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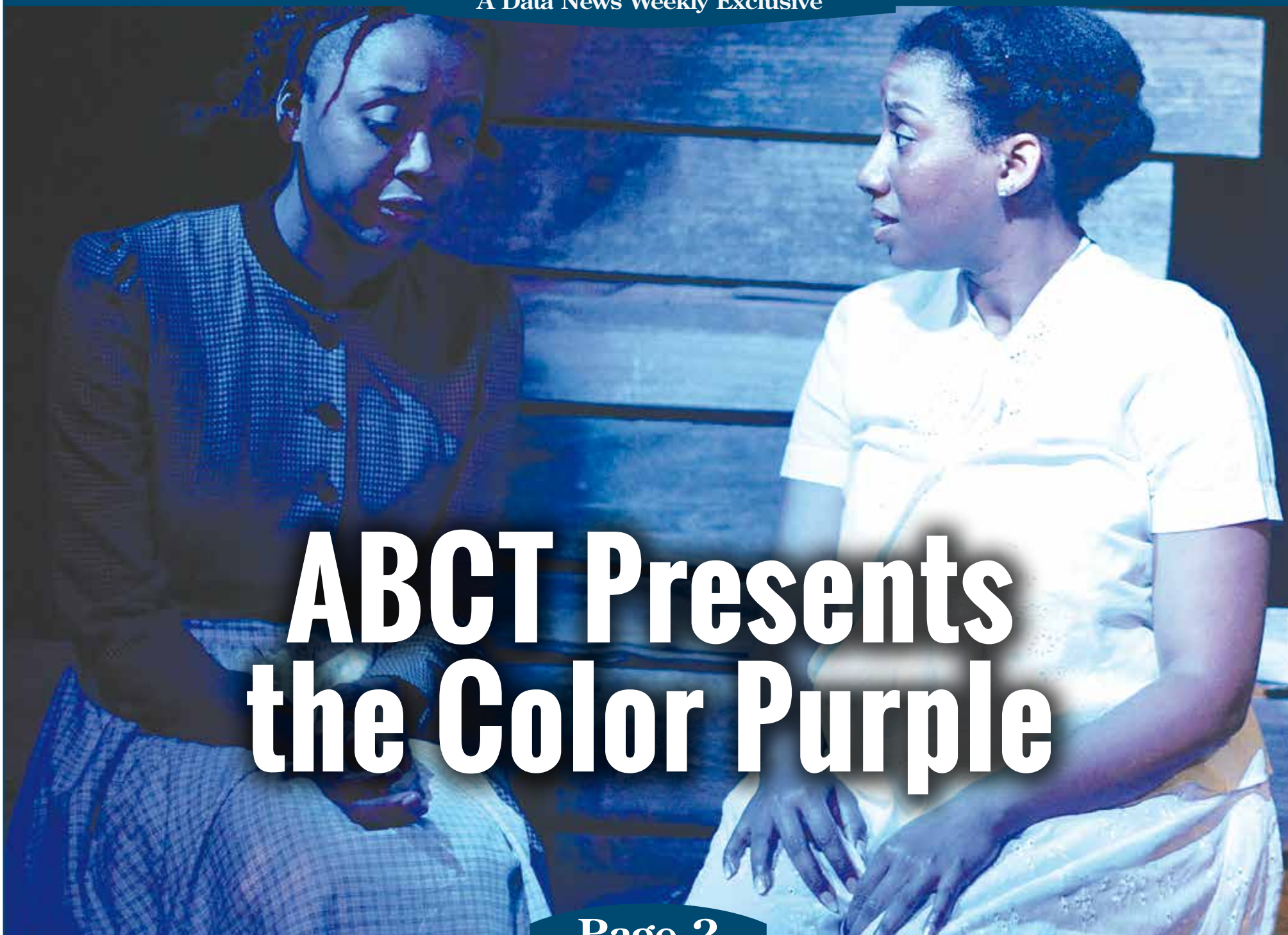
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**Data
Zone
Page 7**

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A Data News Weekly Exclusive



ABCT Presents the Color Purple

Page 2



Newsmaker
Austin Badon
takes on Marijuana
Possession Laws

Page 4

Special

NOLA Secondliner Series
Ed Buckner



Page 5

ABCT Presents the Magnificent Grammy-Nominated Musical Saga "The Color Purple"



On the Cover and above are members of the cast of "The Color Purple", playing at the Anthony Bean Community Theater.

by Edwin Buggage

Thirty Years after The Color Purple hit the big screen. It makes its onstage premiere in New Orleans at Anthony Bean Community Theater.

