

Lighting The Road To The Future

New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

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Congo Square Fest

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Trayvon Martin's Parents Re-live a 'Nightmare'



Trayvon Martin



On the cover and above, Tracy Martin, center, speaks at the Sanford City Commission meeting with Trayvon's mother, Sybrina Fulton, left, and the family lawyer, Benjamin Crump at the Sanford Civic Center in Sanford Fla., Monday, March 26, 2012. Martin, a black teen, was fatally shot by a neighborhood watch captain last month. (AP Photo/Julie Fletcher)

By George E. Curry
NNPA Special Contributor

On the night of Feb. 26th, Tracy Martin and his girlfriend had gone out to dinner in Sanford, Fla., leaving his 17-year-old son, Trayvon, behind at the townhouse with plans to watch the NBA All-Star game scheduled to be televised at 7 p.m. from Orlando's Amway Center.

Trayvon decided to walk to a nearby 7-Eleven convenience store to pick up a bag of Skittles candy and a can of Arizona iced tea before settling in to watch East v. West all-stars. On his way back to the gated community, however, Trayvon was stalked by George Zimmerman, a non-Black neighborhood

watch captain armed with a 9 millimeter handgun and a head full of stereotypes about African-American males.

According to 911 tapes, Zimmerman, 28, told the emergency police dispatcher that he had spotted a suspicious young male walking in the neighborhood. "This guy looks like he's up to no good. He is on drugs or something," Zimmerman said, "These _ _holes. They are always getting away."

When the dispatcher asked Zimmerman if he was following the young man in his vehicle, Zimmerman confirmed that he was. The 911 operator said, "OK, we don't need you to do that." Still, Zimmerman continued to trail Trayvon, who was unarmed. At one point, Zimmerman got out of his SUV, confronted Trayvon and fatally shot him in the chest.

Tracy Martin was unaware that his son, who was

visiting from Miami, had been killed around 7 p.m. that Sunday.

Martin, Trayvon's mother, Sybrina Fulton; Benjamin Crump, the family lawyer; Al Sharpton and former New York Gov. David Patterson participated in an exclusive 1-hour telephone conference call last Thursday with more than three dozen publishers from the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA).

Martin told publishers how he learned that his son had been killed.

"I had been out to dinner. When we got back between 10:15 and 10:45, he wasn't at home. The night before, he had been to the movies with my nephew, who had recently moved up to the Orlando area from Miami. Every time Trayvon would come up here, they would find something to do, usually they

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would go to dinner. My nephew is 20 years old, a very responsible young man. So there was not panic at that moment that he was not home. I made several attempts to call his cell phone and it was going straight to voicemail. I called my nephew's cell phone and it was going straight to voicemail. So at that point, I figured they had been in the movies because they

He said, "I got up, got on clothes, went outside because I knew my kid was going to walk back up to the door." Instead, three cars pulled up to the door, one of them an unmarked police vehicle.

"The first officer approached. I introduced myself and told him I was filing a missing person's report. The second person to

a suspect."

Sharpton explained, "What happened to Trayvon is that it brought to the surface the fear that all of us have for our children and ourselves. I think White America was stunned. Black America became ignited when we finally got it out there. They [Whites] thought having a Black President had solved it. And now, people working in

their offices, in the next cubicle, were saying, 'No, this is me.' They relate to Trayvon – it was me."

After three weeks of mobilizing on social media, keeping the story alive in Black newspapers and African-American radio, the mounting pressure forced Sanford, Fla. officials to release the 911 tapes. Those tapes – which show that Zimmerman disobeyed the 911

dispatcher's directive that he not follow Trayvon – along with the decision not to arrest Zimmerman, forced Police Chief Bill Lee to temporarily step down as police chief on Thursday.

On April 10, a grand jury will be convened to determine whether Zimmerman should be indicted. Both the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and the FBI are looking into the case to determine if any federal statutes were violated.

Florida Gov. Rick Scott has appointed a Task Force on Citizen Safety and Protection to investigate how such tragedies can be avoided in the future. Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll will chair the special panel. Rev. R.B. Holmes, Jr., Publisher of the Capital Outlook in Tallahassee will serve as Vice Chair.

Sharpton led a rally Thursday night of more than 30,000 people in Sanford, many of them from around the nation.

Referring to the police chief, Sharpton said, "We did not come here for a temporary leave of absence. We came for permanent justice – arrest Zimmerman now."



