

# Faubourg Tremé: Cultural and Societal Progress in a Neighborhood Faced with Gentrification

## Introduction

In New Orleans the word for neighborhood is Faubourg. This, like so many other things in New Orleans, speaks to one of the many inherent differences between this city and others. Faubourg Tremé was established in 1842 by free people of color. It is not only the oldest black neighborhood in the United States, but the birthplace of jazz, home to cultural museums, and to Louis Armstrong Park which houses Congo Square – a place where slaves used to meet on Sundays during their one day “off.” For the past two centuries, many of the residents of Tremé have made significant contributions to cultural, social, and political movements. For much of that time, it was a neighborhood where generations of families resided, and parents passed their houses on to their children and their children’s children, relatives lived side by side, down the street, or ‘round the corner from each other. Celebrations, births, and deaths were neighborhood gatherings because they were, after all, family.

Now, Tremé is one of the common destinations of horse and carriage, bicycle, walking, and Segway tours. There are not many days that go by in which I do not hear the methodical sound of a horse drawn buggy going by my house and the words “Tremé is the oldest black neighborhood in the US, founded by freed slaves...” It is a comforting sound tinged with sadness because so many of those families, families whose ancestors fought to buy their freedom and homes they could call their own, are gone. In the scant year I resided there, at least three of the families that welcomed me to the neighborhood have left and the historical interiors of their homes torn apart and discarded to make way for those with

money. As a result of this shift, despite the tremendous contributions the neighborhood has made in terms of progress and rebounding from Hurricane Katrina, the residents of this community are now facing the impact of gentrification. In this essay, I intend to discuss the history of Tremé's contributions to the community-at-large, political movements, and progress, as well as what the neighborhood is doing to meet the societal implications of gentrification in their outreach to new members of the neighborhood; utilizing community events, narrative, general conversation, and discussing how gentrification may impede or advance progress. As a result of my inquiries, I believe, with time, it is possible for many of these issues to be resolved if the community members of New Orleans come together with mutual respect, cultural understanding, and a willingness to listen without marginalization.

New Orleans has a great deal to offer. Almost everywhere you go you can find someone playing music somewhere; the food is said to be world renowned; people greeting you on the street is customary; and there are parades for just about everything. Yet, post-Katrina New Orleans, crime is on the rise, housing costs are up, lots of neighborhoods are food deserts, healthcare services (especially Planned Parenthood) are limited, education is steadily declining, the cost of utilities in the city is rising, and marginalization is increasing. As a result of many of these changes, most of the people who perform the service industry jobs in New Orleans are being forced to live outside of the city they work in. While these are developments common to many US American cities, one might question why any of this makes New Orleans and Tremé different from any other community facing gentrification? What was Tremé before gentrification and why are these changes worthy of discussion? When I originally began my research on Tremé I looked at the changes the neighborhood was facing and was disheartened by what I was seeing, but had yet to make the connection of the impact of Hurricane Katrina in relation to the gentrification of Tremé. It was upon discovering how much former members of the neighborhood had contributed to politics and social movements, such as, fighting the Separate Car Act and buying church pews for slaves, that I began to try and figure out what Tremé had truly been and what it was becoming. In the article "New Orleans' Treme neighborhood turns 200" by Claude Johnson and Stacey Plainance, Toni Rice, spokeswoman for a neighborhood group, said "All things sacred to New Orleans bubbled up from that neighborhood, because Treme had such a mixture of people and cultures...It wasn't just slaves. It wasn't all white or all black. It was German, Spanish, Haitian, Italian" (1).

