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**Faubourg Treme: Fighting for Civil Rights in 19th
Century New Orleans, Who's Responsible for
Preserving its Legacy and Culture?**

Performance

Junior Division

Process Paper: 497

Process Paper

After viewing the documentary, Fauberg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans, I was both excited and intrigued by the fact that there were Free People of Color in New Orleans who in the 1800's, owned about 80% of the land in the Treme community. Under French and Spanish rule, slaves (primarily from Senegal and Senegambia) could also work to buy their freedom. This unique suburb also included Europeans from many countries as well as free people from St. Dominique (Haiti) . My curiosity peaked and I was inspired to find out more about Homer Plessy and the Comite des Citoyens (Citizens Committee) which included writers, business owners , newspaper editors and activists who fought to ensure their right to be free of Jim Crow laws. My interest in the topic increased as I wondered why this history is unknown, the reason for racial hatred and what can be done to get rid of it and heal the past.

I conducted my research by using Google Books to search for books relevant to my topic. At the University of Houston, I found several works by authors with expertise on Treme .Two important examples include, *Revolution and Romanticism and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868* by Caryn Cosse Bell, and *We as Freeman : Plessy V. Ferguson*, by Keith Weldon Medley. A few of my books have copies of letters and other documents related to Plessy Versus Ferguson. Extremely important is a book by Rodolph Desdunes , who lived in Treme in the 1800's and includes essays and poems written in French, translated by a friend from Senegal. Primary source newspapers like The New Orleans Tribune were downloaded from data bases from the University of Houston and were photocopied from The New Orleans Historical Collection, Williams Research Center. While at the center, I met with Jennifer Navarre, an archivist, who helped me with primary source documents. I walked through Fauberg Treme, Congo Square, and stood at the historical marker on Press Street where Homer Plessy boarded the train and walked down Rampart Street where he lived.

The Performance category was chosen because it offers a creative way to present my research. My script was developed using primary source material (translations) and information from historians and interviews. I also prepared a short piano piece with the help of my piano teacher, Olga Marek, providing an example of Spanish influence to early jazz music inspiring Jelly Roll Morton, who lived in Treme.

Finally, the National History Day Theme is: Rights and Responsibilities in History. Free People of Color like Captain Arnold Bertonneau, Paul Trevigne, Homer Plessy and others exhibited extreme courage and personal responsibility in their fight for the rights of people of African descent, to participate fully in America as citizens, living its dream and demanding color blind justice..

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources.

Adams, Lionel. "Assistant District Attorney Charges Homer Plessy with Violation of Separate Car Act" 6 June 1892. Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, Earl K. Long library, University of New Orleans. Docket #11134. New Orleans, Louisiana. Print.

This is a valuable document validating the history of the beginning of the Plessy Versus Ferguson case where Homer A. Plessy, chosen by a group of activists and free men of color from the Citizens Committee in Faubourg Tremé to challenge the Separate Car Act in New Orleans.

Associate Press. "Supreme Court Decision" 19 May 1896. *New Orleans Daily Picayune*. 19 May 1896. Print.

News about the "Jim Crow Car Case" was reported in this issue. The Supreme Court ruled that the Separate Car Act was constitutional which opened the doors for full blown segregation between the races. The entire issue is informative giving a glimpse into the way of life in the 1890's. The advertisements give information about economic issues as well as clothing styles which inspire ideas for the performance.

Many Citizens. "To The Friends of Equal Justice in Georgia." *The Colored American*. [Augusta, Georgia] 30 December 1865. Print.

The article is an excellent example of the excitement with which many free people of color encouraged others to participate in the political process as American citizens. The article states, "You are invited to serve as Delegates to Congress to be held in the city of Augusta on Wednesday the 10th of January. We appeal to the nobler feelings of those in authority asking them to deal justly by all the citizens of the state." Although the paper comes from Georgia, it exemplifies, like African American papers in Louisiana, that there were men of color who were in the position of leadership to influence others to fight for civil rights and participation in democracy.

Mckay, James. "Official Report on the Freedmen." *New Orleans Tribune*. 26 July 1864. Print. The New Orleans Tribune was an African American newspaper in New Orleans which was published by free people of color in Faubourg Tremé. Colonel James Mckay of New York reported on the status of freed slaves and their former masters in Louisiana.

He gave eye witness accounts of the fact that many of the settlements were comprised of primarily French, Spanish and Portuguese land owners. He also observed a greater degree of mixing between the settlers and free Blacks, Creoles, and slaves than in many other southern states.

Taylor, Spencer W. "Taylor and Craig's Boarding School for Boys." *New Orleans Daily Creole* 27 January 1856. Print.

