

The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection

Fighting for Inclusion: Blacks' Continual Struggle for Citizenship Rights

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Introduction

Black New Orleanians have long struggled for the same basic rights and opportunities that most whites take for granted. Initially, the fight for civil rights was led by free blacks who fought only for their own inclusion, not for their enslaved brethren.¹ These free people of color sought equality in a society that defined freedom based on race: whites were free, blacks were slaves. Indeed, the free blacks' very existence was an anomaly, and this contradiction became keener each year as they lived as uninvited guests in their own community during the decades before the Civil War.

From Reconstruction through the 20th century, piecemeal gains in education, voting rights, and civil rights were typically offset by retaliatory regulations that impeded racial progress in New Orleans. In response, black civic and fraternal organizations—some national, some local—pursued legal remedies and representation. Like the local black community itself, these groups were diverse; at times they competed for membership and leadership, often fracturing along class lines. Some partnered with progressive white organizations, whereas others pursued a black-only agenda. The black press and black clergy proved to be valuable allies in advancing specific goals.

Post-Katrina, many familiar concerns have resurfaced: income inequality, lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities, and voting restrictions. If today's remedies are inadequate, black legislators are now as much a target for criticism as their white counterparts. Grassroots organizations such as Take 'Em Down NOLA and HousingNOLA have emerged, joining enduring chapters of more traditional groups like the Urban League and NAACP, to press for a New Orleans that lives up to its reputation as a multiethnic, multicultural oasis of the Deep South.

Pre-Civil War

In 1805 the new American government restricted political rights to landholding whites who could now vote, hold political office, and serve on juries. While free blacks had not enjoyed complete equality with whites under French or Spanish rule, the inequality between free blacks and whites was not as sharply defined under Continental control because no one had voting rights and only a few privileged whites monopolized political power.²

A group of free black men formally protested the restrictions, claiming that the new laws violated the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, which guaranteed equal rights to all inhabitants. Governor Claiborne, however, rejected their demand and interpretation of the treaty.³ This was a bellwether for restrictions that would further erode the rights of free blacks and even suggest their return to slave status.

Prior to the Civil War, free blacks suffered a continual loss of rights, including sailors being confined to their ship or facing re-enslavement, black passengers being restricted to "star" streetcars (marked with a black star), and prohibitions on free blacks being able to attend church at the same times as slaves. For example, the police arrested the pastor of St. James A.M.E. Church, who allowed both free and un-free blacks to attend the same service.⁴ At times this curtailment of rights would lead to protest. In 1833, a group of armed blacks attacked



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a streetcar driver who refused to admit them, and in 1843 an angry free black man shot at the conductor who did not stop for him.⁵ Despite continual protests, streetcars were not desegregated until after the Civil War – an advance that would prove to be only temporary.⁶

Eventually, the state banned all new black in-migrations and ordered departure of all unauthorized black residents. During the 1840s, New Orleans' free black population declined nearly 50 percent as a result of hostile state actions, from 19,226 in 1840 to 9,961 ten years later.⁷ An 1857 law banned future emancipations; and an 1859 amendment ordered free blacks to “voluntarily” return to slavery, though they could choose their new masters. Many fled in protest to Mexico, France, and to northern states, taking with them their valuable talents and collective wealth.⁸

Unlike other American migrants, free blacks were denied the opportunity to embrace the larger American culture through interaction in public schools. They especially resented paying taxes to support schools their own children could not attend. Inclusion was their ideal, but, out of necessity, they developed their own separate institutions, schools, theater, and even their own philharmonic orchestra.⁹ In 1845, 17 free men of color published *Les Cenelles*, the first anthology of black verse in the western hemisphere.¹⁰ Though whites considered free black New Orleanians their legal and social inferiors, they were better educated and wealthier than any of their national peers.

