

YOUNG MEN OLYMPIAN, JUNIOR



BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION, INC.

Est, 1884

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Date 10/19/2023

To: Humanities “documentary Photographer of the Year awards Committee.

My is Norman Dixon Jr. and I am proud to offer my recommendation for Pableaux Johnson as a nominee for the Humanities “Documentary Photographer of the Year”. I have been a part of the culture in New Orleans all my 56yrs of my life. I am currently the President of the Young Men Olympian Junior Benevolent Assc. Co. established in 1884 which makes it the second oldest benevolent organization in the country. I am also the CEO of the Norman Dixon Sr. Foundation, which is named, after my father. This foundation provides financial assistance to different culture groups throughout the City of New Orleans.

I have known Pableaux for many years now, and it has been an honor. He is someone who has brought light on the culture of New Orleans like fellow others, and I am not just the speaking about the flash of his camera. Pableaux has been able to share his picture around the world which allow people to enjoy the culture they may not have a chance to do without his wonderful pictures. Pableaux has truly won the support of the culture through his great personality and the dedication he puts into his work.

Pableaux is a regular supporter of all the cultural events giving by either individual cultural group or the community in which they belong. His pictures have recorded thousands of history making events that will tell the story of today to many tomorrow. He once has been a light to the culture of New Orleans and I am not just speaking of his flash. I hope this letter has solved it purpose, which is to help a great blessing of a man be blessed.

Norman Dixon Jr

Norman Dixon Jr. RSW, MSM
President

C/O NORMAN DIXON, JR. ---PRESIDENT, YMO JR., INCORPORATED
2101 SOUTH LIBERTY STREET --- NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70113
PHONE: 504-527-6235 or 504-329-6595

Humanities Awards Committee
Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
938 Lafayette St, Suite 300,
New Orleans, LA 70113 October 10, 2023

October 17, 2023

Attn: Clare Shelburne;

It is my distinct pleasure to write in support of Pableaux Johnson's nomination for the Documentary Photographer of the Year award sponsored by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. While his photographic output has greatly impressed me for decades, the opportunities I have had in recent years to watch Pableaux's documentary practice in person as well my experience curating an exhibition of his work allow me to offer the highest praise for the art of his camera. Even more so, I am in awe of his remarkable dedication to intimate, collaborative engagement with those whose lives and traditions he depicts. In short, I can't think of a Louisiana photographer more deserving of this recognition. He has my highest, most sincere, recommendation.

As a curator at the Fowler Museum at UCLA and a university instructor who has taught both undergraduate and graduate courses on folk culture, visual anthropology, and archival practice, I have spent a significant amount of time critically examining the photographic documentation of community celebrations and public festivities, especially such events organized by minority and/or marginalized communities. At the museum, I have participated in the development of numerous exhibitions that were solely or largely based on photography. These have included 19th century colonialist portraits of indigenous peoples, early 20th century North American touristic images of "exotic" cultures, late 20th century photographic records of cultural revitalization produced by Southern California Native activists, and contemporary art photography by African-descendant artists in Latin America. As we know, all modes of visual representation are fraught with possibility for misrepresentation and missteps and this is especially true of documentary photography today.

When considering Pableaux's work, I must say that I have never met a photographer or cultural documentarian more professionally dedicated and personally engaged with the process of getting it right in terms of working in and with the represented communities. He "walks the walk." Having personally followed him during public events in New Orleans that he was photographing, I remain amazed by his committed, long-term connections with those whose images he was taking as well as those who were not the subjects of his camera. In a local context where many in the black community have

rightly called out voyeuristic, sensationalistic, and appropriationist behaviors on the part of some photographers, Pableaux provides a remarkable example of how to do it right. This is evidenced by the incredible support he receives from the community groups, performance troupes, and families he has photographed for several generations.

In 2018/2019, our museum mounted an exhibition entitled “New Orleans Second Line Parades: Photographs by Pableaux Johnson” which was the culmination of several years of direct work with him in New Orleans and Los Angeles. This show presented color portraits of members of African American Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs (SAPCs) in New Orleans. Beyond the beautiful intimacy of the photographs on display, the exhibition was a success on account of the ways that Pableaux’s work supported classroom instruction across several academic disciplines (African-American Studies, Art History, etc.) and how it also served as a locus for broadening local understanding of often overlooked connections between Los Angeles and New Orleans.

