

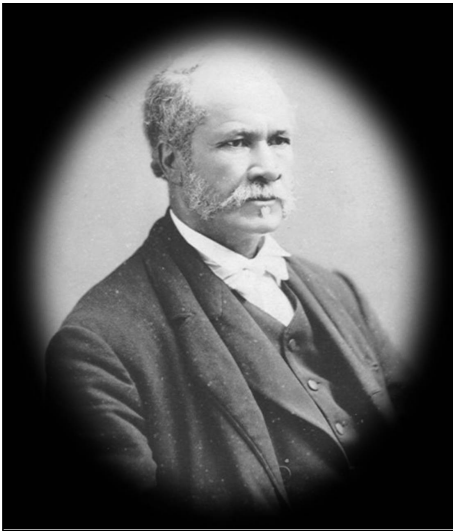
## **DR. LOUIS CHARLES ROUDANEZ: PUBLISHER OF AMERICA'S FIRST BLACK DAILY NEWSPAPER**

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Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez (date unknown).

Louis Charles Roudanez, a black Creole visionary was born June 12, 1823, in Saint James Parish, Louisiana. His parents were Louis Roudanez, a Frenchman who migrated to Louisiana from a Haitian coffee plantation and Aimée Potens, a free woman of color who was a midwife and nurse in New Orleans. Louis Charles was baptized at St. Michael's Parish Church in Convent, Louisiana, and

later sent to New Orleans to get a practical education in business. In New Orleans, Roudanez acquired the money to move to Paris to study medicine at the French Medical Academy where he graduated with honors in 1853. After receiving his M.D. in France, he returned to the U.S. and enrolled in Dartmouth's medical school where he received a second medical degree in 1857.

Armed with two medical degrees and a radical racial and political philosophy, Dr. Roudanez returned to his beloved and racially restricted New Orleans of the 1850s. He developed a lucrative medical practice serving black and white patients, and married Celie Saulay, a free woman of color in the St. Louis Cathedral in 1858. The couple had

nine children which included two sons, George A. Roudanez and Charles Louis Roudanez who became doctors, while a third son became a dentist. At Dr. Roudanez's death, three of his daughters lived in Paris, and a fourth son studied at Louis le Grand College in Paris.

Louis and Celie were active in the black Creole community in New Orleans. They contributed both time and money to provide shelter, clothing and schooling for the newly freed slaves, and the indigent free orphans of color. The couple worked closely with the Sisters of the Holy Family (a black Catholic order of nuns) providing financial support for their school and family projects. Celie's charitable endeavors continued as Dr.



Tintype of Aimée Potens (ca. 1793-1878),  
mother of Louis Charles Roudanez.



Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez.

Roudanez, and a small group of black Creole men united to create two newspapers designed to articulate the civil and political aspirations of the city's free and freed people of color. The men first launched *L'Union*, the first black-owned newspaper in the south dedicated to ending slavery and the oppression of black people. When harassment against *L'Union* intensified with threats to burn the building and kill its editor, Paul Trevigne, it stopped publication on July 19, 1864. Recognizing the need to con-



Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez  
and four sons,  
Rudolph, Walter, Georges, and Charles.

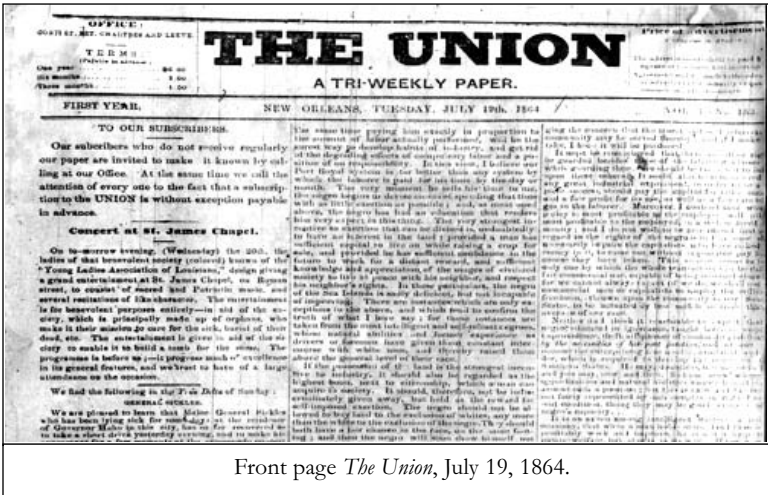
tinue the struggle for civil rights, Dr. Roudanez bought out the other investors in *L'Union* and started *La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orleans* (*The New Orleans Tribune*) which became the first black-owned daily in the United States.