The Anthony Bean Community Theater has become a staple in New Orleans for the best in stage

performances. His upcoming project is the highly anticipated "The Color Purple."

"I am excited about bringing this show to New Orleans, people are really excited to see it and it's a show all can enjoy," says Bean.

In a press release sent out to describe the play it says. Expect to be moved and inspired by this new

musical adaptation of the groundbreaking novel and movie adapted by Marsha Norman from the Classic Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Alice Walker, music and lyrics by Brenda Russell, Aliee Willis and Stephen Bray! Directed by Anthony Bean and choreographed by Giselle Nakhid. Vocals by Steve Burke and Musical directions by Emanuel Burke. THE COLOR PURPLE

Cover Story, Continued
on next page.

INSIDE DATA

Cover Story	2	Commentary.	8
Newsmaker	4	Dollars & Sense	9
Special Series	5	State & Local News .	10
Data Zone	6		

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.



features over 30 extremely talented, singers and dancers throughout the New Orleans area; among them: Asia Nelson as Celie. Damien A. Moses as Mister. DC Paul as Harpo, Giselle Nakhid as Nettie, Tomeka L. Williams as Shug and Jade Hillery as Sofia - ABCT will stage the first local production of this smash Broadway hit. From the moving film by Steven Spielberg, *The Color Purple* is an inspiring family saga that tells the unforgettable story of a woman who-through love-finds the strength to triumph over adversity and discover her unique voice in the world. Set to a joyous score featuring jazz, ragtime, gospel, and blues, *The Color Purple* is a story of hope, a testament to the healing power of love, and a celebration of life.

"I loves Harpo. God knows I do, but I'll kill him dead fo' I let him beat me"

"You sho' is ugly" These are just a few of the oft-quoted lines from film version of *The Color Purple*. In fact, it's not at all that uncommon to

find Black people who can literally recite the entire film line by line. Today *The Color Purple* is such a beloved film in the Black community that it's hard that it's been 30 years since "*The Color Purple*" hit the big screen.

He has an amazing cast of actors and actresses in this play. Some who have been with him for many years.

"All the learning, training, performing, observing the stage veterans at ABCT has built my confidence and prepared me for this moment," says Actor DC Paul who plays Harpo.

As one looks back at the book and the film, it has been three decades since many of the characters have become a permanent part of our consciousness one of those characters is Shug Avery, a singer who is strong yet conflicted in her path to understanding herself as a woman.

"Having the opportunity to play Shug Avery has enabled me to break free from an unordinary

mundane existence and live in truth. Shug's character has the ability to be fearless, sexy, and sassy. It has been a real awakening of spirit," says Tomeka L. Williams, who portrays Shug in the ABCT Production.

In addition to a great story, *The Color Purple* has amazing musical and dance sequences. Something that will be on full display according to Giselle R. Nakhid, who is the play's choreographer and also plays Nettie.

"I always admired the movie *The Color Purple*. I saw the musical twice. So when asked to choreograph the musical for ABCT I didn't hesitate to say yes but deep down I really wanted to play Nettie. I respected her tenacious and persistent character and saw myself in her. In this play I was able to teach dance which is my first love and to play Nettie, couldn't have asked for anything more."

Bean feels that this story of empowerment and reflection will touch people and hearts and souls.

"*The Color Purple* is a timeless story of overcoming obstacles in life on a way to redemption. I hope people come out to enjoy this magnificent play that will make them, laugh, cry, tap their feet and realize that you can overcome any struggle in life."

Performance Schedule is as follows:

Friday, May 22 at 8:00 PM
 Saturday, May 23 at 8:00 PM
 Sunday, May 24 at 3:00 PM
 Friday, May 29 at 8:00 PM
 Saturday, May 30 at 8:00 PM
 Sunday, May 31 at 3:00 PM
 Friday, June 5 at 8: PM
 Saturday, June 6 at 8:00 PM
 Sunday, June 7 at 8:00 PM
 Friday, June 12 at 8:00 PM
 Saturday, June 13 at 8:00 PM
 Sunday, June 14 at 3:00 PM

Tickets are \$25 and special pricing for groups of 12+ are available by calling the Box Office at (504) 862-PLAY (7529). Box Office hours are Thursday - Saturday, 6pm - 8pm and two hours before performances.

You can also charge by phone or on line at www.anthonybeantheater.com/BoxOffice.cfm

Louisiana Legislator Austin Badon Proposes Reducing Penalties for Marijuana Possession

By Edwin Buggage

Across the country we see a relaxing of penalties or the decriminalization of possession of marijuana. Today you can look at states like Colorado or California and see the wave against the prohibitions against marijuana is changing.