Paradoxically, by restricting free blacks—treating them more unfree than free—whites undermined the former's efforts to develop a separate black community. Ironically, some free blacks were former Haitian slaveholders who had always lived apart from Haitian slaves, with whom they shared no racial commonality. Indeed, had Louisiana provided free blacks more rights, they may have become a safety bulwark between whites and slaves. Perhaps contrary to intention, these were not lost years, as exclusion allowed maturation within their own community. Specifically, exclusion of this semi-free group provided a later opportunity for free blacks and slaves to mold into one unified racial group that sought inclusion for both.¹¹

Short-Lived Gains

After the city's fall to the Union in 1862, free black leaders lobbied for full civil rights for both free and enslaved blacks, including voting rights. Many of the leaders were wealthy and educated. For example, the Roudanez brothers (Jean B., a wine merchant, and Louis C., a physician) had received a classical French education and were imbued with French Revolutionary liberalism. Their activist newspaper, *New Orleans Tribune*, propagated these progressive views. Free black leaders failed to gain the vote in 1864, but successfully lobbied to completely abolish slavery, even though some were former slaveholders.¹²

Black leaders joined with moderate white Unionists to organize the Friends of Universal Suffrage and sent Louis Roudanez and E. Arnold Bertonneau as delegates to President Lincoln to demand immediate full citizenship rights, including for former slaves. Lincoln made no commitments, but later expressed his favorable impression of these men.¹³ They also organized a local branch of the National Equal Rights League and sent delegates to the first truly national black civil rights convention in Syracuse, New York. Their delegates were among the few who supported full integration of *all* public facilities, including public schools. They won support from the Scottish Rite Masons, who ordered all lodges to integrate. Although many local white Masons refused to obey, black Scottish Rite Masons became a mainstay of the civil rights leadership of the late 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁴

During Reconstruction, this New Orleans coalition pursued a goal of total inclusion and made important, if short-lived, gains. Among them was the illusive right for blacks, including former slaves, to vote, hold public office, and to serve on juries. They worked to elect several black lieutenant governors, numerous state legislators, a congressman, and school board and city council members.¹⁵ The coalition demanded and won equal access to all public accommodations, and integrated schools. But bridging the racial divide proved too great, and even some black leaders shied away from what black governor P.B.S. Pinchback decried as unwanted forced integration.

Within the decade following the end of Reconstruction, the nation's highest court voided Louisiana's public accommodations law. In 1879, the state re-segregated public schools and restricted LSU to whites, while creating Southern University as a black school. Nominally a university, in actuality it also enrolled students in upper primary grades as well as high school. For most of its existence in New Orleans, where it remained until relocation to East Baton Rouge Parish in 1914, only a minority of Southern's students were college-level students. Pursuit of integrated schools could have seemed like a fool's errand, but it was a key component of many black leaders' goal of total inclusion, believing that there could never be one New Orleans society as long as there were racially separate schools.

In 1890, the state banned interracial railroad travel. In response, a predominantly black Citizens Committee organized an unsuccessful challenge that led to the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in which the nation's high court ruled racial separation constitutional, as long as facilities were “substantially” equal.¹⁶ Unfortunately, *Plessy* led to further segregation: streetcars, hotels, theaters, restaurants, jailhouses and even whorehouses, and, in 1898, the state eliminated virtually all its black voters by using literacy tests and good morals or property-holding qualifications.

Frustration Sets In

Racial violence, including police brutality, increased during the last years of the 19th century. Some lost hope and left the city for northern or foreign places, which mirrored similar actions taken by their ancestors a half-century earlier. While most attempted peaceful means to ameliorate the worse effects of the new racial order, a minority were attracted to the latest “return to Africa” movement as the only escape from political and civil deprivations. One of the movement leaders was Robert Charles, a Mississippi transplant who encouraged blacks to emigrate to Liberia.

In 1900, Charles was at the center of racial violence which affected the city’s race relations for many years to come. He responded to police brutality with self-defense. By the time the three-day incident ended, he had killed seven, including four policemen, and wounded about a dozen other whites.¹⁷ In the end he was killed, and mutilated, as then rampaging white rioters killed or wounded more than 50 innocent black victims.¹⁸ Following Charles’ action, conservative whites pushed for further racial emasculation and isolation, which frightened or silenced many blacks who felt compelled to “go along to get along.”

Additionally, fading hopes for quality education further descended when, also in 1900, the local school board eliminated grades 6 through 8 in its “colored” schools because “it was giving up the pretense of creating separate schools identical with white schools.” Instead, it “would follow the South’s trend to provide Negroes only as much education that was suitable for the jobs available to them.” Shockingly, Tulane University President Edwin A. Alderman shared those same sentiments: “I believe in the education of the Negro. I believe in the education of the mule. I believe in the education of all animals.”¹⁹ For much of the first decade of the 20th century, although there were no public schools dedicated to serving black high school students within the state, blacks were forced to petition the school board for a return of grades 6 through 8, foregoing efforts to secure a high school.

