State of Black America

Right to Return Rally

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The Race for City Hall Heats Up

The fight for who will run the city for the next four years is in full swing. As the days leading up to the April twenty-second election nears, recently thirteen members of the crowded field of twenty-three candidates slug it out in a war of words expressing their ideas and plans about who would be best suited to lead New Orleans into the future. On March 31, 2005 The Rebuild Hope Now Coalition which consists of a number of civil rights organizations, civic groups and businesses (including Data News Weekly) held the second of four mayoral forums that’s planned leading up to the primary election. The room was filled to capacity, as the candidates dialoged about a wide range of issues from Peggy Wilson’s proposed tax free city, to Virginia Boulet plans for universal health care and everything in between.

The moderators for this event were NNPA’s Editor-in-Chief George Curry and ABC26 News Anchor Liz Reyes. Curry came out like a saber tooth tiger with his no-nonsense tone of questioning immediately asking about “The Chocolate City” and should the demographics of the city be the same as they were pre-Katrina. For as we know Mayor Nagin’s comments created a firestorm that showed how deeply people are divided along racial lines and this has become a divisive and controversial issue because race has been tied into so much of the present dialog regarding the future direction of the city.

The answer to the question showed that race is still a thorny and politically potential powder keg with the candidate’s responses almost being split down the center based on race. Several of the African-American candidates tackled it head

By: Edwin Buggage
Photos By: Glenn Summers
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Moderators George Curry and Liz Reyes

on like the Rev. Tom Watson who stated if he were the Mayor he wouldn’t have apologized for making the remarks, and gave a resounding unapologetic yes to the question. While some the White candidates answered the question peppering it with vague and unspecific platitudes stating everyone should have the right to come back much to the chagrin of moderator Curry. This issue where the underlying subject is race caused a rift that led to a heated exchange between candidates Rev. Tom Watson and Peggy Wilson who said, “Some of the people are better off where they are and its an embarrassment but it’s because the way we’ve done things in this city, but they are better schools, and more support in the places they are so why should they come back.”

The incumbent Ray Nagin was on the offensive as he defended his record and reminded the people, “The runoff for mayor is May 20th and hurricane season starts June 1st let’s finish what we’ve started.” One of his most formidable challengers Audubon Institute CEO Ron Foreman touted his credentials as a leader in the business community for three decades as to why he should be the next mayor, proclaiming he has a proven record of getting things done and that’s the reason he should be the candidate chosen to move New Orleans ahead post Katrina.

As Mayor Nagin spoke and as the incumbent he stressed the uniqueness of his position contrasting himself in relation to his opponents saying he has built relationships and has carte blanche and immediate access to the power brokers in Washington D.C. This in his opinion would help expedite the rebuilding and repopulating of New Orleans. Challenger Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu chimed in commenting that he to was present at meetings in Washington D.C. regarding the recovery effort and added that is important that the city and the state speak with one voice, and there is a need for a restructuring of government because of negative perceptions of Louisiana and New Orleans politics and that it is an impediment to progress.

Liz Reyes jumped into the fray posing a question about the problems residents are having with the local utility company and its ensuing bankruptcy claims and the proposed usage of block

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There was going to be some violence involving firearms. The Superintendent called me and I worked with the Housing Authority of New Orleans to resolve one of the most violent feuds at the time between the kids from the St. Bernard and St. Thomas Housing Developments.”

After closing remarks by the candidates where they spelled out the themes of their campaigns for the attendees, the forum ended with a few words from the former Mayor and President of the National Urban League Marc Morial. In his talk although brief it was powerful and heartfelt as he stressed the importance of protecting displaced residents right to vote, “The government has spent tax payer dollars to set up polling places in the U.S. for Iraqi citizens displaced in cities in the United States to vote in an election in Baghdad.” As he continued his voice rose to a fever pitch as he passionately said, “They were not asked to vote through the mail, they were not asked to fax in a form, they were given the opportunity to vote, and what’s good for them is good for New Orleanians.”
New Orleans Voting Rights March

The Making of History

By: Edwin Buggage

Photos By: Glenn Summers

It was an unseasonably warm day of early spring in New Orleans, and it got even hotter as the Rev. Jesse Jackson organized a rally and march protesting the fairness of the April 22nd elections. This historic event began at the New Orleans Convention Center; the same location where the world witnessed desperation and deprivation as the world's perception of the city as this mystical otherworldly place far removed from the rest of the world was changed forever. Right before their eyes they witnessed a New Orleans one could never imagine, contrary to popular belief the city was not only a place that has this antiquated beauty and unusual social customs, but behind the façade it is steeped and mired with third world conditions, racial inequality and widespread poverty.

It's been nearly eight months since the Hurricane Katrina and the breaching of the levees destroying much of the city, and with that many citizens futures are also uncertain, "This election may be one of the most important in the history of New Orleans" according to Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus Chair Cedric Richmond. In response to what can be perceived as a lack of concern of the state and national government, Jesse Jackson along with other notable figures from the world of politics, academia, activist groups, entertainment and most importantly the residents came together to speak with one voice. In an attempt to address the problems that countless displaced New Orleanians are facing in regarding their rights to vote.

At the rally the podium was shared by many, as powerful words filled the humid air, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Hill Cosby, Michael Eric Dyson, Congressman William Jefferson were just a few of the persons who spoke before the march offering words of inspiration and hope igniting the crowd as they cheered in anticipation of the march they hope would place the spotlight on their dilemma. Many voices were heard during the two hour rally, but the theme was a common one, that displaced residents should be given the right to choose those who represent them in elected office. As final preparations were being made about the ensuing march the crowd was treated to musical performances by New Orleans icon George Porter and by the Grammy Award Winning artist John Legend.

