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# Oliver Thomas Speaks Out in Exclusive Letter



*The Soul of New Orleans*

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# Former Councilmember Oliver Thomas Speaks Out

After serving 14 months in an Atlanta, Ga. Prison, former New Orleans Councilmember Oliver M. Thomas, Jr. is speaking out. In an exclusive letter to Data News Weekly, Thomas offers insight regarding his outlook on life, experiences in prison, and lessons learned.

Thomas received a sentence of 37 months back in November of 2007 after pleading guilty to taking \$20,000 in bribes and other forms of kick-backs from a business associate hoping to secure a public parking garage contract. He reported to prison in January of 2008.

Thomas was first elected to the New Orleans City Council in 1994. Be-

fore Thomas' legal problems, many political analysts viewed him as a possible top candidate for Mayor of New Orleans in 2010. The U.S. Attorney's office wanted Thomas to point them in the direction of possible corrupt politicians, and because he had no information for them, the office asked the Judge to grant Thomas a tough sentence.

In Thomas' letter, he explains how he has no bitterness in his heart, and is actually learning and growing mentally, physically, and spiritually as a result of his incarceration. Thomas looks forward to the day he can live everyday with his family once his sentence is completed.

## Invisible

*Just hanging around not sure where to go  
It's a shame this society can't see me anymore  
I know I look derelict  
But I contributed at one time  
I'm not as bad as you think, I still  
Have some of my mind  
But you can't see me, with your busy, busy life  
You can't even see me  
If I'm there with kids, and a wife  
I see you  
Why do you seem to be so out of touch  
I see you  
And the things you've accumulated  
So much unnecessary stuff  
Does your heart beat  
Are you filled with any compassion and care  
Are you not blind; Why can't you see me standing there  
Matthew twenty-five verse thirty-five  
Says my lie should not go unseen  
God's words say I should matter to you  
Even if my surroundings are not so clean  
I'm waving at you, sometimes I have a sign  
A kind word would be nice  
Don't want much of your time  
I wish you could see me  
It would be nice if you would  
Yes, I do have some problems  
I'd like to do better if I could  
I'm not going anywhere  
I pray of how much better it could be  
Yes, I'll be here until your heart lets your eyes  
See me!!  
Oliver M. Thomas, Jr. Copyright 2009*



Photo Credit: Edwin Buggage



Thomas and cast members from a local Anthony Bean play he starred in. Photo Credit: Glen Summers



Thomas, along with Mayor Nagin and members of the City Council. Photo Credit: Glen Summers

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## DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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*Cover Story, Continued from previous page.*

## Former New Orleans Councilmember Oliver Thomas Opens Up and Shares Thoughts on His Experiences

First, let me thank Mr. Jones and the Data News Family for your commitment, and support of New Orleans citizens and the cultural niche that you fill and the highlighting of citizens and airing of issues that rarely make other media outlets. You have filled a void for years.

I am doing fine. I miss my wife and daughter, my family and friends, and the wonderful people of one of the most unique cities in America. The last fourteen months have been quite a journey. I've worked on my book "Deep Waters" that I'm co-writing with my wife (Angelle Thomas) and Dionne Powe, a great creative journalist and I am looking forward to its completion. Also, I'm completing a series of poems called "Poetry from Prison" that will deal with many of life's issues. Hopefully, these writings can inspire others and bring God's light into their lives as well as strengthen relationships and friendships.

Other than reading and writing, I've been working with Hakim Kashuf, a young man from New Orleans who has been in prison for 16 years. For the past nine months, we have been in intense mind, body, and soul workout four days a week for up to two hours a day. The first couple of months was walking, and character and integrity training. Strengthening character, and understanding the importance of morals and integrity [is achieved] through the process of repentance and atonement.

I learned a lot about myself, and how the values of society, or lack thereof, are having a negative effect on our world. And only through each individual making a commitment to live right, love right, and conduct business right, can we create better ethics and morals in this world.

Physically, I've lost 40lbs, feel great, and will always be committed to a spiritual and physical workout. One of my heroes, a great woman, my wife Angelle, told me for years, change the world don't let the world change you. She would also say that Christian morals and principles are the things we should hold onto for life. I always knew she was right, but I understand it now that I've been in prison. Her ability to stay strong, manage the family affairs, fight to pay the bills on one income, and teach my daughter (Leah Thomas), the value of being a good woman, makes her one of the greatest human beings I know. I respect her morals and integrity, and God has granted me those same gifts.

I've also read so many great books, that I can't name them all, but I wish I was this smart and insightful when I was elected, but God does things in his own time and own way. The Bible and the Qur'an have been the foundation for all of my learning. These are two great books that everyone should read and try to understand. I look forward to practicing the word and applying the word with Rev. Fred Luter, and my Franklin Ave. family, as well as in my daily life.

One thing that has really been a blessing to me is all of the support I've gotten from citizens I've never met before. Their letters and prayers have helped to sustain me. My parents write me almost every week, but there are several citizens who keep pace with them. I can't thank them enough! Letters and visits are some of the things we look forward to. It makes the time easier. I wish I was closer to home so I could get more visits, and see my wife and daughter every month, at least. I also don't get holiday visits and I don't want to burden people, life is tough enough, and travel is expensive. I envy the inmates that see their wives, children, and parents every week. Atlanta is a long drive! The government really doesn't try to support the family unit; many of the policies are anti-family. So, I pray my family survives this ordeal.

Well, I've used my time wisely. I don't blame anyone else anymore for my mistakes, and I'm free of all bitterness. I just pray that people have forgiven me, the way God has allowed me to forgive myself and others. My advice to any and everyone who reads this article is, forgive and let bitterness go! You curse your own life when you can't forgive others. No child of God should carry that burden around. The Devil will feast on your life if you can't let negative feelings go. I have eternal optimism and spiritual peace that I will carry with me the rest of my life.

God Bless New Orleans,  
Oliver M. Thomas, Jr.



# City Holds Elections on April 4

**Benjamin Bates**  
Data News Weekly  
Contributor

The city will hold a special election on April 4, 2009 with four races and a proposition on the ballot. In the race for State Representative District 97 it is an open field of candidates as J.P. Morrell has been elected to the state senate.

The candidates include Jared

Brossett who formerly served as New Orleans City Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell. He has racked up many major endorsements in spite of allegations that he did not live in the district. He has rebutted these allegations saying he is not bothered by the claims of his opponents.

Leroy Doucette, who is an official at the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office, is also run-



Tammy Stewart, Candidate for Juvenile Court Judge

back the resources we need to begin rebuilding." He also said that he feels that it is time for a changing of the guard in the district. "If we are to begin changing the image and perception of the city, we cannot continue to elect the same people who are politically connected. As we [re]build for the citizens, that should be unacceptable, but we should not change simply for the sake of change. We need new effective leadership and I feel I am the best qualified for this position."

With the retirement of longtime Judge C. Hearn Taylor last year, three candidates are in the race for

Judge of Juvenile Court Section B. Tammy Stewart has been at the forefront of all the candidates racking up endorsements from elected officials, civic organizations and media outlets, including Data News Weekly. She says preventive measures are necessary to deter young people from becoming career criminals, so she is advocating that the Youth Study Center be rebuilt.

"I will support the immediate rebuilding of the Youth Study Center in accordance with the Missouri Model for best practices for prevention of juvenile delinquency. Programs that focus on a remedial approach, with regionally based facilities and community programs that emphasize rehabilitation, treatment, and education," said Stewart. "This change led to a dramatic reduction in Missouri's recidivism rate to less than 8% annually. These are the kind of changes we can implement in Louisiana to prevent recurring juvenile crime."

Stewart is also an advocate of early intervention in the lives of youth. "I will support and advocate for funding that focuses on establishing programs for early intervention and prevention of juvenile crime. Traditionally, the juvenile justice system has focused on dealing with youth after an initial contact with the local juvenile court," she said. "While this reactive emphasis on delinquent behavior is still prominent and necessary, I will focus on programs aimed at prevention and early in-

ning for the seat. He told Data News Weekly that it is unfair that Brossett be allowed to run in the special election. He also said he feels that he is the best qualified to tackle the issues that face the district. "Crime and blight are two major issues that our district are struggling with and I feel with my background is best suit to represent the residents as we move forward."

Other candidates vying for the seat are: Oliver "Bishop OC" Coleman, the lone Republican, who is the pastor of Greater Light Ministries.

NIK Richard is the youngest candidate in the field, who is a student at UNO studying urban planning and feels change is necessary in the district. "We do not need someone who is connected to the past administration, these candidates talk about experience, but it is experience the past we don't need that we need someone who is going to hit the ground running with new and fresh idea for the city." On top of his agenda he plans to address crime and higher education.

Ambrose J. Pratt is a Democrat and the owner of an environmental risk-assessment company.

