

ATTACKING JIM CROW: BLACK ACTIVISM IN NEW ORLEANS, 1925-1941

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agriculture and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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May 2009

Acknowledgements

I received a tremendous amount of support in writing this dissertation. The staff of the following research facilities were very helpful, often offering knowledge of my subject: the Amistad Research Center, University of New Orleans Special Collections, and New Orleans Public Library Louisiana Division: City Archives & Special Collections.

Many people assisted me in my project. My advisor Dr. Gaines Foster gave me a great deal of critical encouragement and support at various stages of my work. I would also like to thank my family and friends for being there every step of the way while I was writing this dissertation. My sisters Shannon, Dametria, and Laura thanks for listening and only being a phone call away. My parents Betty and Joseph Sinegal thanks for all of the sacrifices you made to get me where I am today. To my grandparents Hilda Foster, and Rita Sinegal thanks for your prayers. Barbara and Winston DeCuir thanks for keeping me focused and for being my second parents. My husband Brandon DeCuir thanks for patiently sharing my dream through this long process and making sure that I always saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

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Abstract

After the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, blacks in the South lost most of the rights achieved during Reconstruction and for over half a century lived in a system defined by disfranchisement and segregation. *Plessy* promised a “separate but equal” society but by 1920 it was evident that separate was fulfilled but equal fell short in facilities. At about the same time, a three-tiered racial hierarchy, rooted in New Orleans long and distinctive racial history, returned. New Orleans’ black community was split into two groups, American blacks and Creoles. The two groups rarely interacted. As the black community developed its own economy, independent of white control, however, interactions between elite members of each group began to take place.

By 1925, elite members of each group came together to provide the black community in New Orleans with its first racial progressionist leaders. Racial progressionists used a gradual and moderate approach centered on attacking Jim Crow from within. They practiced a restrained, modest and reasonable leadership style in which they carefully and slowly petitioned whites for concessions within the system while not posing a threat to the white power structure. They chose to work primarily through two organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Federation of Civic Leagues. Through these organizations racial progressionists strove to make separate better in New Orleans’ black community by petitioning for better schools and more recreational facilities. This study thereby

examines, what might be considered, the first phase of the civil rights movement, in one southern city, New Orleans.

By the mid-thirties, the black community, led by the *Louisiana Weekly*, began to question the gradual and moderate approach of racial progressionists. The *Weekly* argued that the community needed new leaders who offered an active, aggressive and inclusive approach to obtaining civil rights. In 1941, a group of young men who called themselves “The Group” took over the leadership role in the New Orleans’ NAACP. They provided the community with the aggressive leadership it needed to continue the attack on the Jim Crow system that racial progressionists had begun in 1925.

Introduction

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, blacks in the South experienced the lowest point in their pursuit of social, political and economic equality. Most of the rights achieved during Reconstruction, including citizenship and suffrage, were infringed upon by a system of segregation and intimidation. The struggle for civil rights in the twentieth century was a fight to gain back what was lost after Reconstruction. Traditionally scholars of civil rights history begin analyzing the movement after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Topeka* decision or the Montgomery Bus boycott. Some have emphasized the impact of World War II. They have focused on national leaders, the non-violent approach that led the movement, and legal challenges within the judicial system to change the laws. They often have over looked the local leaders and their part in the movement as well as the approach those leaders took in the years before World War II. This study examines what might be considered the first phase of the civil rights movement, in a southern city, New Orleans. It focuses on the style and approach that emerged within a newly unified economic elite leadership in New Orleans, Louisiana in the years from 1925 to 1941.

August Meier in *Negro Thought in America* argues that between 1880 and 1915, African American thought on racial views changed in response to white opinion. During this time hostility and the adoption of racist legislation forced blacks to think of themselves as a group apart from white American society. The exclusion of blacks from

mainstream America led them to focus on improving their own society. In *Uplifting the Race: Black, Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Kevin Gaines argues that educated blacks, who made up the black elite, responded to the burdens of Jim Crow by focusing on uplifting themselves to white America's standards. Black elites, according to Gaines, claimed class distinctions because they were the "better class," whose very existence was evidence of race progress. The black elite wanted to prove to whites that through self-help they had acquired "respectable" values that should allow them a different status from other blacks. The strength of white supremacy and the notions of black inferiority kept the black elite from obtaining their desired status as first-class citizens.

Gaines' study focuses on the years between 1890 and 1920, when the black elite are developing a class identity that allows them to be representatives of the race's potential. Yet by 1914, Gaines argues, the uplift ideology started to experience difficulty because it could not keep up with the changing times, the war and a period of black militancy, which lasted from 1914-1925. After 1925 both the uplift ideology and the brief militancy fade. Gaines does not examine what happens to elite black leadership after 1925.

In New Orleans the uplift ideology is very important. During these years, New Orleans was divided based on cultural divisions from slavery and the revival of New Orleans' three-tiered racial hierarchy. New Orleans' black community consisted of two

groups, American blacks and Creoles. Through the uplift ideology, the black community began to develop its own economy independent of white control. That economy in turn allowed elite blacks from both the American black and Creole groups to begin to repair the division within the black community.

Once the elite black leadership formed it took on an additional approach that was realistic in the context of the times and centered on attacking Jim Crow from within. In New Orleans, 1925 is an important year because it was the first year in which the black elite united to ask for concessions. Elite black leaders in New Orleans from 1925 to 1940 reinvented themselves as racial progressionist (Pro`gres'sion`ist) --“one who holds to a belief in the progression of society towards perfection.”¹ The approach racial progressionists took towards advancing black society was gradual and moderate. It represented a restrained, modest and reasonable leadership style in which they carefully and slowly petitioned whites for concessions within the system while not threatening the white power structure.

Racial progressionists were not challenging the system to bring about integration or even equality they just wanted better facilities for the black community. They believed that in order to obtain change and gain concessions for the black masses they

¹ Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary. (Springfield, Massachusetts: C. & G. Merriam Co., 1913)

had to be exclusive in their leadership and work in the best interest of the masses. These leaders in turn created a form of social control over the middle and lower classes of American blacks and Creoles. The idea of working in the best interest of the community allowed racial progressionist to keep relationships between the black and white communities in New Orleans somewhat peaceful. At this time, lynching was a fact of everyday life, if a black person overtly disobeyed white authority they were subject to violence. Racial progressionist knew that as long as blacks in New Orleans accepted their place in the racial order, whites could be friendly sympathizers to their causes.

Racial progressionist leadership in New Orleans began with the uniting of two economic elite groups, the American blacks and Creoles, through business and educational relationships. Two men who led the progressionist's leadership early in its development were Walter Cohen and George Lucas. Cohen, a successful Creole, businessman and Republican Party leader, and Lucas, an American black, President of the local NAACP and distinguished doctor, established the exclusive gradual and moderate approach of the racial progressionists that lasted for fifteen years. This approach was so well established within the economic elite that it persisted ten years after Cohen's death in 1930 and Lucas' death in 1931.

During the following decade, men like Joseph A. Hardin, Rivers Frederick, Henderson H. Dunn, George Labat, James Gayle and other members of the economic

elite continued to pursue a gradual and moderate approach of gaining concessions within the system. They chose to work primarily through two organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Federation of Civic Leagues. However, as time changed and black problems grew, the gradual and moderate approach used by leaders within these organizations came to be challenged. By the mid-thirties, elite leaders like A. P. Tureaud, a young black lawyer, and C. C. Dejoie, a successful businessman and publisher of the *Louisiana Weekly*, who worked within and accepted the racial progressionist leadership, began to question its approach.

Tureaud and Dejoie saw a greater need to offer an active, aggressive and inclusive leadership to blacks in New Orleans who were experiencing severe racial injustices due to the harsh realities of the depression. These men were both able to slowly challenge the leadership to become more aggressive and inclusive. Tureaud challenged the leadership from within the two organizations that led New Orleans' black community, the NAACP and the Federation of Civic Leagues. His challenge was more vigorous in the NAACP than the Federation because the NAACP was a national protest organization that prided itself on demanding equality. The Federation was a local organization that united to improve black facilities in New Orleans. It was not a protest organization; Tureaud understood that and was still willing to work with the Federation to improve facilities.

Dejoie challenged the leadership to become more aggressive through his newspaper the *Louisiana Weekly*. He exposed the weaknesses of the leadership to deal with evolving problems in the community. Both Tureaud and Dejoie helped to bridge the gap between the moderate and exclusive leadership that evolved in New Orleans by 1925 and the aggressive and inclusive leadership that the community craved in 1939. These men listened to the needs of the community and challenged the existing leadership to stop working in the best interest of the masses and start working with the masses.

To understand the progressionist leadership that dominated black leadership in New Orleans from 1925 to 1941, one needs to understand the historical context out of which that leadership emerged. The first chapter, "New Orleans' Caste System," traces the evolution of the black community in New Orleans from slavery to 1896. It explains the unique racial, cultural, and social dynamics of a community divided and united by a long history of French, Spanish and later American rule. Culturally, Creoles were Catholic and American blacks were Protestant; socially, the groups were separated, Creoles lived downtown and American blacks uptown; politically, Creoles were more aggressive and American blacks more docile. In 1862, when Union troops captured New Orleans, during the Civil War, the two groups along with slaves were merged into one racial group to fit within America's dual racial order. The accord between the groups was always unbalanced with Creoles taking the lead in an aggressive manner

that demanded rights. American blacks were more willing to compromise with whites to gradually obtain civil rights. American blacks and Creoles had two competing political traditions that made it difficult for the groups to work together successfully.

The second chapter, "Formation of the Racial Progressionist Leadership" focuses on the years between 1900 and 1925. During those years, cultural divisions and the renewal of New Orleans' three-tiered caste system re-formed social separations in the black community. The Creole and American black communities each had its own economic hierarchy of upper, middle and lower classes. The upper class of Creoles and American blacks were largely college educated members of their communities who adhered to the principles of racial uplift of self-help and thrift through the creation of businesses. The notion of owning businesses and creating a black economy independent of white control appealed to many members of the black community, both Creoles and American blacks.

Through business enterprise, large business owners and professionals of both groups began to explore the possibilities of uniting to challenge the Jim Crow system. Despite cultural and social differences, the economic elite of both groups wanted improvements in race relations and facilities in the black community. The economic elite provided the black community in New Orleans with a racial progressionist leadership that used a moderate approach to gain concessions within the Jim Crow system.

The third chapter “The Federation of Civic Leagues” and the fourth chapter, the “NAACP,” concentrate on the creation of the leadership style and types of issues advocated by progressionists. The focus of the racial progressionist was on helping the entire black community by gaining resources that would best benefit the interest of the community. The path the leadership first took was education. The leaders of these groups viewed education as a prime means to uplift the community. The next aim of the leadership focused on better recreational facilities. Recreational facilities allowed the black community a place to relax and for safe activities for children.

The moderate approach worked well in the Federation of Civic Leagues, but not within the NAACP. The Federation, an organization exclusive to New Orleans with no national ties, was led by racial progressionist Joseph A. Hardin. It allowed Hardin the freedom to challenge Jim Crow as he saw fit. Hardin’s method for gaining concessions through the system relied on petitioning white officials to equalize black facilities. Petitioning was a slow and tedious process; however, the Federation met with some success and concessions were received.

The racial progressionist’s moderate approach experienced problems within the local NAACP, since it was not consistent with that of the national NAACP. As a protest organization, the national NAACP demanded that the Constitutional rights for blacks be honored. It strove to overturn the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision by filling lawsuits within the court system that revealed the disparities in separate facilities. It also fought

to end racial violence by whites against blacks, police brutality, intimidation, and lynching. The leadership of the New Orleans branch NAACP did not pursue cases of brutality or intimidation. They made it clear to whites in New Orleans that they were not trying to change the system. This showed the timid nature of the racial progressionist leadership and its unwillingness to pose a threat to the white power structure.

The fifth chapter, "*Louisiana Weekly*" examines New Orleans' black owned newspaper, the *Louisiana Weekly*, from its inception. Although the *Weekly's* positions on specific controversies are discussed in earlier chapters, this chapter focuses on the paper's coverage of the racial progressionist leadership in New Orleans between 1925 and 1940. In 1925, the paper did not criticize or question the approach of racial progressionist; instead they praised them for taking on the challenge of leading the community. However, as community problems grew and changed, the *Weekly* began to question the passivity of the racial progressionist leadership. It criticized and exposed the weaknesses and exclusive nature of the racial progressionists. It publish articles about the problems of blacks in New Orleans, such as brutality and discrimination cases and it exposed the weaknesses and reluctances of the two major organizations led by the racial progressionist, the Federation of Civic Leagues and the NAACP, to handle these issues.

The *Weekly* proposed its own agenda, which encouraged the black community to become more active. By 1939, the *Louisiana Weekly* called for a new leadership that would offer the black community an active, aggressive and inclusive leadership. This call was answered by a group of young men who called themselves “The Group” and rose to the leadership in the NAACP. They promised to offer a new leadership that focused on uniting the entire black community regardless of cultural, social and economic background in the struggle for equality. The Group’s leadership gave the black community renewed optimism. The new leaders of the NAACP related to the masses as they were members of the lower and middle class. The organization now had clear goals and objectives with leaders determined to fight aggressively.

Chapter 1 New Orleans's Caste System

A unique city in so many ways, New Orleans had a distinctive pattern of race relations, both before and after the Civil War. A vast array of literature has attempted to make sense of the complex nature of New Orleans' racial history.¹ Few have analyzed the connection between the pattern of race relations in New Orleans and the leadership the black community formed based on those connections. The type of leadership styles that evolved in the black community, one demanding equal citizenship, the other seeking pragmatic concessions, cannot be understood without first examining the historical composition of New Orleans' caste system. In order to understand the caste system, one must begin at the inception of the city and trace that evolution through slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction.

New Orleans' distinctive history began in 1718 when the French first settled there more than a century after the English founded their colonies along the Atlantic coast. English colonies often mirrored life in England; the language spoken was English and the religion practiced was Protestant. Life in New Orleans followed the culture of

¹ The vast literature includes, Virginia Domingues, *White by Definition: Social Classifications in Creole Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); James T. McGowan, *The Creation of a Slave Society: Louisiana Plantations in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: University of Rochester, 1976); Kimberly Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society In Colonial New Orleans*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997); Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2008); Sybil Kein *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

France; the language spoken was French and the religion was Catholicism. According to historians Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, “relative isolation as well as divergent experiences maintained the differences between Anglo-American settlements and New Orleans.”²

French rule in New Orleans lasted for forty-five years, from 1718 to 1763. Under the French, all settlers in New Orleans, including slaves, were Catholic. The Code Noir (Black Code) of 1724, allowed slaves to be baptized and to marry and forbade the separation of a married couple and their children under the age of fourteen. The Code Noir and the Roman Catholic Church also forbade interracial affairs, yet the colonist ignored that part of the Code. The church, according to historian Caryn Bell, adapted to such practices because of the scarcity of white women. “By the middle of the eighteenth century, interracial liaisons were commonplace, and parish registers indicated the church’s acceptance of social patterns within the city.”³ This led to a mixed free black Catholic population with “relative status and social mobility.”⁴

² Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon ed., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), xi.

³ Jerah Johnson, “Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos.” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 12-13; Laura Foner, “The Free People of Color in Louisiana and St. Dominique,” *Journal of Social History* III (Summer, 1970): 409; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New York Press, 1974), 108-109.

⁴ Caryn Cosse’ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 15.

The interracial liaisons created a three-tiered social system in New Orleans. Under it, white elites and slaves were at opposite ends, but in the middle was a free black class that enjoyed most legal rights and privileges of whites, except social status.⁵ In fact, historians Carl A. Brasseaux, Keith P. Fontenot and Claude F. Oubre have noted, colonial and antebellum records listed several transactions between whites and free persons of color, including business contracts, and legal suits, “clearly showing that free blacks were fully aware of their legal rights and responsibilities, that they knew how to use the legal system effectively to protect their civil and property rights, and that they were full participants in the region’s economic system.”⁶ Although, free people of color understood their legal rights and sometimes engaged in business with whites, they still were aware of their social status. Regardless of their economic status, they were treated as inferior to whites.

In 1763, New Orleans became a Spanish colony and remained one for the next thirty-seven years, until 1800. When Spain took over Louisiana it imposed the Spanish slave code, *Las Siete Partidas*, which allowed slaves to purchase their freedom from their masters. The Spanish government adopted this plan to keep French planters in line by giving slaves legal rights that they had never had before; “it was a key element

⁵ Carl A. Brasseaux, Keith P. Fontenot and Claude F. Oubre, *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40

in their strategy of control.”⁷ This strategy worked so well that French planters accused the Spanish government of “elevating the blacks to the status of freemen while reducing the French to a state of slavery.”⁸ By 1786 the population of free people of color grew significantly along with its social mobility and level of freedom. The growth of the free population caused Spanish Governor Estaban Miro to limit both the slave and free black populations in the city. He restricted the activities of the slave population by prohibiting slaves from buying alcohol, renting houses, and dancing in public on holidays. For free blacks of color, he restricted gatherings and forbade concubinage. His rules also required all free women of color to wear their hair up in tignons (kerchief); in addition, free women of color could not wear jewelry, feathers, or anything that would enhance their attractiveness.

While new laws were implemented in New Orleans by Spain, antagonism grew between New Orleans’ French colonists and its Spanish government. French colonists worried about slave revolts because of the large number of slaves purchasing their freedom under the Spanish regime. However, discontent was not limited to New Orleans. Restlessness was prevalent in French controlled colonies of the Caribbean and in English controlled colonies in North America. Notions of revolution began to spread through Europe and America, giving way to new interpretations of freedom and

⁷ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 18. If not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on Bell.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

liberty. To free men of color the new understanding of freedom and liberty meant racial equality.

In 1800, Louisiana returned to French rule. Three years later Napoleon sold New Orleans, as part of the Louisiana Purchase, to the United States. What the United States received in New Orleans was a melting pot of cultures, ideas and most importantly, a tripartite racial order with a well- educated, prosperous and assertive free black population that demanded political rights. By the end of colonial rule in 1803, according to Bell, there were 1,335 free blacks in New Orleans out of a total population of 8,050 residents, of which 2,775 were slaves.

When the United States took possession of Louisiana it implemented stricter laws to control the free people of color. Bell notes that in 1806, Louisiana enacted one of the harshest slave codes in the American South, which declared a slave subordinate to the will of his master under no restrictions. A slave master could do whatever he pleased with his slave, no matter if the slave was Catholic or worked outside the plantation. A slave had no rights. The territorial legislation also prohibited the emancipation of slaves under the age of thirty and the entry of free black males into Louisiana. Still, Bell argues, the new laws could not eliminate the presence of a free black caste unique in southern slave society.⁹ Adding to the free black caste was an influx of Saint Domingue refugees forced to seek asylum in New Orleans after the

⁹ Ibid., 36; Paul F. Lachance, "The Politics of Fear: French Louisianans and the Slave Trade, 1786-1809," *Plantation Society* I (June, 1979): 178- 84.

Haitian Revolution.¹⁰ The French speaking free people of color who came from Haiti more than doubled the free black population of New Orleans, thereby “strengthening the existing three-caste society developed under the French and Spanish rule.”¹¹

In Louisiana attempts were made to restrict free people of color, widen the socially segregated society and ensure unequal and inferior treatment. Under the Louisiana Civil Code of 1808, free people of color were required to identify themselves on public documents as a free man or free woman of color and interracial marriages were forbidden. Louisiana’s Civil Codes progressively got harsher as the years passed and slowly, the existing rights of the free people of color began to disappear.

The influx of free Anglo-Protestant blacks added to the already strained racial problems in New Orleans. According to Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cosse Bell, slaves and free men and women who migrated to Louisiana brought a highly developed way of life that had been created over many decades in various parts of the United States. Logsdon and Bell note that the institutions and values of Anglo-Protestant blacks, or American blacks, as Creoles of Color would later call them, differed drastically and helped to shape New Orleans’ black community’s peculiar way of life for years to come.¹² Most of the free American blacks migrated to Louisiana for work “bringing

¹⁰ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹² Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cosse’ Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900.” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton

with them a North American culture that was much older than that of the black Creoles of New Orleans.”¹³ They understood the dual racial order of the United States and accepted the tenets of the Anglo-American Protestant church. The Protestant church taught American blacks to be subservient, honor their masters, and most of all not to revolt.

In the 1840's, New Orleans' free American blacks formed their own Protestant church and secret society separate from whites. They created the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and obtained a charter from northern black leaders to open a Prince Hall Masonic lodge.¹⁴ In 1848, the St. James AME Church was incorporated and became the first AME church in New Orleans totally independent of white control. However, in 1858 St. James AME Church lost its incorporation because of concerns whites had over the large number of members and frequency of church gatherings. During these ten years American black leaders managed to establish at least three other AME churches, including: St. James, Morris Brown and Quinn. They also established three Prince Hall Masonic lodges--- the Richmond, Stringer and the Parsons Lodges.

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 209. If not otherwise cited the following rest on Logsdon and Bell.

¹³ Ibid., 211.

¹⁴ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 83; Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 213-215. In not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on Bell and Logsdon.

America's dual racial order allowed for no differences. The line was clearly drawn between black and white; however, in New Orleans that line had long been unclear. Its three-tiered caste system went back to French settlement with whites at the top, freed blacks in the middle and slaves at the bottom. There were fundamental differences between the middle and the bottom groups. According to historian Eric Foner, New Orleans had the largest free black community in the Deep South. Most of the free black population in New Orleans considered themselves Creoles. They were Catholic, educated, born in New Orleans, and could trace some family ties to white Creoles of the city. Their wealth, social standing, education, and unique history set them apart from slaves as well as free persons of color in other states.¹⁵ Most were descendants of unions among Native Americans, French, Spanish and Africans. They enjoyed various rights and privileges, but not the right to vote. Before the Civil War, they owned about two million dollars worth of property and dominated skilled crafts like bricklaying, cigar making, carpentry, and shoemaking.

The wealth that Creoles accumulated before the war provided them the means to build social institutions that strengthened their community. During the antebellum period the Creole community organized more than thirty social and benevolent societies and one orphan asylum. The best-known organizations included the Marie

¹⁵ Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction 1863- 1877* (Harper & Row: New York, 1984), 21; John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1973), 11.

Couvent's Catholic Society for the Instruction of Orphans, the Colored Female Benevolent Society, the Union Band Society, and the Benevolent Association of the Veterans of 1815.¹⁶ Institutions like these created a leadership class, fostered an awareness of social problems, and promoted racial uplift in the Creole community.¹⁷ The Catholic Society for the Instruction of Orphans built a free school for orphan children at 1941 Dauphine Street. In 1915 a hurricane destroyed the school. The other organizations mentioned did not survive into the mid twentieth century.

The most important possession of a Creole was his education. Through a good education, Creoles were able to become self-sufficient. The Creole community prided itself on its ability to achieve a formal education that led to prestigious careers in medicine, law, science and music. In 1850, there were 1,000 Creoles attending private schools in Orleans parish not to mention the approximately 2,000 Creoles who attended schools in Paris and in the North and West. The culture and social life of the free antebellum Creoles was just as rich as whites. They enjoyed recreations that included dancing, drinking, gambling and going to the opera and the theater. Still, despite the rich culture and social life and the self-sufficiency that education brought to the Creole community, they did not have full citizenship rights and were not equal to whites. Yet they were arguably different from slaves and free Anglo-Protestant blacks. For many

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷ Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 11. If not otherwise cited the following primarily rest on Blassingame.

whites in New Orleans those differences went beyond education levels, religious preference and social ties, to skin complexion. In a society in which white skin was glorified, the lighter one's skin tone the more favor one received from whites. This caused an even greater separation between Creoles, free Anglo-Protestant blacks, and slaves.

Generally, Creoles had light complexions and slaves had dark complexions. There were some Anglo-Protestant blacks who had light complexions that enjoyed the privileges associated with light skin in the white community. Skin color had a close correlation to status. In New Orleans 80 percent of all dark-skinned blacks were slaves and 70 percent of all light-skinned blacks were freedmen.¹⁸ By law free light-skinned blacks could not socialize with dark-skinned slaves. The separation based on skin color was used by the white community as a way of controlling the black population both slave and free. It made light-skinned blacks believe they were better than dark-skinned blacks when in actuality both groups were considered inferior to whites.

The three-tiered caste system remained in place in New Orleans until Union troops captured the city in 1862. Soon after, Reconstruction began in Louisiana and the stage was set for what many thought would be a new South. Slaves and freedmen dreamed of a New Orleans that would allow them the basic rights afforded in the United States Constitution. According to historians Logdson and Bell, "nowhere did

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

Reconstruction begin so early or advance so far in its legal changes as in New Orleans, and probably nowhere were black leaders so demanding or, on occasion, so divided in their response to the new American leadership."¹⁹ Reconstruction brought out several questions about the rights of ex-slaves and free people of color, and whether there would be any distinction between the two groups. Issues critical to the ex-slaves and freedmen included: freedom and family security, land and economic security, suffrage and equality before the law, and education and social justice. The move towards freedom in New Orleans caused older divisions between slave and free to disappear, including the three-tiered caste system that gave New Orleans its uniqueness. It was replaced by the American caste system.

Despite color distinctions and ethno-cultural differences between Creoles and American blacks in New Orleans, they were grouped together into one racial category according to America's caste system, which only saw black and white.²⁰ The two groups had a choice to make, either unify under a common black identity to work towards similar goals or to remain divided, with each group fighting for the interest of its own group. *L'Union*, a newspaper in the city edited by radical Creole Paul Trevigne,

¹⁹ Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 216.

²⁰ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 689.

called for “harmony among all the descendants of the African race.”²¹ Both groups accepted the challenge. Their first goal included forming a coalition of leaders from each community and allying with white union supporters. One of the most essential parts of this coalition came from the leadership of American black Prince Hall Masonic lodges formed before the Civil War began. Historians Logsdon and Bell note that even before the war, Creole and American black leaders had begun to “transcend barriers of language and culture” in part because the Masonic lodges recruited both American blacks and Creoles.²² Oscar J. Dunn, a free American black, recruited Creoles of color into the Prince Hall Masonic unit of the Richmond Lodge, and by 1864, Dunn became grandmaster of all Prince Hall units in the city. The Masonic lodges provided an important catalyst that helped to bridge the gap among social, religious and cultural differences by seeking an overall goal of social and political equality.

The first goal of the coalition was suffrage. On November 5, 1863, leaders of the newspaper *L'Union*, organized the first interracial rally among white unionists, American blacks led by P. B. S. Pinchback, and Creoles of color led by Francois Boisdore, to discuss enfranchisement.²³ At the meeting a white unionist suggested that

²¹ Logsdon and Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans.” in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 216. In not otherwise cited, the following rest primarily on Bell, and Logdson.

²² *Ibid.*, 223.

²³ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 248; Hirsch and Logsdon ed., *Creole New Orleans*, 224.

blacks refrain from asking for suffrage rights because racial prejudice was too strong to consider giving blacks political rights.²⁴ Immediately, Creole leader Francois Boisdore rejected that idea, arguing that suffrage rights for blacks were long overdue. American black leader P. B. S. Pinchback agreed. At a second interracial meeting held on November 26, 1863, white unionist radical Thomas Durant, of the Union Association, argued that ex-slaves should not be given suffrage rights. He felt that suffrage rights should only be extended to “the antebellum free black community- a class of persons who had exercised many of the rights of free men before the war.”²⁵ Boisdore and Pinchback reluctantly agreed with Durant’s argument because they felt it would be the only way to gain suffrage; however, the possibility of extending suffrage rights to ex-slaves still existed. At this point, Lincoln had not freed any slaves in territories occupied by the union army. Therefore, the suffrage question did not apply to non-free-born blacks in Louisiana because they were not recognized as U.S. citizens. Still, black leaders went to Washington to petition President Lincoln for suffrage rights for all black men in Louisiana. Before the black leaders made it to Washington, Durant and other white unionist persuaded them to modify the petition to focus on gaining suffrage rights for only freeborn blacks. Durant felt this was the only way the petition would succeed in Washington.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 249.

On March 10, 1864, Creole leaders, Jean-Baptiste Roudanez and E. Arnold Bertonneau, met with U. S. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Congressman William D. Kelley of Pennsylvania to discuss the final preparations for the petition. Kelly and Sumner suggested to Roudanez and Bertonneau that the petition be amended to its original form, which asked that extended suffrage rights be extended to all freedmen and freeborn men in the South.²⁶ A few days later, Roudanez and Bertonneau presented the amended petition to President Lincoln. Lincoln was very impressed with the presentation. Privately, he encouraged Louisiana's governor, Michael Hahn to consider granting suffrage rights to a select few freeborn blacks. However, publically Lincoln remained reserved by denying suffrage rights to blacks.²⁷

In 1864, the campaign for suffrage rights moved from a petition to the president to a grassroots movement enlisting congressional involvement. The men who engineered this movement in Louisiana were Thomas Durant, a white radical unionist, and Louis C. Roudanez, a prominent Creole physician. Durant continued to lobby senators and congressmen in Washington. Roudanez founded a newspaper to promote unity within the black community and to continue the fight for suffrage rights. He called the newspaper *La Tribune* and published it in both French and English editions so that all blacks could read it. Paul Trevigne, former editor of *L'Union*, became the editor

²⁶ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 252; Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 225-226.