## A History of Tremé and Contributions to Civil Rights

Claude Tremé was a model hat maker and real estate agent. He came from France and settled in New Orleans in 1783. He married Julie Moreau and as laws of the time allowed when women married, he “inherited the land from his wife’s family, began to subdivide and sell off plots of land in the late 1700s. New Orleans, unlike other Southern cities at the time, was populated by free people of color, who quickly moved into the neighborhood...” (Jervis 1). The interesting thing about this is that while these freed slaves were buying property in Tremé, New Orleans was a port that slaves passed through on their way to being bought and sold. These freed slaves mingled with slaves on a daily basis. The freed slaves purchased their goods from the enslaved in Congo Square in Tremé on Sundays and worshipped with them as well, most likely strengthening the enslaved populations desire and resolve to free themselves:

Tremé soon became a bastion of French-speaking, mixed-race plasterers, bricklayers, cigar makers, sculptors, writers and intellectuals...Tremé residents in 1845 published *Les Cenelles*, widely considered the first anthology of black poetry in the USA and the *Tribune*, one of the first black daily newspapers in the country. (Jervis 1-2)

In the early years of Tremé, African-American residents worked together to form a community and build a solid foundation. They even purchased a church in the 1800s. Naming it St. Augustine Catholic Church, they established the oldest African-American Catholic parish in the United States.

Originally, the land and the building were purchased by Jeanine Marie Aliquot, a Frenchwoman, who turned it into a Catholic elementary school for free girls of color. Eventually, the school was sold to the Ursulines Sisters (nuns) who then sold it to the Carmelite Sisters in 1840 and it merged into a school for black and white girls. When they relocated, free people of color requested permission to build a church. The one condition attached to the \$10,000 sale was that the church be named after St. Angela Merci. For some reason this did not occur and the church was named St. Augustine. One of the interesting stories attached to this bit of history is that, being a mixed neighborhood, black families began buying pews for their families, when this occurred:

white people in the area started a campaign to buy more pews than the colored folks. Thus, The War of the Pews began and was ultimately won by the free people of color who bought three pews to every one purchased by the whites. In an unprecedented social, political and religious move, the colored members also bought all the pews of both side aisles. They gave

those pews to the slaves as their exclusive place of worship, a first in the history of slavery in the United States. (Staff 2)

It was another historical event in which blacks pushed forward to fight for rights. It is at this point that I, again, consider progress. Banneker wrote his letter to Jefferson in 1791. One of the things he wrote was:

Father hath given being to us all; and that he hath not only made us all of one flesh, but that he hath also, without partiality, afforded us all the same sensations and endowed us all with the same facilities; and that however variable we may be in society or religion, however diversified in situation or color, we are all of the same family, and stand in the same relation to him. Sir, if these are sentiments of which you are fully persuaded, I hope you cannot but acknowledge, that it is the indispensable duty of those, who maintain for themselves the human rights of nature, and who possess the obligations of Christianity, to extend their power and influence to the relief of every part of the human race, from whatever burden or oppression they may unjustly labor under... (1)

Yet, some fifty years later, some of the same battles and requests for equality were still being fought and the need to be understood and accepted still remained. So, in this instance, freed slaves in Tremé took the reins into their own hands and found the financial means to gain their own power. While I am still in awe at the success of their endeavor, I believe it was their collective effort that wrought a societal change allowing them to move forward in other endeavors of equality and progress (Staff).

Kant wrote, “Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority...This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another” (1). I do not believe that the people of Tremé lived in a “self-incurred minority,” but instead, an inflicted state of otherness. What I find so inspiring about what the people of Tremé accomplished during that time was their courage and fortitude. Perhaps because their history was so dark, their perception of their otherness, tinged with the fact that many of them may not have had our western mindset (based on where they came from), allowed them to have a requisite “resolution and courage” that comes from having been in such a place of oppression that you either fight or you die; emotionally or sometimes physically. My analysis may be somewhat dramatic, but I believe great adversity enables us to do things we might not normally do.

After the Civil War, Louisiana faced reconstruction. Having had a relatively liberal antebellum period the “Radical Reconstruction in Louisiana was an intense,

occasionally violent, contest between those who favored Radical Reconstruction policies and those who fought for white supremacy as the philosophy that would guide public policy in Louisiana” (Museum). The inception of these new laws, instituted “to control the behavior and actions of former slaves in the ‘free’ postwar society, Louisiana and other southern states enacted Black Codes, modeled on restrictions in force under slavery” (Museum), increased the marginalization of African-Americans.