Soon the march began as the Mississippi River Bridge was filled with the several thousand people who chose to trek across it in the name of freedom and equality. Spirits of the past seemed to loom; and visual images of people marching in unison reminiscent of the march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. across the Edmund Pettis Bridge in 1965. But this Saturday would not resemble ‘Bloody Sunday’ with people receiving any bodily harm. This day would be one where the people made a statement to the world and triumphed.

The march was more than a protest it had the feeling of a family reunion, as people spotted friends, relatives and loved ones who they hadn’t seen since Hurricane Katrina’s wrath washed away for many their lives, livelihoods, mementos and memories. Joy filled reunions were ever present, as perspiration married tears as people embraced one and other and got reacquainted. Vehicles on the other side of the crowded bridge joined in lending their support with the symbolic gesture of blowing their horns, and shouting we’re coming back, nobody can hold us back.

The march ended at the Oakwood Shopping Mall where weary bodies rested briefly before the start of another rally; on the stage and in the parking lot there weren’t any shortages of smiles on the faces of the organizers and the participants who saw this event as a success. One in which African-Americans came together for a common cause, as NAACP Chairman Bruce Gordon said, “Some people think we cannot come together, but here you have all these different organizations represented up here standing together united.”  Rev. Jackson reminded the captive audience that this is not the end, that it is only the beginning. Rev. Al Sharpton soon followed by saying that economic unity is as important as political unity.

The rally soon ended but April 1, 2005 will always hold a special place in the hearts, minds, and imaginations for those who courageously walked the road less traveled. There were no fools walking across the bridge on this day; it was concerned citizens protesting the fairness of the elections. There were no fools walking across the bridge on this day; it was concerned citizens protesting the fairness of the elections. Some people think we cannot come together, but here you have all these different organizations represented up here standing together united.”  Rev. Jackson reminded the captive audience that this is not the end, that it is only the beginning. Rev. Al Sharpton soon followed by saying that economic unity is as important as political unity.

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NEW ORLEANS, La. — Citing “sacilege” by demonstrators who disrupted a Mass, Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans has ordered the removal of the blessed sacrament from historic St. Augustine Church and said it will be closed “for the foreseeable future.”

The order came March 27, the day after sign-waving protesters repeatedly interrupted a priest trying to celebrate Mass in the church, causing the liturgy to be terminated.

St. Augustine Parish, in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans next to the French Quarter, was founded in 1841 as a multicultural parish attended by free African-Americans, slaves and whites. It calls itself the nation’s oldest predominantly African-American parish and was the birthplace of the Sisters of the Holy Family, the second-oldest congregation of African-American women religious.

Following the recommendations of an archdiocesan pastoral plan in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Archbishop Hughes had earlier decided to close the small parish, merging it with neighboring St. Peter Claver Parish, but to keep the church building open for one Mass each Sunday.

Under the plan, announced in February, seven parishes in the archdiocese were closed and 23 others have been put on hold until enough people return to warrant their reopening.

After the disruption of Mass March 26, the archbishop announced that St. Augustine Church had been “desecrated” and would be closed.

He also called on individuals who had occupied the parish rectory for more than a week to “vacate the premises immediately” and he asked that church property “be secured.”

Once a church is desecrated, it cannot be reused until it is reconsecrated,” he said.

“I am very open to the reopening of the church once safety can be guaranteed and once we can have it reconsecrated,” he said.

Citing sacrilege, New Orleans archbishop closes historic black church

Calling the disruption of Mass a “very serious desecration,” he added, “What we as Catholics call a sacilege was committed there.”

Edmundite Father Michael Jacques, pastor of St. Peter Claver Parish, which is also predominantly African-American, was the celebrant of the March 26 Mass. It was intended to mark a welcoming of St. Augustine parishioners into the new faith community, but it never got that far.

St. Augustine Parish was officially closed March 15 when the post-hurricane pastoral plan took effect, and its pastor, Divine Word Father Jerome LeDoux, celebrated his final Mass there March 19.

The archdiocese said the small number of baptisms, first Communions, confessions and confirmations in the parish was a factor in the decision to close it.

If You Were Impacted by Hurricane Katrina or Rita, You May be Eligible for Help from FEMA.

The deadline to register for FEMA assistance is April 10, 2006.

There are a number of disaster programs for which you may be eligible. The programs include: temporary housing assistance, replacement grants for serious disaster related needs and home repair not covered by private insurance, or other assistance programs including low-interest disaster loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration. You do not need to complete a loan application with the SBA to be considered for FEMA’s temporary housing assistance or funds for certain other disaster related needs you may have.

Call FEMA to register or go online
1-800-621-FEMA (6:00 a.m. – Midnight daily EST)
TTY 1-800-462-7585
http://www.fema.gov
Multilingual operators are available

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, you should call FEMA at 800-621-3362 or contact your State Office of Equal Rights.
Forman Plan Gives “Specifics”

The entire field of Mayoral Candidates are all promising the same things to New Orleans voters - I will bring you home; it's time to rebuild; we need a safe city and on and on. What most of the candidates are not saying is how they will implement their lofty, if not rhetorical, promises.

There is at least one exception to the rhetoric spouting and that is Ron Forman. Forman, who engineered the success and national acclaimed of the Audubon Zoo and the Aquarium of the Americas, gives specifics to the “how to’s” of his plan. Forman has dubbed his agenda for New Orleans “Action Plan for Rebuilding New Orleans”.