The article discusses the opportunity of the children of the Free Men of Color to attend a school which emphasized the development of business skills and English and literature. The article documents other sources which discuss the involvement of this group of people in business ownership and literary endeavors. The children were the descendants of free people from Haiti and other mixed creole people who enjoyed a level of education and financial backing and property ownership unique to the residents of Faubourg Treme in New Orleans.

"Is The Black Code Still in Force?" *New Orleans Tribune* 21 July, 1864. Print.

In this article, the author writes a commentary criticizing any person in a leadership position who participates in obstructing the new rights of former slaves. For example, the author states, "The judge that can consider the Black Code still in force must be so tangled up in legal webs...so involved in mental obscurity as to be positively incapacitated to act." The Free People of Color in New Orleans were bold and appeared to have the ability to articulate well their desire for social justice. These factors set the stage for Homer Plessy to resist segregation.

"Dinner to Citizens of Louisiana" *The Liberator* [Boston, Massachusetts] 15 April, 1864. Volume XXXIV Issue 16 p.63.

This is an extremely important primary source documenting the political activity of free men of color from New Orleans who were persistent in their fight for civil rights and full participation in America. J.B Roudanez , an engineer and machinist, and Arnold Bertonneau, a wine merchant who was a captain in the first colored regiment in Louisiana, were honored at a republican dinner in Washington D.C. they were chosen by the Treme community to take a petition signed by 1000 free men of color to President Lincoln and members of Congress asking for voting rights. Captain Bertonneau delivered a powerful speech. He said, " Nearly all the free people of color can read and write, many of them being highly educated and quite wealthy. Taxed on an assessment of more than \$15,000,000 among other things, for the support of public school education-debarred of the right of sending their children to the common schools, which they have been and are compelled to contribute towards the general expense of the state, they have always been and are now prohibited from exercising the elective franchise." Bertonneau is a very important example and representative of free men of color of African and French dissent in New Orleans who played a powerful role in American history.

White, James." Slaves! Slaves!! Slaves!! *New Orleans Daily Creole*. 23 September 1856.p.3
Print. The author advertises the upcoming auction of slaves on Gravier Street.
Apparently mechanics, waitresses, field hands, cooks, nurses and a variety of other
skilled laborers would be available for sale. Several other sources document the
harmonious relationships between slaves, Free People of Color and French Creoles in
the city of New Orleans in Faubourg Tremé.

Secondary Sources

Barry, John M. *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. Print.

This source gave me a lot of knowledge and information about the "Rights" portion of my project. During the flood of 1927, many African Americans living in the Treme area were forced to leave their homes with no money and no place to go. Their rights were violated due to racism and segregation. For example, African American men were forced to act as human sandbags, and the poor were required to stay in the city of New Orleans in order to keep their jobs.

Bell, Caryn C. "Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868." Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. Print.

This book is an extremely valuable source documenting the influence of France, and the Haitian and American Revolutions on the Free People of Color in Fauberg Treme. The author discusses in detail the unique positions of Free Blacks in New Orleans. Several examples of protest poems written in French and English during the Antebellum period.

Capanella, Richard. *Bienville's Dilemma: A historical Geography of New Orleans*. Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies. 2008. Print.

Capanella provides several pictures of the shotgun style houses which were typical of New Orleans in several suburbs like Treme which are used in my props. There are also 19th Century maps of the layout of the city with the various faubourgs or suburbs. The book also describes how the geography of the city contributed to the mixing of various cultures. As was typical in Treme, and explains how New Orleans as a port city attracted people from all around the world.

Dalphinis, Morgan. *Caribbean & African Languages: Social History, Language, Literature, and Education*. London, U.K.: Karia, 1985. Print.

Since the Free People of Color in Faubourg Treme were highly advanced in literary skills, this source also documents literary works emphasizing resistance and themes of social justice. The work is important for the development of my script.

Desdunes, Rodolph D. *Our People and Our History: A Tribute to the Creole People of Color in Memory of the Great Men They Have Given Us and of the Good Works They Have Accomplished*. Ed. Translated, McCants, Sister Dorothea O., Baton Rouge, Louisiana University Press, 1973. Print.

This is an exceptional book, which is a translation of the French writings of one of the important free men of color in New Orleans who participated in the fight for civil rights in

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New Orleans. He compiled many of the writings of several free people of color including Paul Trevigne, who was the editor in chief of the newspaper *L'Union*, which was published in New Orleans in 1865, and later invited to be editor of *La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orleans* (*The New Orleans Tribune*) by Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez, the founder of the paper. Sister McCants discusses valuable history of free people of color who live during the French colonial period who are also the descendants of Africans and Haitians.

