

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

JAN 11 2018

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945–1960

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

African American Public Education in New Orleans, Louisiana, 1718–1960

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D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

Kristen P. Anderson

Signature of certifying official

Deputy SHPO

Title

December 18, 2017

Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

James Salbert

Signature of the Keeper

For

2-21-2018

Date of Action

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Conversion and Consolidation Era of Public Schools in Orleans Parish, 1945–1960
Name of Multiple Property Listing

New Orleans, Louisiana
State

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Create a Table of Contents and list the page numbers for each of these sections in the space below.

Provide narrative explanations for each of these sections on continuation sheets. In the header of each section, cite the letter, page number, and name of the multiple property listing. Refer to *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* for additional guidance.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

This Multiple Property Documentation Form is a listing of public schools in Orleans Parish associated with the Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945–1960, and includes one historic context, African American Public Education in New Orleans, Louisiana, 1718–1960. The educational facilities included in this listing were identified as part of research efforts conducted by Clio Associates LLC to investigate the potential historic significance of one of these schools, Alfred C. Priestley Junior High School at 1601 Leonidas Street (formerly 1619 Leonidas Street). The buildings are located in various residential neighborhoods in New Orleans so that a contiguous National Register district is not feasible.

This multiple property documentation form identifies one property type, School Buildings, with two subtypes, Primary and Secondary Schools, which are significantly associated with the context. The context serves to describe and identify the different types of public educational facilities associated with African American residents in New Orleans. The property type and subtypes are derived from the Data Categories for Functions and Uses utilized by the National Register Registration Form. The context statement outlines general historic developments related to the theme. The discussion of property types includes a description of physical characteristics, an evaluation of significance, and registration requirements for the property type and subtypes. The schools included in this multiple property group are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. New Orleans Public Schools Included in this Submission

No.	Building Name	Address	Date of original building	Original name	Date of Conversion
1	Clark Annex	2111 Dumaine Street	1913	Benjamin Franklin High School	1947
2	Joseph Clark High School	1817 Bayou Road	1922-23	Edward White School	1949
3	Myrtle Banks School	1307 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.	1910-11	Robert C. Davey/McDonogh No. 38 School	1952
4	Samuel J. Green Junior High School	2319 Valence Street	1929-30	Edwin T. Merrick School	1952
5	Alfred C. Priestley Junior High School	1601 Leonidas Street	1938	Walter C. Flower School	1953

Historic Context: African American Public Education in New Orleans, Louisiana, 1718–1960

(This context summarizes and builds upon information provided in two historic contexts prepared for the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation by Laura Ewen Blokker in 2012, “Education in Louisiana” and “The African American Experience in Louisiana.” Additional sources are individually cited.)

The history of education in New Orleans, and in particular African American public education, is a story of highs and lows. At some points in the city’s history, New Orleans public schools were leaders of racial progress. In the colonial period, for example, enslaved African American girls were among the first people to receive a formal education, and in 1871 New Orleans’s school system became the first in the South and one of just a handful in the nation to racially integrate. At other times, they represented the worst kind of institutional failure, the most egregious of which is the Jim Crow era of school segregation.

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African American Education in the Colonial Period, 1718–1811

Prior to the initiation of a government-funded public education system in 1811, educational opportunities in New Orleans were limited to whatever level of schooling was provided by religious organizations (primarily Catholic), private academies or tutors, and alternative sources such as apprenticeships. The first school in the colony was established in 1725 by the Capuchins and was open to all male children in the colony, including African Americans. The Ursuline nuns, who arrived in the colony in 1727, established a school that was open to girls of all colors. There, Native American and African American students were instructed for two hours per day in reading, writing, sewing, fabric making, silkworm care, and religion, while French and white Creole girls were taught for four hours per day. The Capuchin and Ursuline schools established the state's strong tradition of Catholic education, but, in some sense, they were the first public schools in New Orleans in that they were open to all, regardless of color, creed, or class. Apprenticeships were another option available to enslaved African Americans, during which they were taught the basics of reading and writing in accordance with Spanish Colonial laws (1763–1802).