In 1890, Louisiana passed a law which segregated public facilities (Gehman). This law included the Separate Car Act said to provide separate but equal seating on streetcars for whites and African-Americans. Homer Plessy, a resident of Tremé and shoemaker, was born “of mixed racial heritage. His family could pass for white and were considered ‘free people of color.’ Plessy thought of himself as 1/8 black since his great-grandmother was from Africa” (Britannica). In 1887, Plessy took up social activism and “served as vice president of the Justice, Protective, Educational and Social Club to reform New Orleans’ public education system” (Britannica). In 1892, Plessy, with the aid of the Comité des Citoyens or Citizen’s Committee, contested the law by purchasing a first-class ticket and sitting in the “whites only” section, stated his race, and refused to move. He was eventually removed from the train and arrested. “The Citizen’s Committee shunned violence, rather becoming active in the courts by initiating a series of legal cases to enforce civil rights guaranteed by Congress in the 1870s but often denied locally” (Gehman). The organization’s nonviolent mantra could be said to be the precursor for the nonviolent behavior deployed by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Working with Plessy, a black man who could pass for white, gave them just the platform they needed to take their case to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court decided against the case him 1896 ruling “that states had the right to maintain separate but equal public facilities for blacks and for whites [which]...ushered in a spate of Jim Crow laws throughout the South...” (Gehman 94). However, despite the loss, this case had far reaching implications for the Civil Rights Movement when the NAACP incorporated components from this case during “1954 in the historic and controversial Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*” (Spring 102), overturning the separate but equal ruling (Britannica).

Bellamy wrote, in his work of fiction, *Looking Backward*, “The other fact is yet more curious, consisting in a singular hallucination which those on the top of the coach generally shared, that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled at the rope, but of finer clay, in some way belonging to a higher order of beings...” (6). One might infer that fiction has no place here. I believe, in

this instance, it does. It is the context behind those words which should be considered. New Orleans was a melting pot with Tremé as an unusual community of people. “The ability to acquire, purchase and own real property during an era when America was still immersed in slavery was remarkable and only in New Orleans did this occur with any regularity or consistency” (New Orleans). But residents took it beyond owning a piece of land and fought to move beyond othering, upholding the principle of equality and taking, into their own hands, the course of their lives. Yet, in my opinion, history can be cyclical and in the years beyond slavery Tremé would face changes which would alter aspects of a once vibrant neighborhood and a group of people who fought for what they believed in.

### Times Change

In the 1960s, Interstate I-110 was constructed, running straight through the center of Tremé effectively cutting one half of the neighborhood from the other. I reside in Tremé and it was not until I had to locate a business in another section of the neighborhood that I realized there even was another part. It was during that walk that I began to understand why Tremé has the reputation for not being the best place to live. Crossing the interstate and walking into the other side of Tremé is, for me, like entering a different world. The side of Tremé that I live in is a diverse neighborhood a few short blocks away from the French Quarter surrounded by shops, parks, and museums. In thinking about this, I realized that the people I see on those neighborhood tours on a regular basis, will likely never see the other side of Tremé. To me, the other side of the neighborhood is not the safest place to wander. It, like so many other places here, still have not recovered from Hurricane Katrina. Many of the houses in that part of the neighborhood are boarded up, have fallen into total ruin, or need a tremendous amount of repair. Here, I did not see the diversity I am so used to and the feeling of poverty is palpable. I left the area with a heavy heart and the realization that I have a privilege here I had yet to recognize before my exploration.

