saw me drown my pain in a bottle of brandy, and they looked on as I rolled the 'gar and smoked it till my nails burned. When did this happen? When did I change from pushing them in the right direction to toting them into my world of demons and addiction? I hated who I had transformed into, but I did nothing to change it. The dark side had seduced me a long time ago, and even though I refused to accept it—to this day I still refuse to accept it—I was still enamored with that part of me that causes pain to herself. I kept moving further away from my true self and closer to that wild animal on the edge of self-destructing. I drink. I smoke. I fight. That's how I survived Katrina, but the question is how will I survive myself? I'm slowly killing myself. I party all night and race cars drunk. I say I don't wanna die, but it is obvious that I don't wanna live. All those around me know what is going on, but they make it a point not to mention it.

I cry in my sleep, whenever I do sleep, and I wake up in the morning to a tear-stained face and a cold, wet pillow. However, this is not a cry for help. It is too late for that. This is my suicide note. I just wanted everyone to know who I had turned into. So now I can leave this life behind for a better one. And who knows—maybe my lost flock will follow me this one last time. It took me three years to find myself again. Now that I am sober and clean, I can clearly see when it all went bad. As I look back, I know exactly where I lost sight of that key ingredient I had been reaching for. The last time I saw it was in one of those fifteen desks arranged in a circle in a special-ed looking class on the fourth floor of Frederick A. Douglass High School. I am now on a life or death mission to find it among the wreckage Katrina left behind.

A Letter to Major

Wesley Alexander

As I sit at my kitchen table, drunk as the lifeless soul who begs for change outside the corner store, I think of writing about you, someone I too wished to change. Today, which in an hour will be yesterday, I saw you, and I am sure you saw me. I debated if I should write about you or Henry. Both of you have made a heavy impact on me. The way I think about the world around me is because of you two. Since you are the closest thing I had to a father, I decided to rightfully address this letter to you. By the end of this letter, I hope you will understand why I chose not to be "Alexander," your son. I chose to be Wesley, my self.

I have not been exposed to drinking in my household. My mother tries her best to be everything and more she can for me. Surviving off less than $14,000 a year, my mother has paid off her home, managed to feed her two children, and most of all been a devoted, single parent. I came to the realization that my family is virtually poor earlier this school year. While I was filling out my Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), I was asked about my parents' income. Of course, my father's absence disabled me from fully answering the question. However, my mother has always been present and continues to be. When my mother gave me her W2 form, I was disturbed by the small numbers. I asked myself, "How has she learned to survive off so little?" My mother always refrained from discussing her income, which explains why I was struck by the realization of where I, and many other Hollygrove residents, stand in this society.

My mother has been working as a Certified Nurse's Assistant since she was nineteen years old. My mother is now fifty years old, and she still has not received a pay raise. If I would have known this earlier in my life, I would have encouraged my mother to quit her underpaid job long ago. Working from 11:00pm-7:00am five days out of the week is a constant struggle for my mother. Each day my mother is demanded to lift over ninety pounds of human muscle, change urinated sheets/diapers, follow the orders of her white advisers, and risk being infected by any diseases or germs that surround the nursing home, Chateu de Notre Dame. With word that the retirement age is increasing lingering through the streets of my neighborhood, the thought of my mother still working, now wearing her wrinkles of old age, struggling to keep up with the younger CNAs who are stronger, healthier, frightens me. Retiring comfortably at a decent age is a distant fantasy to many poor blacks in Hollygrove. Instead, the overwhelming reality of working to death has been accepted as our fated lives.

The blacks of New Orleans continue to perform the labor of our forgotten ancestors, the slaves who developed the culture, land, and vibe of this city during Spanish New Orleans. You probably are already aware of this, but if not, slavery in New Orleans was not as brutal as other places in the South. Slaves were given holidays and Sundays for worship off from work, similar to poor blacks today. However, if they could no longer tolerate the restricted life of being a slave, they ran away to the swampy areas of Louisiana. These runaways were known as "maroons." Consequently, those who were caught or could not run away were killed. Today, when blacks grow tired of life, we run away to more problems: drugs, alcohol, and sometimes, suicide. I learned by observing my mother's life as a Certified Nurse's Assistant that history does not repeat itself, but certain aspects, such as slavery, are altered over time.

My mother believed "colorblinding" me would allow me to think I was anything but black. After she paid the bills and bought the groceries, my mother used the last of her money to buy me something special. She made me feel as if I was the richest boy alive. In the voice of my mother, "he wasn't wanting for nothing when he was lil!" I did not want anything when I was a little boy. After taking my eyes off my pile of action figures, I regained my vision. I could see that my mother was a single parent. I wondered to myself, what else could I possibly want? As I realized I needed something that was missing in my life, the problems gradually began to arise. Pardon me, but I have a bad memory. My mother blames my failure to remember things on my father, because he always lost his keys and wallet, which she secretly kept. Although my memory is slightly impaired by genetics, I retain moments that evoked or provoked the summoning of my chained emotions.

I remember when my father began appearing on the porch of my house when I was a child. He always had a grin on his face when he saw me. Those times when I did grow the courage to look him directly in his eyes resulted in me being engulfed by his hurtful lies.

"I'm gonna come pick you up tomorrow, hear bruh?"

"Okay, Henry."

My mother told me that my father was Henry Elmore. I did not know my father. My mother had no pictures of him to show me. His location was unknown. So, why should I have not referred to him simply as Henry? Even at a young age, I was aware that the title "father" has a meaning to it, a purpose to his children.

"Who the hell is Henry? I'm your daddy."

"I'm sorry Henry. I meant, daddy."

I did not mean to call him, daddy. "Daddies" are the men I saw at the park with my mother as smiling children ran to each and every one of those humane men who claimed those children. I would clench my nose when I smelt the strong odor of liquor escape from his pores. When the smell leaked through the screen door of my house, my mother stormed her way towards him. I wondered to myself, "how does she know him so well?" He was a stranger to me. However, that did not stop me from believing him.

"What the fuck do you want, Henry? This boy needs clothes!"

"Why do I need clothes? I think I have enough." Obviously, I did not. My mother was keeping the truth away from me. Henry was obligated to help her raise me, their son.

Henry would ignore my mother's statement and ask with that same grin, "You miss me, huh Connie?" As I stood almost two feet away, watching their altercation unfold, for the first time in my life, I was angry, angry because I was not satisfied with my mother's contributions to my life. My mother stared pitifully at me when I woke myself each morning earlier than usual after my father's unappreciated visit. I had this outfit my mother always scolded me for wearing too much. It was nice too. I could not miss the chance to sport my

favorite outfit on those bound-to-be memorable days. I would sit on my porch, waiting for his sudden appearance for several minutes, and those several minutes turned into several hours. My brief moment of happiness diminished when it was apparent he was not coming to get me. That day changed me. I became Wesley, the only person besides my mother whom I could truly rely on when I needed someone.

Do you remember when I was recommended for expulsion after drinking at school? The reason I brought alcohol to school is because I was influenced by my father's alcoholism. During my freshman year, I was heavily feeling the effects of not having a father. Do not get me wrong. I was proud that I entered high school as my own motivation. I was branded a "troublemaker" in middle school. I was on academic probation, and my mother slowly started to believe that I was not capable of excelling in school. I refused to allow that belief to persist. I had to "man up." Therefore, I went into high school with a passion to be educated. When I allowed my personal life to interfere with my education, I ended up sitting in the principal's office, drunk as the lifeless soul who begs for change outside the corner store, for another chance at getting an education. Mrs. Frick granted me an education when she asked me to write a statement, explaining the events that led to me becoming intoxicated. Instead of writing her statement, I made my own by writing a fully developed piece, illustrating why I had to stay in McMain. When I handed her my paper, stained by my tears, as expected, she was impressed by my writing. Mrs. Frick sympathized with me, partly because she was aware that I am not the "troublemaker" I was presumed to be. I served my suspension and returned to school.

I did not know you, if I actually do now, as a freshman. During my freshman year, Sergeant Terry saw past the "troublemaker" in me. When I returned to school from my suspension, he immediately took me under his wing. As I mentioned earlier in this letter, my father is the reason I chose to become Wesley. I felt as if I could not rely on anyone besides myself and my mother. Sergeant Terry offered to come to my hearing, if Mrs. Frick decided to expel me. I was agitated by his willingness to help me. I grew not to trust men because of my father. What if he was lying? What if he did not show up? What if I would be expelled? He reassured me that he would, and that was something new to me.

I enjoyed being around him. He was the first male to ever make me feel valuable, worthy of being somewhat of an apprentice. I did whatever I could to maintain this apprenticeship. I and a few other "cadets" participated weekly in JROTC by attending drill competitions. Along with our participation, we wore our uniforms properly. Oh, and I cannot forget the one-mile run. I easily outdid all my classmates. My desire to be something more encouraged me to be competitive. Up until my junior year, I loved being a part of JROTC. Being in the environment gave me a feeling I never had outside it. It was only in that class I felt acknowledged, respected, treated highly, especially by Sergeant Terry. He admitted to his students that he favored me. In return, I felt as if it was my duty to perform up to my ability in the class. However, when I allowed my chained feelings to slip into my relationship with Sergeant Terry, everything began to change. I had a new goal – to be a son.

Honestly, I don't think Sergeant Terry realized I looked up to him. I did not realize it myself until I noticed how I suddenly came to his defense when my peers would ridicule him. I hated that I was growing attached to him. The feeling was embarrassing to detect. I was raised in a society that views intuition as man's weakness. To love or admire another man would seem "gay" or unusual. If I

told him that I viewed him as a father, would he have suddenly perceived me as weak? I decided to distance myself from him, because I knew nothing more would grow from our relationship than "Alexander, do this" or "Alexander, can you come to this?"

My sophomore year at McMain was my best year. I was still keeping my grades up, which was encouraged and used as a model for students by Sergeant Terry. Instead of being enrolled in Sergeant Terry's class again, however, I was now in yours. Now that I'm reflecting on my sophomore year, I do not think it was my best year at McMain after all. While in your class, I felt as if I could not be myself. You were very strict back then. Instead of having fun in Sergeant Terry's class, I now was urged to perform above and beyond in your class. Your presence was overwhelming. I never talked in class, always followed every order, ran my mile during PT, wore my uniform properly, and went to every drill meet. I am quite sure you have forgotten this statement you made, but I have not. You said to Jerome Fedison, a former cadet, "I don't know why Sergeant Terry favors him so much." I took that statement seriously and saw it as a threat.

I gained the courage to lead drill competitions, something Sergeant Terry did not encourage me to do while in his class. My friends disliked my new character. Some of them began referring to me as a "robot," because I showed no emotion while in your class. I was completely lifeless; it scares me to recap the events all over again. I sat, did as I was told, and when I got home, I would embarrassingly fantasize how life would be if you could be something more to me than my army instructor. Those fantasies enabled me to see that while working to prove to you I could be a good cadet, I unintentionally established a bond with you. I gradually began revealing my true self, Wesley.