Organizing for Change

The dream for full inclusion became more elusive, often caused by intra-racial divisions. There were Creole/Anglo, Catholic/Protestant, Uptown/Downtown splits. The small black middle class often turned inward and abandoned the lower classes. But like most oppressed groups, common suffering and rejection eventually forced greater group cooperation and interaction. Differences lessened slowly as they interacted more with each other within the same schools, the same organizations, and the same buildings. The Pythian Temple, a large modern building in downtown New Orleans, provided more opportunity for significant inter-group interactions in professional settings. Over time it would house lawyers, doctors, civic groups, insurance companies, fraternal groups, as well as newspapers. It became a meeting place for the black middle class.²¹

Most educated blacks belonged to fraternal and social organizations such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Peter Claver, a Catholic organization. These helped to raise funds for civil rights campaigns and to improve education. John G. Lewis, Grand Master of Prince Hall Masons, was an important Protestant leader whose father had been a Reconstruction legislator. Lewis was a major supporter of the state and national NAACP. Similarly, Walter L. Cohen, a leading black Republican who was sometimes criticized for his cautious approach, was also a leader among Catholics in New Orleans. Cohen mentored a fellow Claverite and later civil rights icon, Alexander P. Tureaud. In 1911, New Orleans sought to establish a local chapter of the NAACP, the new national biracial coalition organized in 1909. The NAACP, however, initially required an equal number of black and white charter members. This proved to be a difficult task, and New Orleans only received a charter in 1915 after the national organization changed its policy.

Within three years of being established, the local NAACP chapter published the *Vindicator*, which publicized its demands for a public high school, an end to police brutality, an end to using black female prisoners to clean public streets, and for the vote.²³ Regaining the vote was a continual objective that would prove elusive. After the Supreme Court invalidated the “grandfather clause,” the state

NEW ORLEANS’ FIRST BLACK HIGH SCHOOL

McDonogh #35 High School was opened in 1917 as the city’s first black public high school. The “new” school, actually an abandoned white school, quickly became overcrowded and students had to attend day or night sessions. It offered college prep courses as well as a teacher training program. Many of its graduates played leading roles in education, business, and civil rights as the black middle class began a slow expansion. Prior to that, Southern University functioned as the local black high school before it was relocated to East Baton Rouge Parish.²⁰

WHAT IS CREOLE?

What made people “Creole” was having been born and raised in New Orleans, usually with colonial-era roots. It cut across the lines of race, language, and national origin. A Creole was almost always Catholic and Latin in culture, and usually had significant amounts of French or Spanish blood, but a Creole could also be of German, Acadian, Irish, or other origin.²²

required prospective applicants to produce a registered voter (basically a white man) to certify their “good moral character.” The state limited membership in the Democratic Party to whites. Hence the few registered black voters, Republicans, could not participate in the Democratic primaries to vote for a nominee. This was important, as the Democratic nominee *always* won in the general election. Because these restrictions were so effective, there were only 802 black registered voters in New Orleans in 1921.²⁴

The NAACP won few victories during its first decades, but at least provided an opportunity for group protests. It circulated anti-lynching petitions and sponsored poll tax drives, and supported issues such as “Negro History Week” celebrations. Its first major victory came against a 1923 city ordinance mandating segregated neighborhoods. Decent housing, already scarce, became a cause around which black New Orleanians could rally. NAACP membership increased, although housing segregation did not abate. The protest also stimulated a small increase in voter registration.²⁵

Much of the local chapter’s work was carried on by women, usually non-paid secretaries; yet women rarely held an office above second vice president. The typical NAACP member had attended high school or college and was middle class by status, if not income. In reality, its agenda was more attractive to the small black intelligentsia.²⁶ Initially, the NAACP had little support from the working class.²⁷ On the other hand, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) had a brief but exciting existence in New Orleans with a strong appeal to working-class blacks. The UNIA was not a protest organization, but stressed race pride and self-help. It did not protest against segregation, but encouraged blacks to form and support black businesses. At its peak during the early 1920s, it had several local chapters with combined membership much greater than the NAACP’s, although some were members of both.²⁸

