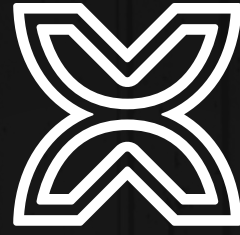




— THE —  
**DESCENDANTS**  
PROJECT

**[THEDESCENDANTSPROJECT.ORG](http://THEDESCENDANTSPROJECT.ORG)**





# THE DESCENDANTS PROJECT

**The Descendants Project** was founded to preserve and protect the health, land, and lives of the Black descendant community located in Louisiana's River Parishes. Through advocacy, resources, engaging the descendant community, and creating strategies for a safe and sustainable economy, **The Descendants Project** utilizes an innovative approach that uplifts cultural and emotional enrichment for the community's ultimate liberation.

We are descended from the enslaved men, women, and children who were forced to labor at one or more of the hundreds of plantations that line the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Starting in the 1970s, large industrial petrochemical plants began purchasing the land of these plantations still surrounded by vulnerable Black descendant communities.

Today we face the threat of loss of land, health and culture as the systems that have traditionally exploited us continue to do so unchallenged. We seek to break this cycle, hold those liable to account and empower our community.

Through programming, education, advocacy, and outreach, **The Descendants Project** is committed to reversing the vagancy of slavery through healing and restorative work. We aim to champion the voice of the Black descendant community while demanding action that supports their total well-being.

**To support our cause, either through action or donation,  
visit [thedescendantsproject.org](https://thedescendantsproject.org) or  
email [info@thedescendantsproject.org](mailto:info@thedescendantsproject.org)**



## INTRODUCING H.O.P.E

**In our youth**, we remember sitting with our grandparents and hearing countless tales about St. John the Baptist Parish and our town of Wallace, tales that wove the history of our ancestors with the rich traditions and folklore of the area. They were instrumental in fostering our love for the community. For us, they made our world magical.

We also remember having this world almost ripped from us due to the threat of the Formosa Plastics Plant. The colorful tales our grandparents spun were replaced with worrisome pondering about the destruction of their community, a community that has been part of our family for centuries. When it seemed as if all were lost, however, the citizens of Wallace were inspired to fight. They rallied against corrupt zoning and paid-off politicians, and they won. They were more than just victorious—they were empowered.

Thirty years later, as we fight to protect our community from the legacy of this crooked "zoning," we recognize what an empowered community can do. With empowerment, there is hope! The wisdom of our community, combined with the support of many advocates and allies, gives us the momentum to push forward.

Today, we are bringing this hope to you through our **Hands of the People Empowered Campaign**. We built H.O.P.E. with tools that foster stout-heartedness and support citizens in achieving true liberation from untrustworthy systems. With H.O.P.E., we will uplift our community through alternative economies, strategic partnerships, and resources at our fingertips every step of the way forward.

The Descendants Project co-founders Joy (left) and Jo (right) Banner

### OUR WORK INCLUDES:

- Assisting community, especially during natural disasters
- Challenging harmful policies that promote legacy pollution and environmental racism
- Developing descendant engaged tourism programs that foster descendant participation in the tourism economy
- Engaging Archeologists, Genealogists, and historians for the protection and recognition of our history, particularly the history of the enslaved
- Fostering relationships with key allies and advocates for the advancement of our community
- Providing workforce training opportunities in non-heavy industry fields

**We are excited to take this journey of H.O.P.E. with you! We remain ever committed to our continued support.**



**The Descendants Project** is a non-profit organization that tends to the needs of our descendant community by sustaining a system that supports their voice, heritage, and needs free of influence from past power structures that have relied on their subjugation.

# ACKNOWLEDGING OUR PAST FIGHTING FOR OUR FUTURE



Photo: Dr. Jayur Madhusudan Mehta

## Unmarked Burial Grounds

The numerous plantations that once dotted the land along the Mississippi River are also the final resting place for many of the enslaved. Nonusable portions of land were given to the enslaved to bury their dead. Without access to headstones, the enslaved planted trees, such as Magnolias and Elm, to memorialize their loved ones. Although the plantations no longer exist, the burial grounds of the enslaved are still present. **The Descendants Project** is working with archeologists and historians to preserve and protect these burial grounds. We are working to ensure this sacred land is violated no more, and descendants like us are provided access to honor our ancestors.

