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### **Congo Square: The Roots of Jazz and African American Heritage**

New Orleans is filled with swinging jazz, Mardi Gras parades, and is America's most haunted city. But there is more to this lively city, it is a sight overflowing with African American history. Congo Square, an old African meeting place, is located here. Through preservation, Congo Square has maintained its African American Memorial reputation.

Congo Square is a garden area filled with stone walkways and magnificent flora. Located right outside the famous French Quarter in Louis Armstrong Park, Congo Square houses much more than just a plush garden. In 1817, the New Orleans government made a new rule. This allowed African Americans, both enslaved and free, to hold meetings and dances. The mayor chose the meeting place, which was Congo Square. Congo Square would later become a place where African Americans cultivated their practices, by sharing their meeting place through the generations. This makes Congo Square an excellent African American historical site, due to the fact that through the years Congo Square has been a safe, holding many African American customs. During socials, the African Americans of New Orleans created many dances. The "Flat-Footed-Shuffle" and "Bamboula" were dances created during early Congo Square socials. New music also made its way into the socials, created from a mix of heritages and played on African instruments. The music played by African Americans here would later develop into jazz.

This shows African Americans early contributions to New Orleans culture, and also the development of jazz.

Now recognized as a historical landmark, Congo Square is crucial to teaching about African American memory. Without Congo Square, jazz would not have been born and African Americans would be much different than they are now. Freddi Williams Evans, author of “Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans,” agrees. She says, “The study of Congo Square is crucial because it shows how African culture has influenced American culture.” This stands true, because by passing down the Congo Square history we have preserved African American culture. Not only have we keep the musical traditions alive, we have keep the lively spirit of early African Americans by recognizing Congo Square nationally. To this day, African American musicians visit Congo Square to experience part of their history and relish in the music that is played through the area. African Americans, young and old go to Congo Square to time travel to the past, and teach their younger family the impact this landmark has made to their lives.

The Soul of New Orleans, Congo Square has been central in creating African American memory. From the creation of jazz to the safe keeping of customs, Congo Square has safeguarded the African culture while being a landmark and learning center for the world. When visiting here, we get a glimpse of African American history, while also seeing the roots of African Americans influence on jazz.