In conjunction with the separation that the interstate highway imposed, the people of Tremé also faced the impact of the drug and crime epidemics that occurred in the 1980s. This, I believe, is when the neighborhood lost the sense of community it once had. It became an unsafe place to be for those who resided there along with anyone else. I have been told that white people avoided the area because a visit was sure to result in robbery or worse. The many that resided there and did not partake in crime remained not only because they lived in homes that had been in their families for generations, but because many of them did not have

the means to leave and/or were determined to hold on to the bit of community they might have once had. According to Jervis, it was not until Hurricane Katrina that many of the people who lived in the area left either of their own accord or were forced to leave because of the circumstances surrounding the storm. (Jervis)

### Hurricane Katrina Brings Change

In the early morning of August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. The storm had a category three rating and the winds reached upwards of 140 miles per hour. As devastating as the hurricane was, it was not the storm that did the most damage in New Orleans, it was the levee breaches. New Orleans is below sea level, some areas more than others, but when those particular levees broke, the area sustained damage and destruction that still impacts the city almost 11 years later, and, I believe, will continue to do so.

Some people left before the storm. Those who remained either lost their lives, were stranded in the Superdome, trapped on rooftops, or wherever else they could find shelter until they were evacuated or died. The conditions were beyond deplorable. When the evacuations did begin, there were thousands of people who never returned because they either did not want to or, could not. Many of those who did come back in the weeks and months that followed returned to homes that were uninhabitable. Rebuilding was slow and, according to a local tour guide, the areas that seemed to receive the most funding were the French Quarter and surrounding areas that were frequented by tourists and which had sustained comparatively little damage. Other areas, such as the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, still have entire sections which have not been repaired (H. Staff).

People came from all over the world to assist in the rebuilding. They came with the best of intentions. Some, so moved by what they saw and experienced, remained. Yet, I have heard people who discuss seeing “bunches of white people” with New York, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, etc., license plates who were riding through some of the neighborhoods looking for abandoned property they could buy on the cheap. There is no way to know for sure if this was actually what people were doing, but the upsurge in the sale of houses would seem to indicate a modicum of legitimacy.

During all that transpired in the aftermath of Katrina as well as the number of people who had to leave the area and did not return, there are many who seem to have forgotten that the situation in which the people of New Orleans found themselves and the onslaught of gentrification is not just due to the hurricane itself. There is a portion of this turmoil that was man-made when the levees were breached. I believe that if Louisiana had only Hurricane Katrina to contend with,

things would have progressed differently. New Orleans would have probably undergone a time-period of recovery and the damage from the storm would have been repaired. Many of those who left for the duration of the storm would have returned and the city would have gone back to being “A place like no other.” Yet, that is not what transpired. Many transplants came and stayed, many came and conquered, but in the process those who had made New Orleans and Tremé what it once was were gone, along with their culture. In her article, “Gentrification’s Ground Zero”, Megan French-Marcelin wrote:

Long before the floodwaters had receded, any chance of progressive reconstruction—rebuilding as a restorative public works program aimed at meaningful redistribution—was stamped out by policy wonks and TV commentators, liberal city council members, feisty NGOs, speculative real-estate developers, and boutique hotel owners.” (2)

What was left, seems to have become a shell, changing with the influx of transplants and their money.

### Gentrification and Tremé

As mentioned earlier, the part of Tremé in which I reside is quite close to the French Quarter. It is a bustling area with plenty to do and see, even if you have been here for a while. It is a trendy little area with a coffee shop, a community center, and a jazz and cultural museum. My neighbors are friendly and chat with each other from time to time, but some of that “neighborhood feel,” generated by people sitting out on their stoops watching people come and go is waning. In the short seven months that I have been here the faces of my neighbors are beginning to change with some regularity, there is less diversity, and many more transplants (including myself). When a property goes on the market, it can sell in a matter of days and is immediately gutted so that any vestiges of its past are gone and bright cottage colors reminiscent of the gingerbread houses on Martha’s Vineyard adorn the outside, instead of some of the deep rich colors I generally see.