For centuries, the people of St. John the Baptist have experienced one of the most diverse cultures along the Mississippi River. Contributions from the native Indigenous, settler Europeans, and enslaved Africans are still deeply rooted in our community and experienced through our food, language, and more. While we celebrate the beauty of our culture, we recognize this culture was built on the backs of the enslaved Africans, the ancestors of many of our community members today. Although painful, we do not shy away from this part of our history. In fact, we seek recognition for the many people who labored without reward, without the very freedom we hold dear today.

Yet, our identities span far beyond the glamorized “plantation country” label forced upon our community by tourism agencies and marketing firms. We refuse to be defined by this one aspect of our beautiful yet complex culture. We honor our past, but we fight to have say on our future, fighting to dismantle problematic systems still forced up on our community. We work every day to equip our community with the tools necessary to do so.

Gone are the days of us accepting the Legacy Pollution of Cancer Alley in silence. No more will we accept pollutant causing heavy industry as the only recognized economy.



Blessing Ceremony

WE HONOR THE LEGACY OF OUR GREAT-GREAT GRANDMOTHERS, WHO WERE BORN ENSLAVED IN LOUISIANA



Sarah Hebert Brown



Camelia Aubert Alexis "Mama Joe"

The Children of Whitney is a series of sculptures by artist Woodrow Nash representing these former slaves as they were at the time of emancipation: children.

Photo: Whitney Plantation



# HANDS OF THE PEOPLE EMPOWERED

Far too long, the fate of our community has been in the hands of those who sacrifice our health and happiness in order to satisfy their agendas. The politicians, agencies, and boards who should protect us seem to care about only one thing... themselves. We know the frustration of speaking out to better our community yet feeling like no one is listening. It can make us feel powerless — or that things are out of our hands.

We're here to give you **HOPE:**  
**Hands of the People Empowered.**

We will work with you in the development of creative strategies that free us from the systems and people that seek to keep us powerless.

Together, we can build the community we want. A community based on a vision that includes both prosperity and health. Protecting our past while preparing for our future.

## FUTURE STRATEGIES:



Photo: Val Waller Photography

**Chef Ederique Goudia** — Wallace native, Ederique Goudia (above) has brought our unique culinary heritage all the way to the big city of Detroit! Even with her busy schedule as a celebrated chef, Ederique raised \$8,500 to support Wallace in its Hurricane Recovery and hosted a special community dinner to treat residents, through her non-profit Taste the Diaspora Detroit.

### ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**“Small, locally owned businesses and startups tend to generate higher income for people in a community than big, non-local firms, which can actually depress local economies”**

—**Stephan Goetz**, Ph.D., professor of agricultural and regional economics, Penn State



Photo: Supplied

### ENCOURAGE PROGRAMS IN HUMANITIES

This includes art, music, and literature that express our culture and enliven our community.



Photo: Supplied

**Rashod Saul** is a Wallace resident and entrepreneur who has a growing business making hand-poured candles.

\* 2020 Louisiana Tourism By The Numbers, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

\*\* TREY BURVANT, president, Louisiana Film Entertainment Association, New Orleans Film industry: Louisiana needs subsidies to be competitive with Georgia, others, The Advocate, Jun 1, 2021

### TEACH METHODS TO KEEP POLITICIANS AND DECISION-MAKERS ACCOUNTABLE

We will teach our community how to keep those in power honest by using tools such as Robert's Rules of Orders, public information requests, and meeting monitors.

### FACILITATE NON-HEAVY INDUSTRIES WITH WELL-PAYING JOBS

We are building connections with other sectors, such as the film industry, to provide jobs that don't harm people and the environment. The average job in film pays \$65,000 plus extra perks and benefits. Most of these positions do not require a college degree.



### PROMOTE DESCENDANT ENGAGED TOURISM

We want tourism that finally gives a voice to the descendants of the enslaved and gives us access to the tourism economy.



# WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

The Descendants Project has been busy fighting to make sure the descendant community, especially those who descend from the enslaved, have a safe, healthy, prosperous place to live today and for future generations. Since March 2021 The Descendants Project has been reaching out to the community through programming, education, advocacy, and outreach. Here is what we've been up to:

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Descendants Project has been teaching our community about Environmental Justice through peaceful protests, online talks and town halls.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): *"Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys:*

- The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and
- Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."

— <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

## FIGHTING THE WALLACE GRAIN TERMINAL

The Descendants Project has been holding Community Town Halls in-person and on Facebook Live to discuss and educate each other about the negative impacts the Wallace Grain Terminal will have on our community. We have organized letter-writing campaigns and demonstrations. Presently, we have a lawsuit challenging an illegal rezoning law that would allow the construction of this massive heavy industry project in St. John the Baptist Parish.

