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Page 4 DataZone

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Haiti Rebounds

**Even as
Needs Grow
for Rainy
Season**



The Soul of New Orleans

Page 2



**State & Local
School
Registration
Begins**

Page 7



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Haiti Rebounds

Even as Needs Grow for Rainy Season

by Herb Boyd
NNPA Special Correspondent

Hurricane-ravaged Port-au-Prince continues to rebound even as the rainy season earnestly approaches the Island of Haiti.

This week, U. S. officials are scurrying to deliver portable toilets, hurricane-resistant tents, and plastic tarps which Haitian Tourism Minister Patrick Delatour has said he prefers for the coming torrential rains, possible hurricanes and mudslides. Already eight people were killed over the weekend in flooding after a downpour - and the rainy season has not fully started in earnest.

Weather is key in Haiti right now as the rainy season is set to start in early April and last for several months. The forecast for this week fluctuated between sunny to partly cloudy; then more downpours at the end of this week. Temperatures are fluctuating between the mid 70s at night and into the 90s during the day hours.

Racing the rains, former President Bill Clinton, the United Nations Special Envoy for Haiti, on Monday convened a teleconference with United Nations officials involved in leading the emergency and humanitarian response in Haiti. According to a release that followed the conference, they assessed the relief operations, highlighted unmet needs - particularly in areas outside of Port-au-Prince and in advance of the rainy season - and encourage closer coordination with the Government of Haiti and with each other.

It's not just the weather, but conditions poten-

tially caused by the weather that's concerning the citizens and relief workers. Those conditions could mean the spread of disease, human waste and even human bodies, many of which did not receive proper burial in the initial aftermath of the earthquake. Nearly 200,000 were killed.

Meanwhile, life in the capitol continues to struggle for normalcy. After you get beyond the fact that Haiti, particularly Port-au-Prince, is a modern day ruin—which is not easy when around each new

corner is a more devastating scene—there is the amazing vitality, ingenuity and creativity of the Haitian people.

This ability, this undying resilience, was evident from one end of the city to another during a whirlwind visit to the city by a team of Black journalists in mid February. Here and there were welders, their torches melding torn metal; masons mending broken walls; carpenters repairing doors and roof tops; painters putting a fresh gloss on ravaged buildings;



Continued next page.

INSIDE DATA

Cover Story	2	National News	6
Data Zone	4	State & Local News . . .	7

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

and the countless vendors setting up shop in front of totally damaged structures.

And exactly one month after the catastrophe, the spirit of recovery was seen in the hundreds of people walking along the streets and roads, many of them dressed in white, on their way to various sites of mourning, ready to remember the dead and dying as they celebrate another day of living.

"We are determined to put our homes and our lives back together," said a young man, who stood with his mother and father outside a tent where bricks provided a makeshift foundation. "Our home was completely destroyed, so this will have to do until we can do better."

Even for this reporter, who visited Mississippi and Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and stood as an eyewitness to the collapse of the World Trade Center, spending four days traveling with a delegation of African-American media representatives amid the rubble of Port-au-Prince and the surrounding neighborhoods is to experience a tragedy of almost in-

comparable proportions.

It was mindboggling to see the President's Palace, an architectural wonder, its twin domes crushing the floors below; the beautiful National Cathedral where President Rene Preval was inaugurated in 2006 with only the historic statues as a reminder of its splendor; and all of the city's municipal buildings in silent piles of dusty cement with rods of steel protruding like rusty fingers.

Immediately the question becomes why some buildings remain standing while others crumbled in the 7.0 magnitude earthquake? "Many of the buildings that collapsed were built without consideration of the building codes," said Delatour, Haiti's Minister of Tourism, a trained architect who studied at Howard University and is leading the recovery effort.

Fortunately, thousands of lives were spared because people weren't at home and asleep when the earthquake rattled the land at 4:53p.m. on January 12.

One concern for Haitian construction companies is how to build a home or an office building capable of withstanding an earth-

quake and, at the same time, hurricanes, which most of the current buildings that fell were constructed to endure.