“I think Ron has an excellent plan”, says Paul Beaulieu, political analyst. He details how he is going to bring the city back. His challenge “Beaulieu said, “is to get his plan in front of the voters and to make sure they understand it. The beef is there”.

Under Safety and Flood Protection, Forman says, “The Corp of Engineers had the responsibility to design safe levees. They failed. My staff will work along with the Corp and monitor its progress”.

Even though the Corp has been slow to consider innovative thinking and design, Forman vows to have his own team interact with the Corp of Engineers to insure new and effective ideas are part and parcel of our hurricane protection strategy.

Forman’s plan for the New Orleans economy asserts a partnership among New Orleans and its neighboring parishes.

“Let’s think big” says Forman, “and recognize that our economy and that of our neighbors are interdependent. I see Baton Rouge and New Orleans as book ends to a powerhouse regional economy. Dallas and Fort Worth recognized the power of partnership and both cities have benefited greatly. My plan is to create that partnership”.

Another facet of Forman’s “Action Plan” deals with hurricane preparedness. “I plan to better prepare our city for the force of devastating hurricanes”, Forman said. I will establish a Global Hurricane Preparedness Center to create good-paying jobs while broadening our knowledge and expertise in preventing injury, damage or loss of life”, Forman said.

One of the chief concerns of New Orleans is the element of crime in the city. Forman outlined his methods to ensure a safer New Orleans. I will strengthen the new efforts of regional cooperation between New Orleans and surrounding parishes among city, state and federal law enforcement. I will ensure a reliable police presence in every neighborhood to stop crime and establish zero tolerance”, Forman said.

More details of Ron Forman’s “Action Plan” maybe seen on his web-site, www.formanformayor.com
WASHINGTON (NNPA) – In evaluating recent nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court, too much emphasis was placed on competence and academic achievement while not enough weight was given to basic values, retired federal Judge Nathaniel R. Jones says.

Jones' analysis appears as an essay in the National Urban League’s 2006 State of Black America report, released on Wednesday.

"One’s fitness to be a U.S. Supreme Court justice transcends what so many focused on during the recent confirmation process – stellar academic achievements and a degree of unquestioned professional competence," writes Jones, a former lawyer for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and ex-general counsel for the NAACP. "While such credentials are relevant, they should be the beginning of the scrutiny, not the end. The critical question is one of values, not competence."

Jones noted that Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who presided over the Dred Scott case was a supremely qualified jurist and had served as Secretary of Treasury in the Andrew Jackson administration.

"Yet, when faced with the fundamental question of whether a one-time slave, Dred Scott, had standing to sue to retain his newly-acquired free status, Justice Taney wrote that black people –slaves – were not persons within the contemplation of the framers of the Constitution and were therefore powerless to sue. Had Chief Justice Taney been imbued with a different scale of values, our national history on race might have been considerably different," Jones writes.

In another landmark case, Plessy v. Ferguson, then-Chief Justice Henry Billings had impeccable legal credentials.

"Justice Brown had served on the Sixth Circuit of Appeals and was the holder of degrees from Harvard and Yale," observed Jones, who retired from the same appeals court. "Yet, he lacks the values that sensitized him to understand why the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments had to become part of the Constitution. That responsibility fell to the lone dissenter, John Marshall Harlan, the son of Kentucky slave owners, a graduate of Centre College and Transylvania University. Justice Harland offered an eloquent prophecy that the court and the nation would regret the doctrine it had imposed on the nation.

"At first glance, Justice Brown's academic and career credentials may have appeared more impressive than Justice Harlan’s. But in the final analysis, it was Justice Harlan, with his superior values, who was unquestionably the finer judge. Clearly, if Justice Harlan’s dissent had been the majority view, we would not be faced with the continuing struggles over race."

Jones' contribution was one of eight essays included in this year's State of Black America. In addition to the essays, the report presents this year’s annual National Urban League Equality Index, a yardstick for measuring progress, and an analysis of African-American presence on Sunday morning talk shows.

"I wish that the Urban League could tell you that the State of Black America in 2006 was improving. We can’t," said Marc H. Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. "We are here to tell it to your straight. The State of Black America is in trouble. We can’t close the great divides in this country in a day just like we can’t end poverty in a night. But we’re going to start by speaking truth to power. America is not America when millions of our citizens are still viewed as a fraction of a person."

The essay on Black home ownership contains some stunning revelations.

"Between 199 and 200 , the Black homeownership rate rose from 2.3 percent to 9.1 percent, the highest rate in history. Moreover, the Black homeownership rate grew faster than the White homeownership rate," writes Lance Freeman in "Black Homeownership: A Dream No Longer Deferred?" He continues, "Despite these impressive gains, however, the Black homeownership rate grew faster than the White homeownership rate."
Rebuilding A Greater New Orleans

After 25 years of serving New Orleans, Cox Communications is committed to rebuilding the Greater New Orleans area better than ever.

Cox has already given a $10 million gift to help our citizens recover from this tragedy. The American Red Cross, United Way, Habitat For Humanity and Boys & Girls Clubs have received these donations to help begin to rebuild our community.

This city is our home too and we are looking forward to the next twenty five years... and beyond.

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NNPA News Service Editor-in-Chief George E. Curry served as editor of this year’s State of Black America report and wrote a chapter titled, “Racial Disparities Drive Prison Boom.”