Tulane University students show their support for this case with their Occupy the Hood rally held this week on the campus of Tulane



Sharpton led a rally Thursday night of more than 30,000 people in Sanford, many of them from around the nation.

would always go to the movies."

Tracy Martin and his girlfriend went to bed. But the next morning, the day Martin and his son had planned to return to Miami, he learned that Trayvon still wasn't back in the house. Tracy called his nephew again, this time reaching him and learning that Trayvon wasn't with him.

"I had [his girlfriend] call juvenile justice, just to check and see if anyone by the name of Trayvon Martin had been picked up. No Trayvon Martin," the father told NNPA Publishers. "My next call was to the Seminole County Sheriff's Department to see if any kid had been picked up.

"My third call was to a non-emergency number at the Seminole County Sheriff's Department and I informed them that I was filing a missing person's report. I let them know it hadn't been 24 hours, but it was unusual for Trayvon not to return home. I told them we were supposed to be leaving that morning when we woke up. They asked me a few questions about him: date of birth, height, complexion, weight and they told me they would dispatch a unit. Five minutes later, she called me back and asked what was he last wearing. I gave them a description of the clothes that he had on last. She said a unit would be out."

At that point, Tracy Martin still had no clue that his son was dead.

approach was a plainclothes detective. He asked me if I had a recent picture of Trayvon and it just so happened that I had taken a picture in my camera, maybe a week or two prior to the incident. I showed them the picture. He told me to give him a second. He walked to his vehicle, retrieved a folder and asked could we go into the house. We walked into the house. He told me he was going to show me a photo and that he was going to ask me if this was my kid. And he pulled out the photo. From that point, it's been like a nightmare."

That nightmare was compounded by the decision not to arrest or prosecute Zimmerman, who admitted killing Trayvon. Led by Attorney Benjamin Crump, the family has been making the rounds of national television programs to share their story – and to express their outrage that Zimmerman hasn't been brought to justice. Protests, many of them led by college students, have taken place across the country. On Monday, hundreds of students at Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School in Miami were dressed in black and wore hoodies to mourn their slain schoolmate.

"In the Black community, we all see Trayvon in ourselves," Sharpton said. "We all subconsciously know that we're born as suspects rather than citizens and that's what Trayvon was – he was

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"Best Chefs of Louisiana" Awards April 16 at Generations Hall in New Orleans

On Monday, April 16, 7-10 p.m., The American Culinary Federation of New Orleans will host the 2nd Annual "Best Chefs of Louisiana" Awards at Generations Hall, 310 Andrew Higgins Drive in New Orleans. Thirty of the New Orleans area's best chefs will tantalize guests with their signature dishes. Included in this prestigious group are legendary chefs Leah Chase, Paul Prudhomme, Susan Spicer, Tory McPhail, Tenney Flynn and Philip Chan.

Best Chef Nominees include Aaron Burgau (Restaurant Patois), Dominique Macquet (Tamarind by Dominique), Spencer Minch (Emeril's Delmonico), Joshua Laskay (Emeril's NOLA) and Frank Brigtsen (Brigtsen's) along with 20 more of our re-



Chef and Legend Leah Chase along with twenty-nine more of the New Orleans area's best chefs will tantalize guests with their signature dishes.

gion's most notable culinary artists.

The award ceremony will be hosted by food guru, Tom Fitzmorris. Attendees will be able to meet and greet with Best Chef awardees, and enjoy all you can eat Chef Specialties and custom beverages. There will also be a silent auction and live entertainment by the renowned (and aptly named) Louisiana Spice Band.

Tickets are value priced at \$75 per person, inclusive of food and beverages. Proceeds from this event will help local charities, Children's Hospital of New Orleans, the International School of Louisiana and the ACF-NO Scholarship Fund.

For more information or to purchase tickets go to www.acfno.org.

SUNO Scholars Compete in the 2012 National Honda Campus All-Star Challenge

Three Ben Franklin HS grads, former two-time Delgado CC SGA president on team

Southern University at New Orleans' (SUNO) Honda Challengers Team traveled this week to Los Angeles, site of the 2012 National Honda Campus All-Star Challenge, March 30th through April 3rd. Forty-eight (48) teams were in competition for financial grants from Honda ranging from \$3,000 to \$50,000.

Honda Campus All-Star Challenge (HCASC) is a Q&A Game that combines academic material, popular culture and sports in a format emphasizing quick recall. African-American history and culture are prominently featured in the questions. The HCASC season involves two levels of play-Campus Games and the National Championship.