In closing, let me once again offer my strongest recommendation for Pableaux’s nomination. He is absolutely deserving of such an award. I hope that my words here have been as supportive as I would like them to be. And, please feel free to contact me should you need any further elaboration.

Sincerely,

Patrick A. Polk

Patrick A. Polk

Senior Curator of Latin American and Caribbean Popular Arts
polk@arts.ucla.edu

THE NEIGHBORHOOD STORY PROJECT

Our Stories Told By Us

Humanities Awards Committee
Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
938 Lafayette St, Suite 300
New Orleans, LA 70113

October 18, 2023

Attn: Clare Shelburne

I am writing in strong support of Dr. Matt Sakakeeny's nomination of Pableaux Johnson for the LEH's "Documentary Photographer of the Year" award. I first became aware of Mr. Johnson's photography through his exhibition at the Fowler Museum at UCLA—one of the leading venues for exhibitions on the African Diaspora in the country. African art historians who I have worked with over the years talked about the exhibit and led me to learn more about his work. In "New Orleans Second Line Parades," the portraits were intimate and graceful. I could tell he understood the rhythm of the parade because the images were on beat with the gestures, dance, and expressions that move with the music.

Once I became aware of Mr. Johnson's images, they were easy to recognize. I began to see them on fans and on posters that the club members created themselves—often to memorialize members who passed away. As an ethnographer who worked for years with Sylvester Francis of the Backstreet Cultural Museum and Ronald W. Lewis of the House of Dance and Feathers, I understood Mr. Johnson's praxis as following a lineage of an ethic of care and reciprocity. Over time, I realized the clubs were able to use images from his archives because he always shared his photography with them after their parades.

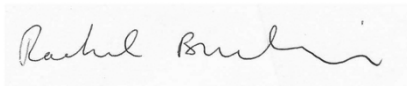
My professional relationship with Mr. Johnson began in 2020 when I worked with The Historic New Orleans Collection on the exhibit "Dancing in the Streets." The first round of my work was to identify everyone in the photographs THNOC curators had chosen and to contact the clubs to see if they would like to share stories about them. Many of the photographers were unsure of the people who were in their images, but Mr. Johnson knew everyone. In interviews, club members frequently shared favorite images they stored in their phone, which were usually taken by Mr. Johnson. The second round of work developed as I interviewed the club founders and presidents involved in the exhibition, we decided with THNOC to create life histories of their clubs. To complement their oral histories, I asked Mr. Johnson if he might have

photographs of each of the people being interviewed so they could have a beautiful portrait to accompany their interview. In an incredibly organized archive of each club's parade by year, he was able to locate multiple images of everyone, which we shared with the clubs and they chose their favorites: : <https://www.hnoc.org/dits-club-narratives> In addition to these images, he also shared entire photo shoots of parades with me to be able to represent important moments that club members wanted to share. I would not have been able to create this body of work without Mr. Johnson's gracious involvement. The clubs have been extremely happy with the finished project. For many, it is the first time an in-depth history of their organization has been published.

More recently, Mr. Johnson collaborated with The Neighborhood Story Project on a booklet with the Young Men Olympian, Jr. about the interments in their society tombs in Lafayette Cemetery No. 2. I am forever grateful for his generosity and in-depth archive that allows us to go back to particular moments that have layers of meaning. As he has thought about the broader arcs of the work, I have consulted with Mr. Johnson about his interest in making the archive accessible in the public realm with a primary audience being the communities represented in the images. I believe that the recognition of Documentary Photographer of the Year would allow him to articulate this vision in deeper ways and to help garner support for building the infrastructure to make it happen.