The absence of stable black newspapers hampered efforts to publicize and coordinate actions. Few survived more than a year, mostly lacking sufficient subscribers or a strong advertising base. However, the movement gained key support when C.C. Dejoie, a descendant of pre-Civil War Creoles of color, founded the *Louisiana Weekly* in 1925. His family owned a local insurance company that was able to subsidize the newspaper. Dejoie, who had earlier helped to galvanize support against the 1923 city neighborhood ordinance, helped to bridge the intra-racial divide and was a member of Straight Congregational Church, arguably the city’s most prestigious black church. Many of its parishioners were graduates or faculty members of Straight College, which later merged with New Orleans University to form Dillard University.²⁹

Unfortunately for the NAACP, gains made in the 1920s were quickly lost in the Depression. The national NAACP lost more than half of its members, especially among civil servants and schoolteachers. This forced it to respond to criticism that it failed to address bread-and-butter issues. At best, the NAACP acted on behalf of the masses, but did not make serious overtures to recruit them into active participation. It now faced challenges from other organizations: communists, and the new progressive labor union, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Both appealed more directly to unskilled workers in the black community and made brief inroads, but violence, or the threat of violence, aborted these efforts before they bore much fruit. In 1938 there was a violent clash between the local affiliates of the CIO and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for control of the longshoremen unions. The more conservative AFL, supported by the business establishment, used goon squads and the police to intimidate CIO supporters who were branded communists. The insurgency quickly fizzled.³⁰

In 1938, conservative blacks and white moderates formed a chapter of the Urban League,³¹ which had been founded in 1911 by Booker T. Washington’s supporters to draw away support from the “radical race-mixing” NAACP. The Urban League, which received significant white support, did not take the lead in civil rights, but played a role in providing research and publicity for other organizations. In 1941, taking a more direct approach, Ernest Wright, a trained social worker, organized the People’s Defense League and encouraged blacks to fight for all their rights. In his militant column in the *Louisiana Weekly*, “I Dare Say,” he challenged the old black leadership to actively identify with the underclass. He organized a strike by black agents against local black-owned insurance companies, lost, and served 60 days in jail, but he emerged as a trusted leader of the black masses.³²

Litigating for Change

During the 1930s, the national NAACP began a transformation and now focused on undermining legal segregation. Charles Houston, the NAACP’s new general counsel and the first black dean of Howard University Law School, had helped train a cadre of civil rights lawyers as part of this new strategy to overturn legal segregation by forcing states to equalize facilities for both races, or failing that, to desegregate them. He launched simultaneous attacks against unequal teacher salaries, the absence of separate facilities for blacks in higher education, and gross inequities in educational facilities in public schools. In 1939, Houston’s prized student, Thurgood Marshall, came to New Orleans to assist black teachers in their lawsuit against the local school board, which paid black teachers an average of 40 percent of what their white counterparts earned.

Marshall enlisted the support of local attorney A. P. Tureaud, who had served intermittently on the NAACP’s executive committee, but had once resigned in protest when the branch hired a white attorney to litigate a voter registration case. He was one of a handful of struggling black attorneys and was, for a brief period, the state’s only black lawyer. In 1941, he sued successfully on behalf of black

teachers, resulting in all New Orleans teachers' salaries being equalized in 1942.³³ Most black teachers received substantial salary increases and many joined the NAACP. They and their students benefitted from the NAACP school equalizations cases, which brought either physical improvements or new construction of black schools. The membership increase made possible the hiring of Daniel E. Byrd as a full-time Executive Secretary. Byrd became the founding president of the Louisiana State Conference of NAACP Branches, and subsequently its full-time State Field Secretary.³⁴

After the Supreme Court overturned the "white primary" in 1944, black voter registration slowly increased, but not without white resistance. A. P. Tureaud had to file a local suit (*Hall v. Nagel*) to force compliance in Louisiana, but by 1950, there were more than 100,000 African Americans registered, about 10 percent of the state's total. In a few places, the black vote made a difference in choosing white candidates such as Chep Morrison, the "reform" mayor of New Orleans, and Earl Long, who was elected governor after recruiting black voters.