He cites a Sentencing Project report: “African-Americans who use drugs are more likely to be arrested than other groups, and then to penetrate more deeply into the criminal justice system. White African-Americans constitute 13 percent of the nation’s monthly drug users, they represent 35 percent of those persons arrested for drug crime, 53 percent of drug convictions and 58 percent of those in prison for drug offenses.”

Curry wrote that racial disparities grow even wider in states with “three strikes and you’re out” mandatory sentencing requirements. California, the nation’s most populous state, is a case in point.

Quoting one report, he writes: “Minorities tend to be arrested at higher rates than whites, then their mothers die in childbirth. A theologian who argued that the test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children. The U.S. is failing that test, especially in how its treats Black babies. “Black babies are four times as likely as white babies to have their mothers die in childbirth. A black preschool boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a black preschool girl has a one in 17 chance...Black youth are 48 times more likely to be incarcerated than white youths for comparable drug offenses.”

On the other hand, whites constitute 47.1 percent of the population but only 35.7 percent of felony arrests and 28.7 percent of the prison population. Whites constitute 26.1 percent of second strikers and 25.4 percent of third strikers. Thus, as cases move through the process into progressively harsher punishment, the proportion of whites diminishes while the proportion of African Americans increases.”

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children’s Defense Fund, quotes a German theologian who argued that the test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children. The U.S. is failing that test, especially in how it treats Black babies. “Black babies are four times as likely as white babies to have their mothers die in childbirth. A black preschool boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a black preschool girl has a one in 17 chance...Black youth are 48 times more likely to be incarcerated than white youths for comparable drug offenses.”

National Urban League President Marc Morial, a former two-time mayor of New Orleans, and Louisiana native Donna Brazil, a political consultant, offered deeply personal reflections on Hurricane Katrina and their hometowns.

“As we rode back across the St. Claude Avenue Bridge toward downtown New Orleans, we encountered a man walking swiftly with what appeared to be a large book,” Morial recalls. “He recognized me and we embraced. He said that he had walked 55 blocks, defying the order to stay away from the lower 9th Ward area. He not only wanted to see his home, but retrieve his large family Bible. That was what he carried under his arm and he said it was one of the few things in his home that was not completely destroyed. Seeing his home had brought him to closure, and retrieving his treasured family Bible gave him the power and strength to move on.”

Brazile, who grew up in New Orleans, writes: “Katrina struck my hometown in the early hours of the morning at the end of a long, hot month, when people living paycheck-to-paycheck are often without resources to do more than just survive. Countless New Orleans residents, like my Dad and several of my siblings, were stuck in Katrina’s path without cars, gas, money, public transportation or credit cards to take them to higher ground. More than 1 million people were displaced in the days and months following Katrina, and less than half have returned. Some may never go back home.”

The National Urban League Policy Institute, based in Washington, studied the guest lineups of Sunday morning TV talk shows from January 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. Discouraged by its findings, it launched a larger, 2-year study from January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2005.

Stephanie J. Jones writes: “Although the preliminary report was widely-publicized – with the hope that networks would take it upon themselves to present a more diverse palette – the full two-year follow-up study showed no significant progress since publication of the initial study. Indeed, in some areas there has even been reiteration.”

For example, the percentage of Sunday morning news shows with no interviews with Black guests increased between the two studies from 78 percent to 80 percent.”

A widely referenced component of the Annual State of Black America is what the organization calls it’s equality index,” measuring the decreasing or increasing gaps between Blacks and Whites in health, education, economics, social justice and civic engagement.

Of those areas, the greatest disparity was the economic gap, which more than 20 percent wider than in any other category. The median net worth of Blacks ($86,160) is 10 times less than that of the average White family ($877,000). Much of that difference is because of the different rate of home ownership, with nearly 50 percent of African-Americans owning their homes, compared to more than 70 percent of Whites.

“Overall, the Total Equality Index is virtually unchanged, registering 0.73 in both 2005 and 2006,” this year’s report stated. “This is not surprising, since wholesale national changes move at a glacial pace.”

Experience ✧ Courage ✧ Conviction ✧ Vision ✧ Leadership

Experience:
Renée knows how, who to talk to, and where to go to solve the many problems our city faces. She knows the first responsibility of government is to its citizens and she has met with leaders in Washington and Baton Rouge to make sure that our city gets its fair share of federal and state funds and to ensure that our levees are constructed properly and in a timely manner.

Courage:
When others were fleeing New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, Renée stayed in the city, putting herself at risk to try to help others. Renée knew that once the storm had passed the human suffering and the damage to life and property would have to be dealt with, and she was ready to meet the challenge.

Conviction:
Renée believes she can succeed where others have failed because of her positive attitude, her strong work ethic, her belief in the goodness of people and her faith in God.

Vision:
Renée knows the importance of safe and reliable evacuation routes, but is also aware that everyone does not have a car or the price of an airline ticket. That is why Renée met with Amtrak, the Army and the National Guard to ensure that we can move our sick, our elderly and our poor citizens at the same time that we demand that others evacuate.

Leadership:
Renée led by example: She is a hands-on leader and never asks anyone to do something she would not do herself. Renée’s average workday lasts 12 to 13 hours, sometimes 6 or 7 days a week. With untiring energy, Renée possesses the unique ability to multi-task and convince others to see things her way.

On Saturday, April 22nd, we need to re-elect Renée Gill Pratt, Councilmember District B.

VOTE #94 Saturday, April 22, 2006
Ron Forman's track record of success shows that he has what it takes to rebuild New Orleans.

