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Mayor Ray Nagin and the State of the City of New Orleans



Mayor Ray Nagin. Photo: cityofno.com



photo: cityofno.com

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

New Orleans: A Tale of Two Cities

It has been nearly four years since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city altering its residents' lives forever. Since then, the lives of New Orleanians

have seemingly been in a science fiction movie aptly titled, 'Apocalypse 504.' It has been an uphill battle as citizens are still grappling with issues of how to put the pieces of their lives back together. Today, pockets of the city still resemble those tumultuous times, a constant reminder of the wreckage that wreaked havoc on the city. It is a sight that resembles two cities where debris filled structures

stand alongside houses where residents are trying to rebuild their homes, neighborhoods and lives.

In this troubled time for New Orleans, one man, Mayor Ray Nagin, stands inside the crosshairs of a barrage of criticism that may have an impact on how the city recovers and how it is being perceived by people across the globe. As Nagin made his final state of the city address he continued on his theme of One New Orleans united, but the city is a far cry from that if one looks at how polarized the city has become since the 2005 storm. The unspoken truce between the haves and have nots have come to the forefront and the six degrees that separates racial camaraderie from chaos is rearing its ugly head.

Now in 2009, the state of the city is a matter of perspective. Where some are standing, it seems as though things are progressing. Others, however, have seen the road home to a normal way of life as one filled with roadblocks, obstacles and frustrations. Admittedly, there have been considerable progress, but it is a sad tale of two cities, where the lines between hope and despair dance a strange tango in what many may call a continuous trail of tears. As Mayor Nagin nears the end of his term, his approval rating has plummeted to an all time low of 24 percent, according to a poll conducted by the University of New Orleans. This is the lowest score since the university began recording it in 1986.

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

616 Barrone Street, Suite 584, New Orleans, LA 70113

Phone: (504) 821-7421 | Fax: (504) 821-7622

editorial: datanewseditor@bellsouth.net | advertising: datanewsad@bellsouth.net

Terry B. Jones

CEO/Publisher

Glenn Jones

VP Advertising

& Marketing

Edwin Buggage

Editor-in-Chief

Shaniece Bickham

Managing Editor

June Hazeur

Accounting

Contributors

Dionne Character

Tiyana Jordan

NNPA

Art Direction & Production

MainorMedia.com

Editorial Submissions

datanewseditor@bellsouth.net

Advertising Inquiries

datanewsad@bellsouth.net

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

What a Difference Four Years Make

According to this poll's findings, only five percent of whites and 36 percent of blacks thought the mayor was doing an adequate job. While both numbers are dismally low, there is a great disparity between the races in the city. In these years after Hurricane Katrina, Mayor Nagin has been repositioned in the court of perception. Initially, he was thought by many segments inside the African-American community as the mayor of white elites and business interests who overwhelmingly voted him into office in a runoff against then Police Chief Richard Pennington, who had the backing of New Orleans outgoing Mayor Marc Morial and Former U.S Congressman William Jefferson.

Post Katrina, the politics of New Orleans have become a political shell game as the racial reshuffling of the deck in terms of leadership will be an open question in the next election cycle. Where will the power lie and in whose hands will it rest in the future as the city tries to navigate its way back to a place of normalcy?

Or are those days long gone and have we entered a Reconstruction-like moment in the city's history where power both economically and politically will re-enter into the hands of a few, and additionally, the carpetbaggers who come to the city to find it a place with unlimited possibilities? And is it as it was during those troubled times in our history that today we will witness mainstream media outlets serving as a voice that echoes the thoughts of some in the white community that demonizes African-Americans as incompetent and unfit to take a leading role in the recovery and the rebuilding of New Orleans?

And will the reign of Mayor Ray Nagin have an impact on how African-American leadership is perceived in the city moving forward? Have his actions whether one's approve or not, whether fan or foe how has it impacted the city's image and the pace and state of the recovery?

N.O. S.O.S.

New Orleans is a city that has come a long way in the nearly four years since Hurricane Katrina, but it still has a long way to go. To go from a city where 80 percent of it was underwater and where floods ravaged the city and its future lied in the balance. Four years later, the city has gotten up and is limping down the road to recovery. Although the city is not where many would like it to be, there has been some progress on the watch of Mayor Nagin.

But for all the progress, the problems that continue to persist cannot be ignored, such as a school system that is still not rebuilt, parks and infrastructure in an abysmal state, continuing problems in the areas of crime and violence, neighborhoods still resembling ghost towns, and people still a long way from home. These are some of the more important issues that face New Orleans as it recovers.

Recovery, Redemption and Renaissance

As Mayor Nagin left the podium after his State of the City address, he greeted all of his well wishers, friends and foes, adversaries and allies. In the coming months, he will continue in what will be his final lap as mayor of the city of New Orleans. His legacy will be forever steeped in the city's storied history. And for better or worse he was the captain of the ship in the city's darkest hour, so as the sun sets on his administration, it is perhaps time to write a new prescription on how to cure what ails this city.

There is no more time for a simple us vs. them approach, for everything in life is not so black and white. In between, there are shades of gray where grains of truth and common interest intersect. It is there where the city will reach its moment of redemption.

It is only then that New Orleans can become a great city on every front. Not just a place that can throw a great party, or be perceived as a third world banana republic, which by happenstance is connected to the United States. Today, the people of New Orleans are better than that. Today, they want more and expect more. Today, the city is on the stand as the world witnesses our testimony after the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. And, it is incumbent upon us to put our best foot forward on the world stage.

We need to resolve some of the things we do in house as a family, as people who are now in the same boat trying to stay afloat to recover and rebuild their lives. As the city moves forward, it requires a mayor who is not just capable and competent, but can practice some restraint and not find himself sometimes resembling Othello where his excessive hubris sometimes get in the way of progress for the city.

In the next administration, hopefully the mainstream media can rehabilitate its image and get past a corporate culture caught up in scandal mongering for ratings and revenues. And in the final analysis, who benefits from this? After all these so-called special reports and investigations, has it gotten this city to where it needs to be? Has it gotten people back into their homes? Has it stopped the trail of heartbreak, pain and suffering so many citizens are still experiencing nearly four years later? Has it changed the state of the city for the better?

The state of the city is a complex proposition. What will the city look like in the future; what will its footprint be? What type of city will it be? Time will tell, but as Nagin's reign comes to a close, it is a cause for citizens to reflect and think about their lives and how it changed after August 29, 2005. How have they coped trying to put the fragments of their lives back together? How can they continue to keep the strands of kinship connected that serve as the life of a New Orleanian alive, for the state of the city is only as strong as the bonds that connect the people regardless of where they are today? They are, 504-ever.



Mayor Nagin greets State Senator Edwin Murray during New Orleans Day at the State Capitol. Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com



Mayor Nagin has received a lot of attention from the media over his two-term tenure. Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com



Mayor Nagin, along with city administrators and City Council members. Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com

The New Orleans Recreational Department Gears Up for 2009 Summer Activities

Tiyana Jordan

The sun is shining and the weather is warming up...it's almost summer! For students in the New Orleans area, that means no school, enjoyable activities and hot summer fun.

