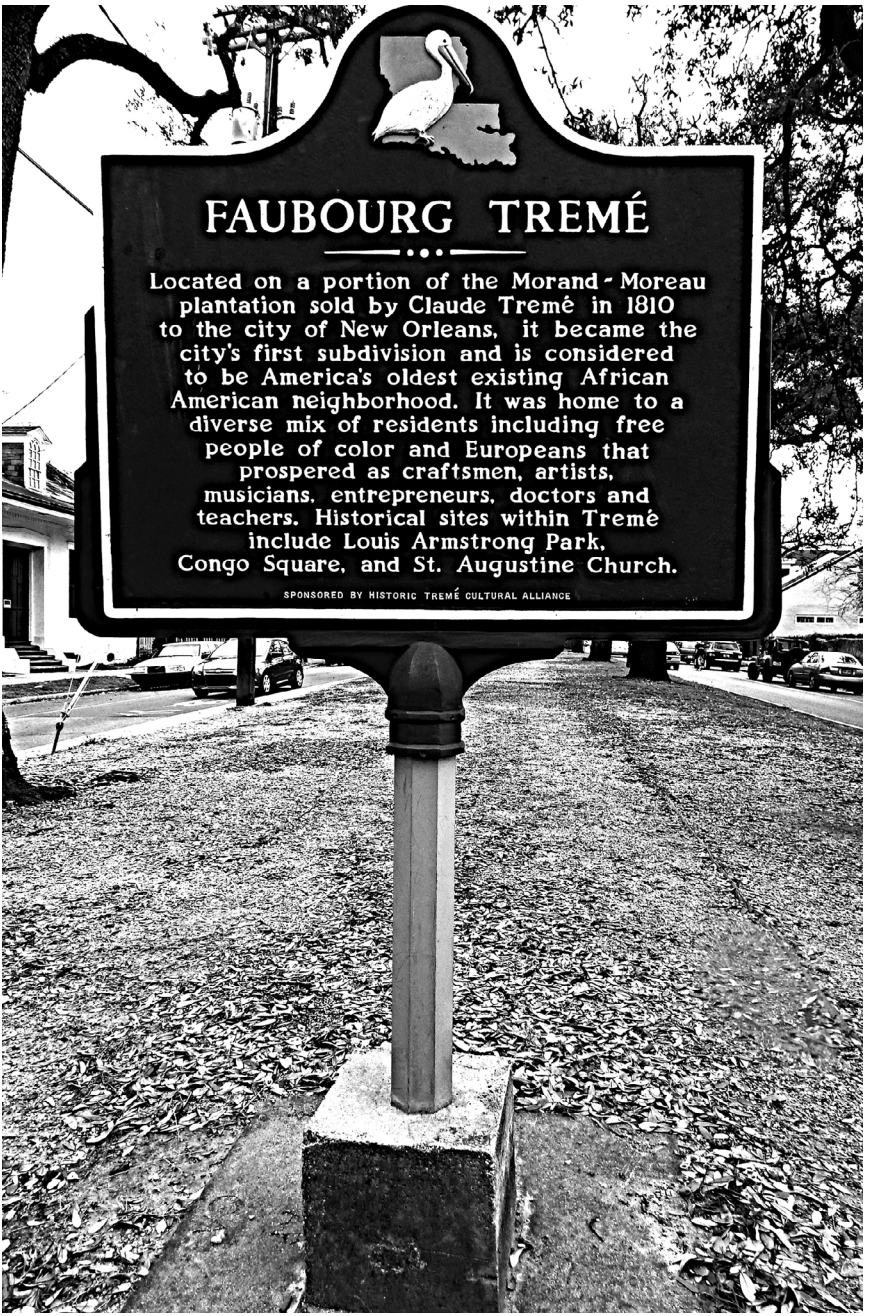

FAUBOURG TREMÉ
Located on a portion of the Morand - Moreau plantation sold by Claude Tremé in 1810 to the city of New Orleans, it became the city's first subdivision and is considered to be America's oldest existing African American neighborhood. It was home to a diverse mix of residents including free people of color and Europeans that prospered as craftsmen, artists, musicians, entrepreneurs, doctors and teachers. Historical sites within Tremé include Louis Armstrong Park, Congo Square, and St. Augustine Church.
SPONSORED BY HISTORIC TREMÉ CULTURAL ALLIANCE

Chapter 1

1790s: Inside Old Treme

Faubourg Treme has emerged as one of New Orleans' most storied enclaves. Its preserved nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture pays homage to the carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers, lathers, and other specialty tradesmen whose expertise kept the weather-beaten city afloat. The architectural mélange that characterizes Treme includes ornate townhouses, Creole cottages, and stately center hall villas. Side-porch and shotgun houses, former slave quarters, and benevolent-society halls stand as lasting contributions to the culture and history of old New Orleans.


1123
1125

A stucco Creole cottage, 1123-25 Treme Street

In the 1790s, three free women of color, Rose Tissoneau, Gotton Meunier, and Agnes Mathieu, became the first purchasers of new lots on the *Chemin du Bayou* (Bayou Road, now Governor Nicholls Street) between Saint Claude Avenue and North Rampart Street. Of the thirty-seven original lots in Faubourg Treme, free people of color purchased thirteen parcels, initiating a lasting link of downtown Creole culture with the Treme neighborhood.[1]

Treme stands adjacent to the French Quarter at North Rampart and within walking distance to the Mississippi River, the Saint Louis cemeteries, and Canal Street. Its development pushed urban New Orleans northward toward Lake Pontchartrain. In *New Orleans Architecture Volume VI: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road,* Roulhac B. Toledano and Mary Louise Christovich stated, "From the time of Faubourg Tremé's earliest settlement to its urbanization, free people of color played a predominant role within the entire geographical area. . . . Eighty percent of the lots between Dumaine and Saint Bernard, North Rampart and North Broad

