

Lighting The Road To Freedom

New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

Data Zone

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Faces of Jazz Fest

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The Soul of New Orleans

Jesse Jackson Leads Historic March Through Ninth Ward



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DATA NEWS WEEKLY
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COVER STORY

Jesse Jackson Leads Historic March Through Ninth Ward



By Edwin Buggage
Photos by Glenn Summers

As the Crescent City filled with tourists during Jazzfest, and as festival goers enjoyed this spectacular spectacle, people from around the globe flooded the streets of the Crescent City creating the illusion that New Orleans is once again a vibrant and thriving place; but the sad reality is this is a far cry from the true picture of New Orleans which is much bleaker. In its entirety it is one where many New Orleanians are still suffering; nearly two years after the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina and the levee breach that washed away the lives they previously knew; citizens are still displaced and feeling the after effects of the devastation and are trying to put the pieces of their fragmented lives back together. It is a place where some the antiquated facade of splendor still exists, conversely much of it lies in ruins, where the cement blocks that were the foundation where houses once stood now resemble headstones as communities that were once filled with life are the graveyards of a city and neighborhoods with futures that are uncertain.

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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COVER STORY

Cover Story, Continued from page 2.

The March

The Rev. Jesse Jackson along with local and national leaders staged a march across the Judge William Seeber Bridge (Claiborne Avenue Bridge) on April 28th 2007 to call attention the plight of the citizens of New Orleans most devastated area; the Lower Ninth Ward where nearly two years have past since the levee washed away their homes and it looks as it did days after the flood waters receded. Jackson who vowed to continue the fight for displaced residents saying, "The people of the lower nine must return, we will continue the fight and we won't surrender as long as 250,000 people are in exile across this nation."

As several hundred protesters took part in this historic march, walking past houses that are still in a state of disrepair; today these neighborhoods resemble the skeletal remains of what was once a burgeoning bustling community, marchers echoed the chants of protest which were reminiscent of the days of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's chanting in unison, "The people united will never be defeated." As the procession stopped after crossing the bridge the marchers gathered around the monument dedicated to those who lost their lives during Hurricane Katrina pausing in a moment of silence as trumpeter Marlon Jordan played a song that was a somber tribute to the lives lost. Tears rolled down the faces of many who were present including Charmaine Marchand who is the Louisiana State Representative of District 99 which includes both the Upper and Lower Ninth Ward. As her eyes welled with tears she encouraged those who have the means to rebuild to do so and vowing that the Ninth Ward will be back, "We have a long struggle to get back home, but it's time to start rebuilding, and for those who have the wherewithal please start the process." Continuing she dispelled the misconceptions about lack of services in the area, "It's time to come back, we have running water, electricity and cable television we are ready for you so don't believe the hype."

As the march continued to its final destination where a rally would be staged and as many of the leaders spoke on a number of issues that are slowing up the recovery process they did so with much fervor and compassion in their voices, the atmosphere became almost church like as their pleas and demands

resonated with the audience as if they were sermons. As the crowd echoed amen to many of the words spoken as they became excited and galvanized by the words of many of the speakers.



Present National Urban League President and former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial Spoke about the Louisiana Road Home debacle, "The Road Home Program has not worked; I propose that the monies go from the federal government, not to the state or city, but directly to the people." Continuing he spoke to the centuries old question of patronage and corruption that has been and eyesore to the city and state but not barring the federal government out of his equation he said, "Instead of a government that works for the people we've got a winding road, more winding than the road to Damascus." "We've got a winding road more crooked than the Mississippi, so crooked that maybe the Good Samaritan couldn't help us along." "We have a winding road with too many 'bureaucrats', 'sophisticrats', 'powercrats' and 'politcrats'."

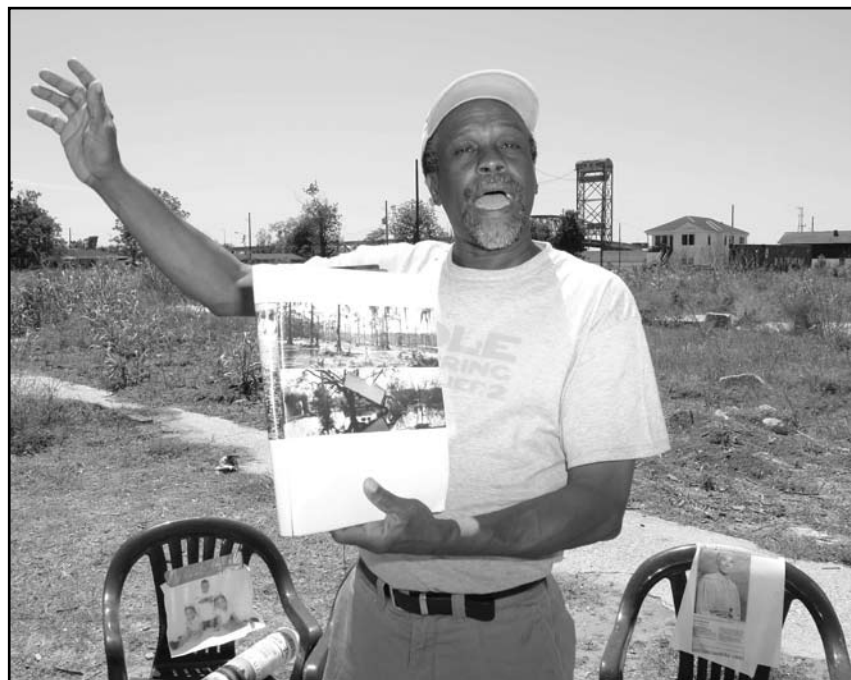
The Economics Of Race, Class, And Cash

As race and class has become intertwined with the slow pace of the recovery in some of the affected areas some speculate that it is a power play by the business elite of the city take over land in the Lower Ninth Ward and other parts of the city and use it for purposes where they can benefit from an economic windfall that may be forthcoming. Former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial in his speech spoke about the importance of the Industrial Canal to industry and

questions how it can come back into commerce but not much is being done about bringing people home to the Lower Ninth Ward, "The Industrial Canal has been important in assisting economic