You actually liked me, and I was surprised. Yet, once I began overpowering Alexander, the emotionless cadet, you grew frustrated. You began to call me, "unmotivated" and no longer an exemplar of leadership. I had no clue what you were talking about. Was being human around you my weakness? Although you too began opening yourself up around me, showing me a different side of you, Major Reaves still existed. I was angered, because I wanted you to stop allowing Major Reaves to suppress the person I saw within you – the side that does not care if I take out a phone in school, talks to me about anything other than JROTC, laughs when I tell a joke, asks me if I want to go somewhere besides a drill meet, never makes me feel like no matter what I do it is still not enough, is the man I see as a dad: my true father figure.

He does not exist. I thought you cared enough to overpower your opposing persona, but you appear to like that side of you. The side that tells me I cannot get higher than an 18 on the ACT, did not recognize Tareian King for winning a full scholarship to college, ridicules my neighborhood, calls me unmotivated, fails to see what mattered most to me out of him. The side who failed to see I wanted the person embedded in him as my dad. The side who could see I did not give a damn about rank on my shoulders, but feared a future without him. The side who understood I stayed in JROTC for three years because I was afraid to lose him as a father figure. The side that wanted Wesley, not Alexander. The side that did not tell me, "I'll bring you home once I'm finished," clearly saying, "I'm not rushing what I have to do for you." The side that would have asked me instead, "Well, Wesley, what's wrong with your mom? Why do you want me to bring you home so soon?" The side that still would have been there for me on days such as the cold winter night when I felt like shit when my father made his unexpected visit.

You are aware that I stormed out of your classroom when you asked me why did I have my earphones on in the library. It was enough that I was already frustrated about how horribly my education was being undertaken at McMain, but in addition to my mother calling me, crying, telling me, "Wesley, I can't move. Ask Major Reaves to bring you home for me, please," you dared to ask me why did I have my earphones on in the library.

While I sat at the bus stop, unexpectedly shedding a few tears I had been fighting back for a while now, I thought about when I waited on my porch for my father to come. You really hurt me that day, Major Reaves, and I'll never forget that. During my junior year, I decided that I had enough with forcing myself to stay in JROTC. Being Command Sergeant Major did not mean anything to me. Sergeant Terry said to me, "You probably only hang around Major Reaves cause you want that rank, huh?" He was wrong. If you are understanding enough to put your pride aside to continue reading my letter up until this point, I think you too see that I did not become attached to you over a desire for power. I wanted to be a son, but "Alexander," I did not. You yelled at me like a dog because I refused to miss my College Algebra test to attend a Free Men of Color field trip. I could not conceive the fact you said those things as if taking my test was something unforgivable. I grew tired of submitting to you out of fear that you would disown me, which is why I decided to take the test. I knew I could not do well on it if I took it alone. You of all people know how badly I struggle in mathematics. Why did you yell at me? I was ashamed by your words. Everyone could hear you. They were appalled because they knew how much I did for you, not me, in JROTC. When I told you I was not going on the field trip, you said to me, "I'll never forget this!" When my father had me by the collar of my shirt on that night I called you, he told me, "I'll lay your ass out if you say one more word." When he released me, my head lowered to the ground. I was weakened by his words. I will definitely not forget those two moments you two shamed me for allowing my emotions to break free. I still cannot forgive myself for going on the Free Men of Color field trip after you said that to me.

I did not write this letter to "get back at you" or any other idea you may have concluded about the purpose of my letter. The purpose of my letter is to inform you why I chose not to be Alexander. Do you remember when I first wrote about you? I believe I first grew the emotional strength to write about you last year. Anyways, I basically explained that you meant something to me besides as an army instructor. Also, I explained that I wanted you to move past the mentality I am convinced you have adopted from the effects of being in the army. You read the last line of my piece and told me, "You should have stayed home that day instead of going to drill practice." Man, I was crushed. As I sit at my kitchen table, drunk as the lifeless soul who begs for change outside the corner store, I now understand why I began to think of one day committing suicide. Slitting my wrist. Walking into a moving car. Falling into a deep body of water. So many choices, but what one could I possibly choose? After you said that unforgettable statement, I questioned your motives for playing the role of my forgotten father. Did you see me as a burden, an obligation you were required to fulfill as a citizen who once served this country? You may deny this, but I am not quite sure. You are the first male I thought I could trust.

Do not be afraid. I am more alive than ever now. I no longer need to smoke marijuana to relieve my thoughts of suicide. After meeting people such as Shujaah, Dan, and Jerome, three people who were unjustly accused of a crime

and sentenced to life in prison, my entire perspective of the world around me has been dramatically altered. When I met Shujaah, I did not really think much of him. After being around you and Sergeant Terry for so long, I assumed he was someone who felt as if he was "saved," relieved from the oppression of the criminal justice system by "the GOD above" or some shit. Tareian, Shujaah, and I did not get into our discussion good without him opening himself up emotionally. I was a bit shaken by his courage to be vulnerable around us. I knew prison had this effect on many people, but I did not expect someone to pour his pain out so easily when around me. As I watched the tears of oppression roll down his face, I did whatever I possibly could to prevent myself from doing the same. Unlike him, I was afraid to be vulnerable. This is an effect of being a victim of a colonized educational system: A system that discourages minorities from implementing their feelings and experiences in the black community into their writings/discussion in and outside school. I could not come off as weak to them. I had to "man up," similarly to what I did in JROTC. I never publicly cried before. My feelings have always been caged, endured by me alone.

After hearing the heartbreaking stories told by Shujaah, my view of prison and the law itself was once again remarkably altered. It is no longer difficult for me to connect things that are not evident to the colonized in this age of colorblindness. Now that I can see, I can never go back. Matter of fact, I do not want to go back. Although my sight is literally weakening each day, I am grateful for being opened to the world around me.

Unity and Leadership were the two main elements Shujaah strictly forced upon Tareian and me. He knew we were capable; it was evident in our eyes and our voice. He practically praised me for speaking so eloquently. I could not believe someone actually praised me for talking. You never did that to me. I felt good, and I still do. When Tareian and I spoke about the problems in our school: careless teachers, policies over education, and the expulsion of Phillip Wricks, someone you were confident did not make a 23 on the ACT, Dan and Shujaah became empowered by our determination to make a difference in our school. They urged us to gather students, mature students, who feel strongly about our school just as greatly as we do, and conduct meetings to tackle this fucked-up ass school of ours and all the others like it in New Orleans. Tareian stated that she wishes to start a group for girls. I plan to form a movement within the student body to overthrow our adopted-imperialist influenced system of oppression. We are not playing. This shit is serious. Something has to be done immediately, and it can only start with us, the few who are conscious.

After I read my letter to Jerome Morgan, a black man who continues to fight against his life sentence in prison, I felt relieved. In the letter, I told Jerome how I thought of suicide, my relationship with my father/you, and the effects of growing up in a female-dominated household. He responded to my letter with great appreciation. I was astonished that he offered to be a part of my life. He could not understand why you nor my father consciously or subconsciously did not feel honored as potential fathers in my life. I never imagined these words would slip from my thoughts, but I finally can move on in my life without wondering if you will still be here. I can just cry right now, at this very damn moment, because this is real. I can finally be the agent of my life. What amazes me, what astonishes me, what inspires me, what touches my soul, is that Dan and Shujaah listened to my entire letter to Jerome and appreciated every component of it. Their appreciation is what puts my harmful thoughts to ease. I feel the empty hole inside me being filled again.

A change is coming. I guarantee you, my encounter with the three intellectual black men only marks the beginning of a legacy of decolonization. I will continue to open the minds of any black male or female who is not afraid to reject a system, a belief they secretly question. The change has already started with me. I chose not to continue being a cadet, Alexander. I can write. This talent of mine will take me on many adventures throughout my lifetime. Finally, this letter is coming to a close. I hope you understand why I could not continue being a person I am not. I live and breathe Wesley. I do not need to mimic my alcoholic father or my militant Major. The effects of this alcohol are quickly wearing off. The THC has been out of my system for almost a month now. I may not know exactly what my calling is, but what I do know is that something is waiting for me out here. I will be the one to help the lifeless soul who begs for change outside the corner store.

Best Regards,

Wesley

Changing Frames

Dave Cash

"Which has been a basic principle of American democracy since the earliest colonial times?

A. Participation in government by the individual

B. The right to inherited political

C. Control of the government by one political party

D. The right of women to vote"

— released test item from the Louisiana's Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) Graduate Exit Exam, a high-stakes standardized test

"There are still people in the minority community angry that we took over the schools and that we disenfranchised them."

— Leslie Jacobs, charter school advocate and architect of LEAP

On November 1, 2011, I was fired from my job. The people who fired me would almost certainly argue that I was laid off. The difference between the two is a matter of blame. When employees fail, they are fired. When employers fail, employees are laid off. In this case, although I feel that I have performed admirably, I believe my employer, the Recovery School District, believes that I have failed.

I wasn't the only one fired on that day. All the teachers, administrators and support staff at nine schools in New Orleans were fired that day too. The district believes that all the teachers, administrators and support staff at these nine schools have failed to serve the students who attend them. The district believes that the students will be better served by private companies, likely from somewhere else. The teachers and administrators will likely be from somewhere else and their average level of experience will likely be, if history can serve as a guide, far lower than that of the teachers and administrators who currently serve the students of these nine schools.

Even though I had known for years that I would be fired from this job, it still hurt. Most of the teachers just asked practical questions about how their termination would affect their retirement, their certification, unemployment, etc. However, our art teacher, Mr. Smith, rose and spoke with unvarnished emotion. He spoke of the years of sacrifices we had all made for the students and for the school. He said he felt like an axe had fallen and that it would be unrealistic for the district to expect that this news would not settle as a dark cloud over the tone in every teacher's classroom. When he finished, he was applauded by the staff. We were told that parents would be notified of the changes to the school on the following day and that a community meeting would be held at the school on November 10. A few minutes later, the meeting was over.

* * *

By November 3, the news—along with a healthy dose of rumors—had made its way through the student body. In my first period, my students had many questions. I answered them as best I could. Yes, the school will be chartered next year. Yes, all the teachers, administrators and support staff have been fired, as of the end of this school year. Yes, you will all be able to attend this school next year, though we don't know yet who will be running it.

We took time in class that morning to listen to what each student was feeling about the news. Quiane started. She said she felt chartering the school was not the solution. She wanted her current teachers to have more resources. She wanted small class sizes. She wanted her school to stay her school. Ernest piggy-backed off Quiane and said he thought Carver was a good school. He said he had learned a lot. More importantly, he said he had grown up a lot. As a junior, he said he didn't want to start over with a new school. Quiane suggested that she and Ernest start a petition to keep Carver the way it was.

Enigel believed that the school did need change, but that it wasn't the teachers' fault. He believed the office was to blame. To him, it didn't matter if it was charter or RSD. He gave Quiane and Ernest a bit of advice: don't go out head first—know what you're fighting for and fight for something positive.

Caisha thought it was good the school was going charter. She believed it showed that they wanted the students to learn. However, she said, she didn't want to see the teachers leave.

Geva'n seconded what Enigel and Ernest had said. Ivan said he didn't care. Brandon said he was outraged. He didn't want to go to another school and have to meet new people.