In November 2021, The Descendants Project met with EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan (below left) who listened to our concerns. Administrator Regan has dedicated funding to order the monitoring of heavy industry pollution throughout the River Parishes. He also wanted a Stop the Wallace Grain Elevator t-shirt!

In June 2021, Retired Lt. General Russel L. Honoré (below right) was a keynote speaker for a "Stop the Wallace Grain Terminal" town hall meeting in St. John the Baptist Parish. Honoré urged local politicians to listen to the concerns of their citizens regarding heavy industry and encouraged locals to use social media to share their voices.



Photo: Val Waller Photography/Courtesy A Taste of the Diaspora Detroit

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

To connect with our community, The Descendants Project held a "Turkey Giveaway" on November 19th, 2021 and a "Christmas Toy Give Away" on December 19th, 2021.



## TAKING A STAND

The Descendants Project refuses to be silenced! When our co-founder Joy Banner received a certified letter in May 2021 from Councilman Kurt Becnel trying to remove her from the Historic District Commission she fought it...and won! Her position was reinstated later that month in another letter from the Historic District with an apology. Joy wrote on facebook after she received the second letter: "Yes, it's difficult to 'cause hard feelings', but in the words of John Lewis, 'Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.' Thank you to the DA's office for stepping in, but most of all thank you to the Wallace and West Bank community for your LOVING support!!"



Photo: Jo Banner

## HURRICANE IDA RECOVERY

To help after Hurricane Ida, The Descendants Project partnered with many different organizations to raise money and to do outreach for the West Bank of St. John the Baptist Parish. Thanks to everyone who donated, we were able to give out:

- generators
- tarps and roofing repairs
- toiletries
- cleaning supplies
- food
- gift cards
- mini-grants

We also partnered with Taste The Diaspora Detroit for a lovely Thanksgiving Meal.



Photo: Val Waller Photography/Courtesy A Taste of the Diaspora Detroit

# IN THE NEWS

The **Descendants Project** is committed to bringing the concerns of our community into the public eye. Here are some quotes we selected from those articles and interviews.

For links to these articles and more, visit: [thedescendantsproject.org/in-the-news](https://thedescendantsproject.org/in-the-news)

## CONCERNS ABOUT THE WALLACE GRAIN ELEVATOR

**"It will cause a lot of health risks; it will destroy your automobiles; it will destroy your houses."**

—Wanda Boudreaux  
Community member

*"Wallace Community Responds To Grain Elevator Project" L'Observateur, 2021/03/24*

**"But the reality is that the dust that comes from these facilities is not pure grain... It's grain dust mixed with bacteria, bird droppings, rat droppings, insect parts, lots of things that could irritate your lungs and also potentially include toxins."**

—Dr. Kimberly Terrell  
Research scientist and director of community outreach, Tulane Environmental Law Clinic  
*"Descendants Of Slaves Say This Proposed Grain Factory Will Destroy The Community" NPR, 2021/07/07*

**"The Descendants Project is reaching back into the past to right one of the wrongs that has been done to the community of Wallace and prevent the harm that lurks over them again."**

—Pam Spees  
Senior Staff Attorney, Center for Constitutional Rights  
*"Descendants Project Sues Parish To Invalidate Zoning Ordinance That Threatens Health And Safety Of Black Historic Community - OpEd" Eurasia Review, 2021/11/09*

## PRESERVING HISTORY

**"Whitney Plantation is one of very few plantations in the state where this original viewshed as yet remains undisturbed. The construction of the grain terminal would permanently change this and forever destroy this cultural landscape."**

—Whitney Plantation Board  
*"Louisiana's only museum centering the enslaved opposes \$400 million grain terminal in St. John" nola.com, 2021/12/06*

**"Instead of perpetuating the violent narrative of plantation grandeur for slave owners, this space will instead serve the greater good and amplify the experience of the Black descendant community and the indigenous peoples who inhabited this land."**

—Joy Banner  
The Descendants Project co-founder  
*"Louisiana's only museum centering the enslaved opposes \$400 million grain terminal in St. John" nola.com, 2021/12/06*

## ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

**"There are many of these little linear villages that were a relic of plantations, and they were predominantly African American. And oftentimes, these plants are situated adjacent to those [fence-line communities] or very close to them."**