For parents of summer vacationing students, however, the approach of summer equates to seeking safe and entertaining programs that will shape their children physically while keeping them mentally in tune while away from their normal school schedules.

Due to multi-million dollar damages caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, more than

half of the New Orleans Recreational Department's facilities and almost all of its playgrounds and stadiums were washed away. Over the past four years, NORD

has gone through major changes to ensure that the families of New Orleans have access to public recreation.

In June 2006, Larry Barabino, a graduate of John F. Kennedy High School and Southern University of New Orleans was elected interim director of NORD. On Feb. 27, 2007, Mayor Ray Nagin then appointed Barabino as the official director. With his ten plus years of experience in the New Orleans Public School System and managerial position for NORD's St. Bernard Multi-Purpose Recreation Center, Barabino has been committed to revitalizing the agency to make it even better than before.

According to NORD's official March and April reports for 2009, the agency currently has four multi-cultural centers: Berhman, Treme, St. Bernard and Cut Off.

Some of the available programs available are youth and adult basketball, table tennis, adult exercise classes and weightlifting. There are also cultural and special programs such as dance classes, computer lab usage, choir practice, library usage, and the Young at Heart Senior programs.

For spring 2009, a program was designed to create track and baseball as seasonal sports. In addition, public swimming facilities were upgraded for families to enjoy. There are now seven operational playgrounds in the Algiers area, seven in the Downtown area, eight in Lakeshore, and 15 in the Uptown area. City-wide, there are four operational stadiums: Behrman, Larry Gilbert, Skelly-Rupp, and Wesley Barrow stadiums.

As it gets closer to hanging up school uniforms and taking out the athletic apparel, parents



should be sure to participate in NORD's 2009 Summer Camp registration. Registration opened on May 7 and will end on May 22. Parents can register from 3 pm to 8 pm at the Treme, St. Bernard, Cut-Off, and Behrman centers. Summer camps will begin June 1 and end July 24.

As part of the summer camp activities, girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 14 can engage

in academics, life skills, arts and crafts, sports, and field trips. NORD's partnership with the New Orleans Ballet Association Center for Dance has made it possible for New Orleans area youth to receive free summer dance classes. NORD's Cultural Division is also accepting applications from students and graduates in visual arts and ceramics.

Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Data News Weekly showcases its readers each week through candid photographs.

Be sure to submit your photographs to datanewsphotos@gmail.com so that you can be featured in our next issue!



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Mobile City Hall Brings Government to the Citizens

When you go to the grocery store, you can also pay your property tax or a parking ticket, thanks to the convenience of the new City of New Orleans kiosks in all Orleans Parish Winn Dixie stores. Mayor Ray Nagin and the regional vice president of Winn Dixie Joey Medina recently hosted a press conference announcing the new initiative in the New Orleans East store off Chef Menteur Highway. The press conference was also attended by New Orleans District E City Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis

"Winn Dixie continues to demonstrate leadership and commitment to the recovery of new Orleans," said Mayor C. Ray Nagin. "Winn Dixie was the first major



Mayor Nagin announced the new partnership with Winn Dixie at the store's New Orleans East location. www.cityofno.com

grocery store to reopen in New Orleans East following Hurricane Katrina, which was a strong sig-

nal of their investment in this recovery. And today, by rolling out City of New Orleans kiosks that



Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis also participated in the launching of the kiosks. Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com

feature recovery project maps, as well as express city services, Winn Dixie continues to show

that they value their customers and this city."

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C. Ray Nagin, Mayor

Rhodes Family of Businesses Honored at Tulane Family Business Center Awards Gala

The Tulane Family Business Center hosted its 8th Annual Wealth Management Seminar Friday, May 8 at the Westin New Orleans Hotel. Experts at the event provided insight on topics such as city's infrastructure post Katrina, the importance of a White House level federal coordinator for Gulf Coast recovery, succession and investment strategies.

In addition to the seminar, an awards gala and reception was held honoring the Rhodes Family of Businesses with the 2009 Outstanding Family Enterprise Award.

Keynote speaker Peter Ricchiuti, Associate Dean of the A. B. Freeman School of Business,

will discuss the current economic conditions and what investors, individuals, and businesses can anticipate throughout 2009 and 2010. Ricchiuti founded Tulane's highly acclaimed BURKENROAD REPORTS stock research program. He has been featured on prominent news outlets such as CNN, CNBC, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal.

Founded in 1992, the Tulane Family Business Center has served more than 100 family-owned companies with programs and resources that enable these members to successfully plan, evaluate, and manage their companies as they transition from one generation to the next.



The Rhodes Family was honored as part of this year's Tulane Family Business Center's Wealth Management Seminar.

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New Orleans East Recovery Initiatives Continue

Mayor C. Ray Nagin signed an agreement on May 8 with the Lake Forest Plaza, LLC (LFP) allowing the company to begin redevelopment of The Plaza shopping center area in New Orleans East. Ashton J. Ryan, Jr. and Cesar Burgos, are the Co-Managers of the LFP.

In another related matter, the City was awarded \$2.3 million in a civil case versus the Grand Theater facility. In 2002, the Grand Theater, LLC (also known as the "Grand in the East") borrowed \$5 million utilizing a HUD Section 108 loan from the City for the construction of a 12-screen mega-plex theater on the site of the Lake Forest Plaza mall. On or about July 15, 2003, the Grand in the East paid a note on the loan which was their last payment received by the City, leaving the City to pay HUD from its general fund. After Hurricane Katrina, the Grand in the East received several million dollars in insurance proceeds. The City requested that these proceeds be delivered to it pursuant to the loan agreement executed in 2002.



Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com



Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com

City Council Reviewing Over Two Million Pages of Emails for Release

The New Orleans City Council is in the process of reviewing over two million pages of emails for public release and website posting.

With 24-hour notice, on April 21 the City Attorney delivered to the City Council more than 400,000 emails comprising over two million pages. The delivery was made in a disc format that

included calendars and various attachments.

Due to the volume of emails to be reviewed as required under the state's public records law, the process has necessitated three phases of review which includes a technology expert, Council's Special Legal Counsel and Councilmembers and staff, as appropriate.

Since receipt of the emails, the Council's technology expert with assistance from Special Legal Counsel has developed a rolling system to separate and catalog the emails and remove computer viruses. Using word searches and manual review, Special Legal Counsel has reviewed and redacted privileged and confidential information from a portion of the

emails.

Over the next few days, Councilmembers and some members of their staffs will meet with its technology expert and Special Legal Counsel to become skilled at accessing and reviewing the emails for privileged and confidential constituent information also covered under the state's public records law. Over a period

of time, City Councilmembers will be reviewing emails and making them available to the public.

Independently of the Council's three phase email review, District "B" Councilmember Stacy Head has begun reviewing and posting her emails on her website.

