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Queen Lisa of the Beautiful Ladies

Data Zone Page 4

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ESSENCE Festival of Culture 2025 Lights Up New Orleans

A Cultural Phenomenon




Jill Scott



Master P



Glorilla




Newsmaker

Dr. Monique Guillory
Charts the Future of
Dillard University

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Sports

LSU Clinches
Eighth National
Title



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ESSENCE Festival of Culture 2025 Lights Up New Orleans

A Cultural Phenomenon



Maxwell

Glenda Bell
Data News Weekly Contributor

The iconic ESSENCE Festival of Culture, presented by Coca-Cola, is making a triumphant return to its spiritual home in New Orleans over Independence Day weekend, marking 55 years of ESSENCE Magazine

with a Vibrant Celebration of Legacy, music, art, empowerment, and Black Joy. The 2025 festival continues its tradition of honoring Black Excellence while pushing creative and cultural boundaries. This year's event is anticipated to bring massive crowds to the Caesars Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, offering an unmatched blend of world-class enter-

tainment and culturally rich programming. The city will be filled with energy as festivalgoers from across the country and around the world gather to uplift, connect, and celebrate the beauty and power of the Black Experience.

The star-studded lineup will span generations and genres, with performances from legends such as Boyz

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II Men, Maxwell, Patti LaBelle, Jill Scott & Friends, Babyface, Nas, The Isley Brothers, and Buju Banton, alongside a highly anticipated final hometown performance by Master P. Rising stars and contemporary hitmakers will also take

the stage, including GloRilla, Summer Walker, Davido, Muni Long. One of the most moving moments of the weekend will be the “ESSENCE Flowers” tribute to Quincy Jones, curated by Jermaine Dupri, which will bring together genera-

tions of artists to honor a Titan of Black Music and Innovation. From the Evening Concert Series, which will feature dazzling fireworks and emotional tributes, to the Food & Wine Stage, which will offered culinary panels and tastings led by

acclaimed Black Chefs and influencers like Ashley Jonique and Ingrid Best, the festival will embody memorable experiences designed to inspire, empower, and unite. Beyond the performances, the festival will deliver deeply im-

mersive and thought-provoking programming through signature experiences like AFROPUNK BLK-TOPIA, BEAUTYCON, the ESSENCE Film Festival, ESSENCE
Cover Story, Continued on page 5.

VOTE

DATA NEWS WEEKLY

Your Voice Matters

Rooted in Legacy, Leading with Vision

Dr. Monique Guillory Charts the Future of Dillard University

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief
Data News Weekly

A Homegrown Leader with a Global Perspective

When Dr. Monique Guillory was unanimously appointed as the Ninth president of Dillard University, it marked both a professional milestone and a meaningful homecoming. A native New Orleanian and lifelong advocate for academic equity and cultural empowerment, Dr. Guillory's elevation to the presidency represents more than a leadership transition; it signals a bold, community-centered future for one of the nation's most treasured Historically Black institutions.

Her journey to the presidency began with a foundation in scholarship, cultural leadership, and public service. A proud graduate of St. Mary's Academy, Dr. Guillory earned her bachelor's degree in English Literature and Rhetorical Communication from Tulane University, followed by a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Performance Studies from New York University. Her academic contributions include co-editing the influential volume *Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure* and receiving the Arthur J. Schomburg Award for Excellence in the Humanities, underscoring her deep commitment to elevating Black culture, thought, and expression.

A Vision Rooted in Culture, Creativity, and Community

As president, Dr. Guillory has outlined a forward-thinking academic strategy focused on enhancing faculty development, introduc-



Dr. Monique Guillory, President of Dillard University, leads the institution with a bold vision rooted in academic excellence, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.



ing interdisciplinary credentialing models, and deepening Dillard's commitment to health equity. But perhaps most notable is her cultural vision for the institution.

"I want Dillard to lean all the way into the culture of New Orleans," she shared. "We don't yet have an academic institution that gives our city's cultural collateral the elevation and gravitas it deserves. From our food and music to second lines and spiritual traditions, these aren't just customs. They are systems of knowledge, economic engines, and symbols of resilience."

Her vision includes transforming Dillard into a national leader in cultural preservation and applied creativity, expanding programs in food studies, urban agriculture, entertainment business,

and performing arts. "We already have one of the oldest theater programs among HBCUs," she said. "Now is the time to build around that by developing music industry pipelines, elevating culinary arts, and partnering with local creatives and cultural institutions."

