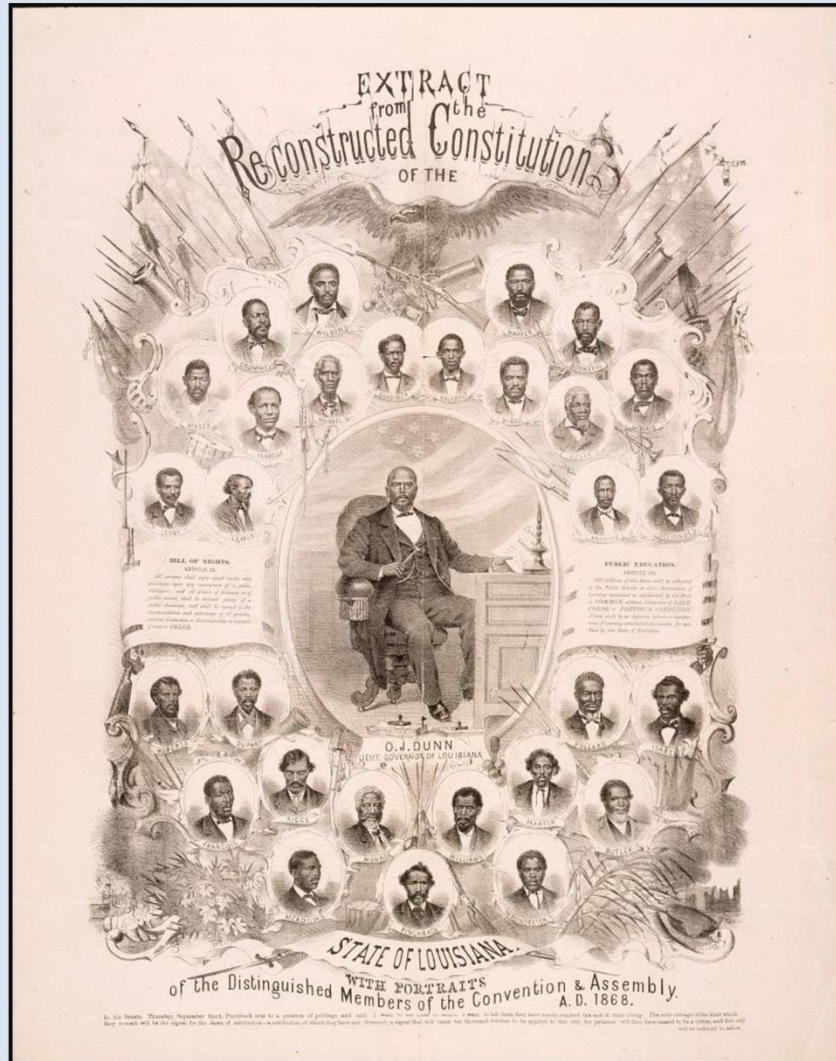


SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AT NEW ORLEANS
CENTER FOR AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
and the
LOUISIANA PUBLIC HISTORY FORUM (LPHF)

Present the Second

LOUISIANA RECONSTRUCTION CONFERENCE

*“THE STRUGGLE TO LEARN AND THE STRUGGLE LEFT BEHIND: THE BATTLES FOR
EDUCATION AND THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC SITES”*



SAVE THE DATES!

OPENING RECEPTION – FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2015

New Orleans Public Library Main Branch
219 Loyola Avenue, New Orleans, La. 70122

CONFERENCE - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2015

Southern University at New Orleans
6400 Press Drive, New Orleans, La. 70126

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Retracing the Struggle for the Right to Education

The struggle for freedom, equality, and fraternity by people of African descent in Louisiana has always manifested itself, especially in the fight to be educated. In the course of this struggle, there are several periods that distinguish themselves in Louisiana: (1862–1876) Period of Military Rule, (1870s–1890s) Period of Counterrevolutionary Reversals, (1900–1954) Period of Jim Crow, and (1954–2005) Period of Desegregation.

Period Prior to 1862

Prior to 1841, only private schools in homes or parochial schools offered education for those who could afford tuition or fees, or could access free schooling. Such learning venues date back to the year 1822 in Louisiana. Some historic sites for learning were Providence Baptist Church in La Place, La., St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church and St. James A.M.E. Church in New Orleans, La.

The creation of a public school system would be introduced to New Orleans in 1841 for white students only. The ideological leaders of this system would originate from the New England states. The New England area was a huge slave industry and market for the transatlantic slave trade. The principal New England leaders that would effectively influence the public school development in New Orleans were Horace Mann, John Angier Shaw and Henry Barnard. Their anti-African and pro-slave sentiment would be comfortably welcomed in deep South Louisiana.

1862-1876: Period of Military Rule

With the victory over the slaveholding class and the Confederate Army, very important gains would be won for the former enslaved. No person could any longer own another person. People of African descent would become ‘citizens’ (or Americans in 1868) and Black men would win the right to vote. But the real question that Black people faced was whether the political and social rights that Black people won would be guaranteed and protected. Since Black people were not considered the political and social equals of whites, what would be the fate of Black people now that they were free?

Historian Malcolm Suber asserts that, “Emancipation demanded a social revolution in the South – a new political and social order. The political and social power of the former slave masters had to be completely broken. Only by depriving the former slave master of their political and social power could the freed people have a chance at their freedom. This contest for the complete freedom of the former slaves would prove to be a daunting task that would require the suppression of any resistance by the former slave owners. It would require a complete ideological campaign to defeat white supremacist ideology. This proved to be more of a task than the Northern ruling class, the victor in the Civil War, was willing to wage.” (Malcolm Suber, “The July 1866 Mechanics Institute Massacre” Memorial Seminar Address, 25 July 2009, E. J. Thompson Sr. Multi-Purpose Center)

Authors Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon would further comment: “The Civil War opened an era of revolutionary change in the New Orleans school system. For fifteen years, from appearance of Union warships in 1862 to the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877, the schools of New Orleans stood in the center of the social and political turmoil of the Reconstruction era.

Nowhere did Reconstruction begin earlier or last longer. True, the overhaul of the public schools was only one part of the momentous upheavals that ended slavery, enfranchised Black citizens, and reshaped federal-state relations. But the schools of New Orleans often stood at the center of those tumultuous events. They not only absorbed the first Black urban educational system in the South, but also participated in a far more dramatic experiment. Alone in the South and almost singularly in the nation, the public schools of New Orleans reached for the most difficult objective embodied in the American common school ideal: fundamental racial integration – with Black and white students, Black and white teachers, and Black and white administrators.” (Devore and Logsdon, “Revolution and Integration, 1862-1876,” in *Crescent City Schools*, page 40.)

Devore and Logsdon continued, “Such an achievement required a virtual revolution in New Orleans. Before the occupation army of General Benjamin F. Butler left their Union warships to patrol and garrison New Orleans, no single Black child had ever been allowed to enter a free, public schoolroom in New Orleans. Louisiana authorities had pointedly established their public schools for white students only. What is more, they made it a serious crime to teach any slave to read, and that official policy mandated a terrible legacy of illiteracy for virtually the entire half of the state’s population who were enslaved.”

Under General Benjamin F. Butler’s command, public schools for Blacks would be created; some in military units, others in converted buildings. After General Butler is replaced by General Nathaniel Banks in 1862, Banks continues Butler’s school program, but practices a policy of conciliation with the white power structure of New Orleans. To appease whites, Banks removes Black officers from leadership posts. In 1864, the state legislature, dominated by confederate sympathies, adopts a new state constitution that abolishes slavery and establishes a public school system for whites only. Banks would increase educational opportunities for Blacks with the supervision of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

The adoption of the new state constitution of 1868 that provided for the right to a free public education for all Black and white persons, would fuel the aspirations for the former enslaved. The demand for free public education would nurture the growth of the public school system even though much of it remained segregated. Overall, the period from 1862 – 1876 was a progressive time for Blacks that fulfilled some of their educational aspirations. It must be noted that this progressive road began before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863 and continued during the war.

From 1872 – 1876, Louisiana’s first State Superintendent of Public Education of African descent would serve the public. His name was William G. Brown. Under his leadership school buildings would be established, school curriculum would be created, instructional staff would be recruited, the financial funding and the accounting of schools’ finances would be strengthened. Brown’s leadership was not only impeccable, honest, scandal free but also visionary. He strived to establish a funding entity that would provide for the physical and academic well-being of the schools for the long term. Brown would contribute his writings skills to enlighten people, to make people conscious, to arouse people into action as a contributor to the newspaper called *The Crusader*. *The Crusader* was a newspaper founded by Louis A. Martinet, a famous activist during the latter part of the Reconstruction era.

1870s – 1890s: Period of Counterrevolutionary Reversals

The late 1870s' through the 1890s' would be a period of counterrevolutionary reversals. The infamous White League would terrorize Blacks across the state of Louisiana killing over 3000 Blacks across the state. White allies, like Dr. William B. Jones, editor of the Republican newspaper in Lake Providence, Louisiana would be assassinated for their convictions and political activities. With the betrayal of the Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877 that transferred 20 electoral votes from Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina and Oregon to Republican Presidential candidate Rutherford Hayes, the former oppressors would be restored to power. The final removal of Union soldiers by President Ulysses S. Grant from Louisiana would speed up the restoration of the former oppressors to state political control including the control of public education.

With the return of the control of public education to the restored oppressor class, public education would start to go downhill rapidly. State and city funding would be slashed. Some schools would close during the first semester and open in the fall. The idea that Blacks need not go to school past 5th grade because Blacks made good 'field' workers gained traction. The Citizens Committee that led and fought the Homer A. Plessy case would be denied the right to equal public accommodations which included public schools. Black children would be violently removed from public schools as the new law would emerge: '*separate but equal*' and the new form of oppression, Jim Crow, would begin.

By the time the twentieth century had arrived, Black people had developed into a distinct nation. Black people had developed into a nation that had been captured and rested on a territory that arose from the former large plantations in an area called the Black Belt. This area stretches from Louisiana across the middle areas of the southern states to South Carolina. By the turn of the new century, Black people would be forever denied the basic democratic right of any oppressed nation- the right to govern itself, the right to self-determination.

1900 – 1954: Period of Jim Crow

From the 1900 to the 1950s', Black people would struggle to regain the victories in public education that were previously won. This included the right to a free public education, the right to build schools for Blacks, the right to equal pay for Blacks, etc. This struggle was a component part of the overall struggle to recapture the democratic gains and reforms that Blacks won during Reconstruction.

Had the gains that were won post-Civil War remained intact, what would that have meant for the newly freed? Had the agrarian revolution (40 acres and a mule) been implemented, what would that have meant for the newly freed? Had a new democratic political and social order been established after the Civil War, what would that have meant for the newly freed? Has integration fulfilled Blacks' aspiration for a quality education? And will privatization of public education fulfill Blacks' aspiration for quality public education? The conference seeks to retrace and examine the fight for public education and advance the public's knowledge about the struggles and contributions of people of African descent over the course of Louisiana history.

The Struggle Left Behind – The Preservation of Historic Sites

The territory and state of Louisiana were developed by 50 different nations from Africa. These nations originate from central Africa, West Africa, northwest Africa and some from east Africa and by way of Brazil. These enslaved peoples would populate the river plantations along

the Mississippi River and beyond. They would provide the diversity of labor that would build the economy of the Louisiana territory and later the states adjacent to the Mississippi River.

Over 30,000 of these peoples (from Louisiana) of African descent would fight for their freedom in the Civil War as members of the Union Army and Navy. Some of their descendants would continue the fight for complete liberation during Reconstruction. And many more would continue the fight during the period of Jim Crow.

There are numerous historic sites that endear preservation that tell the stories of these heroes of Louisiana. Some are famous peoples' homes, some are churches and schools where Black people attended for learning, some are halls where Black peoples' culture flourished, some are the final resting places where Black people are buried.

Such homes include A.P. Tureaud's residence in New Orleans, and Dr. John H. Lowery's residence in Donaldsonville, La. Then there are buildings like the Rosenwald Schools, such as the one at the River Road African American Museum in Donaldsonville and the dormant Rosenwald building in Algiers. Moreover, we have the numerous cemeteries where the peoples' remains rest. Some of these cemeteries are being properly preserved, some are not and others are hidden from public view. These hidden ones are covered over by trees, debris, gravel or buildings.

Several commonly, and not so well known, cemeteries are: Reveilletown Cemetery in Iberville Parish; Star Cemetery in Shreveport, LA.; Gilfield Baptist Church cemetery in Concordia Parish; Wright/Henderson Cemetery in St. Helena Parish; Bonnet Carré Spillway cemeteries in St. Charles Parish, African American cemeteries in Kenner; St. Joseph Cemetery in Phoenix; Holt and St. Louis Cemeteries No. 1 and No. 2 in New Orleans. St. Louis Cemeteries No. 1 and No. 2 have two of the largest concentrations of monuments to valiant Black heroes. But probably the largest is in Chalmette, where over 15,000 Black Civil War soldiers rest.

Today, many of these cemeteries are under assault by oil companies, chemical industries, or other kinds of large businesses. Some are victims of government wrongdoing and injustice. Whatever their condition, however, these cemeteries are rich personal and public treasures. They are in many ways unique archives endowed with rich history.

Preserving historic sites is to be able to save the stories of our ancestors that many times today's schools do not tell.

In the words of Jari Honora, Conference Chairperson, these historic sites are "sacred spaces and endangered places."

The 2015 conference seeks to engage with the public the importance of the struggle to learn and the struggle left behind. (*Prepared by Leon A. Waters*)

2015 CALL FOR PAPERS

LOUISIANA RECONSTRUCTION CONFERENCE

“THE STRUGGLE TO LEARN AND THE STRUGGLE LEFT BEHIND: THE BATTLES FOR EDUCATION AND THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC SITES”

MISSION

The **Louisiana Public History Forum (LPHF)** is an alliance of organizations and individuals that develops educational programs to engage scholars, teachers, students, citizens, and the public in discussions about the history of Slavery, Freedom and Resistance.

PURPOSE

The history of African descended people during the Reconstruction Era in Louisiana remains greatly understudied and poorly understood. This conference will have a double theme focus: the right of Black people to a public education and the importance of preserving Black cemeteries and historic sites. The conference seeks to determine why the struggle for public education continues today; and what is the importance of preserving Black cemeteries.

OBJECTIVES

The **LPHF** presents: **“The Struggle to Learn and the Struggle Left Behind: The Battles for Education and the Preservation of Historic Sites,”** its second in a series of public programs designed by the Forum to educate the public about the people, events and landmarks associated with the era known as Reconstruction. Despite the falsifications and distortions of Black contributions in the fight for the right to public education as written or omitted in various textbooks, this conference will seek to reveal the true story. The conference shall engage knowledgeable presenters whose expertise shall highlight the role played by Blacks in the fight for public education and the importance of preserving our cemeteries.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE: December 15, 2014

For more information contact:

Linda Hill – lhill@suno.edu

LPHF ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

LaToya Devezin – African American Community Archivist, Austin History Center of the Austin Public Library

Leslie Ellison – District IV Member & Vice-President, Orleans Parish School Board

Charissa Helluin – Curator, Bayou Vermillion District

Linda Hill – Curator, Center for African & African American Studies, Southern University at New Orleans

Jari C. Honora – Historian, Genealogist

Kathe Hambrick Jackson – Founder & Director, River Road African American Museum

Warren Jones – Educator, Researcher

Constance Milton – Public Historian, Bayou Vermillion District

Tiffany Powell – Journalist, Businesswoman

Leona Tate – Civil Rights Leader, Founder & Executive Director, Leona Tate Foundation for Change

Leon A. Waters – Board Chair, Louisiana Museum of African American History

2015 CALL FOR PAPERS

“THE STRUGGLE TO LEARN AND THE STRUGGLE LEFT BEHIND: THE BATTLES FOR EDUCATION AND THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC SITES”

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Monday, December 15, 2014

Presentation Criteria: Clarity of ideas and content is essential as it relates to the conference theme and the mission, purpose and objectives of the Forum

Suggested Subject Areas:

- The Development of Educational Opportunities in Louisiana
- Public Education – Under Military Authority 1862-1876, in the Jim Crow Era, under Twentieth Century Segregation, and Desegregation
- William G. Brown, State Superintendent of Education
- Documenting Historic Schools, Churches, and Historic Sites
- The Stories the Bones will Tell: Saving Our Cemeteries, Preserving Our History
- Sacred Spaces, Endangered Places: The Sites Where Rights Were Won

Note: The focus of a presentation can be on a person(s), a specific campaign/struggle, a specific historic site, or a specific area/region of the state of Louisiana.

SUBMISSION I – PRESENTER INFORMATION

Please include the following information typed in provided format:

Name _____

Title/Position _____

Affiliation(s) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Abstract/Presentation Title: _____

Anticipated A/V Needs - Please circle

Slide Projector Power Point Projector
TV & VCR/DVD Player Easel(s) Flip Chart

Other _____

MEDIA CONSENT (Please read, sign, and date): I hereby give my consent for photography, filming, videotaping and/or audio recording or other means of capturing my image or voice and/or being quoted in the media or printed materials (including social media websites) and hereby authorize without reservation the release of such to Southern University at New Orleans, the Center for African and African American Studies, and the Louisiana Public History Forum.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

SUBMISSION II: PRESENTER BIO

A 250-word *maximum* biography

SUBMISSION III: ABSTRACT

A 300-word *maximum* abstract of your presentation that clearly describes your topic, position, presentation.

All three (3) sections must be submitted electronically in one (1) pdf file package, no later than 12:00 midnight, Monday, December 15, 2014 to lhill@suno.edu.

The Abstract Review Committee will notify all submitters of their results and status no later than January 16, 2015.

Please take note of the following:

- All travel accommodations and other expenses are to be incurred by participants.
- Submissions should include the signed media consent section.
- One of the outcomes of the conference is a printed journal produced by the Center for African and African American Studies in conjunction with the LPHF Publishing/Editing Committee. As such, a copy of your presentation suitable for publication (with citations adhering to the *Chicago Manual of Style*) should be submitted to lhill@suno.edu no later than February 20, 2015. For more information contact Linda Hill – lhill@suno.edu.