The Original Super Sunday Parade Rescheduled to May 31



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The Tamborine & Fan Soiree, commonly known as the Original Super Sunday, has been rescheduled from its original date of Sunday, May 17 to Sunday, May 31. The event was founded in 1970 and is dedicated to the thousands of children that are still disconnected from the city. According to Tamborine & Fan, the purpose of this year's event, "Drumbeat for Dignity, a Salute to the Struggle," is to bring the message that "the exile of thousands of children from this city as a result of Katrina is beyond shame."

The organization also wishes to shine light with a note of thanks to Big Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana, who made it known to all who touches a needle or feather that they should remember the police attacks that took place on March 19, 2005 and the sacrifice that Tootie (who died defending the Indian culture) made as he petitioned the city council to respect Indian culture. Forgetting Tootie's contribution would be a grave dishonor to the Mardi Gras Indian Tradition, according to an official statement from the organization.

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Bobby J and Stuff Like That Ole' School Band

Giving Back Through Music



Dionne Character
Data News Weekly Columnist

R&B, Funk, Jazz, and "The Stuff Like That Band" threw down at Sweet Lorraine's Jazz Club together with "Bobby J" leading the way in full force creating locomotion of soul, song and dance for one hour of power and entertainment on Tuesday, May 5. Singing ole' school classics from Earth, Wind, and Fire to Etta James, Bobby J is capable of "Getting Any Party Started".

An accomplished percussionist-turned-vocalist, Robert "Bobby J" Jordan has been entertaining in rhythm for over 35 years in and around New Orleans. Touring with Frankie Beverly and Maze while performing with a local band called "Cool Enterprise," many couldn't help but notice Bobby J's front stage presence. He left "Cool Enterprise" and became the main man with the "Louisiana Purchase Band."

Bobby J then recorded as lead vocalist on "Every Time You Go Away" and from there; we have the coolest band in the land, Bobby J and Stuff Like That Band.

Keeping the rhythm to the funky beat while the crowd danced in harmony, Bobby J kept the crowd jumping all to raise monies for a well-deserved cause. The concert's proceeds will benefit a gifted student and inspiring musician, Jordan Character. Jordan is a multi-talented and focused student who excels consistently in academics and has earned the privilege of being chosen to attend The Junior Leadership Conference for his academics and leadership skills. Two hundred and fifty outstanding middle school students from across the United States will take part in the extraordinary leadership conference in Washington, DC, which is held annually every summer.

You can check Bobby J out for yourself at www.bobbyj.biz for future events. If you have any comments, email me at dasolediva@yahoo.com or visit www.dionnecharacter.com.



The Bobby J and Stuff Like That Band performs for the benefit of a worthy cause, while patrons at the event, including Data's publisher Terry Jones enjoys the music. Photo Credit for these three pictures: Peter Forest

A Night at the Museum With the Legal Aid Bureau



Data News Weekly's Dionne Character and Warner A. Tureaud, Port of New Orleans.



Terrence Dugas, Delores Dugas and Kim-Dugas Glass.



Judge Nadine M. Ramsey and Judge Kern A. Reese.

Dionne Character

The Legal Aid Bureau recently held its Second Annual Event on May 15, 2009 at the Historical Wax Museum of New Orleans.

One of the oldest non-profit legal agencies in the Greater New Orleans, established in 1932, the Legal Aid Bureau has provided quality legal services to low-income, elderly and disabled persons in the community at no cost. Since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the office staff has been down-sized, so the Legal Aid Bureau is working

tirelessly to raise funds to get back to its Pre-Katrina level of service.

The night featured a silent auction, a showing of the Historical Wax Museum, and live entertainment provided by The Olive Trio, and David Batiste, Sr. & Friends, featuring Berthena Burks. Judge Kern A. Reese, Judge Nadine M. Ramsey, Christopher K. Ralston, Kim-Dugass Glass and a host of committee members and donors were all in attendance to give back, making this night a success!

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Black Women Contract HIV/AIDS Mostly Through Heterosexual Activity

George E. Curry
NNPA Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - C. Virginia Fields, president of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, was giving a speech in Rocky Mount, N.C. last week before a group of social service providers when she made a surprising revelation about the AIDS epidemic.

"One of the things I talked about were the numbers for heterosexual Black women," Fields recounted. "When people heard that, they were very surprised. It's something that they did not know, it's something they had not focused on."

What many did not know or focus on was that Black women account for the largest share of new HIV infections - 61 percent - among women. That's an infection rate nearly 15 times that of White women. And most of those African-American women were infected through heterosexual activity.

"Unfortunately, a lot of people associate HIV/AIDS simply with gay people," Fields explained. "They don't think it's only a White gay disease because there has been more attention on Black gay men. To many, it's a gay disease."

In addition to being grossly misinformed, those who lack accurate information about HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, place their health and indeed their life in danger. If they think that AIDS is only a "gay disease," they should speak with Marvelyn Brown, whose book

- *The Naked Truth: Young, Beautiful and (HIV) Positive* - was recently published by HarperCollins.

At the international conference on AIDS last summer in Mexico City, she told journalists how she was infected with HIV in 2003 at the age of 19 by the man she had viewed as her Prince Charming. She said he knew that he was HIV positive but did not tell her.

"I kept thinking to myself that he doesn't have a condom," she recalled. "But I thought, this is my Prince Charming and I wouldn't mind being his baby's mother if this is the worst that could happen."

She later learned that getting pregnant wasn't the worst thing that could happen to her. In a telephone interview from Nashville, her hometown, Brown discussed

the message she tries to convey to help others from repeating her mistake.

"I have to let people know how



Marvelyn Brown

easy I contracted HIV," she said. "It's the same way you make a child. For whatever reason, women think I got the 'H' from this guy, the 'I' from another guy and the 'V' from another guy and all came together and that's how I got HIV. That's not how it happened. I got the 'H,' the 'I,' and the 'V' from one guy, one time."

She continued, "It doesn't matter if that guy was straight, bi-sexual or whatever, in that moment, I should have been more concerned about protecting myself so that I would not contract HIV."

The Food and Drug Administration reports, "The surest way to avoid [STDs] is to not have sex altogether (abstinence). Another way is to limit sex to one partner who also limits his or her sex in the same way (monogamy). Condoms are not 100 percent safe, but, if used properly, will reduce the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS."

Brown says she blames herself, not her misnamed Prince Charming, for her disease.

"People are looking at women infected with HIV/AIDS as victims," she said. "If someone gave it to them, it always goes back to, 'My husband cheated on me' or 'My man was on the down low.' People ask, 'How did you get it?' instead of, 'How can I not get it?'"

Brown refuses to view herself

as a victim.

"I look at my diagnosis like someone who was told they have cancer or diabetes," she explained.

"It's doesn't define me - it's not who I am. It's just something that I have."

But some heterosexual women have AIDS because their sexual partners were on the down low, or DL. Living on the down low is generally defined as men who pretend to be straight while secretly having sex with other men.

Trystin K. Francis, an openly gay resident of Washington, D.C., says he has been approached by married men in malls and de-

partment stores.

"This one man was with his wife or girlfriend and I was by myself. When he got away from her, it's like, 'Hey, how are you? Can I get your number? Can I call you?' It's the weirdest feeling."

