



PROJECT GARDERE:

Revitalizing the Community

Final Report

July 31, 2009

Prepared by:

Grassroots Society for Residential Involvement

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70816

Submitted to:

Governor “Bobby” Jindal, State of Louisiana

Mayor-President Melvin “Kip” Holden, Baton Rouge City-Parish Government

Councilman Chandler Loupe, Baton Rouge District 3

Mary Fontenot, Director of Baton Rouge Office of Neighborhoods



PROJECT GARDERE: *Revitalizing the Community*

by
Grassroots Society for Residential Involvement



Acknowledgements

Baton Rouge District 3
Councilman Chandler Loupe

Baton Rouge Office of Neighborhoods
Mary Fontenot

Burbank Tire and Car Care
Zoli Horvath

CSRS, Inc.
Travis Woodard

Connections Ministries
Clayton Hays

EBR City-Parish Government
Mayor-President Melvin “Kip” Holden

EBR Department of Public Works
Uta Cress

EBR Wastewater Treatment Plant
Hugh Taylor

Family Roads
Dena Morrison

Family Worship Center
Mary Lindsay

GSRI Property Owners Association
Carlos Padial, Jr.

Gamma Alpha Psi, Inc.
Lenise Lyons

Gardere Initiative
Rica H. Kwentua

Grassroots-Baton Rouge
Christy Dright
Ira Gautier
Delbert Gomez
Jerome Hill
Nisha Modica

Horizon CNA Training School, LLC
Lois Garibaldi

Louisiana State Archives Library
John Fowler

Louisiana State University
Facility Development
Emit David
Reference Library
Louana Henderson

Mo-Hair Beauty Salon
“The” Joan Louis

Pinnacle Entertainment, Inc.
Alex Stoliyar
3800 Howard Hughes Pkwy Suite 1800
Las Vegas, NV 89169

Louisiana National Guard
Construction and Facilities Management Office
Captain William W. Saint

WAFB (9) News Channel
Greg Meriwether
Keitha Nelson

Abstract

Louisiana has a remarkable history, yet has become so neglected, that it is an embarrassment to all. Once a hub for agriculture and commerce, this community has become a victim of circumstance(s). Situated in the center of District 3, lots are overgrown and there are numerous open, unsecured buildings, which have been abandoned. Culverts have no guards and children are at risk every time they go out to play. The Department of Public Works is back-logged and it can take up to six months for a work order to be filled. As property values have shown a decline, in recent years, it is vital that measures be taken to bring back this community, Sidewalks, curbs and bicycle lanes are rudimentary in urban areas, as twenty-four percent of renter-occupied households, in Louisiana, do not have a car.¹