His father was a welder at the Port, his mom a bookkeeper. From them he learned the values of hard work and excellence. A proud graduate of New Orleans public schools, he attended Kingsley House and Wilson, McMann, Fortier High, and L.S.U. He served in the Army and became a proud parent. A successful business executive, his leadership united the community in an unprecedented effort that turned a zoo that had been called an “animal ghetto” from a national disgrace into a national treasure, and built the Aquarium of the Americas when people said it couldn’t be done.

A University of New Orleans study concluded that these achievements created 6500 new jobs and a $350 million annual impact on our economy.

The Audubon Zoo and the Aquarium of the Americas are ranked among the top five in the nation.

As Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce he helped create jobs. His leadership has benefited the United Negro College Fund, the LSU Health Sciences Center Foundation, and the LSU Medical Center Foundation. Gambit named him “New Orleanian of the Year”. New Orleans Magazine honored him as “Man of the Decade”.

Ron Forman has proven he knows how to turn big ideas and bold visions into reality.

(504) 525-4777

Read Ron’s Plan to Rebuild New Orleans at www.formanformayor.com
Historic March Highlights

NAACP President Bruce Gordon makes a call for unity
Congressman William Jefferson and Data News Publisher Terry

Cynthia Willard-Lewis #116
She's fighting to rebuild District E

Cynthia says our people have a right to come home!

- Thanks to Cynthia and our community leaders, electricity, water, sewage and trailers are here with more coming daily to District E
- Cynthia is fighting for Category 3 Levees now and will keep fighting until Category 5 Levees are in place
- With Cynthia’s leadership, churches, schools and businesses are returning to District E

Cynthia’s Commitment: “Our goal remains bringing back all of us to a place to live while we rebuild our families, our neighborhoods and our lives. Across New Orleans, we will continue to fight together, from Lower Nine and New Orleans East to Lakeview and Gentilly, from Broadmoor to Mid-City, we’ll encourage each other and pray for one another. With the help of God, our great city will rise again as we will – together, committed, stronger, fighting to continue our traditions, our neighborhoods and our love for New Orleans.”

VOTE FOR CYNTHIA #116 ON SATURDAY, APRIL 22!
To volunteer, call us at 636-3547/1515 Poydras Street, Suite 1420
Make New Orleans

A SAFE CITY

A SMART CITY

AN ACCOUNTABLE CITY

A CARING CITY

A WORLD CITY

“We only have one chance to get this right, and our margin for error is zero.”

Mitch Landrieu will bring his energy, dedication and passion for public service to the Mayor’s office. He will be responsive, honest and tough. He understands the basic responsibilities of City Government, and he will restore credibility with citizens, businesses, and government leaders who want to invest in rebuilding New Orleans.

Mitch Landrieu has a strong record of making government work. He has been at the forefront of some of Louisiana’s most sweeping reforms. Mitch Landrieu has a detailed plan that will restore basic services in our neighborhoods, complete the neighborhood planning process and prioritize emergency preparedness and public safety.

Along with the media support came moral and community support from those who finally identified those who are the new movers and shakers, she has started connecting these new, accountable for their decisions and leadership. This where Simms envisions networking with artists. It is as much about teaching these things so I let them know where they can look for social services.  

Simms gets great satisfaction in knowing that she got people to understand her and other evacuees’ point of view. She is pleased with the support that she not only got from her fellow evacuees but even media people admitted that they felt that her efforts were logical and even inspirational. Simms says, “The support that I got from media was good. Got interviewed on CNN, local Atlanta outlets, travel magazines and Houston outlets.” She continues, “I especially like that people got to see that I’m not just some bitter black person. They saw that I’m educated and professional.”

Simms is not only looking at community progress among evacuees in Atlanta but also progress in economic development, entertainment and leadership. Of course entertainment is her bread and butter, so she has decided to take more of New Orleans back to Atlanta. “I’ve started a ‘504 Night’ at one of the local clubs,” she says. Simms has also introduced the “ATL” to various brass bands, Second Line groups and New Orleans Hip Hop artists. It is as much about teaching these groups how to expand their market base as it is about entertaining folks in Atlanta. “They’ve never seen anything like us before. They can’t believe how hyped up we get, even when there’s a Second Line.” Beyond entertainment, it is also about directing transplanted New Orleans resources to help them advance their lives in their new city. She laments, “Some people still don’t know where to go for the simple things so I let them know where they can look for apartments or where they can get help or social services.”

Simms’ biggest project is her “What Now, New Orleans” campaign. The campaign is designed to hold New Orleans politicians accountable for their decisions and leadership. This where Simms envisions networking with what she calls a “new regime” of leaders. Having taken advantage of her connections and having identified those who are the new movers and shakers, she has started connecting these new, young professional power brokers in an effort to establish a new leadership base. Simms reveals that they are even working together in order to raise funds for future campaigns for elected positions. “I’m excited! It’s our time. We’ve got to get started making moves because the people who are in office now aren’t doing what they’re supposed to do. So we’ve got to step up and take charge,” she exhails. That is why ChiQuita Simms is our March Trailblazer.
Parents, Educators NEED You!

Not quite. Teachers have a myriad of expectations they must manage. They have lesson plans to execute, students to govern; and they have administrators and parents to whom they must answer. For every parent there are anywhere from 400 to 500 students. Administrators are under pressure from school districts to satisfy state testing goals and, most recently, No Child Left Behind requirements for federal funding. All of that and they are in a constant race against the clock.