Dalton Savvoir worked in the office of former New Orleans District Attorney Eddie Jordan and says his has the experience and temperament to bring District 97 where it needs to be in what he calls a slow recovery. "I think I can go to Baton Rouge and bring

intervention. A pro-active approach aimed at infusing accountability and stronger sanctions, and develops more innovative judicial responses to nonviolent offenders overcrowding both court dockets and detention facilities. I will focus on frequent hearings, immediate sanctions, family involvement, and treatment services."

Although Stewart is an advocate of prevention, she said repeat and violent offenders should not go unpunished. "I am keenly aware of the need to balance the interest of the child with that of public safety. Repeat violent offenders must be taken off the streets to protect the safety of our other children and the community."

Jason Cantrell is a Democrat who has been endorsed by the Alliance for Good Government, State Senator Cheryl Gray, and State Representative Karen Carter. He touts his experience as a public and private criminal defense attorney in domestic and family law cases. Cantrell also believes that his experience as a former elementary school teacher gives him a valuable perspective on how to best deal with juveniles who come through the court.

Cantrell's platform includes:

- Increase public safety by employing effective risk-screening instruments to recognize youth who need to be detained.
- Increase the reliance on effective community-based services to provide multi-dimensional treatment and positive development opportunities for youth.
- Ensure safe, healthy, constructive conditions of youth confinement.
- Implement a Youth Re-Entry process that provides support services, education and skills training to ensure incarcerated youth make a transition into society as productive citizens.
- Institute Drug Court for 1st and 2nd time offenders.
- Advocate for increased federal funding for juvenile justice to support successful programs and cost effective strategies.

The third candidate, Gary Wainwright, is a long-time criminal defense attorney who is also running as a Democrat. Mr. Wainwright could not be reached for comment.

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# State Funds \$68 Million Historic Redevelopment for Workforce Housing at 200 Carondelet in New Orleans

Representatives from the Louisiana Recovery Authority, the Office of Community Development and the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency joined investors, lawmakers and city officials at the March 23 grand opening of a new multi-family rental housing development in downtown New Orleans, representing a combined public and private investment of \$68 million.

The 24-story skyscraper is a historic rehabilitation of the former National American Bank building, which was erected in 1929 and was the first public space in New Orleans equipped with indoor air-conditioning.

The development at 200 Carondelet used \$26.5 million in Community Development Block Grants from a pool of federal disaster recovery funds administered by the Office of Community Development. These funds were "piggybacked" onto \$20.5 million in equity generated through the syndication of GO Zone Housing Tax Credits administered by



the LHFA. The development also used equity produced by the sale of federal and state Historic Tax Credits, as well as traditional financing from Sun America Affordable Housing Partners.

Paul Rainwater, LRA and OCD executive director said, "We lost more than 82,000 units, or 47 percent of the rental housing in the state, to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In New Orleans alone, more than 44,000 rental units were damaged or destroyed. The renovation of this historic landmark

in the central business district will help restore critically needed rental stock to a valued workforce that drives our rebuilding efforts. Our recovery needs workers and workers need affordable housing."

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin said, "This redevelopment is a win-win opportunity for our city. It is a thoughtful renovation of a historic structure located in a section of town that is vital to the growth of New Orleans because of its proximity to the hospitality industry, the central business district and the proposed medical complex."

Reliance Housing Foundation President Robert O. Jackson said, "Reliance and our partner EDI are honored to be part of the effort to rebuild, restore and recover in New Orleans. Our historic preservation and adaptive reuse of this National Historic Landmark utilized Smart Growth principles, sustainable building practices and "Green Communities" criteria to provide 189 contemporary

rental apartments within walking distance of the major CBD employers. Market response to the building has been very positive, with more than 80 residents moving into the building within the first 60 days of availability."

Sixty percent of the 189 units at 200 Carondelet will be available as market-rate rentals, with the remaining 40 percent reserved for affordable workforce housing. The location in downtown New Orleans is near jobs and public transportation, making it ideal for workers in the hospitality, office and medical industries. Essential service providers such as teachers, police and firefighters also will be targeted by the developer.

Through a competitive process, Louisiana has made awards to a total of 57 Piggyback projects in areas of the state most impacted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, amounting to more than \$580 million in CDBG gap financing. The first six developments are scheduled to come online this month and will provide 850

mixed-income rental units.

In total, the Piggyback program will create 8,185 rental units to help replace housing stock lost in the storms. Nearly 7,000 units, or more than 80 percent, will be built in the New Orleans metro area. A total of 1,800 units are anticipated to come online by June, with an anticipated total of 3,200 units online by Dec. 31.

Created in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) is the coordinating and planning body leading the most extensive rebuilding effort in American history. The central point for hurricane recovery in Louisiana, the LRA works closely with the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) and partners with state and federal agencies to oversee more than \$20 billion worth of programs, speed the pace of rebuilding, remove hurdles and red tape and ensure that Louisiana recovers safer and stronger than before.

## Jetting to the top, NORD Swim Team Achieves Success

The NORD Jets, a youth swim team sponsored by the City's Recreation Department, participated in the Louisiana Swimming Short Course State Championships. Swimmers ages 9-19 traveled to the Spar Aquatics Center in Sulphur, LA to compete against teams primarily from Louisiana.

In the District Championships, NORD swimmers dominated the breast stroke competition. Dean

Rhodies placed 2nd in the 50 yard breast stroke and 3rd in the 50 yard freestyle races. Dale Rhodies placed 2nd in the 100 yard breast stroke, and Morgan James placed 3rd in the 100 yard breast stroke races.

The girls 9 to 10 year NORD Jets Relay team, comprised of A'Leahia Barbarin, MaKalah Toney, Ariyan Brister and Kaylan Smith, placed 2nd in the 200 yard

freestyle race in the State Championship competition. Alexandra Age, Ariyan Brister, MaKalah Toney and Eric Arrington all finished in the top 8 in various races, with A'Leahia Barbarin and Dean Rhodies completing their day as top 16 finishers. Alexandra Age also placed in the top 16 in various races.

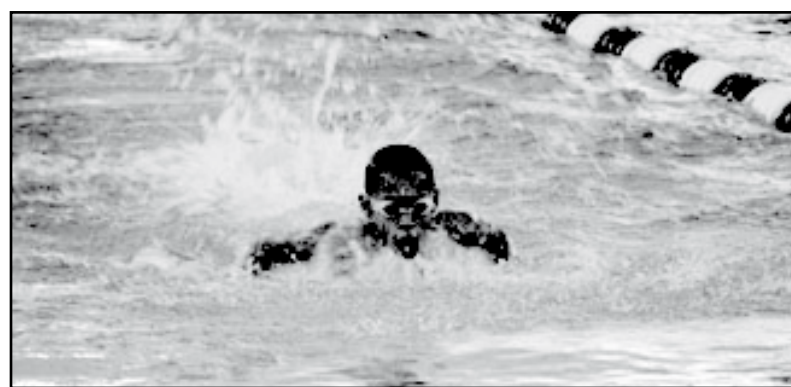


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## Sav-A-Lot Store Opens in New Orleans Neighborhood

The most creative, fun ribbon-cutting ceremony in the city took place on March 12 at the new Save A Lot store at 1841 Almonaster Blvd. Instead of the traditional ribbon and scissors, three shopping carts, pushed by shoppers, carried three preschool children and busted through a large-scale paper dollar, symbolizing the "slashing" of prices at the Save A Lot store. The carts and children then rushed into the store for a shopping contest to see which child-shopper team could find the products on a list the fastest. It was a fun and wild ride through the aisles of the new



Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com



Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com

store. Preceding the contest, Save A Lot hosted an official program where neighbors, city officials, and store employees gathered to celebrate the grand opening of three stores in the New Orleans area. The company also announced two generous donations of \$5,000 to the non-profits First Book and Second Harvest

Food Bank. Mayor Nagin's office presented a proclamation thanking the company for its devotion to New Orleans and the recovery effort.

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(504) 241-5556

## Sears Renames its Authorized Dealer Stores

During the past fifteen years, Sears Authorized Retail Dealer Store owners have provided home appliance brands – including Kenmore, Craftsman lawn and garden equipment and tools, fitness equipment and consumer electronics products and have served our valued customers nationwide. These independent owners and business partners have proudly represented Sears since 1993 in 120 locations and in 2009 in over 900 locations. Throughout the entire month of March, Sears celebrated its success and new name – Sears Hometown Stores.

"We decided to change our name to better identify our stores to the customer we serve," said Will Powell, SVP and President – Sears Hometown Stores. "We are privileged to have stores in communities throughout the country and we feel that the new name better represents what we are to our customers – the Sears store in their neighborhood – the Sears Hometown Store."

"We look forward to welcoming customers to our stores during the entire month for a chance to win terrific prizes including a Kenmore Appliance Package during our Hometown Celebration Sweepstakes scheduled March 5th - April 4th" said Keri Durkin, Director of Sales/Field Effectiveness – Sears Hometown Stores. Each week during the month we will feature a unique promotional offer in our stores. "Although our name has changed, our customers can count on the same great service they have come to expect in our Hometown Store locations," said Durkin.