Rouge, but the main chunk of the money was spent right after Katrina when no bid contracts were given to four contractors to the tune of 400 million dollars that came in and moved debris." Speaking to the question of the red tape and bureaucracy at the state level he says chiming in on the lack of success of the road home program and a lucrative contract awarded to ICF International, "The state set up another bureaucracy where another contract was awarded to issue out checks to homeowners, through a company with a contract for 750 million dollars and so far only seven thousand people have gotten checks out of one-hundred twenty thousand people that need the money."

While the Lower Ninth Ward has become the symbol of the devastation that took place in New Orleans and questions about rebuilding in this area has been the subject of many debates



powers in this nation to enhance their revenues, and profits." "Almost two years after Katrina the Industrial Canal is back, but the people are not and there is a question of fairness, equal treatment, and parity."

The question of contracts and the lack of minority participation have been at the center of many discussions about the recovery effort, and secondarily have race, class and patronage or a combination of the three played a part in why so much monies are being held up at the state level? New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin said in his speech when asked about where much of the money that has been allocated to the city since the storm he said, "Much of the money is still tied up in Baton

at the local, state, and national levels Louisiana Congressman Bill Jefferson feels every part of the city should be rebuilt and is fighting in the U.S. Congress to get the monies the city needs to rebuild and feels the money should come from the federal government because he feels they are responsible for the levee breach and should be held accountable. "I feel the federal government needs to fix what it broke, we're not asking please help us we're victims, what we're saying you drowned our city, you drowned the Lower Ninth Ward you fix it." He questions why the Lower Ninth Ward should not be rebuilt when it actually is not the in the lowest part of the city; contrary to what some believe

according to Jefferson the lowest part of the city is in the middle to upper middle class and heavily white populated Lakeview area where questions about to build or not to rebuild are moot. "The Lower Ninth Ward is a foot and a half below sea level, the lowest part of town is Lakeview which is four and one-half feet below sea level." He says the technology is there but does not know if at the federal level the will is there to make an investment in the city of New Orleans referencing the sophisticated levee system in the Netherlands as a model of levee protection for the Crescent City, "I went to the Netherlands, and they are 15 feet below sea level sometimes 20 feet, the technology exists, but the will does not, there's no reason why we should not rebuild this part of town or any neighborhood in the city."

Lives Lost; To Rebuild Or Not To Rebuild?

Robert Green has been a tax accountant for 35 years and is a resident of the Lower Ninth Ward he has appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, CNN, he has also told his story to the Washington Post and USA Today and other media outlets across the country. He has persevered through the trauma of Katrina and its aftermath, as he stands outside one of his two trailers that stand on a lot where their family home once stood. He is one of few residents who have returned to this devastated unpopulated area. He says he has returned and is back to stay, "I feel I wanted to come back, this is home, and I am doing everything I can to help

some of my neighbors come back." He paints a very different picture of the Lower Ninth Ward which in his view was not as a place where poverty and social ills ran amuck, but it was a community where people were productive and the majority owned their homes. "We didn't have the crime and drugs like other parts of the city, we had hard working people who got up and went to work everyday, we had some problems, but everybody took care of themselves and looked out for each other in this neighborhood."

Prior to the storm Green's family sought refuge at the Superdome but were turned away and told to come back later in the evening an area that was dedicated to people with special

Continued on page 14.

“I can start to live again.”

“I never left the city before Katrina but they kept saying, ‘It’s the big one, it’s the big one!’ As it turned out, my house was underwater for about three weeks. I had to throw away just about everything. I’m glad that now I can start to live again.”



Frankie from New Orleans

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NEWSMAKER

Keeping Culture in the Schools

Story and Photo by: Avery Brewton

NEW ORLEANS, LA—Arijanae Lewis, Leslie Willis, Ronell Cummings, Alleah Estrada and Jade Randall have not yet matriculated through high school, yet they have already defined their life goals and have a clear vision of their dreams. They aspire to join New Orleans' rich legacy of music as a successful rhythm and blues singing powerhouse.

These future leaders attend O. Perry Walker High School, and are being nurtured through Kids with Culture, a nonprofit organization created by their drama and arts teacher, Ateja Lewis. Since its inception in 2003, Kids with Culture has been dedicated to "encouraging youth to explore their true potential through training in the field of fine arts." Under Lewis's tutelage, students emerge from the program equipped with the necessary skills and tools to succeed in the arts. "Most alumnae of the program go forward in the arts, and they graduate from the program with a polished portfolio that includes highly marketable tools such as a



Kids With Culture and Grey's Anatomy Star Isaiah Washington at NAACP Image Awards.

video resume, professional demo CD's, and their original material (music, songs, plays) copyrighted and secure." says Lewis, "They have published articles discussing the issues pertinent to teens in

New Orleans and conducted interviews with major artists like Anthony Hamilton and teen sensation, Pretty Ricky." The students also have experience in developing major community events that unite students from schools citywide. "We work hard to engage the students by utilizing their natural talents and providing them with exposure to things based on their interests." Lewis works tirelessly in conjunction with many community leaders and businesses to provide unique and beneficial opportunities to her students.