America’s urban teachers must often learn how to manage a classroom the hard way. There are those unhappy students, who tend to command most of the attention. There are also those great students, who teachers cannot afford to ignore. The students who lose out are the ones in the middle. What complicates matters is that the parents of the best students tend to show up. The parents of the lowest performing students sometimes show up. The parents of the students in the middle tend to show up the least, thus they stay lost in the shuffle.

I am not ignorant of the fact that parents work just as hard as everyone else. My wife and I will soon find out how much of challenge it is to have a child in school. There is more than one way to skin a cat, however. Attending a parent/teacher is not the only alternative for parents to show their support. Exchange phone numbers or e-mail addresses with teachers. Probably the most effective way of communicating with teachers is the old fashioned way—the note. I cannot even begin to imagine the amount of effort that has been focused on college admissions. We live during a time when we have the most sensitive spots. Even the toughest kids are in this period of post-Katrina rediscovery, it is time for us to rediscover the needs of our children.

As long as many of us are in this period of post-Katrina rediscovery, it is time for us to rediscover the needs of our children. As resilient as they are, children are still fragile. Even the toughest kids have the most sensitive spots. Even the kids who long to emulate thug life know that there are those wiser than they are. As a by-product of Pop Culture kids feel pressure to be as hard as nails in a world that they have seen will unapologetically eat them alive. Let’s not forget that they do not have the greatest examples of leadership in our politicians, business people, adults in their neighborhoods and even their own parents. So, to whom can they look for guidance? Educators.

I wish that parents could see what educators deal with on a day-to-day basis. We are asking underpaid people to walk into a school full of kids and teach them. Simple, right?

Positive Spring Break for Black College Students

We live during a time when we have doubted the commitment of Black students to help elevate the condition of the less fortunate among us. Some of this ambiguity has been focused on college students whom we believe should know better.

They have access to the written and video legacy of past examples of individuals who have engaged in selfless struggle to advance the race so that successive generations could progress. So, this post-Civil Rights movement generation has been pampered for the apparent lack of struggle in their DNA and their permissiveness in allowing aspects of racism to persist by often adopting neoliberal attitudes that allow them to fit in with their White peers. Therefore, to many, their strong response to the Katrina disaster this Spring Break has been surprising.

The Alternative Spring Break projects began several years ago, when press attention to thousands of students descending on places like Daytona Beach, Fla., to engage in beer-laden orgies revealed a vacuous set of values. To counter this image and the substance of this period, universities began to permit credit for positive internships, or travel abroad experiences, or other types of productive work projects.

This year, while college students have been better known for trucking to plush hideaways in Latin America, or on sunny beaches in Florida, many have dedicated themselves to working in the American Gulf to make the people damaged by Hurricane Katrina whole. Because of this desire, MTV and United Way sponsored a special project that attracted students from many universities and subsequently more than 35,000 students participated, a welcome response by students of all colors.

However, when the media began to focus on this event, stories emerged that featured students at predominantly White universities, and as I looked at the numbers of students involved, they ranged from 12 to 78 each from about 50 universities. But nearly 250 students from Howard University alone became involved, a number that school officials said quadrupled that of any similar period in the past. Press interview with these students revealed a strong motivation to affect change in the region, by partnering with Habitat for Humanity to rebuild homes, clean houses, remove debris, paint, and mentor students. This was reported to be empowering work, both for the students who participated and for those families and individuals assisted. In this instance, at least one major TV network recognized the uniqueness of this contribution. Last week, ABC’s World News Tonight named the Howard students it’s “People of the Week” to devoted a segment to their work in New Orleans.

It should also be noted that students went from other HBCUs, including Morgan State University. Morgan called their project “Katrina On The Ground.” HBCUs in the Atlanta area sent not only significant sums of money, but their choirs and other resources into the area. In addition, many of these institutions (Howard again in the lead) accepted many students from the Gulf region on a temporary basis, in an illustration of family solidarity. It was a positive gesture of partnership of these often-maligned institutions.

In truth, many of the HBCUs stepped up when the religious community has lagged. And although some such as the African American Leadership Institute of Howard University, I am aware of the lead) accepted many students from the Gulf region on a temporary basis, in an illustration of family solidarity. It was a positive gesture of partnership of these often-maligned institutions.

Ron Walters
NNPA Columnist
New Orleans Residents Ponder their Future

KATRINA SERIES - PART 7

This is the seventh of an 8-part series of stories about the Gulf Coast and the road to recovery after Hurricane Katrina.

By Hazel Trice Edney and Zenitha Prince
NNPA Special Correspondents

Sandra Robertson is just the kind of resident New Orleans needs to rebuild. At 38 years old, she was working as an urban planner there when Hurricane Katrina turned her life upside down. She is now living in Dallas, not knowing when – or, if – she’ll return to the place she once called home.

“It’s very stressful not knowing where we stand with a lot of things,” she says, softly. “I have so many emotions about it and on a daily basis, it changes.”

Summing up the fate of more than 800,000 displaced residents, some relocated as far away as Alaska, she said: “Having to be forced to be somewhere or being somewhere that is not our home. I can’t fix that.”

The people who can fix it – at the local, state and national level – have failed residents of the Gulf areas, especially the most vulnerable – African-Americans and the poor – and are now asking the people they failed, to trust them to make things right.

Not only is incumbent mayor Ray Nagin seeking re-election, 22 candidates are lined up to show him the door. If a mayoral forum in Houston last Saturday is any indication, most have no concrete plan to return residents to a safe and thriving Crescent City. In fact, one candidate said that until there is ample housing, he wouldn’t recommend that residents return.