Educational Opportunities for Black New Orleanians in the Antebellum and Civil War Periods, 1803–1865

The concept of government-funded education was first introduced in Louisiana with the Americans, who arrived in the state following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Louisiana's first appointed American governor, Virginia native William C. C. Claiborne, made public education a focus of his political career. In 1811, after several failed attempts, he successfully secured enough funds from the state legislature to establish the College of Orleans and twelve parish schools throughout the state. These early state-supported schools were required by law to accept 50 indigent students per year, including African Americans, and accepted tuition from others in the manner of private schools.

These new American-style schools faced resistance from the city's French-speaking Creole population, who resented the idea that the newcomers saw them as immigrants in need of "Americanization."¹ Many of these Creoles were well-to-do free people of color, who educated their children in the same manner as their white peers; they attended private or Catholic schools or received private instruction. Most Creole schools were bilingual, and Creole children, including black Creoles, were often sent abroad to study in France. The animosity between the Americans and Creoles was the source of many years of quarreling during the first half of the 19th century, souring several attempts to compromise on how state-funded schooling should be run.

Educational opportunities for African Americans declined significantly in the 1830s and 1840s, with a cultural shift in attitudes towards the city's enslaved population in particular. In 1830, the state made it illegal to teach any slave to read or write. New Orleans's Catholic schools became segregated during this period. In 1836, the city's free black population paid an estimated \$2.4 million in property taxes and yet, when the modern public school system was established in 1841, it excluded African Americans altogether.

In 1847, the first school organized and run by African Americans was established through the initiation of Marie Justine Cirnaire Couvent, a former slave and slave owner who recognized the need for a free school for black children. The *Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents* was established in 1847 and opened in 1848 in temporary quarters in Faubourg Marigny. Its misleading name, which implies a religious and charitable focus, was chosen to make the school sound less threatening to those who opposed African American education. When its permanent building was completed in 1852, it was likely the first school completed solely for the education of African Americans in Louisiana. The Couvent school's teachers and former students would go on to become

¹ Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1991), 9.

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leaders in the post-Civil War efforts to create an integrated public school system open to all.² Today, no buildings associated with the Couvent School remain.

There were also several religious-based schools open to black New Orleanians during the antebellum period, including those of the Order of the Sisters of the Holy Family, whose primary mission was education. The order was established in 1842 by two free women of color, Henriette DeLille and Juliette Gaudin.

Some real progress was made in the education of former slaves during the Civil War (1862–1865). In 1864, seven or eight free schools for African Americans were in operation in New Orleans, in large part the result of the well-publicized demands of New Orleans' free black leaders for the right to public education. Their calls had been scorned by Louisiana's Commanding General Nathaniel Banks, the Union officer who succeeded General Benjamin Butler, but the issue soon gained national attention, and political scrutiny from Northern abolitionists and Republicans forced General Banks to change his tune. He set up a separate Board of Education for the purpose, and by the end of the war in 1865, approximately one half of the city's black children were receiving a public education.³ These wartime schools were housed in any type of available building, such as houses, former white schools, and churches, and were often substandard in quality, although one school was established in one of the fine Greek Revival buildings of the University of Louisiana in New Orleans.

Reconstruction and the Integration of Public Schools, 1867–1877

Building on President Abraham Lincoln's wartime reconstruction efforts, which were aimed at reintroducing states to the Union and reorganizing the South's political and economic systems, President Andrew Johnson's congressional Reconstruction efforts (also known as Radical Reconstruction) began in 1867 and marked a period of tremendous advancement toward racial equality. These steps forward were tempered, however, by violent efforts to suppress African American rights, particularly in politics.

Article 135 of the new Louisiana state constitution, ratified in 1868, required public education for all children, regardless of race, and prohibited school segregation. The new law represented an important step forward for black education, but it was not readily accepted by racist whites. There was a deep-seated resistance to the idea of providing blacks with an education, especially one that relied on taxes for financial support, and numerous lawsuits and injunctions were filed by city officials to delay the state's mandate. Nevertheless, integration took place in 1870, at which time African American students were free to attend any school to which they applied. It was the first school system in the South to integrate. Of the three public high schools in New Orleans, two were desegregated in the Reconstruction era, allowing many African Americans to pursue a secondary education for the first time.