In a state closer to home in Texas just approved a limited medical marijuana bill. Recently, a bill authored by State Representative Austin Badon, from District 100 covering parts of New Orleans East looks to alter the punishment for marijuana possession. His bill passed the Louisiana House and soon the State Senate will take up this issue.

Presently, Louisiana Law has some of the stiffest penalties for marijuana in the country, which in part raises the number of convicts that gives the state the distinction of being the world prison capital. Below is the law that is on the books in the State of Louisiana for possessing marijuana.

For first offenders, possession of less than 60 pounds of marijuana is punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and/or up to 6 months of imprisonment. Second offenses are punishable by a fine of \$250-\$2500 and/or up to 5 years of imprisonment. Both first and second offenders may be eligible for probation, which will include 32 hours of community service and a substance abuse program, the cost of probation will be paid by the defendant. Third and subsequent offenses are punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or up to 20 years of imprisonment.



"With this change in the law for possession of marijuana would be six month maximum for first offense, second conviction is now up to five years, my bill would drop it down to a maximum of two years. The third conviction maximum of twenty years, my bill would drop it down a maximum of five years," says Badon would happen if his bill became law.

This bill was proposed before by Badon and was rejected by the legislature, but today as opinions about possession of marijuana is changing nationally he sees that more people are supporting reforms even some of those in law enforcement and others in the Criminal Justice System.

"The Sheriff's Association and the District Attorney's Association

are no longer in opposition of this legislation. In the past they have been but today they are not. There have been changes in marijuana laws across the country and it is time we bring some reforms to Louisiana," an enthused Badon told Data News Weekly as his bill is garnering support.

Some of the critics say that this bill is a route to legalizing marijuana use in Louisiana. That some feel would cause larger societal problems. Badon says that's not the goal of this legislation. He says this legislation is about eliminating extraneous sentencing that impacts individuals and families in negative ways in addition to saving the state money on the cost of locking up those charged with marijuana possession.

"There are two completely different issues, legalizing marijuana is not what this bill is focusing on. It is working to reform laws on the books that punishes people in ways that are severe and need to be changed. We need to bring the sentencing in line with the severity of the offense."

He says it would make fiscal sense for the state from a budgetary standpoint and reduce the prison population.

"This reform would save 12 million dollars over 5 years, it takes 20,000 dollars a year in tax payer's dollars to house these people monies that could be used in other ways. We should now be in the business of breaking up families and disrupting people lives for such a minor offense and simply the penalty does not match the crime."

He illustrates the problem with this law by speaking about the case of Bernard Nobles a man who in 2011 was convicted and sentenced to thirteen years for possessing two marijuana cigarettes.

"Bernard Nobles was sentenced to thirteen years for having two marijuana cigarettes for his own personal use and someone like former Saints player Darren Sharper

do not match with the severity of the crime. Reform is necessary if we are to have fairness in our Criminal Justice System."

He says the way that the laws that are presently on the books adversely impacts poor people and minorities.

"The present laws for possession of marijuana disproportionately affects low income people and minorities. I see they are more likely to get charged and have that scarlet letter on them for life. It makes it more difficult for them to get a job and they are branded as a felon."

With many of the problems in New Orleans Criminal Justice System; funding a consent decree, recruiting more police, fighting violent crime and other more pressing priorities Badon says it is time for this law to change and would steer valuable resources to help solve some of the other problems of the City and the state.

"We have more important things that our officers or people in the Criminal Justice System to deal with other than simple marijuana possession. We need to have sensible guidelines that is manageable for those who offend. This type of reform is good on two fronts; every



who had powerful and potent drugs he used for sexual assaults on women and he was only sentenced to 9 years in federal prison. These laws

dollar we can save we can use on infrastructure and other things and not spend our valuable dollars in incarcerating people unnecessarily."

Second-Liner Profile Series

Edward Buckner



Photo by William Widmer for MSNBC

By Rachel Carrico
Data News Weekly
Contributor

On Mother's Day, May 10, 2015, the Original Big 7 Social Aid and Pleasure Club came out from the home of its President, Edward Buckner. If you attended, you saw a colorful display of suits and decorations that Buckner began designing many months ago. These days, it is customary for second-line clubs to outsource the construction of their streamers and fans, but the Big 7 still handcrafts every item that they carry into the street. Buckner is always thinking up new designs, sketching them on paper and crafting prototypes. He starts planning for next year immediately after each parade. Club members see his wheels turning while strutting inside the ropes and remind him, "Ed, stop thinking about what you're going to be doing next year. Enjoy the rest of the parade!"