Trineka said she was mad. She said she had made a decision to graduate from Carver and had given up other opportunities to do it. She wanted to stick with the same people she was already in school with. She didn't want her credits to get messed up in the transition from RSD to charter control.

Jercyra said that an academy would be better than a charter school. She said she'd heard about the silent student policy that had recently been imposed on the students of Lake Area New Tech Early College High School, a new charter school in Gentilly. She said she did not want to go to a school like that.

Quiane implored all the students to attend the meeting on November 10 to let the RSD know how they felt about their decision regarding Carver.

* * *

In conversations with co-workers that week, it was clear that we were feeling insulted and demoralized. Mrs. Mingo-Douglas said she wasn't going to let them scapegoat her.

* * *

On November 10, I was exhausted. I stayed after school to get some work done before the community meeting, but couldn't keep my eyes open. I laid my head on my desk and caught an hour of sleep before I finished my grading and walked over to the library.

When I got there, I was a little disappointed to see a low turnout. I sat next to Grace Lomba, an UTNO friend. Also at our table were two men who were the guardians of two of my students. I was glad to meet them.

The meeting started with Sameta Brown and Kunjan Narechenia from the Recovery School District. They began to explain that Carver High would not have a ninth grade in the next school year, a fact that had not yet been revealed before that evening. Hands shot up and parents and alumni began to share their anger. A few minutes into the meeting, Quiane walked in and sat down next to me. Her hand went right up. I don't think Ms. Brown and Ms. Narechenia knew quite what was coming.

Quiane said that she didn't want a new school. She said she wanted to graduate as a Carver Ram. She wanted to wear green and orange in her senior year. She wanted her teachers with her at her graduation. She told them they were tearing her heart out with their decision. She told them her teachers needed more resources. She said her school needed more teachers. She told them one of her classes had 35 students, which made it very difficult for that teacher to teach them. Quiane was voicing a strong, proud legacy, one uniquely potent among the schools of New Orleans. It was Carver Rams who stood up to the NOPD and its tanks in 1970 and forced them to leave Desire without firing a shot. It was green and orange that forced Carver out of the School Facilities Master Plan's "land bank" and back onto the educational map of New Orleans. Rams are not born to back down. Green and orange are fighting colors.

When they told her she could still graduate from Carver with her green and orange, Quiane pounded on the arm of her chair and said, "You're not listening to me. I don't want you to take away my school." They asked her to write down her name, telling her they would like to meet with her and a group of her peers at Carver in a separate meeting.

Her words moved the entire room. Half the speakers who spoke pointed back to what she had said. Alumni leader Betty Washington spoke angrily and told the RSD representatives that they were tired of being betrayed. She said that if they expected to take Carver without a serious fight, they were gravely mistaken. When the RSD said they would continue to give the alumni a seat at the table, the crowd made it clear that it wasn't the RSD's table. It was their table. And they would consider giving the RSD a seat at their table. Many of us stood and began to leave the meeting. The frame had changed. The community was refusing to see the school's future according to the RSD's process. The community was taking ownership of the process.

Quiane spoke once again before leaving. She recalled with deep appreciation the extra time and effort her teachers had put into helping her. She wanted to bear witness to the dedication of the teachers at the school and the bond of trust that dedication had formed. When the RSD leaders again reached out to her for a separate meeting with students, she shook her head and her hand to say, no, I see what this is and I will not participate in your process.

* * *

Though I struggle sometimes to see that I am making a difference as a teacher, I knew that night that I had not failed. I was so proud of Quiane. She was passionate, articulate and able to see through the games being played by the RSD. We—her parents, her community, and her teachers—have reared a bright, fierce young woman.

Although my employers see me and my colleagues as the obstacle to student achievement, I know that we are not. Every day we go to school and make a huge difference in the lives of the students we teach. We and our students deserve the right to continue the profound and transformative work we do every day.

On Cloning, Compliments, and the Question of Administrative Support

Callie Thuma

For the past two years, I have taught elementary special education at Super Charter School, under the leadership of Mr. Principal[1]. I came in as a Teach for America corps member, completely inexperienced in the classroom, although certainly very optimistic. As a new teacher, I initially depended heavily on the guidance of the administration. Unfortunately, Mr. Principal and his vice-principals did not give me the support I needed, so I eventually learned how to find it elsewhere, from other veteran educators and from UTNO, the teacher's union.

"So what was lacking?" you ask. "How did it feel to work for Mr. Principal?"

To be honest, I cannot say that I did not feel valued by Mr. Principal. To the contrary, he frequently affirmed our hard work and our importance in the lives of our students. The problem was not a lack of support; the problem was the quality of the support. The way he directed and delivered his compliments could leave a person feeling worse. Let me give you an example.

This spring I walked into the teacher prep room while Mr. Principal was in the midst of praising his teaching staff to a couple of visitors from a similar charter school. "I have terrific teachers," he was saying to them as I walked in to grab a packet of printer paper. "Like Ms. Thuma," he said, gesturing in my direction. "If I could I would clone Ms. Thuma and make fifty-seven more of her." He was smiling, as though he had made a funny joke. I forced a smile too, though I said nothing, and continued in the direction of the paper reams. Right then, still smiling, he added, "Although that might be a little strange."

Strange, indeed. Disturbing, too, I might add. But very indicative of how he sees us as teachers. And not surprising, coming from a man who evaluated the effectiveness of our teaching by the extent to which we were at the same place, at the same time, in the same pre-approved, administration-sanctioned, standardized lesson.

I remember him saying one day at morning meeting, "When I looked into the first grade classrooms yesterday, I could tell that high quality instruction and teamwork was going on because Ms. X, Ms. Y, and Ms. Z were all at the same place in their lesson about place value, using the same words. They were even standing in the same part of the classroom!" At the time, I remember imagining Ms. X, Y, and Z wearing the same outfit, speaking in the same monotone voice, tilting their heads in the same direction, lifting one of their hands to gesture to the whiteboard, while their spare hands each gripped the ten-page lesson plan detailing every word they were to utter.

I have no interest in being cloned. I am not a robot, nor a cog in a machine, although I felt like both during my time at Super Charter School.

At the risk of sounding too much like Beyoncé, I am irreplaceable. My teaching is irreplaceable. My relationships with my students are irreplaceable. Mr. Principal might find another excellent teacher to fill my position, perhaps one with even more experience and credentials than me, but he will never find another me.

As a special education teacher, I have learned from experience that the success of a lesson cannot be measured by how closely it adheres to a script. One cannot expect all teachers to teach in the same way any more than one can expect all students to learn in the same way. Each student brings different questions, perspectives, insights, and misunderstandings into the classroom, and each teacher has her or his own creative ways of engaging, challenging, and supporting the students' development.

If Ms. X, Y, and Z were working in a school that valued the diverse personalities of students and teachers, I believe each of their lessons would be unfolding slightly differently. There would be time to respond to a student whose questions reveal a lack of understanding. There would be time to make a connection to the students' lives. There might even be time to laugh together. At Super Charter School, despite having an eight-hour school day and extended school year, we rarely had time for any of that.

"Stick to your times! Hit your times," was administrative code language for deliver that lesson, give that test, and don't be late to the next activity. One minute for the lesson hook, three minutes for the intro to new material, fifteen minutes for the guided practice...and whatever you do, don't run over time.

And if the students don't get it? That was always my question, and I never got an answer from my administration that satisfied me.

So here's *my* answer. If the students don't get it, you might have to stop your lesson. You might have to listen, *really listen* to your students to determine why they aren't following your explanation. You might even have to ask them some other questions to discover the source of their confusion. Then you might have to slow down, explain it differently, or ask another student to share her understanding. And at the end of the day, you may end up having to return to the same material tomorrow.

I am suggesting that teachers listen to their students. I am arguing that dialogue and recognition of each other's complexities must take place between teachers and students in order for true learning to occur.[2] Despite the urgency of the ever-widening achievement gap, we must make time for this kind of pedagogy.

You might be thinking there's nothing sophisticated about this answer, and in some sense, you are correct. Surely, many veteran educators would say much the same thing. But within the structure of my school, I would argue that my response is almost revolutionary. Why?

Because within Super Charter School, the treatment of teachers as replaceable, mechanized parts within a well-oiled, so-called "ed-reform-movement" extended to seeing all our students as passive, empty vessels, desperately needing to be filled by our unimaginative, over-scripted lesson plans.

Our common language said it all:

"Do not complain or make any noise except, 'Yes, M'am,' when I tell you to do something." "Noise level zero. Eyes tracking the speaker." "Hold your bodies still. Your voices are off. Your eyes are on me." "Sit in scholar position." "Hands down, I am speaking."

If you were to conduct a study tracking the frequency of expressions spoken by Super Charter School teachers, "Noise Level Zero" would top the charts. Someone once asked me, "What are the other noise levels?" They exist, but I could scarcely remember what they were; we never referred to them in the classroom. It was always, "Noise Level Zero" time. Our students could not speak during lunchtime. They could not speak in the hallways. They could not speak while their teacher was speaking. And the majority of their work consisted of packets of worksheets, which were to be completed independently, in absolute silence.

The silence, rigidity, and vast amount of rules to be enforced and followed at Super Charter School were suffocating. I hated punishing children for whispering to each other at lunch. I hated making nine year olds walk through the halls with their fingers on their lips, like little silent prisoners. I withered; I slid into depression and apathy. As the months passed, the system began to break me too. I became a stickler for students walking 'hip-n-lip'. To those who slipped up, I commanded, "Go back and do it again. Do it the right way. Do it better." Seeing the neat lines of students following me, Mr. Principal beamed. Inside, I crumbled. I lost my energy, my optimism, and my resourcefulness. I felt mired in the enormous, insurmountable problems of my students' academic deficits. I felt alone. Where was my spark? What happened to my ideas for lessons that were original and fun for my students? Why didn't I care that all my students had just failed my latest exit ticket?[3]

Ironically, innovation was one of our school values. To innovate means to bring forth new ideas or methods. There has been no other period in my life when I felt less inspired to innovate than the two years I spent at Super Charter School. I was a shell of my former creative, imaginative self.

At some point, toward the end of my first year, I stumbled across a reference to the former employee handbook of Nordstrom´s department store in an education blog[4]. It was an index card with 75 words, reading as follows:

> **Welcome to Nordstrom**
>
> We're glad to have you with our Company. Our number one goal is to provide outstanding customer service. Set both your personal and professional goals high. We have great confidence in your ability to achieve them.
>
> **Nordstrom Rules: Rule #1: Use best judgment in all situations. There will be no additional rules.**
>
> Please feel free to ask your department manager, store manager, or division general manager any question at any time.

In a work environment like this, trust was implicitly placed in the employees. When you expect great things from people and trust them to deliver, it is amazing what people can create and accomplish. I learned this first-hand working with my students. The author of the blog, George Couros, remarked, "Innovation doesn't seem to thrive when we don't trust." I agreed with his observation. I decided in that moment that one of the issues with the administrators at Super Charter School was that they did not trust us as

teachers. They were forever giving us rules, guidelines, templates, and rubrics for everything that should be done according to their vision. Is it any wonder that my innovation reached an all time low?

