

Lighting The Road To The Future

New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

Data Zone

Page 4

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Fishers Of Men

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A Question of Equality



Page 2



Trailblazer
Charles
Vaughn

Page 7

Commentary
Come
On Down



Page 6

A Question of Equality...

The Debate over Same Sex Marriage



By Gary Estwick

President Obama's recent statements supporting gay marriage has created the nation's latest political divide, from liberals and conservatives to sympathizers and critics.

Here in New Orleans, a city with a well-documented history of gay tolerance, if not acceptance, opinions in the African-American community range from acceptance to disgust.

"I think the president, like everyone else, has a right to his opinion," said Marcel McGee, 38, a non-profit consultant. "We voted him in, and so I believe we have to support him and his legislation."

"I don't really care if people decide to enter a contract that is beneficial to them both as partners/

friends/lovers. Laws can be interpreted a million different ways, however the law of nature (procreation) cannot."

Local business owner Erica King disagrees. "I'm a Christian, and for me reading the Bible and understanding it as best I could, I never saw where He approved of it or mentioned anything (good) about it," King said. "It was always Adam and Eve. "I know if somebody makes you happy, that's fine... But it should be man and woman so you can reproduce."

Still, another perspective, Bruce Banks is neither for nor against Obama's historical statements on May 9.

"I can't say no, I don't think a guy should marry

a guy or a girl shouldn't marry a girl because that's that individual's choice," Banks, 62, said. "Choice is what the Lord gave all humans. And you know the consequences when you make these choices and you choose it anyway, you just need to be ready for the consequences."

At the heart of the debate: whether stopping any two people from being married is an assault on their civil rights. Others question the origin of gay lifestyles, also known as the nature-versus-nurture debate. Still others point to Biblical warnings about fallen societies that accepted gay practices.

Their arguments originate from a place where the French Quarters, our city's most treasured relic, in-

INSIDE DATA

Cover Story	2	Commentary	6
Data Zone	4	Trailblazer	7

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.



President Obama became the first sitting president to publicly support gay marriage

cludes a gay section, and some of our most documented music entertainers in recent years have names like Big Freedia, Katey Red and Sissy Black - pioneers of a sound called, Sissy Bounce.

Nationally, the issue is expected to remain through the November presidential election when Obama faces Republican nominee Mitt Romney, a conservative who is against gay marriage.

"I've been going through an evolution on this issue. I've always been adamant that gay and lesbian Americans should be treated fairly and equally," Obama said in the television interview. "At a certain point I've just concluded that, for me personally, it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

With that statement, Obama, already the first black U.S. president, became the first sitting president to publicly support gay marriage. Reportedly, he opposes the federal Defense of Marriage law that defines marriage as a union of a man and a woman, but has no plans to challenge the policy and will leave the issue to states to decide.

Changes are this issue will continue long after the 2012 Presidential election. After all, society has struggled to agree on this issue in recent decades. In 1977, a Gallup poll stated that just 13 percent of Americans believed men and women could be born gay.

This spring, the same poll was completed with 40 percent answering the same question.

Conversely, dropped to 35 percent - although it has gone up and down since the late 1990s.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supports Obama's message, while another organization, the Coalition of African American Pastors, denounced his actions.

Reverend William Owens,

president and founder of the Memphis-based Coalition of African-American Pastors (CAAP), has asked Obama to resend his statements. Owens believes gay rights, is allowed to become a social norm, will only empower this group to push for more. If Obama does not resend his message, Owens said will place many of the blacks that voted for him in a precarious situation. They may vote Republican, or not at all.

"From the replies we get on our web site, asking him to change his position... I feel there will be some (blacks) that sit this (election) out."

According to the NAACP, president/CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous gave a keynote address at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual conference earlier this year. Also, senior staff member Hilary Shelton was subpoenaed before the U.S. Senate to testify in opposition to a federal amendment that would outlaw marriage equality.

"We are a non-partisan organization and our decision was not in support or in opposition to any candidate," the NAACP said in a statement. "Rather our resolution is a continuation of our mission and our constitution which states our objective to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of all people. This decision is an extension of that mission."

Earlier this month, Owens denounced the NAACP's statement, saying, the organization "has abandoned its historic responsibility to speak for and safeguard the civil rights movement," CAAP founder and President William Owens said Tuesday. "We who marched with Rev. King did not march one inch or one mile to promote same-sex marriage."

