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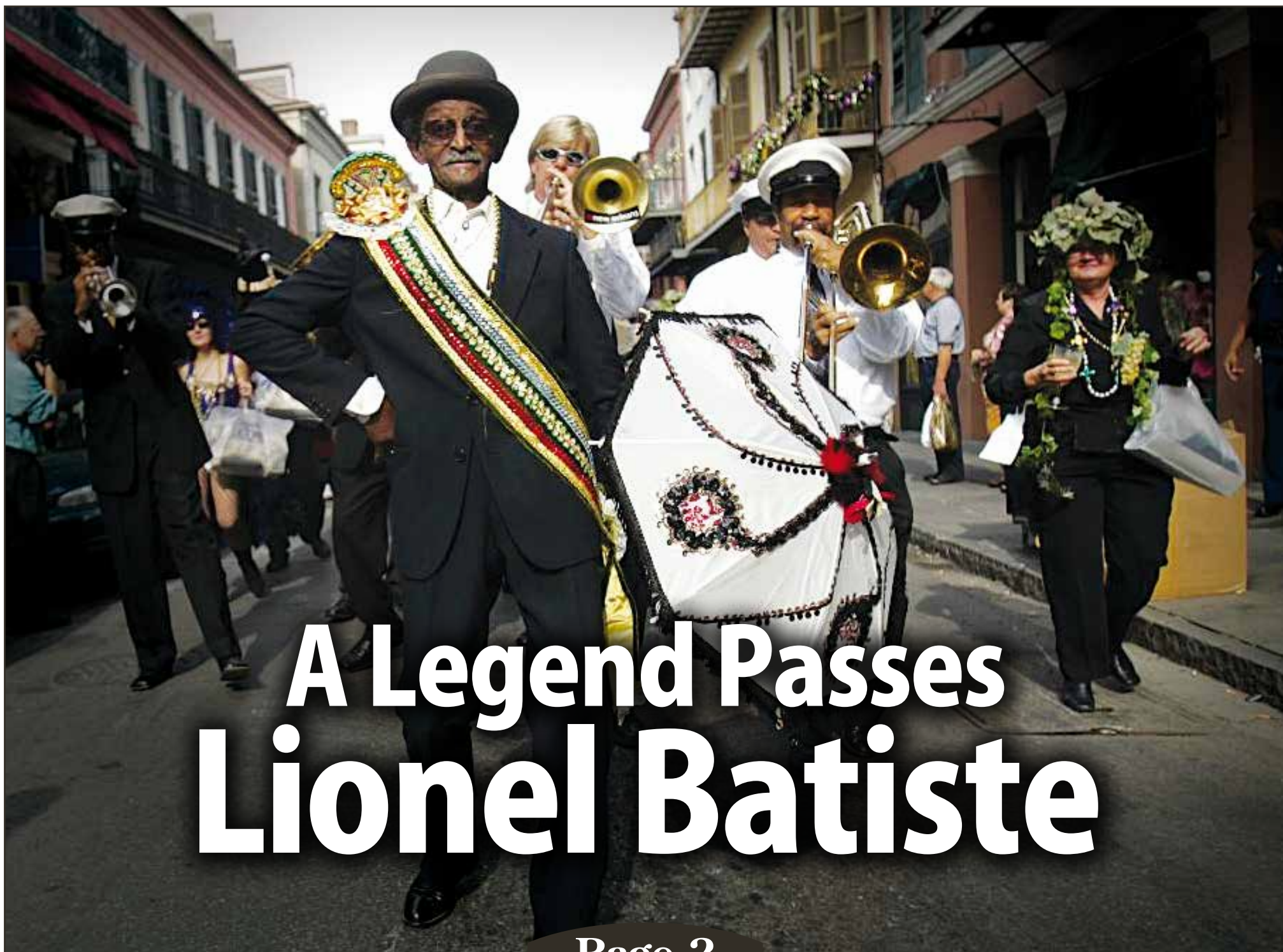
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"Uncle" Lionel Batiste

Reflections on His Life and Legacy



Uncle Lionel at Funeral 2nd Line for Richard Payne. Photo by Kichea S. Burt

By Edwin Buggage

Uncle Lionel Batiste: A Man and His City

New Orleans is a City where music is its heartbeat, giving life to a City where people from across the globe come to experience the splendor and magic of this American cultural jewel. It is a City like no other in the U.S. with many traditions and what seems like a daily celebration of its heritage and unique way of life.

