Haiti
One Year Later

The Soul of New Orleans

Trailblazer
John O’Neal

Happy Birthday
Audrey Pellerin
One year after an earthquake devastated Haiti, much of the promised relief and reconstruction aid has not reached those most in need. In fact, the tragedy has served as an opportunity to further enrich corporate interests.

The details of a recent lawsuit, as reported by Business Week, highlights the ways in which contractors—including some of the same players who profited from Hurricane Katrina-related reconstruction—have continued to use their political connections to gain profits from others’ suffering, receiving contracts worth tens of millions of dollars while the Haitian people receive pennies at best.

It also demonstrates how charity and development efforts have mirrored and contributed to corporate abuses.

Lewis Lucke, a 27-year veteran of the US Agency for International Development, said the US is “guilty of the same kind of mismanagement that plagued the post-Katrina effort.”

By Jordan Flaherty
percent of contracts to minority-owned businesses. As a result... early reports suggest that over 90 percent of the $2 billion in initial contracts was awarded to companies based outside of the three primary affected states, and that minority businesses received just 1.5 percent of the first $1.6 billion.”

Alex Dupuy, writing in The Washington Post, reported a similar pattern in Haiti, noting that “of the more than 1,500 US contracts doled out worth $267 million, only 20, worth $4.3 million, have gone to Haitian firms. The rest have gone to US firms, which almost exclusively use US suppliers. Although these foreign contractors employ Haitians, mostly on a cash-for-work basis, the bulk of the money and profits are reinvested in the United States.” The same article notes that to use the disaster as an attempt at further privatization of the country’s economy.

Relief and recovery efforts, led by the US Military, have also brought a further militarization of relief and criminalization of survivors. Haiti and Katrina also served as staging grounds for increased involvement of mercenaries in reconstruction efforts. As one Blackwater Mercenary told Jeremy Scahill when he visited New Orleans in the days after Katrina, “This is a trend. You’re going to see more guys like us in these situations.”

And it’s not just corporations who have been guilty of profiting from Haiti suffering. A recent report from the Disaster Accountability Project (DAP) describes a “significant lack of transparency in the disaster-relief/aid foreign aid, as administered through USAID in Haiti, basically serves to fuel conflicts and covertly promote US corporate interests to the detriment of democracy and Haitian health, liberty, sovereignty, social justice and political freedoms. USAID projects have been at the frontlines of orchestrating undemocratic behavior, bringing under-development, coup d'etat, impunity of the Haitian Oligarchy, indefinite incarceration of dissenters, and destroying Haiti’s food sovereignty, essentially promoting famine.”

Throughout its history, Haiti has been a victim of many of those who have claimed they are there to help. Until we address this fundamental issue of corporate profiteering masquerading as aid and development, the nation will remain mired in poverty. And
John O’Neal has used theatre as a tool to empower and uplift people for almost half a century. He arrived in New Orleans from his native Illinois in 1963 as a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). “I am one who has lived and dedicated my life in the fight for justice and equality,” says O’Neal.

Art at its best can inspire and uplift a community; also it serves a mirror that reflects its plight and aspirations. O’Neal was one of the co-founders of the Free Southern Theater in 1963 which served as the cultural arm of the Civil Rights Movement and was part of what was to become the Black Arts Movement. During this time of social upheaval art was used to challenge the conventional thinking the era. “We were young people who were dedicated to making a statement and changing the world, to make people think about what was going on around them, our goal was not only to entertain but to teach and inform,” O’Neal says of the 1960’s.

After Free Southern Theater ended, O’Neal created another vehicle to help place a mirror on society’s ills forming Junebug Productions in 1980. Since its inception he has bought quality entertainment to the stage that challenges its audience with thought provoking work. Upon founding Junebug Productions he began touring in a series of original plays most notably the mythic character Junebug Jabbo Jones, who is the embodiment of a wise, down-home Everyman.

O’Neal is passionate about playing his part in uplifting the youth in the Crescent City. Today as New Orleans suffers from many societal ills, with young Black males being disproportionately affected as victims of violent crime against one and other this is something that concerns O’Neal. He feels it is important to focus on helping young men. “Yesterday we marched and protested for access, but today the battleground is our own community where we must restore hope in our young black men and through the theater we have done much in the area of outreach to young men,” says O’Neal of what he feels is the struggle of the 21st century.

He feels that today more than ever it is important to present work that can critique and promote dialog that moves humanity forward, “I think it is important that what we create can make people think about what is going on around them and inspire them to not just talk about the problems we face but do something,” O’Neal says of the intended purpose of his work. He also says of the mission of Junebug Productions, “It is to create and present artwork of the highest quality that encourages and supports African Americans in the Black Belt South who are working to improve the quality of life available to themselves and others who are similarly oppressed and exploited.”

Throughout his career O’Neal has received many accolades and awards for his work as an artist and activist. “I am humbled by the recognition for my work, but more importantly it is about the young people looking at the example of those who came before them and continue the fight of today such as those centering around healthcare, adequate education, affordable housing, crime and social justice,” says O’Neal. Continuing he says, “We cannot go to sleep because some people have positions in politics, that is only one form of progress and yes we have moved forward but there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.”