He added, "If you went to a gay club to observe what was going on, you'd be surprised by how many men are in there that look straight and probably have a girlfriend. The girlfriend is probably thinking he is probably out with the boys, it's poker night, or they're going to a sports bar when, in fact, they are going out to this club. Their boyfriend or husband is at a gay club getting phone numbers from men and possibly bringing some of these men around you. I've talked to friends over the years who have said, 'I've met the wife, I've met

the kids, I've babysat the kids and she didn't know and I'm not saying anything."

Francis said despite the pain and disappointment it might cause, men should be honest with their mates.

"If you're not going to be committed to your wife as a man and you're going to sleep with another man, you need to tell your wife," he said. "I think Tyler Perry said it best: There are so many men out here that are cheating on their wives, but if you're going to cheat on your wife, use protection. That's a line from his movie, 'Why Did I Get Married?' But it's true. Why cheat on your wife and have unprotected sex with a stranger and bring it into your bedroom or household, particularly when one's life is at stake?"

And women are not the only ones that should be concerned, he said.

"Don't rule out African-American women sleeping with other women, cheating on their husbands," Francis said. "We're so focused on the DL phenomenon, but there are a lot of women out there cheating on their man with other women. Oprah just did a show

Virginia Fields about it."

Virginia Fields, the head of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, said in addition to the DL and infected men refusing to share their HIV status with unsuspecting sexual partners, the growth of heterosexual Black women being infected with HIV is also being fueled by men with

multiple partners.

"In North Carolina, I was talking to a minister who told me about this 35-year-old woman he had just buried. She has two children. She had become involved with a guy who had just moved down from New York and he was HIV positive. He infected her. She developed AIDS. He infected two other women since he has been in the area. More and more women are being infected as a result of this men shortage."

In addition, she said, men returning from prison are also frequently HIV infected. Fields said her organization is placing more emphasis on reaching heterosexual women who may not know



how to protect themselves.

She explained, "I'm hoping it will lead to more women demanding and participating in safe sex, insisting that condoms be used and that they will get tested and become more involved with talking about it among themselves."

New Orleans
DATA
News Weekly

ADVERTISE

trailblazer

Vince Craige

A Cultural Warrior

by: Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief



The facility is also an event space.

"We feel like we want to tackle the issues that are inhibiting our people in a holistic way," said Craige.

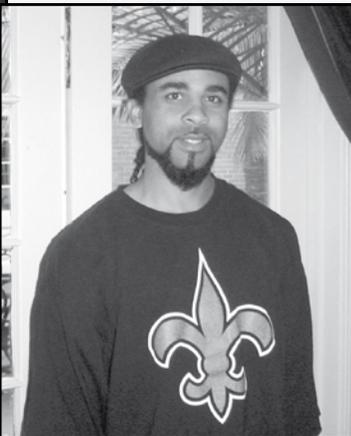
Over the years, he has been involved as a civic activist and through the Craige Center, is at the forefront of a movement to revitalize the spirit of change. "I have been taught in spirit by many of the leaders of the past, but I realize today that we need

people where they are and give them the tools they need to be productive citizens and leaders of our community moving forward."

Craige said he feels as though a real investment in education is an important component in turning some of the youth around, particularly young males. "At the Craige Center, we are dedicated to doing something about helping young people, especially our young boys. We must stop the cycle of a system that seems to place incarceration above education," he added.

To combat this problem, they have put in place a Rites of Passage Program. "I think it is important in our community that we have something like this, something where our young people can learn from adults what it takes to be responsible, respectable, adults," Craige said. "I believe that a lot of the problems we have stem from the elders not passing on enough to the youth, and with this program we are trying to do that; give something back to our youth."

Craige said that the expansion on his father's vision is not his alone. "My brother Todd and my family, friends and volunteers are all part of what makes the Craige Center successful." As far as future plans for the center he said, "We are working on having the center become even more visible and impactful in the community. We are looking to partner with community groups, businesses, educational entities and others to further our mission, and that is to help people by any means necessary. For we are a chain linked together in struggle working to empower our community."



He comes from a family where service in the community matters. Vince Craige is the program coordinator of the Craige Cultural Center named after his deceased father Thomas Craige.

"My father was one of the first African-American chiropractors in the city. He believed in empowering citizens of the community. During his life, he was more than just a doctor, said Craige of his father. "He was involved in real estate and a host of other things where the main goal was to help people help themselves. Seeing all the things my father and mother, Loyce Craige, who was a teacher, do inside the community inspired me to want to be part of something larger than myself."

Vince and his brother Todd has transformed an Algiers building that has been in their family into the Craige Cultural Center. He speaks with conviction about his level of commitment, "We opened the center with the hope of continuing in the tradition of my father. Our doors are open and we want to be a ray of hope in the rebuilding of the city and a positive symbol of progress for our youth," said Craige.

The center has several programs that range from arts and culture, literacy, wellness, and tutoring.

approaches that address the things that are the problems of today. Our young people need a different type of leadership model," said Craige. "And with the center, that is what we are trying to do— create a 21st century model for what that should be where we can teach and reach young

JMJ
Joseph M. Jones
Continuing Education Fund



at&t

Is There Common Ground on Faith?



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

It was vintage Obama. As an example, he contrasted those who oppose stem cell research because they think life is sacred, with those who support the research because they too, find sacred life in the lives of those whose worlds would improve if there were cures for juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's, or other conditions that could be helped by stem cell research.

Which life, Obama implicitly asks, should we value more. Can one side concede, at the very least, the good will on the part of the other side? And if there is disagreement, should one side or the other be demonized instead of understood?

For all the strengths of the Obama commencement speech, the Notre Dame situation was out of control, with disrespectful opponents actually heckling and booing the President of the United States as he spoke. There were students who did not attend their commencement because someone who "supports" abortion was speaking. There were calls by some Catholics for the invitation to the President to be rescinded.

And the so-called Christians and Catholics who spent so much energy opposing the President gave an interesting example of Christian behavior. Indeed, they gave

their own faith a bad name with the vociferousness of their opposition.

If there is such fervor for life among Catholics, why do these people think it was okay for us to invade Iraq and kill how many tens of thousands there, not to mention our own thousands dead? If there is such fervor for life, why not protest the unavailability of health care that kills hundreds each year. For that matter, why not have such vociferous protests for presidents, like the last one, who support the death penalty. Methinks the outrage is selective!

It seems that the bar for respecting our leader has been lowered since President Obama has taken office. The man has not been in office a good six months, and he's had more hits than misses as a leader, yet not an hour in the 24-hour news cycle goes by without some obstructionism.

Comments about Obama range from near-science fiction (the birth certificate) to simple political opposition, but there is a tone that is ugly and unfortunate. I think the President addressed issues of tone in his Notre Dame speech, not only in dealing with matters of religion, but also in dealing with matters of simple disagreement.

Our commander-in-chief seemingly also

has to be our nation's chief protocol officer. In speaking to the manner of discourse in our nation, he is clinging to his campaign slogan, "yes, we can".