SUNO's team consists of Benjamin Franklin High School graduates Terri Simon Coleman, Andre Davis, whose also a member of SUNO's Men's Basketball Team, and Dalvin Ford, Jr. Other members include former two-time Delgado Community College SGA President and Abramson High School graduate Marc Guichard, Catheryn Major, who graduated salutatorian of Warren Easton High School in 2008, and Tiffany Campbell. Guichard says that being selected for the team validates his family, himself, and the child psychologist who said that he was beyond brilliant at the age of four.

"From graduating kindergarten in five months to failing seventh grade and barely graduating high school, and then ascending to the highest seat that a Louisi-

ana college student can achieve, I've experienced a lot," he said. "Being on the team has allowed me to totally be myself."

During a pre-National Championship Tournament event held earlier this year at Prairie View A&M University, Tom Cunningham, an official with the national tournament, informed the audience that SUNO's team set a precedent by correctly responding to ten questions in one minute, with 29 seconds to spare, during the Ultimate Challenge Round.

"I am often awestruck by these gifted young people, their scholarly banter and high-level discourse," said Ruth W. Johnson, Director of SUNO's Educational Talent Search Program (ETSP) and Campus Coordinator of the University's Honda Challengers since 2006. "SUNO is a Mecca of academic opportunities, where unconventional yet gifted students converge to hone their skills as well as themselves. This activity addresses the intellectual need for students to pit wit-against-wit in friendly, but serious competition."

Coaches include Amelia B. Sellers, Data Manager for SUNO's ETSP, and former SUNO SGA President and Honda Team Captain Eugenie Tobin. Since 1997, SUNO's Honda Challengers have participated in ten National Honda Campus All-Star Challenges, winning more than \$32,000 in grants.

"On the Honda Team, I've made lasting friendships and financed my education. I found a fun activity that I can be proud of and put on my resume," said Ford.

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trailblazer

Jerrelda Drummer-Sanders

Overcoming the Odds

by: Edwin Buggage

She is a woman who has overcome many hardships and setbacks in life and is an example of someone whose known adversity and now is dedicating her life to giving back. Jerrelda Drummer-Sanders' life story is filled with multiple triumphs and overcoming overwhelming odds. "I tell my life story many times over and if I had think about it, the little engine that would best describe me," says Jerrelda. Continuing she says, "I have overcome the hardships of a difficult upbringing, unstable household, teenage pregnancy; I was a victim of youth violence, experienced the loss of my older brother. In my life there was knockdown after knockdown, but, I had the ability to get back up. Now I have a story to tell and my testimony is not hiding from the enemies which are the negative things and obstacles that can happen." She continues, "Instead, I'm exposing the enemy every chance I get and knowing that overcoming is possible."

Jerrelda's life today is a picture of victory. She's is armed with words of positivity and encouragement and is an inspiration to those who have the chance to meet her. She is a mother and grandmother and is the founder of Mother's Helpers, a mentoring program and full service learning center for youth ages 9 thru 17. "I remember when I was this age and trying to find myself and my path in life; when I looked around, I saw so many kids not getting what they needed so I created Mother's Helpers to fill that void and provide support for young people," says Sanders.

When she holds workshops her goal is to inspire young people to reach higher; giving her prescription to lead a successful and fruitful life she says, "You determine your limits, set your goals and prepare to put in the work, know your worth, believe in yourself and finally, understand that you have a responsibility to the elders, you are the hope and the dream of the slave and those who came before you."



In addition to running Mother's Helpers, she is the founder of New Orleans East Women of Action and the owner of DrumSands Publishing, where she publishes her own work and is looking to expand her company and begin to publish the work of other authors. She says her love for writing began at an early age and has been therapeutic. She feels that young people can benefit by putting their thoughts down on paper. Recalling how it helped

her through a tough time in her life she says, "I found the beauty in writing in 1994 when I was in a post high school program (The Dillard Teen Program) which was offered to females who lived in public housing. I had an assignment to write about an experience. I had lost my brother to violence and I did not know it at the time, but I was very angry. I was so angry that I wrote a poem entitled "My Greatest Fear" The more I read it and recite it this allowed me to be the less fearful about the situation and the fear of death."

She feels her early struggles made her stronger so when things came along later in life she was better able to deal with them, "There are a lot of people who have gone through or are going through traumatic events at a very early age and sometimes people never come through those things. I have successfully done that and now I feel it is my duty to let people know that yes they can come through struggles and not let that become something that holds them back in reaching their full potential."