One of those many traditions is that of the brass band, unlike other cities New Orleans bands with its blend of many influences have created a sonic gumbo that many have come to imitate but nothing comes close to the original. One of the innovators of Brass Band music "Uncle" Lionel Batiste, the beloved bass drummer, vocalist best known for his work with Harold De-Jean's Olympia Brass Band, Tremé' Brass Band. He is a man whose signature, whose image and dapper style has come to symbolize this musical tradition. A man who lived by his own rules and marched to the beat

of his own drum, the Great Uncle Lionel passed away on July 8, 2012.

Batiste, known simply as Uncle Lionel came to be known for more than just his musical talent, but to embody a City rich with traditions. Jerome Smith is the founder of Tambourine and Fan and for decades has been teaching young people the importance of appreciating and understanding their cultural heritage. On this day he is in Tremé', the neighborhood that Uncle Lionel called home, "Right now I am looking out the window at Craig Elementary School in Tremé' where

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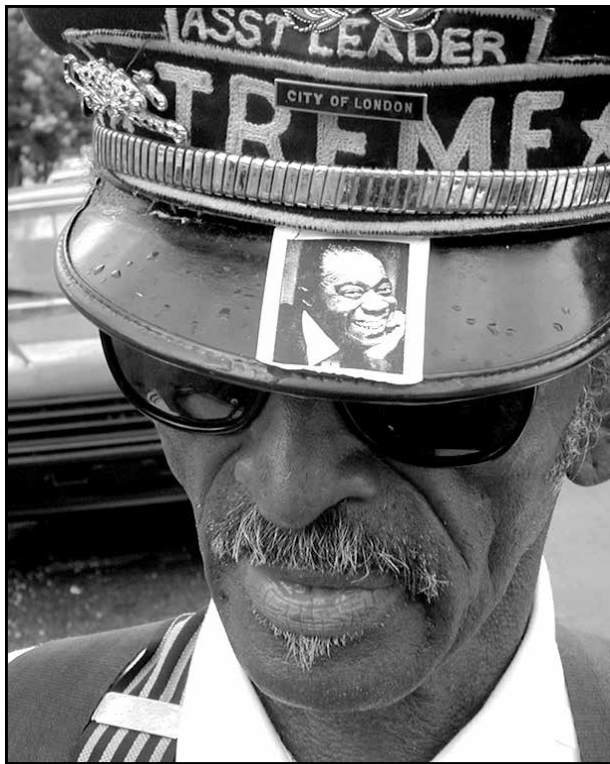
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Uncle Lionel went to school, and I remember attending this same school many years ago and I remember hearing the music coming from Uncle Lionel's house on St. Phillip Street and this was about 1950. So when I think of his life it has been a long beautiful journey and he's contributed so much to the City and its musical traditions and is as important to it a Louis Armstrong and Buddy Bolden," says Smith.

In a City as tight knit as New Orleans where family extends far beyond bloodlines. It is a place where it is a shared culture that breeds kinship, camaraderie and familiarity. Smith talks about how connected Uncle Lionel was to the people of the City and was a person full of positivity with legions of people that respected him not only as a musician, but as a man of the people because he stayed connected to his City and its culture, "He was already celebrated here in New Orleans before his images were on billboards, posters or TV, the real celebration of Uncle Lionel was about ordinary people on an ordinary day. Year after year he wasn't only making music when he was playing the bass drum, he played music into the hearts of people everyday by being a good person."