It will take several years and \$3 billion to complete the recovery, Delatour speculated, "Though it could be much more because it's hard to factor in everything at the moment," he added.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that some three million Haitians are homeless or dwelling in tents and other makeshift quarters, often waiting desperately for decent shelter, food, and medical attention.

Nothing was more depressing than to see the long line of injured people outside one of the city's few functioning hospitals, where emergency rescue units have set up tents to provide additional space for the injured. "We can handle maybe 500 patients a day here," said Dr. Alix Lasseque, executive director of the State University Hospital in Port-au-Prince. "But we are terribly understaffed and we can't perform major surgeries here."

Food and water distribution remain troubling challenges to the

various organizations although it has helped somewhat that women are now given coupons to pick up such foodstuff as 50 pound bags of Haitian rice, which they balance on their heads as if it were a pillow.

At other points, the distribution is not so orderly and the crush of people, a veritable stampede, swarming to catch packages of protein snacks tossed from trucks, present a great danger to the weak, aged and disabled.

When it comes to shelter, the distribution of food and water, and tending to the medical needs of the people, Carlene Dei, head of the USAID mission, said great strides had been made, "but there is still so much more to be done."

Overall, Dei said, referring to the relationship between her organization and the Haitian government, "We can do better than we're doing...what's needed is a whole new paradigm."

That new paradigm, especially in reference to the rebuilding of Haiti, is something that Delatour has given considerable thought. "You see, I'm an optimist," he told the African American delegation.

"For me the glass is always half full, not half empty."

"The first thing we have to do is to rebuild the waterfront and the city's infrastructure," he continued, rising from behind his desk and facing a wall-size map of Port-au-Prince. "Then we can begin to deal with the 17 ministries which have been destroyed. Customs, the churches, the schools all have to be rebuilt. We lost more than 8,000 schools. There is the problem of demolition and what's to be done with the rubble."

These are just a few of the problems President Preval has given the energetic minister and he seems more than equal to the task.

Like Delatour, Ron Daniels, who led the delegation, is an optimist, but they will need more than a half-glass outlook to deal with the enormous recovery and rebuilding of Haiti, particularly with the rainy season and hurricanes looming on the horizon.

NNPA News Service Editor-in-Chief Hazel Trice Edney contributed to this story.



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Our Family Wedding

A Bridge to Cultural Understanding



Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

On March 12th Fox Searchlight will release a film that will be the fodder for water cooler conversations, dinner table discussions, and happy hours; people will be abuzz about a new film that explores stereotypes and prejudice in a thought provoking way that while we laugh we are being educated in new ways of thinking about a world that has emerged. One where issues of nation, race and ethnicity are being questioned; where the walls that were previously erected keeping people divided are now being torn down creating a colorless bastion of brotherhood as we move into 10 years into a new century. In which new questions abound about identity and traditions.

Our Family Wedding is the Guess Who's Coming to Dinner of the 21st century. It is the story of an interracial couple and their attempts to plan a perfect wedding. It is a film where tradition meets cosmopolitanism in a film that has the potential to become the template of filmmaking for the 'skittles generation.' The groom is an African-American played by Lance Gross best known for his role as Calvin on Tyler Perry's House of Payne and the bride a Mexican-American played by America Ferrera of Ugly Betty Fame.

The star studded cast includes, Academy Award winner Forest Whitaker in a comic performance that is a turn from the roles we have become accustomed to seeing him in. Carlos Mencia co-stars giving a hilarious over the top performance as the over-protective and somewhat prejudiced father of the bride. The film also co-stars Regina King, Lupe Ontiveros, Anjelah Johnson as Lucia's doll sister and Diana Maria Riva as Lucia's mother. This is a thought provoking comedy that sheds light on the ignorance that keeps people separated along lines of race and ethnicity. "Although this film is a comedy it is so of the moment and I hope it can become a conversation starter about an issue that a lot of people don't talk about in our society racial prejudice among minorities," says Whitaker.