### Sears Hometown Stores

Sears Hometown Stores, part of the retail operation of Sears Holdings Corporation, is comprised of over 900 stores which are primarily independently-owned and predominantly located in smaller communities nationwide. Most Sears Hometown Stores offer appliances, consumer electronics, lawn and garden equipment, tools, fitness equipment, tractor and boat batteries and mattresses. Hometown Stores carry proprietary Sears brands, such as Craftsman, Kenmore and DieHard, as well as a wide assortment of national brands.



The Sears Hometown Store pictured above is located in New Orleans East at 7300 Read Blvd. It is owned by Walter Wilson, Jr. and George T. Daison.



### Local Debate Team Wins Big

Congratulations to Mr. Mike Billips and The Arthur Ashe Debate Team, who placed 1st and 2nd Place in the International Debate Education Association Meet, recently held at the University of New Orleans.

# Governor Jindal Announces New Re-Entry Program for State Inmates in Parish Prisons

Governor Bobby Jindal joined Department of Corrections Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc to announce that the state will be partnering with sheriffs in a program to better prepare state prison inmates for release and re-entry into society so they do not become repeat offenders. The Governor said that currently, inmates in state prisons have access to re-entry initiatives, but many state prisoners in local or parish jails do not have access to these services.

The partnership will expand re-entry services to state prisoners housed in local and parish jails by creating up to ten regional programs. Governor Jindal emphasized that these re-entry programs will make Louisiana's communities safer and will provide offenders with the tools they need to pursue lawful opportunities in their lives.

Governor Jindal said, "Too often, communities are not prepared to deal with the many issues that arise for released offenders, including the challenges they face to find housing, jobs, and handle their substance abuse problems. And likewise, many offenders are not fully prepared to re-enter society and start anew once they leave prison."

"Without education, job skills, and other basic services, offenders are likely to repeat the same steps that brought them to jail in the first place. This not only affects the offender, but families and our communities as well. This is a problem that needs to be addressed head-on. We cannot say we are doing everything we can to keep our communities and our families safe if we are not addressing the high rate at which offenders are becoming repeat criminals."



Governor Bobby Jindal

"By implementing this re-entry program, we can curb the cycle of repeat offenders and thereby reduce the burden on our prisons and help offenders create a place in society that adds value to their lives while keeping our communities safe for our families."

Governor Jindal said on average 15,000 offenders are sentenced to the custody of the Department of Corrections each year and around 15,000 offenders are released back into the community each year. Further, he noted that the average offender in Louisiana comes into prison with a fifth-grade education and many have medical problems, mental health issues or grew up in difficult conditions. The Governor said these factors all contribute to a complicated re-entry process and can lead to a repeat offense.

The Governor noted that half of offenders in the state commit additional crimes or violate their parole and return to prison. In fact, he said Louisiana's recidivism rate – or the rate at which criminals are repeat offenders – is

approximately 50 percent after five years.

Governor Jindal pointed out that during Secretary LeBlanc's tenure as the warden at Dixon Correctional Institute, intensive efforts in educational and vocational training, faith-based programs, and work release programs led to a five-year recidivism rate of just 36 percent. Secretary LeBlanc said he attributes this directly to effective re-entry programs he employed at that institution.

Currently, a variety of re-entry initiatives are already underway in state prisons.

Governor Jindal said that while in prison, the offender has the opportunity to earn a GED, participate in vocational training and other programs, which include observance of faith and religion, psychological services and counseling, release preparation and other programs that teach life skills. State law today requires 100 hours of pre-release programming in resume writing, parenting skills, job search training, and more.

The Governor highlighted that with the exception of a few local facilities, these services are not available to many state prisoners housed in parish and local jails. Further, he noted that this sizeable population consists of nearly half of all state prisoners. Currently, there are roughly 20,000 inmates in state facilities and more than 18,000 on the local level. In total, 11,000 will be released from local prisons each year, while only 4,000 are released from state prisons.

Governor Jindal said that in order to fill this void in re-entry skills programming being of-

fered at the local level, Secretary LeBlanc and the Department of Corrections will begin to contract with sheriffs to operate up to ten regional reception and re-entry programs specifically for state inmates housed in parish and local facilities.

Governor Jindal said, "This partnership will be a long-term, phased-in initiative, with the goal of reducing the number of repeat offenders through better educational and skills training to prepare them for a more productive life in our communities."

The Governor highlighted five critical goals of the new reception and re-entry programs.

First, he said these programs will ensure that all state offenders have the same standard evaluation when entering prison.

Second, a risk and needs assessment will be performed on all offenders to start planning a course of rehabilitative action.

Third, offenders will be assessed for placement into various educational programs offered by the Department.

Fourth, Governor Jindal said that all offenders leaving the system – from state or local facilities, regardless of their term or sentence – will be exposed to the same standard pre-release programming, which is currently only offered in state correctional facilities.

Fifth and finally, the Governor noted that these local partnerships will reach the shorter-term offenders who have a greater chance at successful re-entry when exposed to timely and productive training.

Secretary LeBlanc added: "Over the last year, the Department of Public Safety and Corrections has worked to strengthen

and standardize educational, vocational, and pre-releasing programming for offenders in state correctional facilities. However, nearly half of all DOC offenders are assigned to local parish and private jails across the state and, in most cases, don't have access to educational programming and treatment services offered on the state level, which is quite a unique challenge compared to other states. The addition of the Regional Reception and Reentry program concept will allow all DOC offenders the opportunity to take advantage of programs and services that will enable success upon release.

"Corrections cannot solve this problem alone and Governor Jindal and many of my colleagues in the Cabinet understand that. It is only through partnerships with other state agencies—such as the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the community and technical colleges, K-12 education, DSS, and DHH—as well as faith-based organizations and community service providers that Louisiana can start to hammer away at its dubious distinction of having the highest incarceration rate in the world.

"Teaching basic literacy to offenders, teaching vocational skills such as carpentry or welding, providing substance abuse treatment – this is not being soft on crime. It's being smart on crime. Having efficient and effective re-entry programming for DOC offenders on the state and local levels and in our communities through the Day Reporting Centers will lead to lower incarceration rates, lower crime rates, fewer crime victims and safer communities across Louisiana. That's a legacy to be proud of."

*NewsMaker, Continued from page 4.*

The race for Judge of Municipal Court is a three-way contest featuring Joe Landry, Ranord Darensburg, and Phillip Montelepre.

"If I am elected I will draw upon my 19 years of experience as an attorney, and my appointment by the Louisiana Supreme Court as Judge ad hoc in Municipal Court to provide for the fair and impar-

tial administration of justice to all who appear before the court," says democrat Joe Landry.

Ranord Darensburg, who is not affiliated with any political party, is making his first run for office. His credentials include having a J.D. as well as a M.S.W. Darensburg has done a lot of work in the community. He co-founded a non-profit community service

organization called Community Volunteers Association (CVA), which served at risk youth in New Orleans. CVA instituted drug-free schools and communities programs, tutoring programs and a summer camp called Camp Enhancement. He has said that he will be a judge that is fair, but will run the court in a way that is efficient. Darensburg also added

that he will make the best use of the city's resources.

Phillip Montelepre, who could not be reached for comment, is also running and is the lone Republican Candidate in the race.

Also on the ballot is the race for Judge of Traffic Court Division C, which is a two-man race between two Democratic candidates, Traffic Court prosecutor Mark Shea

and attorney Ray A. Bright.



# Hip-Hop 101

*(Corporate Hip Hop...The New Minstrel Show)*

Hip-Hop was once a music that was on the cutting edge. With its raw grit, hip-hop told the tales of inner-city life, covering its joys and pains, and its ups and downs in rhythmic verse over music. The hybrid nature of Hip-Hop bor-

rows from many cultural practices in the African-American community and is tied to a historical tradition of the genius of African-Americans using the spoken word and music to make sense of their precarious predicament in

America. Hip-Hop music incorporates playing the dozens, nursery rhymes, the personal narrative of the blues, and the improvisational style of jazz. These modern day urban griots have become the voices of the voiceless, and at their

best are tied to a tradition of struggle similar to Richard Wright's character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* or the nameless protagonist in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

Hip-Hop more than any other recent cultural phenomenon has become a vital part of the entertainment universe affecting many aspects of popular culture. With the ascendance of Hip-Hop we have witnessed it going from the streets to the suites, with it having an impact all over the globe. No longer, just a cultural production isolated in its indigenous environment, it is used to sell products and has been co-opted by companies who originally were reluctant to align themselves with this new form of music. But now they see the potential to capitalize on its appeal in the selling of its products and it has made many people extremely wealthy, and given visibility and mainstream acceptance to many recording artist who double as pitchmen of products.

But with this acceptance inside



Edwin Buggage  
Editor-in-Chief

the elite corporate coffers the art form has become less cutting edge and simply part of the status quo. Mainstream Hip-Hop today resembles a toothless tiger in the hands of companies who truly do not care about the preservation of it as an art form but only as a means to appear hip and make a profit. This has reduced the subculture from something that was vast, varied and relevant, to simply the presentation of one dimensional caricatures that play to the worst of historical stereotypes of African-Americans.