The Big 7 started in 1995 as "Big 7 on the Other Side," based in the St. Bernard Housing Project. Buckner has been involved since the beginning, and became president in 2000. He also stays busy coach-

ing football and directing the Big 7's Youth Program, the Red Flame Hunters Mardi Gras Indian Tribe. This group of young men and women, led by 17-year-old Chief Justin "Tugga" Cloud, sews their own suits and takes to the streets each Mardi Gras day. "That's one of the give-back things we do as the Big 7; we want to make sure that we are helping this culture survive."

Cultural survival is very important to Buckner, as he was raised in it. "I've been second-lining since before I knew it. My daddy was bringing me to parades, hanging out at the second-lines, so all of the stuff came to me just so easy." He recalls sitting on the stoop with his father. "We'd be singing 'Two-Way-Pocky-Way' and dancing, and it would be two, three o'clock in the morning in the [St. Bernard] projects." Buckner first paraded with the marching band at Andrew J. Bell Jr. High School, where he ascended to the role of drum major. As a twelve-year old, he "was going to second-line parades on Sunday. I was highly upset if my daddy didn't want to take me with him. I wanted to be a part of it. When I got a chance to join the Big 7 that was the highlight of my life."



Photo of Ed with Indian suit behind him (by Louise De Vaney for nola.com)

Buckner's parading life has encountered some setbacks, but he perseveres. Three years ago, he suffered a heart attack and still hit the street. "What better thing to

do dying? You're dying and you're parading. Instead of being sad: 'Oh he's dying and he went away.' No! 'He just danced himself to death.'" In fact, second-lining keeps

Buckner healthy. "Second-lining is tougher than a football game. It's a physical, physical thing. A lot of people don't know that the physical condition that those dancers are in is incredible." Another recent setback occurred in 2013, when the Big 7's second-line was tragically halted by a shooting that injured twenty paraders. However, the club refused to let the tragedy curtail their celebration, and staged a "re-do" parade a few weeks later. Buckner sees the activities of social aid and pleasure clubs and Mardi Gras Indian Tribes as important antidotes to violence. For this reason, he accepts any young person into the Red Flame Hunters. "My thing is, with so much killing that's going on in the streets of New Orleans, I can't turn not one child away. So I will have to figure out more creative ways of getting funding to help me with those suits. But I'm not going to turn them away. I won't lose them back to the streets." Buckner's greatest hope is that he can nurture a younger generation: "Hopefully, they can understand the great quality of the very unique culture that only happens here in New Orleans."

Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Michael Ward Gets Married

Michael Marries Lenzie

Violinist Michael Ward and Lenzie LeBeauf exchanges their wedding vows on Sunday, May 17th at the Greta United Methodist Church. It was a beautiful ceremony attended by many. A reception followed at the Pontchartrain Landing where musicians from throughout the country performed and Data was there!!! Photos by Terry B. Jones



Nicole Holds her Hawaiian Birthday Party at The Prime Example

On Friday May 15th, Nicole Carter, one of The Prime Examples main barmaid's holds her Annual Hawaiian Theme Birthday Party. It was a big success with lots of guest, food and of course Data was there!!! Photos by Terry B Jones



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

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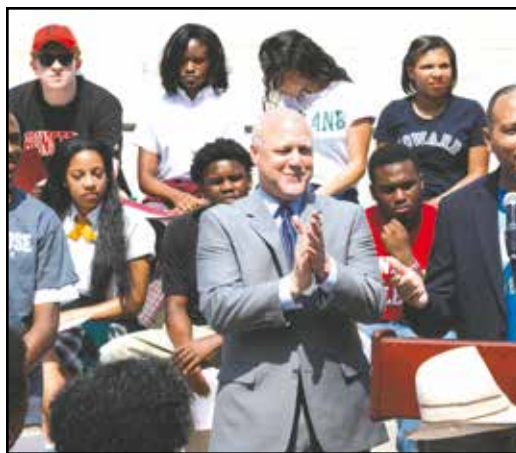
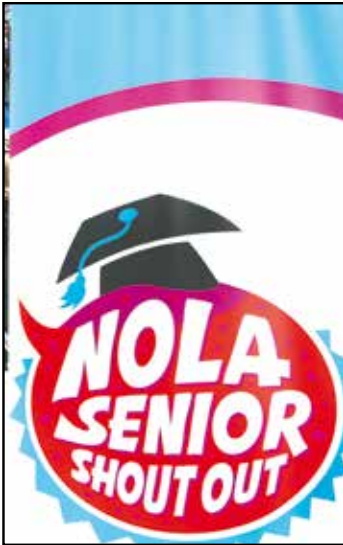
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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

