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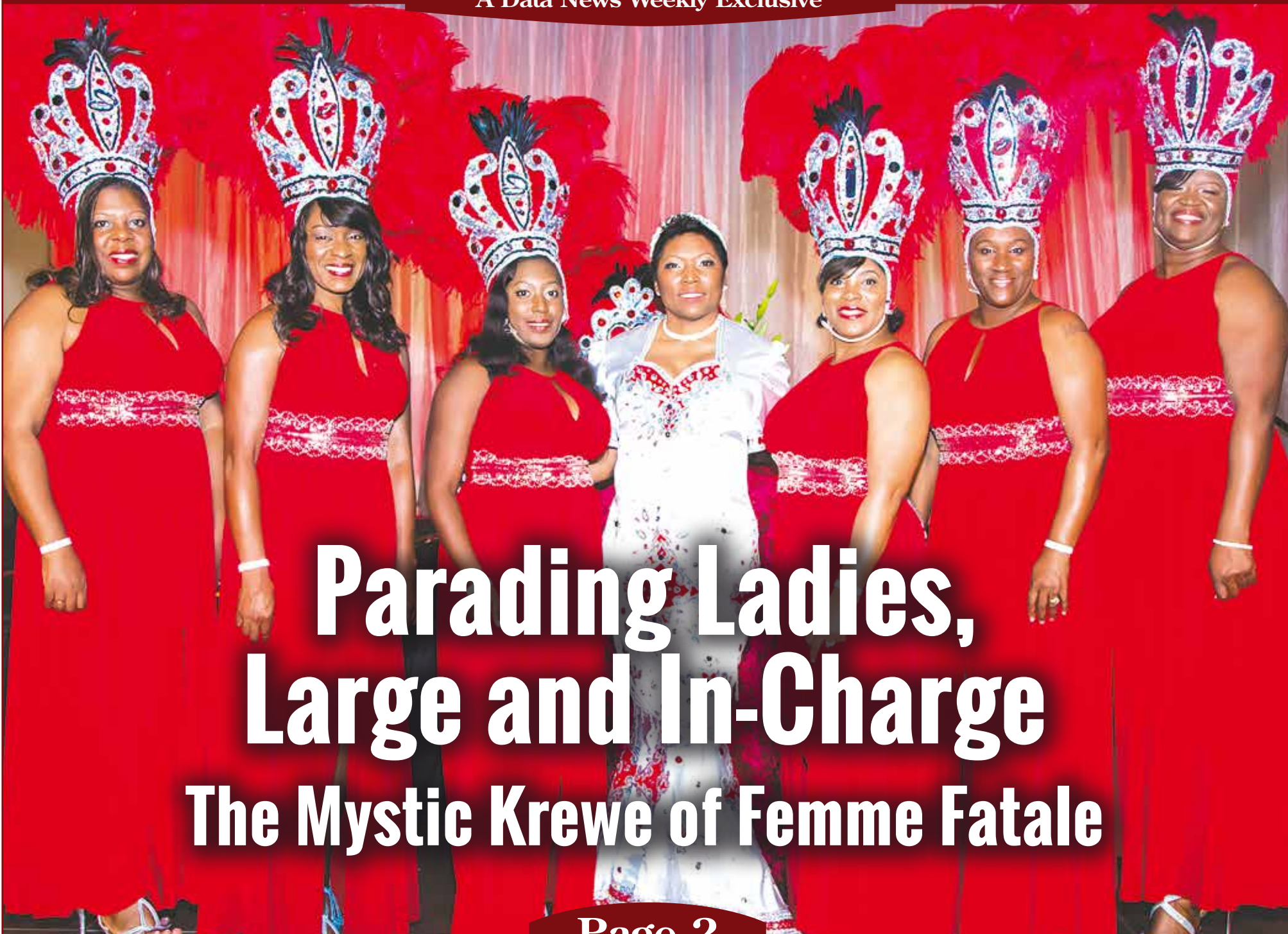
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Ride Along 2

Data Zone
Page 6

January 30 - February 5, 2016 50th Year Volume 40 www.ladatanews.com

A Data News Weekly Exclusive



Parading Ladies, Large and In-Charge

The Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale

Page 2



Newsmaker
Irvin Mayfield
Performs for a
Cause

Page 4

Opinion

All Votes Matter in
2016



Page 9

Parading Ladies, Large and In-Charge



This year the Krewe's theme will be "The Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale visits Theme Parks." The floats are decorated by Blaine Kern Artists who highlight the Krewe's recognizable colors, red and black. Above is one of the Femme Fatale from the 2015 parade.