There are some families that are holding on, but there is wariness in their eyes and when there has been discussion about the changes within the neighborhood, I have heard the old residents say “We don’t know these people!” There does not seem to be a connection between the old residents and the new. Long term residents are used to family and even when they do sell their property, many times it is to a family member because “keeping it in the family” is very important here. Of those who have sold outside their family, it has been because of great financial need. Oftentimes, when a home was sold to someone who was

not a family member, they witnessed that it was promptly put back on the market and sold to a transplant for almost double the price. This practice has left the neighborhood struggling to retain some semblance of community in what looks to be a losing battle.

To bridge this gap, community organizations such as the Backstreet Cultural Museum and members of Jazz in the Park are working together. In 2015, the first Tremé Festival was held to bring members of the community and surrounding areas together. There was song and dance, and they opened up St. Augustine Church and provided tours for many of the newcomers in the neighborhood so they could really learn about the history of Tremé. It was a gathering to get people on committees and share backgrounds. Jazz in the Park is held on Thursdays and is a family-oriented event with music, a farmers' market, and activities for children. There are always people on hand to discuss ways in which those who attend can become active in the community with one of the main goals being the discussion of the history and culture of the area.

### Where Has Our Culture Gone?

As previously written, Tremé is a place that was filled with a distinct culture which is now eroding. With the transplants come lofty ideals that in some ways make a mockery of old traditions by putting a subtle twist on them. French-Marcelin, who is a twentieth-century historian of urban policy and planning, wrote:

In the years after Hurricane Katrina, cultural commodification has been extended to the business of rebuilding and preserving the city's unique customs. Transplant communities, exemplified most conspicuously by Solange Knowles (Beyoncé's younger sister), have effectively taken up the mantle of a grassroots cultural reclamation: renovating historic shotguns, opening stores with local wares, and engaging the tradition of second lines for private events. (4)

These events, these trends of usurpation, are not particular to Tremé or to New Orleans in the way they are being presented and they are not being met with open arms.

One of the things that I see happening as a result of gentrification and cultural change is that many of the long-term are closing ranks to preserve whatever they can of their culture. When I moved here it was pointed out to me that much of what transpires among the locals is handled by word of mouth. I found this out because there were a number of times that I was searching for something and could only find the most cursory bits of information. When I

finally asked someone why I was told “That’s just how it’s done here.”

Transplants, such as myself, are accustomed to finding out about what is going on by using the internet. It is just the way we think things work. Here, if a local is looking for an apartment, she is relying on word of mouth and those she knows. If something is being sold, it is not advertised in the paper or online, it is offered by word of mouth. It is the transplants who want it online, at their fingertips, and do not have the time to ask around. For employment, you have to know someone who knows someone. “Who are your people? Are they here? How long have they been here? How long have you been here? I knew you didn’t come from here” While I initially found this somewhat surprising I have come to realize that it is one of the ways local people are trying to maintain what little control they still have over their neighborhood.

While the local people try to keep things “in house,” the transplants are coming to either work in the new University Medical Center or they are entrepreneurs who arrive with wads of cash and a view of success which includes being a busy, productive member of society and a “hurry up and wait’ mentality. Someone recently told me that visiting somewhere is far different than living there and they were, of course, right. Some of the newcomers have a difficult time taking that philosophy into account. When you are on vacation, you have a different perspective than when you live in a place. You may not mind the wait, that people are moving slowly, that there is music in most of the places you go, that people are trying to hustle you for a couple of dollars, that the homeless approach you not only for money, but for your leftovers. When you live there, many of the same things you did not mind before becoming an issue. Second lines (brass band parades) are not viewed with the same fondness when those same parades are going past your house “making all that noise.” You do not have time to leisurely wait while the cashier catches up with someone while you are waiting in line and you get sick of people “hustling” you because they are trying to make, in your estimation, a “fast buck.” After all, good money was paid for the piece of property you own, and you do not need to get to know your neighbors other than making sure they keep up the property.