—Craig Colten  
Professor Emeritus, Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University  
*"Descendants Of Slaves Say This Proposed Grain Factory Will Destroy The Community" NPR, 2021/07/07*

**"They [The Descendants Project] are saying no, we deserve reparations for what has been done to us... This land belongs to our families, our families were born, our ancestors who have gone on this land, and we will not be moved."**

—Dr. Beverly Wright  
Founder, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice  
*"Twin sisters want their parish to heal descendants of the enslaved. How? Through the land" nola.com, 2022/01/24*

## THIS IS OUR LAND

**"This land is sacred. The way in which these facilities come into our community is a game plan of how they work and how they've been working for decades."**

—Joy Banner  
The Descendants Project co-founder  
*"Louisiana's only museum centering the enslaved opposes \$400 million grain terminal in St. John" nola.com, 2021/12/06*

**"You see this a lot going on in predominantly Black communities. They don't come to you. They don't have any town meetings with you."**

—Angelique Mitchell  
Wallace resident  
*"Descendants Of Slaves Say This Proposed Grain Factory Will Destroy The Community" NPR, 2021/07/07*

**"This is centuries of land-based injustice that really began with settler colonialism and the stealing of this land from indigenous folks, but we see the continuation of that violence through these zoning decisions, and through the lack of community control over how these lands are stewarded."**

—Jordan Brewington  
Researcher, Louisiana Bucket Brigade  
*"Twin sisters want their parish to heal descendants of the enslaved. How? Through the land" nola.com, 2022/01/24*

## SUPPORT

**"We are incredibly grateful to our donors for their generous support. More than anything, these donations prove that we have organizations that want us to live happy and healthy lives. We don't have to settle for dangerous industries that degrade our beautiful communities and compromise our health."**

—Joy Banner  
The Descendants Project co-founder  
*"The Descendants Project awarded major grants; philanthropists & donors seek partnerships" L'Observateur, 2022/01/01*



Photo: Shutterstock

# AGAINST THE GRAIN

In 1993 the corrupt and coercive actions of Parish President Lester Millet Jr. opened the door for illegal zoning in Wallace. Millet used his power to sway the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Parish Council while threatening the appropriation of the community's land. Millet's efforts switched residential land to heavy industry, just footsteps away from homes. Thankfully, the Federal Government discovered Millet's illegal activities. He was later convicted and spent over five years in federal prison. Despite Millet's conviction, St. John the Baptist Parish still represents the land as "heavy industry." Greenfield Louisiana, LLC and principal investor Christopher Medlock James now exploit this fraudulent designation by attempting to bring their

heavy industry, a grain terminal, to our small town. The grain industry is classified as highly dangerous: grain elevators can explode, workers can suffocate from falling in the grain bins, and, most importantly, grain elevators produce particulate matter and dust that will be emitted into the air, further damaging our vulnerable and overburdened community. Grain dust carries mold, bacteria, rodent feces, shredded metal, and cancer-causing silica. Our Parish Council and Parish Administration have refused to hear our concerns and even signed letters of support of the project. In their attempts to silence us, the parish council has denied our attempts for placement on the council agenda. It takes more than that to silence us!

WE COLLECTED ALMOST  
**5000**  
SIGNATURES  
OPPOSING THE PROPOSED  
GREENFIELD GRAIN ELEVATOR  
FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF THE COMMUNITY

Through "Stop the Wallace Grain Elevator," we have supported the community in their opposition to this detrimental project.

Our work includes:

- Soliciting comment letters from community members to send to permitting agencies
- Obtaining support from organizations such as the National Trust of Historic Preservation
- Challenging zone designations and permit decisions through the legal teams of the Center for Constitutional Rights and the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic
- Arranging town halls, virtual meetings, and press conferences to alert the public

# FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

The Descendants Project is suing St. John the Baptist Parish over an unjust zoning designation that has threatened our community for over thirty years. Despite the illegal actions of the Parish President Lester Millet, Jr to convert residential land to heavy industry, the unlawful designation has been allowed to stand by the Parish. Numerous errors were discovered on zoning maps, and the official zoning map is missing. We are urging the courts to declare the zoning designation null and void and return the land's rightful residential designation.