Mr. Johnson says that the parades are part of a spiritual practice in his life. Like church, he says he receives more than he gives. It is part of the call and response ethic of his work in the city that is backed up with an incredible eye for the gorgeous diversity of self and communal expression from our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rachel Breunlin". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Rachel Breunlin
Director
The Neighborhood Story Project
The Department of Anthropology & Sociology
University of New Orleans



October 18, 2023

Dear Humanities Awards Committee,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of Pableaux Johnson's nomination for Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities "Documentary Photographer of the Year" award.

For 52 plus years, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival has celebrated the culture and heritage of Louisiana (and the world) both on and off the Festival's 14 stages. On the very first day of the very first "Jazz Fest" in 1970, the festival was ushered in with a second line parade comprised of musicians, social aid and pleasure club dancers and Mardi Gras Indians. These parades continue to this day throughout the city on primarily on Sundays and special holidays and also every day at the Festival.

At Jazz Fest, we turn to Pableaux to help us document our daily second line parades. His weekly devotion to cover all of the cities social aid & pleasure club and Mardi Gras parades has made him uniquely qualified to understand the microcosm of the second line community. But what makes a great documentary photographer still rests heavily on the eye of the photographer and understanding the moment. Where some see colors, Pableaux sees communities. Where some see feathers, Pableaux sees multiple generations of families. Where some see a parade, Pableaux sees the history of the city.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

W. David Foster

Design & Internet Director

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival

Festival Productions Inc. New Orleans



NOMGIC / MOHAWK HUNTERS INC.

2608 LaSalle Street

New Orleans, La. 7011

October 12, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of NOMGIC/ Mohawk Hunters, Inc., I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Pableaux Johnson for his incomparable courage and commitment to the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian Culture.

While furthering his knowledge with the local cultural arts Pableaux's, Photography and assistance in maintaining this very unique cultural experience through pictures has had a lasting impact on the individuals and community that he has photographed over the years.

Pableaux has been extremely valuable because of his interpersonal skills and personality which enhanced his ability to interact with the culture and maintaining a great respect for the secrecy and rituals of the Mardi Gras Indians.

Big Chief Tyrone Casby

Secretary /Treasurer

Tyrone5322@att.net

504-239-3685

22 October 2023

Humanities Awards Committee
Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
938 Lafayette St, Suite 300,
New Orleans, LA 70113

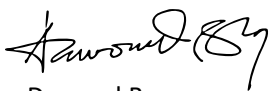
Dear Members of the Humanity Awards Committee,

I have been asked to write on behalf of Pableaux Johnson's nomination as Documentary Photographer of the Year, and I am pleased to do so.

I have spent many years visiting New Orleans, both for pleasure and to work on a recent project, and during those years I became increasingly aware of Mr. Johnson's photographic work documenting aspects of New Orleans culture. Many photographers have visualized aspects of this storied city in photographs of course, but I've paid consistent attention to Mr. Johnson because of the quality of execution that his photographs embody in addition to my deep interest in his subjects. These photographs are intimate, visceral, and charged with life, but they are also consistently executed with a high degree of visual sophistication, which is what sets them apart for me. Mr. Johnson clearly connects with the subjects of his work in a very deep way, as only a true insider to the culture of New Orleans can. And while he has photographed many aspects of the life and culture, it is his photographs of New Orleans street pageantry and celebration that I am most familiar with and find most compelling. I always know I am looking at a Pableaux Johnson photograph even before I see his name, such is the strong individual visual sensibility inherent in his work.

Mr. Johnson's work is clearly an invaluable and indelible archive of photographs about a singular cultural contribution to this country, and as such should be celebrated and supported whenever and wherever possible. I am happy to write this letter in support of his nomination, and encourage you to give all serious consideration to his significant work as a photographer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawoud Bey' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dawoud Bey

Professor of Photography and
Distinguished College Professor
MacArthur Foundation Fellow 2017

Columbia College Chicago
600 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60615
dawoubey@gmail.com

October 18, 2024

Dear Humanities Award Committee:

A mutual friend introduced me to Pableaux Johnson more than a decade ago. This friend wasn't actually in the room to make the introductions and help break the ice that can form between strangers. He merely facilitated the meeting. When I arrived in New Orleans for a story and knocked on Pableaux's front door, I didn't know what to expect. Pableaux welcomed me into his home with open arms.