He seems to mean that we can be a better, more civil America, that we can, indeed, live together as one human family, with our differences, including differences in faith. His calm, civil demeanor reminds us of ways that we too can address opposition. His leadership, and his example, remains refreshing even as some Americans are more polarized than they have ever been about issues of choice and faith.

Has race got anything to do with this? I happen to think the lower bar in respect has some correlation with the President's race but that just happens to be my opinion. Initially I was frustrated at the way President Obama seemed to turn the other cheek at fools, but as I listened to and reread the Notre Dame speech, I concluded, instead, that he is not turning the other cheek, simply showing us another way. And that's a good thing.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C. She can be reached at presbennett@bennett.edu

President Barack Obama is a more tolerant human being than I am. He braved critics at Notre Dame and disarmed many with a sanguine, balanced speech that did not sidestep the issue of abortion, but took on aspects of it. He called for mutual respect among folk who don't see things the same way, and asked for middle ground instead of the hard lines that we now find around the choice debate. Above all, he asked what we have to do to get along as one human family.

Republican Pelosi's Torture Diversion



Ron Walters
NNPA Columnist

This caused Abner Mikva, former White House Counsel and Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (voicing views of other lawyers) to say that "this has never been the law" and that any President operating under a such theory is "breaking the law repeatedly and persistently."

Furthermore, the use of Water boarding as a technique of interrogation is illegal under U. S. law which, as part of the International Convention on Torture and the Geneva Convention, prohibits, "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" of prisoners of war.

So, President Bush has committed a crime and should be punished. Furthermore, he added perjury to the crime by saying on one occasion in June of 2004, "I have never ordered Torture, I will never order torture, the values of this country are such that torture are not a part of our soul and our being."

Then, media analysts seemed shocked about Pelosi's comment that although records show that she was briefed by the CIA on EITs they lied by giving the impression that they expressly covered the subject of Water boarding.

Oh my God! The CIA lied? Let's be real, it was cooked CIA Intelligence that started the whole mess, supporting claims by the

administration and even Secretary Colin Powell that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. And although none were subsequently found, that did not keep George Bush from giving CIA Director George Tenet a Congressional Medal of Freedom as payback when he resigned.

More to the point, in November of 2005, the then CIA Director Porter Goss said his agency's interrogators used "unique and innovative ways" to extract information – "but they do not practice Torture."

We now know that was a lie because CIA Director Michael Hayden, who followed Goss, told the Congress in February of 2008 that torture had indeed been used against admitted Al Queda operatives such as Khalid Seikh Mohammed, Abu Zubaida and others in 2002 and 2003. But even more harsh techniques could account for the fact that some persons turned up dead who were confined in U. S. prison facilities.

Nevertheless, Dick Chaney pushed hard to legitimize the CIA use of these tactics much later.

Finally, Nancy Pelosi was on record during the passage of the 2005 Defense Appropriations Bill as saying, "I urge the Speaker [Dennis Hastert] to appoint House conferees to the Defense Appropriations Bill immediately so that Congressman Murtha can offer his motion to instruct conferees,

which would demonstrate the House's strong opposition to the Torture of detainees."

Rep. Pelosi did not speak up as strongly as she might have because she was not the speaker, and she was giving strong support to Rep. Jack Murtha who was then leading the legislative effort for Democrats to put some limits on U.S. involvement in Iraq by curbing spending and placing criteria on U.S. progress.

She subsequently voted for HR 2863, even though many members of the Black Caucus did not vote for the bill which had no deadline on the U. S. military commitment in Iraq.

The Obama Administration has released some of the memos drafted by John Yoo and others of the Justice Department that provided legal justification for the use of EITs. Obama should now set up a blue ribbon commission to get to the bottom of who knew what, did what, where and when.

President Obama has balked at doing this, feeling it could stifle the momentum of his administration enacting measures that will have a future impact on the lives of the American people. But presidents are also custodians of the Constitution and this responsibility calls him to account for the past as well.

One look at the record and several things become clear about the current debate over Torture which former Bush administration officials – with the help of the media – are attempting to cover up by waging a diversionary campaign against Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

First, President Bush, under a weird theory which his Justice Department attempted to codify in law, asserted the right to expand executive power as head of national security that extended to the approval of the use of so-called "expanded interrogation techniques" (EITs), such as Water boarding of prisoners in secret CIA camps and at Guantanamo prison.

National Foster Care Month



Marian Wright Edelman
NNPA Columnist

Marian Wright Edelman
Child Watch

May is National Foster Care Month and this year is a good time to reflect on the progress we can make in improving the lives of children and youths in foster care by implementing the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections Act).

This important new federal law, approved last fall with broad bipartisan support, will help hundreds of thousands of children and youths who have been abused and neglected. It's now up to all of us to see that states implement it so that it truly benefits young people across the country.

Nothing matters more to children than the love and security a family provides, and

this new law offers family connections to some of our nation's most vulnerable children. More than 500,000 children in America are in foster care at any given time; about one-fourth of them are being cared for by relatives.

Each year, nearly 130,000 children in foster care are waiting to be adopted, and 44 percent of them entered care before age six. More than 26,000 older youths leave foster care each year—most at 18—without being returned home or adopted. Compared to children and youths who have not been in foster care, young people in care are more likely to become homeless, unemployed or to be incarcerated. They are more likely to have physical, developmental and mental health challenges.

The Fostering Connections Act offers them new hope. It promotes family connections by helping children being raised by grandparents and other relative caregivers link up with the supports they need. It also helps children who have lived with relatives in foster care to remain permanently with them outside of foster care when returning home or adoption are not options.

The new law requires that siblings live together in foster care whenever possible and offers greater federal support to states to increase adoptions of older youths and children with disabilities or other special needs from foster care.

The Fostering Connections Act offers

other important new opportunities for older youths in care, who now are often forced out of foster care at age 18 with few resources to help them transition to adulthood. It helps them remain in foster care longer while they are in school or working, and engages them in planning for their futures. It promotes educational stability for children in foster care by requiring they be in school, by minimizing moves from school to school, and improves health outcomes by promoting better coordination of health care.

And it increases services and protections for American Indian children by giving Indian tribes direct access for the first time to federal support for foster care, guardianship and adoption assistance. Federal support is expanded for training of private agency staff, attorneys and others representing abused and neglected children.

All of us should monitor how this new law and new federal support is benefitting children being raised by relatives and in foster care. Many of the new protections are now in effect. A number of states have issued policies requiring notice to grandparents and other relatives when a child is removed from his home and requiring that siblings be placed together in foster care or be helped to stay connected.

In some states, education and child welfare agencies are working together to ensure that children in foster care are at-

tending school and can stay in their original school when they enter care or move to a new foster home or group care setting. Nearly all the states that previously offered subsidies to relative guardians who commit to caring permanently for children they had cared for in foster care are considering new legislation. Find out what is happening in your state and how children are benefiting. These are tight fiscal times but many of these new provisions are cost-effective in the short- and long-term.