Our new commercial highlights corruption, coercion, and capitalization linked to Grain Terminal Land. This commercial brings to light criminal "zoning" that exposes the residents of Wallace, Louisiana to pollutants caused by heavy industry less than 200 feet from our homes. The video describes how the corrupt actions of former Parish President Lester Millet Jr. over 30 years ago are now being used by Greenfield Louisiana LLC, and principal investor Christopher James in their bid to bring a grain terminal to Wallace. Watch the video at: [thedescentstheproject.org/stop-wallace-grain-elevator](http://thedescentstheproject.org/stop-wallace-grain-elevator)

## BY THE NUMBERS

- 10** How old Joy and Jo were when their home was threatened by the potential location of Formosa plastics to their Wallace community
- 5** Number of years Lester Millet was sentenced to federal prison due to his illegal scheme to convert residential land in Wallace to heavy industry to accommodate Formosa
- 30** Number of years St. John the Baptist Parish has refused to officially nullify the illegitimate zoning, at times shopping the land to heavy industry.
- 0** Public meetings Greenfield Louisiana, LLC, who is now exploiting the illegal zone designation to locate its grain elevator, has had with adjacent landowners. The St. John the Baptist Parish Administration and Council have refused to put the grain terminal on the council agenda.
- 4** Number of different maps (each with conflicting zoning designations) St. John the Baptist Parish has provided. The "official zoning map" listed on the parish website, designates the Greenfield land as residential.
- < 200** Distance in feet St. John the Baptist Parish has allowed heavy industry activity and equipment from a residence, despite a buffer zone of **2,000 feet** for heavy industry projects.

- 2006 Map**  
The Descendants Project and the Center for Constitutional Rights discover a 2006 map that designates the Greenfield land as residential. The Parish did not provide the map despite multiple public information requests.
- 2012 Map**  
The team discovers the official zoning map of the parish is missing. The map was replaced in 2012 despite an ordinance that strictly forbids replacement. The team also discovers an additional relevant map was ripped from an official land record book.
- 2021 Lawsuit**  
The Descendants Project sues St. John the Parish to once in for all rid the community of Wallace.

# MANY WATERS HOUSE

The Descendants Project headquarters will be located in a renovated 1806 plantation house now called Many Waters.

The Many Waters House was originally located on the Norma and the Lacaz Plantations in St. John the Baptist Parish.

The house was purchased by the Banners in 2004 and moved to their family's land in Wallace.

Jo and Joy Banner named this historical Creole house Many Waters in connection to their ancestors who traveled by many different bodies of water and settled the area.

The house was also named Many Waters in honor of the Indigenous Chitimacha tribe, whose name translates to "The People of the Many Waters."

Jo and Joy descend from the inhabitants who once occupied the house. As descendants of the enslaved, Jo and Joy Banner, believe that the plantation house should now be fully dedicated to the true liberation of the descendant community.



## THE MANY WATERS HOUSE WILL BE RENOVATED TO INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- **Ancestral Archeology and Burial Ground Research Center**—There is no central location currently that collates the burial ground research and necessary archeological data into one accessible place.
- **African American Genealogy Research Center**
- **Interpretive Public History Space**—The Many Waters house will also contain an interpretive, public, history space that offers explanations, guidance and depicts the history, culture and experience of the descendant community and the deep connection to their ancestors.



# MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

The Descendants Project is a 501c3 nonprofit organization established to support descendant communities in the river parishes working together to dismantle the legacies of slavery and to achieve a healed and liberated future.

If you would like to donate to our mission, visit [thedescendantsproject.org/donate](https://thedescendantsproject.org/donate)

[thedescendantsproject.org](https://thedescendantsproject.org)



Our **Jobs that Don't Stink Career Fair** focused on jobs that produce little to no pollution relative to employment in heavy industries such as petrochemical and grain terminals.

We think it's time the community moves away from the literal "stench" of heavy industry. For decades, we've been told the only way to make money is through jobs that produce harmful, foul-smelling pollutants. Our job fair is proof that residents do not need to sacrifice their health and the community's health to earn a living!





THE  
DESCENDANTS  
PROJECT

**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR PARTNERS FOR THEIR KINDNESS AND ASSISTANCE:**

Concerned Citizens of St. John Parish

Rise St. James

Inclusive Louisiana

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade

The Center for Constitutional Rights

Whitney Plantation

Healthy Gulf

Power Coalition

Louisiana Just Recovery

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

Louisiana National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Good Trouble Network

The Sunrise Movement

The Solutions Project

Tulane Environmental Law Clinic

The Rockefeller Family Foundation

The Bloomberg Foundation

Wallace Community

Jordan Brewington