Opinions on this subject clearly represent the gamut from wholehearted support to absolute rejection, but this should be expected. It is certain that the Black community is not mono-



Reverend William Owens (pictured), president and founder of the Memphis-based Coalition of African-American Pastors (CAAP), has asked Obama to resend his statements.

lithic and shouldn't be seen as such. Even a controversial subject as gay marriage offers a moment of clarity. No longer can the general public credit Obama's success as a bi-product of his creed. They may not agree with every policy and message, but overall, they know that four years of Romney is not a suitable Plan B. So if he wins re-election in November, it will occur because America - including its blacks - deemed him the best candidate, who happened to be black.



NAACP, President/CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous (pictured) gave a keynote address at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Annual Conference earlier this year.

Visit our facebook page to voice your opinion on Marriage Equality/Gay Marriage. What do you think, is it a matter of equal rights or should it be banned? Talk to us.



The Joseph S. Clark Class of 1972

40th Year

Class Reunion

May 25-27, 2012

The Joseph S. Clark of 1972 is having its 40th Year Reunion Memorial Day Weekend (May 25-27, 2012). The activities include a social event on Friday May 25th, picnic on Saturday May 26th and a church service on Sunday May 27th.

J. S. Clark Alumni and Friends of Clark are invited to celebrate with the Class of 1972. Please come out and celebrate with us our memorable past in this milestone occasion.

For more info please call **504-430-6002** or **504-975-2874** or visit us on Facebook at **Joseph S. Clark c/o 1972**.