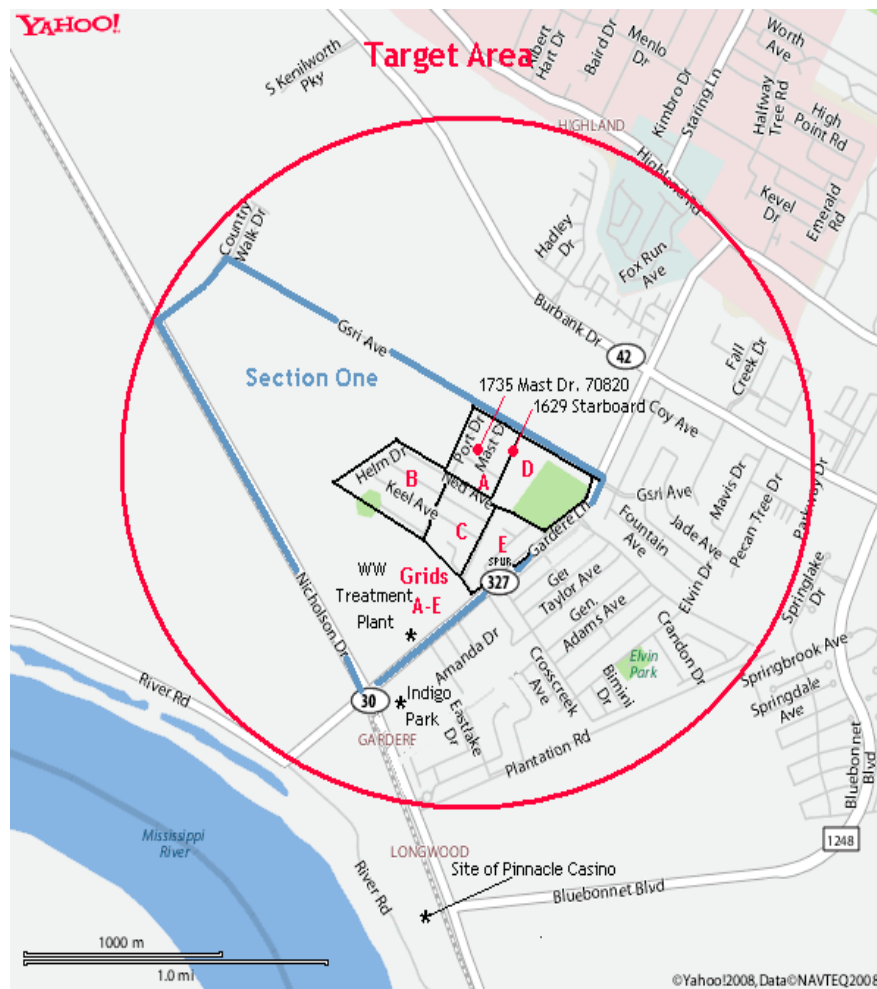
Today, Gardere is known by such terms as "the war zone" and "the hood". It is a well-known fact that this area is one of the City's toughest and hardest, when it comes to crime. Statistics show that there is an average of 2,689 people per square mile and one-third of that population lives in poverty. The area in focus encompasses less than a four-mile radius in South Baton Rouge. See Map A. The "Target Area" is divided into sections and each section has grids. This breakdown of the area will facilitate organization and progress. See Map B.

1. LA Department of Transportation
<http://www.dotd.la.gov/planning/highway_safety/bike_ped/masterplan.asp>

Due to the extent of blight in Section One, it has been determined to be a good starting point. This is where we will focus, however references will be made that may affect the whole of the Target Area, and some even beyond. At first, some concepts of this report may seem unreachable, yet with the resources at hand, and a little innovation, progress can be made. Even the most far-fetched ideas will come within reach. Imagine a community with cafés, shops and galleries. Envision landscaping and colorful banners along main street, lined with cafés and shops: This can be Gardere.



Map A: Within the red circle is our Target Area-situated in South Baton Rouge, District 3. Its proximity to the Mississippi can be built upon to bring economic revival by means of increased tourism and farming.



Map B: The area in focus encompasses less than a four-mile radius, in South Baton Rouge, we call the 'Target Area', bordered in red. The Target Area has been divided into sections. Section One, bordered in blue, is divided into grids A - E. Streets are named for parts of ships, as it is located in the South Highland Industrial Park (SHIP) subdivision. Annie Marie, Amy, Christian Paul and Ned are streets named after the developer's children. Starting at Nicholson Drive, move east to GSR for 1.0 mile and then turn left to the bend-in-the-road, go another 1.48 miles, which then turns left to Nicholson (0.34 miles), left again back to Gardere, for 1.76 miles.

Our mission is to convey a city-wide awareness to the plight that grips the neighborhood. Once awareness has been made, revitalization of the community, restoring it to its proper place in society, is next. Our aim is total renewal of the community, with goals to pave and paint neglected streets, clean and clear vacant lots and fix up abandoned dwellings--keeping them free from squatters and drug users. Some streets are in worse shape than others. This will make our boundaries obscure and sometimes vague. Now is the time for development. Bi-cycle lanes, landscaping, and sidewalks need to be incorporated into the community. Establishing a community center should be a priority. This will provide a place where resources can be networked.

