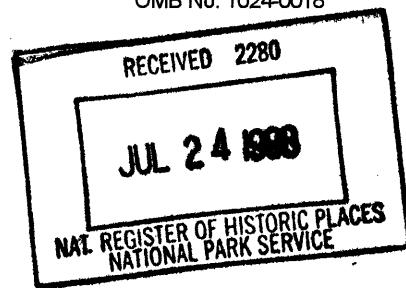


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



1078

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Carver Theater

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2101 Orleans Avenue NA not for publication

city or town New Orleans NA vicinity

state Louisiana code LA county Orleans code 071 zip code 70116

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Geri Hobdy

July 14, 1998

Signature of certifying official/Title Geri Hobdy
LA SHPO, Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register
- removed from the National
Register
- other (explain):

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of Action 8-20-98

Carver Theater

Name of property

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing		Noncontributing		
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

 NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat. Recreation and Culture

Sub. Theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat. Health Care

Sub. Medical Offices

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

 Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick (veneer)

roof Metal

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" next to the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" next to all that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
X G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Ethnic Heritage/Black

Period of Significance

1950

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Architect: Jack Corgan (Dallas)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

NA

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other
Name of repository:

Carver Theater

Name of property

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than an acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 15 782100 3318520

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

__ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff

organization Division of Historic Preservation

date June 1998

street & number P.O. Box 44247

telephone (504) 342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge

state LA

zip code 70804

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name UMOJA Institute of African-American Culture, Trade and Economic Development, Inc.

street & number P. O. Box 770237

telephone (504) 821-5004

city or town New Orleans

state LA zip code 70116

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 1

The Carver Theater is a large brick veneer over concrete block cinema which opened in September 1950 as "an exclusively Negro" theater. It is located in a late nineteenth-early twentieth century neighborhood which was and is predominantly African-American. Directly across the street from the Carver is the Lafitte Housing Project (1941). The theater is a late but still convincing example of the Moderne style. Alterations have been confined principally to the interior. And, in any event, the Carver still easily conveys enough of its original appearance.

The building design has a very strong orientation to its prominent corner entrance at the intersection of Orleans Avenue and Johnson. The exterior uses superimposed masses and contrasting brick patterns to produce an energetic effect. The main side walls feature reddish brown brick laid with pronounced vertical grooves. These walls are partially superimposed on a taller corner section which features square beige brick panels on a brick background of the same color. The exterior culminates at the corner with a strongly vertical neon sign that extends well above the building. Originally crowned with a neon finial, the curving sign proclaims the theater's name. Immediately beneath the sign is a three-part faceted window that cuts the corner of the building. The corner entrance also retains its original marquee which has a slight geometrical build-up at the center. The roof is rather unusual, taking the form of a shallow vault.

Originally the theater had a free-standing ticket booth located on the exterior immediately below the middle of the marquee. Behind this were steps set at an angle leading to entrance doors (see attached diagram). The ticket booth has been incorporated into an enclosure which encompasses the stairs. (The stairs are still there; they are just no longer on the exterior.) A large "confectionary" was located on the Orleans Avenue elevation with its own door and a large window. The window has been covered and the door replaced. Above the confectionary are three relatively small windows which are original. Also surviving are a three-part window on the Orleans Avenue facade to display movie posters and a three-part corner display window below one end of the marquee. (Part of it is within the previously mentioned enclosure.)

The Carver closed circa 1980 and since that time some of the interior has been converted to offices. The back one-third to one-half of the lobby has been subdivided for offices, and offices occupy about the first third of the 1,050 seat auditorium. As can be seen from the accompanying photo taken from the stage, the offices are quite small in comparison to the height of the auditorium. Also, almost all of the theater

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CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 2

chairs have been removed. Despite these changes to the auditorium, it retains the bulk of its original character -- i.e., a large rectangular space with a stage on one end and a high vaulted ceiling. Surviving features on or off the lobby include the men's bathroom, the ladies' bathroom with an adjacent "powder room," a staircase with an adjacent curving wall, and the previously mentioned set of entrance steps set at an angle. As one walks down the steps to exit the theater, the terrazzo floor has a geometrical design that leads one away from the building.

Assessment of Integrity:

While there have been various changes, as noted above, the Carver easily retains enough of its original character-defining features for someone who attended the grand opening to recognize the theater today. On the interior, the office partitions can be easily knocked down, which is the intention of the current owner.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 1

The Carver Theater is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A because it represents an important phenomenon in the entertainment history of New Orleans' large African-American population -- the development of theaters in the city's black neighborhoods. These entertainment meccas were of real and symbolic value in the segregated world of separate but typically unequal. Named for the famed black scientist and educator, George Washington Carver, the theater meets the Register's "exceptional significance" requirement for less than fifty year old properties because its construction in 1950 was a watershed in the development of first-rate, state-of-the-art theaters for blacks in New Orleans. (Note: Much of the information for this statement of significance came from an interview with long-time New Orleans theater owner and operator, Rene Brunet. Born in 1921, Mr. Brunet has been actively involved in the movie theater business in New Orleans from the 1930s through today.)

When the Carver opened on September 29, 1950, it was one of several black neighborhood theaters in New Orleans. Virtually all were built by white businessmen who saw an economic opportunity. In short, wherever there was a black neighborhood in the city, some enterprising businessman built a theater. This was part of the overall phenomenon of neighborhood theaters, whether black or white. In addition to neighborhood cinemas, there were a handful of "first-run" major movie houses in the CBD. But obviously, an African-American would have preferred his welcoming neighborhood theater over the "colored" balcony of Loew's State on Canal Street, for example. As historians of segregation have observed, blacks daily had to deal with various indignities and humiliation -- from seats at the back of the bus, to separate drinking fountains, to separate theater entrances and seats in the balcony. By its very nature, segregation implied inferiority.