Tradition... Culture... and Heritage

Today when one thinks of brass bands from New Orleans, Rebirth is one of the first to come to mind. Fresh off their Grammy win, and the first for a brass band; noting that people are now taking notice of this amazing music that is now getting industry wide recognition; Phil Frazier, founder of Rebirth reflects on Uncle Lion-

nel's influence on him when he first started the band with renowned trumpeter Kermit Ruffins, "When we started out we would do a lot of the old music, myself and Kermit Ruffins, we did it for Uncle Lionel to keep the music alive because it is an important part of our heritage and culture." He continues speaking of the luminous spirit and sense of caring for his fellow human beings, Uncle Lionel exuded throughout his life; "He was a great man, I would often confide in and just loved to be around him and whenever he entered a room it would light up, he was one who really loved people and he had charisma like no one I've ever seen."

There are many traditions in the City and the marching clubs and social aid and pleasure clubs are just a few of them. Fred Johnson is the founder of The Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club and has been involved in many aspects of the musical culture of the City for many decades. Reflecting on Uncle Lionel's life and legacy he says, "Uncle Lionel is quintessential to what New Orleans is about, it is unfortunate that we don't have a lot of people who are trying to imitate and mimic his behavior and his character and that is a great loss. Whenever you lose people like him you lose, so there is a serious link out of the chain of culture and information that we now must fill."

New Orleans is a City like no other. It is not an unusual sight on any night to hear the sounds of music in the night air, or seeing a young man walking down the street with a horn in hand or a drum. Music and the arts in general is the blood that runs through the veins of the City

giving it its life and identity. It is something people from around the world come to experience. As Johnson points out, "People come to New Orleans not because we have Fortune 500 companies, they come here because of the music, food, the people and their hospitality and the close proximity of everything and Uncle Lionel represents the music." Continuing he says of building on this legacy, "It's a great loss to the City, now we have to work extremely hard at trying to get young people to understand what his contribution is to the City's culture. What Uncle Lionel represented is what made people love New Orleans all over the world."

Uncle Lionel a Life Dedicated to Giving

Johnson was deeply moved as he spoke of the last time he saw Uncle Lionel before his passing, recounting the meeting he says, "I saw him not long ago, he sent for me, and some of my club members came along. Bennie Jones of the Treme' Brass Band and longtime friend of Uncle Lionel said 'Unc' wanted to see y'all come 'holla' at him just in case it is cut shorter than any of us are thinking. And I didn't take this for granted and I went over to the DBA and he was sitting with his daughters and women in his family and I eased up to him and took an old Harold DeJean spiel, that went something like this, every time you would see him he would say everything's lovely meaning everything was good, so I whispered in his ear everything's lovely and he said "yeah baby everything is lovely" and that was the last words we exchanged."

As the story of New Orleans

has come to the forefront in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, with countless documentaries and most notably the HBO TV show Treme', of which Uncle Lionel has appeared. It has given the world a taste of the flavor of New Orleans and a window inside the unique and sacred culture and traditions of the City. One of the stars of the show is Wendell Pierce, a native of the Crescent City who got to know Uncle Lionel, "He epitomized New Orleans traditions in music and style with his street swagger and gentleman's stance." Of the importance of his contribution he says, "He was passing on a legacy that goes back to the birth of our music. He lived the tradition of playing and singing the canon of traditional New Orleans music relished around the world."

In what is nearing seven years, one cannot deny that the City is

changing, and whether it is good or bad is a matter of where you are standing. But it is an undeniable truth that the traditions of the City are worth preserving for future generations; Pierce echoes this point saying, "We should all feel a greater responsibility to honor Uncle Lionel by protecting and preserving our traditions of music, social aid and pleasure clubs, along with our Masking Indian and culinary culture." Continuing he says of the times they spent together as he got to know the man with the huge heart, "He was a wonderful musician, and I cherished the moments he shared with me at the Candlelight Lounge, I remember being at his birthday party last year at Seal's and many nights on Frenchmen Street. He taught me history, music and