The time frame for this project will be on-going, although once the place is cleaned up, we can expect to see immediate results. Litter crews, building repairs and better lighting will have an instant effect on the neighborhood. Projects to give Ben Burge Park a makeover, and put in uniform landscaping, will take more time. Results can be expected well within the first six months. Substantial improvements should be felt within one year. **The benefits will be a cleaner, safer place to live, increased land values, and a healthier community.** Not all of Gardere is neglected. There are some wonderful, thriving agencies and projects already in existence. Imagine a neighborhood with a community center, a pavilion in the park and a public swimming pool and then think of Gardere. With the need so blatant, this publication hopes to be the turning point to get things started.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii	Chapter 2 (continued)	
Abstract	iii	Farmers Market	19
Preface	vii	Contemporary Urban Development	19
Introduction	x	Indigo Park-Revisited	20
Chapter 1: Overview	1	Plantation Tours	20
Gardere Murder Rate 'Astronomical'	1	<i>Aesthetical Basis: It is our Duty</i>	21
Sheriff's Office Steps-Up Efforts to Curb Violence in Gardere .	2	The Effects of a Clean Neighborhood	22
Living Under the Poverty Level	3	City-Parish Plan of Government Provisions for Urban Areas ...	23
Decline in Property Values	4	Street Cleaning	23
Surrounding Growth and Development	5	Chapter 3: Proposed Strategies	24
The Green Light Plan Comes to Gardere	7	Strategic Plan for Economic Development	24
Waste-Water Treatment Plant to Become Largest in South	7	Abstract Plans for Action - Immediate and Forthcoming	25
Nicholson and Gardere: A 3rd-World Intersection	8	Immediate Implementations	25
Louisiana National Guard Builds Joint Facility	10	Forthcoming Implementations	27
Baseball Complex Too Expensive for Community	10	Xeriscapes	29
Chapter 2: Basis for Revitalization	11	Ten-Step Job Training Program	31
<i>Historical Basis-Gardere's Rich Heritage</i>	11	Horizon CNA Training School	32
The American Indian and European Settlers	11	The François Gardère Community Center	32
Fort Baton Rouge Divided by Land Grants	12	Recreation and Parks Commission (BREC)	33
Along River Road	13	Chapter 4: Resources and Development	34
Fergus Gardère and Chatsworth Plantation	14	EBR Housing Authority	34
Longwood Plantation	15	Existing Agencies, Institutions, Organizations and Programs ...	35
The Kleinpeter Family	16	Computers for Learning Federal Program	38
<i>Economical Basis-Bringing in New Businesses</i>	16	LSU Initiatives in Service	38
Baton Rouge Museum of History/Historic Village	17	Development	39
Agricultural Development	18	Conclusion	40

Table of Contents

Exhibits

Exhibit A: <i>Image of a Beaten Slave, 1863</i>	x
Exhibit B: <i>Pinnacle's Baton Rouge Project</i>	5
Exhibit C: <i>Indigo Park Apartment Homes</i>	6
Exhibit D: <i>State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2009</i>	9
Exhibit E: <i>Cypress Mound Baseball Complex</i>	10
Exhibit F: <i>Explorer Jacques Marquette</i>	12
Exhibit G: <i>Civil War Troops at Longwood</i>	13
Exhibit H: <i>The Preserve at Longwood Housing</i>	20
Exhibit I: <i>Light Pole Banners Examples</i>	26
Exhibit J: <i>Western Illinois University Multicultural Center</i>	28
Exhibit K: <i>Baton Rouge Office of Neighborhoods</i>	36

Graphs

Graph 1: <i>Property Value Trend: 1735 Mast Drive</i>	4
Graph 2: <i>Property Value Trend: 1629 Starboard Drive</i>	4
Graph 3: <i>Comparing Property Values</i>	4

Maps

Map A: <i>Target Area</i>	iii
Map B: <i>Section One (SHIP Streets)</i>	iv
Map C: <i>South Highland Industrial Park Plot Plan</i>	ix
Map D: <i>Staring Lane Extension</i>	7
Map E: <i>Louisiana Highway 30</i>	9
Map G: <i>Subdivisions in Gardere</i>	17
Map H: <i>Proposed Agricultural Map</i>	18

