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A Data News Weekly Exclusive



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Orleans Parish Public Schools Employees May Get Their Day at the U.S. Supreme Court



Pictured above is lead Attorney Willie Zanders with 2 of 3 original plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit, Mildred Goodwin (left) and Oscarlene Nixon (right). Not pictured is Eddy Oliver, the first original plaintiff. Photo by A Square Photos

By Edwin Buggage

As we near the 10th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina we are still dealing with the after effects of a City devastated in many ways and still in a fight to recover. While we continue to see the physical damage

on a daily basis in this sad tale of two cities; there is a deeper human cost as the City has lost many of its citizens. What we have also witnessed is changing demographics and the reshaping of institutions and the locking out of certain people. After Hurricane Katrina many talked about the City and its plans to exclude

poor people, but failed to note the same phenomenon was also taking place among many middle-class African-Americans who are struggling to recover as well. For example many employed as educators came back to find themselves on the receiving end of what many deem as unfair treatment when 7,500 Orleans Parish

On the Cover: (first row l-r) Class Members Oscarlene Nixon, Linda Pichon, Cynthia Jordan, Mildred Goodwin, Dr. Antoinette Aubry-Guillory, Lois Lockhart; (second row l-r) Atty. Rico Alvendia, Atty. Suzette Bagneris, Atty. Juana Lombard, Atty. Mark Glaco, Evelyn Baptiste (Client Relations Manager); (third row l-r) Atty. Larry Samuel, Atty. Willie Zanders, Atty. Clarence Roby; (fourth row l-r) Atty. Wilson Boveland, Atty. Jeremy Pichon, Atty. Bart Kelly. Not pictured : Atty. Anthony Irpino and Atty. Walter Willard Photo by A Square Photos

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Public School employees were fired after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Since the mass termination of these employees there's been lawsuits filed in various state courts. That's resulted in both victories and losses for the plaintiffs. Now a document has been filed with the U.S. Supreme Court that can hopefully make a final decision about the fate of 7,500 employees.

"We filed an application with the United States Supreme Court requesting them to look at this case, because last year the Louisiana State Supreme Court after two previous verdicts in our favor dismissed the case," Willie Zanders, Lead Attorney for the 7,500 terminated employees told Data News Weekly. "Their rights have been violated and they have not been given due process and we feel this case should be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court."

In addition to Zanders who took on the case with 3 plaintiffs that multiplied to over 7,000, there was a similar case filed by the local teachers union that was settled in 2007. The Teachers Union decision was the rationale used by those in State Supreme Court who ruled in favor to dismiss their case in October of last year. While these cases were similar and some of the people were plaintiffs in both cases Zanders contends these suits are dissimilar in many ways and disagreed with the ruling by the majority.

"The Union lawsuit came about right after Katrina, but our lawsuit came first. The union dealt with the violation of their collective bargaining agreement, which had nothing to do with tenured state employees to their due process rights which are what our case is about. Our lawsuit is based on state mandated due process rights. The union settled their lawsuit in 2007. The case in 2007 did not stop our case which continued, if our cases were the same why didn't our case end at that point," Zanders told Data News Weekly.

Zanders speak positively about the case and feels it has a chance of being heard in the nation's highest court. He feels the victories in other courts before it reached the State Supreme Court were the right decisions. And even with the case being dismissed in the state's highest court he feels that Chief Justice Bernette Johnson, the first African-American Chief Justice of this judicial body who sided with the plaintiffs. He feels is a step in the right direction to vindicate those he feels was unfairly terminated.

"Chief Bernette Johnson wrote a very great dissenting opinion saying the 2007 teacher's union decision had nothing to do with our case because we were not named in the settlement and we are using major portions of her dissent in the document we sent to the United States Supreme Court." Continuing he says, "Civil District Court Judge Ethel Julian ruled in June of 2012 that they were wrongfully terminated, the local school board said they were being laid off but they were really being fired, so Judge Julian found in our favor. Also the state appeals court unanimously ruled in the plaintiff's favor saying they were wrongfully terminated in a decision representing the justices written by Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeal Judge Roland Belsome."