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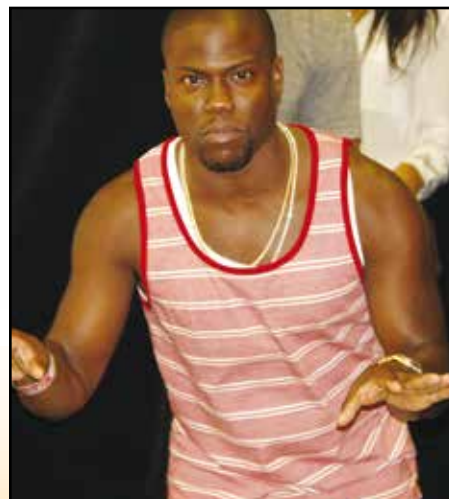
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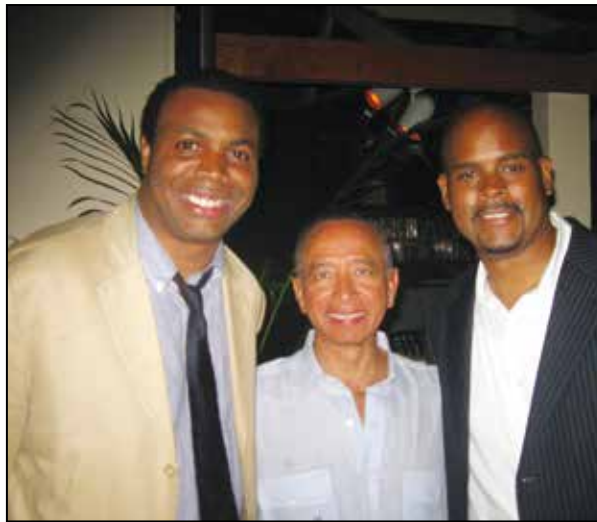
2012 Essence Music Festival Concerts and Party Highlights

Photos by Glenn Summers

The Essence Music Festival again came to New Orleans and although the weekend was sometimes soggy because of rain, “the party with a purpose” provided a ray of sun and positive energy to the City. Throngs of people converged on the Crescent City and Data News Weekly was there for it all.



Shoot Ya Best Shot!



Louisiana Supreme Court Changes Violate Voting Rights Act

Louisiana has violated the Voting Rights Act by changing its voting procedures and processes in the way it plans to vote, according to a letter of objection filed with the U.S. Department of Justice by noted civil rights attorneys Ronald Wilson and William P. Quigley on behalf of National Urban League President and CEO Marc H. Morial and a coalition of Louisiana elected officials and leaders.

"Despite the fact that Justice [Bernette] Johnson has served on the Louisiana Supreme Court longer than any remaining Justice, and should be Chief Justice automatically, action has been commenced by some members of the Court to negate that fact and appoint instead a Justice who is junior to Justice Johnson and has less service on the court," the letter reads. "In order to further their discriminatory purpose, the Court has enacted unprec-

edented changes in its voting processes and procedures which intentionally leave the voters from the majority African American New Orleans area voting district unrepresented, effectively reapportioning the Court to deny and dilute the voting rights of people in the New Orleans area.

"These voting changes violate the Voting Rights Act and, if allowed to undo federal civil rights litigation concluded decades ago, signal a reversal of decades of human and civil rights achievements of African American and other minority voters," the coalition wrote.

Under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Louisiana must submit any changes to voting procedures for preclearance by the Justice Department.

Morial was chair of the plaintiff's committee in the landmark court case which resulted in the creation of Louisiana's first major-

ity African-American voter district on the Louisiana Supreme Court. The consent decree creating the seat temporarily expanded the number of Justices on the Court from seven to eight, to allow an elected representative from the new district in New Orleans to serve while allowing the incumbent Justices to avoid running in the majority African American district. Justice Johnson was elected to serve the district in 1994; the Court reverted to seven justices in 2000.

Shortly after Chief Justice Catherine Kimball tendered her resignation, she issued an unprecedented unilateral order outlining a new voting process to determine who was going to serve as Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court. This order recused Justice Johnson, as well as the justices who were elected after Johnson, but before the year 2000.