In 1850, wealthy white philanthropist John McDonogh bequeathed funds to the City of New Orleans to finance the construction of schools for both white and free black children. In the 1850s, the funds were used to build four schools for whites, but it was not until Reconstruction that the black population benefited from McDonogh's generosity (although this was allegedly due only to a discovered surplus of funds). McDonogh No. 6, designed by architect William Freret, opened in 1875 on Camp Street in Uptown New Orleans. Constructed of brick and designed to the standards of the day, it was the first publicly funded school of quality to be built specifically for African American students in Louisiana and continues to operate as a school today. McDonogh No. 5 in Algiers, a wood-frame building, was the second of the two McDonogh schools constructed during this period (demolished).

Separate and Unequal, 1877–1945

² Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 42.

³ Devore and Logsdon, 55-57.

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The Reconstruction era, and the educational advances for black New Orleanians that it provided, was short lived. With the election of Democrat Rutherford B. Hayes to presidential office in 1876, the subsequent withdrawal of federal troops from Louisiana, and the return of Democrats to state power, the achievements of the school system up to that point unraveled, and educational opportunities for African Americans in New Orleans became even more restricted than they had been prior to the Civil War.⁴ This politically sanctioned disenfranchisement would last for nearly a century.

In 1879, less than ten years after it was implemented, the state constitution was amended to remove its integration requirements. Severe tax cuts in the late 1870s and 1880s drastically impacted the state's public schools, leading to the closure of those in New Orleans for several months in 1883. This period, according to preeminent scholars on New Orleans public schools Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon, "was a humiliating and sad spectacle for an urban system once ranked among the nation's best."⁵

The nadir of African American education came at the end of the 19th century with the state's new 1898 constitution, which incorporated the "separate but equal" concept of Jim Crow law in its mandate of school segregation. Blacks lost the right to vote, which meant that they lost all control over their children's public education, and all black citizens were lumped together as one race regardless of racial background. This disregard for the many subtle shades of racial identity that had long characterized New Orleans's population was particularly devastating for black Creoles, who had lived for generations as a distinct racial class that enjoyed many of the same privileges as their white peers.

From 1898 until 1960, when schools were finally integrated for the second time, black New Orleanians endured horrendous inequities that stunted every aspect of their lives. Among these was severely limited access to public education, and the few opportunities that did exist were consistently unequal to those available to whites. In 1881, the school board eliminated black education beyond the fifth grade (the grades were gradually reinstated between 1910 and 1920). Black students were taught in cheap wood-frame buildings or old converted residences that were small, ill maintained, and inadequately ventilated, while the school board spent thousands on new modern brick schools for white students.⁶ If a quality school building was constructed for black students, the white community protested and frequently succeeded in reassigning it for white use. This was the case for McDonogh No. 6, one of the two McDonogh schools built for African Americans during Reconstruction. In 1888, white protest led to its reassignment as a white school. This change was brief, however; the resulting uproar from the black community, then still able to vote, resulted in the school's reversion to black use, and also led to the construction of another wood-frame McDonogh school, McDonogh No. 24, in Carrollton.⁷

In 1910, there were 68 white schools and only 16 black schools in operation in New Orleans; statewide, white schools were valued at over \$6 million, black schools at just \$250,000. A decade later, despite the construction of schools for both races, this ratio remained roughly the same. The few black schools that were built were inferior in size and design to white schools; a 1925 editorial in *Louisiana Weekly*, the local black newspaper, asked, "Why is it that every time a Negro school is built, we are forced to economize—conserve, et cetera—and build a make-shift structure inadequate for present needs and impossible for future necessities?"⁸ There was also a dramatic increase in black student enrollment between 1900 and 1945 (5,509 in 1901 vs. 27,787 in 1945), which was on track to exceed white enrollment by the 1950s.⁹ The increase in population, lack of facilities, and the

⁴ Devore and Logsdon, 76.

⁵ Ibid, 82.

⁶ Ibid, 183.

⁷ Ibid, 116.