Corporations today that once showed only a passing interest in the music as a novelty now invest millions of dollars in its promotion and dissemination. Additionally many of the people who benefit the most financially from the music have a deep disdain for it and see it as no more than a bunch of noise, but they put it out there making hundreds of millions of dollars possibly billions. While today the music's reach is unprecedented, much of the bite has been sapped away, leaving the music generic, boring, and bland. Hip-Hop was once a music that resembled a beautiful collage of sounds, but today resembles paint by the numbers, with a simple formula; the easy to sing hook and contrived images of the artist, and the predictable video. The once threatening images of N.W.A. saying F-K Tha Police and Public Enemy proclaiming Fight The Power and Don't Believe The Hype have been replaced by cartoon like characters getting crunk, or mindless hedonistic songs and odes to jewels and cars or childish braggadocio, or songs degrading an debasing females or non-threatening muscle bound rappers talking about how many times they've been shot and survived, and then being able to make love all night; basically, corporate Hip-Hop has

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BON JOVI  
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See Hip-Hop continued on next page



# St. Joseph's Night in the Ninth Ward

## Big Chief "Kitoe" of the Seminole Tribe



Dionne Character  
Data News Weekly Columnist

"They mask with pride.. They walk with spirit"

March 19, St. Joseph's Day seems to be the most momentous day for many Indians who mask, as they pay homage to native Indians who took in run-a-way slaves, by dressing them like Indians and painting their faces, so that master could no longer distinguish them as slaves.

Come sundown, many Indian tribes from the Ninth Ward take it to the streets to meet other "gangs" to participate in a ritual contest to win trophies for the most creative costumes.

Big Chief "Kitoe" started with The Ninth Ward Hunters under the guidance of Big Chief, "Rudy" and later went on to be a spy boy with The White Eagles where he and Big Chief, "Joe Pete" masked together.

The Seminole Tribe was then formed by Big Chief, Joseph "Joe Pete" Adams, later taken over by Big Chief, David Beaulieu and now, Big Chief, Keith "Kitoe" Jones, who has been masking for over thirty years.

This St. Joseph Day, I waited with fifty (50) or more people at the home of Big Chief, "Kitoe," who has become a neighborhood favorite, simply because his



Ninth Ward Indians prepare on St. Joseph's Day. Photo Credit: Dionne Character

costume is always elaborate. Although the Chief did not mask for Mardi Gras, due to the loss of his "Big Queen", Linda Jones, the Chief did make his grand entrance to the streets to win yet another trophy for the most creative costume, which was dedicated to his Big Queen along with his slain flag boy, Kendell Parker.

Dressed in black, Big Chief's costume was hand-made with the most expensive glass stones, beads, feathers, ruffles, ribbon bows and lots of creativity. The moment he stepped out of his door, the paparazzi went wild chanting cultural anthems like "My Big Chief Got A Golden Crown" and "Lets Go Get'em," as the drums played and the crowd danced to the spirit-filled songs.

This traditional cul-

tural experience has been ongoing for years in the Lower Ninth Ward between many Indian Tribes who gather every St. Joseph's Day to flaunt their elaborate creations in beadwork, feathers and plums, inspired by their own visions.

If you have any comments, questions



Elaborate attire has always been a trademark of the Big Chief. Photo Credit: Dionne Character

or upcoming events, please email me at [dasolediva@yahoo.com](mailto:dasolediva@yahoo.com).

*Hip-Hop continued from previous page.*

become blaxploitation with a beat.

The mainstream Hip-Hop scene today seems more like an up to date minstrel show with the mythic stereotypes of the coon, buck, and sambo taken to new heights. But what is ironic is while the persons portraying these images and are receiving much of the flack are African-Americans these historical stereotypes were created by white performers who performed in blackface, parodying and grossly exaggerating black behavior, but now these same images are being played by blacks, who make Faustian Bargains becoming the co-conspirators in the proliferation of

these one-dimensional images. One in which the entertainment industry takes carte blanche presenting young black men as mindless misogynists who are irresponsible, and exercise fiscally unsound behavior, and they do this without taking into account the diversity that exist within the African-American community broadcasting these images across the globe.

# NATIONAL TRAIN DAY

MAY 9, 2009

## TRAINIACS REJOICE.

Thanks to you, the first-ever National Train Day was a huge success. So this year, the celebration of everything train will be bigger and better. There'll be live entertainment, family activities with lots of cool stuff for the little engineers, giveaways and exclusive train tours. Can't wait to show all your train love? We've got you covered. Go to [nationaltrainday.com](http://nationaltrainday.com) to find out what's happening leading up to this year's celebration. Get on board and become a NTD fan. Find out where to celebrate National Train Day or plan your own party. Plus, discover special offers and promotions designed to make any trainiac go choo-choo! Mark your calendars, because on **May 9th, NATIONAL TRAIN DAY IS BACK.**

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## Community-based Program Has African-American Communities Working Alongside National Cancer Institute to Address Disparities



(NNPA) - Deep in the heart of the South, a cadre of researchers at the University of Alabama-Birmingham is taking a personal approach to investigating cancer.

While work continues to go on in traditional laboratory settings where cells and microbes are studied on slides under the intense light of microscopes, the fight against cancer also involves communicating with and listening to people. That means talking with local African-American residents about the disease and its impact on their lives to determine education and awareness gaps. It's also about sharing cancer knowledge with the community, relying on the communications channels that people know and trust, and identifying resources people can turn to for help and information, all in a culturally appropriate way.

When it comes to researching and confronting cancer, all populations are different. There are different factors that influence the course and outcome of the disease, different cancer burdens, and even different ways of dealing with a cancer diagnosis due to cultural norms and a person's background.

This is where the National Cancer In-

stitute's Community Networks Program (CNP) comes into play. NCI is supporting an array of community-based cancer control programs that focus on cancer disparities in communities serving African-American and other racial/ethnic and underserved populations.

The University of Alabama-Birmingham program, called the Deep South Network, is one of the CNP initiatives that work to improve cancer outcomes within the African American community. It serves the Mississippi delta and the Alabama black belt.

The key to success in the CNP is Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR is a research approach that mandates a partnership between traditionally trained "experts" and members of a community, with all parties addressing a common research problem.

This approach requires the community to be a full research partner, participating in planning, developing, implementing, evaluating, and disseminating the research. Community members are actively engaged with the local research team and the federal partners in cancer education, training, and research initiatives within community boundaries.

Four years ago, the NCI created CNP by investing \$95 million in five-year grants to various cancer research institutions located in 25 communities. The mission is to

develop participatory education, training, and research programs.

Some typical CNP services that help African Americans confront cancer include:

- Providing transportation to people in Greene and Sumter counties in Alabama, who have to travel at least 30 miles to see a doctor;
- Promoting a healthier lifestyle through a neighborhood Walk Campaign;
- Utilizing the services of the CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP), which provides access to critical breast and cervical cancer screening services for underserved women in the United States.
- Recruiting local churches to participate in NCI's Body & Soul program to encourage the intake of fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Counseling individuals through "There is Hope"; and
- Preparing for life after cancer.

The Deep South Network is reaching far and wide, cutting a broad swath through 22 counties in Alabama and Mississippi, with the help of 550 well trained community workers and 460 others from various groups in the community. Other cancer control outreach programs that focus on the African American population are based in South Carolina, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Florida, Massachusetts,

and Missouri.

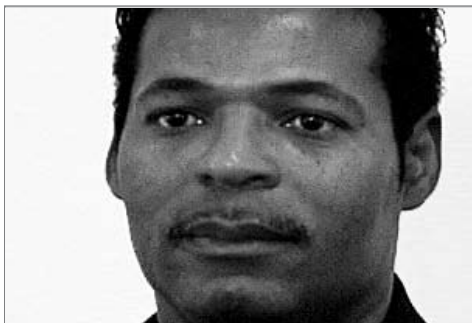
You may live in or near one of these CNPs and be completely unaware of the services and resources that may be available to you. While some CNP sites work with African American communities, the 25 programs nationwide benefit other underserved racial groups, such as Native American, Native Alaskan, Asian, and Pacific Islander, as well as groups classified by ethnicity, such as Hispanic/Latino.

The cultural aspects of the CNP cannot be overestimated. A key understanding of social and cultural norms is important to the work that goes on every day. For example, through understanding of the importance of the black church in America, especially in the South, the Deep South Network was able to successfully find a way to bring health issues into the structure of African American churches. You can learn more about the Deep South Network and the CNP on the World Wide Web at the following sites: <http://crchd.cancer.gov/cnp/pi-partridge-description.html> and <http://crchd.cancer.gov/cnp/overview.html>

Also, the Cancer Information Service is just a phone call away, 1-800-4CANCER. Calling that number will connect you with a specialist who can advise you or recommend resources to learn more about cancer.

## Relationships

*"How do you agree when you disagree?"*



Dr. Aaron E. Harold  
Data Columnist

ever heard someone say to you or someone else the term, "she is so strange"?