While this has become a political issue with people weighing in on both sides; this is something that's had a larger impact on individuals, families and the entire community post-Katrina.

"When you look at this you have to also think about the human impact, anytime you fire 7,500 employees who represent the Black middle-class in New Orleans that supported many things around the City. They supported the home mortgage industry, businesses such as beauticians, barbers, lawyers, accountants; all types of businesses they support were affected."

"Additionally, these employees were left without health insurance. One of plaintiff in this case, Gwendolyn Ridgley, died of Cancer. I feel if she would have had access to insurance it may have saved her life." He says of the human toll of this tragedy. "Since being wrongfully terminated in 2005 people's lives by no fault of their own been affected on an emotional, physical and financial level; firing 7500 people while they were under a mandatory evacuation is unconstitutional, immoral and un-American I believe it is wrong anyway you look at it."

While it is undeniable that the politics of race and class are at play in the school system that's changed in unprecedented ways post-Katrina. It is the rule of law that Zanders says will be important in deciding this case and he is encouraged by the people who encourage him to keep on fighting.

"We get positive feedback all the time on what we are doing, but I realize public opinion will not win this case, but it will be decided by the justices of the United States Supreme Court.

But we are very thankful people are encouraging us and they come from all backgrounds and I feel very good about that."

If this case reaches the U.S. Supreme Court and the Louisiana State Supreme Court's dismissal is upheld, the state and the Orleans Parish School Board will have to

pay out what is estimated at one-billion dollars in damages.

With the victories in the first two trials Zanders is optimistic but realistic, realizing this is an uphill climb to getting this case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Saying he doesn't care how long the fight will take, it is a fight for justice for peo-

ple who did an important job before Hurricane Katrina changed their lives forever; they were helping to shape the minds of the young who would lead us into the next generation. A noble cause that he hopes they can finally get the justice they deserve from the highest court in the land.



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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

4th Annual Sacred Music Festival

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

The 4th Annual Sacred Music Festival at The New Orleans Healing Center included a march for peace, Tibetan monks, Gospel music, Blues and Spiritual music, Japanese Shinto Drumming, Spoken word and Medieval Catholic Chants, Muslim call to prayer, Sufi Music, Mantra music and much, much more including the dedication of the new National Marie Laveau Shrine.



WWOZ Jazz & Heritage Pledge Drive

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

WWOZ 90.7 FM Jazz & Heritage Community supported radio ends its Spring 2015 Pledge Drive with a blowout bash at Kermit Ruffins Mother In Law Lounge with live broadcast of performances by Treme' Brass Band, Alvin Youngblood Hart, and Kermit Ruffins with the Barbecue Swingers, 'OZ' along with boiled crawfish, supportive listeners - members, and "OZ volunteers and staff.



Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events

Shoot Ya Best Shot!

2015 Super Sunday Highlights

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

There is nothing else in the entire world like Super Sunday in New Orleans. This year was as spectacular as any year before, with the color, the music and the celebratory feelings of the day. Super Sunday never disappoints, and of course, Data was there!!!



Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events

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#BlackGirlsMatter Right Here in America



Walter Fields
NNPA Columnist

Every morning, when I fix my teenage daughter breakfast and drop her off to school, she reminds me that #BlackGirlsMatter. Her journey has not been easy; made all the more difficult by an experience, beginning in middle school and persisting to high school, that threatened to crush her dreams by denying her access to classes education professionals deem critical to demonstrate college readiness. Had it not been for the advocacy of her parents, and the threat of litigation, my daughter would have been cast aside and surrendered to a curriculum that was not simply less challenging, but inadequate by the standards of competitive colleges and an increasingly analytical and technical workforce. Today, in her junior year, she remains one of only a handful of Black girls enrolled in advanced

honors and advanced placement classes in her public high school, Columbia Senior High School in suburban Maplewood, N.J.