"Communiversality" and the National HBCU Moment

Dr. Guillory is also deeply committed to community-centered leadership, especially in the university's historic Gentilly neighborhood. "I think Dillard has a responsibility to be more deliberate in its role as a partner and anchor institution," she said. "We used to be stronger in helping to accelerate growth in this part of the city. I want to bring back that spirit of welcoming the community in, creating economic op-

portunity, and supporting Gentilly's development."

Her leadership comes at a time of renewed national interest in HBCUs. "We are in an era of opportunity," she said. "In the wake of recent Supreme Court decisions and the current political climate, we're seeing more students, of all backgrounds, seeking out HBCUs. These are institutions that represent the best of American ideals: democracy, justice, and equity. People are realizing that now more than ever."

Stewarding Dillard's Next Chapter

As she begins her presidency, Dr. Guillory is not only focused on growth, she's also focused on relevance and resonance. "If Dillard can be the institution that studies,

protects, and elevates New Orleans' cultural practices, we not only preserve them, we create jobs, we foster global understanding, and we show the world that our traditions have intellectual and economic value," she said. "It's time to bring our cultural practices into the academy, to treat them as the rich, complex systems they are. That's the future I see for Dillard."

With Dr. Monique Guillory at the helm, the future of this historic institution, founded in 1869, is not only bold, but deeply rooted in the City of New Orleans, its people, and the enduring legacy of HBCU excellence, which has shaped American progress and inspired movements for justice, scholarship, and leadership across the globe.

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Cover Story/ Continued from page 3.

Authors, wellness lounges, tech showcases, and entrepreneurship workshops. Each element is woven into the broader theme: “We Are Made Like This” a bold affirmation of identity, creativity, and cultural resilience.

With over 500,000 attendees, ESSENCE Festival of Culture 2025 will demonstrate its unmatched cultural and economic influence on New Orleans and beyond. The introduction of new digital experiences and elevated

curated activations will have an enormous impact on this amazing event. Festivalgoers will describe the weekend as “a celebration of our fullest selves,” a living testament to Black brilliance, community, and the continuing Legacy of ESSENCE.

“ESSENCE Fest isn’t just an event, it’s a homecoming,” says New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell. “It showcases the best of our city and the best of our culture. The energy, the creativity, the eco-

nomic impact—it all reflects how vital this festival is to New Orleans and the Global Celebration of Black Excellence.”

Caroline Wanga, President and CEO of ESSENCE Ventures, echoed that sentiment: “ESSENCE Festival 2025 is a reflection of who we are, past, present, and future. We’re proud to create space that celebrates Blackness in all its dimensions and to continue building a legacy rooted in joy, culture, and empowerment.”



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Queen Lisa of the Beautiful Ladies Social Aid & Pleasure Club

Enriching New Orleans through Community Engagement

Photos by
Glenn Summers
Data News
Contributor

In the Vibrant Heart of New Orleans, Queen Lisa reigns over the Beautiful Ladies Social Aid & Pleasure Club, a beacon of culture and community spirit. Known for their stunning second line parades, Queen Lisa and her royal ladies embody the Essence of New Orleans rich traditions while emphasizing the importance of community enrichment.



Something About
Helena

Helena led the fight to ensure small and local businesses get a chance when the big show comes to town. Whether it's the Super Bowl or Essence Fest, for years, too many of these events have come and gone without our community reaping the benefits. Everyone knew this was wrong, but it took her courage and a commitment to our small minority-owned and women-owned businesses to make a difference.

Helena
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MAYOR



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Ninth Inmate Captured

Antoine Massey Recaptured in Hollygrove Weeks After Daring Jailbreak

Benjamin Bates
Data News Weekly
Contributor

After more than a month on the run, 33-year-old Antoine Massey was taken into custody by law enforcement on Friday at a residence in the Hollygrove neighborhood of New Orleans. Massey, one of ten inmates who escaped from the Orleans Justice Center on May 16th surrendered peacefully after the home he was hiding in was surrounded by officers, thanks to an anonymous tip submitted to Crime Stoppers.

New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick confirmed that Massey exited the house without resistance. "He simply walked out with his hands up," she said during a brief press conference. "This arrest was carried out safely



Antoine Massey was located and arrested on June 27.

his former partner, who has since been charged with obstruction of justice and harboring a fugitive.