²⁷ Ibid.

of *La Tribune*. The paper started out as a weekly, but soon became the first black newspaper published daily in the United States.²⁸

La Tribune encouraged the community to fight for universal male suffrage. The newspaper almost succeeded, until, white politicians began to create problems by exploiting fundamental cultural and religious differences between the American blacks and Creoles.²⁹ These politicians convinced American black leaders to disagree with the Creoles' radical plan for universal male suffrage. They did so by preying on American blacks who accepted the American racial order as inevitable. Creoles had never accepted the inevitability of America's racial order, "this struck some black Americans as a denial of racial solidarity."³⁰ Further dividing the black community, white politicians, with the help of a few American black leaders, launched a newspaper, called the *Black Republican*.³¹ The newspaper argued against universal male suffrage stating that, "It would be an anomaly in the history of politics to change in a short season the usage of a State like this to such as to confer upon the colored race rights and privileges

²⁸ "Celebrate One Hundred Sixteen Years of Negro Newspapers" Roll 58, Box 77, Folder 59, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 229.

²⁹ Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 246.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

heretofore not enjoyed by them in any other state."³² Still, the *Tribune* pressed forward with its political demands.

In 1865 the interracial coalition between Durant and Roudanez became a political coalition called the Friends of Universal Suffrage. The coalition proposed radical political changes for blacks, stating that everyone must be "given a fair chance in the world, with the same rights before the law; that each one be free and unobstructed to find his own level, according to his education and means."³³ The Friends of Universal Suffrage wanted equal political rights for blacks, the right to serve on juries, the right to vote and the right to hold political offices.

In opposition to the radical coalition of the Friends of Universal Suffrage, a moderate interracial political organization, the National Union Republican Club, was created. Its president, Henry Clay Warmoth, a former Union officer from Missouri, was a conservative who had not favored emancipation; however, he was the first moderate to express public support for black suffrage.³⁴ On September 25, 1865, a suggestion was made that the two groups, Friends of Universal Suffrage and the National Union Republican Club, merge to form the Republican Party of Louisiana. Durant was all for the merger; however, Roudanez and the *Tribune* did not support it. The newspaper

³² Ibid., 239.

³³ Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 256.

³⁴ Ibid., 258.

argued that a merger of the two groups under the Republican Party would ultimately mean the adoption of the Republican Party's platform. The paper argued that Friends of Universal Suffrage would become obedient tools in the hands of a party whose policy was not settled on the question of suffrage rights. Instead the newspaper argued, "Let us be allies of the Republicans, not their tools; let us retain our individuality, our banner, and our name."³⁵ In the end the radicals agreed to the merger with the moderates after the moderates adopted universal suffrage as part of the party's national platform. The Republican Party of Louisiana was thus formed.

In a state wide election in November of 1865, white voters reelected southern Democrats, reversed all advances blacks had made, revised Louisiana's black codes, and reduced blacks to a semi-slave status. In municipal elections held in the beginning of 1866, city residents continued to elect southern Democrats and expel Unionists. The Republican Party with the help of conservative Unionists fought back by trying to reconvene the constitutional convention of 1864 to give blacks voting rights and to take voting rights away from former Rebels. On July 30, 1866, the convention, set to convene at Mechanics Institute, was assaulted by a white mob that opened fire on a procession of over two hundred black marchers converging on the convention hall. At the end of the day there were over 150 black wounded and about 45 dead. Three white unionists died

³⁵ Tribune, 26, September 1865, 1; Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 258.

and only one rioter.³⁶ The riot caused several white Unionist radicals, including Thomas Durant, to leave the state.

By 1867, Congress had had enough of President Johnson's plan for reconstruction which allowed Southern states to elect the same white politicians as before the war, created another form of slavery with the black codes, and openly intimidated blacks with violence. Thus, Congress adopted a new plan for reconstruction. Under Congressional Reconstruction, Louisiana became a military district occupied by union soldiers, ex-Confederates were disfranchised, and the Fourteenth Amendment, promoting equal protection, was passed. Congressional Reconstruction revived the *Tribune's* demands for political rights and helped to add demands for social rights. In May of 1867, the *Tribune* gained powerful new friends. The French-speaking Scottish Rite Masonic order opened its doors to black members. Creole leaders like Paul Trevigne, Henry and Octave Rey, Louis Nelson Fouche, Lucien Capla and Arnold Bertonneau became members of the new Scottish Rite lodges.³⁷ Until then, the only Masonic lodges open to blacks were Prince Hall Lodges created by American blacks. Despite the new alliances, the radical faction of the Republican Party of Louisiana led by the *Tribune* was overthrown by a moderate faction of white carpetbaggers and American blacks led by Henry Clay Warmoth.

³⁶ Ibid., 260-262.

³⁷ Ibid., 265.

Warmoth captured control of the Republican Party by dividing the black community. He formed a key alliance with John P. Newman, a white leader in the American black community. Newman was minister of the Ames Methodist Episcopal Church and ran his own weekly newspaper, the *New Orleans Advocate*.³⁸ Warmoth used Newman's influence in the black community to open up ethnic feuds between Creoles and American blacks. In his newspaper Newman condemned radical Creole leaders for wanting to claim exclusive rights to rule the city and encouraged American blacks to rebel against Creole leadership. Creole leaders responded with an article in the *Tribune* accusing Newman of wanting to split the black community in politics, religion and social relations.

Relationships in the Republican Party between white moderates and radical Creoles deteriorated, leaving many American blacks to choose sides. Fighting within the party lasted for weeks before the next scheduled constitutional convention held on November 23, 1867. The fighting caused Creole leaders to demand assurances from the party that black Republicans would have an equal share of seats as whites at the convention. They wanted a guarantee of half of the delegates so that they would have equal representation for their platform. The Creole radicals never received their guarantee.

³⁸Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon, 246.

The debate over the one-half guarantee exposed a rift among black Republicans, some of whom did not support it. One of the people who opposed it was P. B. S. Pinchback, an American black, who felt that merit, not race, should be the basis for political office. Radical Creole leaders disagreed with Pinchback. They wanted total equality and not what moderate white Republicans believed they should have at the moment. The differences in views between the radical Creole leaders, who wanted the one-half guarantee, and American black leaders, who opposed it, gave white moderates the chance to secure their control of the Republican Party at the state convention.³⁹

At the convention Warmoth received endorsements for governor from two American black leaders, Pinchback and James H. Ingraham. Radical Creoles supported one of their own for governor, Major Francis Dumas.⁴⁰ Dumas lost the Republican nomination for governor by two votes to Warmoth.⁴¹ The *Tribune*, leaders, subsequently refused to support the Republican nominee Warmoth; as a result, Roudanez and his supporters never recovered their dominant leadership role in Louisiana politics. The *Tribune* lost its support as a daily newspaper and eventually

³⁹ Ibid. 274.

⁴⁰ Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon ed., 241; "Celebrate One Hundred Sixteen Years of Negro Newspapers," Roll 58, Box 77, Folder 59. A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴¹ Ibid; Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 274.

ceased publication. The radical Creoles forceful voice in New Orleans politics was slowly silenced.

In fact, the only voice radical Creoles had was that of American black leader Oscar Dunn, elected as lieutenant governor of Louisiana in 1868. Although he long supported their radical platform for full equality, Dunn was not totally inclined to help radical Creole leaders. He was unhappy with radical Creole leaders because most of them left the Prince Hall Masonic lodges for newly integrated Scottish Rite Lodges. Historians Logsdon and Bell argue that Dunn did not “feel that the logic of integration extended to the voluntary societies that blacks had fostered within their own communities.”⁴² According to Logsdon and Bell, Dunn charged that the Scottish Rite Masons did not truly integrate their lodges; instead they formed new all black Scottish Rite Lodges. The new lodges created were integrated although they did have more Creole members than white members. Logsdon and Bell further note that Dunn was wrong in his charge, but that this was a turning point in destroying the Creole and American black alliance. Despite the controversy between the Masons, Dunn tried hard to reestablish the radical Creole leadership by having Governor Warmoth impeached.

In the meantime, Warmoth formed an important alliance with American black leader, P. B. S. Pinchback, who at this time was increasing in popularity and power.

⁴² Logsdon and Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans.” in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon Hirsch and Logsdon ed., 249. If not otherwise cited, the following rest primarily on Logsdon and Bell.

Pinchback, a native of Macon, Georgia, was born to a white planter and a former slave. During the Civil War, he came to Louisiana and became the only African American captain in the Union controlled 1st Louisiana Native Guards. After the war, he remained in the state and became active in the Republican Party. In 1868, Pinchback was elected as a Louisiana state senator and later appointed lieutenant governor by Henry Clay Warmoth. In 1872, he became governor after the impeachment of Henry Clay Warmoth, the result of Dunn's efforts. White anti-Warmoth Republicans and radical black Creoles did not approve of Pinchback's reign as governor, which lasted for only thirty-five days, from December 9, 1872 to January 13, 1873. Both groups saw Pinchback as a pawn of former governor Warmoth, and thus white anti-Warmoth Republicans and radical black Creoles formed an alliance.

In 1873, the alliance between white anti-Warmoth Republican leader William P. Kellogg and Creole leaders led to the election of Kellogg as governor and C.C. Antoine, an American black who sympathized with radical Creoles, as lieutenant governor. The alliance formed proved powerless to the advancement of any racial causes of the radical Creoles. From 1873 to 1876, violence against blacks increased in the state as the federal government slowly turned its back on the South. The fear of white violence caused many blacks to stop voting. By 1877, the Democratic Party regained control in Louisiana. Reconstruction of the south ended; the nation was "united" once again. In 1879, Pinchback, as the "black leader," accepted Louisiana's new constitution that

reversed the constitution of 1868 and all of the work of the radical Creoles, including integrated schools, integrated public accommodations, and voting rights, in exchange for the black college, Southern University. Creole leaders never forgave Pinchback. In their eyes he had betrayed the race.

In reality Pinchback did what he had to because he was not given any options. He knew that the Compromise of 1877 ended the national Republican Party's ties to southern blacks, leaving them powerless in the face of white Democrat control. In a newspaper article Pinchback stated his plea to the black community by saying that he had, "learned to look at things as they are and not as I would have them." This "country, at least so far as the South is concerned, is a white man's country. What I wish to impress upon my people, is that no change is likely to take place in our day and generation that will reverse the order of things."⁴³

Pinchback's decision to be practical and accept the racial order of the South divided the black community. Some American black and Creoles leaders agreed with Pinchback; they felt that there was nothing they could do to change the inevitable. The only thing that they could do was to be practical about the situation and accept whatever concessions they could for the betterment of the black community. Others felt the complete opposite. They agreed with radical Creole leaders like Louis Roudanez,

⁴³ *Louisianian*, 14 June 1879.

Paul Trevigne, Aristide Mary, and Arthur Esteves that there could be no concessions of the rights of a United States citizen.

At the end of Reconstruction, Creoles and American blacks still remained grouped together under the American caste system. Leaders of both groups worked hard to remain united so that African Americans could prosper and enjoy the rights of a United States citizen. In 1879, black leaders lost most of their political involvement in state government when Louisiana adopted a new constitution ushering in Democratic rule. Still, blacks continued to organize efforts towards gaining full equality. One of the main organizers at this time was Rodolphe Desdune, a Creole law student at Straight University, a black college in New Orleans founded in 1868 by the American Missionary Association. Desdune helped organize a group of Creoles and American blacks into the Young Men's Progressive Association. The goal of the association was to renew idealism and militancy among younger blacks. In 1881, Desdune tried to form an "Association of Equal Right" to protect black voting rights.⁴⁴ Neither of the two organizations received very much support from prominent Creole and American black leaders. Those leaders were still trying to accept the restrictions placed on black rights by the new constitution.

By 1890, the political situation for blacks had further deteriorated, which provoked radical Creoles to try once more to resist segregation. The first goal of these

⁴⁴ Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon Hirsch and Logsdon ed., 255.

activists included having a voice in both the American black and Creole community. In order to have a voice they repeated history by establishing a new newspaper, which would be printed in both French and English. They called the newspaper the *Crusader*. The *Crusader* became exactly what its name implied, an advocate for equal rights. The publisher of the *Crusader* was Louis A. Martinet. Martinet was one of eight children born to a Belgian carpenter and a free woman of color in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, in 1849. Martinet attended and graduated from Straight University Law School in New Orleans in 1876. After graduation he remained in New Orleans, married a Creole woman named Leonora V. Miller in 1882, and had two children.⁴⁵ In addition to his legal education, Martinet obtained a medical degree from the New Orleans University medical department called Flint Medical College, which opened in 1899. He was admired and respected by both American blacks and Creoles.

The editor of the *Crusader* was Rodolph L. Desdunes, a New Orleans Creole, prominent writer, public speaker and author, who often criticized political leaders for their indecisive policies with respect to race matters.⁴⁶ The *Crusader* became the voice and advocate of black protest. The newspaper allowed Desdune and Martinet to spread

⁴⁵ Hunting For Bears, comp. *Louisiana Marriages, 1718-1925* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2004. Original data: Compiled from a variety of sources including original marriage records located in Family History Library microfilm, microfiche, or books. Original marriage records are available from the Clerk of the Court where the marriage license was issued.

⁴⁶ "Celebrate One Hundred Sixteen Years of Negro Newspapers," Roll 58, Box 77, Folder 59. A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

their message about the continual fight for equality. It also helped them spearhead the formation of a new national civil rights group, the American Citizens Equal Rights Association (ACERA). ACERA included both black and white leaders from throughout the South who wanted to “better secure the free and full exercise of every political and civil right as guaranteed to the American citizen by the constitution.”⁴⁷ Shortly after ACERA’s first convention in Washington, D. C., Louisiana’s legislature passed laws forbidding interracial marriages and mandating the separation of blacks and whites on all railroads in the state. Louisiana’s chapter of ACERA responded on May 24, 1890, by sending a delegation of its members to Baton Rouge to speak out against the legislation.

The delegation consisted of both Creole and American black leaders. The American black leaders included Reverend A. E. P. Albert, a black Protestant minister and editor of *Southwest Christian Advocate*, and James Lewis, the Grand Master of Eureka Grand Lodge of Prince Hall Mason and leader of the first black regiment for the U.S. Army during the Civil War. The Creole leaders included Martinet and Desdunes from the *Crusader*; Paul Trevigne, former editor of the *Tribune* and *La Union*; and Laurent Auguste, former Unification Movement member. However, by June 3, 1890, many American black members of ACERA had dropped out because of white

⁴⁷ Keith Weldon Medley, *We as Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 92.

intimidation, leaving Creole leaders to continue the struggle alone.⁴⁸ The delegation ultimately failed to prevent the passage of the Separate Car Act and ACERA collapsed shortly thereafter.

The collapse of ACERA did not deter Desdunes and Martinet from continuing the struggle for equal rights. In 1891, they used the *Crusader* once again to promote equal rights in a grassroots attempt to form yet another committee of black citizens, for the purpose of fighting against the 1890 Separate Car Act. Desdunes and Martinet felt that it was the first of many acts that would hinder the rights of black citizens in Louisiana. On July 4, 1891, the *Crusader* made a public plea to leaders of the black community:

We are American citizens and it is our duty to defend our constitutional rights against the encroachments and attacks of prejudice. The courts are open for that purpose and it is our faults if we do not seek the redress they alone can afford in cases of injustice done or of wrongs endured.⁴⁹

One of the first black leaders to accept the challenge from Desdunes and Martinet was Aristide Mary. Mary was a wealthy Creole, whose estate at the time of his death in 1893 was estimated to be a quarter of a million dollars.⁵⁰ Desdunes described Mary as a

⁴⁸ Logsdon and Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans." in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon Hirsch and Logsdon ed., 257.

⁴⁹ *Crusader*, 4 July 1891.

⁵⁰ *Daily Item*, 15 May 1893.

person who, “understood that equality could not take up its residence within the domain of subordination, and that compromises ...only postponed the solution.”⁵¹

After Mary committed to the cause for equal rights, several other leaders, both Creole and American black, did the same.

On September 1, 1891, the Comite des Citoyens (Citizens Committee) formed with the ultimate goal of ending the practice of racial segregation in the South. Members of the committee included educators, lawyers, businessmen, social activist, ex- Union soldiers, government workers and writers. Most of the members were Creoles, who lived in the downtown areas of the city.⁵² However, a few American black members including C. C. Antoine, former lieutenant governor of Louisiana; and James Lewis, Grand Master of Eureka Grand Lodge of Prince Hall Mason, joined as well.

The Citizens Committee believed that the only way blacks could gain equality was through the federal courts; however, first they needed a test case. In 1892, the Citizens Committee recruited Homer Plessy, a Creole shoemaker, to test the validity of the Separate Car Act. On June 7, 1892, Plessy purchased a train ticket from the East Louisiana Railroad Company. He boarded the train and purposely sat in the white section. When asked by the conductor to move to the “colored car,” Plessy refused and

⁵¹ Keith Weldon Medley, *We as Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson*, (Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 171. Desdune Quoted in Medley.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118. The downtown area refers to areas along the Mississippi River down river from canal Street, including the French Quarter, Treme and Faubourg Marigny.

was arrested. Soon after, a court battle began. Lawyers working for the Citizens Committee to defend Plessy argued that the East Louisiana Railroad Company had denied Plessy his constitutional rights under the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. The battle over the constitutionality of the Separate Car Act lasted until 1896. During this time, the Citizens Committee fought tirelessly to end what it considered to be the first of many Jim Crow laws of the South. However, instead of ending Jim Crow, the *Plessy* case established the separate but equal doctrine in American law. The devastating loss caused the Citizens Committee to disperse and further eroded the already fragile relationships between Creoles and American blacks. The community became fractured once again, and ultimately vulnerable to white control.

Whites used the vulnerability of the black community to create a strong political system of white supremacy. In the South maintaining security and protection of citizens meant political disfranchisement of blacks. Many southern white believed in the ultimate supremacy of the white man especially in matters concerning social and political equality. It was a known and accepted fact that many white people believed blacks were inferior and incapable of any real social or political equality. As a result, segregation and disfranchisement became the law in Louisiana with the passage of the 1898 state constitution.

In article 197 of the constitution, the Louisiana legislature made exceptions to voting rights of a Louisiana citizen by stating that all men who wished to vote had to be

able to read and write. According to the constitution, that person had to demonstrate to the registrar his ability to read and write without assistance from anyone. If he was not able to read or write, he could still register if he owned three hundred dollars worth of property. If he did not own three hundred dollars worth of property and could not read and write, he could still register to vote if he voted before January 1, 1867, or was the son or grandson of a person who voted before that date.

Article 198 of the state constitution implemented a poll tax of one dollar a year to be paid on or before December 31st of each year, for two years preceding the year a person wanted to vote.⁵³ Lawmakers claimed that such requirements did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment because they applied to all voters regardless of race. In reality, blacks received the strictest enforcement of the requirements as opposed to whites. Between the years of 1897 and 1900, the state of Louisiana purged over one hundred twenty thousand of its black citizenry from the voting rolls. Black voting strength in Louisiana dropped from 44 percent in 1897 to 4 percent in 1900. By 1910, black voter registration in Louisiana dropped to 0.6 percent of registered voters.⁵⁴

Blacks were politically weakened by the voter registration laws and socially damaged by the failure of the *Plessy* case. This caused already fragile relationships

⁵³ Louisiana State Constitution, 1898, Suffrage and Elections. It is unknown if the Creole population retained more voting numbers than the American blacks population.

⁵⁴ Keith Weldon Medley, *We as Freeman*, 213; Perry Howard, *Political Tendencies in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 190. Legally by 1910, the Louisiana legislature abolished any law differentiating between dark-skinned blacks and Creoles of color.

between American blacks and Creoles to be exploited by whites. The instability in the black community allowed whites to place its favor of one group against another. Whites in the city took advantage of this opportunity by destroying the American caste system of two racial categories and replaced it with a version of New Orleans's antebellum three-tiered caste system. The three-tiered caste system focused on widening the divide within the black community.⁵⁵ Creating such a divide would ultimately ensure that the black community would never experience the same type of unity it did during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Additionally it reinstated and reinforced the inferiority of blacks.

White supremacy and white skin was glorified within this system, "since whites had all the power and most of the wealth and education, many Negroes accepted the concept of the goodness, purity, and sanctity of whiteness and the degradation of blackness."⁵⁶ Based on this notion whites began to differentiate between blacks based on skin color, resulting in Creoles of Color accepting the assessments of whites and associating privileges with their light skin.⁵⁷ This separation was encouraged by whites as a means of dividing the black community, thereby making it easier to control them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 696; Brasseaux, Fontenot, and Oubre, eds., *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country*, 105.

⁵⁸ Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 21.

The revival of the three-tiered caste system in New Orleans at the end of the nineteenth century set black progress back. It allowed whites to control and shape black society in the twentieth century, and meant “that whites had the power to reach into the black community and shape it, to determine the goals the black community sought, the means devised to seek those goals, the leadership the black community had, the kinds of personal options black often felt they had, and even the views blacks had of themselves.”⁵⁹ The three-tiered caste system left blacks powerless to connect on the commonality of being a black person in America and on the struggles that all blacks endured. Blacks were socially separated within their own communities because of this system.

By the turn of the century, according to Rudolph Desdunes, *Creoles of Color* became obsessed with maintaining their appearances. They turned into an “amalgamated Negro” who was “a fool in his own house” and who “esteemed nothing so much as the fairness of his skin and the souple strains of his hair.”⁶⁰ Light skin, silky hair, and light eyes made up the ideal Creole of Color. In order to fit into Creole society you had to pass the “brown- paper- bag test” and the “fine- tooth- comb” test. One Creole lady said, when talking about American blacks, “those people ain’t my

⁵⁹ Jack Bloom, *Class Race, And The Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 120. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 21.

⁶⁰ Logsdon and Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans.” in *Creole New Orleans*, ed. Hirsch and Logsdon Hirsch and Logsdon ed., 203. R. L. Desdune, *A Few Words to Dr. Dubois: With Malice Towards None* quoted in Logsdon and Bell.

people.”⁶¹ When applying for anything in the city, “there were three letters you could mark...: W for white, N for Negro and C for Creole.”⁶² The three letters were based on a three-tiered racial caste system. A cliché in the black community appropriately described the degree of social and legal favoritism based on color:

If you white,
You alright.
If you brown,
You can stick around.
But if you black,
You better get back.⁶³

Blacks with a darker complexion began to dislike those with a lighter complexion, because more advantages through the three-tiered caste system were given to them. Thus, blacks in the city separated themselves into two different social classes based on white assessments created by the caste system. These assessments caused blacks to segregate themselves in all walks of life including residential. The two groups became such strangers to each other that men faced the risk of bodily harm if they

⁶¹ Dalt Wonk, “The Creole of Color,” *Orleans Magazine*, 10 (May 1976): 47-58.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Oliver Evans, *New Orleans* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 179-180.

strayed into the wrong territory.⁶⁴

Blacks in New Orleans, from the Civil War to the turn of the century, struggled with two protest traditions, one tied to the Creole culture and the other to the American black culture. The Creole tradition produced equal rights activists like Mary, Martinet and Desdunes, who felt that it was, “more noble and dignified to fight, no matter what, than to show a passive attitude of resignation.”⁶⁵ The American black tradition produced practical advocates like P. B. S. Pinchback, who sought pragmatic concessions and accepted the racial order of the south. The struggle between these two competing protest traditions ended when the Democrats came to power. For a time, both the practical activism of American blacks and the radical activism of Creoles died, except for a brief revival during the *Plessy* case. Alliances between Creoles and American blacks dissipated as did contact between the two groups as whites reintroduced the three-tiered caste system in the city. The New Orleans black community became divided and lacked clear leadership.

⁶⁴ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 14-15.

⁶⁵ Rodolphe L. Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*. Translated and Edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, Daughter of the Cross Foreword by Charles E. O'Neill (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 147.

Chapter 2 Formation of the Racial Progressionist Leadership

By the beginning of the twentieth century, segregation and disfranchisement became the norm in the South as blacks rapidly lost their rights and were forced to become second-class citizens. In New Orleans the black community dealt with those issues and others such as cultural divisions and the reemergence of the three-tiered caste system, which caused the black community to separate into two social groups - American blacks and Creoles. Within each group, an upper, middle and lower economic class existed. After 1925, the upper economic classes of the American blacks and Creoles united to form a new African American economic elite.

The economic elite formed relationships based on values it shared with mainstream black intellectual thought on wealth, occupation and education. In doing so they created a unity that crossed family background, native or non- native origin, language and religion. Only upper economic classes of these groups were part of this alliance. Common objectives and goals made them more alike in terms of attaining the “American dream” of respectability, refinement and education. Each group strove to escape from, “a predetermined set of racially proscribed realities” that labeled them as inferior.¹ The middle and lower economic classes of both groups did not form any alliances in New Orleans until the late thirties. In order to understand the formation of

¹ Ralph J. Bunche, *A Brief and Tentative Analysis of Negro Leadership*, ed. Jonathan Scott Holloway (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 8.

the economic elite, a closer examination of the divisions within the black community is necessary.

From 1900 to 1925 the American blacks and Creoles had limited contact with each other outside of business. The two groups lived in separate worlds within the city's seventeen wards. They experienced the pressures of Jim Crow very differently. American blacks were discriminated against by both Creoles and whites. Being dark-complexioned and poor, instead of being light-complexioned, educated, and "well off" - created the "tale of two cities." Creoles experienced problems with whites, but their problems differed significantly from those American blacks experienced. Their problems came from whites who were resentful of their education and wealth. American blacks' problems consisted of simple survival, such as finding jobs. Often American blacks were paid less than the average white worker and suffered dramatically higher mortality rates. Additionally American blacks were forced to live in the city's worst housing, with deplorable public sanitation.²

Creoles lived in the downtown wards, which consisted of the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth wards. American blacks lived in uptown wards, of the first, second, third, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth.

² William Ivy Hair, *Carnival Of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) 72.

University; the majority of the University of New Orleans' lakefront campus; the Fairgrounds; St. Louis Cemetery #3; and Frenchman Street.⁴

In the early nineteenth century, the Seventh Ward became known as the place where white "gentlemen" established households for their colored mistresses and their children. This produced a free Creole of color population that mimicked the morals and manners of the slaveholding aristocracy. Sociologist Franklin Frazier notes that in large Creole communities the genteel tradition associated with the ideal of the southern lady and gentleman became a part of the Creole family tradition. Frazier further argues that these families formed a closed circle that excluded all people who did not have a Creole lineage nor conform to the same standards of morals and manners.⁵ By the twentieth century little had changed in the Seventh Ward neighborhoods. A segment of this culture still desired to maintain their distinctiveness, which allowed them to continue to dominate the area. Adam Fairclough argues that to outsiders, Creoles of the Seventh Ward resembled a clannish elite.⁶

The French influence of the diverse Creoles of color continued to dominate Seventh Ward neighborhoods. Creoles often spoke French, emphasized their

⁴ These terms were not used in the 1920's; however, they give a modern reference of where things were in the ward.

⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1957), 112.

⁶ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 14-15.

Catholicism and remained active church goers. Many Creoles were members of St. Augustine Catholic Church, which first opened its doors on October 9, 1842, to an integrated congregation. A month later two Creole women, Henriette Delille and Juliette Gaudin, founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, the second-oldest African American congregation of religious women in the United States.⁷ Creoles of Color also belonged to the all black Corpus Christi Catholic Church established in 1916. This church had approximately twelve thousand members and claimed to be the largest black Catholic Church in the world.⁸ Creole life centered on social activities and exclusive clubs, such as Polar Star, a Scottish Rite Masonic lodge; Knights of Peter Claver, a Catholic fraternal society for black laymen; and the Autocrat; and the San Jacinto clubs.

Many Creole men in the city belonged to one of the oldest secret societies in the world, the Masons. On May 2, 1867, Eugene Chassignac, a French immigrant and head of Scottish Rite Masonry, ordered white lodges under his jurisdiction to welcome all freemasons “without distinction as to race or color.”⁹ Chassignac declared that masonry should always “march in the forefront of the struggle against prejudice and

⁷ St. Augustine Catholic Church, *Summary of Church History* (New Orleans, Louisiana: <http://www.staugustinecatholicchurch-neworleans.org/index.htm>)

⁸ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 14.