Everybody can play a role even if you aren't a foster parent. You can serve as a mentor for a child or youth in foster care, or work with others to provide scholarships for children in care to be able to participate in extracurricular activities or for graduating youths to go on to college. There is always a special role for the faith community, which can come together to support families in their congregations and communities who do provide foster care and grandparents and other relatives who have taken on full-time responsibility for the care of children to help keep them out of foster care. Ask your own state where there are volunteer opportunities or other chances for you to become involved. Children need all of us.

Marian Wright Edelman is president and CEO of the Children's Defense Fund.

Maybe the U.S. Auto Industry Can Get It Now



Harry C. Alford
NNPA Columnist

It is so easy to excel when you are the only player on the field. Such was the case for the US Automobile Industry for decades.

World War II and the Korean War devastated European and Asian automobile capacity. The bombing and aggression left their manufacturing facilities in total disarray.

They were knocked back into the "stone ages". The Big 3 of the United States had virtually little competition during the 1950's through the mid-'970's. We foolishly thought it was our ingenuity and prowess but the actual playing field wasn't level at all.

The conversion from our manufacturing from World War II equipment to automobiles was pretty seamless and the ready workforce was there and more willing and able than ever. The manufacturing counterparts of Europe and Asia such as BMW, Mercedes, Toyota and Mitsubishi were crumbled ruins and had to start step by step. It would take them decades to recover.

While our foreign competitors were slowly recovering we were totally cavalier. Whatever "Detroit" would produce we would gobble up.

The advantages of those times were the cost and easiness of maintaining your vehicle personally. Consumers could upkeep their own car. Oh how simple it was to change your oil, tune up your car and, with a 9/16th wrench and screwdriver do just about anything your ride needed.

It was fun adjusting the timing, cleaning the valves, changing the spark plugs in your drive way or garage. Young men would show off their ability by letting their machines publicly "purr" before their friends. The simonize wax job you personally put on it would keep it looking like new.

If something was remiss, you could be admonished by a friend who would, after listening to the engine say: "It's missing, can I help you?" You always kept your

"ride" in perfect condition.

The car cost little and you accepted whatever Detroit would make it look like. It would run on gasoline that cost 25 - 40 cents per gallon. The gas mileage didn't even matter. I remember driving from my military post in Utah to my hometown in Southern California without a care in the world.

I personally had it in mint condition and would cross into Nevada that had no speed limit laws. I would go about 110 miles per hour and wave at the state troopers who would wave back.

There was no concept of a true luxury car. We accepted a Cadillac or Continental regardless of its look or mileage. Even when GM issued that ultra ugly Cadillac Seville we accepted it and took that box called a Continental as is. There was no alternative.

By the late 1970s things changed severely. Gasoline prices had become out of our control as foreign nations took charge of their own natural resources.

Gas mileage became a big factor. Germany, Sweden, Italy, Japan began making economical and good looking cars, even luxury models that were super slick. Also, and most importantly, cars started having electric ignitions and high tech engines that the common person could no longer

manage.

Affordability, gas mileage, attractiveness and reliability became serious consumer factors. Detroit went into denial - BIG TIME.

At the same time, the cost of making a car became a disadvantageous proposition for US automakers. The cost of US steel became prohibitive. The number two cost for Detroit was healthcare while European and Asian manufacturers had that covered by their nationalized healthcare delivery systems (their governments).

In addition to those two factors were the luxurious labor agreements made with the United Auto Workers union divisions over the decades. In essence, Detroit could no longer adequately compete with its foreign competitors.

It is our entire fault. We had decades of a head start and the biggest captivated market in the world. We took it for granted and got whipped at our own game. It is time to reflect, regroup and bring back that good old Yankee ingenuity. Let us learn from these careless mistakes and malfeasance.

Harry Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Website: www.nationalbcc.org.

Health Care Reform Important to Blacks, Says Obama

Cash Michaels
Special to the NNPA from the
Wilmington Journal

WILMINGTON (NNPA) - If there is any population where it is vital not only that healthcare costs be lowered, but access to quality healthcare be improved, experts agree, it's the African-American community. President Obama knows the need firsthand from his former days as a community organizer on the streets of Southside Chicago, and First Lady Michelle Obama's work as a hospital administrator there.

"Over the past several years the costs of healthcare have increased dramatically," then Sen. Obama, running in the general election for president last fall, told the Black Press in a teleconference. "The average premium has gone up by 100 percent; the average deductible has gone up 30 percent just this year. But obviously the African-American community continues to have poor health and receive lower quality healthcare than other Americans, more likely to be uninsured; the death rate from cancer is one-third higher for African-Americans than it is for whites; the community suffers from a higher rate of chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes."

Then Sen. Obama continued in the 2008 conference, "Healthcare is universally important, and we've got to do something about it ... But it is especially important in the African-American community."

That's why Obama's White

House reached out to the Black Press last week in an effort to emphasize "the importance of lowering healthcare costs and the long-term impacts on the African-American community."

According to Nancy-Ann DeParle, director of the White House Office of Health Reform - the office that "coordinates the development of the Administration's policy agenda ... concerning the provision of high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care and slowing the growth of health costs" - the president knows that "reducing costs is particularly important for the African-American community because on average, they spend a higher percentage of their income on healthcare costs (16.5 percent) compared to their white counterparts (12 percent)."

"And despite spending more of their income on medical care, African-Americans continue to face disparities in terms of the [quality of care] that they get," DeParle told Black reporters during the May 14 White House teleconference. "Those [disparities] are brought about because [Blacks] tend to visit hospitals that provide lower quality care, which, of course, is directly attributable to the lack of financial resources for the hospital."

DeParle continued, "So we know that there is a special problem in predominately African-American communities, where Medicaid reimbursements are lower, charity cases are higher and healthcare providers may find it more difficult to maintain a

practice ... We want to make sure that controlling spending is about more than just saving money. It's also got to be about ensuring that we provide the best patient-centered healthcare system that promotes health and prevents illness."

The administration, through the U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, will be making concentrated efforts to minimize the disparities in care and treatment," Ms. DeParle added. Hospitals that serve low-wealth communities of color will be worked with to improve their standards of care.

Obama has made it clear that the key to solving the nation's long-term economic problems is lowering spiraling healthcare costs to consumers. Democratic leaders in Congress have pledged to have healthcare reform legislation completed, and on the president's desk, before lawmakers break for summer recess in August.

"Our broken healthcare system is unsustainable for our families and our businesses, and our government itself," DeParle said. "Nearly 46 million Americans don't have any health insurance at all. We know that there are millions of families that are struggling to pay skyrocketing premiums, and businesses are sacrificing growth and innovation to cover healthcare costs."

"The issue of [rising] healthcare costs is especially troubling in the African-American community, where African-Americans suffer from higher percentages

of chronic diseases such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes, that are due in part to a lack of access to quality care."

DeParle recounted how she met a black newspaper owner in Greensboro, NC who was struggling to keep providing health insurance for his employees amidst mounting costs.

"He was telling me that if something doesn't happen soon, he's going to have to lay people off, which is obviously the last thing that people want," DeParle said.