The major thrust for inclusion continued to be around public education. For example, in 1950 the school board pushed a millage increase, and in a belated effort to provide blacks with equality within segregation, earned strong black support after promising that more than 60 percent of the new money would be spent on black schools. And, in 1951, Tureaud sued to desegregate New Orleans public schools.³⁵

When World War II ended, the NAACP accelerated its push for the vote, as well as improvements in education. However, many of the black masses, especially WWII veterans, chafed under second-class citizenship: lack of civility by public officials and white merchants, segregated transit, and exclusion from public-owned facilities. Northern black soldiers who came to New Orleans were especially sensitive to problems they faced in transportation, housing, dining, and other facilities as they innocently violated local laws and customs. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the legal approach for civil rights was augmented by an increase in direct action as political headwinds strengthened.

The State Pushes Back

After the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* ruling declaring school segregation illegal, the state legislature passed a slew of laws to create a firewall to prevent desegregation. It mandated racial separation in toilets, waiting rooms, dining facilities, and water fountains in train and bus terminals. It also banned interracial interaction in social and sports events.³⁶ State employees, including teachers, could not belong to organizations that advocated racial integration. As a last resort, the state threatened to close public schools to prevent desegregation. Token school desegregation began in 1960, producing violent resistance and the withdrawal of many whites from public schools. Ten years after *Brown*, most schools remained completely segregated; no meaningful desegregation occurred until 1969, when the Supreme Court, which had originally called for desegregation to take place "with all deliberate speed," ordered schools to desegregate "at once."³⁷

The state legislature continued to approve more punitive legislation that adversely affected New Orleans' black population. In 1960 it criminalized common law marriages and stopped welfare payments to parents of illegitimate children, affecting more than 20,000 children, most of them African Americans. The state further restricted voter registration by denying the vote to persons who had been convicted of felonies, who had lived in a common law marriage, or who had been the parent of an illegitimate child within the last five years.³⁸

Eventually, the state used a law first designed to combat the Ku Klux Klan in an attempt to destroy the NAACP. When the latter refused to disclose its membership, it was enjoined from operating within the state. Although later overturned, the order forced the NAACP underground. It retained a skeletal presence and was virtually replaced by the New Orleans Improvement Association, which under new leadership successfully sued to desegregate public transit (1958) and Audubon and City Parks (1959). NAACP attorneys also successfully sued to desegregate the new LSU campus in New Orleans, which became a hotbed of civil rights activism.

LATE-ARRIVING ALLIES

Paradoxically, the state's draconian actions created new black support. The movement gained additional allies from more conservative quarters: the black clergy. Traditionally, most black clergymen stressed spiritual freedom; i.e. happiness in the world to come, rather than this present life. A few suggested that racism was a form of persecution that Scriptures predicted that Christians would suffer. Now more black shepherds began to respond to attacks against their sheep. When the United Way excluded the Urban League from its 1957 campaign, black ministers, prodded by the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA), spearheaded a fund-raising effort to save the League. Similarly, when the state cut welfare payments to illegitimate children, a broad coalition of religious and civic leaders rallied to their support, although not nearly enough to offset the state cuts. Increasingly, the IMA, under leadership of Dr. A. L. Davis Jr., played a key role in the movement. In 1957 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. formally organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at Davis' church, historic New Zion Baptist Church, which hosted many civil rights rallies over the years. Davis was the lead plaintiff in the successful lawsuit that desegregated public transit in New Orleans in 1958.

The Push for Inclusion Broadens

The NAACP's temporary departure occurred as black activism increased. The Consumers League of Greater New Orleans was organized and was successful in gaining meaningful employment for African Americans on Dryades Street, a predominantly black shopping area. Undoubtedly, however, the most dynamic of the new organizations was the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE).

CORE, more than the NAACP, had utilized non-violent direct action, popularized by Gandhi and the CIO. With the onset of sit-ins at black colleges in 1960, it moved into Louisiana. Young and idealistic, CORE's members played a significant role in the student-led strikes at Southern University in Baton Rouge in the spring of 1960. Ultimately, however, university officials quelled the movement when they expelled key student leaders. Several returned home to organize direct action in New Orleans.³⁹

One student leader, Jerome Smith, became a founding member of the New Orleans chapter. Rudolph Lombard, a student leader at Xavier, became CORE's chairman. It also attracted white students from Tulane. The challenge to its role as the dominant historical force in the pursuit of equality forced the NAACP into increased activism. The national office sent a full-time organizer to reactivate the NAACP's New Orleans Youth Council. CORE and the Youth Council planned the city's first sit-in in September 1960, only a few days after Mayor Morrison opined that New Orleans blacks would not engage in these types of activities.⁴⁰