⁸ *Louisiana Weekly*, October 3, 1925.

⁹ Orleans Parish School Board, "Conversion of Flower School," April 7, 1953. Orleans Parish School Board Archive, Special

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inadequacies of those facilities that existed, meant that black schools were chronically overcrowded, with student-teacher ratios often exceeding 45-1.¹⁰

The all-white school board attempted to address school overcrowding by constructing annexes or renting other buildings, such as churches, to use as temporary classrooms, but these efforts never proved adequate. The board then turned to a concept known as “platooning,” which simply restricted students in some areas to part-time days to allow more students to attend school in shifts. By 1923 the practice was widespread in black schools, with 5,396 black students platooned compared to only 192 white students.¹¹

While some secondary education was available through institutions such as Leland and Southern Universities, two of several black colleges organized during Reconstruction, there was no dedicated black high school in New Orleans until 1917, when the school board established McDonogh No. 35 in an old white school (demolished 1965).¹² The city did not provide a vocational high school for black students until 1942 when Booker T. Washington High School opened on South Roman Street.

The Slow March Toward Integration, 1945–1960

New Orleans’s population boomed after World War II, creating the largest student population in the city’s history. Census-based population estimates indicated that the number of black students enrolled in public school would exceed that of white students by the mid-1950s.¹³ With no new schools built since before the war, more black students were being platooned than ever before (over 10,000 in 1953), a fact that was particularly insulting when a number of white schools were operating well below capacity.¹⁴ The school board recognized that its pre-war problems of overcrowding and unequal school facilities would only worsen in light of these increases and would need to be addressed in some new way. The matter was further complicated by the distinct shift in race relations that manifested after the war. Both in New Orleans and elsewhere, according to Devore and Logsdon, “[d]emands by the black community for equality [after WWII] soon dispelled the postwar euphoria, forcing Americans to face anew the troubling questions of the meaning of democracy in America. And the Orleans Parish School Board became the first official body in the state [of Louisiana] to have to grapple with the changing spectrum of race relations.”¹⁵ The New Orleans chapter of the NAACP and other local black leaders emerged as a powerful voice during this period; they relentlessly pressured the school board to improve conditions through community engagement and, often, through legal means, which proved particularly persuasive. All of these factors—population growth, an increasingly influential and prominent black leadership, and an obviously “separate and unequal” school system—would create arguably the most turbulent and impactful period in the city’s history of education.

In 1946, the NAACP launched a series of equalization lawsuits against school boards around the country. In New Orleans, these efforts were led by branch president Daniel Byrd and attorney A. P. Turead, who filed their first equalization lawsuit against the Orleans Parish School Board in 1948. Although the NAACP’s ultimate goal was integration, most members acknowledged that equalization of the segregated systems was a more realistic short-term goal. It was also hoped that when funds were unavailable to provide two equal systems then integration would be inevitable.

Collections, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

¹⁰ Devore and Logsdon, 184-187.

¹¹ Ibid, 189.

¹² Ibid, 187.

¹³ Orleans Parish School Board, “Conversion of Flower School,” April 7, 1953.

¹⁴ Ibid; and Mary Lee Muller, *The Orleans Parish School Board and Negro Education, 1940-1960* (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, August 1975), 25.

¹⁵ Devore and Logsdon, 216.

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Superintendent Lionel J. Bourgeois, elected 1946, aggressively pursued a \$40 million building program that he knew “would prove adequate for white enrollment but would not provide enough classrooms for black students.”¹⁶ Bourgeois’s solution was to institute a program of consolidation and conversion, which consolidated underutilized white schools into fewer buildings and then converted those vacated white schools to black use. Indeed, while black schools were bursting at the seams, several white public schools were operating so below capacity that the school board could not economically justify keeping them open. In some instances, the pupil-teacher ratio at these schools was as low as 8 to 1. Whether this was due to a surplus of white schools, neighborhood population shifts, or a rising popularity of private and Catholic schools in the white community, the fact remains that many of the city’s white public school buildings were going to waste.¹⁷