The movie is a unique blend of slapstick and seriousness exploring stereotypes, magnifying them in the end deeming them irrelevant and silly. "In this age a lot of these old ideas are not important in the age we are living in," says director and screenwriter Rick Fumuyiwa. "The world is changing around us and we are in a global world where old identities and traditions are being merged with new ones in this global world we are living and I wanted to make a film that reflects that reality."



Lance Gross and America Ferrera are very convincing as an attractive young couple trying to make things work while their parents take control of what was to be a small intimate wedding. "It was really fun making this film and be a different type of character," says Gross. "America is a wonderful actress and it was great working with her." He says of being a black actor in Hollywood and the avail

Ferrera who has come to mainstream attention and international fame as the underdog heroine on the hit TV show Ugly Betty transforms into a swan in amazing performance in this film. In real life she is beautiful like a Jennifer Lopez but in a girl next door kind of way. This role explores many of the same issues facing young Latina girls, how generational shifts affect tradition. In her breakout role in Real Women Have Curves she was a young girl with ambition beyond what Latina Girls

are expected to achieve, and in this film she is a young girl, who is willing to sacrifice her ambition in the name of love. Talking about her TV fame and her transformation as a woman and actress she says, "Ugly Betty was a great show and I am glad to have been part of it and it has helped my career, but I am ready to take on new roles and this is a step in this direction that will help me grow as an actress and as a woman."

In this film Whitaker shows he is a true thespian, transforming into a likeable but misguided character, lending his talent this light but heady comedy, "I just wanted to do something different and have some fun and that's what I've done in this film it was a real release for me." Whitaker has spent time in New Orleans after the storm decimated the city. He starred

in the film Hurricane Season, an inspiring film about a basketball team succeeding against the odds after Hurricane Katrina. Whitaker says he was disappointed that his film Hurricane Season wasn't promoted properly. His attachment to New Orleans topics will continue as his next project is a biopic about New Orleans jazz icon Louis Armstrong which he will direct and star in.

Our Family Wedding is a funny film that is insightful and delightful foray into the beginning of a new age in Hollywood. This film may be an entry point and introduction to a new genre Black and Latino united creating a bridge of understanding between the two groups. Veteran actress Regina King who has gone from child star to adult actress without missing a beat, a rarity in the entertainment industry says, "I learned a lot doing filming about Mexican traditions



during filming, I grew doing this filming and this is what this moving is about getting past our prejudices and moving forward," says King. She goes on to say, "The world is a very different place now and it is time for us to see ourselves and each other different and understand we have more in common than the things that separate us and if this film can create that it is a good thing."

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Mo'Nique's Oscar - Victory and Setback



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

(NNPA) - The comedienne, talk show host and actress Mo'Nique has become just the fifth African-American woman to win an Oscar. Her portrayal of Mary Jones, the revolting and depraved mother of Precious, was arguably masterful, and she now joins Hattie McDaniel (who played a maid), Halle Berry (who played a sex-starved fool), Whoopi Goldberg (who played a medium in Ghost), and Jennifer Hudson (who played a singer).

I mention the roles that African-American women played to win their Oscars because the roles African-American women get in Hollywood are too frequently stereotypical, and it is these stereotypical performances that are often lifted up. While I am glad for Mo'Nique's victory, I did not relish the Precious story of welfare pathology making it to the screen. Why not more positive roles for African-American women?

Sandra Bullock, for example, won Best Actress for her role in The Blind Side. She played a White mother who took a Black

child into her home and helped him reach football stardom. Why no roles like that for Black women? While The Blind Side is based on a true story, there are countless true stories of African-American women who take in relatives or other people's children and move mountains for them. This might send the wrong message about Black women, though. It might suggest that we believe that it takes a village to raise a child, instead of highlighting the bestial way that Mary Jones treated Precious.

I know, I know, it's all about the Benjamins, and those who have the power to "green light" films don't think that people will go see a movie with positive depictions of African-American people. Precious, for all its pathology, didn't have an easy time getting produced and, indeed, has twelve producers, including Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry, who helped promote the film. The movie had a small, \$10 million, production budget, and has earned only about \$50 million, recouping production costs, but underscoring the modest level of resources available for this movie.