Jerrelda has been recognized by WWL-TV as a Quiet Hero and now as a New Orleans Data News Weekly Trailblazer, "I am honored to be recognized for the work I do, but giving back is something I live for and my greatest reward is seeing young people armed with the tools they need to succeed."

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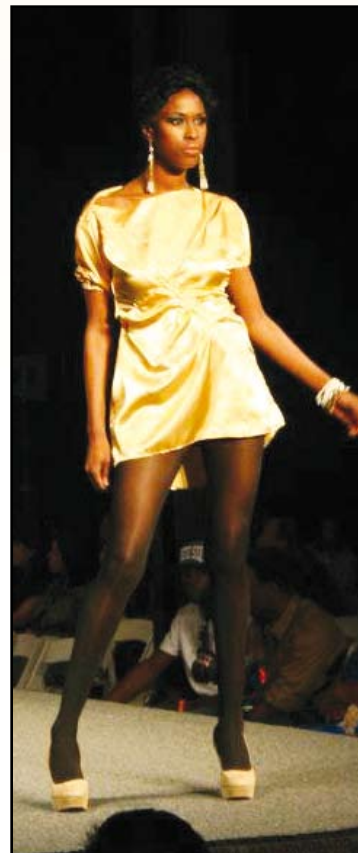
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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Fashion Week Highlights

Photos by Von Paul Reeves

2012 New Orleans Fashion Week was several evenings of glitz and glamour. Fashion Week New Orleans was a huge success, and is planting the seeds to make New Orleans one of the future fashion meccas, and Data News Weekly was there!



If you have photos of parties or events you would like to run in DATA, please send to datanewsad@bellsouth.net for inclusion.

Shoot Ya Best Shot!

The Congo Square New World Rhythms Festival

Photos by Kichea S. Burt



From the Congo to Cuba, from Brazil to Basin Street and New Orleans "bounce," the universal drum were beating in Armstrong Park on March 24 and 25, when the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation presented the Fifth Annual Congo Square New World Rhythms Festival. Newly reopened after years of post-Katrina repair, the park came alive with the sounds of the African Diaspora.

The Congo Square New World Rhythms Festival is the Premier World-Music Event in New Orleans.

Celebrating the rich cultural heritage of Louisiana, the festival showcases the influences from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America that combined in the Crescent City to make New Orleans a melting pot of world culture.

Congo Square is the location just outside of New Orleans' French Quarter where, starting in the mid-1700s, African slaves were permitted to gather on Sunday afternoons to practice their ancestral traditions of drumming and dance. Visitors from around

the world marveled at the rich culture. It was the mix of African influences with those from Europe, Latin America and elsewhere that led to the development of jazz and all that followed. Congo Square is truly the birthplace of American music.

With two stages of music and dance, plus a huge arts market, food vendors and beverages and a Social Services Community Center, the Congo Square New World Rhythms Festival is more than just an event. It's a true community celebration.

If you have photos of parties or events you would like to run in DATA, please send to datanewsad@bellsouth.net for inclusion.

From NYPD Spying to Trayvon Martin Current Policing Makes Us Less Safe



Jordan Flaherty
Data New Contributor

When I heard that my name was featured in a New York City Police Department report, I should have been outraged. I had followed revelations of NYPD spying, but it hadn't occurred to me that they would come to New Orleans to watch me speak at a film festival.

However, I also knew that the NYPD, in their crusade under

the guise of safety, had gone whitewater rafting with college students and aggressively monitored and infiltrated mosques and Muslim businesses. They operate in at least 9 foreign countries, so why shouldn't they come to New Orleans, listen to me say a few words at a public event, and write a classified report about it? Perhaps the only strange thing about the case is that I don't fit their regular profile. As a White US citizen, I feel my case is a bit of an anomaly for a department that has developed a reputation for targeting immigrants and communities of color. My privilege has given me a certain amount of security and expectation of privacy that many others simply don't experience.

Recent revelations about NYPD abuses go beyond spying. The no-

torious stop-and-frisk program, which has led to the criminalization of virtually an entire generation of young men of color in the city, is one example. The New York Civil Liberties Union reported that more than 4 million stops and interrogations from 2004 through 2011 led to no evidence of any wrongdoing – about 90% of all stops. Other recent revelations about NYPD abuses have included arrest quotas, sexual assaults, and the harassment and arrest of an officer who had turned whistleblower. So my little brush with violation of privacy was just a small taste of what is possible from a police department that never met a boundary it didn't want to cross.