⁹ Caryn Cosset' Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 265.

declared to the world its grand principal of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."¹⁰ In 1867, Creoles eagerly joined the French lodges in the city. Several of them left the all black Prince Hall Lodges established by American blacks to join the white Scottish Rite Lodges. Among the well known Creole leaders who left the Prince Hall Lodge for Scottish Rite Lodge were Paul Trevigne, Henry and Oscar Rey, Jean Pierre Capla and Arnold Bertonneau.¹¹ Out of the Scottish Rite Lodge, Creole lodges emerged such as Fraternite Lodge #20, chartered on June 16, 1867, and the Fusion Lodge #23, chartered on August 30, 1867. The members of these lodges were French speaking and mostly Catholic.¹² The chart below shows that by 1925, the Fusion Lodge #23 remained Creole with most of its members living within the well established Creole wards of the city.

Table 1. Fusion Lodge # 23 Membership Roll

Name	Address	Ward
Albert J. Bonseigneur	1510 N. Roman	7 th Ward
Leon J. Fraise	617 N. Roman	7 th Ward
Robert T. Metere	1469 N. Roman	7 th Ward
Rene C. Metoyer	2421 Iberville	4 th Ward
Gustave W. Roman	2316 London Ave.	7 th Ward
Edward Washington	2020 N. Villere	7 th Ward
Emile Labat	1615 St. Phillip	6 th Ward
Milton B. Veazie	2426 St. Peters	6 th Ward

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Table 1. Continued

Mitchell Toca	1720 N. Rocheblave	7 th Ward
Isaac Steward	2316 London Ave.	7 th Ward
Pierre Desdurse	1930 Laharpe	7 th Ward
Ferdinan Drannier	1830 Annette	7 th Ward
Jacob S. Rapheal	1818 Allen	7 th Ward
Harry Green	1543 Iberville	4 th Ward
Alfred Aicman	324 N. Robertson	7 th Ward
Joseph Brooks	2205 Allen	7 th Ward
Maurice Asseville	524 Burgundy	4 th Ward
Noah Burleigh	1523 N. Roman	7 th Ward
Joseph Brooks	2205 Allen	7 th Ward
Louis Dubarere	2104 St. Louis	4 th Ward
Joseph Delpeach	2220 Marais	7 th Ward
William Eggerson	1516 Marigny	7 th Ward
Thomas Elliot	835 St. Louis	4 th Ward
Daniel Field	1565 Iberville	4 th Ward
Thomas Elliot	835 St. Louis	4 th Ward

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The Knights of Peter Claver, another strong organization within the Creole community, is exclusive to the Catholic Church. Established in 1909, in Alabama it became the largest lay Catholic organization for African-Americans in the United States. The order was named after St. Peter Claver, a Jesuit Priest, who ministered to African slaves in the 1600s and reportedly converted over 300,000 slaves to Catholicism. The objectives of the organization include: supporting the Catholic Church, participating in community activities, making contributions to worthwhile causes, developing the

¹³ Fusion Lodge No. 23 Membership Roll, Box 10, Folder 13, George Longe Papers Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. The names listed represent only a select number of the membership list.

youth, and providing social and intellectual fellowship for its members. The social activities included dances, picnics, banquets, athletic events, workshops, and fundraising projects.¹⁴ Each Catholic Church had its own council of the Knights of Peter Claver, and all councils interacted socially. Below is the membership list of one council associated with the Holy Redeemers Catholic Church on Royal St. and Elysian Fields. All but one member lived in the Seventh Ward, demonstrating the strong Catholic influence within the Creoles community.¹⁵

Table 2. Knights of Peter Claver, Council #29 Membership, 1929-1938

Name	Address
Louis Amedee	11611 N. Villere St.
Clifton Amedee	1622 Urquhart St.
George Amedee	1622 Urquhart St.
James Alexander	1926 N. Robertson St.
Norman Alcina	816 Andry St.
Robert B. Aubry	914 Montegut St.
Dr. A. J. Aurby	809 Elmira Ave (Algiers)
J.J. Baptiste	1939 Montegut St.
Edward Barnes	1800 Clutt St.
George Chavalier	2236 Urquhart St.
T.J. Cosse	6101 St. Claude Ave.
Henry Clements	1723 Allen St.
Julis Cavalier	1618 N. Galvez St.
Eugene Desvigne	1826 Urquhart St.
Joseph Francis	1334 St. Bernard St.
Lucien Fomenter	2014 N. Dorgenois St.
Walter Francis	1871 N. Roman St.

¹⁴ Knights of Peter Claver, *Tampa Council #379*, <http://kpc379.org/knights.html>

¹⁵ Knights of Peter Claver, Father John A. Clark Council No. 29, Special Collection at University of New Orleans, Louisiana. It is possible that Dr. A. J. Aurby moved to Algiers because of his practice, but remained a parishioner of Holy Redeemers.

Table 2. Continued

Wilfred Garnier	4607 Willow St.
Bernard Garnier	2318 Touro St.
Oscar Grammer	2418 Mandivell St.
Alhert Grammer	2514 N. Miro St.
Isiah Garnett	2424 Elysian Fields
Andrew Hill	1939 Montegut St.
Harry Jones	5446 Burgundy St.
Leon Jefferson	2421 London Ave.
Roosevelt Johnson	1939 Montegut St.
S. Peter Latur	2541 London Ave.
Charles Lavardin	1133 Touro St.
Oliver Lavardin	1133 Touro St.
August Lavardin	1133 Touro St.
N. Jos. LeBeau	927 Relirec St.
Paul Lacrouix	1620 N. Rouchblave
Theodore Melder	2221 New Orleans St.
Numa Nelson	1327 Columbus St.
Alfred Manuel	1723 Urquhart St.
Thomas Mitchell	1902 New Orleans
Marcelli Mullen	7931 Oleander St.
Louis L. Murphy	1028 St. Anthony
Victor J. Narcisse	1624 N. Galvez
Jacob R. Pierre	2939 Pauger
Felix Paloa	2939 Bourbon St.
Donate Peates Jr.	2137 Bourbon St.
A.J. Richard	1924 Cluet St.
A.R. Richard	2207 D'Abadi St.
Charles B. Rousseve	1408 Touro St.
Will Taylor	7550 Ann St.
Sylvester Wallace	2036 Bourbon

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¹⁶ Ibid.

The Autocrat and San Jacinto Clubs were social and pleasure clubs. These clubs began in the early twentieth century as a place for Creole men to socialize safe from police harassment. In 1909, Simon Belleu acquired a charter from the city of New Orleans to form the Autocrat Club. The club's original location was in the fourth ward on St. Phillip Street and Claiborne Avenue. The club functioned as a private corporation for members only. On September 14, 1914, the club took shape and began to elect officers. Arthur Boisdore, took control of the charter from Simon Belleu and served as the club's first president. Members included Placide Suane, Louis Smith, Gabe Pratts, Walter and Wallace Marine and Edward Labuzan, who would become president later that year. The same year, the club moved from St. Phillip and Claiborne to Onzaga Street where it rented a two room house for seven dollars a month. On November 1, 1924, the club moved again, to its final destination, in the seventh ward at 1725 St. Bernard Avenue. At this location membership grew quickly, and the club began to become a profitable business.¹⁷

¹⁷ Autocrat Social and Pleasure Club, *History of the Autocrat Club*, <http://autocratclub.org>



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Figure 2. Autocrat Club Symbol and Present Building Doorway

A new constitution and by-laws were adopted as well as a new name. The Autocrat Club became the Autocrat Social & Pleasure Club. Under the new constitution the club's goals were to "promote social intercourse, harmony, enjoyment, refinement of manners, and the moral, mental and material welfare of its members."¹⁹ Club membership was open to men eighteen and older who were of good moral character. The club remains active after ninety-three years. The presidents of the club were all Creole men who lived in the Seventh Ward. The chart below shows biographical information of the past presidents of the Autocrat Club. The information, collected by the 1910-1930 United States Federal censuses, describes the men as mulatto. However, on the 1930 census their description is changed to Negro.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Table 3. Presidents of the Autocrat Club

Name	Address	Occupation
Arthur Boisdore	1717 Laharpe	Carpenter
Edward Labuan	1678 N. Roman	Carpenter
Nelson Jean	2430 Lapeyrouse	Custom House Inspector
Peter Reine	1938 Lapeyrouse	NA
Albert Lecezne	1801 Allen	Salon Clerk
Wallace Marine	1714 N. Prieur	Cigar factory Packer
A.M. Trudeau	1927 Prieur	Manager Insurance Company
A.P. Tureaud	1975 N. Dorgenois	Customs House
J. Ewin Wilkns	929 N. Claiborne	Pharmacist
Arthur Chapital Jr.	1825 Aubry	Carpenter

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The San Jacinto Club was organized in 1903 in the Sixth Ward at 1422 Dumaine Street. The club's primary purpose was for social and pleasure. It was an exclusive male Creole organization. The club's history is incomplete and the club is no longer in existence. However, articles from the *Louisiana Weekly* show that in 1916, George Labat

²⁰ Ibid. Ancestry.com. *1910-1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. The records are indeterminable as to the year in which the presidents of the Autocrat served however, this is the order in which they served. This covers the years between 1909-1940.

became president of the organization and remained in office until 1935.²¹ The *Weekly* also listed the club’s officers for 1926. The chart below shows the exclusive nature of the San Jacinto Club officers. All of the club’s officers lived within the Creole wards of the city.

Table 4. San Jacinto Club Officers 1926

Name	Office held	Address	Ward
George Labat	President	1933 Gov. Nicholls	6 th Ward
Charles R. Baquet	1 st Vice President	1127 N. Peters	6 th Ward
Ernest J. Brunet	2 nd Vice President	1917 Orleans	5 th Ward
Arthur J. Monette	Financial Secretary	2209 Bienville	4 th Ward
George M. Turner	Treasurer	318 St. Claude	7 th Ward
Antoine J. Cobette	Recording Secretary	1438 N. Roman	7 th Ward

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Creole society was exclusive and close knit. The organizations and clubs identified above demonstrate the choice of Creoles to remain secluded. The Creoles felt a strong sense of preservation for their culture. This included their desire to speak in French, attend Catholic Churches and socialize among themselves. The desire to remain a closed group fueled the strength of the organizations that many Creoles

²¹ “San Jacinto Elect Labat” *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 August 1926, 4; “San Jacinto Club to Celebrate” *Louisiana Weekly*, 18 May 1935. 1.

²² “San Jacinto Elect Labat” *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 August 1926, 4; Ancestry.com. 1910-1930 *United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

joined. Many of these organizations remain in existence today because of the Creoles' will to preserve their culture.

The second group that made up New Orleans' black community was the American blacks. Like Creoles, American blacks had a culture exclusively their own. American blacks primarily lived uptown, historically defined as anything upriver from Canal Street. The uptown area includes several neighborhoods on the East Bank of the Mississippi River between the French Quarter and the Jefferson Parish line. Most American blacks lived in Central City, an area that includes Melpomene Avenue, Barrone, Simon Bolivar, Claiborne Avenue, Jackson Street, Danneel Street, Louisiana Avenue and Dryades Street. Most American blacks attended public schools and worshiped in Protestant churches. They were, according to Fairclough, on the whole "poorer" than Creoles of color, although they tended to dominate the business and professional class.²³

American blacks spoke English and socialized in national clubs and organizations, including the Prince Hall Masons, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, and the Colored Knights of Pythias. These organizations allowed a person of any religion to join. One Catholic Creole, Walter Cohen, did join these organizations. Cohen, an influential, Creole leader, was listed in *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana*, as

²³ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 14.

being a member of the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, the Elks, the NAACP, and an honorary member of the Autocrat and San Jacinto clubs.²⁴

The Prince Hall Masonic lodges were among the first secret societies in Louisiana open to free blacks. In 1850 New Orleans received its first Prince Hall Masonic charter opening Richmond Lodge #4. Shortly after it received a charter, in 1854, the Stringer Lodge #11 opened, followed by the Parsons Lodge #18 in 1857. American blacks dominated these lodges; they secured the initial charters and recruited fellow American black and Creole members. Oscar Dunn, first black Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana led the Prince Hall masons during the mid to late 1800's. Beginning in 1876, Creole members slowly left the Prince Hall lodges for white Scottish Rite Lodges when membership opened to non whites. The abandonment of Creoles from these lodges allowed American blacks to dominate Prince Hall Lodge memberships. Despite the loss of Creole members, the Prince Hall Lodges continued to thrive.

By 1914 there were seventy-three Prince Hall and Eastern Star Masonic Lodges in the city. All lodge meetings were held at either the Masonic Hall located at 1116 Perdido Street or at the Pythian Temple building located on Gravier and Saratoga Street.²⁵ Each lodge had their own meeting time and date. The chart below shows

²⁴ Archie Perkins, *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Douglas Loan Company Inc., 1930), 112-113.

²⁵ Allen T. Woods, *A Classified Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory* (Woods Publishing, 1914), 21-31.

biographical information on the officers for one of the many American black Prince Hall Masonic lodges. The Vera Cruz Lodge, in 1914, met at the Pythian Temple building the second Wednesday of every month. The lodge's officers were from exclusively American black wards in the city.²⁶

Table 5. Vera Cruz Lodge No. 24

Name	Office Held	Address	Ward
Frank Bradley	Senior Warden	342 S. Saratoga	10 th Ward
A. C. Johnson	Junior Warden	2103 St. Andrews	10 th Ward
George Anderson	Tyler	2813 Delachaise	12 th Ward
Thomas H. Lytle	Senior Deacon	2116 Philip St.	10 th Ward

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The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, (GUOOF), a fraternal society founded by African American Sailor Peter Ogden in 1843 was chartered in New Orleans in 1866. It provided insurance benefits and social interactions to black communities. In 1910, there was an estimated 4,500 GUOOF lodges across the United States.²⁸ By 1914, there were twenty-six lodges in New Orleans including the La Creole Lodge No. 1918. It is believed that this lodge was exclusively Creole because of its name.²⁹ The Creole lodge

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. Ancestry.com. *1910-1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

²⁸ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What A Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 37.

²⁹ Woods *A Classified Colored Business*, 1914, 21-31; Membership records for this lodge were not found but it is possible that this lodge was called the Creole lodge because it was exclusively Creole. If not otherwise cited the following rest on Woods.

met the second and fourth Saturday of each month at the Masonic and Odd Fellows Hall on Perdido Street. The Odd Fellows also had a lodge named in honor of the late Oscar Dunn famed American black Reconstruction leader. The Oscar Dunn Lodge met every second and fourth Thursday of each month at the Masonic and Odd Fellow Hall on Perdido Street. According to the 1910 and 1920 census and as indicated on the chart below the officers of the Odd Fellows Diamond Stone Lodge No. 7334 lived within the predominantly American black wards of the city. The Diamond Stone Lodge met on the second and fourth Monday of each month at the Pythain Temple building.

Table 6. Diamond Stone Loge No. 7334, Officers Ward Locations

Name	Office Held	Address	Ward
George King	Nobel Grand	N/A	3 rd , 10 th , 16 th , 17 th Wards*
Aaron Packard	Past Nobel Grand	N/A	N/A
Charles Randall	Financial Secretary	2720 St. Andrews	10 th Ward
James White	Recording Secretary	N/A	3 rd , 11 th Ward*
Richard Taylor	Vice Grand	N/A	3 rd and 12 th Ward*
Dennis Woods Jr.	Secretary	1917 Forth St.	11 th Ward
Eugene Robertson	Advocate	1308 Socrates	15 th Ward

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³⁰ Ancestry.com. *1910-1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. *There were six George King's found in the 1920 census. All were from American black wards in the city. One from the 3rd ward, three from the 10th ward, and one from the 16th and 17th Wards. There were two James White's found in the 1910 census. Both were from American black wards. One from the 3rd ward and one from the 11th ward. There were two Richard Taylor's found in the 1920 census, both from American black wards, one from the 3rd ward and one from the 12th ward.

The Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Austria (also known as the Colored Knights of Pythias) was formed in Mississippi in 1880 by Dr. Thomas W. Stringer. One year later the Colored Knights of Pythias opened a lodge in New Orleans. By 1914, there were seventeen lodges located in the city.³¹ The organization was similar to the Odd Fellows in its programs that promoted insurance and benevolent benefits to the community. Smith W. Green, the Supreme Chancellor of the Colored Knights of Pythias, led the organization during this time. Prior to Green becoming Supreme Chancellor, in 1899 he moved to New Orleans and became a member of the Colored Knights of Pythias. He worked his way through the ranks of the organization becoming Grand Master of Finance, followed by Grand Keeper of Records and Seals and ultimately Supreme Chancellor. In 1908 Green became the International Supreme Chancellor of the Colored Knights of Pythias, leading all chapters throughout the world remaining as such until 1935.³² Green and his wife Laurenia live at 219 South Miro in the American black section of New Orleans's 3rd ward.³³ Green's neighbors were predominantly white in this section of the 3rd ward.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "S.W. Green Built A Fraternal Empire Worth \$10,000,000" *Sepia Socialite*, 5th Anniversary Edition, (New Orleans, 1942), 146.

³³ Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

The Colored Knights of Pythias and black Odd Fellows organizations suffered during the depression and never recovered.³⁴

American black society was more inclusive, but interactions between Creoles and American blacks were limited. Both groups had their own organizations and social networks as seen by the various pleasure and social clubs in the city. Yet, despite social separation of these groups, educational needs and economic ventures brought a few select Creoles and American blacks together. This select group believed that education could be a significant factor in the lives of blacks who wished to change their economic status and obtain the American dream.

In New Orleans, Creoles who sought a formal education relied on Protestant colleges opened during Reconstruction. Their options included Leland College (Baptist) located on St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans University (Methodist) located on St. Charles Avenue, and Straight University (Congregational) located on Canal Street between Tonti and Rocheblave Streets. Many Creoles chose to attend Straight University because it was closer to their downtown neighborhoods.³⁵ Four years after Reconstruction, in March of 1881, the state sponsored Southern University opened its doors to only twelve students. The university was originally located in a former Jewish

³⁴ Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, *What A Mighty Power We Can Be*, 37 and 38.

³⁵ Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, ed., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 243.

Temple on Calliope Street, between St. Charles and Camp Streets.³⁶ In 1914 the University relocated to Baton Rouge. Approximately fifty years after Reconstruction, in 1925, Xavier University (Catholic) was established to educate people of color and Native Americans. In 1925, Xavier had predominately Creole students because of its Catholic origin. Ten years later in 1935, Dillard University (Protestant) was formed as result of a merger between Straight University and New Orleans University, which included Flint Medical College.

In 1895, Booker T. Washington delivered his acclaimed Atlanta Address. After this speech black universities around the United States, including the black colleges and universities in New Orleans, began to focus on his teachings. His message from 1890 until his death in 1915 was one of appeasement. He believed in “making the best of things.”³⁷ In order to make the best of a segregated south with harsh Jim Crow laws, Washington encouraged the black community to develop economically and not attack America’s racial system. He urged blacks to start new businesses and support existing ones. The core of Washington’s philosophy focused on self help through business enterprise and racial solidarity. He believed that once the black community proved to

³⁶ Southern University Systems, *The History of Southern University: A National Treasure* <http://www.sus.edu/about.htm>

³⁷ Ralphe Bunche, *A Brief and Tentative Analysis of Negro Leadership*, ed. Jonathan Scott Holloway (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 42.

whites that they were successfully able to help themselves; racial discriminations would eventually fade.³⁸

The economic self-help principles of Booker T. Washington provided significant guidance in establishing an economy in New Orleans uninfluenced by whites. This economy marketed exclusively to American blacks and Creoles. Most of the black businesses in the city were located on Dryades Street in Central City. By 1920, Dryades Street became the largest African American commercial district in New Orleans. American black and Creole entrepreneurs opened thriving businesses side by side. Doctors' offices, dentists' offices, real estate offices, barber shops, restaurants, hotels, jewelers, tailors, grocery stores, beauty shops, pharmacies, insurance companies, and funeral parlors were among the many black owned businesses located on Dryades Street.

In 1913 Allen T. Woods published the first black business directory in New Orleans. The directory, *A Classified Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory*, charged 25 cents per advertisement and was distributed free of charge to the public. The directory published advertisements and addresses for over two hundred black businesses in the city ranging from doctors' offices to billiard halls. The directory identified businesses that allowed these groups to purchase anything they wanted or needed in Central City without going to any shops on Canal Street. If a black person

³⁸ Ibid.

was sick they could visit the doctor's office of L.T. Burbridge, M. C. Gaines, George W. Lucas or Charles W. Vance located on Dryades Street.³⁹ Prescriptions could be filled at one of the many "Cut-rate Pharmacy's" located on Dryades, including Dejoie's Cut-Rate Pharmacy. Dejoie's pharmacy advertised not only a complete prescription department but a drug store that had the finest fresh candies, cigars, soda water, and fresh fruit ice cream.⁴⁰

Dryades Street provided employment for women, such as training opportunities to become hairdressers at the Crescent Hairdressing College owned by Mrs. M. J. Spotts. The hairdressing college boasted of being the largest and most equipped hairdressing college in the country owned and managed by colored people. The college offered courses in hairdressing, manicuring, massages, and scalp treatments.⁴¹ For a night out, one could enjoy "choice Creole dishes" at Dorsey Franklin's restaurant with "swift and polite" waiters. For a dream wedding, one could buy a wedding cake or other bakery items from Laura Brown. For a job interview one could look one's best in a fashionable tailored suit from Porter's Tailoring Company. These establishments are a small glimpse of the types of businesses all located on Dryades Street.

³⁹ Woods A Classified Colored Business, 1914, 45-49.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

The many black owned businesses located on Dryades Street proved that New Orleans' black community could create and generate enough business to sustain their communities. In the 1930's, black business owners of Dryades Street formed the New Orleans Negro Board of Trade, an affiliated organization based on Washington's National Negro Business League (NNBL) founded in 1900.⁴² The purpose of the New Orleans Negro Board of Trade was to:

1. Stimulate more and better business.
2. To cooperate with the National Negro Business League and other Trade Associations.
3. To provide avenues of employment for trained Negro youth.
4. To assist in the development of colored business as well as encourage satisfaction for consumers.
5. To organize various classes of business into cooperative groups and to have them function as a unit of the Negro Board of Trade.
6. To assist the small businessman with the instillation of modern business methods.
7. To encourage conventions of commercial, religious, civic, and social character to meet in New Orleans.
8. To create a means of publicizing businesses owned and operated by colored people and to direct the buying public into these businesses.
9. To work with all city organizations for the betterment of the city of New Orleans.⁴³

The success of large black owned businesses on Dryades Street produced an economic corridor which began to foster unity between American blacks and Creoles.

⁴² Leedell Wallace Neyland, "The Negro in Louisiana Since 1900: An Economic Study and Social Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1959), 66; Douglas Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 240.

⁴³ "New Orleans Negro Board of Trade," In George Longe Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Large business owners were often the college educated members of the community who ran insurance companies, funeral parlors, pharmacies, churches, and black colleges. Slowly, the Creole and American black separation ceased to exist within members of these large business groups. This building of unity is first seen within the three large insurance companies that employed both American blacks and Creoles.

People's Industrial Life Insurance Company was instrumental in helping unify the American black and Creole groups of the economic elite. This company first opened on January 3, 1910, operating as a Mutual Benefit Society. On May 18, 1922, Walter Cohen re-organized and incorporated the Mutual Benefit Society into People's Industrial Life Insurance Company. Its first board of directors, appointed by Walter Cohen, represented a cross section of the economic elite including both American blacks and Creoles. The members of the first board of directors seated left to right in the picture below included: Arnold Dufauchard; H. J. Christophe, Secretary-Treasurer; Walter L. Cohen, founder and President; B. V. Branco, Sr., Vice President; Edwin O. Moss, Honorary Vice President; and Dr. George W. Lucas, Medical Director. Standing left to right: George Weeks, Victor F. Collins, Albert Workman, Peter S. Tibbs, O. Lilly Sr., T. J. Johnson, John L. Diaz, and Archille Populus. Not shown in the picture are A. P. Bedou, H. Townsend, George Guidry, J. S. Clark, Edwin Wilkins, and Dr. J. H. Lowery

and Dr. J. S. Clark.⁴⁴

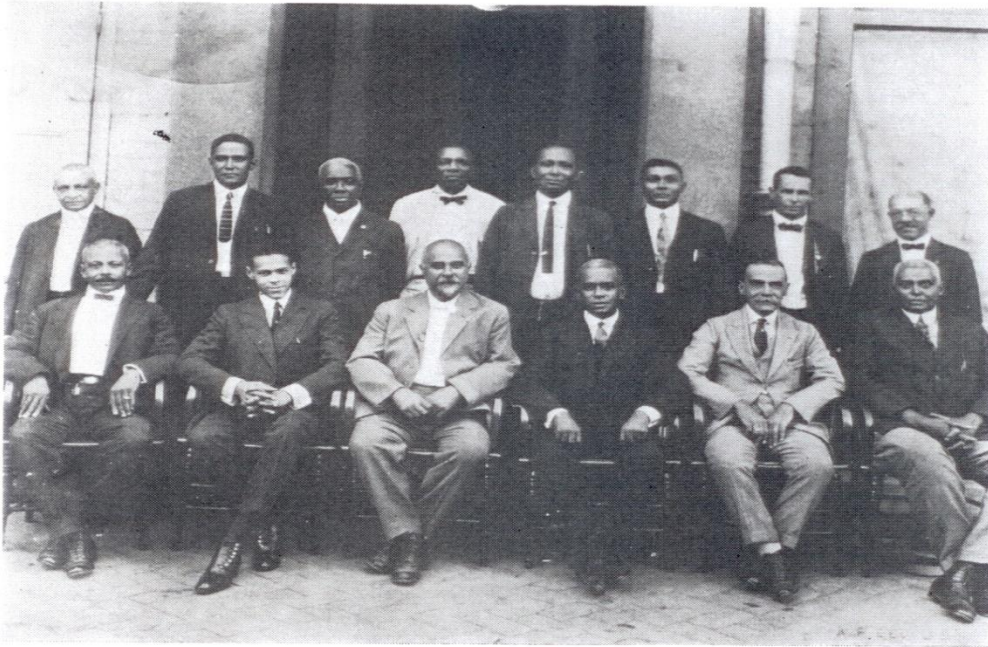


Figure 3. Board of Directors Peoples Life Insurance Company

The chart below examines the diversity of the first board of directors for the insurance company. The board included eight Creoles and six American Blacks. The members of the board lived in the areas of the city consistent with their respective groups. American black members lived the 1st -3rd and 10th -17th wards while Creole members lived in the 4th -9th wards. Three board members lived outside the city; Beverly Baranco lived in Baton Rouge; Octave Lilly lived in Jennings; and Thomas J. Johnson lived in Gretna. Further examination of the board members show many

⁴⁴ Picture of Board of Directors Peoples Life Insurance Company in George Longe Papers.

having occupations apart from their service on the board. Five members owned small business as contractors, barbers, restaurant owners and photographers. Two members were doctors with their own practices, three members worked for the government, and one as a longshoreman.⁴⁵

Table 7. Board of Directors Peoples Life Insurance Company

Name	Job Title	Ward	Origin
Arnold Dufauchard	Plasterer	4 th	Creole
Haidel J. Christophe	Sectary-Treasurer	7 th	Creole
Walter L. Cohen	Comptroller of Customs/Founder and president	5 th	Creole
Beverly V. Branco	Barber/Vice-President	1 st Ward East Baton Rouge	American Black
E. O. Moss	Barber	4 th	Creole
George Lucas	Family physician	12 th	American Black
George Weeks	Mail Carrier	4 th	Creole
Victor F. Collins	Insurance Agent	11 th	American Black
Albert Workman	Longshoreman	3 rd	American Black
Octave Lilly	Insurance Agent	2 nd Ward Jennings	American Black
Thomas J. Johnson	Insurance Agent	3 rd Ward Gretna	Creole

⁴⁵ Ibid. Two of the board members, Drs. J. H. Lowery and J. S. Clark, were not located in the census; therefore, they are not listed in the chart. Albert Workman worked as a longshoreman, it is unknown as to how he became affiliated with the insurance company since it was unusual for the working class and business class to affiliate at this time.

Table 7. Continued

John Diaz	Insurance Collector	5 th	Creole
Archile Populus	Insurance Collector	5 th	Creole
Hazelwood Townsend	Night Inspector Customs House	7 th	Creole
George Guidry	Restaurant Owner	3 rd	American Black
A. P. Bedou	Photographer	4 th	Creole
Edwin Wilkins	Plaster/Contractor	5 th	Creole

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A few of the members of the first board of directors worked and socialized together in various clubs that crossed group barriers. The chart below highlights those clubs and its members. The chart is limited to Walter Cohen, Beverly Baranco, Victor Collins, Haidel Christophe, and George Lucas because they made their organizational ties known to the community. Walter Cohen and George Lucas maintained membership in four of the five organizations. Cohen and Lucas interacted often through work and social activities. Until Cohen’s death in 1930 and Lucas’ death in 1931, they were the leaders in the Creole and American black community. Cohen and Lucas’s association represented the unity of both groups within the economic elite.