*The New Orleans Tribune* began publication in New Orleans on July 21, 1864, two days after *L'Union*, a tri-weekly, militant newspaper published its last issue. The newspaper was the product of a collective editorship

and staff which was open and accessible to the urban black community of New Orleans. Among the most notable of its staff members were editor, Paul Trevigne, a linguist and educator who at the risk of his life, had been editor in chief of *L'Union*, Jean Baptiste Roudanez, Dr. Roudanez' older brother who was a publisher and editor, Armand Lanusse, staff writer, educator, and Joannie Questy staff writer, and world-renowned poet. Jean Charles Houzeau, a Belgian political activist and journalist joined the *Tribune* as a second and most famous editor.

*The Tribune* began as a four-page tri-weekly, but after October 4, 1864, it was published daily except Mondays. The offices of *the Tribune* were most of the time located at 21 Conti Street, which today would be between 525 and 537 Conti in the French Quarter. The newspaper's motto was "Political, Progressive, and Commercial." Its editorials called for the right to vote for black people, civil rights for all citizens, free public education for all citizens, attacked the serfdom labor policy of General Banks, the federal officer in charge of the city's occupation, planned for economic development, sought unity between the freed and free in the black community, and carried on a war against President Johnson's policies by sending copies of *the Tribune* to every member of congress on a regular basis.

*The New Orleans Tribune* was for several years one of the most



Front page *The Union*, July 19, 1864.

impressive of newspapers in New Orleans. Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, and Garibaldi sent letters from Europe to the paper. In addition, in April, 1867, the paper was designated an official organ of the United States Government and received a regular subsidy. It had regular correspondents in Mexico, Paris, and Boston, devoting much space to foreign news. The paper serialized French novels, published the poems of several local black poets, and reported on the social and literary activities in the black community. To round out its coverage, *the Tribune* carried local intelligence, legal items, and notices to mariners.



Front page *New Orleans Tribune*, Thursday, July 21, 1864.

Unfortunately, this success was short-lived, as differences between Houzeau and Dr. Roudanez mounted. Fearing that Blacks would be used by carpetbaggers (outsiders that Roudanez considered corrupt) and other political opportunists, Roudanez urged his readers to vote against the Republican Gubernatorial ticket of Warmouth and Dunn in the election of 1868. Some criticize Roudanez for not being loyal to the Republican Party leading to *the Tribune's* demise. History, however, proves Roudanez to be correct in assessing the character of Warmouth as he was later impeached.

After the election, the government pulled its financial support from the paper and Dr. Roudanez spent approximately \$35,000 from his personal savings to keep the paper going. Dr. Roudanez suspended publication in 1868 after Houzeau's resignation and Lanusse's death. By March 3, 1869, the paper had become a weekly and continued to appear until sometime early in 1870.

After *the New Orleans Tribune* closed its doors for good, Roudanez retreated from politics except for a final involvement in the Louisiana Unification Movement of 1873. The Unification movement was composed of men of both races and members of the Republican and Democratic parties who wanted to replace what they perceived to be a corrupt, incompetent government with an honest, competent one from both races and parties. The Unification movement failed and Dr. Roudanez turned his time and effort to his medical practice.

He lived and worked at his home at 197 Customhouse Street (Iberville) the remainder of his life. Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez died at his residence on March 11, 1890, leaving behind a legacy of human-rights accomplishments. The fact that he did not attempt to hide his African heritage is evidenced by the time and commitment he gave to securing equal rights for people of African descent. His vision and intelligence are reflected in an obituary written in the most conservative white-owned newspaper in New Orleans, *The Picayune*, which states,

[. . .] death carried off Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez,  
A worthy and intelligent representative of the  
Colored element that was from before the war a  
Man of undoubted skill in his profession and great  
Popularity in this city [. . .]. He was an able writer,  
And his articles in his journal reflected a man of  
Genius and cultivation.

Recently, two of Dr. Roudanez's great, great grandsons, Mark Roudané and Mathew Roudané learned of their heritage and came to New Orleans to locate the doctor's tomb.