By Tatyana Aubert
Data News Weekly Contributor

The Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale
Parade goers will spot them by their colors: candy apple red, black and white. The Mystic Krewe of

Femme Fatale will be hard to miss this year because they are a primarily Black, female krewe. Femme Fatale will make their second appearance on the Mardi Gras scene on Sunday, Jan. 31 when they roll from Uptown at 11:00 am. Although only stepping out last year with a krewe of roughly 300, Femme Fatale, which was founded in 2013, now totals some 500 members. The

krewe saw entering the parades as a way to showcase both the power and impact that women of color in particular, have in the City all year round.

"It's time for an all female minority krewe to arrive," said Joan Cooper-Rainey, the Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale 2016 Queen, Joan Cooper-Rainey. Cooper-Rainey, who is not only a registered and forensic nurse,

Cover Story, Continued
on next page.

INSIDE DATA

Cover Story	2	Opinion	9
Newsmaker	4	In The Spirit	10
Data Zone	6	National News	11
Commentary.	8		

DATA NEWS WEEKLY

P.O. Box 57347, New Orleans, LA 70157-7347 | Phone: (504) 821-7421 | Fax: (504) 821-7622
editorial: datanewseditor@bellsouth.net | advertising: datanewsad@bellsouth.net

Terry B. Jones	Contributors	Art Direction & Production
CEO/Publisher	Tatyana Aubert	MainorMedia.com
Edwin Buggage	Dwight Brown	Editorial Submissions
Editor	Atty. Benjamin Crump	datanewseditor@bellsouth.net
Calla Victoria	Bill Fletcher, Jr.	Advertising Inquiries
Executive Assistant	Melanie Campbell	datanewsad@bellsouth.net
June Hazeur	James Washington	Distribution
Accounting	Pat Maryland	On The Run
	Freddie Allen	Courier Services
	Ms. Coralnella Robertson	

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

is also one of the several founding members, Parliamentarian, and chair of fundraising. Rainey said she believes that her krewe is an answer to having more options for women during Mardi Gras season.

Although the majority of the krewe are minorities, Cooper-Rainey said they welcome women of all races and colors. To join the krewe, applicants must be 21 or older and must also apply online. To date, Femme Fatale members comprise a diverse roster of professional women that are not only from New Orleans but are also from California and cities like Atlanta, Georgia.

The krewe's founding team reflect a professional mix that includes Cooper-Rainey, Gwendolyn Rainey, Lisa Diggs, Kimberly Early, Dr. Takeisha Davis, Sharlayne Prevost, Catherine Phipps, Michele Hayes, Ann Marie Allen, Yvonne Grubbs, and Division B Regina Bartholomew Woods.

Last year, obtaining a permit was the biggest challenge that the krewe faced but putting together the parade was much easier, Cooper-Rainey said. For their debut last year, the krewe had less than six months to put together a parade but were confident that their debut was well-delivered. The krewe expects for parade-goers to witness another fabulous parade.

This year the krewe's theme will be "The Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale visits Theme Parks." The floats are decorated by Blaine Kern



Pictured above is Joan Cooper-Rainey, the Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale 2016 Queen.

Artists who highlight the krewe's recognizable colors. Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale will throw their infamous designer ladies compact and red plush lips to parade-goers. The mirrored compact symbolizes a constant inward and outward reflection, organizers said. The parade will consist of 12 bands and assorted dance and marching groups.

Parade viewers will also witness 15 floats depicting popular theme parks such as Sea World, Magic Kingdom and many more.

"The theme is meant as a tribute to families having fun in various theme parks such as Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Sea World just to name a few," Cooper-Rainey said.

Last year's theme was titled "The

Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale remembers Hollywood Horror Classics." This year's theme, organizers said has a community feel that celebrates family and fun.