Ultimately, there is a clash between the old and the new, north and south. For example, a story in The Times-Picayune recounted that on: Monday, at about 8 p.m., nearly 20 police cars swarmed to a Treme corner, breaking up a memorial procession and taking away two well-known neighborhood musicians in handcuffs. The brothers...were in a group of two dozen musicians playing a spontaneous parade for tuba player Kerwin James, who died last week of complications from a stroke he had suffered after Hurricane

Katrina. The confrontation spurred cries in the neighborhood about the over-reaction and disproportionate enforcement by police, who often turned a blind eye to the traditional memorial ceremonies. Still others say the incident is a sign of greater attack on the cultural history of the old city neighborhood by well-heeled newcomers attracted to Treme by the very history they seem to threaten (Reckdahl 1).

Funerals here are often followed by second lines because, in contrast to the somber traditional funerals many are used to, traditionally it is a time of celebration here. I have seen many second lines after a funeral here because there is a funeral home near my residence. I have even seen a coffin taken from a hearse, carried on to the family member's porch, and actually danced on before proceeding to the funeral home. It is nothing new here. Sometimes the procession may be comprised of a hundred people, but people, heretofore, were respectful. Cars caught in the procession would wait, there would be no honking. It was accepted as something that just was, something that needed to be done to honor the dead. There are times now when others do not see it that way, they see it as an encroachment and no longer care to accept or understand the culture or tradition.

This was the case when the brothers were arrested during the second line procession. Now, there is no spontaneity on this side of Tremé. You must procure a permit. "They want to live in Treme, but they want it for their ways of living." 'Curry said.' For newly arrived neighbors, Curry sometimes serves as a cultural interpreter. But to those neighbors dismayed by the noise or the crowds that come along with those brands, Curry is stern. "I say, 'You found us doing this—this is our way'" (Reckdahl 2). No matter, the newcomers win: cross that interstate and you must have a permit or face arrest if an irate neighbor calls the police. To them, this is not a necessity and like many other traditions viewed as something "other," it should be wiped out. To me, it becomes a cultural genocide; a dismantling of a culture that is foreign to the newcomers. Yet, if the housing and rental costs continue to rise and more of my long-standing neighbors are forced out of the area it may become a moot point.

### Climbing Rents and Home Prices.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina there were quite a few public housing units dispersed throughout the community, now, those units are gone. "In the months that followed, many of the city's poorest families got even more bad news: The public housing units they called home would be knocked down, even if undamaged by the storm...The goal was to deconcentrate poverty and give lower-income residents a better place to live" (Fessler 2). There were many people who

were not pleased with this because most would be lumped into one area away from their known neighborhoods. The new units were built anyway. As Fessler underscores, “At the time of Katrina, more than 5,000 families lived in public housing; today [2015], there are only 1,900. Other poor families have relocated to places like Houston and Atlanta or moved elsewhere within New Orleans” (Fessler 2). Many of the residents who reside in these aesthetically appealing units state that while the units are nice, safer, and offer some amenities their former units did not (pools and up-to-date kitchens). It is also adjacent to Walmart. “It’s hard to explain,” ‘Jennings says.’ “There’s something missing, and you miss it every day. You miss your neighbors for one. Like we used to sit on the steps and conversate with our neighbors, and it’s not like that anymore” (Fessler 4-5). There are also new rules that prohibit or restrict gardens, parties, etc. In some ways, looking at it from the outside it is hard not to find the idea of greater safety and less drugs a better scenario, but my culture is different. When you’ve lost your sense of community after having lost so much already, I can understand why some people would not like it.

Out of curiosity I visited one of the new apartment complexes that have gone up in the area. A two bedroom begins at \$2,400 and goes up to \$2,650. The penthouse rents for \$6,500 per month. It has some nice amenities, plenty of restaurants, and an upscale grocery store right next to it. While I thought it was a very nice place, I could not help but think about what a person would have to make to live there, and the woman who was assisting me was quick to provide the answer. A person must make approximately \$90,000 per year for a two bedroom. The local minimum wage here is \$7.50 cents per hour, most people make approximately \$8 to \$10 per hour! “Before Katrina it was possible for people to find housing they could afford, and that’s become virtually impossible for people finding housing in the city” (Woodward 2). The information on the apartment complex helps to explain why. In fact, rents have gone up by over 81 percent since Hurricane Katrina and housing costs have gone up by 46 percent.