While this type of conversion had occasionally taken place before the war based on changes in neighborhood demographics, Bourgeois’s post-war consolidation/conversion plan was unique. It was specifically designed to appease black leaders and avoid pending and future legal troubles by showing that the school board was making efforts to equalize facilities, a tactic he believed would render integration unnecessary.¹⁸

Tureaud and Byrd reluctantly agreed to support Bourgeois’s plan as long as the former white schools were “fit and sound.”¹⁹ The superintendent had significantly less success in the white community, which stood staunchly against the conversion of any of its schools. In several cases, a conversion meant that black students would be introduced into a neighborhood that was racially mixed or still predominantly white. The white community protested every proposed location, even those schools that were vacant or being utilized well under half capacity, and they did so despite Bourgeois’s explanations that if the board failed to equalize, “the courts could very well compel the board to admit black students into white schools.”²⁰ Although they were very much against integration, these white protestors felt it was the board’s duty to find another solution to its problem. They circulated petitions, expressed vocal opposition at public meetings, and filed lawsuits. Racism was clearly their motivation, but these protestors sometimes claimed that the issue had nothing to do with hatred of “coloreds”; one delegation argued with disingenuous concern that “they did not believe Negroes should be subjected to the criticism and embarrassment which would necessarily follow if they were to attend a school in a white neighborhood.”²¹ Another popular refrain involved the “inevitable” decrease in property values, and thus property taxes that would occur if a black school were to operate in their area.²²

In several instances the school board conceded to white resistance and a proposed conversion was cancelled; in at least one case, the board offered to cancel a conversion if the white community promised to support the board’s financial program.²³ In 1948, the state legislature passed a bill prohibiting the conversion of a school from white to black without the consent of 70 percent of the homeowners in the area. Although this act was soon ruled unconstitutional, it illustrates the level of opposition and tension surrounding Bourgeois’s program.

The situation escalated as black leaders angrily confronted the school board about caving to white pressure. In 1949, after only a few schools were successfully converted and the rest were cancelled, NAACP leader Daniel Byrd stated that “if the school board reacts to pressure and antagonism...then we are ready, and ready now, to

¹⁶ Devore and Logsdon, 221.

¹⁷ Muller, *The Orleans Parish School Board and Negro Education*, 18-19.

¹⁸ Devore and Logsdon, 221-225.

¹⁹ Ibid, 224.

²⁰ Ibid, 224.

²¹ Muller, 19-20.

²² Ibid.

²³ Muller, 15.

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start our antagonism and pressure.”²⁴ The same year, Byrd appeared again before the board to present an argument that would ultimately lead to the legal end of segregation nationwide in 1954: segregation, he said, was a violation of the equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution and, as such, school segregation was unconstitutional.²⁵ But the board was not swayed by his arguments and continued to push forward with its efforts at equalization.

In the early 1950s, black leaders were fed up with the board’s token improvements and abandoned its push for equalization to argue instead for full integration of all schools. These demands for desegregation “signified the beginning of a new era in the [African American] fight for equality.”²⁶ In 1951, Tureaud petitioned the board on behalf of a group of petitioners, asking

that the Orleans Parish School Board end at once the practice and custom of discriminating against Negro students solely on account of race and color and admit these Negro children...to the public schools of Orleans Parish which have heretofore and are now restricted to the enrollment of white children and from which Negro children are denied admission.²⁷

Two weeks later, the board responded with a written statement that such a “radical change of policy could not, at this time, serve the best interests of the system....[and] could result only in chaos and confusion and further, quite probably would cause a very serious worsening of race relationships in the community as a whole.”²⁸ Black leaders remained undeterred. The following year, Tureaud and the NAACP filed a federal lawsuit, *Earl Benjamin Bush et al v. Orleans Parish School Board*, to attack the illegality of segregation. Similar lawsuits were filed nationwide. At the school board’s next meeting, members voted to forward the suit to the state attorney general, and at the same meeting they also approved a recommendation to increase platooning at several black schools to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio and thereby remedy the problems that had caused the black community to file suit.²⁹ Somehow, the board did not realize that its egregious overuse of platooning was part of the problem.