"It is an honor to be able to make a difference in the community," said Gwendolyn Rainey, one of the founders on the work that the members do as part of their jobs and other charitable ventures. The krewe hopes its entry onto the Carnival scene will help support the work they do and attract more women to investing in the community with their expertise and time. When Mardi Gras wraps, the Mystic Krewe of Femme Fatale will direct its attention to the community outreach programs, cancer walks, Counsel on Aging, and school supplies give-aways that comprise the year-round work the members do.

"The MKFF organization's mission is to offer women of all creeds and colors a unique opportunity to promote and support New Orleans' cultural landscape, while uplifting the community," said founder Gwendolyn Rainey.

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Irvin Mayfield Performs for a Great Cause

Data News Staff Edited Report

A standing ovation to Irvin Mayfield & The New Orleans Jazz Orchestra for bringing life to #_____ Lives Matter . This soul-stirring event was hosted by none other than the charming and eloquent, Soleda O'Brien. Irvin Mayfield, "The Jazz Maestro" has far exceeded all expectations, with his brilliant compositions and his original, unique jazz style. His willingness to tackle political controversial matters, was provocative, enlightening and entertaining. The orchestra's performance was both pol-



Mr. Mayfield and The New Orleans Jazz Orchestra were extremely effective in addressing a very sensitive issue in an artistic diplomatic way, with a dash of New Orleans flavor. (pictured is Mr. Mayfield conducting the orchestra and being interviewed by Ms.Thibodeaux).

ished and superb, which demonstrates Mr. Mayfield's high standards of excellence in the arts.

There were several pieces dedicated to victims of racial violence such as Medgar Evers, and Trayvon Martin as well as legends of the City, such as 'Leah Chase'. Other guests included, Davell Crawford, Amber Matthews, Lebron "LBJ" Joseph, Adrian Long, Pj Morton, "Big Sam" Williams, Dr. Andre Perry, Brandan "B-Mike" Odums Uptown Angela, 3D NA TEE. The night ended with a New Orleans traditional second-line and a jazzy cosmopolitan after-party.

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Ride Along 2



By Dwight Brown
Data News Weekly Contributor

Too soon. As the opening credits start to roll, you wonder why the producers didn't give moviegoers a real break between "Ride Along" (2014) and "Ride Along 2" (2016). Two years is not enough time to make audiences yearn for more, not enough time to take this

franchise to the next level.

Bad Boys premiered in 1995. Eight years later in 2003, Will Smith and Martin Lawrence teamed up again and the vacation did everybody a world of good. Though this series is not nearly as slick as the aforementioned, the Hart and Cube duo have similarities. Awkward cop buddies. Haphazard, unorthodox crime-fighting. Oh, and there's the set-

ting. Hart and Cube have taken their show to South Beach, where the sun shines on everything, except the script.

The goofy, annoying Ben Barber (Hart), who once patrolled the streets of Atlanta with his curmudgeon brother-in-law-to-be police detective James Payton (Cube), has been sidelined. Payton and his new partner (Tyrese), who are undercover, are on the verge of arresting a

drug dealer. When the tables get turned on them, and James has the barrel of a gun stuck in his gut, it is the flighty, silly Ben who rescues him. And so it goes, time after time, James degrades Ben, but in the end the scamp comes through.

James finds a flash drive with data that can't be unlocked. He tracks

Data Zone,
Continued on page10.

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Art, Beats and Lyrics Returned to New Orleans with Scarface, Rich Medina and More

The Art, Beats and Lyrics event in New Orleans is one of the world's largest traveling art and music tours. Art, Beats and Lyrics combines an affinity for urban contemporary art with hip-hop, to create a one of a kind lifestyle experience merging the two.

The tour showcases some of today's best upcoming artists, along with seasoned veterans in art and music under one roof. The New Orleans event featured visual masterpieces from the likes of Ana Hernandez, J. Hand and Dubelyoo, along with live music and performances from Scarface, Rich Medina and more. Details on remaining tour stops can be found at www.JackHoneyABL.com.



This piece by New Orleans-based artist Matthew Curran was featured in the Art, Beats and Lyrics exhibit at the Howlin' Wolf.



This piece by New Orleans-based artist, Ana Hernandez was featured in the Art, Beats and Lyrics exhibit at the Howlin' Wolf. (Photo by Kat Goduco).