It rankles that an image of the fat, black, slovenly welfare cheat is lifted up even at a time when public assistance rolls have been drastically cut, despite our economy. The myth of the welfare queen, strongly promoted by President Ronald Reagan when he was governor of California, reinforced in 1996 when President Bill Clinton supported "welfare reform (I called it reform) legislation, is one of the ugly urban legends that seems to shape perceptions of African-American women. And ain't I a woman, Sojourner Truth might say. Aren't there positive dramatic roles for African-



Academy Award winning performance by Mo'Nique in the movie "Precious" based on the novel Push by Sapphire

American women in Hollywood?

To be sure, every character in Precious is not a negative stereotype. Mariah Carey's role as a social worker was a pitch perfect depiction of an overworked and somewhat harried helping professional with too large a caseload. Paula Patton plays teacher Miss Blu Rain in a way that reminded me of my best teachers, those who went the extra mile. There are other characters with redeeming social value in the movie, but there would have to be given the pervasive degeneracy of Mary Jones.

I would love to see someone green light the story of Madame C.J. Walker, our nation's first black woman millionaire. There's some glamour there, and some drama! What about the story of Ida B. Wells, who had to flee the state of Tennessee because of her anti-lynching writing. In a contemporary context, why not tell the story of Cathy Liggins Hughes, the millionaire owner of Radio One who slept in her studio because

she couldn't afford rent and the cost of station operations. These are dramatic stories, but they fly in the face of the stereotypes that were replete in Precious.

I don't begrudge Mo'Nique her Oscar. She took the material she was given and she worked it. She made Mary Jones a repulsive character with absolutely no redeeming social value. I am simply frustrated that these are the only kinds of roles that Hollywood offers African-American women, the only kinds of roles that Oscar chooses to lift up. I am frustrated that some may consider Mary Jones' bestiality as typical, not atypical of African-American women.

When African-American women's characters in film are more reflective of our reality, and when these characters' performances are lifted up by Oscar, then we will have come a long way, baby. Until then, Mo'Nique's victory is her laudable personal success. It is a Black community setback.

Celebration of the Black Press to Feature Civil Rights Heroes Next Week

By Hazel Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Black Press Week, the annual celebration of the nearly two centuries-old mission of Black-owned newspapers, will be fueled this year by the fact that the 183-year-old civil rights institution is continuing to plead its own cause even as it honors the achievements of others.

"When Mr. Russwurm and Mr. Cornish said, 'We wish to plead our own cause. For too long have others spoken for us,' they began publishing the very first Black newspaper on March 16, 1827," says Dorothy R. Leavell, chair of the National Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation, which leads the annual event in Washington, D.C. "It certainly is momentous because

183 years later with a Black President in the White House, we still have to plead our own cause. As evident in the lack of meaningful outreach to count all African-Americans in the United States in the Census that's now being conducted; it's evident in many of the advertisers in this country who shun us even though we have strong economic impact upon the economy of the United States and the World. And yet, our newspapers suffer for advertising. And even in this day and time, we are still an afterthought in the main stream media."

NNPA newspaper publishers, who over the past year have taken stands against what appears to be advertising discrimination in economic stimulus dollars, the automobile industry, the U. S. Census and other industries, will convene in the nation's cap-

ital next week for the annual celebration of pleading the cause, a phrase first coined by John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish as they founded Freedom's Journal, the first Black newspaper, in New York City.

Among those to be honored during the annual NewsMaker of the Year Awards Gala on March 18 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel are civil and social justice warriors Dr. Dorothy I. Height, chair and president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women for her lifetime of civil rights achievements; Dr. Ron Daniels, president of the State of the Black World, 21st Century; Earl and Amanda Stafford of the Stafford Foundation; and Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins for their outstanding community service; Rep. Barbara Lee, chair of the Congressional Black

Caucus will be awarded for her political leadership; and a posthumous salute will be given to entertainer Michael Jackson.