Compare the Nordstrom Rule to the ten-page rubric that comprised Mr. Principal's official teacher guidelines for excellence and evaluation system. We were ranked on everything from the percentage of students with raised hands during our lessons, to how many committees we joined, to how much joy we appeared to express while teaching. All these rankings could be boiled down into one number that expressed our effectiveness as a teacher. I was a 2.73 out of 4. "You're among the upper half of our employees. Keep up the hard work and you'll be above a 3 by the end of the year!" Mr. Principal said, encouragingly, as he showed me the scatter plot of our entire staff. Again, what was intended as a compliment only made me feel worse. I had the sneaking feeling I was only among the upper half of our staff because I was an obedient staff member who didn't make a fuss about administrative mandates and tried her best to follow the rules. I was disgusted with the system and disgusted with myself for willingly submitting to it.

Mr. Principal's rubric could not begin to measure what I am capable of achieving with my students. A 2.73 could not tell Mr. Principal anything about my budding talents as an educator, nor did it give him any idea of how to nurture and develop me. A 2.73 says nothing about what motivates me. Its three digits stand mute and lifeless next to the bold radiance and complexity of my vision for my students and myself.

Looking back on my two years at Super Charter School, I think the most serious problem with the administrative direction was that it stifled all of us, teachers and students alike. We were stuck within a structure that disempowered us. I know I am capable of teaching with more creativity, more patience, and more wisdom than I was able to at Super Charter School. I know my coworkers, who are all incredibly talented, intelligent people, are capable of leading their students into deeper, more critical inquiry and knowledge. I know my students are capable of much more than holding their bodies still, tracking the speaker, and remaining at Noise Level Zero. They are capable of speaking themselves, for they can be leaders and innovators too, if they are only given the space to do so. Young people deserve space to make their voices heard and encouragement from adults to do so. As teachers, administrators, and other participants in education reform in New Orleans, we must begin to empower our students to reach their full potential, rather than demanding nothing more than silent compliance.

1 I have chosen to use pseudonyms for my former school and principal because I believe they are typical of many of the charter schools emerging in New Orleans during the current wave of so-called "Ed-Reform Movement." I don't want you to read this and point your fingers at my former school; I want you to read this and begin to question the system as a whole.

2 Paulo Freire makes this argument with great passion and eloquence in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I highly suggest it.

3 At this point, please note: If this is where I was mentally and emotionally, can you imagine how my students were feeling at that time? Can you imagine how class time felt for them? I can't speak for my students, but if you're thinking, "Not good," "Miserable," or "Boring," I suspect you're correct.

4 Couros, George."One Rule." The Principal of Change. Word Press. 11 Feb 2011. Web. 4 July 2012

THE BOTTOM LINE: A Dire Civil Rights Crisis

Dave Cash

In case you've just awoken from a seven-year coma, New Orleans is undergoing a radical transformation. Before Katrina, our school system wasn't perfect, but it was on the rise. In 2005, 88 of 128 schools had met the state's requirement for adequate yearly progress, and 93 schools showed academic growth[1]. Despite the progress, our school system has been replaced by a market of schools. Communities are no longer the majority shareholders in the boardroom of public education. They are no longer allowed to decide who spends their education dollars or to ensure those dollars are spent in ways that strengthen their communities. Parents are no longer seen as partners in the education of their children but as customers making consumer choices. Schools are no longer anchors of communities but nascent corporations looking to survive their start-up phase so they can eventually reward their investors with a healthy bottom line. Well-educated students are not the products of these corporations, but rather the raw materials needed to produce the real products: lines on graphs that go up and up and up. Students who do not produce are discarded, because school success—not student success—ensures solvency. Teachers are valued for their malleability, acquiescence and ignorance, not their professionalism, experience and wisdom. A veteran teacher I know, recently forced into retirement from a charter school, was told by her principal, "You require autonomy, which makes you a great teacher, but we don't have room for that." This is what its architects call education reform or, more often, a miracle, the final solution to all our schools' woes. But a growing number of us see it for what it really is: a dire civil rights crisis.

About fifty years ago, white, working-class New Orleanians started leaving the city and moving to the suburbs. They couldn't stand the idea of their children going to school with black children. White professionals and business leaders, however, never left, since they had the resources to segregate their children into prestigious private, parochial and selective admission public schools. Nevertheless, there was enough white flight to tip the demographic scales and make New Orleans a black city. Whites found this loss of political power unacceptable, especially the control of the public school system, which had a budget larger than the city government's. For years, white leaders schemed to regain the power they felt was rightly theirs. Hurricane Katrina and the devastating floods that followed provided an irresistible opportunity for them. When the pumps were still working overtime to make New Orleans livable again, white leaders orchestrated a takeover of nearly all of New Orleans' schools from the city's democratically elected school board. 7,000 employees of New Orleans Public Schools, most of them teachers, most of them black, most of them middle-class and most of them regular voters—were wrongfully fired by the Orleans Parish School Board, even though insurance policies and federal disaster aid existed to keep those employees on the payroll. As a result, the teachers' union, a powerful voice in New Orleans politics, was decimated. Thousands of distinguished veteran educators—a large segment of New Orleans' black middle class—relocated to other cities, leaving a persistent void in our local economy. The disenfranchisement and displacement of black voters was not accidental or incidental—it was fundamental to the success of the plan. In fact, Honduran President Pepe Lobo, who came to power in a 2009 military coup, visited New

Orleans in 2010 to see what lessons he could learn from the city's leaders about how to strengthen his grip on power. During the visit, his aide said, "We've had a huge problem with teachers' unions...Charter schools are certainly one option to try to solve the union situation."[2] Today in New Orleans, a white mayor and a majority-white city council rule a city whose population is still mostly black, but poorer than it was before Katrina. The Orleans Parish School Board, which had governed 128 schools, now governs only five. The rest are controlled by the state or have been privatized. Mission accomplished.

In much the same way that many Southern whites saw slavery as a benevolent institution—a "positive good," as John Calhoun said[3]—whites who are implementing the education reforms in New Orleans see their system as similarly uplifting to the city's poor students of color, even though it has been imposed on our local communities, not developed in collaboration with us. Reformers reckon that they know what's best, especially since, according to a prominent Louisiana politician, the real goal is not to improve the outcomes of poor students of color, but to create more options for white—and other—middle-class families. This goal is consistent with long-standing goals of white leaders in Louisiana. In 1866, one year after the end of the Civil War and the emancipation of African American slaves, superintendent of schools Robert Lusher wrote, "It is indispensible to the future honor and prosperity of Louisiana, and to the supremacy of the Caucasian race in her councils, that the benefit of a liberal education should be extended to every white child within her limits."[4] Far from being repudiated for his racism, today a prominent charter school in New Orleans proudly bears his name.

A few years prior to Hurricane Katrina's devastating landfall, the state of Louisiana created an agency called the Recovery School District. Its purpose was to take schools with chronically low School Performance Scores away from the local district that ran them, "recover" them to non-failing status and then return them to local control. Before Katrina, about five schools statewide were under the receivership of the RSD. When Katrina hit, the state's definition of a failing school was a school with an SPS of 60 or lower. By this measure, the RSD would have been able to take over thirteen New Orleans public schools[5] at that time. However, while most New Orleanians were still displaced from their homes, state legislators passed Act 35 on November 22, 2005. This law changed the definition of failing to an SPS of 87.5 — but only for schools in one of the state's 60+ school districts: New Orleans Public Schools. This surgical shift allowed the RSD to take over 107 of the city's public schools after Katrina.

In the six and a half years since the RSD took over the schools, it has not recovered a single school. The RSD wasn't ever meant to be the final destination for all the schools in the takeover. Instead of returning schools to the Orleans Parish School Board, the RSD has handed them over to independent educational organizations at a rapid pace. The RSD has ultimately functioned as a kind of Middle Passage from the New Orleans Public Schools system to the charter operators. Today, the RSD directly operates fewer than 10 schools. In contrast, there are more than 90 charter schools in New Orleans, run by more than 50 charter school boards.

Each year, the faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni of 10-15 RSD schools have been told that their schools are going to be phased out. Sometimes this means that the school will lose a grade a year as the charter school invading their campus adds a grade each year. Sometimes it means the school is disappeared immediately and unceremoniously, despite its long history and legacy, to be immediately replaced by a charter school. Often the students and teachers at the occupying charter school are not the same as those who were at the school that was colonized. At most, one or two token community members are allowed to serve on the boards that run the charter schools, boards that are not popularly elected. Black New Orleanians have fought long and hard for many years for the schools their children attend to be both locally controlled and named after inspirational black leaders like Lord Beaconfield Landry, Ronald McNair, Alfred P. Lawless, Valena C. Jones, Oretha Castle Haley, Charles R. Drew, Frederick A. Douglass, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington and many others. If the takeover of our schools is completed, these historic names would once again be relegated to history. In their places would be the names of outposts in growing empires of charter school franchises. The branch offices increasingly housed in our schools bear names unimaginatively contrived by brand-conscious marketing departments: New Orleans College Prep, Sci Academy, KIPP Believe, Akili Academy, Pride College Preparatory Academy, Success Preparatory Academy.

Many of the schools being phased out have long served low-income communities of color. Alumni and community groups have submitted applications year after year to operate their schools. Over and over, these applications have been denied. Because these communities were not given a voice in the decisions related to their storied schools, alumni groups, community members and the teachers' union began struggles to resist the occupation of our schools. As allies we stood together, and we stood strong. The RSD pushed back with efforts to divide us by appealing to our self interest over our collective strength. Some were offered jobs. Some were asked to have a one-on-one chat, somewhere quiet, away from all the "confusion." The RSD successfully used these tactics in some school phase outs, where it was able to silence the dialogue by convincing a few key community members to agree to its rub-out plan. But at other schools it was different. It was not the first fight for justice these elders had fought. They are veterans of struggle, veterans of injustice, veterans of victory. They—and we—will not stop until our schools and our children are back under community control.

A hallmark of the current market reforms in New Orleans is often referred to as "school choice." The architects of these changes say both parents and teachers have choices. Parents, they say, can choose the school that best meets the needs of their children. A teacher, they say, can choose the school that best "aligns with his or her educational and organizational philosophies."[6] The problem is a vast majority of the city's schools follow a model developed by the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, which itself runs several schools in New Orleans. These schools employ highly regimented systems for behavioral control. Between classes, students walk in silence along lines in hallways. In class, students are reprimanded for not raising their hands, even if they don't know the answer. At lunch, students are given detentions for using the word "stupid" in a sentence, even if the word isn't being used to describe a person, and even if what they are discussing is truly stupid. Students are given suspensions for wearing the wrong colored shoes or belts. Some students are even expelled for offenses like these.

A growing number of children who resist end up on the streets or incarcerated. A charter school principal recently described the system at his school as "the structure that liberates." This brings to mind the words of progressive historian Ulrich B. Phillips, who wrote in 1918, "[T]heir despotism, so far as it might properly be so called was benevolent in intent and on the whole beneficial in effect."[7] Of course, he wasn't talking about schools. His book was called *American Negro Slavery*.