President Obama met with healthcare industry leaders last week, reportedly gaining their commitment to reduce the annual healthcare spending growth by an average 1.5 percent a year for the next ten years. DeParle said that doesn't sound like a lot, except that costs were originally expected to grow six to seven percent a year over the next decade.

"If they are able to do that...we can save our country, American families and businesses more than \$2 trillion...which we estimate to about \$2,500 per family, which is something the president really cares about," DeParle noted.

In fall 2008, Obama, then a Democratic presidential candidate, told black reporters via teleconference call that beyond lower healthcare costs through modernizing electronic medical records and billing to reduce bureaucracy, if elected, he would also push for targeted prevention measures in the African-American community.

"The emphasis on prevention will include addressing dispari-

ties. That means we'll make sure that AIDS education programs are in the communities where we've seen the highest growth in AIDS. We're making sure that there are regular screenings for things like prostate cancer and breast cancer that occur at higher rates in the African-American community. That all of those [prevention efforts] are adequately funded on the front end so that we can save money on the back end."

Six months later, there have been "general" discussions with President Obama about ways to emphasize prevention of chronic ailments in the Black community, DeParle told the Carolinian/Wilmington Journal newspapers. In the \$787 billion stimulus package that the president signed into law in February, \$1 billion was designated to fund prevention efforts and public health campaigns across the states.

More than \$2 billion was allotted to the National Institutes of Health for further research into chronic diseases, "making sure that that research is something that looks at not just the White community, but the African-American community," vowed DeParle.

"That will be part of what we will make sure happened with that. ... The problem of costs and access in the African-American community is something that this president cares a lot about," Obama's healthcare reform adviser added, "and that we will be working closely with the Congress to make sure is addressed as part of healthcare reform."

White House Says Permanent HBCU Funding Increased

Zenitha Price
Special to the NNPA from the
Afro-American Newspapers

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The White House reaffirmed its commitment to historically Black colleges and universities last week in response to criticisms that arose when the proposed education budget revealed the loss of an \$85 million allotment to Black institutions.

"The Administration strongly supports the critical work being done by the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities and understands that the system offers students from disadvantaged backgrounds the chance to continue their education," White

House spokesman Corey Ealons wrote in a statement to the AFRO.

Feathers ruffled last week when education officials confirmed that the College Cost Reduction Act—a two-year program approved by Congress in 2007 that awarded additional discretionary funds to minority-serving institutions, including \$85 million per year for Black institutions—was allowed to sunset.

But given the historic and ongoing underfunding of HBCUs, advocates and school officials say, they can't afford a reduction in direct funding, especially in this economy.

"When it comes to direct funding of public HBCUs, there has

been a history of these schools not getting their share compared to majority institutions," said Edith Bartley, director of government affairs at the United Negro College Fund. "... [And] when the world hurts, as it is with this economic crunch, [HBCUs] really feel it."

Radio personality and well-known HBCU advocate Tom Joyner urged the administration to rethink its decision.

"As a passionate supporter of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), I am asking, President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to seriously reconsider cutting more than \$85 million in funding to help our black colleg-

es," Joyner wrote in an e-mailed statement. "...I know you have many priorities, but you've got to continue - and increase - the funding for HBCUs and for Pell Grants."

White House officials contend, however, that rather than decrease funding, as many reports claimed, monies for key initiatives that serve HBCUs have increased in a budget in which a vast majority of Education Department programs have received no new funding at all.

According to figures in the proposed budget, discretionary funding for HBCUs and historically Black graduate institutions—Title III, Part B of the Higher Education Act—will increase by

5 percent from \$296.6 million to \$311.4 million. That's "more than twice the rate of inflation," an administration official stated.

And, set-asides for HBCU capital funding will almost double from \$10.4 million to \$20.6 million. The official also pointed to the president's "historic investments in college affordability" as another boon to HBCUs.

The Recovery Act and the budget invest nearly \$200 billion in new college tax credits and Pell Grants, which "will make a real difference for HBCU students," since half of them receive Pell Grants, the statement read.

In Economic Crisis: Black Church Memberships Increase While Offerings Decrease

Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – The doors of the historic Black Church, a fortress of healing from social pain, have opened even wider during the economic crisis. But, as church membership increases across the nation, offerings are decreasing, causing even houses of faith to make dif-

icult decisions, pastors say. ment rate leaped 1.7 percent from the month before, now at 15 percent overall. That is nearly double that of the 8 percent White unemployment rate and the national average, which is 8.9 percent. For Black men, the unemployment rate is 17.2 percent, more than double that of White men, at 8.5 percent.

From the civil rights movement to the current economic down-

turn, African-Americans have typically turned to the Black church when community is in crisis.

One would speculate that smaller churches may be fairing easier with less overhead. But in coast to coast interviews, most pastors are telling the same story - even congregations with less than 1,000 members.

“We have probably experienced about a 30 percent decline in the giving,” says Pastor Levonzia Stevens Sr., senior pastor of the 700-member Hope Aglow Empowerment Center in Woodbridge, Va. “The people are trying to do what’s right in God’s eye sight. Unfortunately sometimes the pressures of normal bills cause individuals to make decisions that cut back on their giving. It’s been more noticeable over the last year.”

To prevent staff layoffs, Hope Aglow has been forced to dip into its reserve funds.

“Of course, as your reserves are depleted, that puts you in a very precarious situation,” Stevens says. “But, your hopes are

that the giving will take place soon.”

Economic forecasters say unemployment could reach double digits for everyone before it gets better. The pain is indiscriminate.

“I don’t think anyone is not affected by the economy right now from Wall Street to Main Street,” says the Rev. Dr. Tecoy Porter, senior pastor of the 1000-member Genesis Church in Sacramento,

Porter says.

Meanwhile, some pastors say their churches are supplementing messages of faith and hope with practical teachings on finances, job-searching, entrepreneurship and business ownership.

Porter has written a book, “Releasing Your Inner Treasure, 8 Kingdom Keys to Unlocking the Wealth Within You”, based on his personal experiences with finan-

be in this kind of situation and circumstance since they have such prophetic words,” Jones says. “What happens is the church has capitalized the gospel and we have preached Americanism for gospel and ultimately we ended up crashing because there is no credulity and authenticity in the whole presentation.”