Height, among one of the most important figures in civil rights history, is to receive the lifetime achievers award at the NewsMaker dinner.

"She is a jewel in our community," says Leavell, comparing her to famous publishers of old like Frederick Douglas and Ida B. Wells who were counselors to United States presidents. "She is still very vibrant, she is still a warrior and at 97 we are excited that she will grace us with her presence on that evening."

A special State of the Black Press Address by NNPA Chairman Danny Bakewell will be given during a State of the Black

Continued next page.

Student Application Process Begins For 2010-2011 Academic Year

NEW ORLEANS - From now through April 9, 2010, more than 70 public schools throughout New Orleans are accepting the Common Application, a simple form that parents can use to apply to any Recovery School District (RSD) direct-run or charter school for the 2010-2011 school year.

The Common Application process offers centralized locations for parents to pick up and return applications and a unified timeline for the application submissions, school lotteries, parent notification and registration. Applications are available at participating schools; the RSD Central Office, 1641 Poland Ave.; and the RSD Welcome School, 2239 Poydras Street. The RSD Central Office and Welcome School are open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The application also is available online at www.rsdl.net and www.nolaparentsguide.org.

Introduced in 2008, the Common Application process is designed to streamline the student



application process in a landscape of unprecedented public schools in New Orleans. "Parents have the freedom to choose from more than 40 different elementary schools and more than 20 different high schools," said RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas. "We hope parents will become actively engaged in this process, learn about their school options and take advantage of this open appli-

cation period in order to have the best opportunity to secure a spot in the schools that will be the best fit for their children."

The application is a one-page form that asks for basic demographic and geographic information about the student and the name of the school in which he or she is applying. Parents and guardians may apply to more than one school, but must com-

plete an application for each. While multiple applications are encouraged, parents may only enroll their child in one school.

The deadline for returning completed application forms is April 9, 2010. Applications may be returned to the schools where applying, the RSD Central Office or Welcome School. The applications may also be faxed to 504-827-4728. Parents should retain the carbon sheet that is

attached to the application form for their records. If faxed, the fax receipt should be retained. Schools that have more applicants than available spots will conduct lotteries by April 30 to fill those seats. Schools will notify parents and guardians of acceptance into schools by May 7. Parents must go to the school with the necessary documents to officially register their children by May 21 to

reserve a seat at the school of their choice.

To help parents decide which schools are the best fits for their children, the New Orleans Parent Organizing Network will publish an updated edition of the New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools, which has information on each of New Orleans' public schools. The Parents' Guide will be distributed to public schools and public library branches beginning March 15th 2010. For more information about the Parents' Guide or to download an electronic version, visit www.nolaparentsguide.org.

In addition, the Urban League of Greater New Orleans is sponsoring Schools Expo 2010 on Saturday, March 27, 2009 at the Lindy Boggs Center on the campus of UNO.

For more information about the Common Application, call the RSD's toll free help line at (877) 343-4773. The helpline is available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

Black Press, Continued from previous page.

Press Luncheon and Forum at the National Press Club, also on March 18.

The State of the Black Press event, which will feature a Leavell response to the Bakewell speech, will also feature civil rights leaders from a broad spectrum of Black institutions to discuss the current mission and future of the Black Press. They are the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., Rainbow/PUSH Coalition; Dr. Julianne Malveaux, Bennett College; Dr. Ron Daniels; NAACP Chair Roslyn Brock; Harry Alford, National Black Chamber of Commerce; and Marc Morial, National Urban League.

With a new slogan coined by Bakewell, "The Power to Influence Black America," as its backdrop, publishers will also meet with CBC and other Congressional and White House leaders during the three days. The week will culminate, March 19, with an annual enshrinement luncheon at Howard University's Blackburn Center where Dr. Thomas Battle, retired director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, will be honored.

"We're really excited. We have exciting plans," says Leavell. "Our voice is still needed. How will our communities know what we are doing educationally and culturally and as entrepreneurs if it were not for the Black Press? In this day and time, it is just as important because otherwise stories about our communities, stories that involve our issues would still not be on the front burner."