There are, of course, schools that don't follow the oppressive KIPP behavioral model. But these schools, by and large, serve whiter, wealthier students. But whether they use a KIPP model or not, academic successes remain elusive across the city, especially in schools that serve poor students of color. 79% of all New Orleans public schools, the vast majority of which are charter schools, are "D" or "F" schools, according to the state's school report card system. What choice do parents and students of color from lower income communities really have? What choice do parents of students with special needs have? What choice do teachers have who want to serve the most disadvantaged, at-risk communities in this city, especially those who believe that a prison-like regime only prepares students for a prison-like life?

Students deserve to be nurtured and loved, challenged and championed. Schools should draw out of them the greatness that their parents and communities know is within them. With so many local, black, veteran teachers pushed out of the system, white or white-minded elite-college graduates from out of town are more and more likely to school our children. They have no experience working with black children and are ignorant about the richness of New Orleans culture—most of which flows from its blackness. Teach for America has a lucrative contract to supply one third of the adults who enter New Orleans classrooms each fall. Some schools are staffed completely with these folks, all of whom have only committed to stay in New Orleans for two years. They are told that the best way to teach poor, black children is to control their behavior rigidly and keep them busy from bell to bell. They are taught that these children need to be saved from their parents and their communities. They are told that veteran teachers are responsible for the current state of public education in New Orleans. They are told that one day, they will change the world. They are the vanguard of the White Savior Industrial Complex[8].

Yes, children need to learn how to behave positively in school and in society. And yes, children must be held to high expectations. But how do you teach children if you don't know them? And how can you know them if you think you're better than them? Yes, it is much easier to impose obey-or-suffer systems than it is to humanely teach students to self-regulate. Trial and error is messy, but it's also one of the most effective ways to learn. We don't learn to interact with each other by switching off our humanity and pretending like the people around us don't exist—or worse, that the people around us aren't people at all.

What's happening in New Orleans today is clearly a crisis. It's the latest struggle in a long, long fight for civil rights and human rights. It's the 99% grasping for what the 1% won't share. It's righteousness pitted against immorality. It's dignity against arrogance. Unfortunately, when you read the newspaper and watch TV, all you hear is that New Orleans is the forefront of educational promise in the United States. Reporters and talking heads never seem to ask the most important questions: Who benefits from these changes? At whose expense have these changes been made? What are the implications to our democracy? Our rights? Our humanity? Those before us fought hard to win access to and local ownership

of public education. In the blink of the eye of a storm, these hard-fought gains were lost. If we don't fight, these rights may remain out of reach for a very long time.

I work in a system I see as dangerously flawed. These past few years, I've been watching the front lines of charter schools spreading further and further across the city. It's been easy to be a sympathizer, but now the battle is at my doorstep. Can I enter that world and still be a part of this struggle? Or will I just become another well-intentioned collaborator? I know a young man who is a sweet, affectionate, compassionate 18-year-old. He wants to join the Marines. When I point out to him that his personality isn't exactly military grade, he tells me how he believes he will be able to change the culture of the military from within. I smile and shake my head at his naiveté. And then I think about what I'm hoping to accomplish. And I think he's being naïve?

I considered penning this essay anonymously, because I worried about how attaching my name to it might affect my future employment prospects in this profession. The truth is, if you teach in New Orleans today, the decisions you make about where you teach, how you teach, and why you teach are not personal or philosophical preferences. They are political acts.

So the question is, which side of the bottom line are you on?

NOTES

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3 Calhoun, J. C. (1837, February 6). Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions. Washington, D.C.

4 Circular No. 3, Office of the State Superintendent of Public Education, June 2, 1866. (1867). Report of the Superintendent of Public Education , 16.

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8 Cole, T. (2012, March 21). International - Teju Cole - The White Savior Industrial Complex - The Atlantic. Retrieved April 8, 2012, from The Atlantic: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/

An Open Letter to The Senate Public Charter School Caucus and Sister Cities Across The Nation

NEW ORLEANS EDUCATION REFORM

MODEL NEEDS MORE STUDY: New Schools for New Orleans Guide Touts Unfounded Success

On March 1, 2012 Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), co-chairs of the Senate Public Charter School Caucus, hosted a briefing in Washington, D.C. on improving urban school districts using an all-charter school district model. The focus of the briefing was a report by New Schools for New Orleans, a nongovernmental organization that develops charter schools and recruits new teachers and school leaders for them. The report, entitled *New Orleans-Style Education Reform: A Guide for Cities*, outlines lessons learned in the nation's first charter school district and describes how other cities can replicate the New Orleans experiment in reforming their public education systems.

Our Concerns—Stakeholders Deserve Careful Study of New Orleans Public Schools

As students, parents, teachers, school personnel, and alumni of public schools in New Orleans; concerned citizens of New Orleans and Louisiana; and university scholars and community and civil rights organizations, we implore all who read the Guide for Cities to proceed with caution and careful consultation of multiple sources and studies before adopting the reforms implemented in New Orleans since 2005.

The report's foreword acknowledges, "Tens of thousands of students, families, teachers, and leaders make up the New Orleans system, and we are in no position to speak for all of them." We couldn't agree more. In fact, we have grave concerns that the stakeholders who were consulted for the report included only advocates of current reforms—state and district officials, charter leaders, support organization leaders, education reformers, and reform invested philanthropists. In other words, this is an advocacy document that reflects the interests and beliefs of charter school supporters, rather than an analysis of research findings of the reforms instituted since 2005.

Problems with New Schools for New Orleans' Claims

In its *Guide for Cities*, New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) describes the academic achievement of the charter schools as unprecedented, citing increases in test scores and decreases in the number of failing schools in the Recovery School District (RSD). Louisiana Department of Education officials and charter proponents have offered these routine accolades for several years now, ignoring research that shows no measurable difference in achievement between charters and traditional public schools.

Even a cursory examination of the data, however, reveals a much different story. The NSNO report does not discuss the following facts, which are significant in assessing claims of "success" for the New Orleans reform model.

According to the letter grade system adopted by the Louisiana Department of Education:

- 100 percent of the 15 state-run RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a "D" or "F";
- 79 percent of the 42 charter RSD schools assigned a letter grade received a "D" or "F";
- Of the RSD students attending state-run schools with letter grades, 100 percent or 5,422, are attending schools that received "D" or "F";
- Of the RSD students attending charter schools with letter grades, 76 percent or 15,040 are attending schools that received "D" or "F."

RSD schools that have been open for less than three years were not assigned a letter grade. This calls into question the so-called six year New Orleans "miracle" in education reform. These data also obfuscate the multiple changes to the cut off scores that allowed the take over and that now show growth. In other words, the state raised the score to justify the take over and subsequently lowered it to show growth. We take issue with this manipulation of this measure of growth and believe it is essentially a moving target that severely handicaps committed teachers and administrators and fails to capture the talents and skills of the children who attend public schools in New Orleans.

Our Recommendation—In the Interest of Children and the Future of Public Education, Policymakers Should Refrain from One-Sided Promotion of a Market Model and Instead Support Reforms that are Developed with the Voices of All Stakeholders and Ensure Equity for Those Most Directly Affected

Since 2005, there have been numerous reports of the miraculous progress made through education reform in New Orleans. We suggest that more external study be given to the effects and outcomes of current reforms before accepting unsubstantiated claims and the promotion of New Orleans as a national model. Without considering alternative accounts of current education reforms, policymakers run the risk of recklessly projecting an illusion of progress that is capable of doing great harm to the future of public education.

We, the undersigned, commit to using our resources to continue providing analysis of the changes happening in public education in New Orleans since 2005. Please look for and give equal attention to existing research and forthcoming reports from some of the organizations listed below.

Summary of and Excerpts from Judge Ethel S. Julien's "Reasons for Judgment" (June 20, 2012) in Post-Katrina Wrongful Termination Suit of Orleans Parish School Board Employees

On June 20, 2012, Judge Ethel Simms Julien ruled that the termination of over 6,800 OPSB employees following Hurricane Katrina violated law. This ruling came as a result of legal challenges that began as early as October, 2005, and culminated in a month-long bench trial in summer 2011.

Accompanying Judge Julien's ruling in *Eddy Oliver, et al vs. Orleans Parish School Board, et al* is a 45-page document entitled "Reasons for Judgment," which is summarized and condensed with excerpts here.

The full text of Judge Julien's "Reasons for Judgment" is available at www.nopsejustice.com, a web site that also gives fuller detail on the history of the case and the plaintiffs' attorneys.

Judge Julien's document is divided into four major sections: 1) Findings of Fact, 2) Procedural History, 3) Law and Discussion, and 4) Damages. This summary concentrates on the Findings of Fact section, which establishes and documents a number of key points, including the formal partnership established between Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) and other state agents and contractors, the violation of personnel laws and policies established by the defendants, and the misrepresentations of academic and financial performance of pre-Katrina OPSB subsequently used as reason for terminations of OPSB employees and state takeover of OPSB schools.

The increasing usurpation of decision-making power and legal authority of OPSB by LDOE is a major theme in Judge Julien's findings of fact. In terms of the wrongful termination case, this fact is important in establishing the state, not just OPSB, as liable for damages and culpable in violating the law.

Despite Confirmation that OPSB Title I Funds Were Spent Properly, State Forces Contract with Company Reporting Directly to State to Manage OPSB Finances

- In Spring 2005, Auditor Grover Austin, working under contract by Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard, completes audit documenting that *OPSB properly spent at least $69 million of $69.6 million in Title I funds* between 2001 and 2003 [a period when OPSB had at least three superintendents, one of whom was a U.S. military colonel who had no prior experience in public education]. Austin's audit is in response to a November, 2004 letter from the U.S. Department of Education questioning documentation and expenditure of the $69.6 million.
- On Feb 15, 2005 Picard and Austin inform OPSB that the state will seek bids for turnaround firms to work on OPSB finances and that OPSB will have no input in the awarding of this contract. Judge Julien notes, "As of May 23, 2005, notwithstanding the accounting performed by Mr. Austin, Supt. Picard represented to the OPSB that he wanted to enter into a MOU to exercise better control of the OPSB's finances and to move forward."

- On July 16, 2005 OPSB enters "into a 2-year, $16.8 million contract with Alvarez & Marsal, a New York-based financial consulting firm. The firm was recruited and selected by Supt. Picard and State Department of Education officials."
- After the hurricane and at the direction of Superintendent Picard and fellow state actors, Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) assumes much larger contract and much greater control of OPSB after failed attempts by Picard to oust OPSB superintendent Ora Watson and replace her with Bill Roberti of A&M. At this point, state through its contracted agent assumes almost total control of OPSB and consequently full liability for all OPSB actions.
- In October 2005, Picard amends A&M contract giving A&M ability to hire and fire OPSB employees. This document signed by Picard and Roberti "solidified Mr. Roberti's control of OPSB money, allowed Mr. Roberti's authority to supersede that of the Acting Superintendent (Dr. Watson), and contributed to the mass termination of the plaintiff class."

