DISCUSSION GUIDE: FLAMBEAUX GLEAUX.

Students might need some guidance in analyzing the lyrics. You could ask them these questions during discussion, or hand them out before the discussion and have students consider them as a way of preparing for the discussion. You could also assign a different stanza to different students for analysis.

* DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED if students have a great deal of trouble analyzing the lyrics. Subsequent steps in the lesson will give them additional information to allow them to engage in successful analysis.
* If they do have difficulty in analysis until after the later lessons, use that as a way to point out to them that greater understanding comes with greater knowledge. Things make sense when you have data upon which to base analysis and understanding.

1. What is CARNIVAL NIGHT? It is the night of Mardi Gras, or other nights during the Mardi Gras season, when parades move through the city.
2. Can you figure out what FLAMBEAUX (spelled in the SINGULAR form *flambeau* in the lyrics) are? It is a torch carried in the parades, traditionally fired by kerosene.
3. What seems to be going on in the first stanza? Mardi Gras parades were suspended during WWII. The war ended in 1945, in 1946 Mardi Gras was to be celebrated again.
4. What does the reference to JIM CROW suggest? Some aspects of Mardi Gras were discriminatory against people of color.
5. What does the second stanza suggest? Black soldiers returned from the war. They were then reluctant to return to the old ways. They demanded additional pay to carry the flambeaux. As a result, they were not carried. This was a STRIKE by the men who carried the flambeaux.
6. What does the third stanza suggest? The men(women did not carry flambeau) stood firm. Eventually they won the strike and began to be paid more. (The lesson will give additional information on this topic.) The year of having Mardi Gras parades with no flambeaux is remembered as a successful community action to bring about positive social change.

*DISCUSSION AFTER TRI POD PODCAST*

It is best not to go through these questions one at a time. Instead, try to have a discussion in which people share what they learned from the pod cast. How has their understanding of the song and the history deepened?

1. Why is carrying the flambeaux so difficult and dangerous? They are heavy and carry flammable liquid
2. Who originally carried them? Slaves and Free Men of Color. No whites.
3. How much did they make before the war? $2.
4. What did they ask for after the war? $5
5. What did the Mardi Gras Krewes offer? 2.50.
6. What happened? Strike.
7. Why did they think they deserved the raise? *“Right after the second world war, African Americans had been in the military,” said Carolyn Kolb, scholar of New Orleans history. “They knew what they had done for their country, and they didn’t want to be treated badly when they got back.” Carolyn thinks that this what may have caused the flambeaux to ask for higher wages.*
8. How did the Mardi Gras krewes respond to the strike? *So the krewes turned to African American veterans of WWII and asked them to step in. In a front page article in the Times-Picayune, krewe captains addressed African American veterans saying that they should volunteer their services once again, this time on the frontlines of the parade, so that the city could benefit from carnival just like it did before the war. Rien said they invoked patriotic duty, “’For the good of the country,’ you know it’s for the good of Mardi Gras, so please take this lower pay rate and come march as flambeaux.”*

The Krewes were appealing specifically to African American veterans to carry the flambeaux.

1. How did the Black community respond? *Louisiana Weekly also had considerable coverage of the strike.*

*Rien told me that Weekly’s reporter talked to one man who said, “Of all the nerve of appealing to veterans. There’s not a place along the parade route where vets’ wives or children can find seats to see parades.”*

*Basically, how are you going to ask us to save the party if we’re not even invited in the first place? So the flambeaux struck with the support of black veterans who refused to become scab laborers.*

KEY CONCEPTS FOR THE STUDENTS TO GET FROM THIS INCLUDE:

* SOLIDARITY: the community stood together and no one broke the strike.
* The fact that the solidarity sprang partly from anger felt by the Black community that they had always been excluded from Mardi Gras. In those days, Blacks were not allowed to set up along the route and watch the parades. The spectacle was reserved for whites.

1. Why were things changing at that time? What had happened to awaken a spirit if hopeful militancy in the Black community?

*Labor historian Charles Chamberlain.*

*“1946 is a really interesting year,” he said. “It comes at the end of the war where there’s a lot of momentum, especially in the African American community, for political organizing and labor organizing.”*

*Charles said that during the war, newly politicized church leaders and labor organizers were working together in New Orleans for economic and civil rights. “I wouldn’t be surprised if, for example, some of the flambeaux members were members of a local union that was active and then politically active, or hanging out with other people, either their church or just as friends, who were part of this sweeping political activism in 1946.”*

*He said that this also explains why they were not about being scabs. “You may have had such strong political solidarity, especially among veterans who really saw, after they fought for democracy, saw democracy back at home being so important that they refused to cross the picket line.”*

1. Why do people carry the flambeau now?

* Pay and tips
* Attention
* To be a part of Mardi Gras
* Tradition, in some cases a family tradition.