

## BON RESIDENTS

I follow the broken sidewalk,  
sweat running down my back  
T-shirt stuck  
    stifling  
    stinking under my arms,  
shoes slipping and squeaking  
in the September heat  
that is better than July  
but worse than August  
and won't quit till December,  
because that's how it works in the swamplands.

Make a left on St. Charles Ave.

Charles, good ol' Carlos, that Spanish king  
who had nothing to do with the Spanish moss  
that's in the trees  
swinging in the breeze  
too high for me to feel.

He bought us from France,  
who bought us back,  
who sold us again.

France, Spain, France, Spain  
back

and

forth

like a tug-of-war.

“They buy us and forget us,” Ms. Roche says,  
like a toy in the Free Bin outside Goodwill.

I jog behind a streetcar where  
tourists ride high with their  
maps flapping, phones out, ready for some  
Ca-

jun

Cul-

ture.

I give 'em a little salute  
and dart into the park.

It's cooler under the trees  
and I walk with my arms out like an airplane  
looking like a kid playing make-believe  
but really airing my pits  
because I am nine  
and don't have time for make-believe  
no more.

Down by the *M-I-double-S-I-double-S-I-double-P-I* River  
I lower my arms and lower my speed,  
because we're *getting* to it now,  
the place where the answers wait—

under the bridge  
where the men sleep

and drink  
and think  
about life Before and After  
they became the Residents of  
Audubon Park.

Tulane students call them crazy.  
Tourists stick to the paths.  
But I know the truth  
and it's that the Bon Residents  
know what's *up*.  
If anyone can tell me where Roux went,  
it's them.  
They got the knowledge if you can pay the toll.