NOLA Senior Shout-Out Day

More than 200 New Orleans Seniors and an additional 200 students (400 total) joined Mayor Mitch Landrieu, RSD Supt. Patrick Dobard, OPSB Supt. Henderson Lewis, BESE Member Kira Orange-Jones, Councilmember Jason Williams and a number of elected officials and education leaders for NOLA Senior Shout Out Day on Friday, May 8th at Champions Square. This event was filled with band performances from Landry-Walker and Edna Karr High Schools, but more importantly these students told the world where they are headed off to college. Some of these students have faced tremendous adversity, and still many have excelled academically. Data News Weekly salutes the Class of 2015.



ABT Fifteen Years of Theater Excellence **2015**
Anthony Bean Community Theater
 Presents the New Orleans Premiere of

The Color Purple

The Musical about Love

Directed by **Anthony Bean** Choreography by **Giselle Nakhid**

Adapted by Marsha Norman from the novel by Alice Walker
 Music and Lyrics by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis and Stephen Bray!

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Michelle Obama Resists Taking the Easy Way Out



Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

More than any other first lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama continues to stand above those who would attempt to distort her leadership. First Lady Obama's recent commencement address at the Tuskegee University in Alabama exemplified her courage to speak truth to the world without fear of repercussions.

Michelle Obama's resilient optimism is refreshing as well as sobering. I am certain the class of 2015 at Tuskegee will always remember the strong and poignant words of wisdom that they were given during their graduation ceremonies. But we all can learn from her timely

remarks.

We live today in an increased atmosphere of racial polarization in America since the election and re-election of President Barack Obama. We, therefore, should welcome public utterances that transcend the prevalent negativity surrounding any attempt to address the question of race in the United States.

Michele Obama is perfectly qualified and strategically positioned to use her leadership in a constructive manner to advance the interests of Black America and all those who struggle and cry out for freedom, justice and equality. As a talented Harvard Law School graduate, devoted mother, and loyal spouse to the president, the first lady has risen to become one of the most admired persons in the world.

The first lady eloquently stated, "But here's the thing – our history provides us with a better story, a better blueprint for how we can win. It teaches us that when we pull ourselves out of those lowest emotional depths, and we channel our frustra-

tions into studying and organizing and banding together – then we can build ourselves and our communities up. We can take on those deep-rooted problems, and together – together – we can overcome anything that stands in our way."

In other words, we should strive to avoid complacency and the cynicism of hopelessness. The history and the centuries-old legacy of African people in America and throughout the world proves our ability to overcome the hardships of oppression and injustice. It was also good to hear Michelle Obama call for Black American unity and "banding together."

Our families and communities across the nation are certainly in critical need of greater unity and collective resolve to stand up together to provide leadership and direction in particular for our youth and young emerging leaders. We cannot afford to permit the evolution of an ahistorical generation of young people who have not been given the truth of our history nor given the encouragement that they

need to excel and make their mark on history today.

In fact, over the next weeks we will witness numerous graduation ceremonies in particular at other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The good news is that thousands of Black American college graduates from HBCUs and from other institutions of higher learning will be pushing forward to demand greater access to wealth-building careers with the intent on giving more back to the communities from which they have emerged. Like the first lady, I am optimistic about the future to the extent to which we continue to stand up to injustice while at the same time pressing forth to economically empower our families and communities.

Education and empowerment are both goals that must be attained and each generation has to rise to the occasion with persistence and focus. There will be setbacks and sometimes disappointments in everyone's life. Yet, the enduring lesson from Michelle Obama's magnif-

icent address was that when those life challenges happen, do not let your problems or critics define who you are. We have to have faith in our own capacity to rebound and to stand for truth even when it might not be the popular or politically expedient.

We are a resilient people. We resist oppression. We are against inequality and injustice. We stand for liberation and freedom for ourselves and for all people. The more we stand together, the more we make progress. We are grateful that in our lifetime we are privileged to witness how the first lady epitomizes what it means to be a freedom fighter with courage and grace, but most of all, with a glowing resilience that motivates and inspires others to excel.

Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is the President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and can be reached for national advertisement sales and partnership proposals at: dr.bchavis@nnpa.org; and for lectures and other professional consultations at: <http://drbenjaminfchavisjr.wix.com/drbcfc>

To Be Equal

A Message for the Class of 2015



Marc Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

If you are disposed to using the Internet as your guide, a diploma will generally be described as the proof of your successful completion of a course of study, or the bestowal of an academic degree. Speaking from personal experience, I can tell you that diploma in your grasp, occupying a prominent space on a wall or waiting to be pressed into your eager hand is so much more than the sum of your years-long efforts to be where you are today. Your degree is a key that

opens a new door, a new phase of life and a new set of challenges.