That doesn't mean that the person is from another planet, it just means that person is different from you and she or he has his or her own personality. Maybe, that was said about you, because it was said about me. If the truth were told, we are not exactly alike. Many times people will not always agree with our opinion, or see eye to eye with us. If a man and woman or husband and wife disagree with each other on a certain matter, you should try not to get bent out of shape and let strife take over your communication with each other.

Every one of us has a right to an opinion whether we agree with them or not, or whether we like it or not. Folks, we can learn how to agree without disagreeing with each other. I've learned that just because someone is not exactly like me, or do not do things the exact same way that I do, it doesn't mean that I'm right and that person is wrong. It just means that we are dif-

ferent, and we have to learn not to let our different opinions destroy our relationship with each other. Just the other day, I was listening to two couples that I know discuss something.

They were going back and forth and round and round with each other, finger snapping, neck twisting, and in your face, if you know what I mean. After I listened to both of them argue their point to each other, I said to both of them "you both are right." After I explained to them the thing that they were discussing, I told them that they both made good points. One of them realized that you can agree with out disagreeing.

Folks, all I'm trying to say to you is that it takes some patience not to start a heated argument over little issues and not be easily offended by them. If we learn how to agree without disagreeing, we will learn how to give each other the benefit of the doubt. We must learn how to overlook some things, because every one of us has

faults and weaknesses. That is, the person who invented the pencil included an eraser, because we all make some mistakes. We should never think that the person we are in a relationship with now is going to be perfect.

No matter how great he or she may be or no matter how you love and care for that person, at some point in time the one that you call the love of your life or your superman is going to offend you. Learn how to listen to what each other is saying and don't be judgmental about the other person's opinion. You don't have to like it, but respect it as long as it is respectfully said. Remember, problems are solved and relationships are better when we learn to respect the other person and learn how to agree without being disagreeable.

God Bless You,

For your comments and counseling, you can call Dr. Aaron Harold at 504-813-5767.

Relationships, folks, are very important in life. Our relationships with our Creator, our wives, husbands, girlfriend, boyfriend, children, family members, friends, and others are very important. In order to maintain healthy strong relationships, we need to learn how to keep the strife out of our relationship with one another. Every one of us is a little different than the other. Have you



# trailblazer

## Nolan Rollins

### *A 21st Century Visionary*

by: Edwin Buggage  
Editor-in-Chief

His story is one that is inspirational. He is a young man that is wise beyond his years who has come to New Orleans to lead the National Urban League into the 21st century. Nolan Rollins, in addition to being President of the New Orleans Urban League, has dedicated his time to be a force for positive change in the city. "When I came here, I wanted to make the Urban League relevant in a way that reflects and addresses the challenges of the times we are living in," said Rollins.

Rollins' story began in Baltimore, Maryland where he recounts a childhood growing up in a family that sometimes may have been short on money, but loved flowed throughout his household. "Today, a lot of people talk about poverty, and they talk about things, but I didn't know I was what some would consider poor until I went to college because my house was filled with people that loved me and without them I don't know where I'd be today," he said.

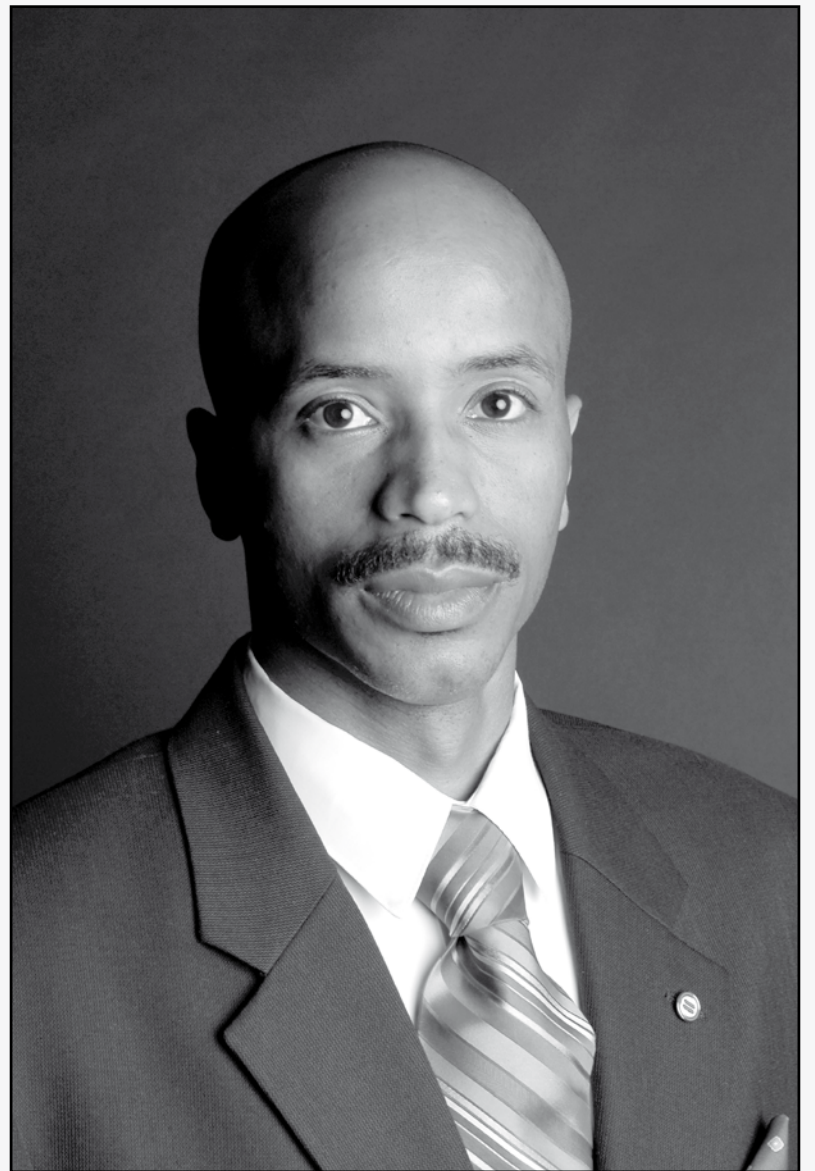
He is committed to making an impact in the community by being a positive role model for young people. "I believe that it is important for us who are in positions of influence [to] use it to help those of the next generation to make their dreams come true," said Rollins, "and to make a big enough footprint where they can step into the shoes and know somebody has blazed a trail for them to succeed."

Rollins is also a dedicated father and husband who said he feels that family is an important part of revitalizing the community as it rebuilds. "When I talk about fam-

ily, it is larger than just the nuclear family. It is about the extended family, and all people in the community working together to ensure that they are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead for them." Continuing he said, "I am sure my child will be ok, my wife and I are there to provide them with what they need, but I am concerned about some of those who don't. How do we fill that void?"

His work spans outside of the Urban League where he volunteers his time and sits on the board of several organizations including the Dryades YMCA. "I sit on many boards, and through the Urban League I have been able to be part of many conversations about the city as it rebuilds, but I feel most passionately about programs that can help our young—that is where my heart is at," said Rollins. "In my life, growing up I've seen so many people of talent lives not reaching their full potential." Speaking of his own life he said, "I am a kid from the inner-city who received three degrees before I was 27. I feel I am not special and that any kid can do this if the right foundation is in place and I hope that's what my life [is an] example of and what the things I do in the community is about."

Nolan Rollins is a man who has come to the Crescent City with a purpose; to be part of the solutions that ails a city as it rebuilds. He is a dedicated father, husband and community leader. And for his service, he has been named the New Orleans Data News Weekly Trailblazer for March of 2009.



Larry Calvin

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Continuing Education Fund



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# DNA Testing Should Be a Right!



**Marc Morial**  
NNPA Columnist

## To Be Equal

(NNPA) - Imagine being convicted of a crime you didn't commit and languishing in prison for 11 years until new DNA evidence proved your innocence.

That's just what happened to Ronald Cotton whose story was told on CBS' 60 Minutes recently. Cotton's accuser, Jennifer Thompson, was absolutely certain she

correctly identified the man who broke into her Burlington, North Carolina apartment and raped her on the night of July 28, 1984.

But she was wrong. And her mistake produced more than one other victim of that brutal crime – Ronald Cotton, an innocent man who was sentenced to life in prison, and several other women who were raped by the real criminal who remained free.

What finally turned the tide in Cotton's case was the science of DNA testing which Cotton's lawyer was allowed to use to prove his client's innocence. The real crime is that hundreds of wrongly convicted people are now behind bars, not only because of eyewitness flaws, but also because of the refusal by a small number of states to allow DNA evidence to be used to prove their innocence. According to the 60 Minutes report, there have been 233 people exonerated by DNA evidence across the country. More than 75 percent of them were convicted because of mistaken identity.

Ronald Cotton was one of the lucky ones.