For example, Brandon Woodrin a 19 year old playwright is a 2006 O. Perry Walker High School graduate and KC stalwart, has the drive that we seldom see and should rightly champion, has produced a written, directed and produced a full-length play, The Wedding. It's about young love. The play tells the stories of two young couples facing the challenges of some very adult problems in their relationships before going to the altar. By the end the four young lovers have reconcile and have their double wedding. The Wedding casts some of the best New Orleans Public School theatrical talent.

Kids With Culture partnered with Ashe Cultural Arts Center in the central city district to produce the play. "They really believed in the project and came on as co-producers," Mrs. Lewis says. Opening night was January

27, 2007. The show was sold out. Tamika Veal, who played Tammy, one of the brides, remembers rehearsing for the play and opening night. "At first we had a lot of trouble. Everyone wanted to be the lead. Then Brandon told us we had to be a theater family, and everyone came together." In contrast to the usual image of urban high school students always fighting with each other, the students were able to recruit on and offstage talent to support the production through partnering with students from Karr and Rabouin high schools to help Brandon achieve his goal. Woodin has produced The Wedding three times throughout New Orleans, and he says his goals are set on taking The Wedding national with its first stop being Atlanta, Georgia.

Through events, awareness campaigns, and fundraisers the students have consistently raised over \$10,000 annually to fund their ideas and projects. Kids with Culture's accomplishments over the last four years are a testament to what children are able to accomplish with the support and encouragement of parents, and a supportive school administration. Guest speakers, workshops, and citywide talent shows, all have the power to foster a rich imagination, creativity, and resourcefulness that helps children to preserve their much needed childhood while being able to process deep emotional and life issues.

Community organizations such as Kids with Culture are vital to the recovery efforts throughout the city because they challenge young adults to be creative in integrating their talents, education and dreams in a practical way. April Brooks and Leslie Smith did it. April has become a sought after songwriter for local artists and Leslie is in her third year in college on a vocal scholarship.

After representing New Orleans at the 38th Annual NAACP Image Awards in Los Angeles in March 2007, Black Entertainment Television has invited Kids with Culture to attend the 2007 BET AWARDS on June 26, 2007. "Our representation at the NAACP Awards enabled us to network with other youth from various parts of the country. Our main focus for this trip is to take care of the kids, and make sure they have a good time. The trip will be a perfect opportunity to meet with people who could be influential in jump starting their careers." According to Lewis, "The impact of mingling with accomplished actors and actresses would do wonders for the girls. Seeing such positive role models who've 'made it' gives the girls something to work toward." Lewis estimates a \$5000 dollar price-tag for the trip, and is rallying the community to put their money where their mouth is and invest in the good works of these young women.

To raise the funds and awareness, Kids with Culture will be hosting a major benefit show on June 2, 2007 at Ray's Room, 508 Frenchman Street, to offset the increase in airfare and lodging costs for four students and two chaperones traveling with them. Local A-list artists are scheduled to perform in the name of collective work and responsibility. Artists include Kermit Ruffins, r&b group-Legit, and Cupid, the voice behind the shuffle craze that's sweeping the nation.

Our children are going places and it's our job to ensure a meaningful journey. Support the movement to keep culture in the schools. Bring 'The Wedding' to your schools and community establishments. Invest in Kids with Culture. To learn more about Kids with Culture, the students, and upcoming events please contact atejadionnelewis@yahoo.com.

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STATE & LOCAL NEWS

Justice in Jena

By **Jordan Flaherty**

Speaking to a crowd of demonstrators in front of a rural Louisiana courthouse last week, Alan Bean, a Baptist minister from the Texas panhandle, inveighed against injustice. "The highest crime in the Old Testament," he declared, "is to withhold due process from poor people, to manipulate the criminal justice system to the advantage of the powerful, against the poor and the powerless."

Bean was speaking at a rally organized by residents of Jena, Louisiana. In the space of a few weeks, more than 150 of this small town's residents have organized an inspiring grassroots struggle against injustice. The demonstrations began when six Black students at Jena High School were arrested after a fight at school and charged with conspiracy to attempt second-degree murder. The students now face up to 100 years in prison without parole; in a case that King Downing, National Coordinator of the ACLU's Campaign Against Racial Profiling, has said "carries the scent of injustice." Local activists say that this wave of problems started last September when Black high school students asked for permission to sit under a tree at an area of the high school that had, traditionally, been used only by white students. The next day, three nooses were hanging from the tree.

The following week, Black students staged a protest under the tree. At a school assembly soon after, Jena district attorney Reed Walters, appearing with local police officers, warned Black students against further unrest. "I can make your lives disappear with a stroke of my pen," he threatened. According to many in Jena, tensions simmered in the town over the fall, occasionally exploding into fights and other incidents. No white students were charged or punished for any of these incidents, including the students found to have been responsible for hanging the nooses. Bryant Purvis, one of the Black students now facing charges, explained to me that, after the incident, "there were a lot of people aggravated about it, a lot of fights at the school after that, a lot of arguments, a lot of people getting treated differently." In the first weekend of December,

a Black student was assaulted by a group of white students, and a white graduate of Jena High School threatened several Black students with a shotgun. The following Monday, white students taunted the Black student who was assaulted over the weekend, and one of the white students was beaten up. Within hours, six Black students were arrested. "I think the district attorney is pinning it on us to make an example of us," said Purvis. "In Jena, people get accused of things they didn't do a lot." Soon after, their parents discovered that these students were facing attempted murder charges. "The courtroom, the whole back side, was filled with police officers," Tina Jones, Bryant's mother, recalls. "I guess they thought maybe when they announced what the charges were, we were gonna go berserk or something."