The Occupy Movement – now just over six months old – first captured mainstream attention when police were filmed pepper

spraying young White women on a New York sidewalk. Subsequent instances of police violence, such as the wounding of former Marine Scott Olsen in Oakland, and the nonchalant pepper spraying of UC Davis students, brought more public outrage and attention. The response from many in the Black community has been, “welcome to our world.”

Step-by-step, we have seen any idea of privacy disappear – everything we do is the business of police. This has always been true for communities of color; now the scope has simply gotten wider. While law enforcement representatives defend the presence of officers filming at every protest around the country as harmless public safety measures, there is no doubt this has had a chilling effect on dissent.

It is not just in New York that there is a divide in how people see – and experience – police. The national outrage over the killing of Trayvon Martin shows that his death – and the continued freedom of his killer – has struck a nerve among Black communities nationwide.

Here in New Orleans, public outrage has been mounting over the abuses carried out by our own City's police department. More than a dozen officers have faced charges for their involvement in the murder of unarmed civilians in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, most notoriously in the Danziger Bridge shootings. In that incident, two families fleeing the storm's devastation were at-

Flaherty, Continued
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Race Matters 2.0



Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

At the end of the last century, African-American Scholar Cornel West wrote a book entitled “Race Matters,” where he examined the issue of race in America. A problem that was first posited by W.E.B. Du Bois who in 1903 published in the “Souls of Black Folk,” where he wrote, “The problem of the 20th Century is that of the color line.” Fast Forward to 2008 and we were at a moment in our history where the buzzword was post-racial; that we were at a place where the country had

finally dealt a death blow to the thorny and divisive issue of race and racism in America. Today four years later it is again front and center as the country grapples with issues of police abuse, vigilante justice and racial paranoia in the political arena. I ask today are we more divided today than we were four years ago? Are we closer to solutions than we sometimes think? Or as we move further into the 21st Century has this become more complicated of an issue where we have to look at racial issues and paint a picture with a broader stroke of wrong vs. right and not always simply Black vs. White.

Today race is a central issue in some people's minds that've had a hard time adjusting to the tides of social change. These people are not only White but Black and in other groups as well. The case of the young man Trayvon Martin has sparked all types of debates surrounding race. For example

the shooter Zimmerman is a White Hispanic, and on the blogosphere there are people who write is there such a thing. Not recognizing that Spain is in Europe and they colonized countries where Native Americans, Africans and others were transported to what is now South, and Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean so people exist in all shades and each society have determined their own racial classification system. And it is further to note that race is a social construct not rooted in biology.

But I digress to say that while race is not rooted in biology, it is a social reality. One that's plagued this country since its inception, for example counting Black slaves as 3/5ths a person, or supreme court decisions saying that Blacks didn't have rights that anyone White was bound to respect, that segregation, lynching and other impediments both in law and in fact kept Blacks from accessing

the American Dream. Also Blacks experiencing a long history where their humanity or right to live with dignity was thwarted by a system of oppression and repression; for this recent case in Florida is not unprecedented and is not a new phenomenon. The list goes on and on of young Black men who have been wronged by America's law enforcement and judicial system. But today the question is can we make it right? Can we do as Rodney King said in the aftermath of the Los Angeles uprisings, “Can't We All Just Get Along?”

In spite of the recent spate of racial incidents, we are still a country that has moved the ball forward in the racial arena. We must remember we are a nation where a majority of people mostly White, elected its first Black president. What does that say about race in America? Or that Blacks and Whites now live side by side in many neighborhoods in America that were once segregated,

and that in majority Black cities like New Orleans voters can elect a White mayor. This is the future of the world we live in where race matters less. And while there is six degrees of separation between racial chaos and camaraderie and that in cases like the Trayvon Martin outrage is justified but the racial divide is exaggerated and exploited by the mainstream media that helps to magnify these issues. And because of this us vs. them framing of the issue mistakes are made by people on both sides of the issue and they are quick to judge and make race alone the central issue and play the blame game. A game where sadly no one wins and creates resentment and misunderstanding; but we must recognize that racial issues in the 21st Century are not as Black and White, both literally and figuratively as it was in the

Buggage, Continued
on page 11.

Taking a Stand Against Injustice



Terry B. Jones
Publisher

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said "Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere." With the recent uproar over the slaying of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida it has created outrage all over America about the death of a young man whose assailant George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch captain claims he fatally wounded Martin in self-defense. Martin who was unarmed and at the time preceding the incident was coming from 7-Eleven after purchasing a bag of skittles and an iced tea; this incident has outraged people across America. And at the center of it is the issue is race, law enforcement and the targeting of Black males.