Timothy Cole of Lubbock, Texas was not so fortunate. He was sentenced to 25 years in 1985 after being wrongly identified by a rape victim. In 1999, Cole died in prison before DNA testing and the jailhouse confession of another inmate later cleared his name. According to the Innocence Project, a national non-profit legal clinic dedicated to exonerating innocent people through DNA testing, there are thousands of prisoners desperate to have their cases evaluated.

Some of them are on death row. Most of them are "poor, forgotten and have used up all legal avenues for relief. The hope they have is that biological evidence from their cases still exists and can be subjected to DNA testing."

Dallas County District Attorney, Craig Watson, the first African American District Attorney in Texas, has made this issue a centerpiece of his work. He believes the DA's job is not only about prosecuting the guilty, it is also about protecting the innocent. That's why, in 2007 he established the

Conviction Integrity Unit, the first division of its kind in the country dedicated to overturning wrongful convictions and securing the release of men and women who have been wrongfully imprisoned in Texas.

His efforts have helped secure the release of more than 19 wrongfully convicted prisoners thus far. Unfortunately, six states still deny prisoners access to DNA testing: Alaska, Alabama, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Mississippi and South Dakota.

The Supreme Court is now deliberating an Alaska case that could grant all prisoners that right. We believe that's what the Court should do.

In a nation that prides itself on the rule of law, there is no good reason to deny prisoners the right to DNA testing if it can prove their innocence, identify the guilty and prevent a tragic miscarriage of justice.

**Marc H. Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.**

# A Stimulus Guide for Dummies



**George C. Curry**  
NNPA

With dueling economists and back and forth between Democrats and Republicans over President Obama's economic recovery package, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has provided us with a Stimulus Guide for Dummies. Actually, it's a report by Chad Stone, the center's chief economist, titled, "Attacks on Congressional Package Don't Withstand Scrutiny."

"The plan for the most part is well-designed to produce as much stimulus as possible as quickly as that can be done," the report states. "It includes fast-spending, high 'bang for the buck' items such as expansions in food stamps and unemployment insurance — provisions that a broad range of economists and CBO [Congressional Budget Office] have rated as the most highly stimulative types of spending. It also includes state fiscal relief, which is essential to moderate the depth of the budget cuts and tax increases that states

otherwise will have to impose; such budget cuts and tax increases would withdraw demand from the economy and make the downturn deeper. In addition, the package includes infrastructure investments, which are highly stimulative once projects are underway but sometimes require significant lead time. Finally, the package includes tax cuts, some of which are targeted on low and moderate income households, making them more effective as stimulus, and some of which are less well-targeted and, according to CBO, likely to have far less of a stimulative effect."

Now you have an overview of the plan written in plain English, something hard to find these days in Washington. But there's more.

"Effective economic stimulus and recovery measures work by increasing the demand for goods and services at a time when there is insufficient existing demand to keep businesses operating at full capacity and to generate full employment. Measures that increase demand stop the destruction of jobs and begin to put people back to work during times when business and consumer confidence is low and economic activity is spiraling downward."

House Republicans have been especially critical of President Obama's stimulus plan, saying it wastes money on social spending, a charge Chad Stone rejects.

"Some critics, for example, argue that spending on safety net programs like food stamps and unemployment insurance may be justified on humanitarian grounds but

does not provide stimulus or create jobs in the way that reductions in, say, taxes for businesses would.

In fact, this argument is completely backward in a recession," he observes. "When the problem is that businesses have excess productive capacity and can't sell everything they can make, the way to reduce pressure on them to lay off workers and to give them a greater incentive to expand is to give their customers more money to spend. When you increase benefits for unemployed workers or food stamp recipients, they spend the money quickly and the benefits spread through the economy."

Of course, there is the complaint that a deeply indebted federal government cannot afford to send money to the states.

"Critics are similarly confused about fiscal relief measures for cash-strapped states. Here, too, some critics have mistakenly charged that such measures are not stimulus and do not create jobs," Stone argues. "... In an economic downturn, states see their revenues fall off and their caseloads for social safety net programs like Medicaid increase. Unlike the federal government, states have balanced budget requirements for their operating budgets. As budget deficits begin to emerge, states must take actions to cut existing programs or raise new revenues."

"Those actions translate into layoffs of state workers, cancellation of contracts with vendors, and a diminished response to the hardship that beneficiaries of safety net programs experience. Without help from

the federal government, those state actions will reverberate through the economy, adding to the job losses and further weakening economic activity. States currently face budget shortfalls projected at more than \$350 billion over the next 2½ years, a stunning amount that, in the absence of federal relief, would translate into budget cuts and tax increases that would make the recession longer and deeper."

Republicans still propose additional tax cuts as a means of jumpstarting the economy. Again, Stone is not impressed.

"A persistent argument heard in the stimulus debate is that tax cuts are more effective stimulus than government spending. That is not the conclusion of mainstream macroeconomic theory or evidence," he notes. "... Tax cuts are most effective as stimulus when they are targeted on low and moderate-income households that will likely spend a high proportion of the benefits. Tax cuts are far less effective as stimulus when they go to high-income taxpayers who will likely save a large proportion of the tax benefits or, as discussed above, to businesses that will not likely spend the tax cuts on expansion when their sales are depressed and they are laying off workers."

Now that we have raised our economics IQ, no one can play us for dummies.

**George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, [www.georgecurry.com](http://www.georgecurry.com).**



# The Stimulus Bill and Section 3 of the HUD Act



Harry C. Alford  
Data Columnist

Stimulus Bill is from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The implementation of Section 3 of the HUD Act can make this opportunity a reality in our urban communities and provide serious business development for our entrepreneurs and vast job opportunities for our people.

This law has been on the books since 1968 after the first Watts Riot of 1965. It was strengthened in 1992 after the Rodney King Riot. I sure hope we do not have to burn down Los Angeles one more time for it to actually be implemented.

Since 1998 the National Black Chamber of Commerce has begun an intensive campaign to get communities to comply with this law. The law states that if you receive HUD funding (cities, counties, states, housing authorities, etc.) 30 percent of the new jobs created by that funding must go to people living below 80 percent of the national medium income level such as public housing residents, low income and very low income people.

Ten percent of the contracts created by the HUD money are to go to Section 3 businesses (those hiring Section 3 residents per the Act). When we started to move on

it only 3 of the 5000 HUD grantees were in compliance. Today, there are about 1300 responders out of the 5000 grantees.

Thus, we are not even half way there and important cities like Los Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Atlanta haven't even begun. One of the largest cities in compliance is New Orleans. 75% of its population is back after Katrina and Section 3 residents are being snapped up by Section 3 businesses. As the nation approaches an average of 10 percent unemployment, New Orleans is at 5 percent. Section 3 makes a difference!

To police this we are going to train our affiliated local chapters to audit their local HUD grantees. By law there are various checkpoints we can review and measure the compliance with Section 3.

Each city, county, state (Governor's Office) and public housing authority doing more than \$500,000 in funding for a fiscal year must prepare and submit a "5 Year Consolidated Plan". This is a forecast on how you are going to recruit, hire and contract with Section 3 residents and Section 3 businesses and how you are going to make regular contractors hire Section 3 residents. In essence, it is a strategic plan.

Next, each grantee has to prepare an Annual Action Plan. This is done at the beginning of each fiscal year and it focuses on the next 12 months specifying immediate projects and programs.

Finally, for each grant there must be an "A-133 Audit". Included in this audit is the 60002 Report. This report details the activity of Section 3 in regards to the grant implementation. Remember, nearly 75% of HUD grantees are not doing these reports.

It will be the NBCC mission to police this and enforce it. Right now, HUD doesn't have the manpower to adequately do it. Failure to comply with Section 3 can lead to sanctions and the freezing of HUD funding for those out of compliance. Our chapters and sister organizations should get very busy on this.

For those of you who want to track the HUD money in the Stimulus Bill please go to [www.hud.gov/recovery](http://www.hud.gov/recovery) and click "funding by state". Check on it every week or so and you can track the actual money coming to your town. Make sure Section 3 is complied with.

Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce. Website: [www.nationalbcc.org](http://www.nationalbcc.org).

## CHILDREN SHOULD NOT SMOKE

### The FDA is Clearly Overwhelmed

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is supposed to approve new medicines, monitor the safety of those already on the market, and keep our food safe.

But, currently the FDA is not doing a good job. In early 2008, a blood thinner manufactured in China which the FDA let into the US was contaminated by a mysterious ingredient and caused 81 deaths.<sup>1</sup> Summer 2008 brought a salmonella outbreak, blamed first on tomatoes and later on hot peppers, that infected 1,442 people and resulted in at least 286 hospitalizations in 43 states.<sup>2</sup> Just this winter, salmonella in peanuts killed six people, made 486 people sick and led to the recall of more than 2,800 foods with peanut ingredients.<sup>3</sup>

It's clear that the FDA is already overwhelmed. Should they be given the authority to regulate the \$80 billion tobacco industry, too?