Oliver Thomas takes over lead role in Hal Clark's Fishers of Men

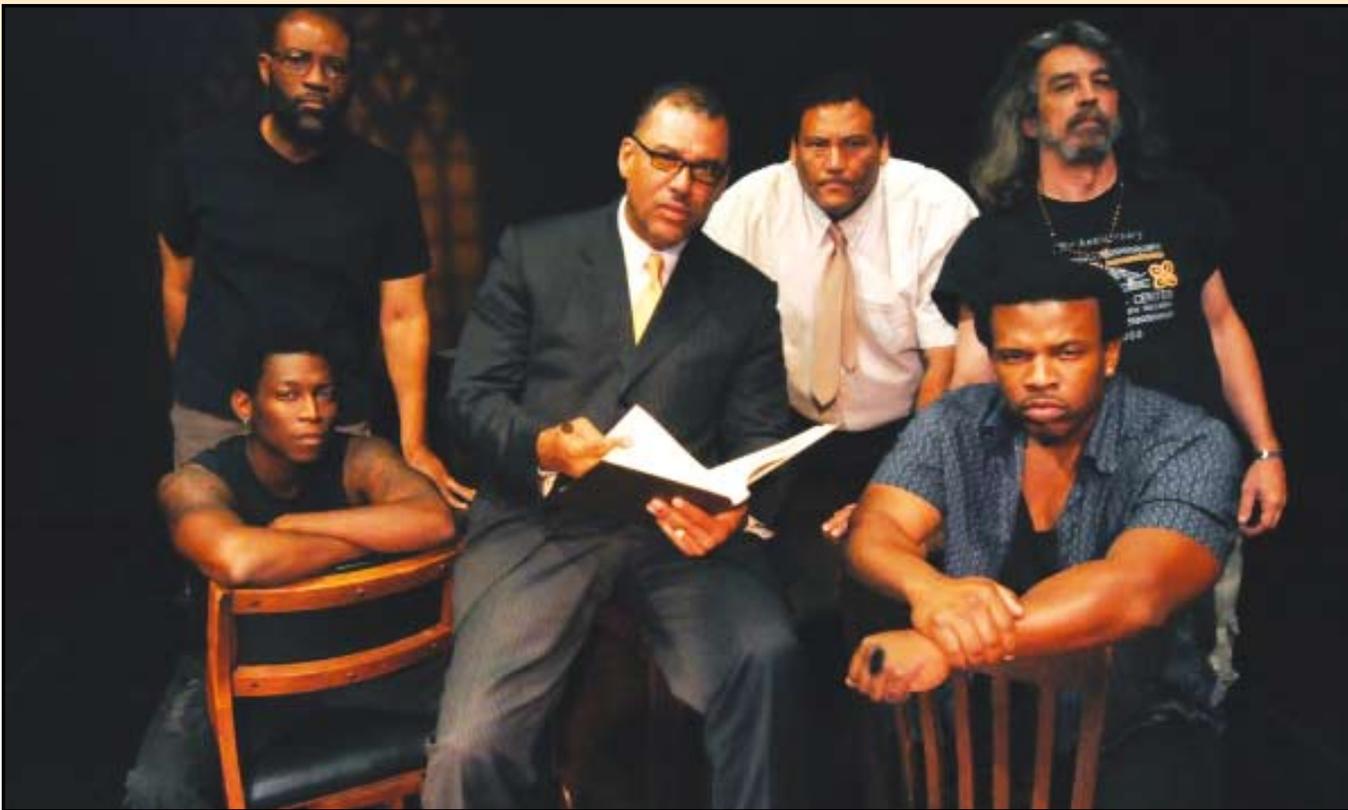


Photo left. Martin "Bats" Bradford ("Dabarrow," seated left), Harold Ellis Clark (playwright/producer, standing left), Oliver Thomas ("Bishop James Perriloux," seated center), Al Aubry ("Deacon Job," standing center), John Grimsley (director/set designer, standing right), and Damien Moses ("Vic," seated right). Photo credit: Jim Belfon

Oliver Thomas stars as Bishop James Perriloux in the world premiere of *Fishers of Men*, a play written and produced by WYLD-FM's Hal Clark, Thursday, June 14 - Sunday, June 17, 2012 at Dillard University's Cook Theatre, 2601 Gentilly Boulevard. The Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances start at 7 p.m.; the Sunday show begins at 3 p.m. Tickets, \$20, are available at www.haroldellisclark.com by calling (504) 433-5498.

Fishers of Men, a follow-up to Clark's 2011, critically-acclaimed play, *Marrero Action*, which debuted at the Anthony Bean Community Theatre (ABCT) focuses on Bishop James Perriloux, an ex-con and pastor of a New Orleans mega-church, who sends men from his congregation into the city's streets to rescue lost souls. Two troubled potential converts threaten the very foundation of Bishop Perriloux's ministry, and place the lives of the four men in jeopardy.

Style of Her Own



Renee' Johnson

Renee' Johnson is a 32 year old artist, living and working in New Orleans, LA. She began using her design name Renee' J. in 2000, after taking fashion design classes in Atlanta, GA, she returned home and started designing her own line of ladies clothing, selling her designs at trunk shows and doing custom orders. She soon after began taking jewelry design classes and added jewelry to her fashion line. In 2006 she began designing dance costumes for N'Fungola Sibó West African Dance and Drum Company, 2007

Renee' began designing costumes for Young Audiences. A year later she began working as a teaching artist, teaching students how to design and sew. She later began taking visual design classes and started teaching arts and crafts to her students. Through visual design Renee began exploring her other creative talents and wanted to expand in this area. Currently she is working on a collection of mixed media and oil paintings in which she plans to exhibit. Her unique design aesthetic derives from her love of differ-

ent cultures and her world travels to England, Spain, Portugal and Egypt. Seeing how people in different parts of the world relate color, texture, and shapes into their everyday lives has helped her evolve her own eclectic style. She is currently working as an art teacher at St. Mary's Academy Elementary School and as a teaching artist at the International School of Louisiana's Westbank campus; where she is able to relate her experiences in travel as well as in design with her students.

Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Zulu 103rd Anniversary Parade

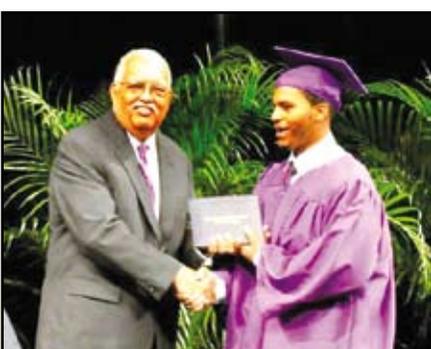
Photos by Kichea S. Burt

The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club celebrated its 103rd Anniversary with an elaborate parade last Sunday. Winding through our streets led by Grand Marshall Delrone Perkins, the parade featured the The Stooges and We Are One Brass Bands. Happy 103rd Anniversay Zulu!