Eli, Lolis A., Telephone Interview. November 24, 2013. 8:00 p.m. I telephoned the writer of the documentary, *Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*. We discussed primary source information and the opportunity to speak with Keith Plessey, the great nephew of Homer Plessey at a later date. We also discussed at length his background as a writer, and the influence of his father as a civil rights attorney. He also elaborated on a variety of issues related to the culture of New Orleans and his views on the responsibility of preserving the contributions of the civil rights activists who lived in Tremé in the 19th century.

Esty, A., *The Civil Rights Movement: Plessy V. Ferguson* North Carolina, Morgan Reynolds Publishing. 2012. Print.

Not only does the book present valuable information concerning the Plessy V. Ferguson case, but it also gives information regarding the social context in New Orleans in the 1800's where Homer Plessey grew up. For example, it explains that despite the fact that Homer's parents hadn't been slaves, they experienced discrimination after the Civil War by laws that were meant to prevent them from being the social equals of Whites. Esty also describes the fact that many free people of color were entrepreneurs like carpenters, mechanics, shoe makers, seamstresses, and spoke French. Culturally, Homer's father could trace his ancestry to both France and Haiti and married Rosa Debergue, Homer's mother. Finally, the book contains several photographs of key people like the Supreme Court Justices and Cabildo, where the case was heard, as well as many other photos of New Orleans in the 1800's.

Ferguson, Phoebe. Telephone Interview. November 21, 2013 11: 00 a.m. I spoke with the great granddaughter of Judge Ferguson who ruled against Plessey, upholding the constitutionality of the Separate Car Act. Both she, and Keith Plessey have started the Plessey Ferguson Foundation which has as one of its missions to visit schools together, communicating the issues regarding the case as well as their ideas and hopes for a better future.

Frystak, Shannon L. *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana, 1924-1967*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2009. Print.

Women like Marie Laveaux were involved in fighting for the rights of people of color and slaves in very non-traditional ways. For example, Laveaux was highly connected to the Catholic church in New Orleans, and her status as an entrepreneur and spiritual leader with support from French Liberals, allowed her the opportunity to advocate successfully on behalf of many Creoles and slaves. Many women helped black slaves and others despite the ability to pass for White.

Garvey, Joan B. and Widmer, M.L., *Louisiana :The First 300 Years*. New Orleans, LA: Garmer Press, Inc., 2007. Print.

This book emphasizes Louisiana history focusing on the Louisiana Purchase and various French Governors who contributed to the political climate in New Orleans. The book also analyzes the impact of geography on the development of social networks. It's interesting to learn that the first people in Louisiana were Amerindians like the Choctaw who intermingled with many of the French settlers, slaves, and Creoles.

Hirsch, Arnold R., and Logsdon, J., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992. Print.

This book discusses in great detail the multitude of factors that were involved in the development of the extremely unique Creole culture in New Orleans, prior to America's interference in its cultural and social networks. The book provides valuable evidence of how it is possible for there to be a true and real melting pot.

Logsdon, D. and Elie, L.E. *Fauberg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*. 2008. DVD. Serendipity Films L.L.C.

The video is written by Lolis Eric Elie who was a journalist in New Orleans. Historical facts regarding the development of this 19th century community and its diverse ethnic groups are presented. Special attention is given to the Creole Free People of Color who fought for civil rights, including Homer Plessy, who challenged the Separate Car Act requiring separate cars for colored people and whites. The film also documents a variety of examples where families of all backgrounds lived and worked together in Treme prior to Jim Crow. The community is noted as the birthplace of jazz. The effects of modern day construction and decisions to replace single family dwellings with housing projects near the community are presented through the eyes of Mr. Irving Trevigne, a descendent of Paul Trevigne, the linguist, teacher and editor of The New Orleans Tribune.

Lowe, John. *Louisiana Culture From the Colonial Era to Katrina*. Baton Rouge.

Louisiana State University Press. 2008. Print. This book provides countless examples of the ways in which New Orleans differs uniquely from the rest of the country from a historical perspective and documents the impact of the change of governments on the rights, worldview, expectations and cultural practices of the people in New Orleans. The book helped me to appreciate how the culture came to be and the richness of the past, which few people seem to understand .Katrina and it effects, and the lack of total renovation of the city, particularly the poor neighborhoods, seems to reveal the possible race and class issues that still exist today

Medley, Keith M. *We as Freeman: Plessy V. Ferguson, The Fight Against Legal Segregation*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc. 2003. Print.

