

NEW ORLEANS

300

1718 - 2018

TRICENTENNIAL

From *Bienville* to *Bourbon Street* to *bounce*. 300 moments that make New Orleans unique.



WHAT HAPPENED

Homer Plessy boarded a whites-only railcar on June 7, 1892.

An 1890 advertisement for the East Louisiana Railroad Company. Homer Plessy boarded one of the company's whites-only railcars on Press Street, but Plessy, one-eighth black, was kicked off. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Homer Plessy, a New Orleans shoemaker, was recruited to test Louisiana's 1890 Separate Car Act.

ANOTHER JIM CROW CAR CASE.
Arrest of a Negro Traveler Who Persisted in Riding With the White People.
On Tuesday evening a negro named Adolph Plessy was arrested by Private Detective Cain on the East Louisiana train and locked up for violating section 2 of act 111 of 1890, relative to separate coaches.
It appears that Plessy purchased a ticket to Covington, and shortly before his arrest the conductor asked him if he was a colored man. On the latter replying that he was the conductor informed him that he would have to go into the car set aside for colored people. This he refused to do, and Mr. Cain then stepped up and requested him to go into the other coach, but he still refused, and Mr. Cain thereupon informed him that he would either have to go or go to jail. He replied that he would sooner go to jail than leave the coach, and was thereupon arrested. He waived examination yesterday before Recorder Moulin, and was sent before the criminal court under \$500 bonds.

A story on June 9, two days after Adolph "Homer" Plessy was arrested after boarding a whites-only railcar.

The 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision **Plessy v. Ferguson** made “separate but equal” segregation the law of the land for 60 years.

The decision was the opposite of what Homer Plessy and his allies were fighting for in 1892 when Plessy set out to test an 1890 state law that required black and white passengers to ride in separate railroad cars. A group, the Comite des Citoyen, recruited Plessy, a shoemaker who was one-eighth black, to ride in a white train car in order to bring the issue to court. On June 7, 1892, Plessy boarded a “whites only” railcar at the Press Street station bound for Covington. Plessy was arrested. He appeared before Judge John Howard Ferguson on Oct. 13, and his attorney argued the Separate Car Act violated the 14th Amendment. Ferguson ruled against Plessy, saying he was provided equal accommodations and that he “was simply deprived of the liberty of doing as he pleased.” The state Supreme Court upheld Ferguson’s decision, which was then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The high court heard the case on April 13. In a 7-1 decision, a month later, the Supreme Court ruled against Plessy. The decision stood until the Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 that overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine.

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The term creole was first used in 1590 to describe people born of mixed race in the New World.

A **Creole** can be black, white, French, Spanish or even German or Native American.

Generally, the term refers to those born to families established in Louisiana before it became American. The Louisiana Creole Heritage Center describes Creole people as those who are “generally known as a people of mixed French, African, Spanish and Native American ancestry, most of whom reside in or have familial ties to Louisiana.” The first use of the word is traced back to 1590 when Father J. de Acosta used the Spanish word “criollo” to describe those born of mixed race in Latin America. In Louisiana, the term was used in the 1700s to describe free persons of color, but by the next century, Creole was used to describe people of mixed birth whose parents were from different countries. It later also came to describe the aristocratic white upper class of French and Spanish ancestry. In New Orleans, Creoles clustered in the French Quarter, and the French Opera House was the center of their society. The term Creole is also used commonly to describe French-inspired cuisine. Creole is also used to describe a type of French spoken in Louisiana that is considered an autonomous language because of differences in grammatical structure.

Today the term Creole refers as much to a culture as to a people. Tomatoes and other products were called “Creole” because they were originally produced by Creoles.