Some former resident have relocated to other cities and have no plan to return. But others are still in limbo and, at minimum, want to decide who will lead the city the next four years. But that won’t be easy. As State Sen. Cleo Fields of Baton Rouge said in a letter to the Justice Department, “300 of the City’s 422 – primarily in black neighborhoods – voting precincts are unavailable for voting because of damaged sustained in and after Hurricane Katrina.”

In his letter to John K. Tanner, chief of the Voting Rights Section of the Civil Rights Division, Fields continued, “As a result of the changes in precinct location and arguably deliberate lack of information the State has provided associated therewith, the State has caused voter confusion which will clearly lead to voter dilution.”

Jesse Jackson, NAACP President Bruce Gordon and other civil rights leaders are holding a march in New Orleans on Saturday seeking to have what they call an “illegal” election postponed so that more former residents can cast ballots.

The civil rights groups received a setback Monday when a federal judge refused to postpone the April 22 election.

National Urban League President Marc Morial, a former two-term mayor of New Orleans, said, “This is a Florida in the making,” referring to widespread voting problems in the 2000 elections. “If you see an election train wreck coming, why not do something to prevent it before the wreck occurs?”

Those living elsewhere must either return to New Orleans to vote or fill out an absentee ballot. And that has angered some displaced residents who witnessed Iraqi citizens living in the U.S. cast votes across the nation at satellite polling stations for an election being held in Iraq.

Yet, U.S. citizens are not being accorded that same courtesy. That’s not the only indignity that affects them.

Because Mississippi has a Republican governor who once served as chairman of the National Republican Party and New Orleans’ mayor is a Democrat as is the state’s governor, Rep. William Jefferson says the Bush administration is playing politics by directing a disproportionate amount of federal recovery funds to Mississippi instead of Louisiana, where most of the damage occurred.

Jefferson keeps a 2-page sheet in his Washington office comparing the damage in Louisiana and Mississippi and the federal response.

According to his calculations, there have been 1,075 confirmed deaths in Louisiana and 231 in Mississippi; 786,372 citizens from Louisiana have been displaced, compared to 110,160 from the Magnolia state; Louisiana has lost 18,752 businesses, Mississippi, 1,912; about 10 miles of Mississippi was damaged compared to 80 percent of Orleans Parish and all of St. Bernard Parish. Although Louisiana suffered 85 percent of the hurricane damage, so far it has received only 54 percent of federal community block grant funds. By contrast, Mississippi, with 15 percent of the damage, has received 46 percent of the block grant funds.

When asked if Mississippi is being favored because of politics, Jefferson replied: “I’m sure that has something to do with it. It should be irrelevant. Both Senators [in Mississippi] are Republicans and the governor is a Republican. On our side of it, the governor is a Democrat and our Senators are split between the two parties. So that probably has something to do with what’s happening here. The chairman of the appropriations committee is also a Mississippi, Thad Cochran, on the Senate side.

“But I would think that if all these folks who are suffering in Louisiana were not predominantly poor and predominantly Black, they’d get more attention. I don’t think they would be ignored and left out there the way they’re being left out.”

Even now, six months after the hurricanes, it is clear that New Orleans is still in need of help.

“It really does look like a ghost town still. You see people like every five blocks or so. They even found a body on Sunday…” There are piles of debris in front of the...
houses. You see cars on top of cars. You see houses that are so weak that they're sinking in the middle," says Shari Logan, a Howard University student who spent her spring break helping residents clean up in New Orleans.

"At some corners, you know that a house had to have been there, but, you don't see any trace of this house. You just see stuff like pots and pans. And I saw, like, a computer. So you know that someone lived there, but you don't see any trace of the house... You see stairs, like going up to the houses. But the stairs are leading nowhere because there's nothing to step into. It's just still devastation."

Some of the devastation continues because of continued bureaucratic bungling by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the primary federal relief agency.

It was disclosed earlier this month that 10,777 mobile homes were parked, unoccupied, in Hope, Ark. It cost $300 million to $30 million to order to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina were parked, or being held in Hope, Arkansas. FEMA said that "a symbol of what's wrong with this administration and what's wrong with FEMA."

The American Red Cross, the charity of choice for most Americans, has also come under fire recently. It fired to supervisors of the Gulf coast operation last week and is investigating allegations that supervisors in charge of kitchens in the disaster zone have been ordering more food than is needed. Interim Red Cross President John F. McGuire had earlier acknowledged that the agency is looking into possible criminal activity connected with the Red Cross kitchens and shelters.

The slow progress and uncertainty over the city's future -- especially whether the rebuilt levees can withstand another hurricane -- is causing die-hard New Orleanians to hesitate about going back. Terry Jones, publisher of the New Orleans Data News Weekly, was in Atlanta when Hurricane Katrina struck. He has resumed printing his paper, changed the name to the Louisiana Data News Weekly and plans to continue to have his business operations there, though he is unsure if he will again take up residence.

"It's never going to be the same. So, it's not what you'll go back to," Jones said. "When you say 'go back home,' it's all relative, you know what I mean? Does it mean I'm going to sit down and eat crawfish? Am I going to pass through? Or what does that mean?"

Jones goes back and forth on whether he should return to his hometown. His mother and younger sister are looking to move back in May -- just before the June 1 hurricane season begins -- and that might influence his decision.

"One thing for sure," Jones said, "I'm not going back until after the hurricane season."

And what about those that return either before or after the hurricane season?

Families with children will have to think long and hard. Before Katrina, there were 118 public schools with 60,000 pupils. Today, only 20 schools have reopened, educating only 9,500 students. Parents of some relocated students are also reporting problems.