Recently, we ran a cover story

on citizens concerned about the shooting deaths of two young men in one week by officers from the New Orleans Police Department. While my intention is not to indict all those in law enforcement or citizens who are concerned about their communities being safe, I feel it is an important time for us to have a continued conversation about race and justice in America.

It is 2012 and even with an African-American President and the leaps and bounds of our society in regards to racial access over the past 50 years; we still grapple with racial intolerance and ignorance. We must today as President Barack Obama stated when asked of this issue, do some real soul searching, and begin to look at how far we have come and how far we still have to go as a society to erase racism in America. The days of overt racial discrimination that I remember of my youth are no longer there, and while legislation has taken down some of the barriers it alone cannot bring about understanding and peace between the races or to eradicate the institutional practices of racism or policies whether written or unwritten that are racially bias.

And while the specifics of this case is unfolding and all the facts



Students around the country are waking up and giving their voice and presence to something that is bigger than they are; they are realizing finally, that they are as the signs says Trayvon Martin too.

are not clear there are several things that are; Trayvon Martin is dead, according to 911 call George Zimmerman was told not to approach the subject, and according to Martin's girlfriend, he said he was being followed. Much of what the police did when they arrived on the scene was fraught with miscues and errors in assessing the situation in my opinion. Some of these things lead to the temporary resigning of their police chief as the investigation is

ongoing.

People are protesting across America about what they see is a miscarriage of justice and the unfair targeting of Black men. Although this is not a new topic, this case is one where a self-proclaimed vigilante decided to take the law into his own hands. This in my view is wrong. If this type of behavior is allowed we will cease to be a civilized society, if people feel like it is ok to take the law into their own hands.

When I think of this case I think of how many Trayvon Martin type cases we've had where either vigilantes or misconduct of police have happened over the years and there are too many to count. Where the circumstances are the same, but the names simply change. This is a shame for our country that has come so far, but still has a long way to go. As these protests take place all over the U.S. I see in my City young people marching that attend Martin Luther King School, located in the Lower Ninth Ward. I think of my time as a young person growing up and how we fought for change and I look at these young people and think they may have found an issue that may be the spark to make them civically engaged. They saw a young person just like themselves; this could have been their friend, brother or relative. I felt proud to see young people organizing and fighting for justice. And we at Data News Weekly along with all our NNPA (National Newspaper Publishers Association) partners across America stand united in demanding justice not only in the case of Trayvon Martin, but in cases across the country where injustices against any citizen threatens not just Black men but us all.

To The Editor

First, the New Orleans Branch NAACP prays for the safety of all our citizens following the recently reported alleged statements made by NOPD officer Jason Girior. Our City has been sitting on a precipice of civil unrest, particularly following the murders of Justin Sipp and

Wendell Allen by NOPD officers. Now, in the middle of this incendiary atmosphere, Jason Girior, the NOPD officer that killed Justin Sipp, reportedly makes a public statement ridiculing

Trayvon Martin, another Black youth killed under questionable circumstances. At the very same

time that people all over the United States, Black, White, Brown, Yellow, all colors and races are decrying the murder of Trayvon Martin, Jason Girior, who is still under investigation for the murder of Justin Sipp; the same Jason Girior who calls himself "the Punisher" and brags that he sometimes does not do "everything by the book," that Jason Girior reportedly feels comfortable enough in the existing culture of the NOPD to make statements about Trayvon Martin now being "in Hell."

The New Orleans Branch NAACP has been in touch with

the Louisiana State Conference NAACP President and is inviting the President/CEO of the National NAACP, Mr. Benjamin Jealous, to come to New Orleans and help us address these issues at a planned April 7, 2012, Community Rally and a planned April 21, 2012, March.

For more information, please call **504-821-3221**.

Sincerely,
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The High Cost of Higher Education More Than \$1 Trillion in Student Debt

Both Black Parents and Students Borrow Heavily to Finance College

By Charlene Crowell
NNPA Columnist

Whether beginning a career or seeking to keep one going, the competitive edge in today's job market usually goes to those with college degrees. In our recovering economy with fewer jobs available than there are people who need them, there is strong motivation to earn degrees. But higher education also costs money – more than many household finances can afford. As a result, many Americans are counting on the potential benefits of higher incomes derived from strong academic credentials against the cost of going in to debt to fund that degree.