"Fight for Fight", a piece by Dubelyoo, visual artist and co-producer of Art, Beats and Lyrics is featured in the traveling art and music tour presented by Jack Daniel's Tennessee Honey and Gentleman Jack. (Photo by Kat Goduco)



This celebrity-inspired piece from J. Hand, a New Orleans-based artist, was featured at the Art, Beats and Lyrics event at The Howlin' Wolf.

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

Former Cop Daniel Holtzclaw Sentenced to 263 Years



Attorney Benjamin L. Crump
NNPA Columnist

“Wrong is wrong: justice needs to be served,” is a statement that my client Jannie Ligons made when she was interviewed shortly after Daniel Holtzclaw was found guilty of rape, forcible oral sodomy and other charges against 13 African-American women. Ligons, a 58-year old grandmother and day care worker with no criminal history, was one of the women sexually assaulted by Holtzclaw while he served as an Oklahoma City Police Officer. In 2014, Ligons made a

complaint about Holtzclaw, which triggered a police investigation that ultimately led to his conviction. Last Thursday, a jury responded by sentencing him to 263 years in prison.

Holtzclaw misused his position and authority as a police officer for at least 15 months while he sexually assaulted 13 African-American women. It is truly courageous that Ligons even came forward against him, because most victims of sexual assault never report their assault.

The case against Holtzclaw was by all counts ignored by mainstream media. Here, we had a police officer preying on African-American women in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Oklahoma City and no one was paying attention. From the moment Ligons filed a complaint against Holtzclaw to when Holtzclaw was indicted to when he sat down for trial in front of an all-white jury, the media did

a disservice by refusing to inform America about what had been happening in Oklahoma City.

The role of the police department is to protect its citizens and property from criminal activity, enforce laws, and assist the prosecution in preparing cases against alleged criminals. However, there is an additional role and expectation where law enforcement should provide oversight and training to ensure that misconduct in their department does not occur. When it does happen, they have an obligation to investigate fully and ensure that there are real consequences. The crimes committed by Holtzclaw are too important to ignore. This man violated 13 women that he vowed to protect. In doing so, he also violated his badge and the trust that people within the community have placed in police.

In 2012, President Obama issued

a proclamation stating, “It is up to all of us to ensure victims of sexual violence are not left to face these trials alone... We must do more to raise awareness about the realities of sexual assault; confront and change insensitive attitudes wherever they persist...” Two years later, the White House Council on Women and Girls issued a report entitled “Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action.” This report examined rape and sexual assault from numerous angles including the economic impact, campus sexual assaults, and the sexual assault of imprisoned men and women. But, it did not focus on the increasing complaints of sexual misconduct against arresting officers; nor did it discuss the underreporting of sexual misconduct and harassment that is endured by women working in law enforcement from their male counterparts and/or supervisors.

As citizens of this nation, we must ensure that mistreatment of women will not be tolerated, particularly while in the custody of law enforcement. Holtzclaw’s victims ranged in age from 17 years old to 57 years old. In many ways, this case represented the 400 years of racism, oppression, and sexual assault African American women have always had to face. This was a victory not only for the OKC 13, but also for so many unknown victims of sexual assault. We were able to stop a serial rapist with a badge when everyone else ignored these Black women. My hope is that now this case will become an example for the rest of America and the world to follow.

Benjamin L. Crump is the President of the National Bar Association and represents the families of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and the father of Tamir Rice. He also represented five of the 13 women in this case.

A Hopefully, Constructive Letter to the Bernie Sanders Campaign



Bill Fletcher, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

To the Campaign:

I am writing as a concerned Sanders supporter. I am thrilled that the campaign has caught on as it has. Senator Sanders has raised many of the issues that need to be raised, which are generally ignored by the political establishment. He is correct to be challenging the political and economic elites that are dominating this country and, for that matter, much of the world. I am certainly hoping that Senator Sanders receives the nomination and handily wins the November 2016 Presidential election.

That said, I am deeply concerned that the campaign is missing tremendous opportunities, particularly when it comes to communities of color. Here’s an example. The noted writer, Ta-Nehisi Coates has recently published a stinging critique of Senator Sanders on the question of reparations to African Americans. Leaving aside differences on the issue, what particularly struck me was the final paragraph of the article. Coates indicated that he had reached out to the campaign and was ignored. How does anyone ignore a writer of such significance as Coates? This is someone who has raised many an eyebrow with his incisive writing on the Black experience and has accumulated quite a following.