Massey was denied bond during a recent court appearance and has now been transferred to Angola State Penitentiary, where most of the recaptured escapees are being held in maximum security.

One Escapee Still at Large

Massey's arrest marks the ninth capture in what has become one of the most extensive inmate manhunts in recent U.S. history. Only Derrick Groves, a convicted murderer, remains at large. Law enforcement agencies continue their search for Groves, offering a \$50,000 reward for any information leading to his arrest.

The Bigger Picture: A Jail in Crisis

The May 16th jailbreak stunned officials and citizens alike. Ten inmates escaped from the Orleans Justice Center by reportedly cutting through a toilet wall, navigating behind-the-scenes infrastructure, and scaling multiple fences, including one topped with barbed wire. The escape prompted widespread scrutiny of jail security protocols.

Subsequent investigations revealed multiple systemic failures, including reports that a jail maintenance worker may have assisted the escape by shutting off water, thereby enabling the prisoners to manipulate physical infrastructure without alerting staff.

A multi-agency task force featuring members of the NOPD, U.S. Marshals, FBI, and Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office was mobilized to track down the escapees, most of whom have since been located across Louisiana and neighboring states.

Authorities urge Derrick Groves to surrender peacefully and ask the public to remain vigilant. "We will continue our efforts until all fugitives are brought to justice," said Superintendent Kirkpatrick. "This city deserves accountability and safety."

and professionally, and we thank the public for assisting."


Social Media Pleas and Claims of Innocence

In a bizarre twist during his time on the run, Massey took to social media, posting multiple videos claiming he hadn't escaped but was instead "let out" of jail. In the videos, he appealed directly to celebrities, activists, and politicians to review his case, stating he was falsely accused and pleading for justice.

Despite these statements, authorities confirmed Massey was being held on serious charges, including rape, second-degree kidnapping, domestic abuse battery involving strangulation, and auto theft prior to his escape. His situation worsened after the jailbreak, as he now faces additional charges for aggravated escape and evading law enforcement.

Aided in Hiding

Investigators believe Massey remained at the Stroelitz Street location for several weeks, hiding in plain sight. According to authorities, he was likely aided by someone with a personal connection—



Something About
Helena

She believes that we should all have a chance to compete. When big businesses wanted to create a so-called clean zone that spans half the city and excludes locals, Helena stood up for the community, and our opportunities multiplied.

Helena Moreno
MAYOR



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LSU Clinches Eighth National Title with Historic College World Series Sweep

Eric Connerly
Data News Weekly
Contributor

The pride of Louisiana roared loud and proud as the LSU Tigers captured their Eighth NCAA Division I Baseball National Championship, delivering a thrilling performance that united fans across the state and reaffirmed LSU's place as a powerhouse in college athletics. With resilience, heart, and undeniable talent, the Tigers swept Coastal Carolina with a 5-3 victory in Game 2 of the Men's College World Series (CWS) finals at Charles Schwab Field.

The win capped an undefeated (5-0) Postseason Tournament run and a remarkable 53-15 overall season record, leaving Louisiana residents beaming with pride and Tiger Nation celebrating coast to coast.



LSU Tigers starting pitcher Anthony Eyanson (24) and catcher Luis Hernandez (23) lead the pitching staff to the dugout against the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers before the game at Charles Schwab Field.

Tournament Highlights

In Game 2, LSU broke open the game with a four-run fourth inning and never looked back. Junior

pitcher Anthony Eyanson delivered a clutch performance, tossing 6.1 innings with one earned run and nine strikeouts. Chase Shores, returning from injury, sealed the game with 2.2 scoreless innings and touched 101 mph on the mound.

In Game 1, Kade Anderson dominated the field with a complete-game shutout and 10 strikeouts in a narrow 1-0 victory. His efforts earned him the title of Most Outstanding Player of the Tournament.

The Tigers closed the finals with a confident 5-3 win, celebrated by a national audience on ESPN and ABC, as thousands filled the stands in Omaha to witness history.

Media and Audience Impact

The 2025 Championship Series drew historic attention, becoming the most-watched two-game sweep in CWS History. Game 2 alone pulled in 2.8 million viewers, with the series averaging 2.5 million overall, ranking it among the most-watched finals since the best-of-three format began.

In total, the 2025 Men's College World Series averaged 1.2 million viewers, the third-largest audience since 2011.