At last week's demonstration, family members and allies spoke about the issues at the center of the case. "I don't know how the DA or the court system gets involved in a school fight," said Jones. "But I'm not surprised? there's a lot of racism in Jena. A white person will get probation, and a black person is liable to get 15 to 20 years for the same crime."

Alan Bean, director of an organization called Friends of Justice, began his activism in response to a string of false arrests in 1999 in Tulia, Texas, where he lives. Since then, he has dedicated himself to supporting community organizing around cases of criminal justice abuse in rural Texas and Louisiana. Small towns like Jena? which has a population of 2,500, and is 85 percent white - are often left out of the organizing support, attention, and funding that struggles in metropolitan areas receive.

This disparity was not always the case. Rural southern towns were the frontlines of the 60s civil rights movement. Groups like CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) were active throughout the rural south. And these rural towns have been important sites of homegrown resistance. In 1964, in Jonesboro Louisiana, just north of Jena, a group of Black veterans of the US military formed the Deacons for Defense, an armed self-defense organization, in support of civil

rights struggles. The Deacons went on to form 21 chapters in rural Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Outrageous violations still occur in many of these towns. A few months ago, Gerald Washington of Westlake, Louisiana was shot three days before he was to become the town's first Black mayor. Less than two weeks after that, shots were fired into the house of another Black mayor, in Greenwood Louisiana. Jena itself is a mostly segregated community that was also the site of the Jena Juvenile Correctional Center for Youth, a legendarily brutal prison that was shut down in 2000.

Jena residents formed their own defense committee, without the support of national organizations. They have been holding weekly protests and organizing meetings that have attracted allies from near and far. A gathering last week was attended by Bean, as

well as allies from other northern and central Louisiana towns, and representatives from the ACLU, NAACP, and National Action Network.

Many parents questioned why the noose and other threatening actions were not taken seriously by the school administration. "What's the difference," asks Marcus Jones, the father of Mychal Bell, one of the students, about the disparity in the charges. "There's a color difference. There was white kids that hung up a noose, but it was black kids in the fight." Sentencing disparity is a big issue in many of these small towns, where many see it as the modern continuation of the ugly southern heritage of lynching.

Jones explains a litany of reasons why the children should not be charged with attempted murder. "The kid did not have life threatening injuries, he was not cut, he was not stabbed,

he was not shot, nothing was broken. There is no evidence of conspiracy to commit attempted murder. You talk about conspiracy to attempt second-degree murder, you think about the mafia, you think somebody paid a sniper or something. We're talking about a high school fistfight. The DA is showing his racist upbringing, his racist acts and his racist nature, and bringing it into the law."

For three of the youth, Robert Bailey, Theo Shaw and Mychal Bell, their trial starts May 21. I asked Bryant Purvis how this has affected him. "One of my goals in life is to go to college, and not to go to jail, and that changed me right there," he tells me. "That crushed me, to be in a jail cell."

When asked how her life has changed, Purvis' mother described the sadness of having her son taken away from her without warning. "You wake up in the morning and your son is

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DATA ZONE

Faces of New Orleans: Jazzfest 2007
A Celebration of Family, Friends, and Fun

Words by Edwin Buggage | Photos by Edwin Buggage and Kichea Burt



John Legend



Allen Toussaint



Joss Stone

People from all over globe came to experience the extravaganza that is the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, as the sun beamed brightly, sunglasses, and umbrellas were everywhere as crowds gathered to hear the music, experience the food, art and culture in America's most interesting city. This year's fest for some was very special and significant as it served as a homecoming and meeting place for many New Orleanians who trekked back to the Big Easy from cities across the country to be re-united with friends, family and loved ones in a show of love and an undying spirit of unity; these are the faces of New Orleans.



Stephen Marley



Myles Colly and brothers Dwaynes LaGrange and Ray Cooper having fun in the sun.



New Orleans artist Lionel Milton and his works of art influenced by the Crescent City.

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IN THEATRES MAY 25

DATA ZONE



Houston's Anissa Jones with New Orleans native Eric Peters traveled from Houston Texas experiencing a day at the fest.



Girlfriends 504 Style: Tija Denson, Keva Dejean, Danielle Burtrain, Candi Nash, and the Queen of New Orleans Bounce Music Ms. Tee



Keith Morris and a man whose plate is always full, businessman and former New Orleans City Councilman Troy Carter.

Enjoy a Little 'Primpin' and Pamperin' at "The Salon"

It's a Hairraiser! by Malika Saoud

"The Salon", following the footsteps of a trichotillomania (hair crazy) genre such as Shampoo, Hair, Barber Shop 1 and 2, Beauty Shop etc. stars an ever youthful-looking and toned Vivica A. Fox (Independence Day, Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2), latest Hollywood fave Terrence



Howard (Crash, Hustle and Flow), famed hip-hop choreographer turned actor Darrin Henson (Soulfood the TV series), Monica

Calhoun (The Best Man, Players' Club), and comedienne Kym Whitley (Next Friday).

The film is chock-full of humorous, poignant, and touching moments is a classic underdog tale set in an urban Baltimore (pronounced Bal'more by natives) community. It consists of a true ensemble cast in that each character equally and elegantly shares screen time. Vivica Fox stars as entrepreneurial Jenny, a witty, endearing, quick tongued single mother who single handedly and relentlessly battles the ruthless real-estate establishment when she is forced to sell her salon to the Department of Water and Power, despite the legal advice she receives from (Henson), who is "tapped" to play attorney. Steadfast in her struggle and conviction, she carries her case to court.

