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# NOLA Counts

*2020 Census: Why It Is Important*



New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell and her administration have launched NOLA Counts to encourage people to fill out the Census.

**Edwin Buggage**  
Editor-in-Chief

In the year 2020 the City, nation and world is at a crossroads, for this is an election year, as well as being in the middle of a global Pandemic. Also, in the year 2020, the National Census is taking place and the dead-

line for filling out the form is September 30th. The Census is a national count of every person living in the United States and only comes around every 10 years. This information is used to decide how \$675 billion of federal funding are allocated and to which communities. When all people are fully and accurately counted,

money for critical programs stays in our community. It only takes a few minutes to participate, but the impact will be felt for years. To discuss the importance and impact of the Census, Data News Weekly spoke with Arthur Walton, New Orleans Director of Intergovernmental Relations. "It is about our representation and related to money

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Arthur Walton, New Orleans Director of Intergovernmental Relations spoke to Data News Weekly about the importance of citizens filling out the Census form.



the federal government will give to municipalities throughout the country, this is based on numbers not need, so we are asking all our citizens to participate, to get our fair share for important resources that can help our City."

"These funds are used for a variety of services that goes to cities including: Head Start Centers, infrastructure is also some way related to federal funding, Health Department, hospitals, police, fire, roads and transportation."

During the 2010 Census in the

 **CENSUS  
COUNTS 2020**

Walton says he is also spending this time dispelling the myths and mistrust that some have regarding filling out the forms to make them realize that this information is something that can empower them and the community.

this time dispelling the myths and mistrust that some have regarding filling out the forms to make them realize that this information is

something that can empower them and the community.

In filling out the Census it also impacts the number of voices the state has in the U.S. Congress.

"The Census in many ways equal political representation, for it is factored into how many Congressmen each state has. In these times we need our voices heard in Washington and we cannot afford to lose representation, so we are asking our people to fill out the Census form, so this does not occur," says Walton.

NOLA Counts is an initiative that the City is promoting to get citizens to fill out the Census.

"Mayor Cantrell is pushing this like never before because we need people in the community talking to each other about the importance of the Census. This is important because we are leaving money on the table consequences."

"We must remember that we have to live with these numbers for next 10 years. It is time for us to get counted."

To fill out census online go to: <https://my2020census.gov/>

**9 questions**  
**10 minutes**

Each response amounts to  
**\$2,291**  
per person

"The form is simple, nine questions ten minutes and this is an act that will bring much needed resources to our City."

aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many were still in transition and there was an undercount that affected monies coming into the City.

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell and her administration have launched NOLA Counts to encourage people to fill out the Census.

Also, this year it is easier because for the first time it can be filled out online, or you can call in or fill it out and mail it in.

"The form is simple, nine questions ten minutes and this is an act that will bring much needed resources to our City."

Walton says he is also spending

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# Morrah Burton-Edwards

## *A Young Black Artist makes her Mark*

Zoe Trask

Data News Weekly Contributor

At a young age, her paintings could not go unseen. Little Morrah knew that her artistry deserved to be showcased on a greater scale, and not just only on paper. With water-color paint, she marked her territory along the walls of her house and across her headboard. Although her behavior was normal for an imaginative child, something about her was special.

"In elementary school, her art teacher called her an artist," said Valerie Burton, Morrah's mother. "It was those words that changed everything for us," she added.

On Monday, August 31st, Google announced that Morrah Burton-Edwards was one of five national finalists for its 2020 Doodle for Google Competition, after she was selected as the winner for the State of Louisiana for grades 10 through 12. Her piece, titled "Love Made Visible," depicts several Black figures embracing each other to convey the ideas of kindness, love, and family within the Black community. Burton-Edwards' piece instantly became a sensation on social media, where she received overwhelming support from major artists and the Black community in just a matter of days. While reflecting on the popularity of her creation, Burton-Edwards raises the issue of Black art being underrepresented by making it her responsibility to showcase it herself.

"If you don't draw people that look like you, then who do you expect to do it?" Burton-Edwards said.

Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement and racial turmoil in America, Burton-Edwards has received strong support for her work.

"Her Black figures were needed in a time when we needed some good news for Black folks," Valerie Burton said.

Now 17 years old, Burton-Edwards attends Lusher Charter School and is a high school senior. As a Doodle for Google National Finalist, Burton-Edwards will receive a Google College Scholarship, and should she win the National Title, her Doodle will be featured for a day on the Google homepage. At Lusher, she is involved in the Certificate of Artistry in Visual Arts Program, where she has built a portfolio of her work and excels as a diligent student. Burton-Edwards' dedication to art has left a unique mark on her peers, especially on her teachers. Jessica Brown, her visual arts teacher, noted the memorable moment when she noticed her student's portrait painting on the back of a denim jacket.

"It was so great to see someone taking that artistic skill and transforming it into fashion," Brown said.

Although Edwards intends to shine a light on the Black community, she specifically encourages Black women artists to hold on to their passion. She stresses the importance of having a role model and using that inspiration to create something innovative.

"My top artists are Kerry James Marshall, Amy Sherald, Kehinde Wiley, and Kadir Nelson," Burton-Edwards said.

On Friday, September 11th, Edwards launched her online gallery and merchandising shop on her website, [www.morrahbe.com](http://www.morrahbe.com). Since her launch, she has received several orders, and soon fans nationwide will be able to take pieces of her creations everywhere they go.

"Everybody is supportive of her," Valerie Burton said. "You can't help but be supportive," she added.



Amidst the Black Lives Matter Movement and racial turmoil in America, Burton-Edwards has received strong support for her work.



At 17, Morrah Burton-Edwards has launched her own online gallery for her artwork on Sept. 11, 2020.



Morrah Burton-Edwards winning Google Doodle is titled "Love Made Visible"



Valerie Burton, mother of Morrah Burton-Edwards



Jessica Brown is Morrah Burton-Edwards visual arts teacher at Lusher Charter School



Lusher Senior Morrah Burton-Edwards is one of Five National Finalists for the 2020 Doodle for Google Competition. She is the winner of the Louisiana round for grades 10 through 12.

Photos courtesy Valerie Burton and Jessica Brown



# B-Mike Exhibit Explores Racial Justice and Belonging

Aviwe DuBois  
Data News Weekly Contributor

His art can be found all over the city he was born and raised in, but for visual artist Brandan “B-Mike” Odums, his exhibit “NOT Supposed 2-Be Here” at the Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University is his first solo show in a museum setting. The exhibit explores the idea of who and what kind of art belongs in a museum.

“A part of that show was being hyper-conscious of the trajectory of even being allowed to be there, whether it’s racially, whether it’s our own personal trajectory as an artist, and thinking about how I got to the point from painting legally outdoors to being in a prestigious institution,” Odums said. “Then there’s another layer of not supposed to be here in terms of just thinking about Louisiana as a whole with environmental justice and the way we think about our existence as it relates to the threat of constant water.”

Odums said his work speaks on the social and political issues Black people face in America and the power of social activism. The “NOT Supposed 2-Be Here” Exhibit, which runs until Dec. 13, 2020, includes paintings, sculptures, mixed media, and immersive installations that explore different perspectives on inclusion and identity in art in terms of art, race, place, and accessibility.

“I think innately as being a Black artist, there is a thread of social justice in the work that you do because you recognize that your existence is a form of resistance and to be able to speak your truth is gonna somehow be offensive if not threatening to some audiences,” Odums said.

Due to the current Pandemic, physically viewing the art exhibit is limited to the Tulane community. However, the museum has provided a virtual tour for the wider public on its website, and an artist walk-through video where Odums guides the audience through a 45-minute tour and in-depth look at his work.

“I think that as an artist that comes from working in the public space in terms of streets and murals and things, I think there’s already like a, a barrier of entry that occurs when you work inside a museum or gallery, and these times just sort of increase those barriers in a way,” Odums said.