Return to Tiger Town

The celebration didn't stop in Omaha. On June 25th, a massive crowd filled Alex Box Stadium, Skip Bertman Field, to welcome home their champions. Head Coach Jay Johnson, players, and fans came together for a high-energy rally that featured speeches, music, and a dazzling fireworks show.

Tiger fans, young and old, turned

out in purple and gold to salute their team's unforgettable achievement.

Legacy and Leadership

This latest victory secures LSU's Eighth National Championship in Baseball, adding to titles from 1991, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2009, and 2023. The Tigers now hold the second-most championships in College World Series History, trailing only USC.

Head Coach Jay Johnson, in just his fourth season, has now delivered two national titles to LSU and was honored as the 2025 ABCA National Coach of the Year for his leadership and vision.

Star Performers

Kade Anderson led the way on the mound, earning both Most Outstanding Player and Baseball America's 2025 College Pitcher of the Year. Key contributors Derek Curiel, Jared Jones, and Anthony Eyanson were each named ABCA All-Americans, showcasing LSU's depth and consistency.

Meanwhile, Chase Shores, rebounding from Tommy John surgery, became a breakout hero, drawing widespread praise for his composure and power in late-inning relief.

From Baton Rouge to beyond, Louisiana fans are celebrating a team that reflects the grit, talent, and pride of the state itself. With championship banners flying and momentum building, LSU has once again proven it's not just a baseball school, it's a symbol of Southern excellence and competitive spirit. The Tigers have roared, and the nation heard them loud and clear.

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'Free America Weekend' Ignites 50-State Wave of Protests Against Trump on July 4th

By Stacy M. Brown
Black Press USA Senior
National Correspondent

A sprawling coalition of activists plans to transform July 4th into a day of protest and civic action, as demonstrators in all 50 states rally against President Donald Trump's second-term agenda. Billed as "Free America Weekend," the effort is the latest in a string of large-scale demonstrations, following June's "No Kings Day" Protest that drew crowds nationwide to reject what organizers described as Trump's push toward authoritarian rule.

The nationwide protests are part of the 50501 Movement—named for the goal of holding 50 protests in 50 states on the same day. The movement emerged in late 2024 through grassroots organizing and quickly gained momentum across social media platforms such as Instagram and Reddit. Organizers say the Fourth of July is a fitting moment to highlight what they see as threats to American democracy, pointing to Trump's executive orders targeting immigrants, efforts to dismantle federal agencies, and the broader influence of Project 2025, a conservative policy blueprint criticized for seeking to consolidate power in the executive branch.

"There is no real independence to celebrate under this administration," the Women's March declared in its call to action for July 4th. "This is our chance to stand together and reclaim the meaning of freedom." More than 170 events are planned across the country, ranging from rallies at state capitals to block parties, dance protests, banner drops, and community art projects. In New York, protests are scheduled both at the state Capitol in Albany and at New York City Hall. Other major gatherings will take place at the California and Texas State Capitols and in cities including Philadelphia, Tampa, and Tallahassee.

The Women's March website encouraged participants to host neighborhood events and create spaces where people "who aren't going to come to a protest can still dream about freedom with hot dogs and veggie burgers." Organizers said the combination of celebration and dissent reflects their conviction that resisting Trump's policies and building community



go hand in hand. In addition to "No Kings Day," activists have staged numerous demonstrations over the past year condemning what they describe as systemic attacks on civil liberties and democratic norms. Free America Weekend is intended to unify those efforts

into a single, coordinated show of resistance.

While organizers have emphasized nonviolence, some local groups have reported receiving threats and harassment online. In Illinois, protest leaders said they secured permits to rally at the Capi-

tol grounds to help ensure participants' safety after threats from pro-Trump groups. "This movement is about more than just one day," organizers wrote online. "It's about standing firm in our beliefs and seeing it through, no matter the challenges we may face."



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New Orleans lives in every rhythm, every gathering, every act of joy and remembrance this weekend.

That same spirit drives everything we do—from how we show up to where we invest. Over the past three years, our partnership has generated more than \$1B in economic impact. This year, we've partnered with over 200 Black-owned businesses, invested in our year-round ESSENCE C3 program that supports and scales emerging Black-owned brands, and revived the Pipeline Initiative to continue the tradition of expanding vendor opportunities. Honoring your legacy means building with you—not just beside you.

To the vendors, artists, elders, activists, and culture-bearers: we see you. We thank you. We move because of you.

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