CORE provided the sit-in demonstrators, and the Youth Council picketed the targeted Woolworth store following the arrests of CORE members.⁴¹ These young activists pushed older black leaders into new assertiveness, which they used to pressure white leaders. Various civic, fraternal, and social organizations coalesced in a coordinating committee to work to improve employment opportunities, desegregate public accommodations, and increase black voter registrations.⁴² While there was sporadic picketing over the next year, none of the stores immediately capitulated to their demands. Many CORE members subsequently left New Orleans for other parts of the South where they encountered more danger and intense opposition in small rural communities. Smith, one of the Freedom Riders, was attacked and beaten by police on his way to New Orleans from Birmingham, Alabama, in 1961.

On the other hand, most New Orleans NAACP Youth Council members stayed close to home, conducting voter registration and get out the vote campaigns.⁴³ In the spring of 1963, the Youth Council joined the adult NAACP branch, along with CORE and the Consumers League, to pressure Canal Street merchants to improve black hiring and to desegregate restroom and dining facilities. White merchants in 1963, in an effort to avoid a boycott during the busy Easter season, agreed to hire 150 blacks, mostly in sales, by the end of June. Ultimately, they hired less than half the targeted number. As a result, the Youth Council conducted a successful two-year (1963–65) campaign against dozens of department stores, which resulted in the employment of hundreds of black salespersons and mid-level managers, and the complete desegregation of dining and restroom facilities.⁴⁴

Passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts altered the activist phase of the civil rights movement. After 1965, most civil rights groups worked to increase the black vote. No organization formally disbanded, but some became dormant. A new group, the Black Panthers, made a brief appearance in New Orleans during the spring and summer of 1970. Although they pursued peaceful goals such as a breakfast program for the poor, the police targeted them as communist-influenced, and after a shootout in the Desire Housing Project, arrested more than a dozen Panthers. A jury would later acquit all of them.⁴⁵

Several civil rights leaders ran for public office. In 1968 Dutch Morial, president of the NAACP (1963–65), was elected the state's first black legislator since Reconstruction. In 1978, he became New Orleans' first black mayor. Avery Alexander, who had been dragged down the steps of City Hall after staging a sit-in in the basement cafeteria, was elected to the State House of Representatives. Later he became that body's Speaker-Pro-Tem.⁴⁶ Eventually blacks were elected to the city council, school board, both houses of the legislature, as assessors, and to judicial seats at every level, including Chief Justice.⁴⁷ Successful redistricting lawsuits would later increase the number of black elected officials. By 2000, Louisiana had more black elected officials than any other state. Thus, African Americans who two centuries earlier had been rigidly kept apart from the larger society now had become a significant part of it, some occupying the very positions they once challenged.

Assessing the Gains

The NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization, continued to protest educational, electoral, health, and housing inequities. Occasionally, it organized mass demonstrations in support of key issues: affirmative action and social or economic justice, but essentially the civil rights movement after the mid-1960s shifted to consolidating and maximizing the gains won by 1965.

Success, however, had been uneven. To be sure, true school desegregation was largely limited to a few magnet schools as most whites abandoned the public school system. Ironically, there would be more integration in neighboring parishes, where many whites had fled. Most gains proved to provide little help for the black working class. The new laws provided political and civil rights, but not economic inclusion and equality. Interracial and even intra-class disparities increased and worsened following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Post-

Katrina housing shortages added a concurrent economic impact to the city's physical devastation as many poorer residents were unable to return to their pre-storm homes. Instead, a number of former predominantly black neighborhoods experienced an influx of white residents that many decried as gentrification. Contemporary civic protests often target a government that includes many black officials. At times the racial divide now manifests as the increasing flight of middle-class blacks from public schools, and fights by middle-class blacks to keep less fortunate blacks out of their neighborhoods.⁴⁸

Ostensibly the African American struggle for inclusion was on behalf of all black New Orleanians, but the traditional struggle had been fought primarily to gain rights that more often benefited black men, though a majority of activists were female. During the 1960s, black women such as CORE leader Oretha Castle Haley and activist Dorothy Mae Taylor began a slow but steady climb. In 1971, Taylor was the first African-American woman elected to the State House of Representatives and fought to reform the criminal justice system. As a city councilperson, she worked to end discrimination in private organizations such as Carnival clubs. Haley became a power broker and sought-after political leader. In May 2018, as New Orleans reaches its tricentennial anniversary, a black woman, LaToya Cantrell, will become the city's first female mayor. Additionally, Helena Moreno, a Hispanic state legislator, and Cyndi Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American, will become members of a much more diverse City Council.⁴⁹