The physical exhibit allows patrons to get a closer look at the materials and designs an artist uses. “Watching it virtually was a bit different because everything I saw was from his point of view [the way it was shot] I wasn’t seeing it the way that I would, if I was in person,” said Noa Joshua, a Loyola University chemistry major.

While speaking his truth through his art, Odums said he wants to inspire future generations of artists to take a stand with their art and perpetuate change in their communities.

“I do think that there is indeed a role and responsibility that art has to be a reflection of those times,” Odums said. “I think there’s a lot of artists who are more conscious of being that reflection of the moments that we exist in. So, I mean, for me, it’s not like an extra point to put on the work. I think the work exists that way regardless.”

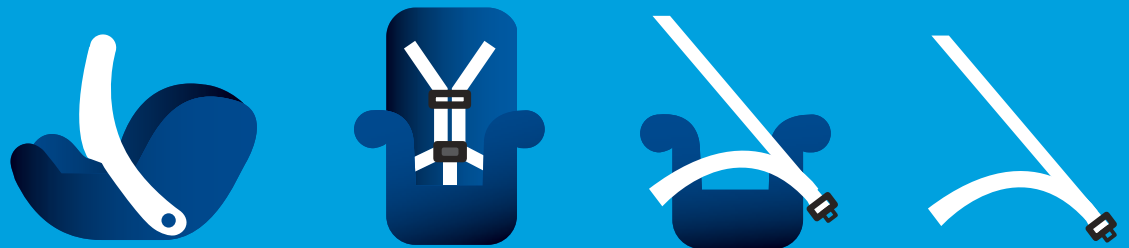


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“I do think that there is indeed a role and responsibility that art has to be a reflection of those times,” Odums said.

Photos courtesy Brandan “B-mike” Odums and Newcomb Art Museum



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# Prolonged Pandemic Impacts Mental Health, Experts Say

**Kelsyn Parker**  
Data News Weekly  
Contributor

Mental Health Disorders rank as the 11th leading cause of death in the United States for all age groups. COVID-19 has claimed the lives of over 190,000 Americans. This makes for a historical recipe that experts said worsens the toll of the Pandemic.

"At this point, the greatest impact on the mental health of most folks has been the continued uncertainty brought about due to inconsistency in leadership," said Brian L. Turner, Ph.D., a licensed Clinical Psychologist and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Xavier University of Louisiana. "Many folks with good information are able to adapt and manage. However, the continued



Constance Bonnet



Jared Riley



Justen Pate



Kobie Lofton



Brian Turner PhD

back and forth has created anxiety and depressive symptoms in many folks who were already diagnosed with a Psychological Disorder and those experiencing Psychological Distress," Turner said.

According to a July 2020 Kaiser Health Family Foundation Study, 53 percent of American adults reported that their mental health had been

negatively impacted due to worry and stress surrounding COVID-19. The poll reported that the effects of the Coronavirus included, but was not limited to, sleeping, and eating deprivation, increases in alcohol consumption and substance abuse, and the worsening of chronic conditions. In more extreme cases, the poll reported that the social distanc-

ing imposed by the Coronavirus has led to isolation and job loss that can cause anxiety, distress, and low self-esteem.

"When the COVID-19 Pandemic first broke out, my stress level was higher than it had ever been in years," said Constance Bonnet, Ph.D., a 52-year-old family Nurse Practitioner in New Orleans. "I

faced severe anxiety at the mere thought of contracting the Coronavirus," Bonnet said. "This is especially true after losing my friends and loved ones that lived in the city to the virus," Bonnet added.

The City of New Orleans was deemed an Epicenter of the CO-

**Newsmaker, Continued**  
on page 7.

## Op-Ed

# Black Americans and COVID-19 Clinical Trials



**Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.**  
President and CEO of the  
National Newspaper  
Publishers Association

The unrelenting spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the United States of America in 2020 continues to pose an unprecedented public health crisis for all Americans, but in particular for Black Americans and other people of color who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

As the trusted voice of Black America, the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) in March of 2020 established the NNPA Coronavirus Task Force as a means of increasing public awareness about the overall preexisting health disparities in Black

America and about the disproportionate fatal consequences of COVID-19 for Black Americans and other people of color.