If the Coates example was the only one it would be bad enough, but that is not the case. Whether one is talking about media appearances or those who have sought to assist the campaign, it is completely unclear why the Sanders campaign

is not seizing opportunities.

The deeper question, which is relevant to strategy and vision, is that the Campaign, while at times speaking about matters of race, has not gone out of its way to embed itself within communities of color. As I have previously raised, there is an interesting contrast between this approach and that taken by Rev. Jesse Jackson in his 1988 presidential campaign. Jackson went out of his way to embed himself and his campaign in social movements and communities that were not his natural constituency, e.g., White farmers in the Midwest. Jackson became their champion and not their savior. What we do not see, at least up until now, is a similar approach by the Sanders campaign.

For raising these issues some have suggested that I am overthinking the issue or being a ‘downer,’ but I reject such arguments. I want to see Sanders win, but I want to see him win as the champion of those who have lived the underside of the “American Dream,” and not just

experienced it since the 2008 Great Recession. We need Sanders to speak before the other candidates about matters like the travesty with Flint, Michigan’s water supply. We need Sanders speaking out about the destruction of Puerto Rico that we are witnessing, the result of both colonialism and the policies of Wall Street. We need him doing

more than agreeing with other candidates when they, first, raise the issue. We need Sanders to be the pacesetter.

I sincerely hope that these concerns will be factored in as the campaign’s strategy evolves.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is the host of The Global African on Telesur-English. Follow him on Twitter, Facebook and at www.billfletcherjr.com.



All Elections Matter

It's Time to Make Our Voices Heard at the Ballot Box in 2016!



By **Melanie Campbell**
President & CEO, National Coalition
on Black Civic Participation

I watched the President with bittersweet remembrance of his historic and impactful two-term presidency. The President stressed the need for reforms in our democracy and emphasized the importance of people, not corporations electing their representatives. He also called for bipartisan unity when it comes to the electoral process.

As the leader of a non-partisan Black civic engagement organization (NCBCP), that will be celebrating the 40th Anniversary of its founding in 2016, it was very moving to hear President Obama deliver a message of hope, optimism and achievement. He also declared he is going full speed with his 4th quarter agenda for the American people that includes continuing to fight for voting rights reform.

During the speech, I recalled the images of millions of black Americans standing in long lines for hours and many voting for the first time for President Obama in 2008 and 2012. Still, even with the historic election of President Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States and the many gains made, there is much work to be done that the next president will be responsible for in 2017 and beyond.

African Americans and other

people of color dominate statistics of the undereducated, unemployed and poor; and millions do not have access to affordable health care in many states with large minority populations, especially in the South where many governors have blocked fully implementing the Affordable Care Act for partisan gain.

Further, the Black Lives Matter Movement is a reminder that there is much social justice work to be done—where we dominate the statistics on those likely to be victims of police violence or injustice. Thanks to partisan gridlock nationally and in many state legislatures, middle class wages are stagnant and the Labor Movement— a traditional gateway to middle class for working families—is under attack like never before in states across the country. Also, thanks to the U. S. Supreme Court—our voting rights are not fully protected through the Voting Rights Act!

As we all know it's not just any old ordinary election year. There's a lot in the mix. The seeds of discourse sowed by some are finding their way into the mainstream. Right now 31 states have passed some form of restriction to voter access. So, we have our work cut out for us to ensure the Black vote not

only turns out in record numbers in 2016, but, we also must unite to protect our vote. That means we have to work even harder.

There is much at stake. In 2016, voters will elect the 45th president, 435 members of the U. S. House of Representatives, 34 U.S. Senators and 12 state governors. Further, history has proven that all politics is local and that local elections matter.

In 2016, forty-one of the 100 largest cities are holding municipal elections including mayor and/or city council. Several of those cities holding local elections have large Black populations including Baltimore, Md., Baton Rouge, La., Norfolk, Va., and Washington, D.C.

It is time for us to use our skills. Those in leadership positions have to reach people on the grassroots level. It's great to reach people who are always taking part in the process but we have to figure out how to go deep – that means the beauty shop and the barber shop and the ushers and the cashier at the drug store and the waitress at the diner.