Shedding light on positive images in the African-American community and milieu, "The Salon" illuminates common thread themes and seamlessly interweaves elements of comradery, humor, race relations, gentrification, deceit, materialism and motherhood along with the expected barbershop banter.

Look for breakout performances from

veteran funnyman and New Orleans native Garrett Morris (Percy) who is best known for his work on Saturday Night Live and The Jamie Foxx Show, and newcomer De'Angelo Wilson (D.D.) who provide side-splitting and wickedly humorous comic relief!

"The Salon, albeit its familiar theme, does deliver! (Also Note: a plot twist and a love tryst)

So let your hair down, Sweat your weaves out with laughter and make an "appointment" to see "The Salon". It's a "top pick" that won't disappoint.



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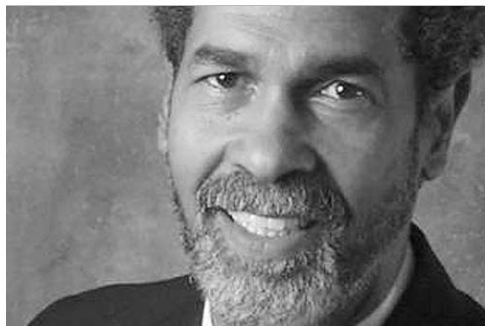
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OPINION

The Silverback



The Love Dr.
Data Columnist

This morning I spoke to the young men at McDonough 35 High School. I am always grateful to have an opportunity to talk to young men and this was a special treat because, as I told the few hundred young men who were assembled in the gymnasium, McDonough 35 is sacred ground to me because my father was a graduate of that institution which prepared so many outstanding and influential citizens for this city.

I brought them a message about who they were to be, for I have long concluded that when you see a person who's life is not making sense, it is usually because they have no sense of purpose. If you don't know where you are going, any path will do, for the moment. So I told these young men that for most of them one of their main purposes should be to become the respected leader of their own clan, as was my grandfather, Eugene Gaspard. They were to become men that all the younger men, women and children in their families would respect, depend on, cherish and honor. They were to see themselves as future "silverbacks", wizened alpha males who protect, provide for and preserve all who come from them.

That must be why God gave men such huge egos, for our egos can be used to drive us to do whatever it takes to earn the respect of those who depend on us to make their lives safe, peaceful and prosperous. Another way I like to put it for young people is, "Every man wants to be a big dog." Every man wants to be respected, and its those huge egos, we carry that can drive us to do the things that earn that respect.

What's funny is that I doubt that many of the young men will remember my name, but they will remember Eugene Gaspard because he was the "silverback" that made me possible, and I spoke his name six times, and the young men respected it every time, because I praised him for being the extraordinary man who set his entire clan on the path where all the little boys and all the little girls had two parents and knew how to be good for their families.

They learned that Eugene, this man who was so loved and respected by their speaker had been a little boy who didn't know his father, and that even his mother didn't treat him right. They learned that Eugene

Gaspard raised eight children and that all the children, grandchildren, great grands and great great grandchildren were on the path that he taught us all simply because he so loved my grandmother and his children and did whatever it took to make sure they were all right and had the things they needed.

They learned how as PaPa sat in that chair, all the men who came by made sure to shake his hand, all the women came by and kissed him or brought him his dinner, and one of us went got his soda or beer. It was like everyone knew how much they got from him, how their lives were all right because he had worked so hard and took such good care of them and their mother. I watched as even my father, who was not his child gave him the same respect and loved him just as much, I guess because PaPa had raised his wife, my mother.

They learned how, when Eugene died the church couldn't fit all the people, and how folk I never knew about and had never met came by to tell me all that my PaPa had been in their lives. It seem that Eugene was a "silverback" for nieces, and nephews, and neighbors and anyone who needed him, but PaPa was always doing stuff for people. We grand children learned early that if you couldn't get your parents to take you somewhere, you could call PaPa and it was on.

They learned that he didn't need a funeral t-shirt because there were sixty eight of us and we all had something in us that looked like him.

And that brings me back to that male ego thing. PaPa's ego was filled with us all, he was interested in everything we did, and while he never bragged about us around us, every time we did anything worthwhile you could just see how good he felt about himself and his life and his family. Who he was and how he felt about himself was obvious that day when, as a teenager and the first born in my generation I saw the "silverback", the only white haired man in the house, being loved and respected by everyone who came.

Is it any wonder that my developing male ego demanded no less for me? That the image of a silverback getting his "props" drives me. To be the same for my seed, and their seed is God's rightful purpose for my huge male ego. So this morning I was a "silverback" teaching about the silverback that inspired me, simply because he decided to be a better man than his father.

And then I looked over my audience of powerful young spirits whose eyes I could feel examining every inch of who I was, but looking at an elder, like an elder and I felt the honor and it felt good (thank You Lord), and I asked, "Are You The One?"

They nodded and I left.

Thanks Wizzer!, You and the entire staff of McDonough 35 deserve "props" for the job I witnessed you doing for the jewels of this nation.

IN THE SPIRIT

A Discussion About Life



Pastor Fred Luter, Jr.
Data Columnist

Psalm 39:4-7(NKJV)

Have you ever had one of those weeks when you thought, "What is this world coming to?" "What is going on in this society?" "What is wrong with mankind?" "Is there anyplace that is safe?"