"The public is completely excluded from every phase of this determination," the coalition wrote. Although temporary judges were appointed to cover the areas of the two justices claiming seniority over Justice Johnson, the order did not appoint an appellate judge from the New Orleans area to represent the voters of the Johnson's seat.

"This was intentional," according to the objection. "The Chief Justice advised that she intentionally left the majority African American district without representation because it had 'too big a stake' in the process to be included. This left the voters of the Court's only majority African American district unrepresented in the Court's plan to decide if the Justice elected from their area was a full member of the Court or not."

Joining Morial in the objection are:

Diana Bajoie, City Council of New Orleans

Marie Bookman, plaintiff in Chisom v Roemer

Jared C. Brossett, Louisiana House of Representatives

Ronald Chisom, plaintiff in Chisom v Roemer

Arthur Morrell, Clerk of Court
Cynthia Morell, City Council of New Orleans

J.P. Morrell, Louisiana State Senate

Edwin Murray, Louisiana State Senate

Karen Carter Peterson, Louisiana State Senate

Cedric Richmond, U.S. House of Representatives

Nolan Rollins, CEO, Urban League of Greater New Orleans

Gregory Tarver, Louisiana State Senate

Commentary

A Cure Sits Right in Front of Our Faces



Oliver M. Thomas Jr.
Data Guest Columnist

The Crime Summit at Watson Memorial was yet another at-

tempt at solving the problem of violence between African-American Men. Pastor Watson and all who participated should be commended. Now how do we solve the problem of crime in New Orleans as well as urban communities throughout America?

First, let me say that we seem to be in an age where communities who struggle to survive and keep up with the fading American Dream are blamed for many of the social-ills that plague their communities. You may want to

blame the patient that suffers from heart disease, because of their eating habits and lifestyle, but that patient stills requires medical attention if we expect that patient to live, in spite of their health deficiencies. So we invest medical attention, prescriptions, recommendations, time, energy, and our best science as it relates to a cure for that ailment. Well, in the African-American community here in New Orleans, a cure sits right in front of our face everyday. An investment that would change the life and lifestyle of many who are struggling to survive and want more out of life. That cure is an economic investment that targets the working poor and working class people in this region.

What do national reports say? They say that more money, per capita, is spent and scheduled to be spent in this area than just about any place in America, so we know the resources are available. If the resources are avail-

able then we have an opportunity to direct some of those resources to our critical areas of need. Now I said critical areas! If our young people are dying at an alarming rate and if innocent people are being killed because of the violence then I think we can assume this is a critical area. If we know we lead the nation in unemployment and poverty for teens in several reports, and if the Pugh Report and the National Census says that the disparity gap for earnings between Whites and Blacks in this area has gotten wider, then a cure must be prescribed. We know the tough on crime cure has been a disease for the African-American community and families, so we won't prescribe that this time because we don't want to practice insanity. So this time we'll do something different.

We'll eliminate the conspiracy to keep the majority population in this area poor (smile), by making sure our largest economy,

the tourism economy, increases opportunity for local minority and women owned businesses, pays a living wage across the board that's representative of how room rates have increased in the last several years and the number of major events that come to our fair City.

I'll give you a simple example: the NFL Yet Center (Boys and Girls Club) over by the B.W. Cooper Development was opened when we had a Super Bowl several years ago. It was billed as a gift from the NFL. Well that gift doesn't get yearly funding from the NFL and struggles to stay afloat every year. Now we know the NFL is the richest Sports Organization in the World and it would be easy for them to fund every Center in every city that has this so called gift. But it's more about P.R. than assisting

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manhood. God Bless Uncle Lionel."

Uncle Lionel and His Legacy

While Uncle Lionel was truly like an uncle to so many, renown trumpeter Kid Merv, who at age 13 was the youngest member of the Olympia Brass Band began working with Uncle Lionel and forged what has become a father and son relationship. "When I was a little boy he and Bennie Jones were playing with Olympia Brass Band, as time went on they started the Treme' Brass Band and I started sitting in with them. When I joined the band he took me under his wing. I'll never forget the time he taught me the song "Mack the Knife" that continues to be part of my sets today. He was a father figure he taught me how to be a vocalist. I learned so much from him because my own father died when I was 8 years old and he's been a great influence on my life."