State Requests Federal Funds to Keep Teachers and other OPSB Employees

A September 13, 2005 letter from Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings requests "$2.4 billion in federal funding to help schools affected by Hurricane Katrina." According to Judge Julien, "He specifically cited a need to continue paying the staffs of hurricane impacted public school districts while the districts were closed; he also warned federal officials of the dire financial situation faced by public school employees." Picard's communication includes language that LDOE, not individual school districts, should receive the federal funds and includes a specific request for "more than $622 million for salaries and more than $155 million for benefits for out-of-work school employees." The letter specifically cites, as state of Florida did in 2004 hurricane devastation, the need to "pay out-of-work teachers 'mainly to assist in retaining staff for when the schools reopened.'"

OPSB, Alvarez & Marsal, and State Department of Education Communications with and Plans for OPSB Employees

- By August 30 A&M had established a call center to locate employees in emergency of hurricane and had approximately 7,000 names and updated addresses of OPSB employees as of that date—giving "reasonable access to post-K contact information on the vast majority of its employees."
- By or before Oct 4 A&M and OPSB meet with the teachers' union (UTNO) and the principals' association (PANOPSI) to help determine who is available to help open and run 16 schools.
- An October 4, 2005 A&M report verifies contact with nearly 7,000 employees through its call center, establishment of online application for "Intent to Return," beginning of process to terminate OPSB employees, and start of Human Resources work for opening up to 16 schools.
- "Prior to November 30, 2005, A&M worked with the School Board to locate certified, highly qualified, and experienced teachers who were available to re-open schools. Also, the School Board planned to open fifty-two (52) public schools for the 2005-06 school year. However, State officials did not support these plans."

Partially As a Result of Access to Additional Federal Funding OPSB Votes to Form Algiers Charter School Association Rather than Open Its Own Schools

- At Sept 15 OPSB meeting, Dr. Watson presents plan to open 13 schools in Algiers. Board takes no action on Watson's plan and instead places all employees on "disaster leave without pay," retroactive to August 29, 2005. OPSB has no such designation in policy, and state has no such designation in law—so Julien rules it fictional and as no grounds for termination.
- On September 27, Superintendent Picard and Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Board Member Ginny Lee Buquet write to USDE asking for waivers in charter process to open 10 charter schools.
- On October 7, OPSB meets to set up Algiers Charter School Association (13 schools) through resolution introduced by OPSB Board member Lourdes Moran. "Funding for the Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA) was diverted from Orleans Parish School Board's pre-Katrina budget for 2005-2006 and subsequent years. OPSB approved ACSA's '[t]otal Revenue of $37,672,560.00 for Nov. 2005-June 2006' from local, state, and federal funding sources."
- "Employees from Orleans Parish, pre-Katrina employees, were not allowed to transfer into jobs at the thirteen (13) new charter schools."
- OPSB comprises initial board of ACSA, OPSB provides $500 per student for the projected 7,200 ACSA students for ACSA start-up funds—in addition to MFP funds for OPSB for 2005-06 year.

Act 35 Establishes Law Applied Only to OPSB that Allows Takeover by State (through Recovery School District) of 102 Rather Than 5 of the 126 OPSB Schools

- At the end of 2004-05 school year, 88 of the more than 120 OPSB schools met or exceeded state Adequate Yearly Progress and thus were not failing schools. 93 schools showed academic growth.
- As of August 2005, the School Performance Score (SPS) for failing in the state of Louisiana was 60. After Katrina that rose, for Orleans Parish only, to 87.5 [the state average school performance score]. SPS that designated a school as failing reverted to 60 in 2010.
- "In November of 2005, the Louisiana Legislature enacted La. R.S. 17:10.7, which resulted in 102 of the 126 public schools in Orleans Parish being taken over by the State. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Recovery School District ("RSD") had jurisdiction over only five schools in the entire State of Louisiana."
- As of 11/30/05 and as a result of Act 35, OPSB lost complete ability to place teachers in schools because state by this date controlled so many public schools in New Orleans.
- Prior to ACT 35, the OPSB budget was approximately $400 million. By 2011-12 OPSB's operating budget was only $40 million. "For the 2005-06 School Year, the OPSB received approximately $17 million per month in state financial support or Minimum Foundation Funds (MFP). These monthly payments ended after the State takeover. Under Act 35, MFP funding 'follows' the child as of November 2005. Consequently, the RSD received MFP money for the 107 schools taken from the OPSB. But for the state takeover, the OPSB would have received those funds. Starting with the December 2005 MFP payments, approximately $130 million of the OPSB's MFP money (for the 2005-06 school year) was diverted to the RSD."

- "Approximately 90% of the School Board's former financial resources have been disbursed to the Recovery School District and charter schools."
- All of above limits OPSB ability to obtain restart funding and establishes state as liable for actions of OPSB.

Termination of OPSB Employees Violates OPSB Guidelines and State Law

- OPSB had in place guidelines based on state law (and required by state law) regarding any Reduction in Force, "including notice procedures to employees, procedures for developing a Recall List, procedures for reducing, retaining, reclassifying, and transferring employees based upon seniority."
- On December 22, 2005, A&M releases two press releases informing employees of termination and detailing related procedures for employees to follow.
- Judge Julien issues Temporary Restraining Order on January 31, 2006, noting among other things that OPSB policy and state law require individual notifications; subsequent individual termination letters are mailed February 8, 2006.
- These terminations are not in compliance with state law, because a) no provision to appeal termination, b) "The February 22, 2006 termination letter was not sent to the proper addresses of most class members as the updated contact information was not utilized in mailing the letter," c) 10-day period stated in letter for appeals "was unrealistic since the OPSB's office was not operating at the 3510 General De Gaulle Drive address to which appeals were to be sent by terminated employees." [This office never opened after Katrina.]
- Defendants did nation-wide recruitment for teachers despite having nearly 7,000 with contact information available
- On April 20, 2006 the state enters into a contract with Teach for America despite thousands of certified, experienced OPSB teachers available for employment and with current contact information on file with OPSB and its manager, Alvarez & Marsal. TFA and related contracts included: 1) $468,468 to train and place 125 TFA corps members and 2) $12.928 million from 2/1/06 through 7/31/06 for operating costs to eligible charter schools.

Judge Julien's Conclusions Based on Findings of Fact

a. OPSB was "on track to prudently manage and expend all federal monies allocated to the OPSB in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina."

b. OPSB and Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) were contractual partners in overall supervision, management, and administration of NOPS. Furthermore, LDOE continually expanded its power following Katrina, for instance adding ability to hire and fire. Also A&M's $16.8 million contract was controlled by Picard and state but paid by OPSB.

c. Roberti signed $10 million in construction change orders without OPSB approval.

d. "Although paid by NOPS, A&M fostered, facilitated and implemented the State's takeover of NOPS. For example, A&M employees were setting up the Algiers Charter School District and an A&M employee was hired to be the financial director of ACSA."

e. OPSB relied on State Defendant funding to meet contractual obligations with respect to paying employees.

g. "Notwithstanding the State Defendants' representation to the U.S. Department of Education that it needed over $770 million to pay the salaries and benefits of out-of-work school employees, and the State Defendants' receipt of over $500 million in post-Katrina federal 'Restart Funds' based upon this representation, the State Defendants did not ensure that any of this money was used to pay the salaries or benefits of the Plaintiff Class. Rather, the State Defendants diverted these funds to the RSD."

g. "The State Defendants and their agents, A&M and Bill Roberti, interfered with the employment rights of the Plaintiff Class by diverting federal 'Restart Funds,' to the RSD and ACSA to the detriment of class members."

h. "The State Defendants assisted in drafting and promoting legislation specifically designed to have the State to take over the New Orleans public schools. The State Defendants analyzed school performance scores in Orleans Parish to provide a listing of the scores to be used in drafting legislation so that the highest number of OPSB schools could be taken over by the State Defendants."

i. Orleans Parish was handled differently than neighboring, similarly affected parishes with respect to recovery of public education and treatment of public employees following Katrina.

Community Demands for Education

Teachers and Community Organizers from Lawrence, Massachusetts and New Orleans, Louisiana

Note: These demands emerged from conversations between teachers and community organizers from Lawrence, Massachusetts and New Orleans in the summer of 2012. In January 2012, Lawrence Public Schools became the first district in Massachusetts to be taken over by the state. There are many parallels between the state receivership in Massachusetts and the Recovery School District in Louisiana. New Orleans teachers are committed to sharing lessons learned from our struggle and learning lessons from others in the same struggle in Lawrence and other communities where the democratic rights of educational self-determination are threatened.

This document is envisioned as a tool for both educating and organizing communities. Our hope is that hearing the demands will make people aware of what has been lost and what is at stake. We envision these demands being reproduced in multiple languages, printed on fliers, posted (without the explanations) on billboards, t-shirts, the sides of buses and anywhere else disenfranchised and disregarded people find themselves. Only when we understand what we have lost can we fight to take it back.

Community Demands for Education

1. **Develop home-grown teachers and teachers invested in our communities.**

   We deserve teachers with roots in our community. If they teach here, they should be settled and/or invested in the city. Our rich culture is valuable to us. We are the ones who can best preserve it.

2. **Give us a meaningful voice in the selection and retention of our school leaders.**

   Only if our school leaders are directly accountable to us can we ensure that our children and teachers are not opportunistically exploited.

3. **Reward schools that effectively serve all students.**

   Schools have too many incentives to selectively keep only the students that will help their school scores increase. Schools should only be considered successful if they serve all students, regardless of their differences.

4. **Distribute resources and best practices equitably throughout all public schools.**

   Communities thrive when every child has what she or he needs. Depriving one child in order to better nurture another weakens the fabric of the entire community. Successful teaching strategies must be shared with all educators so that all children may benefit.

5. **Teach our children about their world and the world.**

   Children are not empty vessels. They come from families and communities with rich cultures. They deserve their heritage. They also live in a world of great wonder and cruelty, a world that will often not see them through the loving eyes that we do. They deserve to know what to expect and how to engage it.

Afterword

Afterword

Adrinda Kelly

I went back to New Orleans for the first time after Katrina on Nov 12, 2005, for a homecoming of SAC students, teachers and graduates. The last time I was there, in August of 2004, I had gone home for a friend's wedding. She got married in a wedding chapel on St. Charles Avenue right below Lee Circle. After the ceremony, we gathered on the verandah to drink wine and fan ourselves beneath the huge, old trees standing tall along the streetcar line. We made a pretty picture on that lovely porch, resting our heads against its white pillars as the trolley lolled by. This is the New Orleans people imagine when I tell them where I'm from. This is the New Orleans that for many people was the only part worth saving.

Now a lot of things are gone in New Orleans and a lot of things remain. The dividing line is as stark as the contrast between black and white. When I was in New Orleans last November, I made a point of driving to the low-lying 9th ward, an area of the city that was devastated by flooding. As I got closer, the lingering rot smell that was hovering over the city got stronger and stronger. But it wasn't only the smell that was so changed. It was the eerie quiet. The absence of construction crews. The heavy darkness hanging over that deadly Industrial Canal. Eventually I couldn't go any further—I was stopped by the national guard and asked to turn around. I felt cheated of a secret.