I am sure that thought and those questions cross the mind of many of us as we witnessed some sad and tragic events last week, particularly in places that you would consider safe.

- You would think that your home is safe, but in Illinois a cousin sets fire to his relatives' home and five people are killed.
- You would think that your workplace is safe, but in Houston a disgruntled NASA employee shoots and kills his supervisor because of a bad evaluation.
- You think that your school is safe, but a fellow student kills 33 students, with over 30 others wounded at Virginia Tech University.
- You would think that you are safe with your family, but in St. Tammany parish a husband shoots his estranged wife and then shoots two of his three children, killing the wife and his son.

Have you ever look at life and said, "How much longer?" "How much more?" "When will it all stop?" "Is there any hope for mankind in this life?"

Well that is the same questions that David is having in this text. David is in a discussion with God about life! David is obviously looking at the times around him and in essence is saying, "Lord I need some answers". "I'm confused, I'm troubled, I'm disturbed, I don't understand life."

If we are honest with ourselves many of us could identify with David. Because there are times in your life when you experience things where nobody can help you but God! Not your horoscope, not the physic line, not Dear Abby, not Dr. Phil, and not even your prayer partner. You need to talk directly to God. So David in our text has a discussion with God about life.

The Request About Life

In verse four David in essence asks, "Lord how long do I have to live?" With all that is going on in this world, it would help me to know when my time is up. Now as much as all of us would like the answer to that question, the Bible says it is not for us to know. Only God knows that. And the reasons are obvious. If God told some of us we only had six months to live we would max out EVERY credit we have and any

new ones that we could open up! In like manner if God told some of us we would live until we were 75 years old, many of would live any kind of worldly, sinful life until we were 74 years and six months... and then we would humbly ask Jesus to come into our life! Therefore this is question about life that God will not give us the answer to. However as children of God, He expects His children to take life one day at a time!

The Reality About Life

In verse five David really answers his own question from verse four by realizing that life on earth is so brief. David compares life to vapor, which you see but for a moment and then it goes away. In other words life on earth is temporary; we are not here to stay. Our eyes get dim, our hair falls out, we need a cane to help us walk and some of us need pacemakers to help our heart beat. It doesn't matter if a person dies in their teens or in their eighties, to the family left behind it is always too soon.

The Risks Of Life

In verse six David points out the fact that life is like a shadow that can disappear at any moment if certain circumstance change. And those circumstances are the risks of life. We take risks everyday in life. Driving on the I-10, driving in certain neighborhoods in our city at night, flying on an airplane, and hanging with the wrong crowd are things that cause risk in life. David even suggests in this verse that all we accomplish in life is vain. In other words because life is so brief, we may make money but not guaranteed to spend it. We may buy a house but not guaranteed to enjoy it. We may start a business but not guaranteed to see it grow. And it's all because life is a risk.

I know this discussion about life seems dim, dismal, and discouraging, however we can't stop reading at verse six we must go to verse seven.

Before you throw in the towel, give up on life, think that all is lost, you must read verse seven!

The Reason For Life

In verse seven David is saying Lord I know how frail I am. I know my days are numbered. I know my life is life a vapor. I know that someone else may live in my house, drive my car, and continue my business, HOWEVER Lord life is worth living because MY HOPE IS IN YOU!

Not in the mayor but in the Messiah!

Not in the governor but in God!

Not in congress but in Christ!

Not is the senate but in an all sufficient Savior!

I know there is anxiety about what's happening in this world but we have a reason for living because our faith, our trust, our confidence, and our HOPE IS IN GOD!

Pastor Fred Luter, Jr. is Pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church

COMMENTARY

A Question About Violence?



Joe M. Ricks Jr. Ph.D.
Data Columnist

As the recent tragedy at Virginia Tech holds the nations attention, it brings to mind how African-Americans must do a better job of focusing the attention of the nation and more importantly, on our own to the epidemic of violence plaguing our communities. The Virginia Tech story will continue to attract and maintain attention because of its historical significance; for this type of event is rare therefore shocking to the public at large. Conversely, the violence in our communities has become so commonplace that it is perceived as the norm, and normal does not attract and maintain the mainstream media's attention. But it is painfully obvious that the level of violence in our communities is unacceptable. This leads to the question, what is an acceptable level of violence?

This key question seems to be missing from any discussion regarding violence, and if we're ever going to understand violence this question must be addressed. The notion that all violence is unacceptable seems to have two sources. First it appears to be consequence of the Civil Rights Movement with Dr. King's call for non-violent civil disobedience, and the second source is the black church.

Dr. King and Gandhi showed the effectiveness of non-violent civil disobedience to facilitate political change; however neither of these movements eliminated violence from their respective societies. In fact, there is no evidence that violence was even reduced in the United States or India during these times. I feel it is a mistake to interpret the call for non-violent civil disobedience as a call for the elimination of violence. The problem with

this idea is that it shows how little we understand the issue for it is complex and solutions are not simple. Violence has been a part of human behavior since its beginning, and the belief that all violence is unacceptable goes against human history and is simply wrong. For example, violence in self-defense is almost always acceptable. Over the centuries, many forms of entertainment (plays, books, movies, and sports) contain violence.

Religious leaders, Christians particularly, suggesting of the elimination of violence is somewhat baffling. All Christian doctrine teaches humans were created in God's image or likeness. Just a cursory reading of scripture or paying attention in church shows clearly that prophets of the Old Testament saw God's glory in violence, especially war. Also, God himself acted violently on multiple occasions (Sodom & Gomorrah; the flood; war). Although these actions were never against a human, scripture records show two occasions where Jesus acted out violently. The first was when he cursed a fig tree and it died. The second was at the Temple when he went on a rampage because priest and traders were using the Temple as a center for economic gain. Seeing the focus on and the displays of material wealth in the Black Church today, it is ironic that this type of activity caused Jesus' most violent behavior, but that's another topic for another day. The bottom line is that if we are created in the image of God, and God exhibits violent behavior, how is it possible that violent behavior is not a part of human nature?