Streets, were owned by people of mixed heritage one or more times since the Spanish Colonial period."[2]

Treme provided an inspirational ambiance for writers, artisans, musicians, and those who fought for freedom. Toledano and Christovich wrote, "A roster of the names and addresses of musicians who played in New Orleans dixieland, brass, and jazz bands between 1880 and 1915 indicates that well over half lived in the Creole suburbs, primarily Faubourg Treme."[3]

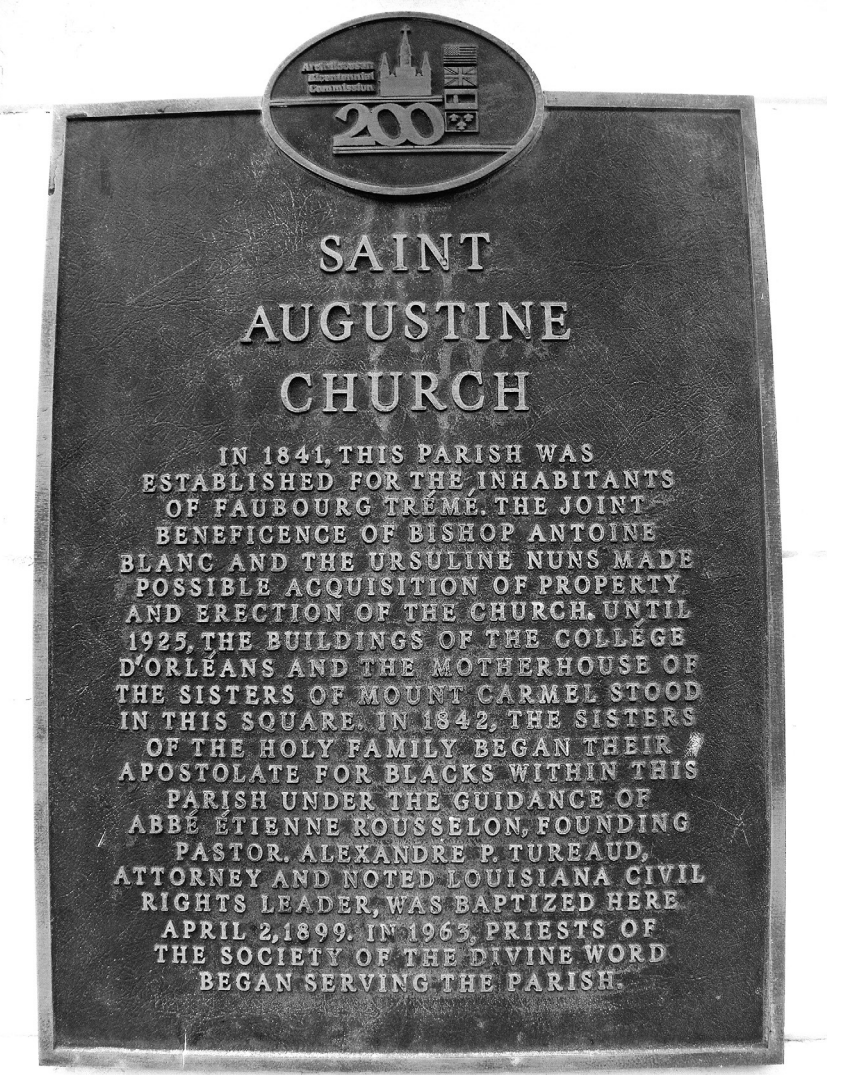
"Pickle Meat" on Claiborne Street

Treme's past and present remains personal to me. My father, who lost both of his parents at an early age, grew up in Treme, where he learned plastering from an uncle. He was "raised to the trade," as the old people would say. My mother's sister, Antonia Toca, "did hair" next door to the Claiborne Poultry Market.[4] My mother's teaching assignment brought her to Joseph A. Craig Elementary School in Treme. As a young boy with Saturday chores, I bicycled to Joe Dave's meat market on North Claiborne Avenue to buy "pickle meat" (pickled meat) for cooking red beans that day to eat on Monday. When Hurricane Betsy destroyed our parish church in 1965 (Holy Redeemer on Royal Street), my parents became members of Saint Augustine Catholic Church, where we attended Mass. As a teenager, I played basketball and football in Saint Augustine's churchyard and went to weekly dances and parties. I also spent time in Esther Barnum Green's shotgun double in the 1000 block of Treme Street. Miss Esther's stewed crabs and rich, lumpy eggnog were legendary in the neighborhood.

Early Treme

From its beginning, Faubourg Treme inhabited a unique corner in America's racial history. Carved from the plantation of Claude Tremé, the area that bears his name has been home to slave masters and enslaved Africans, free people of color, Native Americans, and immigrants from Europe and the Caribbean. Slave labor did the heavy lifting in the early development of Treme. Africans used their bare hands to drain the swamps. Author Henry C. Castellanos described the effort:


TREME ST


200
SAINT
AUGUSTINE
CHURCH
IN 1841, THIS PARISH WAS ESTABLISHED FOR THE INHABITANTS OF FAUBOURG TRÉMÉ. THE JOINT BENEFICENCE OF BISHOP ANTOINE BLANC AND THE URSULINE NUNS MADE POSSIBLE ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY AND ERECTION OF THE CHURCH. UNTIL 1925, THE BUILDINGS OF THE COLLÉGE D'ORLÉANS AND THE MOTHERHOUSE OF THE SISTERS OF MOUNT CARMEL STOOD IN THIS SQUARE. IN 1842, THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY BEGAN THEIR APOSTOLATE FOR BLACKS WITHIN THIS PARISH UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF ABBÉ ÉTIENNE ROUSSELON, FOUNDING PASTOR. ALEXANDRE P. TUREAUD, ATTORNEY AND NOTED LOUISIANA CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER, WAS BAPTIZED HERE APRIL 2, 1899. IN 1963, PRIESTS OF THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD BEGAN SERVING THE PARISH.