The New York Federal Reserve determined that 37 million Americans now owe more in student debt than is owed on either car loans (\$730B) or credit cards (\$693B) nationwide.

Further, according to Rohit Chopra, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's student loan ombudsman, outstanding student loan debt hit the trillion dollar mark several months ago. In just one year, 2011, federal student loan volume totaled \$117 billion.

In a recent blog, Chopra said, "If current trends continue, there will be consequences not just for



young people, but for all of us. Too much debt means too much risk for a generation of young people, many of whom are struggling in today's economy."

Chopra is right. How America Pays for College, a research report from Sallie Mae, the nation's largest financial services company specializing in education found that parents' income(s) and savings are being stretched as well. For the average American, 70 percent of college funding comes from three sources: grants and scholarships (33 percent); parent incomes and savings (30 per-

cent); and parent borrowing (7 percent). Students invest in their own futures by a combination of borrowing in their own names (15 percent) and working/saving (11 percent).

The Sallie Mae Report also found that the recent increase in grant usage occurred among middle and high-income families. Low-income families — with the least financial resources — actually paid more of their incomes and savings for college. Among Black families, 51 percent borrow for college costs and 35 percent of Black students take out loans in their

own names to attend four-year institutions, both public and private.

Instead of comparing curriculum choices or graduation rates to guide a choice of college, today the weightiest influence in selecting a college is the financial aid package offered. The value of a financial aid package, according to the Sallie Mae Report, was the determining factor for 57 percent of Black students. Additionally, 52 percent of Black students live at home while studying to contain costs.

Overall, students who graduate leave campuses with a degree in one hand and a stack of student debt in the other. The average amount of debt new undergraduates amass is \$25,000. But for Black students receiving a bachelor's degree from 2007-2008, 27 percent borrowed \$30,500 or more. The highest student loan debt was most common among families with incomes between \$30,000 and \$59,999.

As young graduates enter the workplace, student debt burdens will likely defer their ability to purchase a home, the traditional gateway to building personal wealth. For their parents, the additional debt of borrowing for their children will probably defer retirement and/or alter their stan-

dard of living.

These devastating financial effects have attracted the attention of some Capitol Hill lawmakers as well.

According to U.S. Rep. Hansen Clarke of Michigan, "Graduates are finding that their degrees, like homes at the height of the real estate bubble, were vastly mispriced assets that are now hard to finance. Yet, unlike the debt from a home bought in the boom years, it is impossible to walk away from the debt incurred by getting a degree. Student borrowers cannot discharge or even refinance their debts in bankruptcy, regardless of how desperate their situations become. We must set these students free."

Finding solutions to this student debt dilemma is another initiative of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Later this year, the bureau will publish a report of their findings on this mounting issue.

If you or someone you know is experiencing problems with student loan debts, register that concern with CFPB: <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/>.

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Women's History Month We Have Good Reason to Celebrate

by Ron Busby Sr.

As this year's Women's History Month comes to an end, I am reminded of how proud I was to have our history acknowledged every February for Black History Month. My parents made sure I learned everything possible about our Black heritage, the struggles and obstacles we endured and the importance of African-Americans on the history of our nation.

In 1986 our government decided that women also deserved to be honored in the same way. So, while February is Black History Month, March has been designat-

ed as Women's History Month. This is a time to focus on and acknowledge the important roles that women take on in today's world and the contributions they continue to make to history. This year, the theme of Women's History Month is the empowerment of women through education.

For many years, women have struggled to obtain the rights so long held by men alone- the right to an education, the right to vote, the right to work, the right to fair wages, and the right to own their own businesses.

Within the last 20 years, there

has been a rise in corporate affirmative action programs, meant to help diversify the workplace and make way for more Black entrepreneurs and businesses. It was intended that African-Americans and other minorities would find a level playing field in the business world. Somewhere along the way, women were also thrown into the category of minority.

This is often seen as a point of frustration for many minorities because while women may own the businesses, in many cases the companies are still being managed by White men, and White

men continue to benefit the most. It is believed that for this reason Black businesses have suffered when it comes to all levels of government contract opportunities and access. Federal contracting still does not fall equally between each minority and disadvantaged groups. The U.S. Black Chamber, however, chooses to embrace this point of diversification and celebrate women-owned businesses each day of the year.

African-American women have struggled to overcome these disadvantages, and with perseverance they have succeeded. In

2007, there were nearly 912,000 African-American women owned businesses in America. From 1997, that is a 191.4% increase.