Photos

Photo 1: <i>Shopping Center Shows Neglect</i>	viii
Photo 2: <i>Kids on Bikes in Gardere</i>	2
Photo 3: <i>Longwood Plantation, circa 1902</i>	15
Photo 4: <i>Potassium-enriched Figs</i>	18
Photo 5: <i>Satsumas: A Louisiana Tradition</i>	19
Photo 6: <i>Mount Hope Plantation House</i>	21
Photo 7: <i>Magnolia Mound Plantation House</i>	21
Photo 8: <i>Over-grown Lots: Dangerous for Kids</i>	21
Photo 9: <i>Open Culverts: Dangerous for Kids</i>	22
Photo 10: <i>Abandoned Building: Dangerous for Kids</i>	24
Photo 11: <i>Sugar Cane</i>	27
Photo 12: <i>Plaquemine-Sunshine Ferry</i>	28
Photo 13: <i>Many Wildflowers Bloom in Purple and Yellow</i>	29
Photo 14: <i>Hearty Trumpet Vine</i>	30
Photo 15: <i>Drought-Tolerant Ground-cover</i>	30
Photo 16: <i>More Open Culverts</i>	40
Photo: <i>Proposed Community Center - 8618 GSRI Avenue</i>	32

Tables

Table 1: <i>Real Estate Demographics from 2007</i>	3
Table 2: <i>EBR Waste-Water Treatment Plant</i>	8
Bibliography	43
Definition of Terms	45
Appendix A: <i>Grassroots-BR</i>	46

Preface

The Mississippi River continues to serve Baton Rouge as one of America's largest, natural resources. The navigational depth of the river allows larger, trade ships to dock just blocks from downtown. This same river served as a main route for those who left their colony, for whatever reason, and settled here during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Whether it was religious persecution, prejudice, or just for the thrill of adventure, many settlers of the “New World” took a chance and navigated from the north, to the mouth of this great river. Others arrived from the south: European explorers and African slaves. The Port of New Orleans received slave traders and explorers at the turn of the 17th century.

By the 19th century, Baton Rouge was established as the State Capital. For 200 years Baton Rouge has had numerous cultural influences, just as it has today. Situated up river from New Orleans, many traveled to Baton Rouge on the Mississippi. Once the steam engine was invented, steamboats appeared everywhere, as the Industrial Revolution began. People traveled on the river as far north as Memphis, Tennessee and then back again. It is well known that writer Mark Twain visited Baton Rouge on a steamboat and, no doubt, disembarked at one point and, quite possibly, visited Gardere's general store.

The era of riverboats was exciting and included trade, travel and adventure, yet, just like the the Railroad System, Ferries have almost gone the way of the dinosaur. A few of the docks, that were situated along the banks of the river, still function today. Sunshine-Plaquemine Ferry is located just eight miles from Gardere. Leon Kleinpeter and his family landed near Sunshine, in St. Gabriel, when they immigrated from Pennsylvania. Kleinpeter had two choices: East bank or west. Fortunately, for us today, he chose the east bank. Kleinpeter Dairies is one Baton Rouge-based industries that contributes to the local economy.

These two docks, Sunshine and St. Gabriel, were major ports for those who traded cotton, molasses and sugar cane. Even Longwood Plantation had its own dock. Having received a large land grant, François Gardère had cultivated the land around the acreage which now bears his name. During the Civil War, Gardere was home to several plantations, a general store and acres of agriculture. Eventually, natural disasters, such as floods and hurricanes, force settlers to move to higher land. It was then that Highland Road was established as a flood-zone boundary.



By the mid-20th century, the big business was refining oil.* At one point, during his time as Governor, Huey P. Long made it mandatory for anyone who wanted to work for the State to come to Baton Rouge for a personal interview by him. On the way to New Orleans, from downtown Baton Rouge, commuters were plenteous through this district, as many politicians lived in the Crescent City. Louisiana State University was well on its way to becoming a major educational institution. With an emphasis on engineering, students, from all over the world, still come here to pursue an engineering degree. As Baton Rouge approached the end of the 20th century, the university grew and yet more big businesses were moving into the area, forcing growth and development.

During the 1970's contractors and developers laid out the plans to build residential complexes as a means of housing for students and commuters. No longer in business, Research Park, Inc. filed the Plot Plan for the South Highland Industrial Park Subdivision. Filed on March 12, 1970 this plan even shows that there was an airport planned for this area at one point. See Map C. Gardere once thrived with families and was considered safe and clean.

