

MARC H. MORIAL
80 Pine Street, 9TH Floor
New York, NY 10005

June 3, 2022

Mr. Christopher James, Founder and Executive Chairman
Ms. Jennifer Grancio, Chief Executive Officer
Engine No. 1
710 Sansome Street
San Francisco, CA 94111

Dear Mr. James and Ms. Grancio:

By way of introduction, I am the President of the National Urban League, the nation's largest civil rights and urban advocacy organization, and a proud descendant of the enslaved Africans who called the Whitney Plantation home.

Let me express my unequivocal and vigorous opposition to your ill-advised plans to develop a massive grain elevator complex, almost as tall as the Statue of Liberty on the site adjacent to the Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana.

As a former Mayor of New Orleans (1994-2002), Louisiana State Senator (1992-1994), and lawyer who serves on corporate boards and works closely with business and corporate leaders in our nation, I understand jobs and economic development, and its intersection with racial justice and equity.

As such, I am shocked, surprised, and disappointed that after your much-heralded efforts to champion a shareholder resolution on climate change at a recent Exxon shareholder's meeting, you would fail to recognize the negative impact of plans to build a grain elevator which adversely impacts the only site in Louisiana which honors the enslaved Africans who built the sugarcane and indigo wealth of Antebellum Louisiana. Your plans reflect insensitivity to this historic, treasured, and sacred site of an essential element of African American history.

I urge you to abandon your plans.

Consider this historical background:

- On August 1st, 1835, a baby boy was born to Anna, an enslaved woman of African descent on the grounds of Habitation Haydel, a sugar cane farm located in what is now called Wallace, Louisiana.
- Anna was enslaved on that ground by its owners, the Haydel Family.
- The baby, named Victor, was baptized at the St. John the Baptist Parish Church on December 13th of that year.
- Victor's godparents, Edouard and Adèle are identified in his original, handwritten baptismal record in the Archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of New Orleans.
- Neither Victor, nor Edouard, nor Adèle's surnames are contained in the church record: as enslaved persons, they had none.
- The family knew Victor to be the child not only of Anna but also of a member of the owners' family.
- Victor appears in the United States Census of 1870 as Victor Haydel, my third great grandfather.
- Today, the ancestral home and property of the Haydel Family, including my mother, Sybil Haydel Morial, the first African American First Lady of the City of New Orleans, is known throughout the world as The Whitney Plantation Museum.
- The Whitney Plantation where enslaved people lived and worked for centuries is one of the only sites in which that history is made available to the public.
- Located on the grounds of the Whitney Plantation Historic District and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the museum tells the true story of the enslavement of people of African descent in the United States.

As our country still struggles to reckon with its past, the Whitney Plantation Museum's mission to tell the story of slavery on one of the hundreds of thousands of sites where humans were held in bondage is more vital than ever. The historic site and its surrounding sugarcane fields offer visitors and the public the opportunity to learn the facts about the brutal institution of slavery in America while walking the same ground as Whitney's enslaved community.

- Whitney Plantation includes 22 historical structures, including slave cabins, 18th century Big House, and an original 1870s freedman's church.
- The uninterrupted view of the sugarcane fields, planted since antebellum times, offers a perspective of the harsh day-to-day realities of enslaved persons and who they were in the workplace.

- It is also believed that unmarked, and yet, unidentified, and unexamined enslaved community burial grounds lie within the property area of the proposed grain elevator complex.

The proposed grain elevator complex extends across 248 acres and surrounds both the Museum and the Wallace community. Operations would inundate a community already burdened with grain dust, noxious odors, and pollution from nearby chemical plant operations. Potential community health risks are serious.

- Exposure to emitted particulate matter includes fungi, bacteria, pesticides, metal fragments, dead insect body parts, and the feces of rodents and insects.
- Lung damage, chronic cough, asthma, bronchitis, and farmer's lung disease are associated with grain dust.
- Tiny dust particles can get stuck in the lungs and cause serious respiratory issues, including fibrosis.
- Irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat and conditions like asthma are exacerbated.
- Conditions are even more dangerous within "cancer alley," where minority residents are already overburdened with the releases of chemicals from over 150 nearby Petrochemical facilities.
- Greenfield, a national concern that operates many grain elevators, has admitted in its permitting materials that it will emit 118 tons of particulate matter per year, in this immediate area.

Besides the disproportionate adverse health and environmental impacts and the destruction of the surrounding landscape, questions have been raised about the legitimacy of zoning and permitting processes, allegations of inappropriate financial involvement by elected officials as well as the silencing of an unfavorable independent assessment.

- The residents of Wallace, the Board of Directors of the Whitney Plantation Museum, the Concerned Citizens of St. John, and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade have formally opposed this development by filing lawsuits and objections to permitting processes.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation have requested that their input be considered in the Section 106 consultation required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- Among the opposition's local permitting objections is the original illegal grant of the present industrial zoning for the site, which was part of a criminal bribery scheme that sent the then parish president to federal prison. (United States of America v. Lester J. Millet, Jr., Nos. 96-30968, 96-30999, US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, 1997).
- Allegations that some elected officials have monetary interests associated with the project developers and operators.
- News reports regarding the suppression of an independent assessment that supports the view that the project will have an adverse impact on the Whitney Plantation Museum and the residents, mostly African Americans, who reside nearby.

I expect to be joined by many of the nation's most prominent civil rights advocates and organizations who are learning of and outraged by the injustice of your plans. We believe that this project should not go forward and that you should reconsider your decision.

I appeal to you to stand up for environmental justice in the same way you have stood for climate change at the Exxon shareholder's meeting. To do otherwise would be an act of hypocrisy and inconsistency.

It is time for you to speak out to protect the people of the Wallace community, the west bank of St. John the Baptist Parish, and the Whitney Plantation, the home of my ancestors. Please cancel your plans to build a Statue of Liberty-sized grain elevator complex.

Very truly yours,



Marc H. Morial
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League

Mayor Emeritus of New Orleans 1994 - 2002