⁴⁶ Ancestry.com. *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. (Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005); The chart represents biographical material about the Board of Directors of Peoples Life Insurance Company.

Table 8. Club Affiliation of Board Members

Mason	Odd Fellow	Pythias	NAACP	Peter Claver	Origin
Cohen	Cohen	Cohen	Cohen		Creole
Baranco	Baranco	Baranco			American
Collins					American
			Christophe	Christophe	Creole
Lucus	Lucas	Lucas	Lucas		American

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Beverly V. Baranco succeeded Walter Cohen as president of the insurance company and remained its head until his death in 1933. Baranco, a native of Baton Rouge, moved to New Orleans to attend Straight College, where he earned a law degree. Prior to becoming president of the insurance company, he worked as a barber and notary public in East Baton Rouge Parish. After Branco's death, Victor Collins became president of the People's Life Insurance Company. Collins' term as president lasted until his death in 1935. Collins, originally from Milton Florida, moved to New Orleans where he worked as a cigar maker and eventually became the first agent for People's Life Insurance Company. He moved rapidly up the corporate ladder becoming the first clerk, state organizer, and general superintendent, before becoming president in 1933.

⁴⁷ "People's Industrial Life Insurance Company," in George Longe Papers. The chart represents club affiliation of members of the Board of Directors of People's Life Insurance Company.

The second of the three largest black insurance companies, Unity Industrial Life Insurance Company, organized in 1907, operated in New Orleans. This company, too, brought Creole and American black communities together in a way that crossed cultural lines. Its founder, Paul H. V. Dejoie, Sr., a physician by trade, practiced medicine above his father's pharmacy on Dryades Street. He began the insurance company with an investment of \$10,000, and opened the first office on Dryades Street. Dejoie advertised his insurance company as providing "protection and assistance in time of illness and need by giving the members the greatest benefits at the lowest cost."⁴⁸ By 1913, the company boasted an estimated annual income of \$62,000, and paid benefits to members totaling over \$125,000. The company also employed over 137 blacks across 37 branches in the state. The board of directors appointed by Dejoie included: George D. Geddes, who worked as the company's secretary; W. E. Roberson, who worked as the treasurer; Constant C. Dejoie, who worked as the general manager; Aristide Dejoie, Jr., and Sr.; Joseph P. Geddes; J. A. Palfrey; and A. T. Harris.

⁴⁸ Allen T. Woods, *A Classified Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory* (Woods Publishing, 1914) 1. If not otherwise cited, the following information rest primarily on Woods.

Table 9. Board of Directors Unity Life Insurance Company

Name	Job Occupation	Ward	Origin
Paul H. V. Dejoie	Doctor	13 th	Creole/ Am. Black*
Constant C. Dejoie	Drug store clerk	13 th	Creole/ Am. Black*
Aristide Dejoie Sr.	Pharmacist	13 th	Creole/ Am. Black*
Aristide Dejoie Jr.	Pharmacist	13 th	Creole/ Am. Black*
George D. Geddes	Undertaker	2 nd	American Black
Joseph D. Geddes	Office Clerk	2 nd	American Black
John A. Palfrey	Railroad Mail Clerk	17 th	American Black

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The Dejoie's are labeled as both Creole and American black because they fit into both groups. They are anomalous in the Creole tradition. Their French surnames suggest that they had a French heritage, which is a common trait among Creoles. However, they lived in predominately American black areas in the city. Constance Dejoie even belonged to a Protestant church, the Central Congregation Church.⁵⁰ Living uptown and going to a Protestant church indicates a strong tie to American black

⁴⁹ Ancestry.com. *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. (Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005). A. T. Harris was not located in the census.

⁵⁰ Archie E. Perkins, *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Douglas Loan Publishing Co. Inc., 1930), 101-102.

culture. The census reported Aristide Dejoie, Sr., born in Louisiana in 1846, it does not list the names of his parents or where they were from. Aristide lived his adult life with his wife, the former Ella Brown, in the 13th Ward on Magazine Street.

The Dejoie family lived in a predominately white neighborhood within the American black wards. The 1900 and 1910 census reported the Dejoie family as one of two mulatto families living on the same block on Magazine Street with predominately white neighbors. Living uptown the Dejoie family blurred the Creole and American black distinctions placed on them by whites. The Dejoie family allowed whites to view them as Creoles for business purposes, as Creoles were favored over American blacks. This view is evident by the political and business success of Aristide Dejoie, Sr., head of the Dejoie family. During his lifetime, Aristide Dejoie, Sr., held positions as a city commissioner, member of the Louisiana Legislature, Official Gauger, Internal Revenue Officer and an operator of a bakery, confectionary and restaurant on Canal Street.⁵¹

Between 1900 and 1910, Aristide Dejoie, Sr., opened two businesses on Dryades street, Dejoie's Cut Rate Pharmacy and the Hub Shoe Store, the only black operated shoe store in town.⁵² His son, Paul, opened a doctor's office and began the Unity Life Insurance Company on Dryades Street. The Dejoie family was the first able to defy ethnic categories. They freely moved in and out of the American black and Creole

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Woods, *A Classified Colored Business*, 59.

groups because they were well respected business owners, property owners, and educated. The Dejoie family did not see distinctions or place themselves in categories. Board members George D. Geddes and Joseph Geddes are identified as American blacks. George Geddes was born in Louisiana in 1850. His mother was from Virginia and his father from Scotland. He owned the George D. Geddes Undertaking & Embalming Company. His son, Joseph, worked as an office clerk. The Geddes family lived uptown in a predominately white area of the 2nd ward on Erato Street. The only other black neighbors on the block included, family members, Clement and Gertrude Geddes. The 1900 census reported Clement, Gertrude and their daughter Thelma Geddes as white and their neighbors; George and Julia Geddes and their children were listed as mulatto. This is a clear indication that the census taker could not tell the race of the Geddes family. The 1910 census listed all of the Geddes family including Clement and his family as mulatto.

Board member John A. Palfrey is also identified as American black. According to the census taken in 1900, Palfrey's mother, Asa George, was from Virginia and his father from Louisiana. Palfrey lived uptown in Central City on Jackson Ave. In 1906, Palfrey married Nellie O. Dejoie, the daughter of Aristide Dejoie, Sr. In 1910 he and his wife moved to an integrated neighborhood of American blacks and whites on Dante Street the 17th ward. The Palfrey's next door neighbor was Constance C. Dejoie's family, Nellie's brother.

The last of the three major insurance companies was organized by Dr. Rivers Frederick in 1920. Louisiana Industrial Life Insurance Company employed several American blacks and Creoles and was located on Dryades St. The board of directors included: Rivers Frederick, a Creole from Point Coupee; J. S. Williams; Thomas Jeffrion, Fredericks's nephew; Percy P. Creuzot, an American black dentist; R. O. Borris, an American black chauffer; R. J. Vining, an American black doctor; and P. J. E. Dejoie, Fredericks's grandson. In 1921, Fredericks appointed Dr. Leonidas F. Burbridge, co-owner of a pharmacy with the Dejoie family, as president of the insurance company. Burbridge was married to C.C. Dejoie's sister, Florence Dejoie, who died in 1916 after having five children. Burbridge was an American black born in Kentucky who moved to New Orleans as a boy. He earned a Bachelors of Science Degree from Straight College, and a Medical Degree from Meharry Medical School. During the time of Burbridge's presidency, which lasted from 1921 to 1933, he raised the company's assets from \$25,000 to \$228,000 and its premium income from \$65,000 to over \$500,000.⁵³

Table 10. Board of Directors Louisiana Industrial Life Insurance Company

Name	Job Occupation	Ward	Origin
Rivers Frederick	Doctor	13 th Ward	Creole*

⁵³ Neyland, *The Negro in Louisiana Since 1900*, 61. Archie Perkins, *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Douglas Loan Co. 1930), 101 and 136-137. Fredericks's daughter Pearl Fredericks married C. C. Dejoie's nephew Prudhomme J. E. Dejoie.

Table 10. Continued

J. S. Williams	N/A	N/A	N/A
Thomas Jeffrion	Electrician	13 th Ward	Creole*
Percy P. Creuzot	Dentist	17 th Ward	American black
Robert O. Borris	Chauffer	13 th Ward	American black
R. J. Vining	Doctor	10 th Ward	American black
Prudhomme J. E. Dejoie	Vice President of Insurance Company	13 th Ward	Creole*
Leonidas Burbridge	Doctor	10 th Ward	American black

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The three largest “blacked owned” insurance companies through their board of directors played a significant role in reinforcing the merger of the American black and Creole economic elite. The insurance companies’ inclusion, of both American blacks and Creoles on the board of directors and as employees, transcended the once rigid lines of separation within these groups. Some of the interactions between American black and Creole members of the board lead to marriage. John A. Palfrey and Nellie Dejoie along with Leonidas F. Burbridge and Florence Dejoie are examples of Creoles and American blacks unifying the economic groups through marriage and business. The size and magnitude of the insurance companies facilitated thought of increasing racial awareness and unity among the economic elite.

⁵⁴ Ancestry.com. *1920 and 1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. (Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005); J. S. Williams was not located in the census. Rivers Fredrick, Thomas Jeffrion, and P.J.E. Dejoie were Creoles that lived in the American black section. The 12th and 13th wards were mixed with Creoles and American black economic elite.

Another area of enterprise that unified American black and Creole economic elite was the funeral home business. In 1914 there were several black funeral homes advertised in the Woods directory including: Geddes and Moss, George D. Geddes, Emile Labat, Blandin and Leblanc, and Boyer and Taylor. These businesses operated profitably, some more so than others. This business, much like the insurance business, allowed significant success as little or no white competition existed. White funeral homes refused to advertise for black patrons out of fear of loss of white business by being labeled as a black funeral home.

Clement and Gertrude Geddes owned and operated the Geddes funeral home until Clement's death in 1913. In 1914, Arnold L. Moss, a Creole, joined the company, and the funeral home became the Geddes & Moss Undertaking and Embalming Company. Moss lived in the Creole 4th ward on Miro St. prior to joining the business. The 1920 census later showed Moss moved next door to the funeral home in the American black section of the 10th ward located on Jackson Avenue. Gertrude Geddes lived near the funeral home as well. Living in close proximity to their business allowed Geddes and Moss to always be available for customers. The funeral home advertised that they were "Always Ready to Serve You" because "We Never Sleep."⁵⁵ In 1930, the

⁵⁵ Woods, *A Classified Colored Business*, 20.

reported value of Geddes & Moss Undertaking and Embalming Company totaled in excess of \$70,000.⁵⁶

The George D. Geddes Undertaking & Embalming Company located on South Rampart was another large funeral home. The company began in 1880 and was one of the first funeral homes serving blacks. In 1916, George D. Geddes died leaving the company to his son Joseph P. Geddes who also owned a considerable amount of stock in the Unity Life Insurance Company. In 1925, the funeral home was rebuilt after a fire destroyed it. The new building was equipped with a “beautiful chapel, the latest designed organ, choir stand, comfortable restrooms, and Cadillac cars and hearses worth \$50,000.”⁵⁷

Large black business owners significantly impacted the New Orleans economy by providing jobs and services for blacks. These businesses supported the unification of American blacks and Creoles; however, black doctors had the most profound impact on unification of the economic elite. Doctors were viewed as having the highest level of education among any professional group in the community. That, along with their substantial income, made them a powerful group thereby having influential impact on civil rights issues. In the nineteenth century, Doctors James Newman, Louis and George H. Roudanez, and Louis A. Martinet, were among the first doctors in New

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106-107.

⁵⁷ Perkins, *Who's Who in Colored Louisiana*, 139.

Orleans to demand civil rights. The two main organizations in New Orleans that fought to make changes for blacks, in the twentieth century, included the NAACP and the Federation of Civic Leagues. These organizations were primarily led by black doctors for many years.

Rivers Frederick, a doctor of the twentieth century, became a leader. Born into a Creole family in 1874 in New Roads, Louisiana, Frederick attended New Orleans University, Flint Medical College, where Newman, Martinet and Roudanez taught him. In his last year of medical school, he transferred from New Orleans University to the University of Illinois, where he graduated in 1897. Frederick worked as a surgical clinician in Chicago for two years before returning to Louisiana. The same year, at the age of twenty-six, he married a poor semi-literate white woman and bought a 210-acre plantation in New Roads, Louisiana. The next year, he moved to Honduras where he worked in the government hospital at El Rio as its chief surgeon. According to his biographer, Nida Vital, Frederick's purchasing a plantation, marring of a white woman, and moving to Central America, "implied a desire to breach the caste barriers in a move toward equality and a greater acceptance within the majority community."⁵⁸ After eight years in Central America, he returned to New Orleans to work as chief surgeon at

⁵⁸ Nida Vital, *Dr. Rivers Frederick and the History of Black Medicine in New Orleans* (M.A. Thesis: University of New Orleans, 1978), 83.

Flint-Goodridge Hospital. By the 1930's, Frederick had become the most prominent black doctor in Louisiana and one of the best surgeons in the South.⁵⁹

The American black, Creole and white communities, viewed Frederick as a great doctor and true professional. He was a unifier in the American black and Creole communities. His insurance company, the Louisiana Industrial Life Insurance Company, employed both American blacks and Creoles. His family ties brought American blacks and Creoles together through business and private ventures. Frederick's wealth and social status allowed him to provide financial support and secure favors for black organizations. He provided financial support for both the NAACP and the Urban League, but he preferred not to participate in forwarding their agendas because he did not want to undermine his favor with whites. He was one of the few Creole or American black doctors who worked with white patients. By the time of his death in 1954, Frederick's assets totaled more than 1.5 million dollars.

George Lucas, another black physician, also assisted in unifying the American black and Creole economic elite. Lucas was born in Lee County, Texas, and moved to New Orleans to attend Flint Medical College. After he finished medical school he remained in New Orleans. In 1910, he married Frances Nesby of New Roads, Louisiana. According to the 1900 census, Nesby was described as a twenty-two year old black woman who worked as a servant in Ascension parish. The two lived together

⁵⁹ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 48-49; Vital, *Dr. Rivers Fredericks*, 83.

in the twelfth ward on Magnolia Street and had no children. Lucas belonged to several organizations, including the local NAACP, where he served as president for over five years. He also served as vice president of the Dryades Street Branch YMCA, and medical director and board member of People's Life Insurance Company. Additionally, he held memberships in the Bulls, Masons, Elks, Pythians and Odd Fellows Clubs.⁶⁰ Lucas gained notoriety when leading the NAACP in a fight against residential segregation and instituting voter registration suits.

Joseph Hardin, like Lucas was a doctor, leader and migrant to New Orleans from Mississippi in 1889.⁶¹ In 1895, he became very interested in politics and began working with Walter Cohen to promote the Republican Party. In 1897 he married a Creole woman from New Orleans, Louisa Monette. The Monette family lived on Galvez Street in the fourth ward. Louisa's father Julian Monette was a tailor and her mother Philomene was a housekeeper. A year after Joseph Hardin and Louisa married, they had a daughter named Yula and lived in the 4th ward on Bienville Avenue. During this time, Hardin also owned and operated a drugstore at the corner of Tulane and Loyola. In 1904, he received a medical degree from Sarah Goodridge Memorial Medical School

⁶⁰ "George Lucas Passes, Heart Attack" *Louisiana Weekly*, 17 January 1931, 1.

⁶¹ Joseph Hardin Papers, Biographical Notes, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

at New Orleans University.⁶² From 1904 to 1926, Hardin taught and practiced medicine, while he continued to work with Walter Cohen and the Republican Party.

In 1923, after the death of his first wife, Joseph Hardin remarried another Creole woman named Leontine Marchand. At the time of his marriage Marchand was a twenty-two years old nurse and he was forty-nine. The two lived in the seventh ward on Orleans Avenue where they had five children. In 1927, Hardin formed the Seventh Ward Civic League to promote civic welfare within the community. In 1929, Hardin successfully united American black and Creole civic leagues into one group, the Federation of Civic Leagues, and became its first president.

New Orleans' black doctors provided the community with intelligent and strong leadership. However, they were not the only ones to provide a form of leadership to the black community. The clergy provided the community with leadership in the form of hope and religious guidance. Clergy leaders were predominately American black and Protestant. Although, many black churchgoers in New Orleans were Catholic the Catholic Church did not have any black priests in the city. Daniel Thompson noted, in *The Leadership Class*, there were seldom more than two or three black Catholic priests employed in any capacity in the city, and they were usually teachers.⁶³ Thus, the Catholic Church did not provide clergy to lead the community nor did the Catholic

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Daniel C. Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1963), 31. Thompson's study focuses on New Orleans.

Church take a stand on racial issues. However, there were Catholic Creole men drawn from the laity who provided leadership in the Creole community, such as Rivers Frederick, Walter Cohen, and George Labat. The absence of a Catholic clerical leadership did not hinder the unification of the American black and Creole economic elite.

The role of the black Protestant clergy enhanced the American black community's position in the city. Ministers, while not as wealthy as doctors or large business owners, were also financially independent of white control and well known. Their presence within the community gave them acceptance into the economic elite class. Pastors provided leadership, news, and counsel to the upper, middle and lower classes. The clerical leaders enjoyed much influence and confidence, which made them an important factor in community unification. According to Thompson, some of these men were highly skilled orators and lecturers who appeared regularly as spokesmen for black causes. However, Thompson notes they rarely became official representatives of organizations with mass followings. They did still hold memberships in community improvement organizations such as the NAACP and the Federation of Civic Leagues.⁶⁴

Reverend Dr. John L. Burrell and Reverend Henderson H. Dunn successfully led American black Protestant churches. These men fought to become an example to blacks of the advantages of hard work and perseverance. They were respectable, educated,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 36.

well trained, articulate, and courageous. Burrell, born in 1859 in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, to enslaved parents, moved to New Orleans in 1880 and attended Leland University. In 1882 he was ordained a Baptist minister and in 1888 was given the honorary Doctorate Degree from Columbia University. He moved around Louisiana, serving in several churches before returning to New Orleans in 1914 to serve as pastor of Progressive Baptist Church.⁶⁵

Reverend Henderson H. Dunn, also born in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, in 1872 to enslaved parents Enoch Dunn and Ellen Dunn. He received his early education at the first school for blacks in Lafourche Parish. In 1900 he received his first degree, a Bachelor of Arts, from Straight University in New Orleans; four years later he received his second degree from Straight University, a Bachelor of Divinity. After graduation he taught school and became pastor of Morris Brown Congressional Church in New Orleans. He also started the first day care for blacks in the city, the Isabella Hume Child Development Center. In 1924, he resigned as pastor of Morris Brown Congressional Church to become regional secretary of the Congressional Churches of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. As regional secretary he founded and organized the Colored Education Alliance, an organization dedicated to expanding the

⁶⁵ William Hicks, *A History of Louisiana Negro Baptist: 1804 to 1914* (Nashville, Tenn. National Baptist Publishing Board) "The Reformed Reader" www.reformedreader.org 1999-2007.

number of black schools.⁶⁶ These men, along with other clergy, ministered to the black community and helped unify the Creole and American black economic elite.

The unified economic elite consisting of American black and Creole doctors, clergymen, lawyers, teachers/professors, dentist and large business owners readily welcomed the task of becoming the community's new leaders. Their financial success and reliance on black patronage allowed them to take the initiative in asking for better facilities within the Jim Crow system and not suffer retaliation. These men, well respected within their professions, once solely focused on business enterprise, in 1925, added race relations to their role as community leaders.

This group subscribed to most, but not all of the philosophies of both Washington and Dubois. They believed in Booker T. Washington's economic policies of thrift, skill and industry, yet did not agree with his willingness to forgo political participation. They also believed in W. E. B. Dubois' quest for a liberal education in the black community, yet did not agree with his direct demands for integration. Instead this group attempted to find a middle ground between Dubois' direct challenges and Washington's acceptance of the Jim Crow South. Their approach included working within the established system, asking not demanding, petitioning not picketing. They understood Southern whites would be reluctant to adopt any immediate change, thus

⁶⁶ Dunn-Landry Family Papers, Biographical Notes, Amistad Research Center, at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

they were willing to wait patiently for concessions to be made within the Jim Crow system. In doing so, this group utilized a moderate and gradual position that resulted in concessions being granted by the white authority. They believed that change could be achieved and over time this moderate and gradual approach would lead blacks to gaining equal rights. They were racial progressionists who found ways to work within the law of separate but equal.

The main goal of the racial progressionists focused on helping the entire black community without being labeled as radicals by whites. Racial progressionist believed in a systematic approach to promoting racial change that included intelligently discussing the issues of the black community with whites based on facts and disparities. The leadership of the racial progressionists relied on appealing to the moral consciousness of whites in New Orleans. Many of the progressionists, according to attorney A. P. Tureaud, "appealed personally to the white power structure in individual cases.... In these cases someone on the board of the NAACP knew someone who was an authority or had some influence.... Through these personal interventions our grievances would be known."⁶⁷ This approach allowed black leaders to petition whites in a non public forum and receive concessions within the Jim Crow system.

⁶⁷ Tureaud quoted in Arnold Hirsch "Simply a Matter of Black and White: The Transformation of Race and Politics in Twentieth-Century New Orleans" in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 264-265.

They concentrated most of their efforts on issues that were inconsequential to whites but created a moderate yet visible and progressive change in the black community.⁶⁸

Politically, the racial progressionists realized that the only avenue for black political participation in Louisiana existed within the Republican Party. Their moderate and gradual approach allowed them to participate in a party that was, “numerically insignificant and bereft of any influences in state politics.”⁶⁹ Yet, however insignificant the Republican Party, it brought a few racial progressionists into contact with prominent white politicians and officials.

Walter L. Cohen, known as “Cap,” actively participated in the Republican Party and eventually became a leading black Republican in Louisiana. Cohen was the primary contact between blacks and whites in the city. Historian Arnold Hirsch described Cohen as the “preeminent spokesman between the turn of the century and the great depression.” The economic elite of both groups, Creoles and American blacks, admired Cohen. They valued his work in the Republican Party and looked to him as a successful businessman.

Cohen’s leadership began during Reconstruction and lasted until his death in 1930. He was the protégée of Louisiana’s first and only black governor, P. B. S. Pinchback. Cohen was one of the few African Americans to hold an appointed political

⁶⁸ Ibid., 268.

⁶⁹ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 12.

office after Reconstruction.⁷⁰ During his lifetime, he received appointments to the office of Customs Inspector by President McKinley, the position of Registrar of U. S. Land Office by President Theodore Roosevelt, and the office of Comptroller of Customs by President Harding.⁷¹ These appointments provided a base for Cohen's leadership of the Louisiana Republican Party's "black and tan" faction.

The Louisiana Republican Party consisted of two groups, the "black and tans," who represented the biracial liberal group, and the "lily-whites," who represented the conservative white segregationists. The "lily-whites" opposed having the "black and tans" within the Republican Party. The "lily white's" believed the Republican Party could not survive in the New South if it continued to be viewed as the "party of Lincoln," the great emancipator and friend of blacks.⁷² The "lily whites" wanted to change this view by gaining control of the party and adopting a segregationist policy. As a leader of the "black and tans" Cohen posed a threat to their goal. In order to eliminate his leadership, in 1925, "lily white" Republicans attempted to frame Cohen for smuggling liquor into the United States through his position as Comptroller of Customs. The attack on Cohen by the "lily whites" led the racial progressionist leadership to look for other avenues available for gaining concessions outside of the

⁷⁰ "Autocrat Club Fetes Walter L. Cohen," *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 March 1926, 2 and 6.

⁷¹ Ibid. Cohen received the Comptroller of Customs position in 1922.

⁷² "Cohen Prosecutor Advocates Lilly White Republican Party," *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 February 1926, 2.

Republican Party. Eventually, Cohen was exonerated of all charges; however attacks by the “lily- white” faction of the Republican Party persisted, causing Cohen to focus much of his attention on Republican Party politics until his death. After Cohen’s death, blacks in the Louisiana Republican Party struggled to keep the “black and tan” faction alive. No new black leader emerged in the party who had the prominence and influence of Cohen. The death of Cohen allowed “lily whites” to gain traction in instituting their segregationist policies by excluding black from positions of power within the party. Cohen’s influence and leadership within the community helped establish the approach black leaders adopted from 1925-1940.

In November of 1925, Cohen led a group of racial progressionists from the unified economic elite in addressing the physical conditions of black schools in New Orleans. This group focused on the unfair allotment of only \$88,000 for black school construction out of a \$2.5 million bond issue. The group included: Reverend J. L. Burrell, Pastor of Progressive Baptist Church; S. W. Green, President of Liberty Life Insurance Company; Dr. Lucas, President of New Orleans NAACP; Dr. J. A. Hardin; and H. H. Dunn, President of Colored Educational Alliance.⁷³ The group petitioned the

⁷³ “Committee of Citizens Meet and Petition School Board for Buildings” *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 November 1925, 1. Other members included Reverend F. W. Brown, Pastor of Wesley M. E. Church; Baptist Church; Reverend J. S. Morgan, President of Baptist Ministers; Dr. C. H. D. Bowers, President of New Orleans College; Dr. E. Charles Thornhill, President of Straight College Alumni Association; and Reverend E. W. White, Pastor of Tulane Ave. Joseph Thornton, attorney; Mrs. Deborah Guidry, Secretary of the Educational Alliance; Mrs. Estelle Wells, President of Federation Parents’ Club; E.J. LaBranche of LaBranche Pharmacies.

New Orleans School Board Superintendent Nicholas Bauer to build new schools and renovate old ones. They asked for enough funding for black schools to train and improve the efficiency of principals and teachers, restoration of McDonogh No. 35, erection of an annex to the Danneel Colored School, a new McCarthy School, a manual training building at the Willow School, and an annex to McDonogh No. 24. Over a year later, in April of 1926, the group received only one of their petitioned requests, a six room annex to McDonogh 24.⁷⁴ The annex provided much less than what the racial progressionists requested; still, they believed this was progress.

For the next fifteen years, the racial progressionist leaders of the unified economic elite sought concessions from whites. They did so through two main organizations in New Orleans, the NAACP and the Federation of Civic Leagues. Leaders such as Walter Cohen, George Lucas, Rivers Frederick, Joseph Hardin, Reverend Burrell, Smith Green and others provided a moderate and gradual approach for the struggles of blacks. This approach worked well in the Federation of Civic Leagues, but not within the NAACP. Their leadership never demanded rights, it only asked white city officials for concessions within the Jim Crow system. By 1933, the *Louisiana Weekly* began to criticize and expose the weaknesses and exclusive nature of their leadership. Despite the criticism, racial progressionists helped the black community progress in its quest to gain equal rights. These leaders provided

⁷⁴ "McDonogh 24 School Annex is Dedicated" *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 April 1926, 1.

leadership to a divided black community, and laid the foundation for a unified civil rights struggle for equality.

Chapter 3 Federation of Civic Leagues

The Republican Party in Louisiana consisted of both blacks and whites. The relationship between the two races within the party deteriorated at times, but the Republican Party always unified to oppose the Democratic Party. In 1925, the unification that existed in the Republican Party began to unravel. "Lily Whites" in the party no longer saw the need for a visible black representation in the party. On September 13, 1927, at a mixed political mass meeting for the Republican Party a white speaker made the statement that, "since whites had been free for 1,000 years and Negroes but 500 years, he shouldn't expect to sit on the party's council, but could vote and help build the party."¹ Blacks at the meeting could not believe the speaker's outright disrespect for the fundamental principles of the Louisiana Republican Party. They left the meeting with an understanding that "lily whites" wanted to remove the "black and tan" faction from the Republican Party, thus leaving blacks without a political avenue to challenge discriminatory laws. Instead, blacks would have to form their own organizations to bring about change.

Alexander Mollay, one of the many blacks in attendance, along with Joseph A. Hardin, a prominent physician, discussed the statements made by the white speaker and decided to form a group of civic-minded individuals who would petition for

¹ T. J. Dejoie, "The Origins, Development and Achievements of the N. O. Federation of Civic Leagues," Roll 57, Box 77, Folder 46, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. The speaker's name is not mentioned in the source.

equality under the law of separate but equal. The two men contacted other residents in their community and planned an organizational meeting for November 23, 1927, at the home of Joseph Hardin. This meeting resulted in the formation of the Seventh Ward Civic League.