The problem with ignoring the concept of acceptable violence is that it prevents us from understanding violent behavior enough to identify realistic strategies to reduce the levels of unacceptable violence. I'm suggesting that there needs to be a serious conversation regarding violence on three levels, scholarly to understand violence, in public policy to reduce violence, and in households to control

violence. Scholarship, without political agendas, can go a long way in helping us understand acceptable and unacceptable violent behavior. It can help us understand in what contexts violent behavior is likely to reduce or increase violence overall. It could also provide a great deal of help to policy makers and parents by providing a comprehensive vocabulary for discussions regarding violence.

We must demand serious attention to violence by policy makers, and be ready to do our part in reducing violence, particularly criminal violence. Our part may consist of participation in a criminal activity reduction program like neighborhood watch, or it could mean supporting tough anti-violent crime initiatives. We can no longer make poverty an excuse for violent and criminal behavior. The fact is that the vast majority of poor people are non-violent law abiding citizens. Brothers and sisters on the left have to realize that social programs alone are not going to stem the violence in our communities and all punishment is not bad and unnecessary, and those on the right are going to have to realize that punishment alone is not sufficient.

To significantly reduce unacceptable violence in our community it is going to require a cultural change that must be reinforced in our homes. Do you know the level of violent content in the games your children play, the music they listen to, or the television they watch? More importantly, have you had a conversation with your child to see how well he or she understands the violent images they see and hear? These questions are vital, because when it comes to violence, scholars can understand it, government can reduce it, but only we as individuals, can control it.

Dr. Ricks is an Associate Professor at Xavier University and Associate Chair in the Department of Business for comments he can be reached at jmricks@xula.edu

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STATE & LOCAL NEWS

New Orleans mourns the loss of veteran clarinetist Alvin Batiste

NEW ORLEANS – New Orleans mourns the loss of veteran clarinetist Alvin Batiste who passed away in his sleep early Sunday morning, May 6, 2007. Batiste was scheduled to perform at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival later that day.

His most current CD; Marsalis Music Honors Alvin Batiste is with Bradford Marsalis and other notable Jazz musicians. It also includes a reading by wife, Mrs. Edith Chatters Batiste.

Several well known musicians studied under Alvin Batiste while at Southern University. They include Randy Jackson (American Idol), his brother Herman, Brandford Marsalis, Donald Harrison, Henry Butler, Kent Jordan, Micheal Ward, Herlin Riley, Charlie Singleton (Cameo), Woodie Douglas (Spirit) and others.

His Columbia album billed him as a "Legendary Pioneer of Jazz." Alvin Batiste is an avant-garde player who does not fit easily into any classification. Under-recorded throughout his career, Batiste was a childhood

friend of Ed Blackwell and he spent time in Los Angeles in 1956 playing with Ornette Coleman. However, Batiste chose the life of an educator in Louisiana where he taught music at Southern University in Baton Rouge where her created the Batiste Jazz Institute and currently at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) where served as lead teacher in jazz instrumental music.

Batiste recorded with the AFO ("all for one") quintet in New Orleans, performed with Cannonball Adderley, and toured with Ray Charles in 1958, but was an obscure legend until he made three albums with Clarinet Summit in the 1980s (a quartet also including John Carter, David Murray, and Jimmy Hamilton). Batiste recorded an album, Bayou Magic, in 1988 as a leader for India Navigation and made the 1993 Columbia album Late. Songs, Words and Messages, Connections appeared in 1999, followed by Marsalis Music Honors Alvin Batiste in 2007.

"Day of Accountability" to Bring Thousands to Louisiana Capital

Renters Rights, Voter Rights to Head Agenda as Advocacy Group Pushes to Remove Government Obstacles to Louisiana's Recovery

Calling on Louisiana citizens near and far to make their voices heard, the Louisiana Diaspora Advocacy Project (LA DAP) is staging a "Day of Accountability" at the state capital on May 15, 2007. In addition to Katrina and Rita evacuees who have already returned to their south Louisiana homes, displaced citizens from as near as Baton Rouge trailer parks and as far as Dallas and Atlanta will be on hand to speak to their state legislators about bills that will make it easier for people to come home.

While LA DAP has identified numerous issues that remain obstacles to returning home, including education, transportation, economic opportunities, and health care, three priority issues will head the Day of Accountability agenda: renters' rights, voters' rights, and early childhood education.

"Whether they plan to return to south Louisiana or to make a new life somewhere else, renters remain largely uncompensated for their hurricane losses," commented Barbara Major, a LA DAP organizer. "They are

victims just as much as property owners, but many are struggling just as much as property owners if not more because they have nothing to rebuild with. And, those few who have been able to return to their parishes have been confronted with inflated rents and flat wages."

LA DAP is pushing the state of Louisiana for a Renters' Resettlement Package for victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The package would include a number of options depending on the circumstances of each individual or family. Among the items in the proposed package:

- Financial assistance for moving expenses back to Louisiana
- Compensation for real property losses
- Various forms of rental assistance until rental rates in the region return to pre-storm levels
- Homeowner assistance for previous renters who wish to become first-time buyers

Equally important according to Lloyd Dennis, another LA DAP organizer, is voters' rights. "The people of Louisiana must have a voice in the recovery of their home, even if they have not yet been able to return. The only way to ensure this is to guarantee their right to vote from outside their home parishes for the next five years. A Louisiana resident who signs up for a five-year military tour of duty has the right to vote in local and state elections no matter where he or she is stationed. Displaced citizens who left involuntarily because of the hurricanes could easily be extended this right."