> Under the administration of Baron Carondelet, in 1794, the scheme of uniting New Orleans by means of a navigable canal with the Bayou St. John was first conceived and partially carried out. . . . Thus it was that, after the subsidence of the flood from the crevasse at Macarty's Point, in 1816, a number of African slaves were put to work in pumping out the water from one compartment into the other. . . . Never was a severer task or more astonishing work ever imposed. . . . They spoke nothing but their native language (Congo). . . .
>
> In the extreme heat of the summer solstice, with only their cotton trousers on, bared breasts and shoulders, protected from the sun by large straw hats or *tignons* merely, they would delve into the midst of our murky swamps, hewing out with picaxes enormous stumps, and spading and throwing up immense clods of dirt. . . .
>
> They had no machinery, no steam contrivance to assist them in their arduous labors. Even the driving of the piles had to be done by hand. The carpenters and educated mechanics were whites and mulattoes, and thus was this huge undertaking carried out toward the main branch of the Bayou St. John. It may be said to be the great initial step toward the drainage of the immense territory, known later as the Faubourg Tremé.[5]

As a port city, New Orleans has been home to diverse groups of people. Before Europeans arrived, the Houma Indians came to the area to celebrate corn harvests. The French and Spanish ruled New Orleans before it was sold to the United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. The city eventually housed Germans, Italians, Irish, West Indians, and other groups. Benjamin Henry Latrobe noted the wide range of people when he visited New Orleans in January of 1819. "Along the Levee, as far as the eye could reach to the West . . . ," he wrote, "White Men and women, and of all hues of brown, and of all Classes of faces, from round Yankees, to grisly and lean Spaniards, black Negroes and negresses, filthy Indians half-naked, Mulattoes, curly and straight haired, Quarteroons of all shades long haired and frizzled, the women dressed in the most flaring yellow, and scarlet gowns, the men caped and hatted."[6]

Treme's early years dovetailed with New Orleans' emergence as a major American city. In 1810, the city of New Orleans paid $40,000 for the Morand-Moreau plantation.[7] While the city contained private subdivisions such as Faubourgs Marigny and Saint Mary, Treme became its first public subdivision. Early Treme's street names included Saint Claude (now Henriette Delille), Treme, and Saint Julie (now Esplanade).

The *Rue de Marais* (Swamp Street) provided an apt description of the marshland that lay beyond. In 1796, except for the houses scattered along the Bayou Road, Fort Saint Ferdinand guarded the city as the only structure north of the French Quarter. Beyond the fort lay the Congo Plains, where enslaved Africans gathered for dance, song, and ancient rituals.

1842: Saint Augustine Catholic Church

One of Treme's most beloved institutions has been Saint Augustine Catholic Church, opened in 1841 at the corner of Governor Nicholls and Saint Claude, in the heart of old Treme. According to James B. Bennett in *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, "Creoles of color supplied much of the funding to build the new St. Augustine Church. . . .

Saint Augustine Catholic Church

Free blacks rented half of the new church's pews, with many of the aisle seats reserved for slaves. Together, slaves and free blacks totaled nearly half of the congregation's membership, with free people of color playing an important role by their ongoing support of the church's budget."[8] In the 1850s, Henriette Delille, Juliette Gaudin, and Josephine Charles recited their vows there as the Sisters of the Holy Family. This order of black nuns ministered to the poor and enslaved.

Carved from the Saint Louis Cathedral parish, Saint Augustine's parish boundaries encompassed the area bounded by North Rampart and Saint Peter streets and North Claiborne and Elysian Fields avenues. The church and rectory were constructed in 1841-42 for $25,000 under Antoine Blanc, who became the first archbishop of New Orleans. Many ethnicities found spiritual comfort at Saint Augustine Church.[9]

Saint Augustine Church had particular significance to New Orleans' African-Americans because of their role in creating the parish. French architect Jacques de Pouilly designed the church building. Architectural historian Ann Masson commented in *Louisiana Cultural Vistas* that he combined "ideas and ornament and influences to create buildings that were completely out of his imagination, rather than following a trend."[10] Toledano and Christovich stated, "The church was designed in the Greek revival style by its French architect, yet it reflects a knowledge of Italian Renaissance buildings and has an international flavor not expressed in the architecture of other New Orleans churches."[11] In 1926, its exposed bricks were covered with cement.[12] For the 1941 centennial, DIVO AUGUSTINO ("Saint Augustine") was inscribed in bronze over the entrance to the church.[13]

Pre-Civil War New Orleans had a history of integrated churches. In 1819, attendees at Saint Louis Cathedral "consisted of at least 4/5 women, of which number one half at least were colored . . . ," Latrobe noted.