In May 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its landmark ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*, which comprised several of the NAACP’s lawsuits. The *Brown* decision confirmed the organization’s long-standing argument that segregated schools were inherently unconstitutional, and the court thus required the desegregation of all schools nationwide. This decision was an enormous victory for Civil Rights activists and African American families everywhere. However, in Louisiana, the *Brown* ruling quickly revealed “the intransigency that would characterize the white South’s massive resistance” to integration.³⁰ The Orleans Parish School Board, with the unwavering support of the governor’s office and state legislature, would successfully delay integration for another six years.

After the contentious yet successful conversion of nine schools between 1947 and 1954, the school board changed its approach to equalization. The reason for this switch is unclear, but perhaps the intractable resistance the board faced with every potential conversion, coupled with the continued legal pressures from black leaders who were unsatisfied with the board’s meager efforts, signaled the need for change. Whatever the case, in his comprehensive 1952 report, *A Planning and Building Program for New Orleans Schools*, school board architect and planner Charles Colbert wrote forcefully about the obvious imbalance between white and black school

²⁴ Devore and Logsdon, 225.

²⁵ Devore and Logsdon, 226.

²⁶ Muller, 35.

²⁷ Ibid, 31.

²⁸ Ibid, 32.

²⁹ Devore and Logsdon, 232.

³⁰ Ibid, 235.

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facilities and the deplorable condition of the existing black schools.³¹ Based on Colbert's recommendations, the school board launched a new building campaign that led to the construction of thirty new schools between 1952 and 1960, over a dozen of which were built for African Americans. These new schools were designed by the leading modern architects of the day and embodied the progressive architecture of post-war educational facilities. Thomy Lafon School, a black elementary completed in 1954, was featured in *LIFE* magazine as one of the country's new well-equipped elementary schools. Another new black elementary, Phillis Wheatley School, received international acclaim for its regional modern design.³² Both the Lafon and Wheatley Schools were demolished in 2011. Like the converted schools, these 1950s facilities were products of the turbulent final chapter of segregation, in which the school board did all it could to avoid integration while the black community fought relentlessly to overcome decades of injustice.

This period in the history of New Orleans's public schools was defined by its bigotry but also by the hard-won progress that African Americans achieved in the face of incredible obstacles. While steeped in racism and controversy, these educational improvements would never have taken place if the black community had not fought for what it knew was right, and as such they represent a significant era in black education in New Orleans.

In 1960, New Orleans' first two schools were finally integrated, a nationally televised event that marked the beginning of a long and difficult transition that lasted well into the decade. One of these brave students, Ruby Bridges, was immortalized in artist Norman Rockwell's painting entitled *The Problem We All Live With*.

³¹ Charles Colbert et al, *A Planning and Building Program for New Orleans Schools: Second Annual Report of the Office of Planning and Construction* (New Orleans: Orleans Parish School Board, 1952), 1-30.

³² Francine Stock, "Is There a Future for the Recent Past in New Orleans?" *MAS CONTEXT* 8 (Winter 2010), <http://www.mascontext.com/tag/phillis-wheatly-elementary-school/>.

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F. Associated Property Types

Property Types and Subtypes Relevant to This Listing

Properties associated with the Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945–1960 include school buildings as the overall property type. Within that property type are the subtypes of primary schools and secondary schools. These two property subtypes are discussed in further detail below.

1. Property Type: School Buildings

Subtype: Primary Schools, Secondary Schools

Property Type: School Buildings/subtypes: primary schools, secondary schools

Description. The school buildings associated with this multiple property group (see Section E Table 1) are white public primary and secondary school buildings that were constructed in the pre-war period and then converted for African American use after World War II. They are located in a variety of different neighborhoods in conformance with the Orleans Parish School Board's policy of school construction based on neighborhood population. Dating between 1910 and 1940, these schools exhibit the physical characteristics of "modern" school architecture as it manifested in the first half of the 20th century and thus stand in marked contrast to the wood-frame schools and repurposed building types (e.g., residences) associated with African American public education in New Orleans during this period.