Representative Jalilah Jefferson has proposed legislation to extend the outreach effort to ensure

absentee voter involvement in the upcoming October election. Her House Bill No. 619 has been approved by a House Committee and could be voted on the floor soon. LA DAP Organizer, Bill Rouselle, urges citizens to begin writing and calling legislators to support passage of the bill. "We must have a voice in the future of our communities. Securing voting rights for evacuated Louisiana citizens is critical."

Citizens interested in participating in the May 15th Day of Accountability can call (504) 592-1800 for more information. Travel to the state capital is available from a variety of locations. In addition, individuals who cannot participate but wish to register their support can do so on-line at www.nola.tv.

The Louisiana May 15th Day of Accountability is supported by a wide variety of organizations, churches and businesses, including The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (New Orleans and Atlanta), Children's Defense Fund (Houston and New Orleans), St. Luke's Home Coming Center, PolicyLink, Orleans Disabled Citizens, Jefferson Disabled Citizens, New Orleans Council on Aging, CBNO/MAC, Louisiana NAACP, Metro Source, Project Exodus (Dallas, TX), Social Engagement Motivating Empowerment and Justice (SEMEAJ), Louisiana Community Reinvestment Coalition, The Praxis Project, Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc., Environmentally One (1), One Torch, NOLA.TV, Katrina Information Network (KIN), Louisiana Advocacy Center, Dennis Enterprises and Bright Moments, Inc.

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STATE & LOCAL NEWS

Data Around Town

New Orleans Community Coalition's Business After Dark Reception, sponsored by Data News Weekly was held on Friday, May 4th. This month's networking event featured Dr. Ed Blakeley, Executive Director of Recovery Management for the City of New Orleans. The well attended event was an opportunity for local businesses to meet and exchange information and also included an SBA Express Loan Workshop which provided information on how to get a start up loan and get your business off the ground. Next month's Business After Dark Reception will be announced in Data News Weekly later on this month.



Master Eric O'Neal, Eleria Hunter, & Louis Edmonds enjoying the event



Tina Martin of Le'Ashmortia, Reuben DeTiege of Corporate Project Management, and Eve Martin



Norbert Rome of noccpage.com makes a presentation to Dr. Ed Blakely

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COVER STORY

Cover Story, Continued from page 4.

needs because his ailing mother Joyce Hilda Green who served 25 years in the military and put five children through college suffered from Parkinson's Disease and a heart condition. So they went back to their family house to weather the storm. As the rain came and the water rose Green and his brother kicked through the roof of their home, while doing so he fell through the sheetrock pricking his hand on a rusted nail where upon arrival to Tennessee doctors considered amputation. During the storm Green and his family braved these grave circumstances on top of their roof, but suddenly it began to collapse. As the house roof crumbled beneath them the family held on for dear life one of his granddaughters who was four and had never swam went into the water to save her three year old sister, but it was too late little Shanai Green was washed away.

Green also lost his mother Joyce Hilda Green, recounting the tragedy he says, "As we were trying to help my mother off the crumbling roof, she began to shake because of her Parkinson's and fell into the water, we pulled her up the first time she was still alive, and the second time she was still blowing bubbles, but by the third time she had stopped breathing, but we resuscitated her and she was alive during the hurricane, but after it was over she died. I told the Red Cross, FEMA, and the New Orleans Police where her body was located, and we came back on Dec. 29th 2006 and her body was still there."

The Future

While the march placed the spotlight on the plight of the people of the Ninth Ward, what will become of their community in the days to come? Will it

become as some proposed green space, or will it become a vibrant community once again? Stephen Bradberry, who is the Head Organizer for ACORN's New Orleans Branch says he is glad Rev. Jackson called the march and people came out to support it, but feels that the solution does not lie within Rev. Jackson or any of the Civil Rights or elected leaders who were present, but that it's up to the people and their will, which will determine their return. "I'm glad they came out for this march, but whether they come out or not is not the main issue, the issue is how closer are people to getting the things they need to get back to the city." "And if and when they get those things the question becomes will they have the desire after all they've been through to return."

Robert Green thought the march was a good idea, but felt the Rainbow Coalition and the leaders who were part of the

march could have done more than just provide lip service and promises. "I thought the Rainbow Coalition instead of collecting money today could have made a huger impact if they could help build one house or several for that matter; if they did something like that more families would be back today." He feels that by moving back into his community and rebuilding his home that he can be a symbol of hope for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. "I will not wait for the government I am going to build my house with my own money and with the help of my friends in Northfield Minnesota where I went college who are both black and white."

The Lower Ninth Ward and its residents as is many New Orleanians are at a crossroads in a city where people are trying to make sense of what the future will bring; will it be a place where prosperity will be abundant, or will it sank into the abyss, or will

it ever be a place again where the sacred marries the secular in this strange historical dance that is life in New Orleans? New Orleans City Councilperson Cynthia Willard-Lewis who spoke at the march thinks the city will come back and that the Lower Ninth Ward is a sacred place worth preserving for future generations. "The Lower Ninth Ward is sacred because of the lives lost, because of the families broke." "We stand today to say a new dream is rising up to resurrection glory, and it will move this neighborhood from the tomb, to the mountaintop."



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