Saint Augustine's entrance

The sanctuary at Saint Augustine

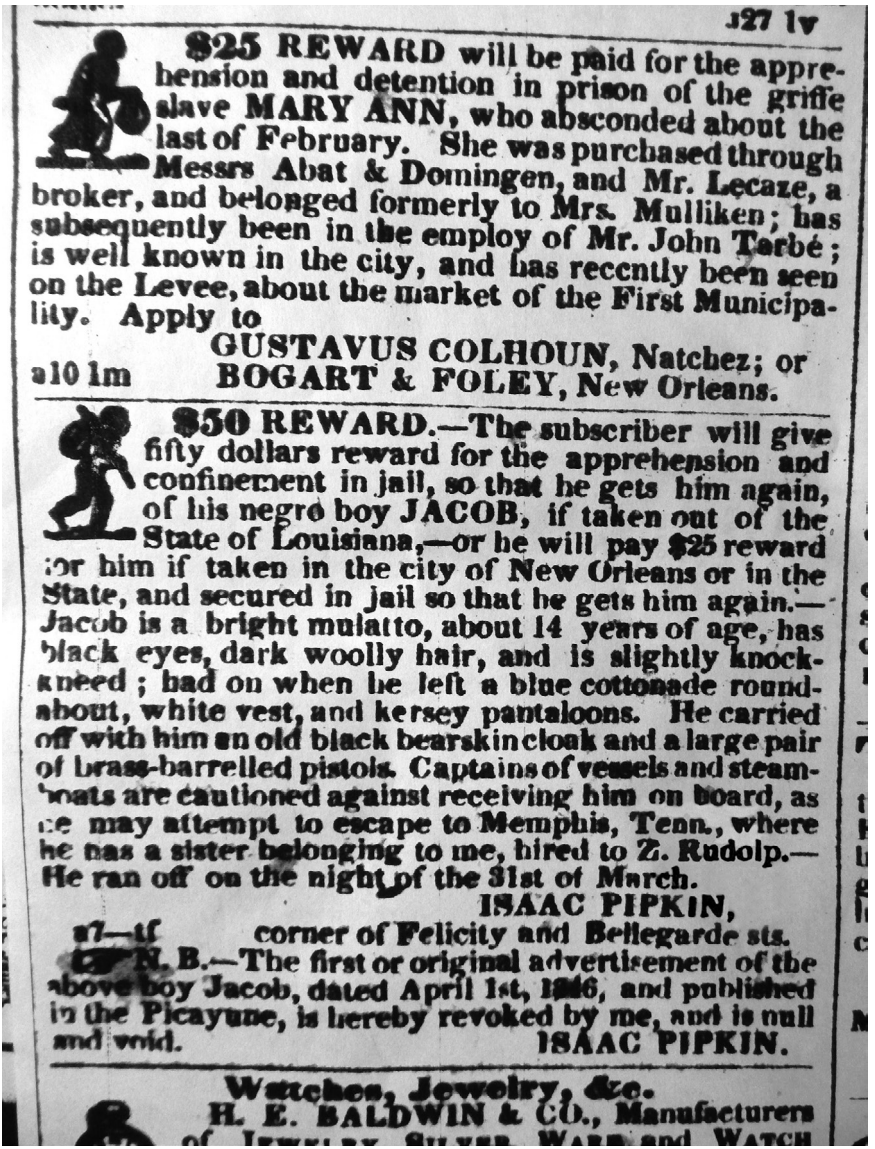
The Good Men of the Parish, circa 1980s

There were half a dozen Candles stuck upon the steps by old colored women, who seemed exceedingly devout."[14] Thomas L. Nichols observed in 1845, "White children and Black with every shade between knelt side by side." [15] Author Charles Barthelemy Rousseve told of a lady who attested that in the 1860s, "colored singers" sat "side by side with whites in the choir of Saint Augustine's Church," and black parishioners knelt "at the altar rail indiscriminately with white first communicants."[16]

1846: Slavery in Treme

Many called slavery "the sum of all villainies." Still, it was an integral part of the Treme story. With slavery as an established component of New Orleans life, newspapers of the era thrived on advertisements of rewards for the capture of runaway slaves. New Orleans in the early 1800s contained nearly 15,000 slaves, along with 7,000 free people of color and 19,000 whites.[17] Shamefully, advertisements in the city's newspapers helped slave owners purchase slaves and hunt down escapees who only sought freedom:

> $50 REWARD—Ran away from the subscriber, on Sunday the 26th, the slave boy EMERSON. Twenty dollars will [be] paid for his apprehension, or fifty dollars on conviction of the person or persons harboring or employing him. Said boy is about 5 feet seven inches high, slender make, a griff in color, with large eyes, and is fond of dress. Had on when he left a black coat and pantaloons, and a black glazed cap. Steamboats, vessels and all persons are forbid employing or harboring said boy, under penalty of the law. E. I. Tracey
>
> $20 REWARD—Ran away from the subscriber or decoyed off by some white person, and the undersigned thinks the latter quite the most probable—a mulatto girl named JANE . . . was arrested from my house last night, by some person, as she required a ladder to escape. She had in her possession a pass until Saturday next. The above reward will be paid for her, and if stolen, One Hundred Dollars for the thief. J. D. Currin
>
> $10 REWARD—Ran away from Mobile, about the 1st of April, 1846, the mulatto slave WILLIAM, belonging to Mrs. A. Sands. Said slave is about 5 feet 4 to five inches high, stout built, sometimes wears a beard on his chin and in walking carries his head down. . . . He will no doubt make his way to New Orleans, and endeavor to pass as a free man. Captains of vessels and steamboats are warned against harboring said slave.



a27 1v

$25 REWARD will be paid for the apprehension and detention in prison of the griffe slave **MARY ANN**, who absconded about the last of February. She was purchased through Messrs Abat & Domingen, and Mr. Lecaze, a broker, and belonged formerly to Mrs. Mulliken; has subsequently been in the employ of Mr. John Tarbé; is well known in the city, and has recently been seen on the Levee, about the market of the First Municipality. Apply to

GUSTAVUS COLHOUN, Natchez; or
a10 1m BOGART & FOLEY, New Orleans.

$50 REWARD.—The subscriber will give fifty dollars reward for the apprehension and confinement in jail, so that he gets him again, of his negro boy **JACOB**, if taken out of the State of Louisiana,—or he will pay $25 reward for him if taken in the city of New Orleans or in the State, and secured in jail so that he gets him again.—Jacob is a bright mulatto, about 14 years of age, has black eyes, dark woolly hair, and is slightly knock-kneed; had on when he left a blue cottonade roundabout, white vest, and kersey pantaloons. He carried off with him an old black bearskin cloak and a large pair of brass-barrelled pistols. Captains of vessels and steamboats are cautioned against receiving him on board, as he may attempt to escape to Memphis, Tenn., where he has a sister belonging to me, hired to Z. Rudolp.—He ran off on the night of the 31st of March.

ISAAC PIPKIN,
a7—tf corner of Felicity and Bellegarde sts.

N. B.—The first or original advertisement of the above boy Jacob, dated April 1st, 1846, and published in the Picayune, is hereby revoked by me, and is null and void. ISAAC PIPKIN.

Watches, Jewelry, &c.
H. E. BALDWIN & CO., Manufacturers

Runaway slave notices from the 1840s

Stolen—On the 18th of March last, from O. K. Field, one mile below Natchez, a black boy, Bill, 14 years old, slight built and small of his age. He is supposed to have been kidnapped by several negroes and one or two

white persons of suspicious character who were seen lurking in the vicinity of my place about the time the boy left. A liberal reward will be given for the delivery of the boy, or for his lodgement in any jail where I can get him. O. K. Field

$10 REWARD—Ran away from her mistress on the 11th, a negro girl slave named MARGARET COLLINS, aged about 17 years being acquired of Thomas Bonder about a month ago. The above reward will be paid for her apprehension and delivery at her mistress's residence, at No. 76 Royal Street.

$50 REWARD—For the Negress Martha or Matilda, absent since the 10th; blind in the right eye, and wears a headdress so as to cover the defect; aged 28 years, and slim. She was formerly owned by M. I. Pesigo in 1844; J. Allen in 1843; James Carter, of Algiers in 1842; and P. Hanson, Lafayette in 1841.

For Sale—A LIKELY NEGRO GIRL, about 15 years of age, fully guaranteed and sold for no fault. Apply to J. H. Morrison & Co. Front Levee.

$50 REWARD—The subscriber will give fifty dollars reward for the apprehension and confinement in jail, so that he gets him again, of his negro boy JACOB, if taken out of the State of Louisiana, or he will pay $25 reward for him if taken in the city of New Orleans or in the State, and secured in jail so that he gets him again. Jacob is a bright mulatto, about 14 years of age, has black eyes, dark woolly hair, and is slightly knock-kneed . . . he may attempt to escape to Memphis, Tenn., where he has a sister belonging to me, hired to Z. Rudolp. He ran off on the night of the 31st of March. Isaac Pipkin.[17]

It is hard to imagine that the savagery of slavery was tolerated in New Orleans in the shadow of houses of worship such as Saint Augustine Catholic Church. Slaves in the city were governed by the Black Codes of 1806. Across the street from the church lived a slave woman named Pauline. She was said to be the first woman subjected to public execution in New Orleans. Her story was well covered in newspaper articles in 1846. She had become a concubine of her owner, Rabbenack, who instructed her to handle the affairs of the house at 52 Bayou Road, between Rampart and Marais streets, across from Saint Augustine Church. His wife and children lived there as well. While the owner was away, a neighbor reported to police that a white woman was being held captive and confined to a closet. The court consisted entirely of slave owners. It was alleged that Pauline had struck Rabbenack's wife.

The Black Codes of that time mandated that "any slave who shall willfully and maliciously strike his master or mistress . . . or any white overseer appointed by his owner to superintend said owner's slave, so as to cause a contusion or shedding of blood, shall be punished with death; or imprisonment at hard labor for a term of not less than ten years."[18] Although a number of people petitioned the governor to commute Pauline's sentence, they were rebuffed, and the newspapers reported her fate. The end of her life graphically unfolded outside of Parish Prison in Faubourg Treme:

> The slave Pauline was executed yesterday at half past 12 o'clock, at the Parish Prison, in accordance with the sentence of the court, for cruelty to her mistress. . . .
>
> Shortly before 12 o'clock the sheriff waited upon the unfortunate culprit, who had been in company with Priest Louis in her cell, and announced that all was in readiness. She was then dressed in a long white robe, her arms bound with a black cord, the white cap was placed upon her head, and walked, accompanied by the priest, sheriff, keeper of the prison, and officers

The Tomb of the Unknown Slave

of the Criminal Court, to the gallows, which was erected upon a platform between the two prisons, fronting on Orleans Street, screened by a double gate. She was perfectly firm, and apparently indifferent to her fate. After praying with the clergyman upon the gallows the crucifix was placed upon her neck, and a white pocket handkerchief in her left hand; the rope was adjusted upon her neck by one of the convicts, whose face was blackened, and she took her seat upon the bench erected upon the platform. The gates were then opened, and a loud murmur ran through the populace at the sight of the wretched woman. The party on the platform uncovered, the cap was pulled over the culprit's eyes, and the gallows was slid out so that it projected a few feet into the street. In a few seconds the drop platform fell, the seat upon which she sat gave way, and she dangled in the air. It was painful, terrible, to see the fearful struggles of the dying woman, for it was several minutes before all was over, as her neck was not broken by the fall, and she died from strangulation. At the expiration of about twenty minutes, she was taken in, and pronounced dead by the physician. As she was taken in and the gates were closed, a sort of ill-suppressed shout rose from a portion of the crowd, and gradually the whole assemblage broke up and went away.[18]

1863: Emancipation in Treme

During the Civil War, Treme residents played a vital role in calling for universal suffrage and equality. Lifelong Treme resident and philanthropist Thomy Lafon helped fund the Underground Railroad and donated to the American Anti-Slavery Society. Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, of Marais Street, was a member of the Citizens Committee, along with Homer Plessy and many Treme residents who fought for equality. Lawyer, philanthropist, and Civil Rights leader Aristide Mary lived on Ursulines Avenue. Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez published two newspapers (*L'Union* and the *New Orleans Tribune*) in the midst of the Civil War.