Primary and secondary schools shared the same design concepts except in overall scale and size. Defining characteristics of both school categories include solid, fireproof construction, using brick, concrete and/or steel; a height of 2 to 3 stories, often with a ground level known as a "raised basement"; large operable windows to provide ample natural light and ventilation; wide central corridors; large classrooms, some of which may be dedicated for kindergartens and/or specialty classes such as shop and home economics; possible residential quarters (usually limited to a small private bedroom) for a caretaker and/or other school personnel; and dedicated indoor recreational areas. Some buildings may have remnants of original equipment such as chalkboards, public address systems, light fixtures, and boiler rooms. Exterior stylistic details typically reflect one of the eclectic revival styles, e.g., Mediterranean Revival or Spanish Colonial Revival, or one of the modern styles, e.g., Art Deco or Moderne.

School grounds are another important feature of this property type. All of the nominated schools occupy large lots, sometimes full city blocks, with large play areas that reflect the growing importance of the physical health of the students in the 20th century.

Renovations and/or additions dating to the school's conversion from a white to a black school in the post-war period are another important feature of these properties because they embody the school board's efforts at equalization, and the design, materials, and workmanship of these modifications are products of the funding the school board was willing to spend for this purpose. Examples of these renovations include but are not limited to attached or detached physical education facilities, classroom additions to accommodate larger student populations, and updated interior finishes.

Significance. This property type is significant for its association with the era of "consolidation and conversion" of New Orleans's racially segregated public school system after World War II. They uniquely represent a program instituted by the Orleans Parish School Board that was designed specifically to appease black leaders by demonstrating a willingness to equalize school facilities, a tactic that the board believed would make it possible to

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avoid integration. While they could be construed as symbols of racism, which they are in some sense, these converted schools are among the few standing structures remaining to reflect the period of turmoil that preceded integration in Orleans Parish in 1960. This chapter in the history of African American education is significant because it embodies the city's worsening racial climate leading up to school integration and, importantly, helps us to remember the work and the struggles that African American leaders and parents endured on a regular basis during this period as they railed against a fundamentally unjust system.³³

In her historic context for the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation entitled "The African American Experience in Louisiana" (2012), author Laura Ewen Blokker sums up the historic significance of all remaining schools in Louisiana that served Africans Americans, including the converted schools:

[T]he story of African American education in Louisiana was one of segregation until desegregation of schools finally began in 1960. Therefore, every school that served black students prior to that year was an integral part of the African American Experience in Louisiana. In spite of all of the restrictions African Americans managed to receive education in many different environments before they were accepted into an integrated public system. Yet this history is not well represented by standing buildings. Some of the most significant buildings...are no more.³⁴

In addition to being among the few standing structures that remain to tell the story of African American education in New Orleans, the 5 schools included in this property group are the only extant examples out of the documented 9 schools that were successfully converted (see Section E Table 1). The 4 demolished schools are: Walter L. Cohen School (formerly Kruttschnitt), 3620 Dryades Street; Robert C. Davey School (formerly McDonogh No. 38), 1835 Erato Street; McDonogh No. 41, 1133 St. Ann Street; and Frederick Rivers Elementary School (formerly Jefferson Davis School), 1932 Touro Street. If additional schools are identified, they should be evaluated against the eligibility criteria as defined in this document.

Registration Requirements. Individual school buildings may be eligible for listing in the National Register through this multiple property listing if they possess, at a minimum, integrity of feeling, association, design, location, and setting. Most importantly, an individually eligible building would need to convey its association with the era of consolidation and conversion as defined in this document. As NPS Bulletin 15, "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" points out, a property eligible under Criterion A "is eligible if it retains the essential physical features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with the important event, historical pattern, or person(s)." However, given the scarcity of extant buildings associated with the public education of African Americans in New Orleans, schools need only be sufficiently documented as a converted school and retain the minimum integrity to be easily recognizable to someone from the era of conversion in order to be potentially eligible for the National Register.