Xavier University of Louisiana #1 in placing African American Students into Medical Schools for 16th Consecutive Year

New Orleans, LA Xavier University of Louisiana continues its track record of successfully placing more African American students into medical schools each year than any other higher education institution in the country, a distinction that it has maintained since 1993. A total of sixty-nine (69) Xavier graduates were accepted into medical and dental schools during the 2008-2009 academic year. The University is off to a good start for the 2009-10 academic year, as evidenced by the more than a dozen seniors who have already been accepted into medical schools.

"The distinction of leading the nation in placing so many deserving and talented young people into medical school is a clear indication of our commitment to academic success," said Dr. Norman C. Francis, Xavier's president. "There's something special about Xavier," he said. "Our faculty and staff take great pride in working with all students from the moment they enter as



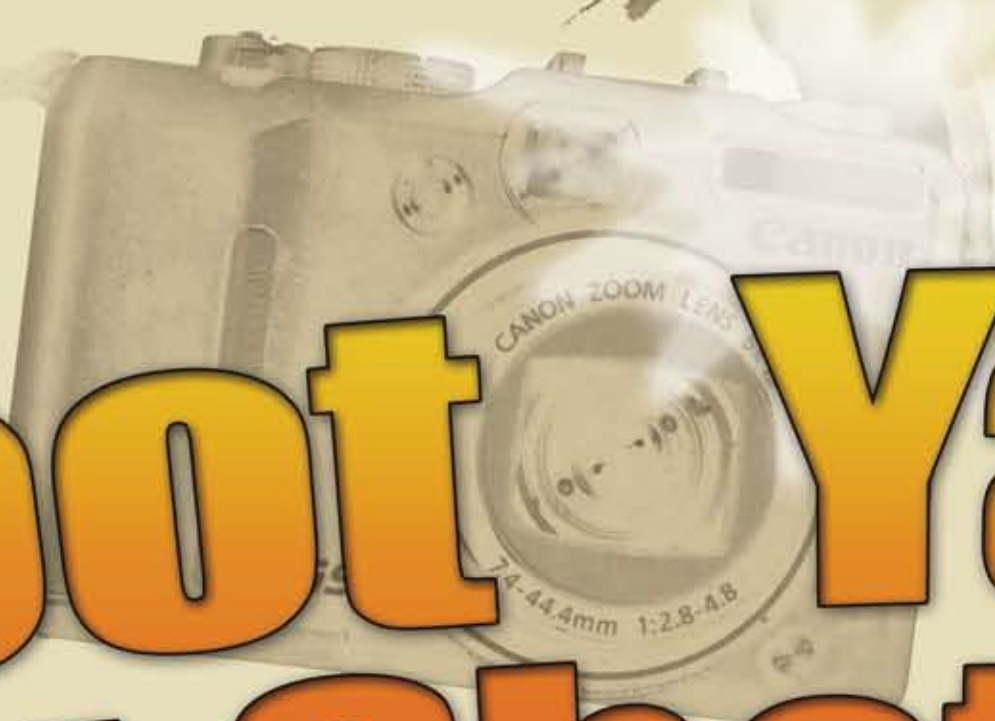
freshmen until the day when they graduate and enter their chosen professions. I'm convinced that the nurturing and academically challenging environment that we offer is a key factor in our continued leadership in not only the health professions, but in the wide range of academic disciplines that we offer."

Xavier, the nation's only Black & Catholic university has long enjoyed a solid reputa-

tion for its excellence in the biological and physical sciences. XU Pre-Med advisor JW Carmichael was individually recognized by Meharry Medical College with an honorary degree in 2008 for his role in helping to make Xavier the leader in African American medical school acceptances. Xavier University, founded in 1925 by St. Katharine Drexel and the Sis-

ters of the Blessed Sacrament, maintains the distinction of being the only college or University in the United States that was founded by an American born saint of the Catholic Church. High school students interested in receiving more information on Xavier University are encouraged to visit www.xula.edu/admissions or by calling 504-520-7388 or 1-877-XAVIERU.

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