In July 1863, Africans freed by the Emancipation Proclamation witnessed the funeral procession of black Civil War hero André Cailloux, in Congo Square. He was one of the first black officers in the Union Army to be killed in combat. In 1864, Arnold Bertoneau sent a petition to Abraham Lincoln that called for voting rights. In a speech he delivered that year in Massachusetts, Bertoneau declared, "As slavery is abolished, with it must vanish every vestige of oppression. The right to vote must

be secured; the doors of our public schools must be opened, that our children, side by side, may study from the same books, and imbibe the same principles and precepts from the Book of Books, learn the great truth that God 'created of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.'"[19]

In 1864, thousands of New Orleanians gathered in Congo Square to celebrate Louisiana's adoption of the Emancipation Proclamation. The city's church bells rang and a 100-gun salute was fired. The Fourth Colored United States Cavalry and Battle of New Orleans veterans, including the former drummer boy Jordan Noble, joined an array of social-aid societies, political clubs, and first-time students and their teachers in marching from Congo Square onto Rampart Street in a glorious parade through the city. "Is not emancipation a fixed fact?" queried the *Era* newspaper. This first "Grand Emancipation Programme" produced speeches, poetry, and a jubilant procession that marked the beginning of the end of American slavery:[20]

> Place d'Armes, formerly called Congo Square, and its surroundings were swarming with thousands of our colored population yesterday. At an early hour the different parts of the city where colored schools are located, or colored societies meet, became alive with them dressed in their holiday attire and ornamented with national flags and colors. About nine o'clock they began to move towards the place appointed for meeting—Congo Square—and at about half-past eleven o'clock they had all arrived, the majority of them accompanied by field-bands, and with banners and flags floating in the breeze.
>
> In the square a large platform, rising in the form of an amphitheater, had been erected, with a stand for the speakers. The platform was decorated with flags and evergreens, and seats were arranged on and in front of it. The speakers' stand was covered by a large awning, underneath which we found a number of ladies, teachers of the colored schools established by General Banks. Among those on the platform, we noticed old Jordan and some fifteen or sixteen of the colored veterans of 1815. Some of them appeared as strong and hearty as the day when they showed their devotion to the glorious stars and stripes.

The proceedings were opened with a prayer by Reverend Forrest:

> He called on all to thank Almighty God for the goodness which allowed them to come together on the eleventh day of June, 1864, to celebrate

> the breaking of the chains of slavery. Thousands of their brethren had looked in vain for relief, but they were the ones privileged to enjoy liberty. He prayed that God would give the Union armies strong arms to help in breaking down this rebellion, and the chains of slavery. . . .
>
> A song in honor of emancipation was sung by the children under the direction of the Rev. C. A. Conway. After which the following address was delivered by the Rev. S. W. Rogers, the orator of the day. Mr. Rogers, although a colored man, spoke of the war, the existence and downfall of slavery, and other prominent topics before the country in a manner that showed his thorough knowledge of the subjects.

One of the speakers at the emancipation celebration was Joseph A. Craig, who now has a school named after him in Faubourg Treme. Addressing the First District Emancipation Club, he stated:

> We have assembled here this evening to court public opinion and to weigh them in the scales of justice, civil rights, and religious liberty. Public opinion says, in language as loud as heaven's artillery, with the deep mutterings of an indignant people, that the slave is a free man all over the United States of America. The *vox populi* is the *vox Dei:* the voice of the people is the voice of God.[21]

1865: Lincoln's Assassination

The following "Notice to the Colored People of the City of New Orleans" appeared in the *New Orleans Tribune* on April 20, 1865:

> Fellow Citizens,
>
> In order to give our fellow citizens at large an opportunity to express in a public manner their grief and sorrow by the untimely death, by assassination, of His Excellency Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States:
>
> Be it therefore Resolved, That all of the Pastors of colored churches throughout the City and State are respectfully requested to have their respective places of worship opened on Saturday, April 22, 1865, and to have in their respective churches Divine Worship appropriate to the occasion.
>
> Be it further Resolved, That all the Benevolent Societies and other associations composed of colored persons are requested to meet at their respective places of meeting, and proceed to the Place d'Armes (CONGO

> SQUARE) at 8 o'clock A. M., Saturday and participate in the exercises there.

On the appointed day, New Orleanians came to Treme to mourn Lincoln. The *New Orleans Tribune* commented:

> We mourn a man who more than any other of his time, was a representative of the people of America. By the nobility of his nature, not less than by the value of his services, he won his way to the hearts of his fellow-countrymen. They loved and greatly respected him while living. Their tears flow for him now.[22]

The newspaper went on to describe the observance:

> MASS MEETING ON CONGO SQUARE
>
> Over ten thousand of our race assembled on Congo Square to pay their [spirit] of regret to the memory of the [departed] Abraham Lincoln—the immortal patriot shot by an infamous assassin, at the very time that he was about to restore the Union upon the basis of freedom and [liberty].
>
> At ten o'clock Mr. Oscar J. Dunn called the meeting to order. The names, Vice-President and Secretaries in the call of the National Equal Rights League were unanimously ratified. The Rev. Wm. A. Dove then offered a [prayer]. . . .
>
> The procession was then formed, under the guidance of a picket of the 20th New York colored regiment. The march was taken through Rampart Street, down Canal, up St. Charles, down Poydras, and up Camp to Lafayette Square.[23]

"Go on any plantation," spoke the Reverend George W. Levere, chaplain of the Twentieth Regiment of the United States Colored Troops, "and you will see every man of African descent with tears in his eyes, saying his prayers to God, and lamenting this national calamity and affliction. Let the name of Abraham Lincoln be blessed forever."[24] Out of respect for President Lincoln, mourning badges were worn for the next thirty days.