Each one, reach one. I'm talking about educating and reinforcing to black people of every stripe about the power and importance of their vote. Lest we forget—in 2012, Black voters surpassed the rate of

White voters for the first time in history—and Black women, we are the “secret sauce” leading the way for the Black vote and young Black women led the way in 2012.

To assist voters, the NCBCP Black Women's Roundtable released our non-partisan 2016 Election Voter Guide. The BWR Voter Guide provides a number of tools that voters can use that includes how to find your precinct, how to become a delegate and other resources. Further the National Coalition has joined with more than 80 organizations to form the National Black Voter Alliance.

History has taught us that all elections matter and the Black vote has made the critical difference to improving the lives of generations.

Now is the time to unite and come together to leverage the power and influence of the Black vote in 2016 and beyond.

Now is the time for action.

Melanie L. Campbell is the president and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), a non-profit organization that promotes greater social and economic justice to enhance the quality of African American life. NCBCP strives to create an enlightened community by engaging people in all aspects of public life through service/volunteerism, advocacy, leadership development and voting.

Data Zone, Continued from page 6.

the encrypted drive to a geek/hacker in Miami, named AJ (Ken Jeong, of The Hangover series). As they hunt him down, they're helped by tough-as-nails Miami homicide detective Maya (Olivia Munn of “X-Men: Apocalypse”). Clues lead to a local, wealthy, well-respected entrepreneur, Antonio Pope (Benjamin Bratt of “Miss Congeniality”), who is secretly a crime lord moving lots of drugs and guns. Can the boys make him pay for his crime? We all know the answer.

There was something so fresh about the original Ride Along. The cocky, buffoonish, diminutive comedian Hart played against the dour bad-attitude ex-NWA member. The pairing was box office gold and vaguely reminiscent of Abbott and Costello.

Screenwriters Phil Hay (Clash Of The Titans) & Matt Manfredi (Clash of the Titans) have failed miserably at reinventing the comedy crime genre. Their script is feeble and formulaic. Plot pieces fit together too easily and subplots don't amount to much (Barber is in the midst of planning his wedding and Sheri Shepherd plays a wedding planner who is a bully.)

There isn't one memorable line of dialogue worth passing on. And that's a shock considering Hart is a master improviser. The screenplay's one engaging gimmick: Barber, who is a champ at playing Grand Theft Auto, uses his video game driving skill when he and Payton are being chased by hoods with guns. Barber commands the steering wheel, and

speeds off like Mario Andretti. Some of these sequences are shot in a digital mode, and that's about as inventive as the film gets.

Director Tim Story (“Barbershop,” “Think Like a Man”) brought verve to the first Ride Along. It was edgy, funny and outrageous at points. It's almost as if he has run out of fresh ideas, minus the chase scenes. Most of the time, Hart and Cube look flat, are poorly choreographed and staged, and they stare into the lens like they're hoping for direction. Once in a while, Cube sucker punches a guy, or Hart shoots the wrong person. You chuckle, maybe laugh for a hot second. But you want more, steady, hilarious humor.

The director of photography Mitchell Amundsen (Horrible Bosses 2), production designer

Chris Cornwell (Ride Along), editor Peter S. Elliot (Think Like a Man), costume designer Olivia Miles (Entourage) and composer Christopher Lennertz (Ride Along) do a competent job, but nothing that elevates the proceedings.

Cube's performance is dry like the character. Sherri Shepherd, as a domineering and emasculating wedding planner is obnoxious, but not funny. Tika Sumpter is sweet as the impending bride and deserved more screen time. It's almost painful to watch an actor of Benjamin Bratt's caliber in a throwaway movie like this. Yes he brings gravitas to his villainous character, but it's clearly a waste of his talent. Maybe it's time to find a new agent?

Granted Hart is the comedian of the hour. He singlehandedly has made comedy buddy movies a cot-

tage industry, and he's the common denominator. That said, it might behoove him to take a hiatus, work on his craft and bring his game up a notch. He has the potential to rise higher. Now, before he gets a reputation for being another Adam Sandler.