### Congress Wants the FDA to Regulate Tobacco

Congress wants to add tobacco products to the FDA's list. We think that's just wrong. The majority of Americans are losing confidence in the FDA's ability to protect our nation's food and drug supply. Recently, a national survey revealed that 61 percent of U.S. adults feel the food recall process

is only fair or poor, while 73 percent of adults say they are just as concerned about food safety as they are about war on terror.<sup>4</sup>

**It's clear that the FDA is already overwhelmed. Should they be given the authority to regulate the \$80 billion tobacco industry, too?**

Before the latest FDA blunders, a poll was conducted which found that 82 percent of likely voters are concerned that a proposal in Congress to let FDA regulate tobacco would interfere with the agency's core mission of regulating the nation's food and drug supply.<sup>5</sup> This is an issue which deserves to be fully debated, and right now, that isn't happening.

### The FDA is Not the Place for it

Lorillard supports additional regulation of the tobacco industry. But the FDA

is not the place for it. Today's ineffective food and drug safety programs pose an immediate threat. Therefore, expanding FDA's current role would be a health hazard all its own.

<sup>1</sup>Harris, Gardner. "Heparin Contamination May Have Been Deliberate, F.D.A. Says." New York Times. April 30, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>"Investigation of Outbreak of Infections Caused by Salmonella Saintpaul." Center for Disease Control and Prevention. August 28, 2008. URL: <http://cdc.gov/Salmonella/saintpaul/>

<sup>3</sup>"Is the FDA a broken agency?" The Associated Press. March 3, 2009.

<sup>4</sup>"Food Safety: Majority of Americans Feel Industry Doesn't Do Enough." American Society for Quality. March 11, 2009. URL: <http://www.asq.org/media-room/press-releases/2009/20090311-food-safety.html>

<sup>5</sup>"Zogby Poll: 82% Fear Tobacco Regulation Mandate Puts FDA Core Mission at Risk." Zogby International. February 26, 2008.

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## HUD Secretary Details Housing Plan's Benefits for African-Americans

**Zenitha Price  
NNPA**

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Black homeowners who were unfairly targeted for the subprime mortgages that helped topple the American economy now face the threat of similar predatory practices, Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan told African-American reporters this week.

"We had many unscrupulous financial institutions, brokers and others that led folks down the wrong paths with these subprime and predatory practices. Unfortunately, we're now seeing some of those same people that got folks into trouble in the first place migrating over into foreclosure scams," Donovan said.

"So we have people who are on the edge of foreclosure, who are in a desperate situation that are hearing things that are, frankly, too good to be true."

Confronting this burgeoning threat will be part of the Obama administration's efforts to address the current foreclosure crisis and strengthen HUD's performance moving forward.

"We need to make sure that these kinds of scams are stopped as quickly as possible," the secretary said, "[to ensure] that folks who have been victimized already by subprime or predatory mortgage practices aren't victimized once again."

Donovan, a HUD undersecretary during the Clinton administration, said they also want to make sure the perpetrators are held accountable through revised and enforced regulation.

"We had many unscrupulous financial institutions, brokers and others that led folks down the wrong paths with these subprime and predatory practices."

He said, "It's become very clear to me in my short time back at HUD that the fair housing enforcement responsibility that HUD has as part of its central mission has been woefully underfunded and neglected under the prior administration. So, one of my top priorities is to reinvigorate the fair housing function here."

President Obama's budget, slated for release next month, will reflect the "high priority" nature of this issue to the new White

House, Donovan said.

"I think you will see a renewed commitment to fair housing enforcement, including enforcement around lending violations that disproportionately targeted African Americans and other minority communities."

The new HUD chief said success on these and other fronts demands cooperation and communication among different government agencies and also between the government and the community.

HUD has already begun talks with Attorney General Eric Holder and others about creating a lender regulatory system that is "more focused, more transparent [and] more fair" among other enforcement tools, Donovan said.

And, they are also working with the White House Office of Urban Policy and the Domestic Policy Council to coordinate overlapping goals for all-around urban development.

An equally important arm of their strategy, Donovan said, is to get the right information into Black homes, an information campaign in which, so far, predatory lenders have bested the government.

"We have to think in new ways at the federal level about how we are reaching, in particular, African-American communities," he said.

The press conference with Black news agencies this week was part of that effort to disseminate the right information about the housing plan, the housing official said, along with public service announcements and advertisements on radio stations and newspapers that serve minority neighborhoods.

One of the first things Donovan wants African Americans to know about the plan is that access is free.

"Let's be completely clear here, there is never...if you're a homeowner you never have to pay for access to the president's plan. There is no fee to talk to your servicer; there is no fee to be part of the plan," he said.

The proposed measure has three main parts:

One, it rewrites regulation so that an estimated 4 million to 5 million families, whose mortgage loans are with Fannie Mae and

Freddie Mac, who owe 80-105 percent of the value of their homes and who are not in default, to refinance into lower-interest loans. Two, it will use \$75 billion taxpayer funds to provide incentives to mortgage servicers to modify at-risk loans for about 3 million to 4 million homeowners to a 31 percent debt-to-income ratio.

Donovan said of the importance of this provision, "One of the most disturbing trends we've seen over the past few months is that while many loan modifications are happening, too many of them result in payments that are unaffordable to those borrowers. And, in fact, what we've seen in many cases is that those payments increase."

There are some borrowers who will not qualify for the plan because of the magnitude of their debt, but, Donovan said, he believes many African-Americans who fell victim to subprime lenders will qualify.

The last part of the plan would give Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac about \$200 billion to backstop lower interest rate loans for people looking to buy or refinance a home.

This last measure is critical for the future development of the African-American community, Donovan said.

"It is absolutely critical that while we seek to stem the impacts of the foreclosure crisis on families that are currently at risk that we don't, as a result, stop credit from being available to African Americans that are looking to refinance their homes or get into the buying market," he said and added, "[But] we've got to make sure that moving forward, the right kind of products are available."

Donovan, the former commissioner of New York's Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, said he used this model to great success within low-income communities there. The plan created or preserved 17,000 homes while limiting defaults to only five foreclosures.

"So I know that if we do this right," he said; "if we get back to basics on lending, we can make sure credit is available so low- and moderate-income African Americans can continue to get access to the American Dream."

## Professionals and Middle Class Losing Income, Opportunities

**Ashahed M. Muhammad  
NNPA**

President Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan has proposed several initiatives that should increase job growth in the professional services sector—including information technology, engineering, legal and financial services—but a recent report warns old barriers to Blacks in the professional services industry could limit benefits from the new government investment.

According to a Chicago Urban League report, the failure of White firms to hire Black workers or Black firms for professional services and unequal treatment of Blacks in the industry is already costing the city's Black community some \$1.2 billion in lost income.

The report, "African-Americans Navigating Chicago's Professional Services Sector: Facing Challenges, Seizing Opportunities," noted that the professional services sector represents "high level, high wage earning jobs."

Institutional barriers create obstacles to future acquisition of Black wealth and could be the death knell for many Black professionals still employed, it warned.

The professional services sector represents those skills offered by specially trained individuals that are licensed and certified, such as lawyers or accountants, or who work in areas such as information technology or real estate. These are also areas where Black entrepreneurs have historically staked out business, but many are now struggling to stay alive.

"Blacks have not recovered from the recession of 2001 where during the good years of the 2000's Black employment decreased by about two per cent and income declined about two per cent. Blacks only have about fifteen per cent of wealth of White Americans with a disproportionate amount of wealth accrued in home values. These facts have led to projections that almost a third of the Black middle class could fallout of their middle class status," observed Dedrick Muhammad, a senior organizer and research associate for the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute of Policy Studies in an e-mail interview with The Final Call.

"Black businesses nationwide are some of the least capitalized so the tightening of the lending market and the decline in consumer spending disproportionately puts Black businesses in jeopardy," Muhammad said.

In his Saviours' Day 2009 keynote address on March 1, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan said that Blacks earn \$744 billion annually, and must unite to survive America's severe economic trial.

Instead of seeking economic benefits from a system that is falling, the Minister said Blacks should sacrifice some of a reported \$2.7 billion spent on leisure and entertainment, some of the \$2.8 billion spent on harmful vices such as tobacco products, on the \$2.5 billion on alcohol. Black America could deposit the money in a national treasure that could be used as a catalyst for building the community, he said.

"Now we as leaders, so called, have to form a national trust of leaders, maybe they ought to be bonded because we don't know who to trust these days," said Min. Farrakhan.

"All of our artists, all of our entertainers, all of our sports figures, they're all doing something to give back. You have to give them credit for that. However, no matter what we do, it's not big enough, but if we were a part of a national pot and everybody put in what they could afford to sacrifice, how short a time would it be that we would have \$30 million, \$40 million, \$50 million, \$100 million, \$200 million, \$500 million, a billion dollars? America is for sale but how much of it do we own?" Min. Farrakhan asked.

Billion dollar loss an underestimate

According to the Chicago Urban League's report, "Together, underrepresentation and unequal earnings among professional services workers result in estimated annual losses in African American personal income of \$1,163,143,694. This figure does not take into account additional losses for entrepreneurs due to unfair business practices."