Community Activity

In the 1890s, literature, music, commerce, and protest coalesced in

Treme. One group on North Claiborne named the Ida Club advanced "music, literature, and the drama."[25] The *Crusader* newspaper printed poems, fiction, and nonfiction in French and English. People came out in Treme for "grand dancing festivals" given by benevolent and social organizations, with proceeds going to widows, funds for libraries, and other community causes. For an admission price of fifteen cents, Prof. Joseph Moret's String Band, the Tio and Doublet Orchestra, and Professor Coustaut's String Band held sway on Saturday nights at the various benevolent halls in Treme.[26]

In his 1911 book *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire* (*Our People and Our History*), Treme resident Rodolphe Desdunes wrote of the sculptors, writers, philanthropists, builders, and others who populated the area. Michel Saint Pierre, a poet who lived on Ursulines, contributed to *Les Cenelles*, noted as the first poetry anthology by people of color in the United States.[27] Free man of color Basil Crockere, who once owned the lot at the corner of Rampart and Ursulines, taught fencing at his *Salle d'Armes*, in a city where dueling under oak trees settled questions of honor.

By the 1890s, Treme encompassed a goodly mixture of industrial, residential, service, and religious sites. Commercial concerns settled in between the houses. A lumber yard, stables, and corner grocery stores

flanked the cobblestones on Ursulines. The sprawling Pelican Brewery arose on North Villere Street between Esplanade and Hospital (now Governor Nicholls). On North Claiborne, every four minutes, mule-drawn yellow streetcars of the Canal and Claiborne line clopped toward the vegetable markets at Saint Bernard Circle.[28]

In the 1940s, North Claiborne Avenue served as a linear business district, with hat manufacturers, a coffee mill, the Claiborne Candy Company, and the black-owned People's Industrial Life Insurance Company. A National Bank of Commerce branch awaited depositors at the corner of North Claiborne and Saint Ann. The National Youth Administration, the Negro branch of the New Deal program, offered services at 831 North Claiborne. Barbers Chattard and Santiago cut hair down the street from the Black and Tan Lounge.

Society halls provided insurance and death benefits to their members. Republican activists protested for constitutional rights at the Globe Hall, located at the corner of Saint Peter and North Rampart. The Globe Hall was also the scene of the formation of the American Equal Rights Association in the 1890s. The Friends of Hope Benevolent Hall, at 922 North Liberty, hosted a large protest accompanied by a pamphlet entitled *Violation of a Constitutional Right*.[29] Homer Plessy lived at 1108 North Claiborne, next to Congregation Hall.

A Visit with Miss Esther of 1027 Treme

In 2007, I visited Miss Esther Barnum Green, who had lived in the 1000 block of Treme Street since the 1930s. I attended Holy Redeemer School with her children and was good friends with her son Bobby. Every Mardi Gras, Miss Esther would open her home to anyone seeking respite and sustenance during their Mardi Gras trek. In the back room of their shotgun double, her daughters Kathy, Sheila, Dale, Yolanda, and Myra

Miss Esther's shotgun double

peeled potatoes and onions, served hot dogs with chili, and provided sweet red punch to the parched revelers. It is in homes such as Miss Esther's that the spirit and soul of old Treme can be found.

Born in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Miss Esther was six years old when she came to New Orleans. She lived at 1802 Saint Philip Street and subsequently moved to 1027 Treme. During that time, horse-drawn wagons passed and sold fruits and vegetables. She lived around the corner from Mr. Schiro, who was the father of New Orleans mayor Victor Schiro. "He used to sell coal in the wintertime and in the summer he sold ice cream," she stated. "Everybody used to buy coal for their fireplace and he had the shop. He used to have snoballs and sherbet and he used to make it and sell it. He would sell the li'l two-cents cone, five-cents cones, and then as much as you want. There was another man who used to pass with the horse and wagon. He sold the taffy candy."[30]

Miss Esther recalled that Carnival Day was marked by the annual arrival of the bawdy "Baby Dolls." "We used to go to the parade. We still have open house every Carnival." Mardi Gras Indians passed in front her house on lively Treme Street on Carnival Day and Saint Joseph's Night.

"I raised six children in the house at 1027 Treme," Miss Esther told me. "It was a mixed neighborhood, with black and white living there. I didn't go to Saint Augustine Church until my later years. Before that it was a white church. Black people could go, but they had to sit to one side. The last ten seats on one side was where black people had to sit. You could go in the church but that was their church."

Her great-aunt was principal of Joseph A. Craig Elementary School in Treme. "She was principal at Craig when they first built it. Then, Miss Dedeaux came," Miss Esther said. Her brother Herman was in the band and her sister "Bebee" was a majorette. Her other brother, Willie, also went to Craig. Miss Esther attended Craig and also Saint Mary's Academy, which was then on Orleans Street in the French Quarter. "I went to Saint Mary's three years," she continued. "My mother died when I was five years old. 'Sister' was taking care of us. Norman Barnum was my father. My grandmother was Clara Durand. I had nine brothers and sisters.

"We went to the lakefront, to the park on North Claiborne and Lafitte. One side of Claiborne was for white people, the other side of Claiborne was for black people. I used to go to the Dew Drop on La Salle. They had breakfast places up that way. I didn't go there when I was young because it was too adult.

"Quite a few musicians lived in my neighborhood. The parades had brass bands. The neighborhood had clubs. Caledonia used to be around the corner. I lived on Treme Street for seventy years. Long time ago, we used to play ball in the street."