The Seventh Ward Civic League elected officers who were all long- time residents of the New Orleans 7th Ward. The officers were: Joseph Hardin, President; Alexander Mollay, 1st Vice President; Antoine M. Trudeau, 2nd Vice President; W. Colin, Sr., 3rd Vice President; Oscar Daste, Treasurer; Remy Despinasse, Financial Secretary; Albert Blandin and Morris Lewis, Assistant Secretaries; Albert Chapital, Sergeant at Arms; G. J. McKenna, Corresponding Secretary; and Reverend M. Williams, Chaplin.²

The chart below examines the age, occupation, and home values taken from the 1930's census of the Seventh Ward Civic League officers. It shows the officers were economically stable citizens.

Table 11. Seventh Ward Civic League Officers Occupation and Home Value in 1930

Name	Title	Age	Job Occupation	Home Value	Origin
Joseph Hardin	President	54	Doctor/ American black*	\$6,000	American Black*
Antoine M. Trudeau	2 nd Vice President	40	Manager Insurance Company	\$1,700	Creole
Oscar Daste	Treasurer	39	Contractor/Bricklayer	\$4,000	Creole

² Ibid.

Table 11. Continued

Albert Blandin	Assistant Secretary	37	Builder/Painter	\$3,000	Creole
Morris Lewis	Assistant Secretary	47	Contractor/House Raiser/ Creole	\$2,500	Creole
Arthur Chapital	Sergeant at Arms	47	Contractor/Carpenter	\$2,500	Creole
George McKenna	Corresponding Secretary	40	Mail Carrier/ Creole	\$5,000	Creole

3

The mission of the league included providing for the civic welfare of the ward, encouraging education, improving public health, encouraging the establishment of new businesses, supporting existing businesses, encouraging citizens to exercise their rights, particularly in voting, providing representation before governmental and public bodies, providing for intelligent interracial cooperation through proper exchange of views before duly recognized bodies of representatives.⁴ Membership in the league extended to all citizens of the ward both male and female over the age of eighteen; dues were fifteen cents a month.

³ Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc., 2002. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. There were a few 7th Ward Civic League officers not mentioned on the chart because they were not found in the census. *Joseph Hardin was an American black who migrated from Mississippi, married a Creole woman in 1897 and lived in the 7th Ward until his death in 1954.

⁴ Ibid.

The approach the league took in achieving its objectives mirrored the leadership tactics of the racial progressionists. The president and founder of the league, Hardin, was a racial progressionist. He understood the workings of the Jim Crow South and its impact in New Orleans. Thus, he created a two-fold plan of helping the black community without posing a threat to the white power structure of the city. In keeping with this approach, Hardin and league members never actively demonstrated nor protested for rights. They merely asked for concessions within the law of separate but equal to ensure the equality of facilities as permitted by the *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The first major project of the newly organized civic league involved acquiring a new building for the Valena C. Jones Elementary School, located in the Seventh Ward. Hardin and league members petitioned the school board in 1927 for a new building to house two thousand school children. The league only asked for a building and nothing else-- no books, equipment, support staff or additional funding for the new school. The new school would operate with the same budget and resources as the old school. In 1929, the school board granted the petition, and Valena C. Jones School received a new "32 room modern brick building." The new building accomplished a major goal for the league. The building provided a convincing symbol to the community that Hardin could acquire resources from whites. This significant accomplishment sparked hope, loyalty and good will from the community.

The Seventh Ward Civic League offered a positive example to other black citizens throughout the city. Soon black citizens in various wards around the city formed similar organizations. Membership in these civic leagues was open to everyone within the wards; however, it is not known if any white people joined. The 1930 census shows that the majority of the wards in the city were biracial; however, the wards were segregated by streets and blocks. Rarely did blacks and whites live next door to one another.⁵ This caused black streets and blocks to be overlooked by the city which in turn encouraged the need for black civic leagues to form.

The wards that organized black civic leagues included both Uptown and Downtown. They included: the Second Ward, the Third Ward, the Fourth Ward, the Fifth Ward, the Sixth Ward, the Eighth Ward, the Ninth Ward, the Eleventh Ward, the Twelfth Ward, the Thirteenth Ward, the Fourteenth Ward, the Fifteenth Ward, the Sixteenth Ward, and the Seventeenth Ward.⁶ On January 18, 1929, the individual civic leagues united to form the Federation of Civic Leagues. The Federation of Civic Leagues brought wards to work together for the civic betterment of black citizens in the city. Through the Federation, American blacks who lived in uptown neighborhoods and Creoles who lived in downtown neighborhoods were united in a common struggle. The Federation's annual membership for each ward was ten dollars. Representation for

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "History of the Federation of Civic Leagues Reveals City's Most Active Group" Joseph Hardin Papers, Box 1, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

each ward in the federation was based on the number of members in a particular ward. For every fifty members, one person was elected to represent that ward in the federation.⁷ The leadership within the Federation of Civic Leagues quickly fell to Hardin and the officers of the Seventh Ward Civic League.⁸

The Federation of Civic Leagues focused on petitioning for educational and recreational facilities within the Jim Crow system. The visibly unequal nature of black schools and recreational facilities in the city provided the federation with the justification needed to bring about a viable challenge to the separate but equal laws. The need for better schools and safe recreational facilities was universal through the black community. Therefore, these two areas received the most attention from Hardin and the Federation of Civic Leagues.

In December of 1929, the federation submitted to the New Orleans School Board the first of its recommendations for equalizing black and white public schools. The recommendations included the basic needs for any child in the public school system such as new textbooks, smaller classes, more desks, better lighting and an overall safe environment. The federation also asked for a kindergarten school, a trade school, the relocation of A. P. Williams Elementary School, and the construction of new schools or

⁷ T. J. Dejoie, "The Origins, Development and Achievements of the N. O. Federation of Civic Leagues," Roll 57, Box 77, Folder 46. A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁸ "Brief of the Schools and Playgrounds of the Federation of Civic League" Roll 10, Box 12, Folder 32, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

the converting of old white schools to black schools.⁹ The 1929 recommendations went unnoticed by the school board. Just one month later, an accident occurred at one of the schools specifically named in the recommendation. A stairway used as a combination stairway and fire escape at the A. P. Williams School collapsed, dropping approximately twenty girls a distance of fifteen feet to the ground.¹⁰ The *Louisiana Weekly* called the incident “a case for the League.” Much to the surprise of the community, however the leaders of the federation failed to protest. Instead the federation continued to petition the school board for improvements.

By the end of February, the school board agreed to enact one of the recommendations made by the federation. It would open a trade school for blacks. The establishment of a trade school provided yet another positive accomplishment of the moderate and gradual approach by the federation. The *Weekly* reported, not everyone in the community whole heartily accepted the trade school, as it did not answer the need for newer and safe black schools.¹¹ The A. P. Williams School accident highlighted the intolerable conditions existing in black schools of New Orleans. The overcrowding, dilapidated structures and neglect by the New Orleans School Board severely impacted

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ “School Stairs Fall; Eight Injured,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 January 1930, 1.

¹¹ “We Need It,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 22 February 1930, 6.

the education of blacks. At this time only one black high school existed, McDonogh 35. Hoffman, the black junior high school, consisted of a group of small single framed buildings. The roofs of the buildings were covered with asbestos and the rooms were poorly lit.¹² The New Orleans School Board neglected the poor conditions of black schools, and built two new schools for white children, each costing over one million dollars.¹³

Despite the problems of black schools, leaders of the federation continued to make moderate progress by agreeing to accept the school board's plan to build wooden annexes. Again, some felt the federation's leaders needed to ask for more improvements. Peter R. Crutchfield publicly voiced his concerns about the leadership of the federation. Crutchfield, editor of the *Louisiana Weekly*, president of the Third Ward Civic League, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Civic Leagues used his editorials in *Louisiana Weekly* to urge the black community to demand more from whites and the black leadership. On October 11, 1930, in a *Louisiana Weekly* editorial titled "'Barnacle' Leaders are Fearful," Crutchfield wrote:

There is an inclination on the part of our so called leaders whenever they assemble together, to deride the action now being pursued by us in publishing facts obtained by us in our survey of the public schools in the city. They of

¹² "Survey of Negro Public Schools Reveals Interesting Facts," *Louisiana Weekly*, 27 September 1930, 1. It is unclear if the surveyors of the black schools understood the dangers of asbestos at this time or if they mentioned it solely to point out the dated construction of the schools.

¹³ "Our School Situation," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 August 1930, 6; "No Money for Colored Schools, Says School Board," *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 August 1930, 4; "Survey of Negro Public Schools Reveals Interesting Facts," *Louisiana Weekly*, 27 September 1930, 1.

course belong to the old school of thought; they constitute the "Barnacles" which have attached themselves to the progress of the "New Negro." With them "inferiority complex" is chronic, they live, but have no hope....

Our agitation is being conducted in a sane and practical manner. The facts obtained by us are authentic.... We thought it not a bad idea to mention the fact that the Hoffman annex was being built with used lumber.... When we visited McDonogh 36, and found as many as three children sitting in one seat, we saw no reason to hide it. Do you?

The Negro is easily deceived, because he hopes too quickly. What "old timers" are afraid to say, young men are anxious to if given the chance. Ships go on dry dock to be cleaned of the "Barnacles" which cling to their sides, why can't we likewise rid ourselves of them? Leadership today is just about as scarce as the dodo bird. Negroes love and consider the friendship of the white man too much not to try to be of real worthwhile value to the race.¹⁴

Crutchfield questioned the leadership of the federation; however, he still made it known that the agitation he and others sought remained practical. He only wanted to change the pace and increase the aggressiveness of the leaders from a moderate and gradual approach, to a new strong unified thought that remained practical but more aggressive in its demand. Crutchfield felt the existing leadership suffered from an "inferiority complex." Crutchfield later wrote, "Imagine the force there is behind a solidly organized number of people who demand to be heard.... An entire city of Negroes begging, pleading for what they are justly entitled to by the virtue of taxation, are turned the deaf ear."¹⁵ Crutchfield's editorials continued to criticize the leadership

¹⁴ "Barnacle' Leaders Are Fearful," *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 October 1930, 6.

¹⁵ "What About Our High School," *Louisiana Weekly*, 23 May 1931, 6.

of the federation; however, the leadership never changed. Hardin remained the president of the federation and the moderate and gradual approach remained.

Year after year the federation petitioned the school board and waited patiently for it to respond. The patience and lack of response by the school board was made evident in the J. W. Hoffman school board petition. In 1931, the federation petitioned the school board on behalf of the J. W. Hoffman School for a new, modern and fire-proof building. The school, located at the corner of Third and South Claiborne, was poorly constructed and failed to accommodate the numerous students enrolled. It also lacked adequate bathroom and library facilities. In the petition, the Executive Committee of the Federation suggested that the school board build a new school that would be complementary to the white schools in the New Orleans Public School System.¹⁶

After submitting the petition, the leaders of the Federation waited patiently for the school board to respond. By 1933 no response to the 1931 petition was ever received, and the Federation again tried to persuade the school board to build a new J. W. Hoffman School. The Federation submitted an informational report on the J. W. Hoffman School by its principal Lawrence D. Crocker. In the report, Crocker remained true to the practical approach of the Federation by acknowledging the financial predicament of the school board; however, he pleaded, "Relief is imperative, somehow,

¹⁶ "Brief of the Schools and Playgrounds of the Federation of Civic League," Roll 10, Box 12, Folder 32, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

in some way, we must have relief.”¹⁷ According to Crocker, the school’s physical plant was a constant source of dismay. The doors did not close, except when bolted locked because of the rotten roof. The roof leaked in several places causing the floors of the classrooms to become badly ruined resulting in large holes in numerous places. Crocker further stated that he was in constant fear that some child would fall and get seriously injured because of the holes. He further wrote that he and the Federation did not wish to exaggerate, but a new school was badly needed for the health safety and welfare of the students. He ended his plea by stating, that we “urgently, yet respectfully, ask that we be given foremost consideration when the Board is in a position to resume building construction.”¹⁸

By 1934, the pleas of the federation still received no answer from the school board. Once again, the federation wrote another letter; however, the tone of the leaders of the federation changed. The Executive Committee formed a new group, the Committee on Schools and Playgrounds, to address grievances with the school board. Young attorney, A. P. Tureaud chaired this committee and believed in challenging the Jim Crow system by demanding rights. Although Tureaud chaired the committee, Hardin limited Tureaud’s aggressive views and challenges to the system. Hardin remained true to the moderate and gradual approach of negotiations and petitions for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

concessions. In a reflection on that era, Tureaud acknowledged that, “we were not looking for anything much. We were asking for separate schools or enough of them to house the children. Whatever benefits we got, we got.... by supplication rather than by demanding.”¹⁹

Tureaud’s letter to the school board recognized the lack of funds necessary to improve schools. Tureaud further wrote, “We have derived much hope, from the ‘New Deal’ program of our courageous President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that federal money will be placed at the disposal of local communities for the construction of school projects, through the agencies of the Public Works Administration.”²⁰ With these new funds available, Tureaud wrote to the board that he and the Federation hoped there would be no more temporary repairs, annexes, or shifting of the children from one school to another in order to meet the growing school enrollment.²¹ According to Tureaud, the only remedy to the situation of black schools was a building program. Tureaud made it known to the school board that the Federation was aware of federal monies allocated for building new schools. Tureaud also understood that the technical reading of *Plessy v. Ferguson* required any federal money given to the State of Louisiana

¹⁹ Arnold Hirsch “Simply a Matter of Black and White: The Transformation of Race and Politics in Twentieth-Century New Orleans,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 267-278.

²⁰ “Brief of the Schools and Playgrounds of the Federation of Civic League,” Roll 10, Box 12, Folder 32, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²¹ Ibid.

and New Orleans specifically required equal distribution to both races. Tureaud, also extended his petition to the Mayor and the city council to provide Public Works Administration (PWA) funds for the construction of six new playgrounds with swimming pools, a black branch of the New Orleans Public Library, and a community center.²²

The Mayor and the school board began to feel pressure to take action. The school board alleviated some of the mayor's pressure by attempting to fix a few of the inequalities within black schools. It was easier to repair the inequalities within black schools than embark upon an all out campaign to make public facilities in New Orleans equal, as mandated in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Edwin W. Eley, assistant public school superintendent, announced plans for a temporary school building to house one thousand elementary school children and relieve congestion in the Thomy Lofton and McDonogh No. 35 schools. Eley also stated that the Department of Construction for the Orleans Parish School Board had been asked to submit tentative plans for building a one story building for Hoffman Junior High and the A. P. Williams School.²³ In October of 1934, at the cost of \$25,000, the school board began the construction of a temporary twenty-one room school building to house one thousand black students of both schools.

²² "Civic League Ask For Many Improvements," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 December 1933, 1.

²³ "Schools To Be Relieved Of Congestion," *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 October 1934, 1.

The *Louisiana Weekly* described construction of the \$25,000 temporary building as a “group of cancer like disappointments... constructed out of the debris of wrecked white schools, covered with a coat of plaster, and grandiosely presented to Negro New Orleans as a marvelous educational plant.”²⁴ According to the *Weekly*, temporary buildings often became permanent fire traps that jeopardized the lives of unsuspecting school children. The J. W. Hoffman Junior High School provided proof of the *Weekly's* concern about the temporary school buildings, “The J. W. Hoffman Junior High School is a conglomeration of ‘temporary’ buildings which are a disgrace to the community and surely constitute a fire hazard if nothing more. How ‘temporary’ have they been? Low, inadequate, poorly constructed, difficult to heat, and set in such small structures as to compel students to go out of doors each hour a class period ends, its ‘temporariness’ has lasted ten years or so.”²⁵

The *Louisiana Weekly* published editorials inquiring the whereabouts of the Federation when the temporary buildings were proposed. The editorial further read, something was “radically wrong with the so called leadership of colored New Orleans when such a desecration is permitted to pass without one voice being raised in protest. Something is equally as wrong with the ‘civic league,’ that no condemnation of this

²⁴ “Where Are The Civic Leagues?” *Louisiana Weekly*, 27 October 1934, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

make- shift offering to the cause of Negro education is uttered by them.”²⁶ The *Weekly* questioned the actions of the several civic leagues and the NAACP.

The Federation of Civic Leagues Committee on Schools and Playgrounds was never informed of the program to build annexes by the school board. The school board began the construction of annexes in October of 1934, still having not replied to the Federation’s petition of December 12, 1933. The Federation’s committee made it clear that no more annexes or temporary repairs would solve the problems in black schools. Blacks questioned the school board motive for acting so quickly in erecting a new “temporary” school building, when no organization requested one.²⁷

Typically, when the federation asked for temporary buildings, the school board responded by saying it would “consider and discuss” the possibility. After consideration and discussion of improvements in black schools, the school board then provided the same response to the Federation, “it had no money.”²⁸ The black community later learned that the school board had an unbudgeted \$500,000. Upon learning this, the Federation continued to petition the school board, which replied, “that they had no money with which to grant the several requests in the petition, but that such a time when as money was obtained the Negro schools would be looked after as

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Brief of the Schools and Playgrounds of the Federation of Civic League,” Roll 10, Box 12, Folder 32, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁸ “Why the School Board’s Haste,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 November 1934, 8.

necessary.”²⁹ The school board hoped the \$25,000 for the “temporary” building would end the petitions of the Federation; however, the black community demanded more permanent resolutions. The black community now perceived the “temporary” buildings as diversion from the unbudgeted \$500,000. As years went by, the Federation continued to petition the school board. Finally in 1937, the Orleans Parish School Board granted the request of the racial progressionists leadership and built a new school for blacks in Algiers. The money for the new school came from a \$1.5 million bond issue.³⁰

The new school was a significant accomplishment for the Federation; however, there was still work to be done. The Federation continued in its moderate and gradual petitioning to the school board for more changes. By 1938, the school board decided to commission a comprehensive study of the city’s public school system to determine its real needs. The study, written by Alonzo Grace, *Tomorrow’s Citizens*, consisted of seven volumes. Grace included an entire volume focused on black education. It confirmed the serious problems of black schools in New Orleans. According to Grace, black schools failed to meet the needs of the community, justifying the petitions of the Federation of Civic Leagues. Grace found that black schools were often in poor condition and overcrowded, resulting in strained student performance levels causing increased dropout rates and poor test scores. The report concluded with

²⁹ “Body Admits it has an ‘Unbudgeted’ Amount of Nearly \$500,000,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 24 November 1934, 1.

³⁰ “A New School,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 August 1937, 8.

recommendations to help improve the city's school system. The findings and recommendations included:

1. Kindergartens should be inaugurated as fast as facilities and finances permit.
2. Playgrounds and recreational facilities are needed.
3. Overcrowded conditions in practically all of the schools.
4. The teacher load is excessively high; additional teachers are required.
5. A twelve year school program should be developed.
6. At least three groups should be formed after comprehensive testing results are available, each with a curricula program adjusted to its special needs.
7. The compulsory attendance law should be enforced to an increasing degree as rapidly as building and teaching facilities permit.
8. The possibility of a vocational school with state and federal or philanthropic support.
9. The program of secondary education needs a complete reorganization.³¹

Despite the findings and recommendations of the Grace report, the school board continued to overlook the educational needs of the black community. In *Crescent City Schools*, Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon write that the Grace report became a source of reference rather than a blueprint for action. The lack of action on the part of the school board caused blacks in the community to begin to question the racial progressionists petitioning efforts of the Federation of Civic Leagues.

The second area of focus for the Federation of Civic Leagues was recreational facilities within the black community. In 1929, blacks in the city of New Orleans had

³¹ Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (The Center for Louisiana Studies: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), 214- 215; The Grace report came in two forms. The initial publication contained seven monographs, under the title: Citizen's Planning Committee for Public Education of New Orleans, *Tomorrow's Citizens: A Study and Program for the Improvement of the New Orleans Public Schools*.

virtually no recreational facilities. All of the parks in the city except one, in the uptown section, were reserved for whites. The city had only one public swimming pool, for a population of 130,000 blacks, and no black beaches.³² Black kids played in the streets and swam in the bayous, while the *Times Picayune* boasted about white recreational facilities. "New Orleans is better prepared than ever before to offer these children safe and pleasant places in which to play. The playgrounds and swimming pools are more numerous. The parks have more baseball diamonds and equipment. These are the safest places for the children outside their own yards."³³ Blacks wanted the same opportunities for their communities. Thus, the Federation began to campaign for more recreational facilities.

The first petition to the New Orleans City Planning and Zoning Commission, written by Hardin and Tureaud, requested that the zoning commission consider making more recreational facilities available to blacks.³⁴ Hardin and Tureaud stated that there were fifteen playgrounds and five swimming pools for white children in New

³² "What About the Child," *Louisiana Weekly*, 15 June 1929, 6.

³³ Ibid. *Times Picayune* quoted in *Louisiana Weekly*.

³⁴ "Story Behind Playground Acquisition," Joseph Hardin Papers. Box 1. Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; "Mayor Purchases Site For Another Negro Playground," *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 January 1939, 1 and 8. No date is given for the first petition however the source states that the playground was received after a 10 year struggle. In 1939, the Mayor purchases the site for the new black playground, which means that the first petition written by the federation was in 1929.

Orleans and only one playground and one swimming pool for black children.³⁵ Hardin and Tureaud also wrote that playgrounds were, “nationally recognized as an asset to the community in which they are located.”³⁶ They improved the health and happiness of the community, while providing an “indispensable factor in character building, and moral uplift.”³⁷

The Federation continued with its challenge in a similar fashion to the school board campaign. They did not demand immediate changes that would equalize public facilities but instead petitioned for changes that would have a moderate to significant impact on blacks in the community. The Federation asked that all playgrounds in strictly black neighborhoods, like Shakespeare Park, at Third and Howard, and Poydras Playground, at Poydras and Rampart, be turned over to blacks instead of having “No Colored Wanted” signs posted.³⁸ They also requested that blacks receive a designated area out of the many miles of beachfront under construction for recreational use.

The city’s planning and zoning commission promised to look into the need for more black recreational facilities. By the time summer began in 1930, no progress or change had occurred. To the surprise of many, the *Times Picayune* printed a story

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. “More Playgrounds,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 15 February 1930, 6.

regarding the planning and zoning commission's failure to answer the federation's petition. According to the *Picayune*, there could be no logical argument to deprive blacks "a share in the comfort of the cool waters of the lake during the hot summer months."³⁹ The article declared that the authorities whose duty it was to make the space assignment should not permit another season to go by without action, "even if it should be found impossible to reach at once a permanent decision of the location of a beach, a temporary one should be set aside pending further discussion"⁴⁰ The *Picayune* article gave hope to the black community that the efforts of the Federation sparked interest and sympathy for the black cause in the white community. Unfortunately, that sympathy fell on deaf ears. In July, an additional swimming pool for whites opened; once again blacks received nothing.

In the summer of 1931, the need for safe recreational facilities became abundantly clear when six black people drowned in Lake Pontchartrain. A group of nine friends went swimming in the lake to cool off and relax on the beach. According to a survivor, "the party had been cautious about going out very far and they were very careful."⁴¹ They had already made two trips in and out of the water, but on the third trip the group

³⁹ Bearing Fruit," *Louisiana Weekly*, 26 April 1930, 6. *Times Picayune* quoted in the *Louisiana Weekly*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Recent Dredgings of Lake Proves Costly," *Louisiana Weekly*, 13 June 1931, 1.

strayed from their previous path and “suddenly fell into a deep trough”⁴² resulting in the drowning of six of the nine friends. The *Louisiana Weekly* reported that the lives of the “unfortunate six” who drowned in the lake was a “sacrifice for the failure of the local municipalities to provide its Negro citizenry with an adequate bathing beach.”⁴³ These six deaths prompted the *Louisiana Weekly* to keep a count of all the black drowning’s in the city. The Federation used the drowning of these six black people to once again petition the city planning and zoning commission for a safe beach for blacks. The city planning and zoning commission again promised the Federation a bathing beach the following summer.

In October of 1931, the *Times Picayune* published another story “Bathing Beach for Negroes” in which the city planning and zoning commission promised a beach for blacks.⁴⁴ The *Times Picayune* noted that for a year blacks in the city had been waiting patiently for a bathing beach. Sites for a black beach were tentatively indicated but a specific site had not been agreed upon. The *Times Picayune* wrote, “Uncertainty about the location benefits no one and works direct injury by its tendency to unsettle values and retard settlement development of the lakefront area.”⁴⁵ The newspaper argued that

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “A Friend in Need,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 31 October 1931, 6. This article includes the *Times Picayune* article titled “Bathing Beaches for Negroes.”

⁴⁵ Ibid. “Bathing Beaches for Negroes” *Times Picayune* quoted in “A Friend in Need,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 31 October 1931, 6.

if the site for a black beach was left undetermined for another indefinite period the delay would only increase the trouble and difficulty of the final selection.

In the summer of 1932, the Federation's efforts of petitioning the city planning and zoning commission were being met. The school board decided to open black public school playgrounds and play centers during the summer for black children. This increased the number of black public parks from one to four. The Federation also received word of the construction of a black beach at Seabrook.⁴⁶ The timing of this announcement came when *Louisiana Weekly* writer, James LaFourche was calling for a protest parade demanding a black beach. LaFourche had just reported that a total of sixteen blacks had drowned while the city decided where to place a black beach.⁴⁷ The petitioning of the Federation ultimately succeeded. The black community gratefully accepted the improvements in recreational facilities, and for the next two years was content with the progress of the Federation. The Federation continued petitioning for more playgrounds, but the bathing beach concern was to be resolved.

By 1934, the beach at Seabrook had become a haven for thousands of blacks in the city. As with all black facilities in the city, however the Seabrook beach facilities

⁴⁶ "Play Centers," *Louisiana Weekly*, 2 July 1932, 6; T. J. Dejoie, "The Origins, Development and Achievements of the N. O. Federation of Civic Leagues" Roll 57 Box 77 Folder 46. A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. The Seabrook beach was located at the foot of Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans.

⁴⁷ "Drownings to Date," and "Citizens Plan to Stage Big Protest Parade Demanding Pontchartrain Beach Front," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 July 1932, 1.

were not equal to any white beach facilities in the city. The city made white beaches safe by equipping them with life guard stations and posting lights along the water's edge, while blacks swam at their own risk at Seabrook. Blacks soon realized that Seabrook fell short of being equal to any white beach.⁴⁸ They had accepted a swimming hole instead of a beach. Discontent over the beach at Seabrook grew, and the Federation petitioned for safer facilities.

In 1936, the Federation became hopeful that their petitions would be answered when Mayor Robert Maestri created the City Development Planning Board. The job of the new board was to run the city's recreational facilities. This board immediately began to make changes. The Federation viewed this as an opportunity to remind the board about the recreational needs of black citizen. "Recreational grounds and a well developed beach are greatly needed, and with the millions being spent for the pleasure of white people, surely some part of the vast territory hereabout can be established and properly maintained for Negroes."⁴⁹

Instead of creating more recreational facilities for blacks, the new board took away an existing black recreational facility. A park once given to blacks in the seventeenth ward, requested in a petition from the Federation, was taken away. The mayor informed Hardin, that the black community was responsible for equipping and

⁴⁸ "Protect the Bathers at Seabrook," *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 June 1934, 8.

⁴⁹ "Don't Ignore Us," *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 August 1936, 6.

using the park. This requirement squarely contradicted the responsibility of the city to the taxpaying black citizens. The Mayor believed the Federation should have asked for the park and the equipment. The Federation did not dispute the Mayor on who was required to equip the park. Thus, the Federation gave instructions to each civic league in a ward that received a park in 1935 to raise money in their ward to equip the park. Many blacks in the seventeenth ward blamed the Seventeenth Ward Civic League for losing the park. According to the *Louisiana Weekly*, leaders of the ward, “were spending their time fighting among themselves for the recognized leadership in the community when, they should have been making efforts to put some equipment in the park to show city officials they welcomed the park, which through the Federation of Civic Leagues had been given to them.”⁵⁰

A year before the park was taken away, Hardin personally drove Secretary DiBenidetto, of the playground commission, into the seventeenth ward to view the park. After seeing the park, Secretary DiBenidetto had city workers build a fence around it and advised local residents to equip it. No one thought the city would re-take the playground because it had no equipment. However, the police came into the park and forced all the black children out.