Count on this comedy to find a loyal audience. Hart has 21M followers on Facebook, 24.6M follow his Tweets. His fans will support him. But they deserve better

The “Bad Boys” and the “Beverly Hills Cop” series too gave their franchises room to breathe. Maybe the Ride Along team doesn't have to wait eight years for the next installment. But two years is cramping everyone's style.

Visit NNPA Syndication Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

Lucky No More, Blessed Always



James Washington
Guest Columnist

I have to say I've been feeling pretty lucky lately and, not necessarily from a financial, physical or even an emotional point of view. When I look at my life from a worldly perspective now, it can sometimes still appear stacked against me. Life happens and well, you know the rest. These days my spiritual resolve kicks in, if I'm fortunate, and I keep coming back to this one thing. It's not about luck anymore. I'm blessed because there are not enough hours in the day to say thank you to the Almighty for that simple transformation of thought. I'm blessed because from where I sit and I could be wrong about this but, I don't think I missed my wake up call from God. I confess. It was

a long time coming but instead of pushing the snooze button, I got my behind out of bed and started paying attention to God's agenda rather than my own. Think about it. That's a question anybody should ask of oneself. Have I missed God's wake up call? All I can say is did you call the front desk and ask/pray for one? My bible is full of not yet saints and prophets who, when called, tried their very best to sleep through it, ignore it or pretend the call was for someone else. Most just denied it. What about you? Remember in the bible God simply played past the "you talking to me?" He gave marching orders and that was it. Hello Moses. At times He even lets you think you know more than He does. Say what Jonah? Even when you doubt what God is saying, He still, with appropriate consequences, rings your phone again. How 'bout that Zechariah?

Imagine missing your wake up call from God and never getting another one. Like I said, I'm feeling pretty blessed today. I would have loved to have seen the look on my mother's face to hear me say I'm saved. The following conversations



would have been the stuff dreams are made of. There are people who have been a part of your life who are or would roll over in their graves to hear that about you. Can you say Holy Ghost party?

I know this for a certainty because I believe I woke up on the last ring of my last wake up call. I could be wrong, but everything A.S. (after saved) is more optimistic for me. I find myself ridiculously giddy

with the reality that God said, 'ring him up one last time.' It gives my every waking moment and inevitable death new meaning. You know when you miss your wake up call, it has a tendency to ruin your whole day. I kinda think if you miss God's wake up call, it has a tendency to ruin your whole life and the next one and the one after that. I'm sure there is someone reading this that knows the feeling of just getting in under the wire; either catching a plane, making an important meeting or beating the bill collector minutes before everything gets turned off. The negative anticipation is replaced with relieved enthusiasm because you made it in the nick of time. Whew, thank God I made it. I may yet not get to heaven, but I can at least say I know the way. That's worth shouting about. The bible counts it all joy. Life and death look a whole lot different to me now. Actually, they're both the same to some extent. God is in both worlds. And it's pretty nice to recognize and follow Him in this one.

Have a nice day and may God bless and keep you always,
James,

African-Americans and the ACA *Much Accomplished, More to Do*



Pat Maryland
NNPA News Wire
Guest Columnist

The passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) promised to improve the delivery of healthcare services in America—especially for historically disadvantaged communities that suffer high rates of chronic illness.

The ACA has begun to deliver on that promise, but work still remains to ensure all who need healthcare in the most prosperous nation on

earth can receive it. Healthcare.gov is now available for the open enrollment period through January 31, 2016. It's imperative that members of the African-American community take advantage of this opportunity to access the coverage and care they need.

Some of the greatest gains in reducing the number of uninsured people in the U.S. have been realized in the African-American community, which has seen a 30 percent increase in those with health insurance. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), nearly 8 million African-Americans now have access to critical preventive services, including mammograms and flu shots.

The benefit is extended further for adults whose children up to age

26 can remain on their parent's health insurance. That includes some 500,000 African-Americans.

Now, our focus turns to educating and mobilizing groups where more work needs to be done, in particular with African-American males. Within this group, 43 percent suffer from high blood pressure, compared to nearly 34 percent of all white men. And black males are more than 30 percent more likely to contract lung cancer, even though their overall exposure to cigarette smoke (the primary risk factor for the disease) is lower. These rates are primarily attributed to affordability and limited access to care. Thanks to the ACA those limitations to care have been lifted.