Sayre states that “The average house sold for \$339,743 in New Orleans in the first half of this year, which amounted to an average of \$166 per square foot – up from \$114 per square foot just before the storm and \$151 per square foot last year. That’s up 46 percent since 2005, or an average yearly gain of about 4.6 percent” (2). Couple this with the fact that many of the new homeowners are evicting tenants or raising rents after buying units and making repairs or moving them out to use units as Airbnb and you have even more displaced people. Many of those making lower wages and are forced to live on the outer edges of town,

facing, in many instances, an unreliable transit system to get them to and from work if they do not have a car.

### Starbucks and Consequences

Another common thing that is lost in the process of gentrification is the local store. For the most part, the French Quarter is made up of locally owned shops and restaurants. In a tourist environment people expect that. They want to stroll down the streets popping in and out of one cutesy place after another. I think many of us like these types of shop when we are on vacation. Yet, this is changing. The French Quarter and Magazine Street (a more upscale shopping area) have also become home to stores like Starbucks and Whole Foods. There is even a Trader Joe's. Some may consider this a step in the right direction; some locals do not. The interesting thing is that many locals, in a display of civic pride and cultural deference, do not just give up and say, "I can get a better deal at this chain store." It is a matter of principle and homage to their culture. So, many of the locals remain true to their community stores. There are a variety of reasons for this, which are inclusive of the fact one or more family members own or work in these stores, they live in a food desert and that corner grocery is sometimes the only place they can get to on a regular basis 'to make groceries,' and they want to keep it local because "their people been going there for years" and they are not going to give their money to some stranger even if they have to pay a bit more sometimes! The motto is "Keep it local."

Let me be clear, it is not the case that local people do not ever frequent stores like Starbucks or Whole Foods. But most of the time, it is seen as a matter of loyalty and duty to go to the local coffee shop, Rouses grocery store, the local hardware store. Why? Because each dollar spent outside of a community store puts it one step closer to closing. It is also a way for locals to express their disapproval of the gentrification taking place and they are fighting to keep more places like Trader Joes out! Yet, there are plenty of transplants who do not understand this, and they want convenience over local loyalty, and will pay more to get it.

### Conclusion

Overall, there is a difference between making a place your home versus making a place your own. Some may not see it that way. However, I believe that when you decide to relocate to a different state and arrive with the idea that you "own" not only your dwelling, but the city or town in general, that "they" should adapt their ideological beliefs to yours, not yours to theirs, you may be missing

something in the translation. Unfortunately, this seems to be part of the process with western assumptions about how things should be done: take no prisoners, ask no questions later because you do not need to.

Some people may think that this is progress. I would have to disagree because with the supposed benefit of gentrification has come further marginalization of a group of people that were already oppressed. In fact, considering some of the tenets of intersectionality, Tremé is a perfect example of why this concept cannot be examined separately. It is a community where oppression is an everyday occurrence that hides behind no false pretenses, but is instead displayed with intolerance of difference and disdain.

Am I part of the problem or will I be part of the solution? Will the education that I am pursuing provide me with more of the tools I will need to be effective in any way here? I believe it will, but in order to do so I must be vigilant in my exploration, what I hold to memory, what I learn, what I impart from what I learn, and how I use it.