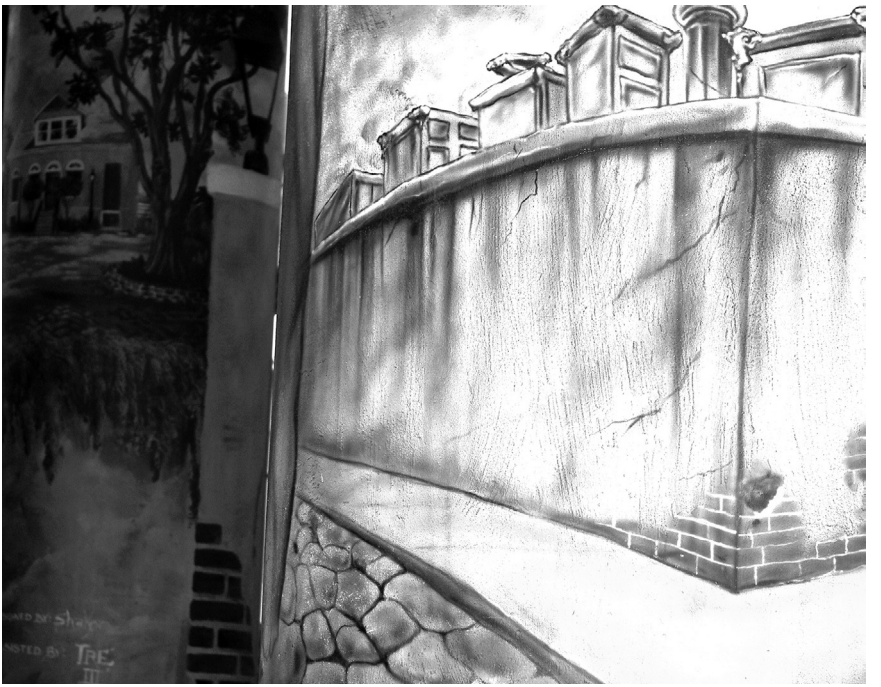
Treme Today

In 2002, the New Orleans African American Museum commissioned a group of artists to express the accomplishments of the people of Treme. Their efforts produced "Restore the Oaks," an enlightening public-art

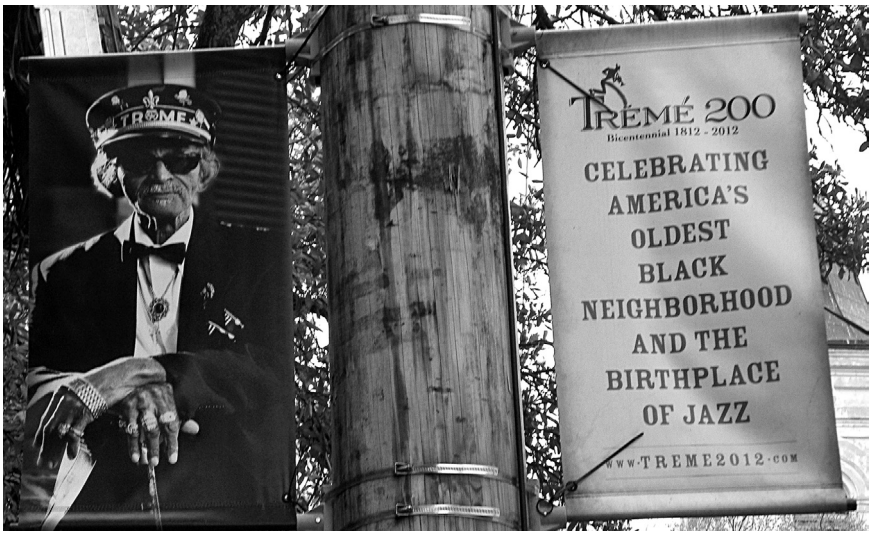
The New Orleans African American Museum

project that stretches for a mile on eleven blocks of North Claiborne Avenue between Saint Bernard Avenue and Saint Peter Street under Interstate 10. Using the pillars of the interstate as a canvas, numerous artists depicted the history of Treme with renderings of Chef Leah Chase, the old Treme market, slave revolts, Civil Rights activities, Africans drumming in Congo Square, the Rebirth Brass Band leading a second-line parade, and other representations of the area's traditions. The outermost pillars were painted with tree limbs and leaves as an homage to North Claiborne's days as a promenade.

Paintings, sculpture, and poetry are evocative representations of historic Treme. But the area itself is the historic treasure. Homer Plessy, Aristide Mary, Louis Armstrong, and others walked these same streets and passed the same houses that exist today. What is the future of Treme? It has been over two hundred years since it became a developed suburb of New Orleans. As the sun once again set on this Sixth Ward neighborhood, I spotted a girl sitting outside on a stoop on Treme Street, braiding another



Art under the Claiborne Avenue Overpass



Street banners celebrating musician "Uncle Lionel" and Treme's 200th anniversary

girl's hair. Next door, a boy strummed an acoustic guitar. In that narrow snapshot, all seemed normal.

I met Rick Mathieu on Treme Street, restoring a house two blocks from Miss Esther's. He is a third-generation construction worker raised to the trade by his father, Emanuel Mathieu. His house in the Seventh Ward took on eight feet of water during Hurricane Katrina. Mathieu and a rescue group dubbed the "Soul Patrol" spent eleven days picking up stranded residents with a pontoon boat and bringing them to safety.

"The challenge is redoing something that's beautiful," Mathieu told me. "Why take something beautiful and replace it with something that's not going to last? If that house stood up 200 years, that's telling you something right there."[31] He pointed across the street to an empty lot where a recently built pre-storm house fell to the winds of Katrina, the only house on the block to do so. "It was a brand-new house that wasn't five months old. It blew down," Mathieu stated. "They didn't know the old way and the [old way] is what counts."