But I didn't have to see it first-hand to know that the 9th ward was gone, and with it, thousands of New Orleans' poorest, blackest residents. I didn't grow up there, but I have memories too. Mine are tied up in high school dances and after parties where the DJ would throw on the latest bounce track and shout out the different wards in a call and response ritual that would build to a frenetic cresendo, resulting in exhausted adolescent bodies ready to fight, have sex, go get a Rally burger, fall asleep. That's the 9th ward. Out there by the Desire projects. Those people whom my mother calls "project people with a project mentality." That means they walk into the grocery store with rollers in their hair and sell their food stamp cards for money to buy po'boys and cigarettes. This is the New Orleans visitors hardly ever see, and people who are from the city tuck it away like a crazy aunt, apologizing and making excuses when it comes out to fight and curse and yell, "I belong to you!"

The truth is, it all belongs to us, and now it's more important than ever to remember it, understand it, love it, find a way to make it better. Start with what you know to learn what you need to know. Start with where you're at to get where you want to go. SAC's philosophy will be the roadmap for our regeneration. Something in the act of remembering will replenish us, and give us the energy to start over.

The challenges facing public education in New Orleans since Katrina are more daunting than they were before the Hurricane. Major change and uncertainty under severe time constraints and with a displaced population comprise the new landscape of public education in New Orleans. SAC's challenge post-Katrina is to ensure that students continue to work collectively, to share their voices, and that their families and community members have a significant say in the direction their city takes in its rebuilding phase.

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TEACHING *THE LONG RIDE*: Selected Archival, Internet, Media, and Print Resources for New Orleans Teachers

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Compilation and Annotations by *Catherine* Michna with Students at the Center

Local Libraries and Archival Collections

University of New Orleans Earl K. Long Library, Special Collections

http://library.uno.edu/specialcollections/lacol_index.cfm

Marcus Christian Collection

The papers of Marcus Bruce Christian (1900-1976), a businessman, a writer and poet, teacher, and head of the Colored Project of the Louisiana Federal Writers Project (FWP). Includes personal papers, historical and literary writings, and data compiled by the FWP pertaining to the black experience in America.

Sybil Kein Creole History Collection

Personal, literary, and research papers of Sybil Kein. The material pertains to Kein's career as a poet, playwright, musician, and academic. In addition to charting the course of Kein's career, the central subject matter of the collection is the history and culture of Louisiana's Creoles of color.

Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO Collection

Records of Greater New Orleans A.F.L. - C.I.O., New Orleans, Louisiana. Consists of files for the Greater New Orleans A.F.L. - C.I.O. and two associate groups: H.R.D.I. (Human Resources Development Institute) and C.O.P.E. (Committee on Political Education.) Included are correspondence, minutes, publications, questionnaires, press releases, election endorsements, agreements, miscellany.

Also available is the **United Teachers of New Orleans (Local 527) Collection** and the **Orleans Parish School Board Archive**.

Tulane University, Amistad Research Center

From books, to historic manuscripts, to collections of letters, photographs, and visual art, the Amistad Collection houses an abundance of resources concerning African American history in New Orleans and throughout the globe. The Center's online finding aid makes it easy to plan research trips: http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/.

Some highlights:

The upcoming (2011-2012) exhibition and collection on **the print culture of the US Civil Rights movement.**

The papers of civil rights attorneys **A.P. Tureud** and **Daniel Ellis Byrd** (1910-1984) contain histories of **desegregation struggles** in schools throughout Louisiana. These papers also contain letters and documents pertaining to the **history of the NAACP** and to the merger of the white teachers union (the Lousiana Education Association) with the African American union, the Louisiana Teachers Association.

The **Tom Dent Papers** contains Dent's first-person history (via letters and journals) as well as his collected poetry, oral histories, and theatrical manuscripts. Topics featured include: the New York Umbra poetry collective and the rise of the Black Arts movement, the Free Southern Theater, the BLKARTSOUTH collective, *Nkombo* and *Black River Journal* literary magazines, second line and Mardi Gras Indian histories, oral histories of New Orleans musicians and civil rights workers, and the early years of Jazz Fest.

The Free Southern Theater collection houses scores of rare play manuscripts and poetry by African American authors in New Orleans and the surrounding region from 1960s to the 1980s.

The ***Nkombo*** collection likewise contains all of the editions of Tom Dent and Kalamu ya Salaam's *Nkombo* journal, from 1969-1976.

Tulane University, Jazz Archive. Howard Tilton Memorial Library

Includes histories, recorded music, photographs and film, sheet music and orchestrations, and manuscripts related to New Orleans. Searchable research database provides a helpful tool for planning student visits: http://jazz.tulane.edu/

New Orleans Public Library City Archives/Special Collections

http://nutrias.org/~nopl/spec/speclist.htm

Internet Resources

Oral History Collections:

Alive in Truth: The New Orleans Disaster Oral History & Memory Project.

http://aliveintruth.org.

Alive In Truth records life histories of people from New Orleans, Louisiana and nearby areas who were affected by hurricane Katrina. Its mission is to document individual lives, restore community bonds, and to uphold the voices, culture, rights, and history of New Orleanians.

Do You Know What It Means

http://www.doyouknowwhatitmeans.org/

An interactive educational oral history and story project designed to help the public better understand what life was like in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Digital Memory Bank

http://www.hurricanearchive.org/collection/

A clearinghouse for oral histories, photography, stories, and videos about post-Katrina New Orleans and the Gulf South. The Hurricane Digital Memory Bank's digital collections include: Smithsonian National Museum of American History Hurricane Katrina Photos; St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana after Katrina on video; United States Coast Guard Released Photographs of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; Louisiana State Museum Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Photograph Collection; Katrina's Kids Project Artwork; New Orleans Video Access Center Short Documentary Series about post-Katrina New Orleans; Mississippi Coastal Damage photo collection; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Student Katrina Oral History Project; Delgado Community College student oral histories; Narrating Hurricane Katrina Through Oral History project; Deaf Government Area: Touring the Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans; Hellicane: Poets Respond to Hurricane Katrina; Convention Center Relief Blockade; Joint Task Force, Katrina History Group; New Orleans Science and Math Charter High School student reflections after the storm; *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge* post-Katrina graphic novel; and more.

Ninth Ward Katrina Stories

http://www.newyorknighttrain.com/zine/issues/3/oralhist.html.

Ninth Ward Underground Katrina Oral History Project by *New York Night Train*. Featuring oral histories by New Orleans musicians.

Local Education and Social Justice Blogs:

G-Bitch Spot

http://g-bitch.com/

Blog by Dedra Johnson, a local educator and activist, about public education in New Orleans and the city's ongoing recovery.

Jim Randels. After the Storm

Education Week blog, 2005.

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/randels/

This blog contains SAC student and staff reflections on the immediate post-Katrina educational climate in New Orleans, including the rise of the market-based educational reform movement in the city and the mass firing of veteran educators.

Jim Randels, Kalamu ya Salaam, and Students at the Center. Student Stories: A Classroom Chronicle

Education Week blog, 2008.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/nola_voices/

This blog contains online versions of many of the stories in *The Long Ride*, complete with interactive discussion and a first-hand history of organized resistance to top-down school restructuring policies in New Orleans since Katrina.

Justice Roars: Louisiana Justice Institute blog

http://louisianajusticeinstitute.blogspot.com/

A source for grassroots journalism and ongoing coverage about the struggles of New Orleans communities to achieve equity and democracy in the city. Authors include Jordan Flaherty, Tracie Washington, Saia Smith, Shaena Johnson, and others.

Kalamu ya Salaam blog and web archive

http://kalamu.posterous.com/

Kalamu's subscribable posterous site is continuously updated with links to the current works of African American and African diasporic musicians, writers, and artists; publication opportunities for emerging writers; multi-media-based social criticism and world news, especially concerning global social justice struggles; and New Orleans cultural events.

Open Society Institute, Katrina: An Unnatural Disaster

http://www.soros.org/resources/multimedia/katrina

A collection of blogs and multi-media resources including films, photography, oral histories, and debates about the most pressing issues facing New Orleans in the years since Hurricane Katrina.

Karran Harper Royal: EdutalkNOLA

Ms. Royal works for Pyramid Parent Resource Center, which helps parents of special needs children learn to advocate for their children in school settings. Ms. Royal is also on the leadership team of Parents Across America.

http://www.edutalknola.com

Local Anti-Racist Curriculum and Pedagogy Resources:

A Katrina Reader: Readings by and for Anti-Racist Educators and Organizers

http://katrinareader.org/

Collected teaching and organizing resources on solidarity-building, as well as interviews, articles, and grassroots journalism concerning pre-Katrina New Orleans community organizations and post-Katrina struggles for an equitable city-wide recovery.

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshops

http://www.pisab.org/

Through dialogue, reflection, role-playing, strategic planning and presentations, the People's Institute's intensive anti-racism training process challenges participants to analyze the structures of power and privilege that hinder social equity and prepares them to be effective organizers for justice. These workshops offer useful tools for preparing democratic, anti-racist curricula and staff training. A *calendar* of workshops and other resources can be found at this website.

Teaching the Levees

http://www.teachingthelevees.org/

A resource for teaching Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* in middle school and high school classrooms. This curriculum guide and multi-media resources are designed to increase teachers' access to methods for promoting democratic dialogue and civic engagement in the classroom.

Internet Resources on Culture and Art in New Orleans Neighborhoods:

Ashé Cultural Arts Center

http://www.ashecac.org/

Ashé's calendar and mailing list can keep teachers notified about many local programs in community development through the arts, ranging from weekly community sings, to public health programs, to community-based theatre and cross-racial dialogues, to artist/educator collaboratives, and local and national visual art exhibitions and film series.

Backstreet Cultural Museum

http://www.backstreetmuseum.org/

Located at 1116 St. Claude Avenue, the Backstreet Cultural Museum contains exhibits on Mardi Gras Indian and Social Aid and Pleasure Club histories and costume traditions. It features guided tours by museum director Sylvester Francis. It also features a film collection of the past thirty years of Mardi Gras Indian performance and second line parading. As part of its education and civic engagement work, the museum also hosts a yearly back-to-school picnic that provides over 250 youth with school supplies.

Guardians of The Flame Blog.

http://guardiansoftheflame.posterous.com/.

Big Chief Brian Harrison Nelson and Big Queen Cherice Harrison-Nelson's Mardi Gras Indian blog contains links to current Mardi Gras Indian events, films, archival resources, and oral histories.

Junebug Productions

http://www.junebugproductions.org/

Directed today by Stephanie McKee, Junebug Productions was formerly by the legendary John O'Neal, the co-founder of the Free Southern Theater and one of the creators of the story-circle method. Junebug Productions presents original theatre productions and cultural events grounded in the experiences of working-class African Americans in the South. Through their Free Southern Theater Institute, Junebug also offers semester-long community arts and theatre-making courses as partnerships with a range of local universities. In 2013, Junebug will spearhead the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Free Southern Theater, an event which promises to bring together theatre artists, Civil Rights and Black Arts movement veterans, and scholars from around the world with New Orleans residents (especially New Orleans youth) for a year-long series of performances, conversations, lectures, and others activities.