As Uncle Lionel transcends his influence on many young musicians lives on, Kid Merv speaks on his impact on other artist and the traditional music of the City "I am doing this type of music because of Uncle Lionel, it has been instilled in me since I was a young kid and there are other musicians out there that are respecting the elders of the music and what they created."



Continuing he says of the future of the music of Uncle Lionel being preserved, "I feel it will not be loss, but it is moving slowly and there are a lot of young people becoming interested in the music and it is about building on the traditions that Uncle Lionel and others have built for us. It is about showing respect for the traditional music of our City. We should be nurturing what we do because we do this all year round, not just certain times of the year."

Reflecting on the life of a man who lived to celebrate life he says of the bond he had with Uncle Lionel, "Uncle Lionel and I were always on the phone, our birthdays are around the same time his birthday on Feb. 13 and mine was on the 18th. One year we had a birthday party together and I believe that was the year he had about 7 or 8 birthday parties, he was one who always enjoyed and celebrated life. We found each other on our birthdays, it was a tradition. It is bittersweet his passing, he put his mark on the world around the world. A true friend is gone, a true musician is gone."

Terrance Osborne, the artist that created the Official Jazzfest poster this year and has created Iconic Images of Trombone Shorty in 2012, Uncle Lionel in 2010 and Phil Frazier of Rebirth in 2007 was raised in' and created the image that became the Congo Square Poster featuring Uncle Lionel in 2010 says of his contribution to the City and its culture, "There will never be another Uncle Lionel. He was a simple, down to earth guy that would always have a story to match whatever mood you were in. His influential tal-

ent and always kind disposition earned him the title "Uncle" first by young aspiring musicians in our neighborhood and then ultimately by the world. One of my facebook friends posted... "When an old man dies, a library burns down" How fitting. Uncle Lionel will forever remain as part of our mental image of what New Orleans really is."

New Orleans is a place where music and art is life; it is in the sounds of the people's speech, the rhythm and pace of life. And a great man who came to embody that spirit of a City Uncle Lionel Batiste has gone to glory, but as a City weeps the loss of a giant, we celebrate his legacy and a heritage that makes us unique and who we are. In spite of destruction we continue to celebrate both life and death. And our traditions continue on our streets everyday, and it brings me back to a time after Hurricane Katrina, I was riding a bike around the City looking at damaged areas. And I heard the broken notes of a trumpet playing the beginning four notes of Joe Avery Blues, made popular by Harold DeJean, a song that we locals all know as "Second Line" and a young kid joined him and began beating a drum. For a second I shed tears of joy and pain watching them knowing that my City and its heritage and culture would live on.

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cities with long-term solutions to funding programs in the inner-cities where many of their players come from. Another solution could be every community where violence and crime disrupts the lives of taxpayer's first-class after-school and recreational programs should be established. How can we do that? Every Contractor that will walk away with millions from our would be Recovery could be directed to help establish these programs in needy, neglected parts of the City.

Another solution; a four point plan that deals with troubled youth in the areas of housing, education, economic development, and gun control. One thing I've recommended in the past is a Youth Council that would be elected from area high schools that would be part of the discussion on local economic inclusion, crime, poverty, recreation, and education. We will not solve the problems we're having with our youth if they're not invited to the

discussion. We may suppress the problems like we do with crime, but it won't be solved. Another solution to fighting crime and creating opportunity would be to include Neighborhood Organizations in the planning process and the awarding of contracts in their communities, so they can help to identify residents and locals that could qualify for sub-contracts and jobs.

Look everybody's efforts should be applauded, from Save Our Sons, to Cease Fire, Peacekeepers, CMS, Crimestoppers, etc. but any effort that will be SUSTAINABLE, has to have aggressive community policing, and an economic development plan that creates opportunities that can compete with the drug trade, and the underground economy. If not we'll suppress crime for a while and we'll be the Murder Capital again in the future!

Just a few things I learned from listening to people.

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