To be potentially eligible, a property must:

- have been constructed as a white school prior to World War II
- have been converted to a black school during the recognized time period (1945–1960)
- retain sufficient historic fabric to remain recognizable as a "modern" urban school as they manifested in Orleans Parish in the first half of the 20th century. Character-defining features of these schools include
 - o fireproof construction (e.g., brick, concrete, steel)

³³ Laura Ewen Blokker, "The Construction, Destruction, and Redesign of African American Education in Louisiana: School Buildings and Social Forces in Three Centuries," paper presented at the annual conference of the Southeastern Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians (SESAH) paper, Charleston, SC, October 2011.

³⁴ Laura Ewen Blokker, "The African American Experience in Louisiana," Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, May 2012, 75.

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- a height of 2 to 3 stories, possibly with a “raised basement” at ground level
- sizeable school grounds with landscaping and building setbacks
- large operable windows
- wide central corridors
- large classrooms
- dedicated indoor recreational areas
- exterior stylistic detailing reflecting one of the early-20th-century eclectic revival styles, e.g., Mediterranean Revival or Spanish Colonial Revival, or one of the modern styles, e.g., Art Deco or Moderne

Post-war (1945–1960) alterations to converted school buildings may contribute to the building's significance if they embody the school board's efforts at equalization. Common alterations from this era include but are not limited to attached or detached physical education facilities, classroom additions to accommodate larger student populations, and updated interior finishes. Alterations that took place after the recognized time period (1945–1960) were also commonplace, since many schools have been continuously occupied and require periodic replacement of elements such as roof materials, windows, and doors. Because these buildings are eligible under Criterion A, such alterations would not necessarily render an individual building ineligible under this context. However, significant compromise of a site's campus, or isolation from the historic setting, association, and feeling of the historic school would prohibit inclusion in the NRHP.

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G. Geographical Data

The geographic boundary for this Multiple Property Documentation Form is the city limits of New Orleans, which constitute the whole of Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

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H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The multiple property listing is based on comprehensive research efforts conducted by Clio Associates LLC to investigate the potential historic significance of one of these schools, Alfred C. Priestley Junior High School at 1601 Leonidas Street. For major bibliographical references consulted as part of this research, please see Section I of this document.

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Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945–1960

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

I. Major Bibliographical References

Blokker, Laura Ewen. "The African American Experience in Louisiana." Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, May 2012.

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The Times-Picayune, 1910–1960.

N/A

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: COVER DOCUMENTATION

Multiple Name: Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945-1960 MPS

State & County:

Date Received: 1/11/2018 Date of 45th Day: 2/26/2018

Reference number: MC100002114

Reason For Review:

☐ Appeal

☐ PDIL

☐ Text/Data Issue

☐ SHPO Request

☐ Landscape

☐ Photo

☐ Waiver

☐ National

☐ Map/Boundary

☐ Resubmission

☐ Mobile Resource

☐ Period

☒ Other

☐ TCP

☐ Less than 50 years

☐ CLG

☒ Accept ☐ Return ☐ Reject 2/21/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Provides context and registration requirements for a specific type of school and specific era of the educational system on New Orleans.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept cover

Reviewer Jim Gabbert

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275

Date

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments: No see attached SLR: No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



BILLY NUNGESSER
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana
OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, RECREATION & TOURISM
OFFICE OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION



DATE: January 10, 2018

TO: Mr. James Gabbert
National Park Service Mail Stop 7228
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

FROM: Jessica Richardson, National Register Coordinator
Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation

RE: Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945-1960 Multiple Property Submission, Orleans Parish, LA

Jim,

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the Public Schools of the Consolidation and Conversion Era in Orleans Parish, 1945-1960 Multiple Property Submission to be placed in the National Register of Historic Places. Please note that the file name on the disk has been shortened some to avoid losing the file due to too long of a file extension name. Should you have any questions, please contact me at 225-219-4595, or jrichardson@crt.la.gov.

Thanks,

Jessica

Enclosures:

- ☒ CD with PDF of the National Register of Historic Places nomination form
☐ CD with electronic images (tiff format)
☒ Physical Transmission Letter
☒ Physical Signature Page, with original signature
☐ Other:

Comments:

- ☒ Please ensure that this nomination receives substantive review
☒ This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
☐ The enclosed owner(s) objection(s) do _____ do not _____
constitute a majority of property owners. (Publicly owned property)
☐ Other: