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POLITICS

FEATURE: NEW ORLEANS TRADE ROUTES: PATH TO RICHES, PATH TO FREEDOM

By The Establishment May 8, 2015 81 Picks



The trade route between New Orleans, Tampico and Veracruz, Mexico and the Caribbean (mainly Havana , Cuba and Port au Prince, Haiti) was a conduit for slaves, goods and services, beginning in the 1500s. Free black entrepreneurs like my ancestors

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news of revolt and resistance that informed and inspired other blacks. This trade route moved refugees from Caribbean wars of independence. And it carried free people of color who sought opportunities beyond the increasingly racist U.S.

By Nick Douglas, AFROPUNK Contributor

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In 1804 Haiti won its independence from France. More than 10,000 refugees fled Haiti, with many ending up in Jamaica and near present day Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. In 1808 the Spanish there, angry about Napoleon's invasion of Spain, forced nearly all these French-speaking refugees to leave Cuba. By 1810 nearly 8,000 of these refugees had reached New Orleans. Of the refugees that ended up in New Orleans, nearly 5,000 were free people of color and slaves.

Recent white immigrants to New Orleans had no experience with the unique society that was already established there. They were alarmed at being outnumbered by slaves and free people of color, many of whom had just witnessed the Haitian Revolution. White lawmakers began to impose racist Americanized policies upon the French- and Spanish-influenced culture of

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In 1807, before New Orleans became a state, a law was passed that no slave under 30 could be freed.

Between 1812 and 1825 free people of color had to register at the mayor's office upon entering New Orleans. Their freedom could be revoked if they were not able to provide proof of freedom and residency upon demand.

After 1825 any slave who was manumitted in Louisiana had to leave the state within 60 days.

Creoles and free people of color used to liberal manumission laws and a variety of other freedoms began leaving New Orleans. Some, like my relatives, moved or returned to France in the 1820s.

In 1830 legislation was passed that all free people of color who entered the state after 1825 had to leave within 60 days or face imprisonment. The appearance of David Walker's Appeal and the Nat Turner Rebellion sent the South into a panic.

In 1831 those who freed slaves in New Orleans needed to post a bond to guarantee the freed slaves would leave the state.

In 1834 a New Orleans ordinance required free black sailors be imprisoned while their ships were in port. In reaction, free black sailors refused to work aboard ships bound for New Orleans, fearing they would be kidnapped and

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blacks.

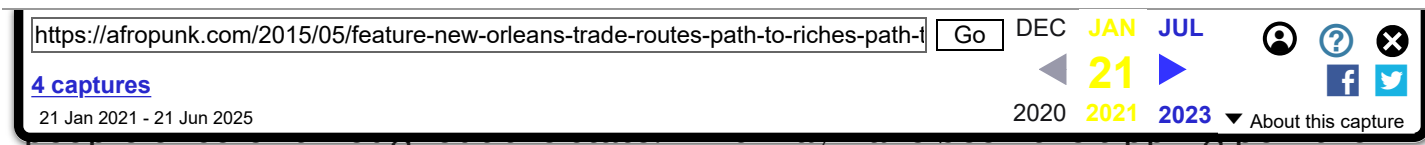
In the 1830s some New Orleans Creoles and free people of color—using their connections to Mexico dating back to the Spanish control of Louisiana—moved to Mexico.

In 1840 Mississippi forced all free people of color to leave the state. In 1842 freeing slaves became illegal there.

In 1853 Mexico's Benito Juarez had been forced into exile because of his opposition to the corrupt military dictatorship of Antonio Santa Anna and his administration's treatment of indigenous people. He came to New Orleans, where he lived among free people of color and supported himself by rolling cigars. Juarez must have noticed the similarities between the plight of New Orleans' free people of color and slaves and the situation of Mexico's mestizos and indigenous people. He returned and in 1858 became President of Mexico. He may have left an open invitation to his New Orleans neighbors to come and settle in Mexico, where slavery had been outlawed since 1829.

In 1857 it became illegal to free slaves in Louisiana.

In 1859 the Louisiana legislature considered a bill to require free people of color to have white "sponsors." Legislation was also introduced to confiscate



free people of color who were on the fence about leaving the U.S.

Many free black and Creoles would return to Haiti in the late 1859. Many former refugees had kept contact with Haitian relatives since the Haitian Revolution. Other had kept or formed business contacts that they used to help transition out of the increasing racism of the pre-Civil War South.

Under these worsening conditions, New Orleans' free people of color sought a way out along the centuries- old trade route. In 1857 New Orleans businessman Nelson Fouche began negotiating with the Mexican government to establish an agricultural cooperative on a land grant near Veracruz, Mexico. He began to sell shares to free people of color in the Cofradia (the Spanish name for the cooperative), later named the Eureka Colony. In 1859 and 1860 Creoles and free blacks began leaving in earnest for the Eureka Colony: more than a hundred families would leave New Orleans for Mexico.

The political situation in Mexico at the time of the Eureka Colony was chaotic. From 1858 to 1860 Benito Juarez led the War of Reform, in which mestizos (of Spanish and Indian heritage) and indigenous Indians fought to break the monopoly on power held by Spanish Creoles (born in Mexico of Spanish heritage).

In 1862 the French Army occupied the port of Veracruz and tried to install

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the Mexican citizenry may have soured.

On November 3, 1862, a suspicious fire burned up a large portion of the Eureka Colony and forced the some of the colonists to leave for the city of Tampico. During this time groups of roving bandits used violence to extort money and food from the Mexican peasantry. Perhaps members of the Eureka Colony, fed up with intimidation and thuggery even before they left Louisiana, had an ill-fated encounter with one or more of these bands. It may not have been accidental that fire nearly destroyed their settlement.

The fire and the chaotic situation in Mexico broke up the Eureka Colony. Some colonists returned to New Orleans. Many colonists stayed and had families with Mexican citizens. Many descendants of those original colonists live in Mexico today near Tampico and Veracruz, including my cousins.

The Eureka Colony is a part of American history that needs to be told. The colonists did not let slavery and racism dictate where and how they lived. They travelled the trade route from New Orleans, actively seeking to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

My ancestors' journey to Mexico would also lead to the birth of jazz in New Orleans, a story I detail in my book Finding Octave: The Untold Story of Two Creole Families and Slavery in Louisiana. Available on amazon.com

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