The Federation of Civic Leagues decided to appeal to the city leaders at their regularly scheduled meeting of the City Council, which usually took place at 7:30 in the

⁵⁰ “Playground Is Taken From Negro Children and Given to Whites While 17th Ward Leaders Are Fighting for Power,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 May 1936, 1.

evening. The Federation had lined up two white sympathizers, Rabbi Louis Binstock and Father Wynnhaven, to plead their case for keeping the park. The City Council learning of the Federation plans moved the meeting to an earlier time. No notice of this time change was given. The council met at noon and voted to turn the playground over to the white children permanently.⁵¹

By 1937, blacks began to question the tactics of the Federation concerning recreational facilities just as they had on petitioning the school board. Blacks saw improvements in white communities with the use of federal money, yet nothing happened in the black community. The need for parks and play areas for black citizens in New Orleans grew more imperative daily. The city spent thousands of tax dollars annually on parks and playgrounds maintained for white residents, yet required blacks to spend their own money to equip black parks. Black citizens, however, remained grateful to the Federation for their accomplishments yet many felt, the burdensome taxes they paid only benefited whites citizens.⁵² Through these numerous setbacks, blacks did not ask to integrate recreational facilities. They only wanted equal facilities according to the law.

The Federation of Civic Leagues progressionist approach began to lose favor with the black community. The Federation of Civic Leagues approached city officials

⁵¹ Ibid. Father Wynnhaven's first name is not given in the source.

⁵² "This Should Not Be," *Louisiana Weekly*, 7 October 1937, 8.

repeatedly, asking for relief for black children. They received some vague promises, but nothing ever developed. Black children remained neglected, and the community demanded substantial change.⁵³ The *Louisiana Weekly* suggested creating a more diverse committee of black leaders to address the challenges blacks faced in the city. This new committee should include representatives of all classes. By organizing a more broad-based committee everyone in the community would have a voice in decisions made for the community. Leaders of the Federation of Civic Leagues would no longer have the sole authority to act on behalf of the entire community. According to the *Weekly*, the first objective of this newly proposed committee should include mapping out a brief and concise program for approaching those responsible for municipal projects. The second and most important objective of the newly proposed committee would include approaching the mayor and his commissioners with the request for worthwhile improvements.

In December of 1938, the new community appointed committee by the *Weekly*, approached Mayor Maestri about the park. The members of the delegation included Herbert Mack, State Supervisor of Negro Activities; W. W. Booth, director of boys projects for the National Youth Administration (NYA); Reverend N. A. Holmes; A. W. Dent, Superintendent of Flint Goodridge Hospital; J. A. Hardin, president of the Seventh Ward Civic League and the Federation of Civic Leagues; and Mrs. Mayme

⁵³ "The City Fathers and Recreation for Negroes," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 July 1937, 8.

Osby Brown, editor of the *Louisiana Weekly*. Hardin was the only member of this committee with ties to the Federation, which suggest that the committee still had faith in Hardin as a leader. On behalf of the committee, Hardin suggested that the mayor consider buying the old Crescent City Ball Park and converting it into a black playground. Hardin told the mayor that the purchase price of the old ball park would be \$48,000.⁵⁴

The mayor rejected Hardin's suggestion saying, "much more desirable locations had been recently purchased for play areas at much less cost." The mayor continued, "I know all about playgrounds, I bought three in one week, so you don't have to tell me about the need. Just find me land that is city owned or can be bought at a reasonable price and I'll know what to do."⁵⁵ He assured Hardin and the committee that he would instruct the city's realtor Brooks Duncan to make an effort to find suitable locations. The committee also asked Mayor Maestri to build and fund a shop for black youth to learn trades such as automobile mechanics and carpentry. Before the committee adjourned, the mayor agreed to provide a building for the shop and another playground for blacks. The committee left the meeting with the mayor feeling hopeful

⁵⁴ "Mayor Maestri Says City Will Build Opportunity Shop For Negro Boys," *Louisiana Weekly*, 10 December 1938, 1- 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

that substantial progress was made; however, they remained wary of vague promises that never came.⁵⁶

A year after the meeting, Mayor Maestri announced that the city of New Orleans had purchased the old Crescent City Ball Park as a playground for black children. The mayor did not disclose the cost for the property; however rumors circulated that the city paid less than \$15,000. According to the mayor, improvements to the park would include renovating the grandstand, adding flood lights and erecting a new field house. The city of New Orleans made a step towards providing decent facilities for its black citizens. Shortly after the announcement, members of the Federation of Civic Leagues met in the auditorium of the Autocrat Club where they happily greeted the Federation's president, J. A. Hardin. Hardin went on record as extending his thanks to the mayor for the playground and the *Louisiana Weekly* for its assistance. Later a committee of the Federation chaired by A. P. Tureaud ask the mayor to name the playground after Joseph A. Hardin. The Federation of Civic Leagues wanted the park named after Hardin because of his dedicated efforts to securing playgrounds for blacks.⁵⁷

The Federation of Civic Leagues under the presidency of J. A. Hardin accomplished many of the goals it set. Through the Federation the need for schools and recreational facilities for the black community in New Orleans were presented to white city officials through a moderate and gradual approach that was realistic and not

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "Asks City Name Playground for Dr. J. A. Hardin," *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 January 1939, 1.

alarming to whites. The accomplishments of the Federation through their persistent moderate and gradual approach laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement. The Federation led by racial progressionists provided progress and hope to blacks in New Orleans. The Jim Crow South through the Roaring Twenties and Great Depression proved difficult for blacks in the south who had little or no civil and political rights. The few brave men able to step forward into leadership positions in the black community often became easy targets of both black and white criticism and retaliation. Hardin's successful creation of the Federation of Civic Leagues balanced with the racial progressionist approach allowed the few leaders of the black community to avoid retaliation of whites.

Chapter 4 New Orleans Branch NAACP

The New Orleans branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) struggled with its leadership approach from the time it was chartered in 1915 through 1940. Throughout these years, leaders of the New Orleans branch cautiously and carefully adopted national NAACP programs that fitted within the safe parameter of their moderate approach. This caused the New Orleans branch to experience uncertainty in its capabilities to perform as a protest organization. The lack of aggressive leadership caused disharmony between the national NAACP and the local branch.

The main objective of the national office of the NAACP was to uplift the black race by “securing for them the complete enjoyment of their rights as citizens, justice in the courts, and equal opportunity in every economic, social and political endeavor in the United States.”¹ The national NAACP began its crusade to achieve political and social equality for blacks by fighting against disfranchisement, discrimination in public accommodations, and educational inequalities.

In 1915, New Orleans received an NAACP Branch charter.² The branch struggled from the time it was founded until the mid twenties. In the second year of

¹ Warren D. St. James, *The National Association For The Advancement of Colored People* (New York: Exposition Press, 1958), 42.

² “NAACP Branch History,” NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch Collection, Special Collections, University of New Orleans. The New Orleans Branch NAACP Papers located at UNO begin

operation the branch had only fifty-six members. However, by 1918, membership nearly doubled to one hundred. During this time the New Orleans branch primarily pursued a patriotic and moral agenda. The branch failed to follow the national NAACP's agenda of opposing Jim Crow laws. It did, however, provide a significant support system for black soldiers fighting in World War I by collecting provisions, sewing clothes, and selling war bonds. Members of the New Orleans branch, according to historian Lee Sartin, linked black soldiers with the struggle for civil rights. Many members of the branch felt that black men fighting bravely would ultimately prove their worth to whites and therefore be treated equally. Members viewed the war as a struggle for democracy abroad and at home.³

The New Orleans branch felt so strongly about its patriotic and moral views that it founded its own newspaper, the *Vindicator*, to express them. The newspaper was published for only two months and was managed by E. M. Dunn and E. W. White. Dunn was editor of the *Vindicator* and secretary of the New Orleans branch of the NAACP. He also was part owner in the Gayle and Dunn's African-American Bookstore. E. W. White was the New Orleans NAACP branch president and pastor of Tulane Avenue Baptist Church. White made it clear through the *Vindicator* that the first

in the early 50's. The earlier papers of the New Orleans Branch NAACP are found in the A.P. Tureaud Papers at the Amistad Research Center.

³ Lee Sartin, *Invisible Activists: Women Of The Louisiana NAACP And The Struggle For Civil Rights* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 52.

duty of the branch was to help win the war, and second to “remove those barriers that would keep the black man from coming into his fullness as a man.”⁴ In doing so, “White tied the idea of manhood and citizenship to the concept of morality and family values.”⁵ He also made a plea to “sensible” white men to aid in the plight of black people who stood up for their rights.

The strong focus on morality and family values gave the New Orleans branch NAACP elitist qualities. The majority of the members belonged to the upper socio-economic class of the black community. These members felt that only blacks of similar status were qualified to participate in such intellectual and progressive thought. The members included, along with Dunn and James Gayle, partners in Gayle and Dunn’s African-American Bookstore, Pastor White and wife, Eva White, owners of the Mme. White School of Beauty; Mrs. O. B. Flower, a midwife and Mrs. R. J. Walls, nurse; Miss Charlotte M. Richards, assistant secretary at Gayle and Dunn’s bookstore; Walter Cohen, founder of People’s Industrial Life Insurance Company of Louisiana, and three physicians, Rivers Frederick, George Lucas, and Joseph Hardin. White, Dunn, Flowers, Walls, and Richards operated the day to day activities of the branch. The remaining members while not active in the daily activities provided support.

⁴ Ibid., 53

⁵ Ibid. If not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on Sartain.

By 1919, four years after the establishment of the New Orleans NAACP Branch, it went dormant. Five years later, in 1924, the branch reorganized with a membership of two hundred and six.⁶ The reorganization focused less on a moral and patriotic agenda and began to slowly select the NAACP's national agenda that fit within a moderate and gradual approach. The branch's membership included: Walter Cohen, George Lucas, Joseph Hardin, James Gayle, E. M. Dunn, and Rivers Frederick. These men readily took on the responsibility of leading the New Orleans branch NAACP and the Federation of Civil Leagues. George Lucas served as the first president of the New Orleans NAACP after its reorganization.

The first challenge faced by the New Orleans branch NAACP president, George Lucas, occurred almost immediately. In 1924, the city passed an ordinance stating that a white person could not rent property for residential purposes in a section occupied by blacks and that blacks could not rent in a white section without written permission from neighbors within three hundred feet.⁷ The ordinance posed problems for black homeowners who lived in white neighborhoods and wanted to rent to other blacks. Joseph W. Tyler, a white man who owned property on Audubon Street between Magazine and Meadow Street, filed suit under this ordinance in civil district court. He wanted to stop his black neighbor Benjamin Harmon, who owned property across the street, from

⁶ Ibid., Appendix 3.

⁷ "Louisiana Segregation Law is Declared Unconstitutional" *Louisiana Weekly*, 10 March 1927, 1 and 8.

converting a cottage into two apartments to be rented by blacks.⁸ Lucas raised money through the NAACP to help Harmon fight his suit. Lucas and the NAACP executive board members stated emphatically, “that they were not advocating a modification of the law, but were complaining of persecutions existing as a result of the law.”⁹ In fighting against residential segregation, Lucas worked within the progressionist’s approach. He made it clear to whites that he was not leading a fight to integrate white neighborhoods. He only fought to ensure that blacks could do whatever they wanted with their property.

The residential segregation case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court where the court ruled the residential segregation ordinance was unconstitutional. Lucas’ success with the residential segregation case resulted in his election to the national board of directors of the NAACP in 1927.¹⁰ Once elected to the national board of directors, Lucas focused on bringing the New Orleans branch NAACP more in line with national NAACP objectives. He accomplished this by preparing to challenge Louisiana’s voter registration laws.

An awareness of New Orleans’ white regimes and southern politics enabled Lucas to navigate the Jim Crow South. He had a keen understanding of the national

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Association of Commerce Meets Negroes and Discusses Segregation Persecutions” *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 November 1925, 1.

¹⁰ “Elect Dr. Lucas to the National Board” *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 May 1927, 1.

policies of the NAACP, especially those pertaining to voting rights. He recognized the need for blacks to maintain their political participation; however, the progressionist philosophy provided a realistic view of what whites would allow in the political process. Lucas was careful not to overstep the boundaries of that political participation. He and other racial progressionists accepted the Democratic white primaries and chose not to challenge, change, question or demand inclusion into the Democratic Party. These leaders found their opportunity to participate in the political process through the concessions of certain whites in the Republican Party. In order to have a presence within the Republican Party an increase in voter registration was necessary.

Racial progressionists in charge of the New Orleans branch encouraged blacks to pay their poll taxes and explained the registration procedures to applicants. The branch sponsored poll tax drives that “utilized the institutions and organizations of the entire community.”¹¹ Insurance companies and social and pleasure clubs were among the institutions used by the NAACP to increase poll tax payments. Many of those organizations had shared members in the NAACP. Walter Cohen, executive board member of the NAACP and founder of People’s Life Insurance Company, required his agents, while collecting insurance payments, to inform blacks of the importance of paying poll taxes and registering to vote. George Labat, executive board member of the NAACP and President of the San Jacinto Club, required club members to pay their poll

¹¹ Donald E. Devore, “The Rise From the Nadir: Black New Orleans Between the Wars, 1920-1940” (Master Thesis, University of New Orleans, 1983), 36. If not otherwise cited, the following rest primarily on Devore.

taxes in addition to club dues. Other social clubs including the Bulls, Iroquois, and Autocrat Clubs followed suit.

Paying poll taxes was just one of the steps blacks took to register to vote. The registration process created by whites sought to discourage blacks from registering. Blacks were forced to wait hours in the sun, rain or cold weather for white registrars to allow them to pick up an application form. Once black applicants submitted the registration form, the registrar could reject the application for any mistake. Few applicants ever made it to the literacy test, which most blacks considered the hardest part of registration. Applicants fortunate enough to make it to the literacy test were required to interpret a part of the United States or Louisiana State Constitution. If the registrar felt that the answer was inadequate, he had the right to dismiss the applicant.

Despite the difficulty in registering, the NAACP viewed obtaining the right to vote as a major goal for the organization. The NAACP knew that without suffrage rights blacks could never advance politically or socially. In 1910, the national goal of the NAACP was a crusade against disfranchisement legislation by examining the grandfather clause amendment, which required potential voters to pass a literacy test in order to qualify to vote. The grandfather clause exempted anyone who was permitted to vote on or before January 1, 1866, from taking the required literacy test. The grandfather clause case, *Guinn v. United States*, was the first case in which the NAACP filed a brief challenging the constitutionality of this clause. The Supreme Court ruled

the grandfather clause violated the Fifteenth Amendment, which states "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."¹²

However, the decision did not seem to have a huge impact on many Southern states as legislation that obstructed blacks from voting continued to pass.

In 1921, Louisiana adopted a new constitution, and replaced the grandfather clause with an interpretation test requiring all voter registration applicants to reasonably interpret a section of the Louisiana Constitution or the United States Constitution. Failure to properly interpret the constitution resulted in the application being denied. In Louisiana, the interpretation test became a severe obstacle to blacks wanting to vote. In 1929, the New Orleans NAACP branch president, George Lucas, launched a drive to raise \$30,000 as a legal fund to fight the suffrage laws of Louisiana. Lucas, at this time, was a member of the national board of directors for the NAACP. His decision to test the constitutionality of the registration laws in Louisiana through a legal battle fitted within the national NAACP's agenda.

The New Orleans NAACP held a mass meeting at the Pythian Temple on Gravier and Saratoga Street, where racial progressionist George Lucas, George Labat, S.W. Green, and Walter Cohen urged a crowd of nearly two-hundred people to financially contribute to the upcoming voter registration legal battle fund. The featured

¹² Ibid.

speaker, Walter Cohen, Comptroller of Customs and Executive Board Member of the New Orleans NAACP, told the audience that the New Orleans NAACP did not want to interfere with the white Democratic primary. The organization only wanted to determine the constitutionality of the system of registration in Louisiana that demanded blacks interpret sections of the state constitution.

The Democratic Party dominated elections in the South. In Louisiana, the Democratic Party adopted all white primaries in 1906 that barred blacks from any involvement. Such strategies precluded any opportunity for blacks to participate in elections and the decision making process. Cohen and the racial progressionists were not out to cause any real threat to the white political structure in the city, nor were they demanding the right to vote. They were, however, “questioning” a part of the registration process.¹³ Accordingly, the racial progressionists sued not for the right to vote, but sued to bring about an end to discriminatory practices that prohibited blacks from registering to vote. This group believed that the United States Constitution already provided the right to vote; they just needed the ability to register.

In 1930, the New Orleans NAACP recruited a plaintiff to bring a suit to challenge Louisiana’s voter registration laws. Antonio M. Trudeau agreed to challenge this law as the NAACP’s plaintiff. Trudeau, a model citizen, was General Manager of Safety Insurance Company, Vice President of the Autocrat Club and Second Vice President of

¹³ “Mass Meeting Held to Raise Big Legal Fund,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 2 November 1929, 1.

the Seventh Ward Civic League. Days before the local NAACP approached Trudeau, the registrar of voters turned down his request to register to vote for failure to “reasonably” interpret a constitutional clause as given to him by the registrar.¹⁴ Trudeau had successfully registered on numerous occasions, never having been turned down. Trudeau’s denial of registration therefore provided the perfect challenge to the state’s registration policies.

The branch’s executive board immediately began to look for a law firm to file suit on behalf of Trudeau. Meanwhile, one of New Orleans’ black attorneys A. P. Tureaud, who served on the branch’s legal committee, researched the issue and formulated a plan to challenge the voter registration laws. The executive board, upon learning of Tureaud’s efforts, dismissed him from the committee and retained the white law firm of Guion and Upton. The NAACP paid \$3,000 in attorney’s fees plus expenses to the firm.¹⁵ The decision to hire white attorneys by executive board members Walter Cohen, George Lucas, George Labat, Joseph Hardin, S. W. Green, James Gayle and others was in line with the practices of racial progressionists. These men believed the involvement of sympathetic white people would assist greatly in promoting racial change. Their hiring of this white law firm showed their willingness to work with whites. It also proved to whites in the city that black leaders were not radical. The

¹⁴ “Local Branch NAACP to Test Suffrage Rights,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 October 1931, 1.

¹⁵ A. P. Tureaud to Walter White, October 1, 1931, Roll 7, Series II, Folder 8/2, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

decision of the executive board was questioned by some blacks, but accepted by most. Many felt that a white lawyer's chance of success exceeded a black lawyer's chance as the white lawyer frequently practiced in front of white peers, lawyers, judges and juries.¹⁶

The *Louisiana Weekly* lashed out at the leaders who made the decision to hire white attorneys, accusing them of not practicing what the NAACP preached. The black leadership, it charged, often "rants and snorts about race patronage, while at the same time if you watch this person's house you will see the insurance agent (white) rapping his door, the physician (white), making his calls, and the delivery boy, who is also white making his deliveries for white merchants."¹⁷ The article harshly called the black leaders "Pseudo leaders, double- crossers, Me Too Boss and modern Judas'" who were, "selling out the race and letting the other group lead them into economic bondage that runs parallel to that damnable bondage of human beings that precipitated the civil war...."¹⁸ The article ended by stating that black leadership in the city needed to change: "Our leaders must be an example to the masses. They must teach them to do by doing."¹⁹ The *Louisiana Weekly* published the article anonymously; however, the

¹⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); 550.

¹⁷ "Pseudo Leaders," *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 June 1930, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

local NAACP executive board members later accused Tureaud of writing the article, and referred to him as “a nigger in a woodpile.”²⁰

Regardless of the opposition expressed by the *Louisiana Weekly* over hiring a white law firm by the branch’s executive board, plans to bring the lawsuit continued. Prior to the filing of the suit, tragedy struck within the leadership of black New Orleans. On December 29, 1930, Walter Cohen died. Less than a month later, George Lucas died. The death of these two leaders left the NAACP vulnerable. Members of the executive committee, led by Joseph Hardin, who became the acting president after Lucas’ death, called for a meeting on January 31, 1931, to select a new president.²¹ Two candidates applied to fill the vacant position as president of the local NAACP, A.P. Tureaud and George Labat. Both candidates were involved in several well known civic organizations and worked together on community projects including the Community Chest, YMCA, and Dillard University Fund Drives. George Labat served as president of the San Jacinto Club, as a member of the executive committee of the NAACP, and as chairman of the committee to raise money to test the registration laws. He also served as the president of the Fifth Ward Civic League and the first vice president of the Federation of Civic Leagues. A. P. Tureaud served as vice president of the Autocrat Club, as a

²⁰ A. P. Tureaud to Walter White, October 1, 1931, Roll 7, Series II, Folder 8/2, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²¹ “Presidency of the NAACP Sought by Tureaud and Labat,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 24 January 1931, 1.

member of the executive board of the NAACP and as chairman of its publicity committee. He also served as the president of the Eighth Ward Civic League and the second vice president of the Federation of Civic Leagues. Although the candidates were equally involved in the black community, their methods of leadership differed significantly.

George Labat was a long time friend of Walter Cohen, George Lucas and Joseph Hardin. Born and raised in New Orleans, he held a job as district superintendent of the black owned and operated Liberty Industrial Life Insurance Company. His methods of seeking equality mirrored those of Cohen, Lucas, Hardin and other racial progressionists. He believed that gradual concessions could lead to equality, and he never brought attention to himself in the white community. He was a cautious realist who utilized a moderate and gradual approach that worked within the white community's approval.

A. P. Tureaud easily fit into the category of economic elite because he was an attorney; however, he was not a racial progressionist. Tureaud was born in New Orleans and lived there until he was seventeen. He then left New Orleans, moved to Chicago, and eventually enrolled in Howard University Law School in Washington D. C. For the next eight years, from age seventeen to twenty-five, Tureaud did not live in New Orleans. Living up north, Tureaud developed a strong sense of racial awareness. He wanted to use the NAACP to actively demand equal rights. Tureaud advocated the

use of the legal system and stressed the importance of aggressive participation by the entire black community in the fight for equality. Tureaud's ideas were too aggressive for the current mainstream leadership; thus, the local NAACP executive board members unanimously elected Labat to succeed. The executive board credited Labat as one of the most active members of the NAACP in New Orleans.²² The leadership of the branch remained the same.

As the newly elected President of the NAACP, Labat went to work quickly, picking up where Cohen and Lucas left off with the registration case. He encountered problems from the beginning when the white law firm withdrew from the case. George Guion, partner in the law firm Guion and Upton, decided to run for governor, which required their withdrawal from the case. The NAACP, led by Labat, chose to hire another white lawyer, Henry Robinson. This decision revived old feuds within the New Orleans NAACP because Tureaud was once again passed over. The NAACP had not considered hiring black lawyers. Tureaud, upon learning that Robinson planned to use the research and proposal he had prepared, sent the NAACP a bill for \$105 for legal advice and research provided to the case.²³

On October 2, 1931, A.P. Tureaud wrote a letter to the NAACP's National Secretary Walter White informing him that the New Orleans branch had been in

²² "Flash" *Louisiana Weekly*, 31 January, 1931, 1.

²³ A. P. Tureaud to Walter White, October 1, 1931, Roll 7, Series II, Folder 8/2, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

turmoil since 1930. Tureaud explained the decision to hire white lawyers had caused much frustration within the organization. He noted that between December of 1930 and January of 1931, several occurrences took place within the organization that could have led to the hiring of black lawyers. Two of the top leaders of the organization died within months of each other, and the original white law firm retained to bring forth the case resigned. This left the new president of the NAACP in charge of finding another law firm. NAACP president George Labat did not consider any black attorneys and blamed black attorneys for the delay in the registration case, saying that black attorneys wanted, "to sponge the community out of \$2,000 more than white attorneys."²⁴ These allegations were not true as Tureaud and other black attorneys never received any consultation about their possible fee. Tureaud felt that the NAACP led by Labat ignored him and other black attorneys. Tureaud believed Labat was one of the most unfit leaders in the black community. Tureaud understood at this time that the leadership of the NAACP was not ready for aggressive progress. The racial progressionists maintained their control of leadership despite losing two of its more prominent members.

On October 6, 1931, the local NAACP filed suit on behalf of Trudeau against Registrar Charles Barnes in Federal District Court before Judge Wayne Borah.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Citizens Are Enthusiastic As Long Deferred Action At Last Gets Under Way," *Louisiana Weekly*, 10 October 1931, 1. If not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on this article.

Attorney Henry Robinson represented Trudeau and asked Judge Borah to award him \$5,000 in damages resulting from Registrar Charles Barnes refusal to register him. The suit rested on Trudeau having previously registered to vote, obtaining his registration papers, and voting in federal, state and local elections. Robinson argued that the interpretation clause unconstitutionally prevented Trudeau from registering to vote, thereby violating the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution granting African American men the right to vote. Robinson argued that the sole reason the interpretation clause was added to the Louisiana State Constitution in 1921 was to prevent blacks from registering to vote.

The interpretation clause gave the registrar the power to reject a black applicant based solely on the registrar's discretion. According to the suit, the only real qualification needed to register under Louisiana's Constitution was that a person be white, of sound mind and never convicted of a crime.²⁶ The NAACP's lawyer brought into evidence that in 1930 there were 1,283,250 white people in Louisiana; of that number, 27 percent were registered voters, and of the 27 percent, 5 percent were illiterate. The black population numbered in excess of 776,326 of which only 0.2 percent were registered voters. The 1931 figures compiled by the registrar of voters in New Orleans showed that the city had a total of 34,162 registered voters. Of this number, 96.5 percent were registered as Democrats and only 3.5 percent were registered as

²⁶ "A Registration Challenge," *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 April 1931, 6.

Republican. Of the 1,213 registered Republicans 58 percent were white and 42 percent were black. The black vote represented less than one seventieth of the total registered voters in New Orleans.²⁷ These numbers testified to the discriminatory registration laws of Louisiana. Black voting power was so inconsequential in New Orleans and the state; blacks had very little chance, if any, to gain political power.

As the registration suit proceeded, so did the feud between Tureaud and Labat. On October 24, 1931, Tureaud wrote to Robert Bagnall, National Director of NAACP Branches and requested the establishment of another NAACP branch in New Orleans. The new branch, according to Tureaud, would have its own president and in no way be subordinate to the existing branch in the city. Tureaud even said that he was willing to let Labat continue his guidance over the registration case; however, he noted that there were “many of us who can’t stomach his brand of administration.”²⁸ Tureaud argued that Labat’s leadership of the branch did not serve all of its members. Many members of the New Orleans Branch NAACP, he continued, particularly the younger group, felt more inclined to work with the National Office. He further contended that he and other young men felt that personal ambition and passive approach had no place in a protest organization like the NAACP. Tureaud and the younger members sought to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A. P. Tureaud to Robert Bagnall, October 27, 1931, Series II, Roll 7, Folder 8/2, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

aggressively promote the cause, whereas the older men, he claimed, “sought honor and glory for themselves first and the organization’s progress second.”²⁹

Tureaud asked Bagnall to send information on the election of officers, as he planned to challenge Labat’s presidency. He also informed Bagnall that it “seemed that the local branch was a self perpetuating body” and noted that when he served on the executive committee no elections seemed to take place. Finally, Tureaud asked Bagnall not to communicate with Labat about the letter, because, “you will spoil the National Office’s chances of getting a president who can at least write a decent letter.”³⁰ Bagnall informed Tureaud that the practice of the NAACP was to allow only one branch in a community. The national office discussed permitting more than one branch in a large metropolitan area; however nothing had been acted upon. Bagnall did enclose a copy of the New Orleans Branch NAACP’s Constitution so that Tureaud could look at the proper election procedures.

On November 12, 1931, President Labat distributed letters to members of the local branch informing them of a scheduled officer’s election on November 16, 1931, at 7:30 pm in the Pythian Temple building. He went on to say that when electing candidates in any organization a person should rely on merit, and not favoritism, friendship, publicity or speeches. According to Labat, voters should judge aspiring candidates by their past activities and service. Labat mentioned that he had belonged to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

the local branch for fifteen years and was unanimously elected by the executive committee to succeed the late President George Lucas.³¹ At the meeting, members of the NAACP cast secret ballots resulting in a victory for Labat over Tureaud.

Tureaud studied the New Orleans Branch NAACP Constitution sent by Bagnall. He later wrote Bagnall for his advice on protesting the meeting and argued that Labat did not follow the rules of the constitution when he called the annual meeting. According to Tureaud, Labat did not give a seven-day written notice to the public about the annual meeting as required by the constitution. Tureaud further claimed that no roll call was held to determine those present at the meeting. Clearly, Tureaud sought to fight Labat by any means necessary. The national office did not challenge Labat's election. Bagnall also told Tureaud that such a challenge could cause embarrassment to the New Orleans NAACP and the national office, thus Labat remained as president for another term. Tureaud's challenge to the leadership of the New Orleans branch NAACP showed his determination to change the moderate and gradual approach of its leaders. He wanted the New Orleans branch to become a true protest organization that followed all of the national NAACP programs regardless of repercussions. After he lost the election for

³¹ George Labat to Members of the New Orleans Branch NAACP, November 12, 1931. Roll 7, Series II, Folder 8/2, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

president he disassociated himself from the New Orleans branch NAACP. He did however, remain an active member of the national NAACP.³²

The progressionists' ability to maintain control of the local NAACP showed their strength. Tureaud's challenge, while unsuccessful, showed that change was on the horizon. For the immediate future; however, older opponents dominated and they did experience mild success through petitioning. This success, while short lived, led the masses to believe the progressionists were still able to deliver progress.

Labat retained control of the New Orleans NAACP, but, his leadership began to decline when the voter registration case was dismissed by Judge Borah on November 3, 1932. Judge Borah dismissed the case because the "plaintiff had not shown a cause of action."³³ Trudeau and his attorney, Henry Robinson, based their entire case on two decisions of the United States Supreme Court: *Guinn & Beal v. United States* and *Myers v. Anderson*. According to Judge Borah, Robinson misinterpreted these decisions when formulating his strategy for the plaintiff. Borah's opinion of the two cases was:

clearly distinguishable from the case at bar, in that the state laws therein involved were openly and on their face discriminatory, and were held to be unconstitutional, not on account of their provisions as to educational qualifications, but on account of presence therein of so-called grandfather

³² Robert Bagnall to A. P. Tureaud, December 7, 1931, Series II, Roll 7, Folder 8/2, A.P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³³"Appeal is Made in Trudeau Case," *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 December 1932 , 1.

clauses, that is clauses which make the right to vote dependant on conditions existing at a date prior to the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment.³⁴

Borah also argued that the suit would have been stronger if Trudeau and his attorney, Robinson, had argued that the law in question was unconstitutional not only because it was intended to discriminate against Trudeau and members of his race, but because “it was discriminatory in its operation.” However, Borah noted “this construction of the pleading would not alter the situation, because the plaintiff has failed to allege that he complied with the Louisiana law and in spite of which compliance was discriminated against.” Borah further argued that Trudeau did not fulfill the requirement of the Constitution. Trudeau, by his own admission, said that he “sought to explain” the meaning of the constitutional clause submitted to him. Trudeau should have said that he explained the meaning of the clause; thus, it was apparent to Borah that Trudeau had not stated a cause of action because he did not fulfill the requirements of the Constitution. Borah dismissed the case and did not find Registrar Charles Barnes liable for any damages. Borah cited registrars under Louisiana law had certain inquisitorial functions to perform, including the right to decide to enroll a voter; however, the registrar is subject to control by review. Therefore, the registrar did not have pure arbitrary power without restraints. In addition Borah held there was nothing

³⁴ One Federal Supplement 453 (District Court Eastern District, Louisiana, 1932), 456. If not otherwise cited all quotes are taken from Supplement 453.

direct and definite in Trudeau's allegations regarding the alleged discriminatory treatment he received.

The NAACP vowed to appeal the judge's verdict, and one month later, on December 3, 1932, it appealed the decision to the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The judges for the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals included Nathan Bryan of Georgia, Rufus Foster of Louisiana and Joseph Hutcheson of Texas. The hearing was held on April 29, 1933, and the arguments were the same as presented at trial.

Robinson, who continued to represent the NAACP, argued that the interpretation clause was a violation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and that Barnes did not allow Trudeau to register because he was black. The judges ruled that the interpretation clause applied to all voters alike, therefore, it did not deny or abridge the right of a citizen of the United States to vote based on race, color, or previous conditions of servitude.³⁵ On June 5, 1933, the appellate court judges issued a written opinion that affirmed the decision of the district court.

Still, the New Orleans NAACP vowed to appeal further to the United States Supreme Court. Just two months later, Attorney Louis Marshall of the National Office of the NAACP filed the registration suit in the United States Supreme Court. This would be the final attempt to dismantle the interpretation clause. In the appeal to the Supreme Court, Marshall argued that both Judges Borah and Bryan ruled incorrectly

³⁵ Sixty-Fifth Federal Report, Second Series, 563 (United States Circuit Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit), 564.

that Trudeau had no cause of action. According to Marshall, the interpretation clause violated both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and therefore, was unconstitutional. He argued that Trudeau could never expect a “local jury of white voters to give him relief against a law of their own making and enforcement.”³⁶ Marshall even mentioned the right to work on public buildings was dependent upon obtaining a certificate of registration. Trudeau’s not being able to register therefore limited his job potential in New Orleans. On October 9, 1933, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case. The original decision of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals stood and the NAACP suffered a major blow.³⁷

From 1929 to 1933 the New Orleans branch NAACP focused solely on the voter registration case. It ignored other immediate and obvious problems of racial violence in the city, which caused the black community to suffer. The national NAACP office wanted local branches to oppose discriminatory voter registration laws in their communities, but also encouraged them to aggressively protest an end to mob violence, racial attacks and lynching of black citizens.³⁸ The crusade to end mob violence, lynching and racial abuse by the national office resulted in an anti-lynching campaign

³⁶ “Trudeau Case Reaches Apex: Fate Of Negro Voters To Be Decided By U.S. Supreme Court,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 12 August 1933, 1.

³⁷ “Trudeau Loses Appeal Case in Supreme Court,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 October 1933, 1.

³⁸ Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1909-1920* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967), 209; The NAACP was founded in response to the August 14, 1908 race riots in Springfield, Illinois.

which lasted from 1912 to 1955. During this time, the national office promised to investigate fully every case of lynching and mob violence in hopes of bringing justice to black Americans.³⁹ The national office encouraged blacks to report abuse by whites to their local NAACP branches.

Several branches throughout the country did report such cases to their local branches and in most instances those cases were reported to the national office. In February of 1930, a brutality case was reported to the New York office that involved a black college student being shot by a white police officer in Brooklyn, New York. Ralph Baker, a student at Lincoln University was shot by patrolman Walter Lowe after an altercation at the Rockaway Avenue elevated car line. Walter White, acting secretary of the national NAACP personally fought for the arrest of Lowe.⁴⁰ Two months later, the Atlanta NAACP office reported to the national office that J. H. Wilkins, a black Pullman porter, had been lynched in the small town of Locus Grove, Georgia, just south of Atlanta. Within days, the national office opened an inquiry into the case.⁴¹ In Monroe, Michigan, the NAACP was asked to assist a black couple who had a cross burned in

³⁹ Mary B. Talbert, *et. al.*, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders [1922], NAACP Papers, Part 7: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955, Library of Congress (Microfilm, Reel 3, Frame numbers 565-566).

⁴⁰ "NAACP Will Seek Arrest of Guilty Policeman," *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 8 February 1930, 2; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

⁴¹ "NAACP Probes Lynching in Georgia," *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 19 April 1930, 2; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

their yard. The couple received no police assistance until blacks in the area came to their defense and nearly caused a race riot.⁴² In June of 1931, the beating of Reverend Bates and his wife in Lincoln County Georgia was reported to the national office, which in turn reported the case to the United States Department of Justice.⁴³ The national NAACP office took cases of abuse reported to them seriously.

In New Orleans abuse cases reported to the local branch of the NAACP were not reported to the national office. Leaders of the New Orleans branch often overlooked abuse cases because they generated an aggressive emotional response that racial progressionists did not want to invoke. Abuse cases highlighted inappropriate actions of whites. If racial progressionists reported these cases to the national office they might be seen as trouble makers in the white community, thereby putting themselves in danger.

The first of many attacks not reported to the national office occurred in February 1932. The police broke into George Jones' house on Cohn Street and severely beat him. They then took Jones to the police station where one officer ordered him to step outside, once outside, the officer shot him. Jones died five days later at Charity Hospital. The

⁴² "Burning of Cross Nearly Causes Race Riot," *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 24 May 1930, 1; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

⁴³ "Minister and Wife Lashed by Georgians: Minister and Wife Whipped by Mob of Georgian Farmers," *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967), 12 September 1931, 13; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

police investigated the death of Jones, but no one was charged.⁴⁴ The local NAACP did not attempt to investigate the shooting nor report it to the national NAACP.

On February 27, 1932, just two days after Jones' death at the hands of the police, a white woman on Urquhart Street reported being attacked in her sleep by a black intruder. The police arrested five members of one family. These men were subjected to days of interrogations until the woman ultimately confessed that her attacker was white. Again, the NAACP did not investigate this injustice. On March 23, 1932, another black man died from a gunshot wound, this time at the hands of a white gas station owner on Gentilly Road. Emile Hirsthir, the white owner, shot Allen Randolph because he [Randolph] allegedly did not listen to him. Hirsthir was never indicted, and the NAACP again failed to investigate.

One month later another black man was killed by a white policeman over a pharmacy bill. According to the *Louisiana Weekly*, the druggist for the store went to the house of Ernest Smith to collect money owed for a bill. Smith did not have the money, and the druggist returned later with two police officers demanding Smith's arrest. Smith objected, stating that the police had no warrant for his arrest nor had he committed a crime. This angered the druggist so much that he told the police to shoot Smith and his brother because they were "bad niggers." The police fired four shots, one

⁴⁴ "A Call to Arms," *Louisiana Weekly*, 13 May 1933, 1-2. If not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on this *Louisiana Weekly* article.

of which killed Smith. The police officers claimed that Smith had tried to attack them. Once again the police officers were exonerated and the NAACP failed to investigate.

In August 1932, still another incident involving the police left a popular young black athlete dead. On August 28, 1932, Hamilton Duplesis died at Charity Hospital from wounds inflicted by an “accidental” discharge of motorcycle Officer William Mellor’s gun. According to Officer Mellor, on August 7th he stopped a car on the corner of Franklin Avenue and Jonquil Street, and told the driver to go to the police station. Duplesis jumped out of the car and began to run and Mellor gave chase. Mellor claimed that he fell during the pursuit causing his gun to discharge and shoot Duplesis. Several witnesses offered to testify that the policeman fired his gun five times at the victim; yet, the policeman was exonerated and the NAACP did not respond. By 1933, the New Orleans branch was so inactive to the point that the national office assumed it no longer existed.⁴⁵

After so many incidents, in May of 1933, the *Louisiana Weekly* ran a front page editorial urging someone to step up and lead the community in its fight for justice. The editorial focused on the past eighteen months of “possibly a dozen different cases that should have been thoroughly investigated.” However, “due to the absence of a ‘strong’ local chapter of the NAACP,” blacks in the city were allowing “conditions which seem

⁴⁵ Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens and London: University Of Georgia Press, 1995), 46.

to justify the killing of Negroes by policemen and citizens of the opposite race.”⁴⁶

Murderers were going free because of the lack of strong leadership in the local NAACP, “we have offered no protest and we have accepted the happenings as purely routine.”⁴⁷

The local NAACP became a timid shell of its principles and objectives as a protest organization. Instead the organization became an elite club run by racial progressionists, who were neither in touch with the community nor in line with the aggressive challenges of the national office. The programs of the national office in 1933 included monitoring city, county and state public works projects to ensure black employment. The national office also focused on how federal relief aid was distributed ensuring blacks received adequate aid, rent and food relief. The national office constantly encouraged challenges to police brutality and legal redress for any injustices to blacks⁴⁸ The New Orleans Branch NAACP failed to comply with this active and aggressive campaign.

On November 18, 1933, NAACP President George Labat told the branch that he would not seek reelection the following year. When the time came, members elected James Gayle to serve as the next branch president. Gayle, a member of the NAACP for years, sat on the executive board and served as the chairman of the grievances

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Roy Wilkins To the Branch Officers , October 11, 1933, Roll 7, Series III, Box 8, Folder 3, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

committee. Gayle was also the building superintendent of the Pythian Temple, director and stockholder of Liberty Insurance Company and secretary of Southern News Publishing Company. Other officers elected to serve the local NAACP read like a “who’s who” of black elite New Orleans. The elected officers included E. J. LaBranche, owner of LaBranche Pharmacies; Raoul J. Llopis, a businessman who owned an undertaking and printing firm; Smith W. Green, President of Liberty Life Industrial Insurance Company and International Supreme Chancellor of Colored Knights of Pythian; Dr. Aaron. W. Brazier, local physician; George Labat, District Superintendent of Liberty Industrial Life Insurance Company and former NAACP President; Reverend J. Wallace Lee, Pastor of Presbyterian Church and Principal of a public school in Shrewsbury (Jefferson Parish); and Professor Archie E. Perkins, Ph.D., writer, educator, and president of New Orleans Principals’ Association ⁴⁹

As president of the New Orleans Branch NAACP, James Gayle tried to refocus the organization on helping the community. He called for fair minded individuals to join the local branch and help push the national NAACP agenda in New Orleans. Gayle made his appeal to the community by printing the national platform in the *Louisiana Weekly*, but fourteen months after Gayle’s election little had changed for black

⁴⁹ Archie E. Perkins, *Who’s Who in Colored Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Douglas Loan Company Inc. 1930), 110-141; “Officers For NAACP To Be Installed On Wednesday At First St. M. E. Church,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 30 December 1933, 1.

citizens in New Orleans.⁵⁰ The black community still experienced the effects of an oppressive Jim Crow system of disfranchisement, physical abuse and segregation.

According to A. P. Tureaud, Gayle's leadership showed "little or no aggression at all."⁵¹ However, in the annual president's report of 1935, Gayle listed a substantial amount of work the branch engaged in under his leadership. It included forming several committees to look into National Recovery Administration violations, lynchings, and school board problems. Still, with all of the committees formed nothing significant came of Gayle's presidency. Gayle's overall effectiveness proved similar to the previous presidents. Gayle's racial progressionist approach did little in response to the injustices occurring in the black community. Gayle attempted to convince black communities tough measures were being taken to alleviate racial problems, while at the same time keeping with the moderate and gradual approach for concessions. During Gayle's leadership from 1933 to November 1937, the NAACP failed to increase its presence in both the black and white communities.

In November 1937, members elected a new president, Dr. Aaron Brazier. Brazier's leadership proved worse than any previous president. The *Louisiana Weekly* reported that under Brazier's leadership, the NAACP did not come to the defense of any victims of alleged police brutality, even though black citizens reported numerous

⁵⁰ "The Key To Unemployment," *Louisiana Weekly*, 28 October 1933, 8; "NAACP Makes Report For Year," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 November 1935, 1-2.

⁵¹ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 56.

cases to the organization. A member of the local branch, James LaFourche wrote to the NAACP's National Secretary Walter White informing him of the poor operations of the NAACP branch in New Orleans. In his letter, LaFourche wrote that the branch had fewer than 300 members in a city with a black population of more than 156,000. In Detroit, Michigan, where the black population was similar to New Orleans, there were 2,400 NAACP members.⁵²

LaFourche blamed the low membership on the lack of public respect and confidence of the present officers. He wrote that other organizations had to take the lead in civic adjustments and cases of injustice as the local branch refused to listen to the complaints of its citizens. As a result, black citizens in New Orleans labeled the organization "dormant."⁵³ The organization remained "dormant" from November 1937 to November 1939.

For almost two years the NAACP did little to help the black community in New Orleans. Adam Fairclough argues that the organization became "timid and isolated."⁵⁴ The main reason for this was the branch's leadership. The men who led the organization were all racial progressionists. None of them dared to challenge or upset

⁵² Christopher Robert Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910-1966* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 228.

⁵³ "Protest NAACP Election; Flays Tactics in Letter to National Secretary," *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 December 1938, 1 and 8; "Says NAACP Asked Membership Fee When He Asked For Aid," *Louisiana Weekly*, 6 August 1938, 1.

⁵⁴ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 56.

the powerful whites in New Orleans. Thus, their leadership never possessed any sense of urgency and never truly connected with the problems of black citizens. In “The Negro in the United States” written for the Carnegie- Myrdal study, black political scientist Ralph J. Bunche argued, “that the control of the branches rest largely in the hands of an exclusive, often class and color snobbish, self appointed, Negro upper class group, and they are run more frequently than not as closed corporations.”⁵⁵ Bunche’s statement accurately described the ill managed New Orleans NAACP branch.

The past and current presidents of the New Orleans branch NAACP represented the highest segment of the economic elite. Two of the past presidents were doctors and the others owned large businesses. The financial success of these men did not depend on New Orleans’ white community but on the business generated within the black community. This allowed these men the freedom to lead the black community in improving race relations and facilities. Their approach as racial progressionists led the masses in ways they felt would benefit the entire black community. They sought advice on their strategies only from members within the economic elite. The input from this small segment within the community failed to address the immediate and pressing concerns of the masses. This exclusive style of leadership coupled with its moderate and gradual approach ignored the demands of active challenges and protests by the black community.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Fairclough, *Race & Democracy*, 48.

The racial progressionist approach did not fit the standards of the national NAACP as a protest organization. These leaders chose parts of the national NAACP's agenda that allowed them the flexibility to follow a moderate and gradual approach to gaining concessions within the Jim Crow system. The items adopted by the New Orleans branch NAACP often caused little controversy within the white community. That approach worked well within the Federation of Civic Leagues, a local organization, but cause discontent in the New Orleans branch NAACP, an organization affiliated with a national protest movement.

Chapter 5

Louisiana Weekly

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, black newspapers played a significant role in the struggle for equal rights in New Orleans. Papers published in the city advocated specific agendas that targeted the struggles of the black community. Papers such as *L'Union* (1862), the first black newspaper published in New Orleans, *La Tribune* (1864), and the *Crusader* (1890) provided the first voices for the black community. The *Crusader* stopped publication in New Orleans in 1896, twenty-nine years prior to the publication of the *Louisiana Weekly*. The *New Orleans Herald*, later renamed the *Louisiana Weekly* became the voice of the black community in 1925. The *Louisiana Weekly* throughout this time period documented and reported on the daily lives and struggles of blacks in New Orleans. The *Weekly* also provided great insight into the conflict between the progressionists and the emergence of Tureaud's active challenge to the Jim Crow south.

The newspaper was founded by businessman Constant Charles Dejoie Sr., and school principal Orlando Capitola Ward Taylor on September 19, 1925. Dejoie published and financed the paper with an investment of \$2,000 while Taylor worked as the papers first editor.¹ Ultimate control of the paper rested with Dejoie, a member of the economic elite with ties to both American black and Creole communities. In 1929, at

¹ "83 years later, La. Weekly remains true to its purpose," *Louisiana Weekly*, posted 3 October 2008 (newspaper on line); available from <http://www.louisianaweekly.com>.

the age of thirty-nine, Dejoie became president of one of the largest black owned insurance companies in Louisiana, Unity Life Insurance Company. Dejoie was not actively involved in the civic leagues or the Federation of Civic Leagues, he was a member of the NAACP, but not a board member, and thus he was able to examine the leadership of those organizations without prejudice. Dejoie focused on providing meaningful and objective criticism of the actions and platforms of the existing leadership.

In 1907, Dejoie, graduated from Southern University at the age of seventeen and then went to work in his family's drug store on the corner of Canal and Liberty Street. Later he worked for the United States Rail Mail Service. His route ran on the Texas Pacific Railway from New Orleans to Ferriday, Louisiana.² In 1925 Dejoie, realizing the need for a newspaper to "dramatize the cause of down-trodden black minority in New Orleans," enlisted the help of O. C. W. Taylor as editor. Taylor born in Tyler, Texas, migrated to New Orleans in 1913, after graduating from Wiley College and serving in the U. S. armed forces. Taylor served as managing editor of the paper until 1927.³ Peter

² Ibid., C.C. Dejoie born in 1880.

³ Ibid.

R. Crutchfield then took over as editor and remained in the position throughout the 1930's. Before serving as editor of the *Weekly*, Crutchfield, a migrant to New Orleans, from McAlister, Oklahoma, also worked for Unity Life Insurance Company.

The newspaper's first office was located in the black owned Pythian Temple building at the corner of Gravier and Saratoga (now Loyola Ave.) Streets. The Pythian Temple building, the only black owned building of its size was home to many of the civic and social organizations in New Orleans. It allowed members of the black community to organize and congregate in an atmosphere free from white involvement. These organizations often shaped issues in the black community providing the *Louisiana Weekly* with easy access to report on agendas and platforms.



Figure 4. Pythian Temple Building

⁴ Pythian Temple Building, <http://www.nutrias.org/~nopl/monthly/june2000/june006.htm>. *Louisiana Weekly* was located in office 303 of the building.

Each issue sold for only a nickel, and one could subscribe for twenty cents a month, a dollar and fifteen cents for six months, and two dollars for a year. On September 19, 1925, the *New Orleans Herald* published its first issue. Less than a month after the first issue, on October 17, 1925, the paper changed its name from the *New Orleans Herald*, to the *Louisiana Weekly*, making the paper appeal to other cities within the state. The *Weekly* published “hard” news, which consisted of local and state news as well as national news which was received from the Negro Associated Press. The editorial page featured articles by the editor about social issues and back leadership. The *Weekly* also included a society section that published engagements and wedding announcements; accounts of debutant balls, parties and dinners; as well as club news. The sports section reported on professional black athletes, and on state, local, high school and collegial sports. The church page included announcements of various church activities in New Orleans.

The *Weekly's* advertisers consisted of local black-owned businesses such as restaurants, dental offices, insurance companies, pharmacies, jewelers, moving and hauling companies, repair shops, realty companies, service stations, and funeral parlors. The frequent and local advertisers in the paper were Dejoie's Cut Rate Pharmacy, J. F. McKay's Electrical Contractor, the Astoria Hotel and Restaurant, the Page House Hotel, E. B. Smith's Watchmaker and Jeweler, Saunders Badie General Hauling, and Foster Service Station. The *Weekly* carried a few national advertisements for household

cleaners, hair straightening creams, skin bleaches, patent medicines, “good luck” charms, and cigarettes.

The mission of the *Weekly* was to bring vital information to the black community without straddling matters pertaining to race. According to Dejoie, there was “only one course to take in matters pertaining to Negro life and that is the right side.”⁵ The goal of Dejoie and Taylor was to make the *Louisiana Weekly* the property of the black community by reporting news that served the interest of its public and not the individuals who ran the paper.⁶ The *Weekly* became the advocate for the masses. It highlighted fundamental issues in the black community while both challenging the social order of the city and encouraging the leadership of racial progressionists to actively demand more. The *Weekly* proposed its own platform similar to that of the racial progressionists which encouraged the black community to act, do, and think.

In June of 1927, on page six the *Weekly* unveiled its platform and objectives as follows:

1. To stimulate a desire on the part of all for education.
2. To create a sentiment for better homes.
3. To condemn sectional differences, and make for unity of thought and purpose.
4. To agitate for more playgrounds, and urge for the necessity for constructive thought with regard to training our youth.

⁵ Donald DeVore, “Race Relations and Community Development: the Education of Blacks in New Orleans, 1862-1960” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1989), 117.

⁶ Ibid.

5. To minimize fun-loving, and seek to secure interest in worthwhile pursuits.
6. To bring about cohesion of business forces for the economic progress of our group.⁷

These goals for better homes, additional recreational facilities, more educational possibilities, racial solidarity, economic progress, and moral interest were also aspirations of the racial progressionist. The *Weekly* published this platform in an effort to generate support for the racial progressionists and to encourage movement within improving race relations. The racial progressionists and the *Weekly* were unified in their aspiration for the black community.

The paper praised leaders for stepping up to take responsibility to lead the masses. At first, the *Weekly* rarely questioned the approach of these leaders nor did it question the exclusiveness of its leadership. The two major leaders of 1925, in the community, were Walter Cohen and George Lucas. Both men were members of the economic elites who were socially involved in several uplift organizations and clubs within the city.

Walter Cohen was a businessman, civic leader and politician. The *Weekly* admired Cohen for his achievements calling him an “approachable, honorable and

⁷ “Our Platform” *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 June 1927, 6. The platform ran in every weekly print of the newspaper throughout the thirties always in the top right hand corner of page 6.

charitable man.”⁸ The *Weekly* wrote “we look with pride upon the fact that he can commune with presidents and senators and yet not lose his common touch.”

According to the *Weekly*, Cohen “exemplified the ability of a black man to hold office and succeed.”⁹ When Cohen died the *Weekly* reported that every employee who worked in Cohen’s office came to pay final respects. Over nine hundred people attended Cohen’s funeral services held at Corpus Christi Church.¹⁰ The *Chicago Defender* covered Cohen’s death and funeral as well as the *Weekly*. The *Defender*, described Cohen as “a man whose friendship embraced all classes and colors.”¹¹

George Lucas was a doctor, businessman and President of the New Orleans Branch NAACP. The *Weekly* hailed Lucas as a great leader and never spoke bad words of him. In 1927, the *Weekly* published an article calling Lucas an “Anti-Segregation Veteran” and “possibly the most venerable fighter of our race.” The *Weekly* reported that Lucas had “no fear when it came down to championing for the race.”¹² In January of 1931, Lucas died of a heart attack. The *Weekly* chronicled the life of the man they once

⁸ “Walter L. (“Cap”) Cohen” *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 March 1926. 2. Cohen was confirmed by the United States Senate as Comptroller of Customs on March 17, 1924.

⁹ “Walter L. Cohen” *Louisiana Weekly*, 20 March 1926. 6.

¹⁰ “Veteran Politician Loses In His Fight With Father Time” *Louisiana Weekly*, 30 December 1930. 1.

¹¹ “Bury Walter Cohen Veteran Politician, in New Orleans” *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 10 January 1931, A1; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

¹² “Anti-Segregation Veteran” *Louisiana Weekly*, 24 December 1927. 4.

called the “watchdog for the race.”¹³ Lucas’ death was reported nationally by the *Chicago Defender*. According to the *Defender*, the large auditorium where the services were held did not accommodate all of the people.¹⁴

Despite the overwhelming support the *Weekly* showed racial progressionist leaders, the paper began to reexamine their moderate and gradual approach after Cohen and Lucas died. The onset of the Great Depression presented new problems of unemployment and poverty; discrimination became more pervasive in the black community. The moderate and gradual approach of the racial progressionist leadership was not equipped to deal with these new problems. The *Weekly* decided to appeal directly to the black community by encouraging them to unite and take an active stance against racial injustice. It reported on two issues of great concern in the black community, unemployment relief and equal treatment in stores. The *Weekly* informed blacks in the community that they had the right to demand equal treatment in stores where they spent their hard earned money.

The *Weekly* at the beginning of the depression with unemployment increasing, ran editorials on whites taking advantage of opportunities to register for unemployment assistance, while blacks chose not to out of fear. It encouraged the black community to apply for unemployment relief to help alleviate the economic burdens of

¹³ Ibid.; “George Lucas Dies” *Louisiana Weekly* 17 January 1931. 1;

¹⁴ “Dr George Lucas Is Buried” *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 24 January 1931, 13; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

the depression. The *Weekly* aggressively spread the message to blacks in New Orleans to fear nothing but the wrath of God; “we must work to support ourselves and we must fight the economical battle to be able to work, therefore let us be men – register, all of you that are out of work”¹⁵

The *Weekly*, for years, reminded blacks in New Orleans of the importance of paying poll taxes and registering to vote, in order to have a voice in the government. However, the registration process proved too difficult and many blacks did not register. During the 1929 mayor’s race the black worker was the topic of debate between the Democrats and the Lily-White Republicans. The black voter according to the *Weekly* “was assailed as an alien, as one who had no right to make a living for himself and his family.”¹⁶ One candidate went so far as to say that if he was elected mayor, he would find a way to oust every black person from his job.¹⁷ Blacks at all levels wanted to know what could be done to alleviate the economic burden. The *Louisiana Weekly* admitted that businesses had the right to fire and hire whomever they wanted; however, they noted that several of the businesses firing black employees also had large black patronage. The *Weekly* believed white businesses needed to understand the economic power of black patronage and called for the use of an “economic defense

¹⁵ “Our Unemployment” *Louisiana Weekly*, 22 March 1930. 6.

¹⁶ “On Employment” *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 May 1930. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

policy.” The “economic defense policy” urged blacks to only spend their money in stores where they could be employed. In doing so, blacks would be able to gain some type of power in the economic struggle.¹⁸ “If you go into a place and find only whites employed, you may know that that is a sign of ‘No Negroes Wanted,’ and you may add to the sign by not leaving any coin of the realm in that store, making the sign read, ‘No Negroes Wanted; No Money Spent.’”¹⁹

The *Louisiana Weekly* adopted this approach from the *Chicago Defender*, which promoted an economic campaign called “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work.” The campaign initially developed in Washington, D.C., by John Aubrey Davis, Belford V. Lawson, Jr., and M. Franklin Thorne of the New Negro Alliance, urged blacks not to buy merchandise from white-owned stores that did not employ blacks. By doing so, blacks would be able to use their economic strength to force white-owned businesses to hire black workers. The tactics used by the New Negro Alliance to enforce their “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign included picketing and boycotting of white-owned businesses. The campaign proved so powerful that it spread through several urban black communities in the United States, including Washington D.C., Chicago, and New Orleans.²⁰

¹⁸ “An Economic Bloc,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 10 May 1930. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ John A. Davis “We Win The Right to Fight for Jobs” *Opportunity Journal of Negro Life*, Vol. XVI, no. 8, August, 1938. 230-237; “Pickets Parade Before ‘Unfair’ Stores in Washington in Demand for Clerk

The *Defender* published several stories on the progress of the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” boycotts and encouraged blacks in other cities to join in boycotting national chain stores. The first chain store that the New Negro Alliance targeted was the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A & P) located in Washington, D.C.²¹ The alliance petitioned the chain store to hire black clerks in communities where the patronage was predominantly black. A & P did not respond to the petition, so the alliance urged blacks to boycott the A & P stores black communities if A & P did not employ blacks.²² According to the articles published in the *Defender*, blacks began to realize the power of mass action. The “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign became a national movement.