My daughter's story is neither unique or an aberration. It is the reality facing Black girls in America. This is what the recently released report Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected confirms. The Center for Intersectional and Social Policy Studies at Columbia University and the African American Policy Forum, authors of the report, have provided the nation with a powerful narrative of the dilemma of Black girls in our country. The report describes the disproportionate punishment meted out to Black girls in school, with data showing that they are suspended six times the rate of white girls as 'zero tolerance' policies hit with racial precision. Black girls also receive more severe sentences than other girls when they enter the juvenile justice system and are the fastest growing population in the criminal justice system. They are also victims of bullying, sexual harassment and violence in school. Our girls are being pushed out but there is little public alarm, policy focus or media attention to their marginalization. Unlike our understandable focus on Black

boys, as seen in President Obama's 'My Brother's Keeper' initiative, our girls are being left to fend for themselves. And we are losing them.

Black girls suffer the discriminatory equivalent of hypertension. Racially based gender bias is a silent killer. It infests the spirits of girls with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, and early on narrows their possibilities. Black girls mostly suffer in silence, absorbing the blows, but incurring significant psychological damage along the way. Bright lights are extinguished early as Black girls encounter institutional bias in school buildings where their uniqueness, in everything from hair to dress to personality, is deemed anti-social and popular culture bombards them with stereotypes of Black females ranging from helpless to raging anger or hyper-sexualized. The intelligent, inquisitive, creative, caring and beautiful Black girl is virtually an urban myth in America when the imagery of them on the cultural landscape is surveyed.

Making matters worse is a nation that hides the suffering of Black girls from public view. Perhaps that is why I find President Obama's recently announced 'Let the Girls Learn' initiative so disappointing. The White House looked beyond

the shores of this nation to launch a global offensive for girls when if they simply Googled a zip code in Washington D.C., they would find Black girls deserving of its attention and policy focus. This might simply be the result of an African-American father who has not had to wrestle with his daughters feeling inadequate or experienced seeing pained expressions of silent suffering given that his children have been fortunate to be shielded by much, given the President's privilege and position. It is, however, a glaring omission by the Obama administration that defies what we know to be the experiences of Black girls in America. We need not search the world for girls in need when our children stand before us broken, rejected and yearning for recognition.

What I desire for our community of Black girls is what I wish for my daughter. I want us to embrace their individuality and celebrate their expressiveness and cultural dynamism. We must recognize their intelligence and support their intellectual curiosity while also encouraging their socializing and affirming their right to be different from boys, yet equal in standing. It is our responsibility to root out gender bias and make certain that our

institutions are not simply diverse but gender-inclusive, meaning opportunity is rooted in equity and not guided by male dominated definitions of worth and success. And, we must hold accountable those who trade in misogynist imagery that limits Black girls' imaginations to the stripper pole, video vixen or reality TV villains. There is a 'Black is Beautiful' canvas for Black girlhood that we must paint so our daughters can see the full expression of God's intent for their lives.

It is with this conviction that we must embrace the mantra #BlackGirlsMatter; because they do, and without the benefit of the full expression of their humanity we suffer as a people. There is no 'better day' for Black America if we persist on wearing gender blinders and if Black men, fathers or not, do not come to terms with the reality of shared suffering and become champions for gender equity. When I look in the mirror I have to see my daughter and make certain the reflection is one of strength, hope, faith and confidence that her life will have meaning and she will be given the opportunity to direct and fulfill her purpose in life.