As the landscape of the city is changing O’Neal says that is important one remembers their roots wherever they are, “New Orleans is a very special city like no other, and while I am saddened by some of the things I see, it is an opportunity for the world to see what we have to offer through our people and their talent that sometimes went unnoticed in the city,” says O’Neal. “But I feel the world today based on our struggles of the past have created new possibilities for our young people and I want to continue to put that message out there and help and inspire as many people as I can to be better and work to leave the world a better place and build for the future.” John O’Neal is a man who has used his gifts to serve his community and while there are many words that aptly describes him, we at Data News Weekly have chosen one that we feel embody the spirit of this legendary figure ‘Trailblazer.’
Data Around Town

Recently, Promoter/Photographe Leo Getz celebrated his birthday. It was an event where a who's who of beautiful ebony faces came out to enjoy the night in spotlight. Cameras flashed as this grown folks affair went down in elegant style as the music went on non-stop and bottles popped.

Happy Birthday Mrs. Audrey Pellerin!

Mrs Audrey Pellerin celebrated her 80th Birthday January 15th amongst numerous friends and family members at the Regency Reception Hall in New Orleans east. Shown above Mrs Pellerin (center) is flank by her son (fl) Kurte Pellerin, Debrina Baham, Orelia Taylor, and her other son Jerome Pellerin.
Politics and Business are Related but Not Equal

Joe M. Ricks, Jr., Ph.D.

A number of conversations I have had over the past few months clearly suggest that many in the African American community are trying to assess the meaning in the fact that in a majority black city we have turned to white political leadership. A friend of mine recently asked me what I thought about it from an economic perspective for African Americans. The more I thought about it, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me think about this, it made me 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Mayor Landrieu and Regional Transit Authority Announce French Quarter Streetcar Expansion

Today, Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu and the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) of New Orleans announced plans to extend streetcar lines through the French Quarter between the Canal Streetcar line and Press Street. This expansion will include a tie-in to the existing Riverfront Streetcar line via Elysian Fields Avenue. The expansion will encompass approximately 2.48 miles and will have 13 stop locations.

Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu stated, “The Regional Transit Authority continues to improve services to better meet the needs of our residents. This expansion brings streetcars back into our neighborhoods, providing affordable and reliable transportation to a large segment of our community.” He added, “This expansion represents a viable new mode of transportation that reconnects us to our rich history and heritage.”

“The RTA Board of Commissioners is committed to making public transportation accessible for all of the city’s residents,” said Barbara C. Major, Chairwoman of the RTA Board. Adding, “With this project, we are providing a significant portion of our residents with transportation to pursue employment opportunities, creating a better environment for economic development along the expanded rail lines, and building the local business community.”

The agency will finalize environmental documents for the French Quarter Rail Expansion Project in April 2011, with the design phase scheduled for May 2011 – Spring 2012. Construction of the corridor will take place from Spring 2012 – Fall 2013 with revenue service beginning in Fall 2013.

The French Quarter Rail Expansion Project is a segment of a larger RTA rail expansion program. The agency will begin construction on the Union Passenger Terminal (UPT)/Loyola Avenue corridor in April 2011 with revenue service of this segment scheduled for June 2012. In addition, the agency has future expansion plans that will continue to grow the transportation system and provide world-class transit service to the residents of New Orleans.

For more information about the Regional Transit Authority or any of its projects call 504-827-8300 or visit us online at www.norta.com.

Greater New Orleans Foundation Hosts First Of Its Kind Virtual Giving Circle

Five organizations announce their partnership in an online giving circle called The Neutral Ground. This will be the first-ever giving circle conducted entirely online. The participating organizations are the Greater New Orleans Foundation, the Human Rights Campaign, Puentes, the Vietnamese American Youth Leaders Association, and the Urban League of Greater New Orleans. The purpose of the giving circle is for participants to engage in an online dialogue about inter-community issues relating to race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and to support through grantmaking important work in this area.

“We live in a multicultural society,” said Albert Ruesga, President & CEO, Greater New Orleans Foundation. “The Neutral Ground offers a place for open dialogue—a place where members of the giving circle and the public can learn together about the many ties that bind us together as one community. It’s a place where we hope connections with others will result in a stronger community for all.”

Topics to be explored include: the special cultural character of New Orleans, the challenges of immigration, black/brown issues and gay/straight issues. Apparently the first of its kind, The Neutral Ground giving circle has members who have contributed $200 each to a pooled fund that has been matched by the Greater New Orleans Foundation for a total of $10,000. Giving circle members will issue grants to organizations supporting projects addressing inter-community issues.

Organizations and projects awarded grants by the giving circle will be announced on Cinco de Mayo.

To learn more, visit http://www.theneutralground.net.

The New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) is currently accepting applications for the following positions:

**Laborer**
**Recreation Leader Assistant**
Senior Lifeguard
Recreation Supervisor
Recreation Maintenance Supervisor
Recreation Coordinator I (Tennis)

Applicants may apply in the Department of Civil Service, 1300 Perido Street (7th Floor), New Orleans, Louisiana, Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., 504-658-3500

**Applicants for these positions should apply at the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC), 800 Race Street, New Orleans, Louisiana Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., 504-658-3000**
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— Julia Edgerson, Peoples Health plan member

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