Your life's journey – and its achievements – does not end here. Celebrate, because you've earned it; bask in your well-earned feeling of accomplishment today, because tomorrow you will find that there is much work to be done.

On the other side of that new door is a staircase, and that staircase may not be the kind fashioned from crystal with smooth, reliable, clear-cut steps. Obstacles may slow or impede your climb. There may be tacks, broken floorboards and torn up carpet that would trip, or at worst, defeat someone without the training you have been so fortunate to attain. There is no shortcut here, no elevator, or bypassing of these difficult steps and turns. There is, however, the choice to apply the perseverance and commitment to excellence you have already shown in your higher education journey.

On the one hand, there is much to celebrate in our country when

it comes to academic achievement in African-American communities. Today, we enjoy the highest high school graduation rates in history. More students of color are in college and dropout rates are at historic lows.

But the wealth and unemployment gap between Blacks and Whites remains wide. While the Black unemployment rate has finally dipped into the single digits, it stubbornly remains more than twice as high as the jobless rate for Whites. As our country's economy continues to make steady gains after the debilitating 2008 recession, millions in Black and Brown communities are being left behind. In this country—founded largely on the principle of economic progress through hard work—the American dream of upward mobility remains only a dream for too many of its citizens.

Your education, drive and diploma, may likely shield you from the harsh economic realities experienced

throughout communities of color across our nation, but it does not strip you of an obligation to be an actor, rather than a spectator, in our country's struggle to create one nation with liberty, justice and economic opportunity for all.

No one gets to where they are on his or her own. You have parents, grandparents, friends and family members who invested in your future success, put you on this path and made sure you stayed the course. How will you repay their commitment to you? Whether your ancestors came here by plane, by train, by ship or shackled underneath the hull of a ship; whether the continent they called home was Asia, Europe or Africa, what they did when they reached the shores of our nation, what they sacrificed—all of it is debt incurred. How will you choose to compensate them for their struggles?

Among you are the teachers who will lift the standard of education in poor communities and be-

gin to close the achievement gap; among you are the preachers who will heal the wounds of communities torn apart by violence; among you are the elected officials who will institute laws and policies that promote social and economic fairness for all of America's citizens. Herein lies the answer. The answer our nation has been searching for is you and your talent, put to a higher purpose.

I cannot promise you that your climb to success in this life will be a crystal stair. You may very well encounter dark corners and obstacles. What I can promise you is that you have been prepared to meet these challenges head on. And more than meet these challenges, you have also been prepared to be an actor in solving so many of the longstanding issues and inequities facing our nation, so "don't you turn back."

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

'Credit Invisible' Blacks and Latinos

By Charlene Crowell
NNPA Columnist

When it comes to consumer finance, traditional lenders usually review credit scores before reaching a decision. In general, the higher a consumer's credit score is, the lower the cost of credit they will pay. Conversely, the lower one's credit score, the higher the cost of credit and interest will likely be. Whether applying for a credit card, auto loan or a mortgage, bad credit histories make future credit and borrowing more expensive.

But according to a new report by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), there are literally 45 million consumers – most of whom are either Black or Latino – who do not fall into traditional credit profiles. Beyond race and ethnicity, the affected consumers often live in low-income neighborhoods.

"When consumers do not have a credit report, or have too little information to have a credit score, the impact on their lives can be profound," said CFPB Director Rich-

ard Cordray. "It can preclude them from accessing credit and taking advantage of certain opportunities."

Cordray explained, "And given that we found that consumers in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to be credit invisible or unscored, this may be limiting opportunities for some of the most economically vulnerable consumers."

CFPB found that one in 10 consumers – some 26 million people – are "credit invisible," meaning they have no credit history with any of the three major nationwide credit-reporting companies. The Bureau's analysis suggests that the differences across racial and ethnic groups occur in early adult lives and persist thereafter.

An additional 19 million consumers are "unscored," with credit profiles either out-of-date or insufficient to be consistent with today's commercially-available credit scoring model.

In comparing the credit experiences of consumers by race and ethnicity, CFPB found that 13 percent of Black consumers and 12



percent of Latino consumers are "unscored," compared to only 7 percent of White consumers.

For the credit invisible, the incidences are higher. About 15 percent of Black and Latino consumers are in this credit group, compared to only 9 percent of Whites.