Among solutions urged by the report were increasing the skills of businesses and their employees; more combined effort from professional groups; increasing

*Continued on next page.*



# Black Publishers Give and Receive Honors During White House Celebration of Black Press Week

Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – A historic delegation of 50 Black publishers and their guests, who convened at the White House last week for a Black Press Week award to President Barack Obama and his family, received equal praise from the First Family for the work of the Black Press of America.

It was a delegation of the more than 200-member National Newspaper Publishers Association, honoring America's first Black President for his NNPA Newsmaker of the Year selection by awarding him with a book of front pages of Black newspaper from his historic Nov. 4, 2008 election.

"The reason that I've been able and Michelle has been able to do what we're doing is because of the extraordinary support and thoughtfulness with which you've covered our campaigns and our activities and so I am very thankful to you," President Obama told the publishers during the ceremony in the State Dining Room March 20. "You are welcome in this house, the people's house, and we are looking forward to continuing to spread, not just our stories, but the stories of struggle and hope and hardships that so many people are going through right now, making those stories real and putting a face to the numbers and statistics because that's how we end up being able to inspire the country as a whole to make the kind of forward progress that we need."

It was a light-hearted atmosphere for the president and First Lady Michelle Obama, dealing with dire issues, as well as for the publishers whose daily lives are focused on the long-held mission of equal justice for African-American people. In remarks interrupt-



NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy Leavell presents book of Black Press front pages to President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle as the Obama family is named NNPA Newsmaker of the Year. Credit: Roy Lewis



NNPA publishers were greeted individually by President Obama. Credit: Roy Lewis

ed several times with cheers and applause, Obama and First Lady Michelle appeared genuinely touched by the magazine-styled book awarded to them, by NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy R. Leavell, publisher of the Chicago and Gary Crusader newspapers. NNPA's Newsmaker of the Year is the highest annual honor bestowed during Black Press Week, the March, 16, 1827, birthday of the Black Press, now in its 182nd year.

"We are so happy to be here and to also congratulate you ... and to let you know that we've got your back," said Leavell as the room erupted with cheers and applause from the publishers. Leavell then gave the President and First Lady the 80-page document titled,

"The Black Press Committed to the Cause."

On the back of the book of Black Press front pages are the words of Richard Hatcher's song, "Feel'n' Good" as a reflection of how musical themes flowed throughout the campaign.

"We want to honor you... We hope you will enjoy looking at them," Leavell said.

"Well, that's beautiful," the President responded, flipping through the book as he asked First Lady Michelle to speak first.

"This is such a special award," she began. "When you're in the middle of the news making, you don't realize how much news you made until it's over. But, this is very special coming from this organization, this membership be-

cause you've followed us through this journey. And to honor us as a family is what makes it special because you recognize that we have been going through this as a family, as a community and all of you know the ins and outs that come along with this."

This is the third Newsmaker award for President Obama. In 2005, he received it as a junior U. S. senator and rising star in Black America. He received it again last year as a leading presidential v, poised to make history. Because he could not attend the annual gala due to Senate votes last year, he promised to receive the award at the White House if he won the election. Both his win and the award are now a part of historic record.

Returning the honor, Michelle Obama stressed that the historic record of the plight of African-Americans have been kept all along in Black newspapers across America.

"You know our story. Our images, our journey our path are not foreign to you. And we are reminded of that when we read our story in your stories. It feels different. I often say I finally recognize myself when I read your papers," she said to applause. "On behalf of the Obama family, the girls and Grandma (her mother, Marian Robinson, who lives with the family), we thank you so much."

NNPA has approximately 215 members, but the White House limited the delegation to only 50 due to available space. Before greeting and shaking hands with each member of the delegation, the President drew laughter and applause during remarks in which he reflected on his three-time win of the award.

"I just want to thank all of you for this extraordinary honor of

being a newsmaker three times. I will try to be a little more low key for the next four years. I don't want to be like a seven-time (loud laughter) ... because other people will feel left out," he said.

Obama said the award was "especially gratifying" because the whole family was being honored this time, including their daughters, Sasha, 7, and Malia, 10. He praised his wife for her part in helping the historic election to come to fruition.

"I could not have done this without Michelle, who is the foundation stump of our family and who each and every day makes me realize how lucky I am to be married to me," he said.

He added that the children bring light moments to his life that take the edge off of the daily grind of tough issues.

"After you've had a bad day, there's nothing like coming home to Malia and Sasha and them telling you all kinds of strange things and you laugh and makes you appreciate why we do what we do," he said. "It's for the next generation and we couldn't have done this without my mother-in-law. She keeps Michelle calm. And there's that old saying, 'When Mama's happy, everybody's happy,' he said as the publishers chimed in with the popular quote. "And so we try to keep Mama happy," he said.

The First Lady's happiness is not only personal, but for the nation, she said: "Every day when I see his calm, his composure, his commitment to his staff, his ability to connect to so many communities in this time of crisis, I am more confident than ever that I would not want anybody else in this house in this seat at this moment in time than my husband, President Obama."

*Professionals,  
continued from previous page.*

the numbers of Blacks who hold partner status in corporate firms; greater transparency and accountability for public agencies and companies; joint action by legislators and policy makers to combat the problem; creation of new resources and finance tools; and more shared research and analysis.

President Obama announced changes March 4 in the way government contracts are awarded. His first move was instructing

budget director Peter Orszag to work with cabinet officials and agency heads to develop more stringent guidelines by the end of September.

According to the president, these reforms save Americans up to \$40 billion annually.

"We will stop outsourcing services that should be performed by the government, and open up the contracting process to small businesses," said President Obama.

During the Bush administration, many no-bid and other highly financially lucrative contracts went to companies and corpora-

tions that were already connected to the internal Washington, D.C. lobbyist network.

In Chicago, the professional services sector represents one-third of all employment in the region generating average monthly wages 42 percent higher than the economy and "generating new firms at a faster rate than the broader economy," the report said.

For example, in the first quarter of 2007, the average monthly wage in the overall economy was \$5,069. During the same time period, the average in the profes-

sional services sector was \$7,193.

Professional Blacks are often not members of the very influential "old-boy" network that leads to lucrative business contracts and favorable business arrangements. The problem is multiplied with the country in the grips of a recession.

At a community stimulus package discussion meeting sponsored by Rep. Bobby L. Rush (D-Ill.) on Chicago's south side, community activist Eddie Read expressed concern that some Black organizations and businesses could miss out on the \$787 billion pack-

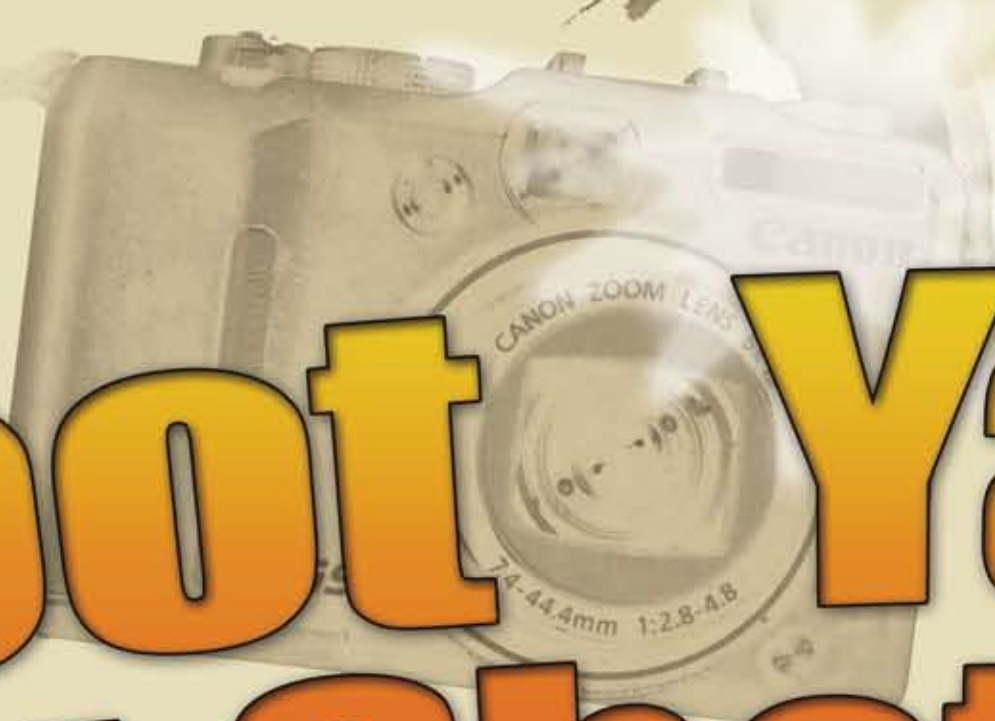
age championed by President Obama.

"I see the resources have been put there like they always are," Read told The Final Call. "The thing that many of us are working for now is to make sure that those resources find their way to the grassroots level," he said.

"We need to know what is there so that we can develop a game plan, and an overall agenda to make sure this money does not fly over our community but flows through our community," said Rep. Rush.



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