St. Augustine High School Presents Its 58th Graduation Class

St Augustine held its 58th Commencement Exercises last week. For the occasion, graduate Eric Burt's proud father hired a Brass Band! Congratulations Graduates!



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Come on Down



Parnell Herbert
Data News Contributor

a damn about this City. My concern is for the people. The people of New Orleans and for New Orleanians who remain stranded in Houston and other US cities with no Road Home."

Everyone says they are concerned about the murder rate and the high crime rates in New Orleans. And I guess there is some unilateral concern but not for the same reasons. Mothers have concern for their sons who are threatened in our community, by citizens and by police officers, while power brokers of this City are concerned with bad press. Murder does not make good headlines.

The Canal Street and French Quarter shootings on Halloween night caused an immediate outcry at city council chambers. Cynthia Hedge-Morrell wanted to authorize the police to stop and search all cars for guns. Susan Giselson-Palmer suggested the creation of an ordinance to allow

police to search everyone within fifty feet of a bar (where can you stand on Bourbon St. and not be within fifty feet of a bar?) And Stacy Head wanted to increase police presence in the French Quarters. But all remained silent when Justin Sipp and Wendell Allen were murdered by New Orleans police officers.

The BP oil spill settlement was beneficial to New Orleans. Many of those dollars are used to fund the very effective "Visit New Orleans Campaign" but shootings in the French Quarters and on Canal St. are counter-productive.

According to local news reports; Mardi Gras spenders brought New Orleans a well needed shot in the arm; three-hundred million dollars. But another news story that same day discussed the possibility of doubling our sewerage and water rates.

Hotels and restaurants boast a 300% increase in the past twenty years, Miss Mary recently retired

after working 30 years for a local hotel. Her salary upon retirement was \$15.00 per hour.

In recent months I have attended meetings where students begged the Superintendent of schools for books, tutors and counselors. I have witnessed an outraged community demand that the city council not use the ploy of a curfew in the French Quarter as an added tool for the NOPD to harass young African- American males.

Citizens in predominantly Black communities consistently make a simple request "Repair the lights on our streets?"

Locals beg for jobs as city administrators boast of all the new construction in the City. Visit the various constructions sights in the City and notice the out of state license plates on the employee vehicles as well as the names of out-of-town companies contracted to do the work. Then ask why our unemployment rate is so high.

This past Valentine's Day I received an early morning phone call but it was not the "Happy Valentine's Day" call I had hoped for. It was a caller telling me that city representatives were issuing citations to roadside vendors selling Valentines gifts without a license.

The following day I went to City Hall and stood in line to apply for a vendor's license. I was informed that the City of New Orleans no longer issues licenses for roadside vendors. Why deny people the opportunity to sell teddy bears and flowers instead of drugs on our street corners?

Morale is at an all-time low on the New Orleans Police Force, schools are failing, qualified teachers are terminated and Racism is Running Rampant. But tourist; "Come on Down!"

"New" New Orleanians are welcome come on Down "Help Us Rebuild."

"FOR WHO?!"

Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell Clears the Air

To the Community:

There has been rampant speculation in regards to my decision to leave the early May council meeting as well as my decision to not return to subsequent council meetings.

I appreciate this opportunity to clear the air regarding these circumstances and my decisions.

I left the early May council meeting because I was extremely frustrated by the politicizing of the Council At Large legislation, which is focused on ensuring that our at-large elected representatives receive a majority vote of the people.

Two specific tactics that I found to be unnecessary and, arguably obstructionist, were the requirements that the legislation repeatedly be sent to Committees, even when the matter had previously been discussed in the same com-

mittees in the past, and the sudden prerequisite that the matter be discussed in public meetings beyond the public Council meetings. Although I believed a vote by the duly-elected representatives of the people, the council, would have sufficiently protected the interests of the voters, I was happy to have the matter decided directly by popular vote in the fall. By comparison, two other critical issues, creating an OIG and the NORDC charter amendments were sent to public meetings after the Council placed those matters on the ballot. When it was clear that day that even a vote to send the matter to the public would be denied by special interests, I became frustrated with these tactics and decided to leave the council meeting.

The next issue I would like to address is why I have stayed away. This completely separate

issue deals with an ongoing and implicit disregard for debate and discussion that has left me feeling as though I've been marginalized.