"He's having a really hard time adjusting to school and just letting go of everything back home," Anetha Baker said, referring to her son, Gantry, 13, now attending school in Jonesville, La. She said teachers have reported that he appears agitated and is argumentative, traits he did not express in New Orleans. She said, "I guess somewhere in his mind, he figures we should be going back."

Some are undecided about whether to go back because Mayor Nagin's Bring Back New Orleans Commission has not been clear on what neighborhoods would be allowed to be rebuilt. Although the city continues to issue building permits for all sections of the city, each neighborhood is being required to prove that it deserves city service by showing that at least 50 percent of the residents plan to return.

Trying to lure tourists back to New Orleans is a critical goal if New Orleans is to be resurrected, city officials say. The 55.5 tourism industry attracts more than 10 million visitors each year to New Orleans, creating more than 80,000 jobs and representing more than 30 percent of the city's operating budget, according to the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Though nowhere near its former levels, some national organizations, such as the American Library Association, the National Black Chamber of Commerce and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education have scheduled conventions there this spring or summer.

Gross, who finds herself crying more often than not, recalls a Delta Sigma Theta sorority meeting she attended.

"For all of us, everybody was like, 'Oh, I'm dying inside.' And I said, 'Me, too.' But everybody was smiling like we're doing all right. But we were doing that for each other," she stated. "We don't have any control over our lives. We don't know what they're going to do two months from now."
These are the polling locations for Election Day in Orleans Parish on April 22, 2006 and May 20, 2006.

To find your new polling location, look for your old polling location, in alphabetical order, in the left hand column. Your new polling location will be in the right hand column. For example, if your old polling location was “A.P. Tureaud School”, your new polling location is “McDonough #35 High School.”

For more information on how to check your current registration status, register to vote, or vote, please contact your home parish Registrar of Voters office or the Louisiana Secretary of State Elections Division by email at elections@sos.louisiana.gov or at 1-800-883-2805.
Paid for by the Louisiana Secretary of State’s Office.
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“Now is not the time to change leadership.
I ask the citizens of New Orleans to let me continue this important job of rebuilding our city. We have the plan and the means to do it. I believe that my first term in office shows I have the credibility and experience to get the job done right.”

**Mayor Ray Nagin**

**INTEGRITY**
For the last four years, our mayor, Ray Nagin has achieved many accomplishments. But, perhaps, the most important and long-lasting change is that he has restored integrity to City Hall. He promised to put an end to patronage politics which benefited only a handful of favorites and allowed corruption to flourish. Instead, our mayor created a modern and efficient city government in which all our citizens have a chance to participate and achieve economic success.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**
- Under Mayor Nagin’s leadership, 37,000 people were able to get off the poverty rolls.
- Construction soared with $3.2 billion in projects underway.
- Hollywood was recruited to make movies here and it did so, in record numbers. New Orleans became known as Hollywood South.
- The cruise industry prospered and the tourist industry had record back to back years - more than 10 million visitors came to the city.
- Real estate values reached record highs. Just before Hurricane Katrina, a deal was made to build a Trump Tower here.

**KATRINA IS SINGLE LARGEST U.S. DISASTER**
- Our mayor led the most successful evacuation of a major American city in history. Over 90% of our citizens left New Orleans due to the Mayor’s urging and found safety for their families.
- Ray Nagin stayed in the city throughout the catastrophe of Katrina leading the way in helping those who stayed behind. He did everything possible to get New Orleans the help it needed to rescue our remaining citizens.
- He overcame Washington’s reluctance to help New Orleans and has won billions of dollars to rebuild our city.

**BRINGING NEW ORLEANS BACK PLAN**
Within 30 days after the hurricane, our mayor created the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, utilizing some of the best and brightest people available to create the plan to restore New Orleans. The plan is currently underway. Much of the city’s infrastructure is working again. We are bringing our citizens home. We have guarantees of federal funding for rebuilding homes that were destroyed. Our levee system is being rebuilt to protect our city in time for this hurricane season.

1-888-VOTE RAY www.reelectmayornagin.com

Paid for by the Nagin Campaign Committee.
Join The Louisiana Unity ’06
Rebuild Hope Now Coalition

For The Katrina Survivors
Empowerment Weekends

Mayoral Candidate Forums
and Empowerment Expos
New Orleans Municipal Elections

Location
SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2006
Houston, Texas

Friday, March 31, 2006
New Orleans, LA

Saturday, April 8, 2006
Atlanta, GA

Saturday, April 15, 2006
Baton Rouge, LA

All forums are
11:00am – 7:00pm

Moderators
Norman Robinson, News Anchor, WDSU-TV6, New Orleans
George Curry, Editor-In-Chief, National Newspaper Publishers Association

Protect Our Right to Return and determine how and when our neighborhoods will be redeveloped. Meet the candidates for mayor, city council, and other races in the municipal elections scheduled for Saturday, April 22, 2006 in New Orleans. Come to the Empowerment Expo to learn more about plans to rebuild our neighborhoods and our city, our public schools, our hospitals, our churches and who will provide jobs and economic opportunity for you and your family to return to our beloved crescent city of New Orleans and learn how you can Protect Your Right to Vote from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in their Voter Empowerment Trainings.


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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PROTECTING YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE CONTACT:
Louisiana Secretary of State @ www.sos.louisiana.gov
or call 1-800-883-2805 to get your exact polling location
NAACP LDF Protect the Katrina Vote @ www.naacpldf.org
Election Protection Hotline – 1-866-OUR VOTE