He told me about New Orleans and its traditions. He told me about his life in food writing and photography. He told me about his red beans-and-rice dinners – and the history behind the Monday night meals. But mostly, he asked questions. He wasn't so much interested in the nuts-and-bolts of my job. He already knew how that world operated. He wanted to know where I called home. How many siblings did I have? What did my parents do for a living? What was life like growing up in Nebraska?

This was the Pableaux Johnson that would I get to know well: a man with a boundless curiosity about the world and people around him.

Here's another thing I've learned about Pableaux: Whenever he goes, whether it's a wedding in rural Louisiana or a trip to the Taj Mahal in India, Pableaux always has a camera slung around his neck. He's not snapping photos to impress friends or win awards. He's capturing little moments in time – the kind of history that is not always preserved in books or shown in museums (though Pableaux's photos have been in both), but the kind that reflects the joys and heartbreaks, large and small, that define a life.

In conducting some quick research for this all-too-brief letter, I came across the quote below from Pableaux. It was part of a press release announcing an exhibition of his second-line parade photographs at the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

“My goal with these photographs is to capture in a single frame what it FEELS like to be in the middle of a Second Line—sandwiched between the horn line and a parked car, riding the rope that defines the club's sacred dance floor, sneaking in to catch the frenetic buckjumping style that matches New Orleans contemporary brass band music,” Johnson said. “In a city that's 300 years old, Sunday Second Lines nod to the past but embrace the present—that thin line where tradition lives fully, four hours of unbridled jubilation at a time.” – Pableaux Johnson

Researchers could spend months breaking down this quote and analyzing the knowledge and history required to express it. To me, the quote speaks of trust and dedication. A photographer isn't just given access to New Orleans Social and Pleasure Clubs. He earns it with hours building trust and rapport. But the quote also speaks volumes about his dedication to the culture of New Orleans. Pableaux embeds himself in the community like a war correspondent. Finally, the quote speaks of Pableaux's poetry, both in word and image.

When I look at Pableaux's photos of second lines or Mardi Gras Indians, I don't see just what he wants me to see: the pageantry, the history, the pride, the dignity, the celebration, the beauty. I also see a photographer, invisible to the eye, who is so fluid and so integrated into the scene that the participants are free to express themselves. This is a gift not just to those who view Pableaux's photos, but to the community captured in them. Their emotions and movements are without self-consciousness. They fully express themselves in a way that uplifts Louisiana culture far from its place of origin.

This, among many other reasons, is why I can't think of a more deserving recipient of the distinguished LEH Documentary Photographer of the Year Award than Pableaux Johnson.

Sincerely,

Tim Carman

Food Reporter

The Washington Post

1301 K St. NW

Washington, DC 20071

202-334-6587

October 12, 2024

Dear Humanities Award Committee:

I write in support of the nomination of Pableaux Johnson for the LEH Documentary Photographer of the Year. Pableaux is a cultural ambassador for Louisiana in so many ways—through his food and drink writing, home cooking, and enormously welcoming, curious nature. But the power of his imagery, imagery in which people are captured in all their vitality and vulnerability, is transfixing and transformative. His photography makes you love people and love the place they come from.

Photography can often seem, to nonpractitioners, like a series of happy accidents, but having had the privilege to be in the room to watch Pableaux go through his shots after working an event, I've gotten to see some of the wizardry behind the curtain, the choices that go into selecting THE image out of dozens. The moment when someone's guard came down or went back up, their expressions of defiance or delight, the specific frame where scene becomes story. You come away from his imagery of second-line culture in New Orleans feeling inspired and moved, even elated. His portraits of people do what Pableaux himself does in a broader sense: they make strangers feel like friends.