Walter Fields is a father, husband and Executive Editor of North-StarNews.com

Home Style

Camellias: Japanese Roses

By LMG Calla Victoria
Data News Weekly Columnist

Camellias are a wonderful additions to any landscape. They are evergreen shrubs with large deep green waxy leaves year around, and they bloom from fall until late spring depending on the variety. The Camellia is a genus of flowering plants in the family Theaceae. They were originally found in Eastern and Southern Asia, from the Himalayas east to Japan and Indonesia. The most common varieties of Camellias are the Camellia sasanqua, and the Camellia japonica. The sasanquas start blooming in September, while the japonicas, like mine, put on their show from January through late spring with

big bodacious blooms ranging from red to white and everything in between. The easiest way to remember when they bloom is by the first letter of the name, sasanquas, start with the letter "s" and they start blooming in Septembers, while the japonicas start blooming in January. Although considered a shrub, some Camellia varieties get as large as 15 feet tall, but you can control the size by pruning. Camellias are nicknamed the Japanese Rose because their large double blooms do resemble several varieties of Roses.

Camellias will grow in most well-drained (or to say dry conditions) slightly acid soil. A soil pH (degree of acidity or alkalinity) of 6.0 - 6.5 is considered best for Camellias. However, they will tolerate

a lower pH. Plants in the sun may suffer scald on the leaves or leaves may appear yellow rather than deep green. It is recommended that Camellia sasanqua generally do better in the sun than those of C. japonica. However my japonica is planted facing east and gets quite a lot of sun with no problem. In fact I have never had issues with that plant. I received it about three Februarys ago as a valentine's gift, and it has been wonderful. I really forget that it is there until it starts blooming. I have never fertilized it, or pruned it so far. It gets zero attention and looks amazing.

Consider planting your Camellias along with other shrubs for an amazing display. During the late spring through early fall when the

Camellias are not in bloom, allow its flossy deep green foliage to be a backdrop of other shrubs and flowers. Plant masses of brilliant flowing plants near your Camellias for an electric display.

Camellias are generally planted in the late fall through the early spring, although they may be set out any month of the year if properly cared for. Adequate moisture is a necessity until the roots become well established in the soil. The newly developed roots will then provide enough moisture for the plant to start growth when spring arrives.

Water is not only essential for normal growth but a continuous supply ensures constant mineral uptake and maximum expansion of

cells making up the new growth. Irregular water supplies interrupt the growth process which can result in stunted leaves and stems.

Fertilizers should be applied in an economic but methodical process to ensure a steady release of nutrients over the growing season. Applications can be applied a week or two before new growth buds begin to swell. It may be best to apply nutrition in small to moderate quantities of three or more periods from March to September.

Major pruning should best be completed over winter or by early spring. While spring and summer growth develops, minor pruning

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"This Other World" Stages Richard Wright Haiku

"Keep Straight Down This Block. Then Turn Right Where You Will Find..."

Xavier University's Performance Studies Laboratory presents "This Other World," a site-specific performance developed around the posthumously published haiku of Richard Wright. The show runs March 26 - 28th at 6 PM, outdoors in the sculpture garden at the Xavier Art Village (3517 Lowerline Street). Weaving Wright's haiku with scenes from *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, "This Other World" explores the author's writing process, formative experiences with race identity, and iconic scenes from his literature. All performances are free and open to the public, but seating is limited. For additional information or ticket reservations, contact xuperforman-cestudieslaboratory@gmail.com.

In the final two years of his life while living in France, Wright com-



posed thousands of haiku, from which he arranged 817 for publication. *Haiku: The Last Poems of an American Icon* was published posthumously in 1998. Adapted and directed by Ross Louis from a broad range of source materials, "This Other World" features two Xavier students (Thomas Nash and Mia Ruffin) in a performance that examines the relationship between Wright's haiku and his earlier fiction and nonfiction. Drawing heavily on archival materials obtained from the Richard Wright collection at the Beinecke Rare Manuscript and Book Library at Yale University, the script includes haiku drafts

and personal correspondence.

Staged outdoors, "This Other World" incorporates visual and physical elements of Xavier's Art Village, while considering several questions about translating Wright's haiku into performance. How might a larger body of 4,000 haiku be curated into performance text? How does Wright represent place within his haiku, especially rural Southern places? How do the values of the haiku genre guide decisions about space, time and movement in a performance of Wright's work?