In other words, a significant number of consumers of color are living outside of the financial mainstream. Instead of having bank accounts or credit cards, these consumers are likely to use money orders, check cashing services, pre-paid debit cards and other costly alternative financial services that facilitate per-

sonal financial transactions while denying them the ability to build solid credit profiles.

While each credit reporting agency has its own criteria, typically consumers with comparatively high credit scores are able to secure the lowest lending rates and fees on financial services. According to FICO, recent credit activity connotes at least one account with activity over the last six months or longer. FICO scores can be as low as 300 or as high as 850.

For consumer advocates, access to credit continues to be a concern, especially when consum-

ers of color are involved.

"The CFPB research suggests that alternative or enhanced credit reporting tools could ensure African-Americans and Latinos have more complete credit histories. The current system does not provide a complete picture of consumers in these growing communities – often forcing them to pay higher fees for financial services," said Nikitra Bailey, executive vice-president with the Center for Responsible Lending. "This, in turn, leaves families and whole communities locked out of mainstream lending and ripe for abuse by predatory lenders."

"Just because a person or family lives in poverty, does not mean their only option should be a predatory lender. Access to credit can and should open doors of opportunity to a range of financial services that are fair, accessible, affordable and transparent for everyone."

Charlene Crowell is a communications manager with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org.

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Wage Theft Threatens Latinos, All Workers In New Orleans

By Charles Turner
Data News Weekly
Contributor

Since the influx of Latino immigrants into New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina there have been reports of hostility between Latino and native New Orleans residents. However, after speaking with members of the Latino immigrant community animosity from neighbors is not as much of a concern as it once was.

"I had a problem with my neighbor before, she wanted me to leave" Juan, a day laborer, recalls his first living situation after Hurricane Katrina, "people are less aggressive now, it's not like before."

The two concerns that were cited the most were: the threat of deportation and not being paid for work performed, a crime known as 'wage theft'. The endemic nature of wage theft suffered by the Latino community was perhaps summarized best in a 2009 study from the Southern Poverty Law Center that surveyed hundreds of laborers in New Orleans. The SPLC report makes it evident that New Orleans's problem is not with Latinos, the problem is with labor rights.

Wage Theft And Abuse Looms Over Every Undocumented Worker

The crime of wage theft was especially common for Latinos in New Orleans during the lawless era immediately after Hurricane Katrina. The most startling statistic from the SPLC report was that 8 out of every 10 Latinos in 2006 reported an experience wage theft in New Orleans. Only a fraction of these were reported to legal representation. This is due to what Elizabeth Fussell, of Brown University, refers to as the 'Deportation Threat Dynamic': The hesitation to involve law enforcement in fear of deportation, a fear that an unscrupulous employer may exploit.

There have been a few legal victories for Latino workers and other exploited immigrant groups since the post-storm era that have elevated employer accountability. Unfortunately, wage theft remains prevalent mainly because the state of Louisiana is uninterested in policing the crime.



A State Uninterested In The Rights Of The Worker

Louisiana has opted to have a Department of Labor that is essentially detached from enforcing laws concerning wage and/or hours, instead deferring to the US Department of Labor. But like any federal agency, especially one that was considered 'non-essential' during the 2013 government shutdown, it only has enough resources to pursue a fraction of the complaints. This pushes many Latino victims of wage theft to seek the legal assistance of people like Luz Molina, Professor of Loyola University and a leader of the Workplace Justice Project.

Without the help of pro bono legal assistance, litigation against an employer can seem futile. Besides the filing fee, which is roughly \$375 in Orleans Parish court, there are other costs. For example, some of Molina's clients are faced with employers who avoid court appearances, "they hide from service. So you may have to hire a private process server to find this person". And of course victims who do not speak Spanish have to hire their own translator since the state courts do not accommodate foreign-language services. The expensive route of litigation is disheartening enough for many wage theft victims to simply hope it does not happen again.

Deportation and language barriers may make undocumented immigrants particularly vulnerable to wage theft. That said, a study on

wage theft trends conducted by the National Employment Law Project found that the crime impacts low-wage labor market as a whole.

Wage Theft is Not a Latino Issue, Its A Low-Wage Issue

Native-born Americans rarely face a situation, like that of many immigrant day laborers, where they are not paid anything. A common scenario, especially in large corporations, is where a worker is forced to clock out even while still having more shifts to complete. Or an employee is docked pay without warning or for an infraction that the worker was unaware of.

NELP states in their study that 39 percent of those interviewed were illegal immigrants, 31 percent were immigrants here legally, and 30 percent were citizens born in the US. Out of this surveyed group, 68 percent were victims of a violation in the agreed upon pay.