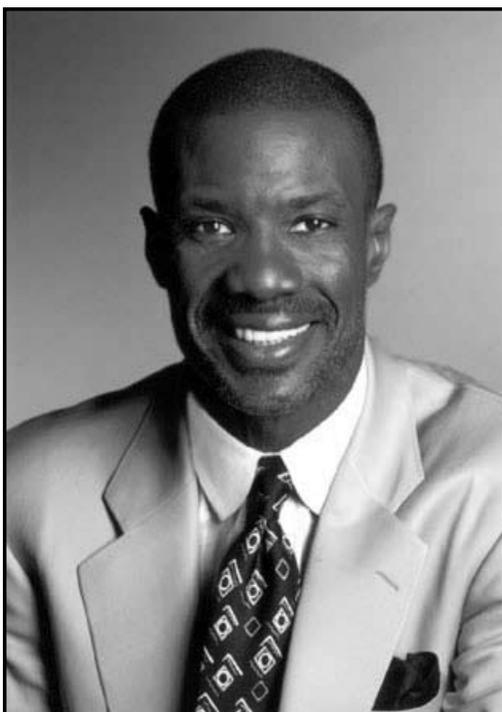
He continues, “The only people who were making any real money were those who were expostulating the theology that left the psychology that debilitated the minds of those who were involved. The debilitation is that everybody expected to bring an offering in church and just get rich though nobody participated and partnered with God. Because at the end of the day nobody receives a check in an envelope postmarked from heaven. It’s your participation that makes it happen...The ministry and the preachers have taken so much money from the church and lived lavish lifestyles. We need to put something back. We need to equip our people. As James puts it, very explicitly, ‘Faith without works is dead’. We co-create, we perpetuate God’s creation by functioning responsibly.”

Jones said many Christians have basically lived on credit and owned nothing.

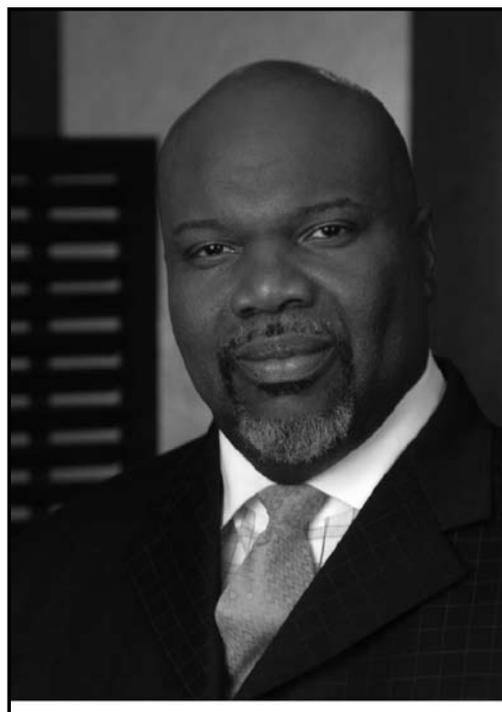
“So, what everybody was talking about as God’s blessing was people living on credit. And the Bible says that the borrower is subject to the lender. So, Christian America simply joined the capitalistic bandwagon - and in the name of God - articulated a theology that has no credulity.”

The pastors agree that the financial troubles won’t last always.

“In the Bible, in every story where you find a famine in the land, by the end of the chapter, you find a blessing, overflowing abundant blessing,” says Stevens. “We don’t serve a ‘get you’ God. God is not coming after you because you want a better house or a better car. Everybody got greedy. God doesn’t hate us for that. So, we have to get over the guilt factor and look at what we can do to be better stewards of our resources. The rebound is coming. We ought to see that and know that. ...Work while we wait, prepare. We are our best stimulus plan. We are our best recovery package.”



Bishop Noel Jones



Bishop TD Jakes



Dr. tecoy Porter Sr.

Calif. “California just got out of the budget crisis so our members are furloughed twice a month and things like that.”

Because of a 20 percent drop in offerings, Porter says he has had to lay off some staff members and restructure his church organization. That includes cutting two Sunday services down to only one. Fortunately, because of the Black community’s history of struggle, Black institutions have a special knack for endurance.

“We’ve been here before. We’re not strangers to any type of depression or oppression or things like that. And so there’s a resiliency of Black churches that cannot be overlooked,” says Porter. “I am a preacher’s kid, a third generation pastor, so I am a product of the Black church and so I believe it is the strongest institution that we have for African-Americans in our community because it has survived so much.”

The messages through the years have been consistent. “We preach hope. We say we can make it. We’ve been here. Don’t panic. This too shall past,”

Last month’s Black unemploy-

ment rate leaped 1.7 percent from the month before, now at 15 percent overall. That is nearly double that of the 8 percent White unemployment rate and the national average, which is 8.9 percent. For Black men, the unemployment rate is 17.2 percent, more than double that of White men, at 8.5 percent.

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turn, African-Americans have typically turned to the Black church when community is in crisis.

One would speculate that smaller churches may be fairing easier with less overhead. But in coast to coast interviews, most pastors are telling the same story - even congregations with less than 1,000 members.

“We have probably experienced about a 30 percent decline in the giving,” says Pastor Levonzia Stevens Sr., senior pastor of the 700-member Hope Aglow Empowerment Center in Woodbridge, Va. “The people are trying to do what’s right in God’s eye sight. Unfortunately sometimes the pressures of normal bills cause individuals to make decisions that cut back on their giving. It’s been more noticeable over the last year.”

To prevent staff layoffs, Hope Aglow has been forced to dip into its reserve funds.

“Of course, as your reserves are depleted, that puts you in a very precarious situation,” Stevens says. “But, your hopes are

that the giving will take place soon.”

Economic forecasters say unemployment could reach double digits for everyone before it gets better. The pain is indiscriminate.

“I don’t think anyone is not affected by the economy right now from Wall Street to Main Street,” says the Rev. Dr. Tecoy Porter, senior pastor of the 1000-member Genesis Church in Sacramento,

Porter says.

Meanwhile, some pastors say their churches are supplementing messages of faith and hope with practical teachings on finances, job-searching, entrepreneurship and business ownership.

Porter has written a book, “Releasing Your Inner Treasure, 8 Kingdom Keys to Unlocking the Wealth Within You”, based on his personal experiences with finan-

be in this kind of situation and circumstance since they have such prophetic words,” Jones says. “What happens is the church has capitalized the gospel and we have preached Americanism for gospel and ultimately we ended up crashing because there is no credulity and authenticity in the whole presentation.”

He continues, “The only people who were making any real money were those who were expostulating the theology that left the psychology that debilitated the minds of those who were involved. The debilitation is that everybody expected to bring an offering in church and just get rich though nobody participated and partnered with God. Because at the end of the day nobody receives a check in an envelope postmarked from heaven. It’s your participation that makes it happen...The ministry and the preachers have taken so much money from the church and lived lavish lifestyles. We need to put something back. We need to equip our people. As James puts it, very explicitly, ‘Faith without works is dead’. We co-create, we perpetuate God’s creation by functioning responsibly.”

Jones said many Christians have basically lived on credit and owned nothing.

“So, what everybody was talking about as God’s blessing was people living on credit. And the Bible says that the borrower is subject to the lender. So, Christian America simply joined the capitalistic bandwagon - and in the name of God - articulated a theology that has no credulity.”

The pastors agree that the financial troubles won’t last always.

“In the Bible, in every story where you find a famine in the land, by the end of the chapter, you find a blessing, overflowing abundant blessing,” says Stevens. “We don’t serve a ‘get you’ God. God is not coming after you because you want a better house or a better car. Everybody got greedy. God doesn’t hate us for that. So, we have to get over the guilt factor and look at what we can do to be better stewards of our resources. The rebound is coming. We ought to see that and know that. ...Work while we wait, prepare. We are our best stimulus plan. We are our best recovery package.”



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