"This Other World" is the third event of the Performance Studies

Laboratory's 2014-2015 season, which included "Here Is Where You Turn Back" in October 2014 and the Patti Pace Performance Festival in February 2015. A Student Performance Showcase will close the season on April 16, 2015. The Performance Studies Laboratory, launched in 2013, is an interdisciplinary working group of Xavier faculty with training and backgrounds in Performance Studies. Lab co-founders Lisa Flanagan, Ross Louis, and Robin Vander teach courses, mentor student research, and collaborate with other faculty on performance-based projects. Other faculty collaborators include Liz Edgecomb, Kimberly Chandler, and Ron Bechet. Performance Studies is often referred to as an embodied way of knowing, a creative approach to scholarship that allows us to make sense of ourselves and others. The Performance Studies Laboratory studies performance in contexts such as literature, cultural ritual and rites of passage, identity construction, civic engagement and political actions, and visual and material culture, among others.

Liberty Bank Merges with First Tuskegee Bank

Liberty Bank and Trust Company ("Liberty Bank") announced that it has acquired the assets and banking relationships of First Tuskegee Bank through a merger agreement that will greatly expand and enhance the services offered by the merged financial institution in Tuskegee and Montgomery, Alabama. The acquisition is a continuation of Liberty Bank's rapid expansion over the past 10 years and marks its first venture into the state of Alabama. Liberty now has operating financial institutions in eight (8) states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri and now Alabama) and nine (9) major urban areas (New Orleans, Baton Rouge, LA - Jackson, MS - Houston, TX - Kansas City, MO/KS - Chicago, IL - Detroit, MI - Tuske-

gee, AL - Montgomery, AL).

The purchase of the assets of First Tuskegee Bank, which has branches in both Tuskegee and Montgomery, AL, will be effective at close of business Friday, March 13, 2015. The new merged institution will re-open on Monday, March 16th as Liberty Bank. Leadership and key banking personnel will remain in place and continue operations at the branch in Tuskegee and two branches in Montgomery. The acquisition has been approved by all of the involved regulatory authorities.

Liberty President and CEO, Alden J. McDonald, Jr. said, "The merger of our financial institutions will be very beneficial for the former customers of First Tuskegee Bank. We intend to continue the mission-driven focus as a commu-

nity development financial institution. Tuskegee and Montgomery are extremely rich in history and we are proud to continue to carry the torch of over a century of service as we introduce Liberty Bank to the Alabama market. The Tuskegee and Montgomery locations will also have a more robust mortgage product offering for its customers and a variety of personal and commercial banking options," said McDonald.

Liberty Bank, headquartered in New Orleans, LA, and was founded in 1972. Liberty Bank has grown from an initial asset base of two million dollars (\$2 million) to more than six hundred million dollars (\$600 million). Liberty Bank is among the top 3 largest African-American owned financial institutions in the United States.

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Home Style, Continued from page 6.

can be accomplished by breaking out soft new growth. The ultimate pruning plan will reflect one's interests in Camellia culture. Thick vegetation is the rule for landscape plants. Inside branches should be removed to reduce the accumulation of pests, scale in particular.

Aside from being beautiful and ornamental, *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant, is of major commercial importance because tea is made from its leaves. While the finest teas are produced by *C. sinensis* thanks to millennia of selective breeding of this species, many other *Camellias* can be used to produce a similar beverage. In some parts of Japan, tea made from *C. sasanqua* leaves is popular. Tea oil used in skincare and cooking oil is made by pressing the seeds of *C. oleifera*, *C. japonica*. *Camellia* oil is also used to clean and protect the blades of cutting instruments

If you are interested in learning about Camellias, consider attending the Camellia Workshop on Sunday, MARCH 16th, sponsored by the Camellia Club of New Orleans from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., 2 p.m. at Longue Vue House and Gardens. This event is free and open to the public. (504) 616-4378, npiatzajr@gmail.com.

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