While immigrants make up the most of the 68 percent, African-Americans were the next most likely victims. African-American workers were three times more likely to be paid less than the minimum wage compared to their white counterparts.

Similar to Latino workers in New Orleans, African-American victims of wage theft rarely recover money lost. According to the Economic Policy Institute, while more than \$933 million was recovered for wage theft victims in 2012, it is es-

timated that the US is home to \$50 billion in wage theft within one calendar year.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know if New Orleans's level of wage theft is accurately represented in the \$50 billion figure since Louisiana does not have a Labor Department that investigates wage-related complaints. In fact, Louisiana routinely does not respond to surveys conducted by EPI or other studies examining wage theft. Instead, the EPI and NEPL studies interviewed employees from New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago and extrapolated from the findings to depict the national population. All three of these cities, and their respective states, have agencies in place to document labor infractions thus making them ideal for a case study on the subject compared to a city like New Orleans.

Conservative analysts criticize the assumption that the levels of wage theft in New York City translate through the country. They argue that quadrupling of wage theft complaints within the past 12 years is a vastly overblown phenomenon in the nation's more liberal pockets. It is possible that, since it is easier for workers to file a wage related complaint, statistics on wage theft in New York City may be inflated. But then similar logic would indict that New York City employers would be far less likely to commit wage theft if the legal system favored employee

restitution. While we do not have official figures on wage issues in New Orleans, it seems likely that wage theft is as prevalent here as in New York City; it may be more so considering Louisiana's laissez-faire approach to labor rights.

Where We Are Now

The heavy burden of wage theft among African-Americans and Latinos begs the question whether these two communities will band together to mobilize on this issue. The idea of low-income New Orleanians organizing together across racial and cultural lines is not something new to the city. The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, along with other activist groups, were able to facilitate a strong solidarity movement after Katrina that resulted in reforms in how police interacted with the Latino community.

Now a primary focus of political organizing has been to increase the minimum wage. Progressive organizations in Louisiana like STAND with Dignity, a group that represents mainly low-income African Americans in New Orleans, have begun to shift efforts on raising the federal minimum wage after failing to do so in the LA statehouse. A focus on federal legislation is a sensible tactic since a national increase would help alleviate poverty by most accounts. That said, a review of wage theft trends indicate that a minimum wage boost does not equate a boost in wages of every minimum wage worker. This is true in California, it is especially true in Louisiana. Even with a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage, Louisiana will not investigate any complaint concerning pay, which includes getting cases of being paid less than the federal minimum. If the people of New Orleans are interested in justice for low-wage workers, the federal government cannot be expected to be the sole enforcer. Whether it's the state, the parish or the city government, history shows that wage theft needs to be policed by an entity bigger than the individual and closer than an investigator from Washington DC. The Latino community can certainly attest to this reality, the experience of African-American and other native New Orleans workers has yet to be documented. charles.m.turner@gmail.com // Tweet @charlesmichio

Michelle Obama Honors Louisiana Children's Museum and PLTI NOLA Parent



Kanitra receiving her PLTI NOLA diploma at the 2015 graduation ceremony.

PLTI NOLA 2015 graduate Kanitra Charles and Julia Bland of the Louisiana Children's Museum met First Lady Michelle Obama at a ceremony honoring exceptional libraries and museums. The LCM received a 2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Sciences —

one of only ten museums and libraries in the nation to do so.

Both Charles and Bland were in the White House's East Room, where Ms. Michelle Obama told Kanitra to send a message back home to her four kids — "Listen to your mom."

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Sheriff's Office Launches Click It or Ticket Campaign to Encourage Wearing of Seat Belts



The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office is spearheading "Click It or Ticket," an awareness campaign to remind drivers and their passengers to wear seat belts. OPSO officers began their campaign Monday, May 18; and they will be out in force today through May 31, keeping a watchful eye out for motorists who violate Louisiana's seat belt laws. Officers will patrol major intersections and performed random stops during the day and at night.

"Click It or Ticket is a high visibility enforcement and public awareness campaign designed to save lives by reminding drivers and their passengers to wear seat belts," said Orleans Parish Sher-

iff Marlin N. Gusman. The annual campaign is credited with saving the lives of motorists throughout the state, with seat belt use one of the major factors in the decline of crash deaths nationwide and in Louisiana. The average seat belt use in Louisiana has improved steadily throughout the last five years, with Louisiana reaching the national average for seat belt use at 87 percent in 2014 compared with 82.5 percent in 2013. Click It or Ticket is funded by the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, which also funds the Buckle Up in Your Truck campaign conducted by the Sheriff's Office last month.

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