Mondo Bizarro Productions' I-Witness Central City.

http://www.mondobizarro.org/blog/?page_id=7

An interactive story-tour and online digital story map of the Central City neighborhood that features oral histories and short films with neighborhood artists, community leaders, church leaders, and residents. The cell-phone version of this story site project is interactive—students and teachers can call in and leave messages with their own stories about the neighborhood for future inclusion in the project.

The Neighborhood Story Project

http://www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org/

Located in the Seventh Ward, the Neighborhood Story Project leads writing workshops and publishes books by, about, and for New Orleans residents, especially New Orleans youth. All books are available online and at local bookstores. The Neighborhood Story Project is a frequent partner of and longterm presence in Recovery School District and New Orleans Public schools and offers many events and creative/curriculum resources for teachers. See also the NSP's place-based *Cornerstones* project, an interactive oral history project and book about public gathering places in New Orleans that hold significance in local residents' lives: http://www.cornerstonesproject.org/.

New Orleans African American Museum

http://noaam.org/

Located in Tremé at 1418 Governor Nicholls Street, the mission of the New Orleans African American Museum is to preserve, interpret, and promote the African American cultural heritage of New Orleans. Community events and discussions are a frequent part of the Museum's program.

The New Orleans Tribune

Available at newsstands and at http://theneworleanstribune.com/

This weekly, progressive African American newspaper covers the issues facing the African American community in the city. With frequent articles about public education and African American history, The Tribune is an excellent resource for classroom reading.

The Trumpet

Available at newsstands and at http://www.npnnola.com/trumpets/view/240/read-the-trumpet.

Weekly neighborhood news and information magazine by the Neighborhood Partnership Network. The Trumpet presents articles by local residents and lists current and developing community resources and meetings.

Literature and Literary Criticism:

Chicken Bones: A Journal for Literary and Artistic African American Themes.

http://www.nathanielturner.com

Edited by Rudy Lewis, this phenomenal online journal community includes literary works, biographies, and essays by and about African American writers, many of whom are from New Orleans. Authors include: Marcus Christian, Tom Dent, Kalamu ya Salaam, Jerry Ward, Mona Lisa Saloy, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Langston Hughes, Gil Scott Heron, and many others.

"La Bibliothèque Tintamarre," n.d.

http://www.centenary.edu/french/louisiane.html.

Online database of French Louisiana Literature, including works by Afro-Creole authors such as Rodolphe and Pierre-Aristide Desdunes, Armand Lanusse (*Les Cenelles*), and many more.

New Orleans History and Geography:

Documenting the American South: Primary Resources for the Study of Southern History, Literature and Culture. University of North Carolina.

http://docsouth.unc.edu/index.html

Includes primary history and literature sources on a variety of subjects relating to New Orleans, including the history of African American Southern Churches, slave narratives, Southern periodicals, literature, photography, and oral histories. Also includes Teachers' Toolkits and Lesson Plans: http://docsouth.unc.edu/classroom/lessonplans/aa_history.html

The Greater New Orleans Data Center

http://www.gnocdc.org/

A searchable database for pre- and post-Katrina demographic statistics in New Orleans. Includes neighborhood profiles and race-, class-, and neighborhood-based analyses of recovery, race- and class-analysis of census data, and publication of all new information regarding New Orleans's continued forms of recovery and development.

Journal of American History: Through the Eye of Katrina

http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/projects/katrina/content.html

A 2007 collection of articles by leading US history scholars as well as collected resources for researching New Orleans history from the Colonial Era to today.

Louisiana Digital Library

http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/

Contains photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, oral histories, and more that document history and culture in Louisiana.

Louisiana Humanities Center: Readings in Louisiana History and Culture

http://www.leh.org/html/relic.html

A wealth of resources for teaching and learning Louisiana history, featuring an online encyclopedia (*KNOW: LA*), videos, photography, interactive historic tours, and podcasts.

Louisiana Studies in Historic Preservation: African American Life

http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/laheritage/AfricanAmericanLife/index.html

Lesson plans and classroom resources for teaching African American Louisiana history to grades 6-12. This curriculum may be most useful if read and taught with a critical eye for how dominant narratives about the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement often function paradoxically to render ongoing forms of structural racism invisible.

New Orleans Research Collaborative

http://nolaresearch.org/

Emory University-based scholarly bibliography of all published resources on New Orleans. Includes topical bibliographies such as Race, Labor, Mardi Gras, Music, Urban Studies, Hurricane Katrina, Environment. Soon to include full access to full Zotero web library on New Orleans research including centralized access to many of the digital resources listed here.

Historic New Orleans Collection

http://hnoc.org

Film, Video, and Audio Resources

Many of these films can be purchased online for a small fee. Most may also be available to educators free of charge if you write directly to the producers or directors.

All on a Mardi Gras Day. Royce Osborn, dir. New Orleans: Spyboy Pictures 2008.

A captivating filmic history of African American Mardi Gras traditions from the nineteenth century to today. This short film would be useful in secondary and middle-school classrooms during student research projects about the important role carnival traditions play in generating community identities and histories in New Orleans.

Baby Love. Students at the Center. New Orleans: Neo-Griot Productions and Students at the Center, 2002.

A feature length film by and for New Orleans students, *Baby Love* was designed to help open conversations about violence, gender oppression, and relationships among urban youth.

Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans. Dawn Logsdon and Lolis Eric Elie, dirs. Berkeley, CA: Serendipity Films, 2008.

A crucial filmic history of Black New Orleans history from Congo Square until today, this film includes narratives by Lolis Eric Elie (writer for HBO's Tremé series), local historian Keith Weldon Medley, Kalamu ya Salaam of SAC, and many other local intellectuals and artists.

Land of Opportunity. Luisa Dantas, dir., and Rebecca Snedecker and Judith Hefland, producers. New Orleans: Independent, 2010.

An independent film about the privatization of public housing in New Orleans.

Mardi Gras: Made in China. David Redmon, dir. Carnivalesque Films, 2005.

This film provocatively juxtaposes the consumption ethic undergirding Bourbon Street and Uptown Mardi Gras parades with the lives of the young women factory workers in China who make Mardi Gras beads. It also highlights the ways in which globalization functions to alienate the struggles and suffering of different oppressed populations whose labor and other resources are abused or stolen in order to fuel the engines of neoliberal capitalism.

Tootie's Last Suit. Lisa Katzman, dir. New York: Pomegrante Productions, 2007.

An independent biography film about the legacy of Mardi Gras Indian Chief, Allison (Tootie) Montana, who died in June, 2005.

Trouble the Water. Tia Lesson and Carl Deal, dirs. Ashland, OR: Elsewhere Films, 2008.

This award-winning film draws on the video recordings that Kimberly Roberts, a hip hop artist and former Ninth Ward resident, made during Hurricane Katrina and during her family's evacuation from the city. With first-hand footage of the Lower Ninth Ward before, during, and after the storm, the film follows Roberts' family's heroic rescue efforts and their struggle to return home after the storm.

When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts. Spike Lee, dir. New York: HBO, 2006.

This four-part, oral-history based documentary traces the racial implications of the Katrina disaster and early, failed recovery and rebuilding efforts. Act Two of this documentary also historicizes New Orleans's African American music traditions and their role in the city's history and its potential recovery. Lesson Plans for teaching with this film are available online (and can be ordered in print-form): http://www.teachingthelevees.org/

Writing With Light. Students at the Center. DVD. Disks 1 and 2. New Orleans: Students at the Center, 2007.

This DVD contains stories of SAC's pre- and post-Katrina classroom strategies as well as methodological resources for teachers focusing on the story circle method, student-centered approaches to teaching writing and literature, and teaching video production.

See Also: Patois Film Festival, http://patoisfilmfest.org/

A yearly human rights film festival held in venues throughout New Orleans and always featuring the works of emerging local independent filmmakers.

Books and Articles

Organized by Topic.
Marked when available online.
* Asterisk indicates highly recommended.

African American New Orleans History

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*"Le Code Noir, ou Édit du Roi, servant de règlement pour le gouvernement et l'adiminstration de la justice, police, discipline et le commerce des esclaves nègres, dans la province et colonie de la Louisianne; donné à Versailles au mois de Mars 1724." In Le code noir, ou, recueil des réglemens rendus jusquà présent: concernant le gouvernement, l'administration de la justice, la police, la discipline & le commerce des négres dans es colonies françoises, et les conseils & compagnies établis à ce sujet. Paris: Chez L. F. Prault, 1742. http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/louisianas-code-noir-1724

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Colophon

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Dr. Waldo Martin
Department of History
University of California, Berkeley

April 25, 2005

SAC Students at the Center

the Renaissance Project

An Open Letter

Dear Students, Teachers, Staff, Parents and Community Supporters of Frederick A. Douglass High School:

After meeting and listening to many of you over the last several months, I am moved to express my deep admiration for your commitment to the creation of the New Orleans Civil Rights Memorial in your neighborhood. Located at the site where Homer Plessy was arrested for challenging the Separate Car Act on June 7, 1892, the Park promises to be the first and only memorial of its kind in our nation.

By definition, historians like myself come in after the history has actually taken place. Like the crime scene investigators so popular on television today, we inspect the evidence, interview witnesses and draw our conclusions from a distance. Rarely do we get the chance to witness history while it is in the process of being made.

Whether you recognize it at this moment or not, Plessy Park is going to challenge and potentially reshape our nation's image of New Orleans' role in the civil rights movement, as well as our image of young people and their role in solving the problems of inequality and injustice we face today. Let me briefly cite the two most obvious reasons.

First, let me draw your attention to the unique collaborations you are forging with the Crescent City Peace Alliance, the Douglass Community Coalition and New Orleans sculptor John T. Scott. While Plessy Park will be the latest in a series of civil rights monuments being built throughout the south, it will be the only one designed, fabricated and operated with the central involvement of young people.

Second, at a time when so many have given up on neighborhood high schools like yours, your idea to incorporate Plessy Park as a central curriculum theme is a bold strategy to put 'knowledge of place' at the center of the learning process. For these and other reasons, I see both Plessy Park and Frederick A. Douglass High School becoming important cultural and educational destinations for thousands of people every year.

History has taught us many lessons, but the greatest and must important may be this: *until the People take charge of our past, we will never be in charge of our future.* By creating a permanent public stage for the stories of thousands of unknown New Orleans civil rights heroes to be told—people from every background and creed—you are challenging all of us to re-imagine our democracy. You are daring us to recognize ourselves as a nation of Homer Plessys: shoemakers engaged in the daily practice of self-governance. This is patriotism in the truest sense of the word.

You—Douglass students, teachers, staff, parents, and supporters—are an inspiration to all those committed to freedom and equality in our present-day world. You are making history a living and breathing force for justice, and we owe a huge debt of appreciation to all of you. I am proud to be part of your project.

Yours in the struggle,
Waldo E. Martin, Jr.

Waldo E. Martin, Jr. is a distinguished professor in American History at University of California, Berkeley. He is author of numerous publications, such as *The Mind of Frederick Douglass,* and co-editor of *Civil Rights in the United States: An Encyclopedia.* Dr. Martin was invited by the Crossroads Center for Art, Learning and Community to visit and address the Douglass Community.

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Frederick A. Douglass High School is now CLOSED.

SEE PAGE 8 for more information.