

# The New York Times

## ***NEW ORLEANS BLACKS PLAN MUSEUM AFTER FAIR***

**By Frances Frank Marcus**

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Surrounded by his sculpture, fanciful kinetic shapes in metal and wood, the artist John Scott searched for words to explain why he felt bound to his native city. There is a spirit here found nowhere else, he said, adding, "In New Orleans the sidewalk and trees talk to you."

The artist, a professor at Xavier University, was referring not only to his attachment to New Orleans but also to his belief that this city, rich in Afro-American history, is the logical place for a new museum and cultural center being planned as an outgrowth of the Afro-American Pavilion at the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition, which opens May 12.

The pavilion, designed mainly by Mr. Scott, will provide an impressionist look at Afro-American history. It will have 12,000 square feet of art and artifacts, brightly colored obelisks inspired by those originating in Africa, photographic murals and audio-visual presentations focusing on the experiences and accomplishments of blacks in America. There will be music, dramatic programs, dances and lectures.

The idea for the Afro-American Pavilion arose two years ago in a conversation between Mr. Scott and a friend and Xavier administrator, Sybil H. Morial, wife of the city's first black Mayor, Ernest N. Dutch Morial. Like Mr. Scott, Mrs. Morial has long been troubled by the scarcity of information about blacks in history books. A Place to 'Keep the Arts Alive'

"We began to talk about a pavilion," Mrs. Morial said, and "decided it was really important for us to do because our history has been neglected and misinterpreted."

They also decided that the world's fair would provide an opportunity to open a cultural center. Mr. Scott said he and several friends, prominent New Orleans musicians, including the jazz pianist Ellis Marsalis, had been talking for at least 10 years about starting a center that would be an urban American version of an African village where artists, musicians, writers, dancers and historians could meet, work and "keep the arts alive."

Mr. Scott sees the center as a place "where a young person can walk in and meet and learn from the masters," such as Mr. Marsalis and his son, Wynton, who recently won two Grammy Awards for jazz and classical music.

Construction began on the pavilion in February. It is being called "I've Known Rivers," from a line in a poem by Langston Hughes that is in keeping with the world's fair theme of rivers. Pavilion Needs \$4 Million

Funds for the pavilion are being raised by a nonprofit organization, "I've Known Rivers Inc.," led by Mrs. Morial, who said the organization had raised \$1.2 million in cash and contributions of equipment and services. It still needs \$2 million more to keep the pavilion open for the six months of the fair, and \$2 million to lease and renovate a building for the museum and cultural center.

Contributions have poured in from a variety of corporations and people, including \$150,000 from Soft Sheen Products of Chicago to numerous small contributions.

Interviewed in the I've Known Rivers headquarters at a small cottage owned by the Liberty Bank, a local black bank that has strongly supported the project, Mrs. Morial said she was optimistic.

"For a long time, I and others have wanted a black museum and culture center in this city," she said. "Our Louisiana history is so rich, there were so many free people of color before the Civil War, people of property who studied abroad and went to the opera. This makes New Orleans unique." 'A Freedom of Movement Here'

Mr. Scott agreed. "A great deal of the culture of New Orleans is Afro- American culture," he said. "Historically, what a lot of people do not understand is that slaves in New Orleans were running businesses, doing crafts, ironwork and carpentry and conducting correspondence. They had a freedom of movement here that they did not have in the rural areas."

Mr. Scott, a teacher, painter, sculptor and printmaker, said he designed the pavilion as a piece of sculpture and as a "holistic" look at the Afro-American experience.

The facade was inspired by Egyptian pyramids and Dogon mosques. The passageway into the pavilion will be an interpretation of a slave ship, designed to be "as experiential as possible," showing the confinement in which millions of Africans came to America.

Later in the exhibit, visitors will be given an impressionistic look at Afro- American accomplishments, including industrial inventions.

Archivists here are collecting historical material not recorded in history books. Mrs. Morial said, "I knew before we started we would have to go to original sources."

One of those working on the project, Florence Borders, the senior archivist at Amistad Research Center, researched exhibits by blacks in past world's fairs. The Amistad center is one of the nation's largest ethnic archives.

According to Mrs. Borders, the exhibits were used as showcases for achievements, ranging from good penmanship as an example of literacy among blacks in the late 19th century to paintings by such artists as Aaron Douglas, who painted murals for the "Hall of Negro Life" at the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936.