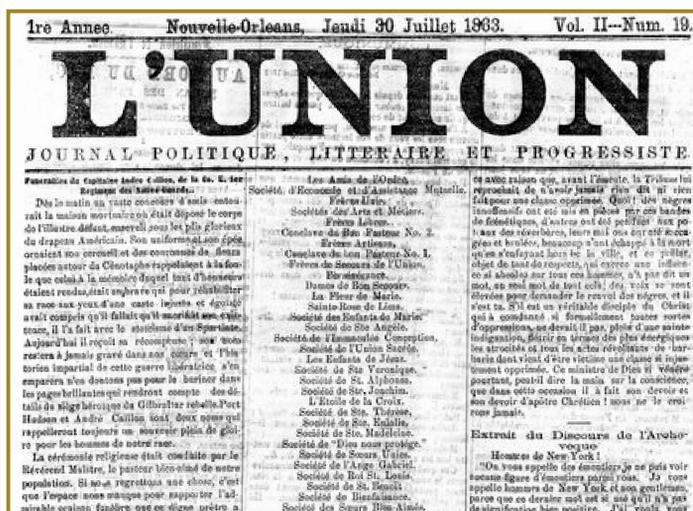


Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité 1863

Long before the Civil War, New Orleans' free people of color had established themselves as a vital and often unruly factor in the city's political and civic life.

Well educated, often through private schools in the city and universities in the North or abroad, many were solid members of the petit bourgeoisie, while some few were exceptionally wealthy. This black creole caste had built a tradition of challenging racial restrictions over decades, through legal strategy, manipulation of regulatory systems, and occasionally direct conflict. Many of those who would emerge as political leaders during the tumultuous period of Union occupation and Reconstruction had also fought at the Battle of New Orleans, or served in the Union army as part of the Louisiana Native Guard.

In 1863, Louis Charles Roudanez – black creole, a University of Paris and Dartmouth-educated physician with a thriving practice – became the founder of *L'Union*, a French language tri-weekly newspaper. *L'Union* was printed in the spirit of the Creole class: “it is not the time to follow in the path of white leaders; it is time to be leaders ourselves.” His editor, Paul Trévigne, a black creole educator with literary inclinations, incorporated poetry and literature into the paper's political agenda. Printed in French when most blacks spoke only English and few read, *L'Union* was essentially a creole caste paper; Trévigne's editorials were erratic in supporting civil rights while accepting social and economic distinctions in their application. Nonetheless, some whites found *L'Union*'s political message threatening. Calls to burn the building and murder Trévigne combined with limited circulation shut the paper down in July 1864.

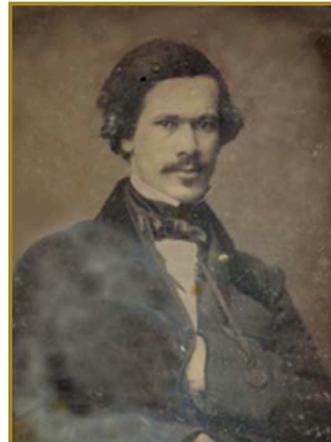


An issue of *L'Union*, dated July 30, 1863.
Source: Special Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Louisiana State University

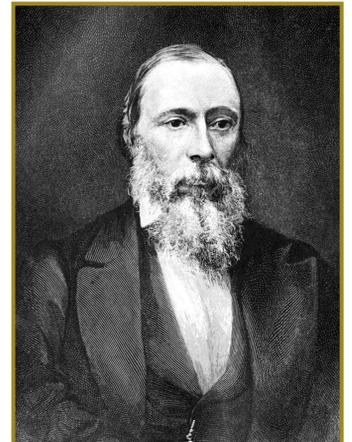
Two weeks after *L'Union*'s closure, Roudanez would launch a bilingual and far more militant publication, the *New Orleans Tribune*, which advocated relentlessly for universal male suffrage and universal education, along with land tenure and labor reform, while pushing its readers to organize and agitate for desegregation of public spaces, transit, and businesses. As editor, Roudanez hired Jean Charles Houzeau, who had left his native Belgium after the 1848 revolutions, when his radical writing in Brussels' newspapers cost him his job at the Royal Observatory. Houzeau returned to New Orleans after some time in Texas, where his anti-slavery writing and actions in support of runaway slaves forced his own escape to Mexico on the same underground routes.

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Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez.
Source: Roudanez Family Archive



Jean Charles Houzeau.
Source: The Popular Science Monthly

Roudanez, Houzeau, and Trévigne as associate editor formed the core of the *Tribune* group, an interracial affiliation of practical radicals whose philosophy engaged Enlightenment ideas in support of a pragmatic economic and civic program. They were joined by a coterie of men whose efforts to influence a new order were exhaustive and tactically diverse. Oscar Dunn, a former slave who would become Lieutenant Governor in 1868, implemented the *Tribune* group's economic ideas through his work with the Freedmen's Aid Association and the establishment of the People's Bakery. Aristide Mary, a wealthy creole businessman would found the Citizens Committee in 1891, and bring a legal challenge to the Separate Car Act by organizing Homer Plessy's brief train ride and helping to fund the lawsuit that followed. Thomy Lafon was a black philanthropist whose real estate fortune had long supported abolitionist and humanitarian causes, and whose legacy would include Dillard University, Charity Hospital, and the Sisters of the Holy Family.



New Orleans Tribune Inaugural Issue.
Source: Roudanez Family Archive

The *Tribune* group's most visible white members were Radical lawyer Thomas Durant, who as a leader in the Union Associations offered sharp opposition to pursuing universal suffrage at the state level and without Federal guarantees, citing the near certainty of a violent response. His foresight was soon validated, likely cold comfort as he fled the city and the South to escape the mob at the Mechanics' Institute riot in 1866. Durant's sometime opponent, Dr. Anthony P. Dostie, was less fortunate. Dostie, a dentist who was elected state auditor in 1864 but was removed from his post for opposing Governor Wells, became a leader of the Radical opposition before being brutally murdered at Mechanics' Institute.