Businesses owned by African-American men during that same time period increased

93.1%. Of all African-American-owned businesses, 47.4% are owned by women. The U.S. Black Chamber sees this opportunity to partner with this fast growing sector.

When we think of Black women who have been successful en-

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trepreneurs, we often look back at Madame C.J. Walker. She traveled the country, demonstrating her method for straightening African-Americans' hair. She was the first Black female to own a business valued at over \$1 million dollars.

Fast forward to recent history we can refer to the success of business women like self-made billionaire Oprah with her Harpo Productions, Janice Bryant Howroyd founder of Act1-Group, the largest minority-owned employment agency in the country and Cathy Hughes, Founder and Chairperson of Radio One, a multi-media company that focuses on African-American and other urban consumers across the country, and so many others.

We can also look to the strength and perseverance of our own women, the women of the U.S. Black Chamber that we serve on a daily basis and celebrate all year long. A woman such as the President and CEO of this month's featured Black Chamber, Natalie Cofield. Natalie heads the Capital City African-American Chamber of Commerce in Austin, Texas. She has brought her extensive skills and knowledge to the chamber in order to help with the economic development on behalf of the African-American community in the greater Austin area.

Another shining example of strong female leaders is the owner of the U.S. Black Chamber featured business of the month, Leah Brown, President and CEO of A10 Clinical Solutions, Inc. Ms. Brown has earned the honor of being Inc. Magazine's Number One African-American-Run Business. Her company is one of the fastest-growing businesses in America.

New York, Georgia and Florida are the three states which have the highest number of businesses owned by African-American women. The top industry in which African-American women own businesses include social assistance and health care (32%).

No matter the industry, African-American women have a place to stake a claim. They have the ability and opportunity to become leaders and to make a true difference in their communities. It takes drive, passion, strength and knowledge to get to where these women are today.

Through education and inspiration, we can see a country that is full of businesses that are owned and operated by African-American women. Those businesses cannot help but succeed if we work together and take their dreams for a future company and turn them into reality.

The U.S. Black Chamber takes great pride in celebrating the successes of Blacks and women, not just during a single designated month, but all year long.

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previous century.

We cannot be naive and pretend it has disappeared, and note that yes racism is still with us and from time to time is like a cancer spreading trying to kill the soul of a new America. Where people have found ways to become more enlightened and realize that we have more in common than not and the bridges that bring us together is wider than the gulf that separates us. I say that to say we must begin to look at issues of race through a different lens, so when incidents happen we can figure out ways to solve these problems together. While we are all justifiably outraged when justice is denied, we must not let these incidents undo what we have done positively in the area of racial relations. That we must realize that like minded people working together can stamp out injustice both of the individual and institutional type. And that as we move further into the 21st Century we the American people must come to the conclusion that we cannot be divided and be a strong nation, and that while race is still a social reality, at this point in our history should we be asking ourselves why does it still matter?

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tacked under a hail of police gunfire that left four wounded and two dead, including Ronald Madison, a mentally challenged 40-year-old, and James Brissette, a sixteen-year-old who had been called nerdy and studious by friends. Most alarmingly, our local media, district attorney, and other systems of accountability mostly failed in their oversight – it was not until the US Justice Department became involved in 2009 that the officers faced charges. The next year, a Justice Department investigation of the NOPD found “reasonable cause to believe that patterns and practices of unconstitutional conduct and/or violations of federal law occurred in several areas.”

In the latest outrage, during the first week of March, two young Black men were killed by New Orleans police in separate incidents. One of the victims, Justin Sipp, was shot by officers during a traffic stop. The other youth, 20-year-old Wendell Allen, was shot in his own home by an officer executing a warrant. Allen was apparently unarmed and only partially dressed. Allen's killer remains free, as does George Zimmerman, who killed Trayvon.

This week, it was revealed that one of the officers who killed Sipp recently wrote a racist rant about Trayvon Martin on a news website, saying the young man deserved to die, and is now “in hell.”

I am disappointed that the NYPD choose to make me a target – however peripheral – of their spying. But I am truly angered by the role that police play in communities of color, at the criminalization of young Black children wearing a hooded sweat-shirts. These latest revelations have had the effect of renewing my commitment to fighting for a system that knows that true safety and security comes from providing justice, liberation, and human rights for all; not in the harsh and violent justice of law enforcement.

Jordan Flaherty is a Journalist based in New Orleans, and the Author of Floodlines: Community and Resistance From Katrina to the Jena Six.

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