The author grew up in New Orleans near where Homer Plessy lived. He provides an extremely detailed and rich account of important people involved in the protest against violations of the rights of free citizens like Albion Tourgee, Plessy's lawyer from Ohio who was a Union soldier, and "outspoken white champion of racial injustice during the last decades of the nineteenth century." The book also provides several pictures which can be used in props. Excerpts from the writings of prominent free men of color like Rodolph Desdunes who wrote in newspapers like the 1891 Fourth of July issue of the *Crusader* are included. For example, he says," We are American citizens and it is our duty to defend our constitutional rights against the encroachments and attacks of prejudice." Desdunes was one of at least 18 prominent free men of color who belonged to to the "Comite' des Citoyens" (The Citizens Committee), which organized resources to fight segregation laws.

Hull Hoffer, William J., *Plessy v. Ferguson: Race and Inequality in Jim Crow America*.

Kansas: University Press of Kansas. 2012. Print.

This book is a current text which incorporates a thorough analysis of the underlying issues behind the events which took place in New Orleans, in Treme prior to and after Plessy challenged the Separate Car Act of 1890. For example, there is a discussion of the fear of white planters that freed slaves would try to avenge the wrongdoings of their former masters .Despite the fact that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 guaranteed many civil rights to African Americans, the book describes the many ways that the southern planters got around the law.

Midlo Hall, G., *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1992. Print.

This book provides highly detailed research and valuable insight from primary sources in French and Spanish which this historian translated. She uncovered records tracing the specific ethnic groups from the coast of Africa which came to New Orleans as slaves.

Senegambia and Senegal provided many of the cultural traditions found in New Orleans. There's an online database that she created with information from slave records. The book also discusses the ways in which the slaves and free people interacted and how they helped to shape the social context of New Orleans along with the many Europeans who intermingled while sharing skills to survive during colonial Louisiana.

Morial, Ernest N., *Sixth Ward/Treme/Lafitte Profile*. New Orleans: The New Orleans Historic Collection: Williams Research Center. 27 December, 2014. Print.

Mayor of New Orleans, during the 1970's, Ernest Morial provided a description of the history of Fauberg Treme and the people who inhabited the community from the 1800's. For example he documented that, "Most of the free persons of color were either manumitted children of white men or individuals who fled the slave uprisings of the West Indies. The free men of color who resided in Treme were often musicians, craftsmen and artisans." The mayor's research provides valuable information regarding the people of the community, and their origins, as well as information about the architecture of the homes or cottages or shotgun houses which were heavily influenced by Haiti.

Plessy, Keith. Telephone Interview. November 21, 2013. 7:30 p.m.

Speaking with the great grandnephew of Homer Plessy was extremely valuable in understanding not only the impact of the Plessy Vs. Ferguson case, but also the nature the relationships of the people who lived in the community of Fauberg Treme. He discussed his experience growing up in a neighborhood where many of the people were descendants of families from the 19th century. For example, he described a conversation with a Sicilian friend he grew up with where he realized the friend was a descendant of Italians who were massacred in the 1800's. Keith Plessy is an artist whose family included carpenters, much like many of the original inhabitants of the community. He met Phoebe Ferguson by accident, and values greatly their relationship as a powerful symbol of racial healing. When he decided to create the Plessy Ferguson Foundation with her, he talked about its extreme importance as a vehicle through which the children of today can learn about the Plessy case in order to learn not to repeat the injustices of the past and more importantly, how to create genuine and lasting relationships with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Trevigne, Barbara. Telephone Interview. February 7, 2014. 7:00 p.m. Ms. Trevigne is the 3rd great niece of Paul Trevigne, the linguist, editor and free man of color of three Black owned papers in New Orleans which played a powerful role as the major agents to resist the racially oppressive practices designed to prevent both free and freed men from enjoying the full rights of citizenship. The newspapers were :*L'Union*, published from 1862-1864 when New Orleans was first occupied by Union troops under Benjamin Butler, and *La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orleans*, or *The New Orleans Tribune*, both owned by Dr. Charles Roudanez. Paul Trevigne was also the editor of the *Crusader*, owned by Louis Martinet. The *Tribune*

was widely known and circulated in the north as well, particularly among radical republicans who advocated for all the rights of citizenship afforded to all Americans. Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists like Charles Sumner also read the paper.

The paper was known to be the major organ or voice of Black people in the south which continually articulated political and legal rights issues, as well as educational, historical and other literary works by authors influenced by the French literary traditions influenced by the revolutionary tradition. For example, an article would likely be written reminding the public about the fact that when France freed its slaves, freedom meant having the right to participate fully in the political process of the country and enjoy entirely the status of citizenship. Barbara Trevigne is a historian, clinical social worker, who also does historical performances. Her interview gave me valuable information for the content and performance aspect of my project..