In the 1980's, a world-renown minister founded a seminary that reached a student population of over 5,000 in a matter of three years, many of whom lived in Gardere. Breech of religious beliefs resulted in loss of support and the school lost over ninety percent of its enrollment literally overnight. This gap caused landlords to turn somewhere to fill their

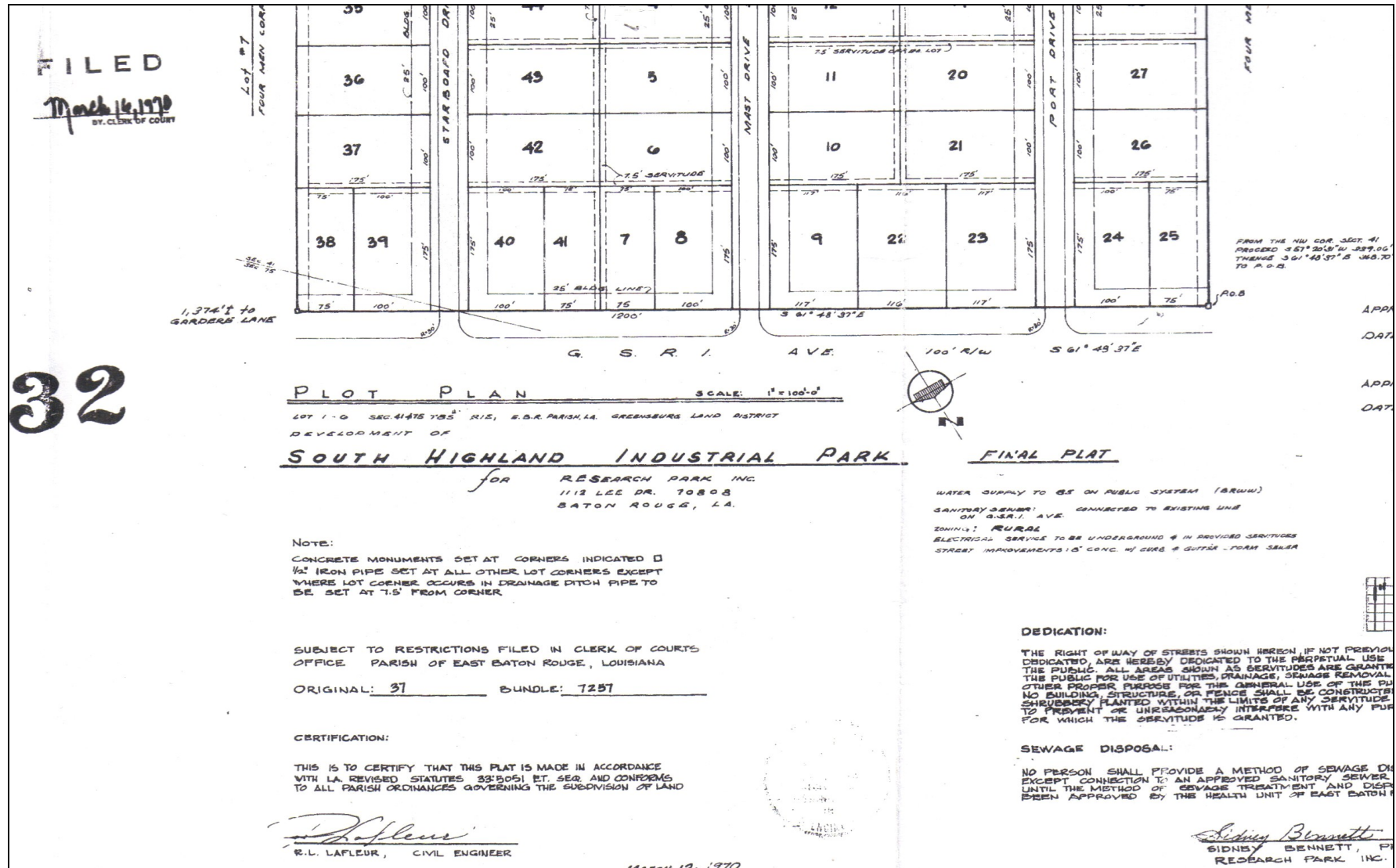
* Unfortunately, there was little, or no, accountability to nature and Louisiana's coastline has suffered the most.

vacancies, many of whom began to accept Section 8 renters. Unfortunately, it is a known fact that those with such an economic struggle have it hard making ends meet and many become the source of blight.