My family comes from the deep South, but we haven't lived there for years. Thanks to my amateur genealogist uncle's discovery of our deeper roots in the area, and regular trips to New Orleans for Tales of the Cocktail, I've come to love the city, but a big part of that love is due to Pableaux, who, through his storytelling and imagery and just general way of being, opens up the city and Louisiana as a whole to everyone he meets. As someone regularly trying to grab the thread of our family's roots, I'm regularly struck by how often I look up some element of Southern culture and find that Pableaux has either written or photographed it. In a bookstore last summer, I picked up an unknown book about New Orleans, and opened it to a random page, and there was Pableaux's imagery of the city's social aid and pleasure clubs. Last year searching for a good recipe for red beans and rice, Pableaux's is the one I found. And I have read his cocktail stories in Imbibe for years, turning to them to understand more about the watering holes and drink history of the city.

I have never met someone who so embodies the spirit of community, not just through his photography, writing and cooking and efforts to give back to the city and its people, but how he creates community via his weekly dinner parties where he cooks red beans and rice and cornbread for whatever gang of random folks happens to be in town. I've been out with Pableaux when he'll invite strangers we've just met for dinner that evening. Who does that these days? Pableaux does. Having now spent many hours at Pableaux's table, and with him at bars and tables far from his home, I've seen that thanks to his naturally gregarious and welcoming personality, every table becomes Pableaux's.

My appreciation for New Orleans has deepened enormously due to his influence, through what he creates and how much he embodies the best aspects of Louisiana. I'm convinced that anyone who spends enough time in New Orleans cannot help but love the city, maybe even get lucky

enough to feel it as a home away from home. That kind of intimacy and devotion to a place takes time to cultivate, but anyone who sees it through Pableaux's lens or experiences it through his warm welcome will feel like they've been there for years.

Sincerely,

M. Carrie Allan

Freelance Cocktail columnist, *The Washington Post*, *Imbibe*, *Food & Wine* and others

Winner of writing awards from the James Beard Foundation, Tales of the Cocktail Spirited Awards, the Association of Food Journalists and the International Association of Culinary Professionals

October 2, 2024

Humanities Awards Committee
Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
938 Lafayette St, Suite 300
New Orleans, LA 70113

Dear Members of the Awards Committee:

This letter is to enthusiastically support Pableaux Johnson for the Documentary Photographer of the Year award.

The two of us speak on his behalf not as photography experts but as friends who can attest to his cultural impact. We've known Pableaux for over three decades, dating back to his time in Austin, Texas, where he first picked up a camera and started taking pictures. Even back then, as a fledgling photographer, he possessed an eye for the telling detail that told us more than what we were looking at. And even back there, in Texas, he carried the banner of Louisiana culture, introducing – and gently schooling – Texans on the importance, beauty, and truth of the complicated and remarkable state that is Louisiana.

We now live in Washington, D.C., which, among whatever else may be said about it, is the headquarters of the world's diplomatic corps, which, if you'll allow us a little berth, permits us to assert that if states had ambassadors, Pableaux would be Louisiana's. He has deepened our appreciation of Louisiana culture at his famous Monday Red Beans salons, held in his New Orleans home. The dinners bring together prominent Louisianans with folks from around the country. Over Pableaux's exquisite red beans and rice, guests delve into the music, food, politics, and lore of Louisiana. The event is so renown (the New York Times and NPR have written about it) that Pableaux has taken it on the road, setting up his Red Beans Road Show in cities across the country, including ours, the nation's capital. Hundreds of people have attended the Road Show dinners, all of them learning about Louisiana culture through Pableaux's storytelling, a storytelling made most vivid through his astonishing, empathetic photography.

Pableaux's photographs transport people - tourists and lifelong residents alike - to a place they may believe they know but discover they don't. Not really. They learn Louisiana has more dimensions and a richer history than they thought. In freezing the dancing of a Mardi Gras Indian, for example, his photos capture the dizzying motion of Louisiana-specific creativity, and, in so doing, allow us to contemplate and marvel at a culture that has helped shape a nation.

The two of us frequently visit New Orleans, where Pableaux's documentary work has helped us to understand the living history of what we're experiencing. His photographs honor the traditions of a complicated culture, capturing its resilience, joy, and beauty. They've enriched and informed not only our lives but those of countless others.

Pableaux Johnson's work is a treasure. We hope you will give serious consideration to selecting him as Documentary Photographer of the Year.

Please contact us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Jim and Jessica Shahin

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