First, it is important that no one Councilmember control two votes. That is why it is vital that each member be involved in choosing the interim appointment. Furthermore, I have misgivings about the lack of consistency of procedure used to fill council vacancies. When Councilman Fielkow resigned, the Council instituted a transparent and open process to solicit qualified individuals to fill the interim seat. The public supported this process and a can-

didate, Mr. Granderson, was selected unanimously.

However, when Ms. Head assumed the At-Large position, the council followed a different procedure and allowed Ms. Head to pick her own replacement without discussion. It is a highly unusual situation for a Councilmember to unilaterally choose their replacement. I was not consulted regarding Ms. Head's choice, and I felt as though a majority of the council had intentionally made a decision without consultation. This lack of coordination devalued my efforts to properly represent my constituents, especially on an is-

sue as impactful as the selection of a new councilmember.

In conclusion, I wish the council could have come to an agreement on these issues so that we could continue to conduct the business of the City. Especially in regards to this unique situation regarding a Councilmember selecting her own replacement, I believe transparency should be held in the forefront. All viewpoints on these critical matters must be given fair hearing without tactics that demean the decorum of the council or disrespect the collegiality that we all strive to achieve as fellow councilmembers.

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trailblazer

Charles Vaughn

Artist and Activist

by: Edwin Buggage

He is someone who is committed to his community and his City. Charles Vaughn is a 21st Century Renaissance man, visual artist, emcee, TV host, writer, archivist and activist. "When some people think about being an activist they think they have to be on the street marching for some grand cause, but I feel that is not for everyone, there are so many ways people can participate in addressing issues that affect them." Continuing he says, the creative arts have been used to inspire people into action, "There have been many great artist who have used art to raise awareness whether it was Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Langston Hughes or Bob Marley says Vaughn expanding on his definition of activism. "I feel activism is about being a positive person and spreading that energy to whoever you come in contact with and whatever gifts or talents you have you should use them to uplift your community."

During Hurricane Katrina when so many people were disconnected from home and all things New Orleans, Vaughn used MySpace and Facebook to create online communities dedicated to highlighting, preserving and celebrating his City and inspiring many in the City's darkest hour. "When I was gone I felt a sense of isolation being away from home and I knew there were so many others who felt the same way, so I began to post my thoughts online and people began to respond, I felt like it was therapy for me as well as others."

For over a decade Vaughn has been hosting events, most notably he was one of the founding members of Pozazz Productions, a poetry event that gave voice to spoken word artist and other performers reflecting on that time he says, "My goal in whatever I do is to give people a voice and an outlet for them to be heard." Continuing he says reflecting on his time during Pozazz, "It is great to see so many of the people who have come through



our event and have moved on to bigger things and I feel good that we were able to be an incubator for them to develop their creative voice and represent the best of New Orleans."

After living in Atlanta for five years Vaughn returned to New Orleans with his new family in tow. He says the support of his wife and his two daughters is what motivates him moving forward. Today he is back in the City of his birth with an expanded vision on how to change society and is vigilant about

working to contribute to his City, "I am glad to be back home and it is good to be able to work with young people inspiring and mentoring them. "He is also creating art that tells the story of his City, "We are the keepers of our history and culture and when I talk about or teach art to young people that is what I try to get them to understand that it should make a statement about what and who we are."

A self-avowed lover of the music, art and culture of New Orleans, Vaughn is an archivist of anything 5-0-4. He has worked as a Graphic Designer for New Orleans Hip-Hop Legend Soulja Slim; he's also worked with Cash Money Records and many other New Orleans hip-hop artists. Now as people are beginning to chronicle New Orleans hip-hop and bounce, he feels it is essential that those who created it have a voice in

defining it in a more authentic way, "It is important today that we see the value and significance of what we do, it is important that we tell our story, because all too often it gets distorted so we must preserve it for future generations." Charles Vaughn is a man who lives to give back and has an undeniable love for his City and he continues to inspire others and represent the best of New Orleans and for his work he is our Trailblazer for the month of May 2012.

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Newly eligible for Medicare?



Eddie Conrad,
Peoples Health
plan member

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If you're new to Medicare you have a lot of options and probably a lot of questions. Is Medicare enough by itself? Do I need to buy a supplement? What about Part D drug coverage? Or a Medicare Advantage plan that combines benefits and Part D?

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