Keeping Them Honest

The protest tradition continues, but now African Americans are often on both sides of the divide. New activists have appeared to redress concerns of the black working class; they understand the need for an economic renaissance to complete the unfinished work of the civil rights movement. These gadflies target absentee representatives, including black leaders who live outside their elected districts in the inner city⁵⁰ and those who shy away from controversial issues. For example, community leaders such as Carl Galmon⁵¹ have led the efforts to remove slaveholders' names from public schools. Randy Mitchell and Malcolm Suber⁵² have been at the forefront in protesting police brutality and advocating for the removal of monuments named for Confederate slaveholders. They show equal fervor in protesting against black and white officials.

Conclusion

Disparities between black and white New Orleanians are stubbornly apparent in 2018, and confirmed by metrics of income, poverty, health, education, criminal justice, and voter turnout.⁵³ Yet looking back 300 years to the city's founding, the historical struggle for equality and civil rights in New Orleans has made significant gains against entrenched discrimination. Looking forward, there is an increasing urgency for a more resilient and inclusive New Orleans economy—one that fully maximizes the potential of black men and women and other minorities. As New Orleans considers how to pursue a more inclusive economy, it may do well to remember the post-Reconstruction notion held by many black leaders of the day that the goal of total inclusion could never be realized as long as there were racially separate schools. Furthermore, continued vigilance regarding state and local policies and legislation that may hamper efforts to increase inclusion may be necessary as this historic struggle evolves. As the fight for economic inclusion progresses (and sometimes regresses), New Orleanians can lean on their proud history of organizing, litigating, voting, and building broad-based alliances to create new strategies for a more prosperous and inclusive New Orleans.

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40. This author was newly elected president of the reactivated NAACP Youth Council.
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43. The New Orleans Youth Council was one of the NAACP's largest and most effective units for decades. Its membership reached 3,000 during the 1960s. Its senior advisor for more than a quarter-century was Llewelyn J. Soniat, who was selected as the #1 advisor in the country 11 times.
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49. The fall 2017 municipal elections created a more diverse and inclusive city council: three black males, one Caucasian male, one Caucasian female, one Hispanic female and one Vietnamese female; a far cry from the all white male city councils that existed until 1975.
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About the Author

Raphael Cassimere Jr. is a sixth generation New Orleanian. He attended Macarty Elementary, A.J. Bell Jr. High, and Joseph S. Clark Senior High (class of '59) public schools in New Orleans. Cassimere received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in History from LSUNO (now the University of New Orleans). In 1971 he received the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in History from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He was the first black instructor at the University of New Orleans and a member of the History department from 1971-2007.

In 1984 Cassimere was named the initial recipient of the UNO-AMOCO Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching Award, and in 1994, he was selected as the UNO Liberal Arts College Distinguished Alumnus of the Year. In 1996 Dr. Cassimere was appointed one of the three initial recipients of the Seraphia D. Leyda University Teaching Fellowships which "recognize outstanding faculty members for their accomplishments as teachers and reflects the university's continuing commitment to excellence in teaching." Cassimere is the author of "African Americans in New Orleans Before the Civil War." He has been continuously active with the NAACP since 1960.

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About The Data Center

The Data Center is the most trusted resource for data about greater New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana. Since 1997, The Data Center has been an objective partner in bringing reliable, thoroughly researched data to conversations about building a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable region.

The Data Center (formerly known as the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center) became the local authority for tracking post-Katrina recovery with *The New Orleans Index*, developed in partnership with the Brookings Institution.

About The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection

The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection includes contributions from more than a dozen local scholars. These reports will assess the long reach of historical practices on contemporary policies and practices contributing to today's racial disparities across multiple systems (criminal justice, education, housing, business ownership, health care, etc.), and provide recommendations for furthering future progress. In addition, The Data Center will release a comprehensive set of metrics that address the question: "Have black New Orleanians experienced increased economic inclusion since the end of the Civil Rights era?"

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The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection includes studies and reports on timely topics worthy of public consideration. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to The Data Center, its trustees, or its funders.