For those living in poor and minority communities, cost has always

been a major barrier to care. However, access to care is now more broadly available, thanks to an expansion of Medicaid in many states, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and health insurance subsidies for millions of individuals and families. In fact, according to HHS, if more states took advantage of these provisions, upwards of 95 percent of African-Americans would qualify. Unfortunately, some states remain reluctant to participate, so access to coverage is limited to some who need it most.

Another barrier to health insurance is lack of information. Therefore, our job – yours and mine – is to help spread the word about the ease of signing up for insurance using Healthcare.gov. For those who have used the program before, it is important that they review their

policy to see if it still meets their needs and fits within their budget. For those would-be first-timers, take them by the hand and lead them through the site.

The Affordable Care Act has begun to meet its goal of revitalizing our healthcare system and making it more accessible and affordable to all Americans. As we make our way through this latest enrollment period, our mission is to ensure more African-Americans have the information they need to make informed choices about their healthcare. Ultimately, we know this will help lead to a higher overall quality of life.

Patricia A. Maryland, Dr.PH, is the president of Healthcare Operations and Chief Operating Officer for Ascension Health.

Gaps in Teacher Effectiveness Hurt Young, Minority Students

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Senior Correspondent

Minority and low-income students are less likely to have consistent access to effective teachers between preschool and the third grade than students from high-income households, according to a new report by the Center for American Progress (CAP), a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

Rachel Herzfeldt-Kamprath, a researcher at CAP and a co-author of the report said that research on brain development shows that kids are learning a lot during that time period and gaining foundational skills that they build on throughout the rest of their academic careers.

"So, having continuity across that time period is really important so that the skills are building on each other," said Herzfeldt-Kamprath.

The report found that more than 60 percent of children in prekindergarten that come from households earning more than \$100,000 have access to highly educated teachers (a bachelor's degree or higher), while about half (52 percent) of the students in prekindergarten that come from households earning less than \$20,000 have access those teachers.

"As children progress through elementary school, they are slightly more likely to have a highly educated teacher," the report said. "This is particularly true for children from higher income families: 60 percent of the highest income second-graders have a teacher with a master's degree compared to only 46 percent of kindergarteners in the same income group."

However only about half of second-graders from households earning less than \$50,000 have access to highly educated teachers.

This finding is particularly troubling, because studies show that African American children are more likely to be enrolled in prekindergarten or child care centers that receive food subsidies and are more likely to attend schools in poor neighborhoods than their White



peers. According to the report, 70 percent of Black children are enrolled in such programs compared to 28 percent of White children.

Black children are also more likely to have teachers whose household income is below \$50,000 when compared to their White and Asian peers, according to the report.

"In the early childhood field, studies have found both direct and indirect links between teachers' pay and the quality of education provided, with comparatively better-compensated educators creating a higher-quality classroom environment," the report said.

The report highlighted a number of priorities including increasing access to high-quality prekindergarten programs, raising teacher pay, promoting collaborative professional development and in-service training, and school-level support.

"These supports should include both infrastructure supports—such as up-to-date textbooks, technology, and developmentally appropriate classroom materials—as well as environmental supports, including teacher-planning time during the school day; adequate teacher and

school-administrator compensation; and a school community that empowers teachers to be effective," the report said. "Additionally, teachers need supportive school leaders; access to community social services to address the broader needs of children and families; and alternative approaches to classroom and school discipline.

Herzfeldt-Kamprath said that parents need to focus on seeking early learning opportunities and high quality childcare centers that offer developmentally appropriate practices as part of their curriculum.

"The main takeaway is that we know that learning starts very early for kids and building those foundational skills is hugely important and parents can play as big a role as teachers can," said Herzfeldt-Kamprath.

"Ensuring that they have access from birth is really critical piece."

Rebecca Ullrich, who also co-authored the report, said that parents should look for schools or childcare centers that are making an effort to engage and involve families in their child's learning.

"Preschool itself isn't necessarily a one-off shot," said Herzfeldt-Kamprath. "We need continuity between prekindergarten and the K-12 system to ensure that kids who get a good quality early education build on the skills that they learned rather than going from a system that takes care of their social and emotional development and their academic skills to an environment that does not necessarily provide the same support that they were receiving."

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