In fact, the NNPA and our Coronavirus Task Force were the first to issue a national "State of Emergency" declaration on April 3, 2020 to warn Black Americans and others about the evolving dangers and public health risks of COVID-19.

Earlier this year there were just too many myths and misinformation circulating primarily via social media that falsely asserted that "Black people and people of African descent were immune to COVID-19 because of the presence of Melanin." Of course, that assertion was not true. Yet, unfortunately, too many people in our communities began to risk inflection to COVID-19 because of those types of falsehoods and misinformation.

The media has a responsibility to research and to report the truth. This year marks the 193rd year of the Black Press of America. Since Freedom's Journal was first published in

March of 1827, the Black Press has remained on the front lines of publishing and speaking truth to power by demanding freedom, justice and equality.

All of this brings me to state categorically, "Black Americans have to be involved at all levels of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot afford to be silent, detached, denied, or prevented from being at the decision-making tables in terms of COVID-19 public health policies, research, clinical trials, remedies, and vaccine development. Our lives and future are at stake."

The good news is that today there are many Black American physicians, infectious disease scholars, clinicians, medical researchers, nurses, and others on the front lines as first responders and as inside leaders inside the major pharmaceutical companies that are striving to develop a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19.

We are profoundly aware that within our communities

there has been an historical and a contemporary distrust of medical research. The challenge currently today, however, is for more Black Americans to be involved at every point of the development of a COVID-19 vaccine to ensure that the medical rights and interests of Black Americans are thoroughly protected, respected, and addressed effectively and truthfully.

In other words, Black American engagement is crucial and critical in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine including participation in clinical trials to make sure that the new vaccine is effective to prevent Blacks and others from COVID-19 infections.

Three years ago, the NNPA, Howard University and Pfizer collaborated to do a national landmark poll and study on Black American awareness on Sickle Cell Disease (SCD). This was important because Black Americans are disproportionately impact by SCD across the nation.

Included in that NNPA-

Howard University-Pfizer poll was the issue of Black Americans willingness to participate in clinical trials with respect to SCD. We were pleased to learn and to document that 76% of the Black American poll respondents had a positive or neutral attitudes toward SCD clinical trials, and a majority indicated a willingness to participate in future clinical trials for SCD, given appropriate knowledge and recommendations from health care professionals.

It is urgent that in the strategic rush now to develop an effective COVID-19 vaccine for all people that Black Americans are not left out of the process. The health of our families and communities necessitates our involvement to raise all the questions that need to be raised, and at the same time to participate responsibly in the COVID-19 clinical trials.

Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is the President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and can be reached at [dr.bchavis@nnpa.org](mailto:dr.bchavis@nnpa.org)

# Marc Morial

## The Gumbo Coalition

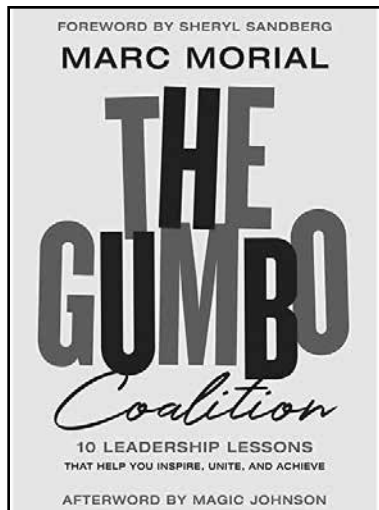
### *Book Signing at Melba's*

**Eric Connerly**  
Data News Weekly  
Contributor

On Thursday, Sept. 24th from 12 noon to 1 PM, National Urban League President and Former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial will be making an appearance and book signing at Melba's Po Boys to promote his book "The Gumbo Coalition: 10 Leadership Lessons that Help you Unite, Inspire and Achieve."

The book is in part a political memoir, and a leadership manual. Morial is effective in drawing from his many years of being around groundbreaking leaders and being one himself leading a City as Mayor as well as an historical Civil Rights organization. This book is a great read for anyone who is interested in how to become an effective leader regardless of their background.

