

DETROIT

Louisiana Supreme Court Approves Formation of New, All-White St. George City



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Deep-seated racial and economic tensions will be present in the new chapter of Baton Rouge's history because of the Louisiana Supreme Court's historic decision approving the creation of the City of St. George. The decision follows a protracted legal battle initiated by affluent white residents seeking to carve out their own municipality from the broader cityscape, citing concerns over governance, public safety, and educational quality.

Encompassing a sprawling 60-square-mile expanse in the southeast of East Baton Rouge Parish, St. George is poised to emerge as an autonomous entity with its own mayor and city council, catering to an estimated population of 86,000 residents. Advocates tout the move as necessary to address high crime rates and underperforming schools.

However, critics argue that the decision heralds the creation of a de facto segregated enclave, further entrenching racial and economic disparities within the Baton Rouge community. The polarizing debate underscores broader societal challenges and raises profound questions about equity and inclusion. It also has all the earmarks of America's dark history of racial segregation, which preserves the economic advantages and social dominance of whites and the politically powerful, who have utilized legal and societal barriers to maintain their elite status over other communities.

In Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, an African American student protested segregation by sitting at a drugstore lunch counter designated for whites only. Demonstrators staged a famous protest at a Woolworth store in New York City in 1960 to denounce segregation at the chain's Southern lunch counters. In 1921,

Racial segregation has been pervasive worldwide among mixed-race communities, excluding regions like Hawaii and

Brazil with significant racial integration. According to Britannica, while social discrimination exists in these areas, formal segregation does not. Conversely, in the Southern United States, the segregation of Black and white individuals in public spaces was legally sanctioned from the late 1800s to the 1950s under the Jim Crow laws. In response, African Americans initiated the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s to dismantle racial segregation. The movement culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which provided robust protections against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and public facilities.

Meanwhile, the genesis of St. George dates back nearly 15 years, when residents initially sought to establish an independent school district. Over time, the ambition evolved into a broader push for municipal independence, culminating in a decisive 2019 ballot initiative in which 54 percent of residents voted in favor of incorporation.

Legal wrangling ensued, with Baton Rouge city officials contesting the move, warning of dire fiscal consequences and service disruptions. While lower courts initially sided with Baton Rouge, the state's Supreme Court ultimately overturned their rulings, endorsing the viability of St. George's internal budget to sustain essential public services.

Nevertheless, lingering concerns persist regarding the economic fallout. A 2014 study by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber projected a substantial budget deficit for the remaining portions of Baton Rouge, raising apprehensions about the city's capacity to uphold public services post-separation.

"My goal from the very beginning—and it will always be my goal — is to advocate for a united Baton Rouge," Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome told reporters. "I am committed to serving the residents of St. George."

NATIVE SUN

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Declaration of Nationality

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After Flint water crisis, art brings Hope

By Nadira Jamerson,
"Flint's Still Fighting" is Word In Black's series about the decade-long water crisis, and the resulting struggles and triumphs still transforming the majority-Black city.

When the water crisis hit Flint, Michigan, in 2014, residents were left with more than just contaminated pipes and brown, unsafe water flowing from their taps. The majority-Black city was also grappling with a profound lack of resources and opportunities. And as is so often the case in challenging times for the Black community, art became an outlet for expression, healing, and demanding accountability.

Ten years after the officials made the disastrous decision to switch Flint's water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River to save money, Black artists are using their work to call for justice and document the city's triumphs.

"Of course, there's that feeling of dread because we still have a lot of dilapidated buildings and gray skies sometimes," says Flint native Keyon Lovett, 34, a multi-disciplinary visual street artist, creatively known as The Art School Dropout. "But the hopeful thing is knowing on Friday that we have the Art Walk downtown. You can go to the Farmer's Market and get some good food and see a show."

Lovett didn't plan to become an activist, but the water crisis changed the trajectory of his life. Around the time the crisis began, he left an arts program with Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, which is located two hours west of Flint near Grand Rapids.

"I didn't want to come home because the only work that would have possibly been available was working at UPS or General Motors, and my family already did that. I wasn't trying to be the next lineage of Lovetts to be in the factory," Lovett says.

Lovett stayed connected to what was happening in Flint through frequent trips home to visit friends and family — and what he saw began to show up in his art. In 2018, Lovett debuted "Home Sweet Home" at ArtPrize, an art competition in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"The installation I did was of me living in a house that was condemned, but I'm living off of six stacks of bottled water," Lovett explains. "As the viewers of ArtPrize come in, they see me cooking, washing, brushing my teeth, and people would offer water because they'd see the stacks getting low. I'd

say, 'No. If I run out, I run out, because that's how it is at home.' At the water centers, there would be days they had donations, and there would be days they don't. People were stealing donations and breaking water machines."

In the face of confusing news coverage and shame-dodging politicians who silenced many Flint residents, Lovett created the "Home Sweet Home" documentary that let Flint's people speak the truth about the lack of access to safe and clean water.

"We filmed a short 10-minute documentary, and what I did was interview my family and friends and have them explain and share their stories on how the water crisis impacted the city, themselves, work, and everyday life," Lovett says.

A decade after the water crisis began, health implications from ingesting the unsafe water as well as financial burdens continue to plague residents. Lovett, who moved back to Flint in 2021, says that while there is much rebuilding left to do, the community is also beaming with progress and hope — and that is, in part, due to Black artists in the city.

"One of the reasons I moved back home is because of the renaissance of Black music, poetry, and art happening in Flint. A lot of Flint rappers, and singers, and artists are just being great. I wanted to come back home and be a part of that," Lovett says.

In addition to his own work, Lovett says many other Flint organizations — from the Beats x Beers music tour, to Comma Bookstore & Social Club, and the creative co-op space Art At The Market — are using art to promote growth and healing.

Lovett and other artists in Flint follow in the footsteps of self-taught painter Clementine Hunter, who depicted plantation life through the 1800s, and renowned photographer Gordon Parks, who captured generations of movements for civil rights starting through the twentieth century. And as Octavia Butler said, "I began writing about power because I had so little."

"It's always important to have art that means something. Art that sheds a light and requires accountability," Lovett says. "Even with the blight in the city, finding ways to put up murals, finding ways to have an initiative of Flint pride within the artwork, to even showcase a Flint artist, is important."

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