Particularly helpful in placing the Carver in its historic context is the reaction of New Orleans' black newspaper, *The Louisiana Weekly*, to the permanent closure of the Loew's State balcony to blacks in September 1950 (almost the same day the Carver opened). The headline of the September 30 issue reads "Loew's New Policy Closes Balcony to Negro Patrons." The article began: "Negro patrons won't have to bother about climbing three flights of stairs any more at the Loew's State Theater." The reporter went on to note that the theater in the past had been picketed in an effort to force management to hire "a Negro ticket taker at the Rampart street entrance to the colored balcony" and that the balcony's patrons had complained of "rickety stairways" and mice. Then in an October 7 editorial the paper observed that

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CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 2

the theater management had "so long insulted our group with inferior accommodations and general indifference to the patron's comfort."

Imagine how those same patrons would have felt about New Orleans' new state-of-the-art theater, the Carver, built "exclusively for Negroes" at a cost of \$300,000, and opening the same week the Loew's balcony closure made front page news. When the Carver opened, it was one of several black neighborhood theaters scattered across the city. When asked if it was any different from the others, Rene Brunet responded with a resounding yes. To quote him, the Carver was "head and shoulders" above the rest. Quite simply, it was the "best 'colored' theater in New Orleans and perhaps the entire South" -- "as good or better than any white theater in town." In contrast to the older black theaters which had "tired" seats and out-of-date equipment, the Carver had the latest in everything -- state-of-the-art projection and sound equipment, air-conditioning, concessions, etc.

The Carver's early ads emphasized this theme as well as certain amenities offered at the theater. A large ad announcing the grand opening featured a picture of the theater with the claim "America's finest theater for colored patrons only." Amenities included a "beautiful concession stand" and "a spacious powder room and lounge with a maid in attendance at all times for the comfort of the ladies." Another grand opening ad proclaimed that "this new super de luxe theater will offer to its patrons," among other items, "100% protection in its modern completely fireproof building," "the latest in architectural designs and comfort," and "the finest and newest projection and sound equipment available."

The theater became known to a wider audience with its inclusion in a nationally distributed trade publication, *1950-51 Theatre Catalog*. In a three-page illustrated article titled "A Modern All-Negro Theatre," the Carver was held up as an example to emulate in what the author considered an underdeveloped field -- providing first-class movie theaters for blacks. Beginning with the premise that the theater industry "has until recently failed to recognize the prominent position of this group [blacks] from a potential patronage viewpoint," the author encouraged theater entrepreneurs to "make a more concentrated effort to attract a greater portion of these amusement funds." "They can do so by convincing the Negro that his patronage is as welcome as anyone else's and by seeing to it that houses in colored neighborhoods are just as finely appointed as other surrounding modern houses. The Negro patron, too, is entitled to as much for the ticket he buys."

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CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 3

The remainder of the article described the Carver in considerable detail to show that it was "a noteworthy and commendable effort" in this regard. As the article subtitle noted, the Carver provided facilities of the "highest order." In addition to commenting upon its modernity and equipment, the article emphasized the overall quality of the theater's appointments and amenities: "A visitor entering the Carver can readily perceive how nearly \$300,000 was spent to construct and equip the building, for there is a note of luxurious elegance wherever one looks." "Marble partitions are to be found in each [bathroom], and a maid is always in attendance in the powder room." This "luxury" was contrasted with the "shabby and ill-kempt structures with poor pictures" one encountered too often in black theaters.

As the foregoing information amply demonstrates, when the Carver opened in September 1950, it was the "ultimate" all-black movie house. The neighborhood did not have a cinema at the time, and theater entrepreneur Jack A. Dicharry (who also owned the Lincoln) saw a good business opportunity. As the article in the *1950-51 Theatre Bulletin* observed, many of the theater's patrons were inhabitants of "an all-negro government housing project" located directly across the street. The project in question (Lafitte) contained about 1,000 units.

Today, the Carver is one of about six surviving black theaters in New Orleans. Regrettably, the Lincoln, the father of them all, has been demolished. None of the survivors are being used as cinemas. Two are churches and one is a pawn shop. While a portion of the Carver is currently being used for medical offices, plans are being formulated by the new owner, the UMOJA Institute of African-American Culture, Trade and Economic Development, Inc., to restore the building to its former glory and open it as a cultural/entertainment center.

Carver Theater

Name of property

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

OMB No. 1024-0018

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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brunet, Rene. Phone interview on June 1, 1998. As noted in Part 8, Mr. Brunet is an authority on the old movie theaters of New Orleans, having been involved in the business since the 1930s.

"A Modern All-Negro Theatre." *1950-51 Theatre Catalog*. Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

The Louisiana Weekly. September 23, September 30, October 7, 1950.

The Times Picayune, September 29, 1950.

Legal Property Description:

Square 268, Lots 1, 2, 10 (A & B), City of New Orleans, said parcel of land measuring 78 feet wide (along Orleans Ave.) by a depth of 155 feet along Johnston St.

Justification:

Boundaries follow property lines.

CARVER THEATER
ORLEANS PARISH, LA



FIRST LEVEL PLAN (below) shows the simplicity and the directness of the crowd controls. Taking full advantage of corner location for boxoffice and lobby, the foyer provides access to a large lobby shop that also serves passersby through its street entrance. There are dressing rooms for staff.

THE EXTERIOR (above) combines several shades of buff face brick, common brick and glazed tile laid in interesting panels and sections. The entrance steps are unfortunate but were necessary to gain elevation in a low area. Location of the extra prolix lobby shop is an interesting feature.