In “Souls of White Folk” Du Bois wrote:

But when the black man begins to dispute the white man’s title to certain bequests of the Fathers in wage and position, authority and training; and when his attitude toward charity is sullen anger rather than humble jollity; when he insists on human right to swagger and swear and waste – then the spell is suddenly broken and the philanthropist is ready to believe that Negroes are impudent... (24)

In a conversation with a recent transplant, I got a hint of this sentiment when the person said, “I don’t understand why they don’t like us! I mean, after all, we’re making things better for them. We’re cleaning up the neighborhood and making it safer. They should be thanking us. They should be grateful!” I still have no idea how I should have responded to this. In fact, I was so stunned that while I know I did reply along the lines of inquiry, asking why people should be thankful for the cleanup of a neighborhood they have been displaced from, I could not find the words to express the measure of my disbelief. I also knew that was one more facet in the notion of paternalistic guidance that western assumptions bring with it; the sense that the marginalized should not only be accepting of the so-called hand being offered to them, but should welcome and learn from it by ‘seeing’ the benefits of the hand being offered. Very rarely does it seem to be seen as oppression, but instead, as the missive “We are bringing you the light!”

What are the detrimental consequences of patriarchal views like that? By the same token, what are the detrimental consequences of simply closing ranks and shutting yourself off? In order for something positive to come out of

gentrification, in order for there to be progress people must work together. Since there seem to be two sides to the community, what may be necessary is a collaborative effort versus a community effort. If the two groups remain separate and not collective, in fact, if a collaborative effort does not occur and remains community based, moving beyond Tremé and into the city-at-large, continuing to divide and conquer other neighborhoods, then I believe the heart and soul of New Orleans will be gone. However, if the two groups can find common ground and work together to create a mutual dialogue there just may be the chance to move with common purpose toward collective progress.

---

### Works Cited

- Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1996.
- Britannica, Encyclopedia. "Plessy v. Ferguson." 2016. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. <http://www.britannica.com/event/Plessy-v-Ferguson>. 9 May 2016.
- DuBois, W.E.B. "The Souls of White Folks." *Darkwater*. Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil. New York: Dover, 1999. 23-37.
- Fessler, Pam. "After Katrina, New Orleans' Public Housing Is A Mix of Pastel and Promises." NPR, 17 August 2015. npr. <http://www.npr.org/2015/08/17/431267040/after-katrina-new-orleans-public-housing-is-a-mix-of-pastel-and-promises>. 28 November 2015.
- French-Marcelin, Megan. "Gentrification's Ground Zero." *Jacobin* (2015): 1-10.
- Gehman, Mary. *The Free People of Color of New Orleans: An Introduction*. Marrero: Margaret Media, Inc., 2014. Book.
- Jervis, Rick. "New Orleans neighborhood boasts rich history." *USATODAY*. *USATODAY.com*, 2 February 2012. Web.
- Johnson, Chevel and Stacey Plaisance. "New Orleans' Treme neighborhood turns 200." *Associated Press* (2013): 1-6.
- Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Mary j. Gregory, Trans. *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 1-7. Book.
- Museum, State of Louisiana. "Reconstruction I: A State Divided." 2016. Louisiana State Museum Online Exhibits *The Cabildo: Two Centuries of Louisiana History*. 14 July 2017.

New Orleans, Online. "Treme Neighborhood in New Orleans." 2015. Treme: America's Oldest African American Neighborhood. 25 February 2016.

PBS. "Banneker's letter to Jefferson." n.d. Africans in America. 2 February 2016.

Reckdahl, Katy. "Culture, Change Collide in Treme." The Times-Picayune [New Orleans] 2 October 2007: 1-4. Web.

Sayre, Katherine. "New Orleans home prices up 46 percent since Hurricane Katrina; suburbs more modest." The Times-Picayune 11 August 2015: 1-6. [http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2015/08/new\\_orleans\\_home\\_prices\\_up\\_46.html](http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2015/08/new_orleans_home_prices_up_46.html) .

Spring, Joel. Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004. Book.

Staff. "Summary of Church History." 2007. St. Augustine Catholic Church of New Orleans. 12 December 2015.

Staff, History.com. Hurricane Katrina. 7 March 2009. <<http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>>.

Woodward, Alex. "New Orleans one of the worst U.S. cities for renters." 30 March 2015. [www.bestofneworleans.com:Gambit](http://www.bestofneworleans.com:Gambit). Web. 12 December 2015.