Well into the 21st century, Baton Rouge is continuing to experience growth. With advances in medicine places like the Pennington Medical Center have been established as major medical research institutes and the Women's Hospital is expanding. Baton Rouge General is one of the many hospitals and clinics which provide medical attention in Baton Rouge, yet *Gardere has no medical or health facilities whatsoever.* The closest emergency room is five miles away and Earl K. Long is way on the other side of town, approximately a fifteen mile drive. Imagine what residents must have to go through in case of an emergency. We would like to see measures taken to provide health care facilities, such as an out-patient clinic, for Gardere and the surrounding neighborhoods.



Photo 1: One of two local grocery stores, this market is questionable when it comes to cleanliness and freshness of product. Bordering on being an eye-sore, this shopping center could use some improvements and remodeling. Fresh paint, landscaping and colorful awnings would improve the aesthetics of this center. Cypress Mound Baseball complex is across the street. Totally state-of-the-art, Cypress is light years ahead of this community—but not for long.



Map C: Plot Plan filed in 1970 for South Highland Industrial Park subdivision. Many building codes have changed in forty years, making this area outdated. Enveloped by construction on every side, the condition of this area must be addressed to keep up with change. Bringing renewal to this part of the neighborhood can be the beginning. We must start somewhere.

Introduction

Baton Rouge, Louisiana is like no other American city. First inhabited by Native Americans; explored by Spanish Conquistadors; named by the French; geographically divided into land grants by the British; and settled by Americans. Long before Christopher Columbus discovered America, Europeans, unfortunately, had practiced slavery for centuries and literally thousands of Africans were brought here against their will. To this day, Baton Rouge has a significant African-American population. At the 2000 Census, over seventy-percent of the population in Gardere was of African descent.



Exhibit A: Peter, a slave from Baton Rouge, 1863. The scars are a result of a whipping by his overseer, who was subsequently discharged. It took two months to recover from the beating.

Approximately one Southern family in four held slaves prior to (the) war. According to the 1860 U.S. census, about 385,000 individuals (1.4% of White Americans in the country, or 4.8% of southern whites) owned one or more slaves. Slaves in many parts of the south were freed by Union armies or when they simply left their former owners. Many joined the Union Army as workers or troops, and many more fled to cities in the north. After the failure of Reconstruction, freed slaves in the United States were treated as second-class citizens. For decades after their emancipation, many former slaves living in the South sharecropped and had a low standard of living. In some states, it was only after the civil rights movement that blacks obtained legal protection from racial discrimination.¹

People settled in Baton Rouge for many reasons. Even today, much of Baton Rouge is experiencing growth.

1. Wikipedia Encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_trade>

In the early years of settlement we see that the geographical location, the fertile land, and the proximity to the Mississippi River, were some of the main reasons people moved here. The recent aftermath of two major hurricanes has also contributed to a population influx, much of which relocated to Gardere, with a substantial population from the 9th Ward in New Orleans, which, sad to say, was in worse shape, economically and aesthetically, as Gardere is today.

In the heart of District 3 we find a most diverse community, both in cultural and topographical detail. Unfortunately Gardere has “slipped through the cracks” and someone is going to have to clean it up. There is no obstacle that is greater than willpower and we must “will” to get it done. Our forefathers founded this land on the basis of freedom of choice and we must choose to make a difference. It is the American thing to do. The first decade of the new century is about over and Gardere is still stuck in the 1980's.

Although much of the nation is hindered by current economic conditions, Baton Rouge is experiencing growth and development. This should be no surprise. Founded on the principles of adventure, this city has stood alone many times. There is an unyielding spirit when it comes to the people. Discovered, explored and settled by so many cultures, living in Louisiana's Capital City is an adventure.