Morial knew his calling from a young age—he was meant to be a leader



National Urban League President and Former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial will be making an appearance and book signing at Melba's Po Boys to promote his book "The Gumbo Coalition: 10 Leadership Lessons that Help you Unite, Inspire and Achieve."



in the fight for meaningful change as he was on the frontlines of seeing the reins of power shift in New Orleans, as his father Ernest "Dutch" Morial became the City's first Black Mayor.

Less than two decades later, in his own mayoral race in New Orleans, Morial built what he christened the "Gumbo Coalition," an incredible mixture of all of New Orleans's ingre-

dients—African Americans, Whites, Latinos, Asians, business leaders, grassroots community activists, business leaders, clergy, and many more. Each ingredient brought its own flavor, creating a dish that was able to reduce crime and rebuild New Orleans's reputation with such power that the city was able to successfully attract an NBA franchise, multiple Super Bowls, and the Essence Festival, the largest African American event in the nation.

Now, Morial fights on behalf of the National Urban League to create a community with a voice so strong that nothing can stand in the way of change. He is ready to teach others what he has learned along the way, by showing readers what it means to be a leader who can unite voices and create meaningful change.

This book is a great recipe for those interested in leadership and is a must read.

#### Newsmaker/ Continued from page 6.

VID-19 Pandemic during the early stages of the global outbreak. As of September 2020, New Orleans has seen over 150,000 cases of COVID-19, with over 5,000 deaths. Although the State of Louisiana has officially entered Phase 3 as of Sept. 11, 2020, which includes the allowance of 75 percent occupancy for certain businesses, the Coronavirus' reach is still felt by many New Orleanians.

"Nothing has been the same since the outbreak. Being the social butterfly that I am, it's so strange to not come into contact with people like I normally do," said 53-year-old Jared Riley Sr., who works as a Sanitation Lead for Zatarain's, Inc. on the Westbank of New Orleans. "Emotionally, I'm stressed as I believe that COVID has caused me to lose friendships

I previously cherished prior to the outbreak," Riley said. He is aware of how the Pandemic has affected him personally, but Riley said he is also aware of how the virus has affected those around him.

"I've witnessed some of my remaining friends lose their jobs and homes as the virus stopped their money from coming in," Riley said. "It has taken a toll on a lot of people differently because they can't deal with the changes. It has caused most people to be mentally exhausted of the situation, so they simply can't deal with it," Riley said.

The Pandemic hasn't just only affected older residents who have lost loved ones, it also impacted younger residents as well.

"COVID-19 has largely impacted my college experience. Last semester, I was abruptly forced out of my dorm, with little notice," said Justen Pate, a 19-year-old psychology ma-

jor at Xavier. "By being a very social person, it was extremely difficult to be locked inside the house and unable to interact with others. I caught myself slipping into a depression," Pate said. "I had trouble sleeping. I rarely ate, and I could not physically interact with others, something I craved," Pate said.

As someone who studies Mental Health, Pate said he noticed that his close friends were also struggling with the change in life routines.

"We could not leave the house, go out to eat or do any fun activities, all while not having the slightest clue as to when it would all be over," Pate said.

Experts shared that it is important for the public to consider strategies to improve Mental Health as the Pandemic drags on through the remainder of the year and into 2021. Meditation and mindfulness training have been shown to enhance emotional

control, alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression, and avoid substance abuse. Healthy foods and regular exercise have also been frequently encouraged by experts as a means of stress reduction at this time.

"To reduce my stress and anxiety during these times, I've taken it upon myself to meditate daily and pray for better days," said Kobie Lofton, the New Orleans-based 22-year-old Clothing Brand Owner of Neighborhood Flexer. "Not only that, but I drink a gallon of water per day while lessening my meat intake," Lofton said.

Lofton said he also works out five days a week to promote his mental stability. "These times call for all of us to remain hopeful that this Pandemic will soon be over. Whether it be exercising, praying, meditating, or eating healthy, we all need to find our way to achieve our own inner peace," Lofton said.

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\*Preproduction computer generated image shown. Available late 2020.