In an article titled “Make Your Own Jobs” the *Louisiana Weekly* urged blacks in the city to stop spending their money in stores that refused to hire them. The *Weekly* reported that black clientele made up over “ninety percent” of the business generated in white stores on South Rampart Street, yet no black clerks were employed in them. The *Weekly* mentioned that a five and dime chain store was going to be opening into the area soon. When it opened, the paper wrote, “there should be a battery of colored clerks

Jobs,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 30 September 1932, 1; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975; “Make Your Own Jobs” *Louisiana Weekly*, 28 July 1934. 8.

²¹ “Pickets Parade Before ‘Unfair’ Stores in Washington in Demand for Clerk Jobs,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 30 September 1932, 1; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

²² “D. C. Judge Ponders Verdict in Picket Case,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967); 14 October 1933, 2; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The *Chicago Defender*, 1905-1975.

ready to serve the hundreds of colored customers.” If the management of the store did not employ from the group he expected to patronize the store, the *Weekly* argued “the prospective customers should have enough Race Pride to walk past the door and trade at places where they can work.”²³ The *Weekly* believed that before spending any money in the city, every black person should “consider whether or not some of the profit from his money will be placed into the payroll envelope of some member of the Negro race, who is occupying a respectable position with that particular company.”²⁴

The “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign succeeded in forcing white-owned businesses to feel the collective economic pressure of the black community. One of the first white-owned stores in the city to hire a black clerk in 1934 was the Eddy Furniture Company. The *Weekly* reported the black salesman made more sales than any other salesman employed with the company and was awarded a prize.²⁵ This demonstrated that blacks had the purchasing power to demand employment in stores where they shopped. The Eddy Furniture Company was the only major store in New Orleans to hire a black clerk.

The *Louisiana Weekly* continued to publish articles that encouraged the boycott of local stores and also added to that boycott, stores that discriminated against them. In

²³ “Make Your Own Jobs” *Louisiana Weekly*, 28 July 1934. 8.

²⁴ “Help Make Your Own Jobs” *Louisiana Weekly*, 1 September 1934. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

1933, the *Weekly* published a story about Mrs. C. Nobles, a black woman who was not allowed to try on a hat in the Maison Blanche store. The *Weekly* reported Nobles entered the store and stopped at the bargain hat counter. She selected a hat and before she could try it on a store clerk stopped her. The clerk told Nobles that she could not try on any hats. When Nobles asked why the clerk replied, "it was just a rule that the hats could not be tried on."²⁶ Nobles left the clerk and located a store manager and informed him of what happened. Nobles told him that she had shopped there for the last twelve years and was not happy with this policy. The manager went to "higher-ups" and told them of the situation. When the manager returned, he told Nobles that the clerk was right, but that there was a special place for colored customers to try on hats on the second floor of the store. Nobles informed the manager that she would not segregate herself in order to make a purchase and left the store.

Days later the *Weekly* published an article stating the "bitter resentment among Negro shoppers" at the actions of Maison Blanche. The article urged blacks in the city not to submit to such humiliating conditions. It told them to "grumble and complain" and to "drop, as a red-hot brick, any store that persisted in clinging to the ante-bellum policy of taking his hard earned money and insulting him by the request that he come around the back alley and receive his merchandise."²⁷ The *Weekly* pushed for all blacks

²⁶ "Negroes Were Not Allowed To 'Try On' Hats on the First Floor of Maison Blanche," *Louisiana Weekly*, 28 October 1933. 1-2.

²⁷ "Jim Crow Bargain Counters" *Louisiana Weekly*, 4 November 1933. 8.

in the community to unite against discrimination regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background.

The constant information of racial, social and political injustices reported by the *Louisiana Weekly* provided the middle and lower class Creole and American black communities in New Orleans with a shared sense of hopelessness. These feelings ultimately helped spark a catalyst for change within the masses of the black community. The change that the black community craved was in the approach of its leadership from moderate, gradual, and timid to aggressive and demanding. The *Weekly* realized the need to push the racial progressionist leadership beyond its comfort zone in hopes that it would reinvent its approach to fit the growing needs of the black community.

The first criticism of black leaders published in the *Weekly* came from an anonymous writer in June of 1930. In the article, the writer called black leaders in New Orleans “Pseudo Leaders” who “were selling out the race.”²⁸ The article ended by stating that the leadership needed to change. Four months later, editor Peter R. Crutchfield, published an editorial called “‘Barnacle’ Leaders are Fearful,” in which he urged black leaders to demand more and become more aggressive. After the deaths of Walter Cohen and George Lucas, the *Weekly* became more vocal in its examination of the approach of racial progressionist leadership in the community.

²⁸ “Pseudo Leaders,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 June 1930, 4.

By the beginning of 1932, the *Weekly* begin to publicly criticize George Labat, who had taken over as president of the NAACP for Lucas. The *Weekly* reported that members of the NAACP, particularly A. P. Tureaud, questioned Labat's handling of the voter registration case. According to the *Weekly*, Tureaud was angry that Labat did not hire black lawyers to represent the suit.²⁹ The *Weekly's* reporting of the voter registration case showed discord among the black leadership. In December of 1932, the case was dismissed by the court and Labat's leadership declined significantly. He did not seek re-election as president after 1933. In addition to reporting on the voter registration suit, the *Weekly* also criticized the local NAACP for not investigating or reporting physical abuse of blacks by whites to the national NAACP office.

In November of 1933, the local NAACP elected James Gayle as president. Once again the *Weekly* praised the new president as a civic, fraternal, and political leader who had a "host of friends in both races."³⁰ Gayle came from the same economic elite class as Cohen, Lucas, Labat, and Hardin. The *Weekly* hoped Gayle's leadership would be different, more aggressive and open to the masses. The *Weekly* urged black citizens "to get behind the new president and help him make the organization a tower of strength, an organization that will champion our rights and improve conditions in the

²⁹ "Plaintiff in Registration Case Threatens to Quit; Tureaud Airs 'Dirty Linen'" *Louisiana Weekly* 9, January 1932, 1.

³⁰ "James E. Gayle Prominent in All Local Activities" *Louisiana Weekly*, 18 November 1933. 1 and 4.

community.”³¹ Gayle’s presidency lasted from 1933 to 1937. During this time the *Weekly* often wrote of “the absence of a ‘strong’ local chapter of the NAACP” stating “Negro citizens of New Orleans have no local organization that will fight continually for justice in courts and civic affairs in the city.”³² In 1937 the NAACP elected yet another racial progressionist to serve as its president. A. W. Brazier, local physician and economic elite served until November 1939. During Brazier’s term as president the *Weekly* called the NAACP “dormant.”³³

The *Weekly*’s criticism of the racial progressionists’ leadership did not end with its coverage of the NAACP. It questioned the slow process of Hardin’s Federation of Civic Leagues to deliver concessions through petitioning. Prior to Labat’s leadership, the *Weekly* did not criticize the racial progressionists’ moderate and gradual approach. However, the pressure to see more progress in the black community of New Orleans and around the United States prompted the *Weekly* to be more critical of its black leadership. School overcrowding, youth drowning at unsafe beaches, and blacks being abused by whites led the *Weekly* to ask for new leadership. The *Weekly* argued “that old leadership must give way to new, that re-organization is needed, that new ideas must

³¹ “Militant Leadership” *Louisiana Weekly*, 18 November 1933. 8.

³² “A Call to Arms” *Louisiana Weekly*, 13 May 1933. 1.

³³ “Protest NAACP Election; Flays Tactics in Letter to National Secretary,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 December 1938, 1 and 8.

be injected into the life stream of these leagues and associations as well as into the leaders."³⁴

In 1939 the *Weekly* initiated a series of "community responsible programs" to bring the leaders in contact with the masses. The *Weekly* believed it was "necessary to bring about more cordial feelings and relationships between local leaders and their followers."³⁵ By providing such a connection the *Weekly* hoped the racial progressionists would realize their slow approach to improving civil rights was not in tune with the community and required new leaders to take charge. The community responded favorably to the *Weekly's* plan. Several citizens wrote to the newspaper expressing their gratitude for the chance to gain a "better understanding between our leaders and their followers." Henry Brooks, a "self proclaimed man of the streets" responded to the *Weekly's* program by stating "We, the unfortunate people of this community, are badly in need of guidance by leaders who know what we need. I see no better way to ascertain this than by such a program." Another citizen wrote "I believe that an accumulation of opinions from various persons in the community will give a clearer picture of what our folks are thinking, than anything else might do."³⁶

³⁴ Where Are The Civic Leagues?" *Louisiana Weekly*, 27 October 1934. 8; "Says NAACP Asked Membership Fee When He Asked For Aid" *Louisiana Weekly* 6 August 1938. 1

³⁵ "Louisiana Weekly Begins Series of Community Responsibility Programs; All Citizens Invited to Take Part" *Louisiana Weekly*, 28 January 1939. 1- 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The *Weekly* called for cooperation and unity in the black community as well as self-help. It used information as a form of activism to transform the black community's approach to race relations in the Jim Crow South. The *Weekly* challenged the masses to become more involved and demand a change in leadership to reflect the growing needs of the community. The need for more aggressive leadership was evidenced by the *Weekly's* change from early support of the racial progressionists' approach to criticism of that approach. The moderate and gradual approach of the racial progressionist leadership did not grow or evolve with community demands. Its approach no longer fitted within the needs of the community as it was too slow in achieving progress. The *Weekly* advocated new leadership for the black community that would reach the masses by being more aggressive, demanding and inclusive.

Conclusion Reaching the Masses

By 1939, the economic tension of the depression began to subside as opportunity for work increased because of preparations for a possible war. The ten years of suffering by blacks in the city during the depression caused them to question the strength of the existing black leadership. Such was evident in articles published in the *Louisiana Weekly* in which the leadership of the local NAACP was called “dormant, elitist, and timid.” The community craved new black leadership that would represent the entire black population and not just one elite social group. They wanted leaders who would listen to the needs of the community and not be afraid to challenge white authority.¹

The change in leadership that blacks in New Orleans sought in 1939 came after a long struggle waged by A. P. Tureaud and a few members within the local NAACP branch. These younger members openly challenged discrimination and brought new ideas and passion to the NAACP. They called themselves “The Group” and consisted of truck drivers, insurance agents, postal carriers and doormen. The members of the group represented the laborers and the unskilled working class. None of these men, according to Adam Fairclough, could be considered upper class or professionals, with

¹ “Protest NAACP Election; Flays Tactics in Letter to National Secretary” *Louisiana Weekly*, 3 December 1938, 1 and 8.

the exception of Attorney A. P. Tureaud and a few school teachers.² The Group's core members included Donald Jones and John Rousseau who were employed as postal clerks; Daniel Byrd, an insurance agent; Arthur J. Chapital, a mailman; Octave Lilly, a writer employed by the Federal Writers Project; and Tureaud. The Group's philosophy differed from the racial progressionists NAACP leaders. The Group's members believed that blacks could not achieve equal status if they remained divided by wealth, status, education, and group distinctions or color. In 1939, The Group's philosophy of active and direct challenges allowed them, to recruit 319 new members to the New Orleans branch NAACP.

In November 1939, The Group made a bid for the NAACP presidency. The *Louisiana Weekly* reported that for the first time since the inception of the NAACP, the black community was enthusiastic about the organization's presidential election.³ This election offered the possibility of having a fundamental change in leadership and approach by the local NAACP. Three people ran for the office: the incumbent racial progressionist, A. W. Brazier, who supported himself; The Group's candidate Everett Stuart, supported by postal clerk, Donald Jones; and the "progressive" candidate, J. Edwin 'Chummy' Wilkins, supported by Rivers Frederick. Wilkins, a pharmacist at Flint Goodridge Hospital, considered himself the "progressive" candidate, although he

² Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 57.

³ "City Eyes With Interest Outcome of NAACP Election for President Fri. Night" *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 November, 1939, 1- 2.

enjoyed the same upper class ties as previous leaders of the branch. The “progressive” ticket represented a faction of the existing racial progressionist leadership, as was evident by Fredrick’s endorsement of its candidate. The only difference between Wilkins, the “progressive” candidate, and the racial progressionist leadership was that Wilkins was willing to work with the masses and not just for the masses. He offered to listen to the needs of the masses and address its problems accordingly.

On November 18, 1939, the NAACP held its elections and six-hundred and ten members voted. Wilkins received three hundred and nineteen votes, narrowly winning the election by thirty votes.⁴ His cabinet included Sheldon Mays, Vice President; Louis Alexander G. Blanchet, Secretary; Haidel J. Christophe, Assistant Secretary; and Percy P. Creuzot, Treasurer. As evidenced in the chart below, the elite leadership of the NAACP did not change. Leadership remained in the hands of large business owners and professionals, with the exception of Louis Blanchet who was a teacher. The executive board included several racial progressionists such as: Rivers Frederick, Aaron Brazier, Joseph Geddes, George McDemmond, Reverend C. C. Taylor, and Harry Braden. The new president reached out to The Group by inviting A. P. Tureaud to serve as the branch’s legal advisor in an attempt to demonstrate its “progressive” reform.

⁴ “Progressive Ticket Wins NAACP Election ‘Chummy’ Wilkins, President,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 18 November 1939, 1 - 2.

Table 12. New Orleans Branch NAACP Officers, 1939

Name	Office	Occupation
Joseph Edwin Wilkins	President	Pharmacist
Sheldon Mays	Vice President	N/A
Louis A. G. Blanchet	Secretary	Teacher
Haidel J. Christophe	Assistant Secretary	Secretary/Treasury Peoples Industrial Life Insurance Company
Percy P. Creuzot	Treasurer	Dentist

5

The first major controversy under the new “progressive” leadership arose over equal accommodations in the Municipal Auditorium. Its management scheduled famed singer Marian Anderson to perform on May 6, 1940, reserving only the balcony for blacks who wanted to attend. The NAACP considered the balcony seating unequal to the floor seating reserved for whites and called for a boycott of the concert. By calling for a boycott, racial progressionists who now considered themselves “progressive” felt they were acting in the best interest of the masses. The boycott was the first serious challenge to segregated accommodations by the New Orleans NAACP. The branch’s action, however, split the black community. Several members wanted to hear Marian Anderson perform regardless of where they sat, while others supported the boycott.⁶

⁵ Ibid. Officers list is taken from the *Weekly* article.

⁶ “Thousands Will Hear Marian Anderson Here Monday Night,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 4 May 1940, 1; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 59.

The *Louisiana Weekly* published an anonymous article scolding the local NAACP for attempting to boycott a great black singer. The article in the *Weekly* implied that the actions of the leaders of the local NAACP did not reflect the views of the majority of the community. It questioned if the branch's leaders had ever done anything constructive to alleviate real black problems.⁷ According to the article in the *Weekly*, the new leadership of the NAACP never protested a single case of police brutality nor attempted to get better schools for black youth. The writer of the article viewed these issues as a more obvious insult to the race as a whole than being forced to sit in an auditorium's balcony to hear Marian Anderson.⁸

The *Weekly* continued its coverage of the Marian Anderson controversy by publishing a letter, written by another anonymous citizen, to NAACP President J. Edwin "Chummy" Wilkins. The writer expressed views on where the president stood "in the estimation of the public."⁹ People had viewed Wilkins' election to the local branch optimistically because he promised action. However, the writer continued, Wilkins failed to produce the action desired by the people. The first general meeting, the writer complained, was not called until three months after Wilkins won the election. Once the meeting was called the community, still excited about the change in

⁷ "Consistency Is A Virtue," *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 May 1940, 8.

⁸ "Be Consistent," *Louisiana Weekly*, 27 April 1940, 8.

⁹ "An Open Letter to "Chummy" Wilkins," *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 May 1940, 8. If not otherwise cited the following quotes are taken from this article in the *Louisiana Weekly*.

leadership, felt the organization, had “come to life with a plan of progress for the New Orleans Negro population.” The meeting, according to the writer, let many people down as its purpose was to collect money for the national office’s anti-lynching campaign. The writer further argued that the public’s skepticism of the sincerity of President Wilkins and the local NAACP increased significantly. A few “stout-hearted individuals were still hopeful,” that Wilkins and the NAACP would bring about change in the black community. This optimism soon came to an end.

Under Wilkins’ leadership, according to the writer, the NAACP failed to provide valuable assistance to members of the community. One incident the writer cited was the “Bluebird Inn” murder of Nathan Everett. John Martello, owner of the Bluebird Inn & Bar, located on Washington Avenue was accused of shooting Everett three times, in an alley outside the bar. Martello told police that Everett picked up a brick to throw at him so he shot Everett.¹⁰ According to the writer, “The NAACP promised an investigation, but after the promise, nothing else happened on the part of the NAACP.” Shortly after the Blue Bird Inn incident, Mr. and Mrs. James Dorsey, of N. Galvaz, were brutally attacked and driven from their neighborhood by white hoodlums. The Dorseys personally appealed to the NAACP, but the branch took no action. The public, for whom the writer claimed to speak, “was convinced that the ‘progressive leader’ of

¹⁰ “Citizens Outraged Over Slaying; NAACP To Investigate Case” *Louisiana Weekly*, 25 November 1939. 1 and 4.

the NAACP was full of 'sound and fury' and void of one iota of courage and backbone."¹¹

Much like the writer of the letter to the *Weekly*, The Group questioned the NAACP's leadership. It started its own weekly newspaper, the *Sentinel* to voice its concerns and rally support for its causes within the NAACP. The *Sentinel* published its first issue in June 1940. One of the most important plans of The Group was to align the New Orleans Branch NAACP with the goals of the national office. The leaders of The Group wanted to prove to Louisiana and the entire southern region of the NAACP that New Orleans could handle important issues. The branch was no longer divided, but united, and most importantly, committed to gaining equal rights through an active and aggressive approach that included the views of the lower and middle class communities.

On October 26, 1940, the *Louisiana Weekly* published an announcement by President Wilkins of the upcoming NAACP elections. In the announcement, Wilkins stated that he would not be a candidate for re-election. He went on to say that it was the "sacred charge of every member to nominate and elect with caution and deliberation," and that "only those persons willing to sacrifice and fight uncompromisingly for equality should be chosen."¹² On November 16, 1940, the

¹¹ "An Open Letter to "Chummy" Wilkins," *Louisiana Weekly*, 11 May 1940, 8.

¹² "The Coming NAACP Election," *Louisiana Weekly*, 26 October 1940, 6. "Nomination Meeting For NAACP; Wilkins Not In Field For Re-election" *Sentinel*, 12 October 1940, 1.

NAACP held its annual elections. Reverend C. C. Taylor of St John’s Fourth Baptist Church was unanimously elected to serve as president of the local NAACP from 1940-1941. The leadership of the NAACP slowly began to change, although several members of the economic elite remained in the ranks of the executive board.¹³ The chart below is a list of members of the economic elite who held offices as executive board members for 1940 and 1941. These members were all racial progressionists with ties to Rivers Frederick. Only two members of The Group, Donald Jones and Reverend A. L. Davis, were elected as executive board members.

Table 13. 1940-1941 New Orleans NAACP Executive Board Members

Name	Occupation
Rivers Frederick	Doctor and Owner of Louisiana Industrial Life Insurance Company
Joseph Edwin Wilkins	Pharmacist and Former NAACP President, 1939-1940
Aaron Brazier	Doctor and Former NAACP President, 1937-1939
Percy P. Creuzot	Dentist and Member of the Board of Directors of Louisiana Industrial Life Insurance Company
Henry Braden	Manager of Insurance Company
George McDemmond	Hospital Manager at Flint-Goodridge
Donald Jones	Postal Clerk

¹³ “Elect Rev. Taylor NAACP President,” *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 November 1940, 1; “Inauguration Exercise for NAACP Monday” *Louisiana Weekly*, 14 December 1940, 1.

Table 13. Continued

Reverend A. L. Davis	Reverend of New Zion Baptist Church
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Once again, The Group failed to seize control of the New Orleans Branch. Despite their loss, The Group took matters into their own hands. They began to look for cases that the national organization promoted, which focused on education and overturning the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In 1941, The Group decided to file suit against the Orleans Parish School Board for teacher pay equalization. The average salary for white school teachers was \$1,523.05 but only \$402.40 for black schoolteachers, a difference of \$1,120.65.¹⁵ The Group believed Orleans Parish School Board had violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution by paying black teachers and principals lower salaries than their white counterparts.

The Group contacted legal counsel for the national NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, and began plans to bring a suit in federal court to challenge the discrepancy of pay between black and white schoolteachers. The Group led by A. P. Tureaud, lead attorney in the suit, found it difficult to find a school teacher willing to serve as plaintiff. Many school teachers were not willing to get involved in the case for fear of losing their jobs and retaliation. One brave teacher, Joseph McKelpin, who worked at the F. P.

¹⁴ "Elect Rev. Taylor NAACP President," *Louisiana Weekly*, 16 November 1940, 1. Elected officers are listed in this article.

¹⁵ Bulletin No. 585, Issued by the State Department of Education of Louisiana, Series III, Roll 8, Folder 37, A. P. Tureaud Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

Ricard School, accepted the challenge. On June 14, 1941, Tureaud filed suit against the Orleans Parish School Board on behalf of McKelpin. He argued that discrimination in teachers' salaries based on race was a violation of the equal protection clause.¹⁶

The approach Tureaud and The Group took with the equalization case was very different from the approach of previous leaders of the NAACP. First, it was the first time the New Orleans branch used black lawyers to argue a civil rights case. And second, the Group actively and openly challenged discrimination through the judicial branch. This showed their willingness to fight for equality despite repercussions by whites. By going to the judicial branch and skipping over the local government, The Group sent a message to the white community that they were tired of petitioning and patiently waiting change. They instead would wage court room battles to permanently change the laws.

By June 1942, the school board made an offer to settle the equalization case of McKelpin. The school board offered to raise the salaries of all black teachers by 20 percent of the difference each year for five years, until the salaries of black and white teachers with the same qualifications were equal.¹⁷ The offer was rejected, and

¹⁶ "Sues School Board for Equal Teachers' Salary in U. S. District Court," *Louisiana Weekly*, 21 June 1941, 1.

¹⁷ Donald DeVore, "The Rise from the Nadir: Black New Orleans Between the Wars, 1920-1940." (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University at New Orleans, 1972), 121.

Tureaud, instead, agreed to a two year equalization plan that would close the gap in teacher pay by 50 percent each year.

The teacher equalization case helped the masses by setting a precedent for all public jobs in New Orleans and Louisiana. The success of the teacher equalization case allowed blacks employed in public jobs a basis to sue for equal wages. Tureaud and The Group chose teachers to fight for pay equalization because the disparities in pay between black and white teachers were more visible than in any other public job. Also, the school system in New Orleans and Louisiana relied on black teachers to teach black students. Through this realization, black teachers possessed a little power in the system because they were needed. That power allowed for a successful outcome in the teacher equalization case.

As the suit gained momentum so did the popularity and power of The Group within the local NAACP. In the next election held in November 1941, The Group's candidate, Daniel Byrd, was elected president. The leadership of the local NAACP took a new direction after The Group came to power, and "the social and class character of the branch's leadership had altered decisively."¹⁸ The new leadership included Daniel Byrd, Raymond Tillman, Donald Jones, Ernest Wright, Arthur J. Chapital, John E. Rousseau, A. P. Tureaud, and Reverend A. L. Davis. These men represented the masses of working lower and middle class people in New Orleans.

¹⁸ Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 65. If not otherwise cited the following rest primarily on Fairclough. 55-68.

The new NAACP President Daniel Byrd, an American black, had moved to New Orleans in 1937 and married a local school teacher. He worked as an insurance agent for Unity Life Insurance Company, one of the three largest insurance companies that unified the economic elite and established the leadership of the racial progressionists. Although Byrd worked for the insurance company, he is described by historian Adam Fairclough, as a born rebel, who led successful protests to stop segregation as early as high school. Raymond Tillman, an American black from Homewood, Illinois, led the Local #206 of the Transport Workers Union in New Orleans. Ernest Wright, was an American black, born in Jefferson Parish who studied social work at the University of Michigan. After college he returned to New Orleans where he joined the staff of the *Louisiana Weekly*, and soon became a well known lecturer and activist. Reverend A. L. Davis, an American black, moved to New Orleans in 1936, where he became pastor of New Zion Baptist Church and leader of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. According to Fairclough, Davis did more than any minister to identify the black church with the fight for voting rights. Donald Jones, John E. Rousseau, Jr., and Arthur J. Chapital were all Creole natives of New Orleans and postal workers. A. P. Tureaud, a Creole, also from New Orleans practiced law. These men offered the black community an aggressive and active leadership that encouraged the participation of the entire black community, regardless of economic and group status.

The Group's leadership gave the black community renewed optimism. The new leaders of the NAACP related to the masses because they came from the lower and middle class. The organization now had clear goals and objectives with leaders determined to fight aggressively. The dramatic changes resulted in more working class members joining the branch and community problems being addressed. This new leadership realized the importance of gaining equal rights by demanding and confronting whites through legal challenges to Jim Crow laws of Louisiana. The new leadership's ability to reach the masses and increase active participation by its members allowed the New Orleans Branch NAACP to become the largest most influential chapter within the state with strong connections to the national office of the NAACP.

The Group's leadership differed significantly from that of George Lucas and other racial progressionists. The racial progressionist leadership that led New Orleans followed a moderate and gradual approach in attacking the Jim Crow system. They were non-confrontational in their pursuits, dismissing anything that would bring harm to themselves or take them out of favor with white sympathizers. Leaders petitioned whites for concessions within the system and waited patiently for the system to change.

Leaders such as Walter Cohen, through his influential position within the federal government in New Orleans, were able to appeal successfully to white leaders because he was respected by whites. He accomplished this early progress by intelligently discussing concerns in the black community and asking for moderate and gradual

changes. He was instrumental in acquiring a six room annex to the McDonogh 24 School in 1926. George Lucas went a step past Cohen in his moderate approach by openly challenging, in court, New Orleans' residential segregation ordinance. Through Lucas' challenge, the residential segregation ordinance was found unconstitutional. Blacks were legally able to rent their property to whomever they chose, regardless of where their property was located. Lucas' use of the judicial system made a swift and immediate impact as opposed to a gradual change. Still, Lucas maintained the overall approach of a progressionist leader because he did not challenge segregation itself. Cohen died in 1930 and Lucas in 1931, yet their approach to challenging the disparities in the Jim Crow system continued for the next ten years.

Joseph Hardin, Rivers Frederick and George Labat were among a few of the racial progressionist leaders who continued to work within the ideological framework of Cohen and Lucas. Through the NAACP, Labat encouraged blacks to pay their poll taxes and continued the voter registration suit started by Lucas. Many of these leaders were members of both the Federation of Civic Leagues and the NAACP. These leaders over time were able to open additional parks, school annexes and a beach for the black community. In 1932, racial progressionists, through the Federation of Civic Leagues led by Joseph Hardin, secured the use of black public school playgrounds for black children during the summer. They also acquired the first black beach in New Orleans at Seabrook. The Seabrook beach was located in eastern New Orleans on Lake

Pontchartrain. In 1937, the Orleans Parish School Board granted the request of the racial progressionist leadership and built a new school for blacks in Algiers. In 1939, a new park for blacks named after racial progressionist leader Joseph Hardin was opened. The park unlike other parks for blacks received by the progressionists was equipped with playground accessories, a grandstand, flood lights and a new field house. The city also provided a new building to house a trade school for blacks specializing in automobile mechanics and carpentry.

The years between 1925 and 1941 are often over looked in the context of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Yet, in New Orleans, during this time period, racial progressionists provided moderate, gradual and pragmatic leadership to the black community in New Orleans at a time when the community was divided and blacks were at their lowest socially, economically and politically. The racial progressionist leadership was the first to offer an avenue to challenge the law of separate but equal in New Orleans since the 1896 *Plessy* decision. These early leaders were viewed as radical for their time. However, in the context with the civil rights movement that followed, their approach and style was slow and gradual. Still, by weakening the Jim Crow system these leaders were able to spark hope and desire in the black community for more change to come and ultimately provide the first phase of the civil rights movement in New Orleans.

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