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**Page 4 DataZone**

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April 3 - April 10, 2010 44th Year Volume 27 [www.ladatanews.com](http://www.ladatanews.com)

# A Racial Coups in Waterproof?

## Investigative Report

*The Soul of New Orleans*

**Page 2**



**Data Zone**  
Legendary  
Marva Wright  
Remembered

**Page 4**

**State & Local**

Luda at  
your Door?



**Page 7**



# Did a White Sheriff and District Attorney Orchestrate a Race-Based Coup in a Northern Louisiana Town?



Parish Sheriff Rickey Jones



Police Chief Miles Jenkins



District Attorney James Paxton

By Jordan Flaherty  
In the small northeast Louisiana town of Waterproof, the African-American mayor and police chief assert that they have been forced from office and arrested as part of an illegal coup carried out by the region's white political power structure. In a lawsuit filed last week, Police Chief Miles Jenkins describes a wide-ranging conspiracy led by the area's district attorney and parish sheriff. These charges come at a time of widespread and high-profile racist attacks against the US President and Black members of Congress nationwide, and in a state where white political corruption and violence have been and continue to be used as tools to suppress Black political representation.  
About 800 people live in Waterproof, a rural community in Tensas Parish

that is 88% African American. Tensas has just over 6,000 residents, making it both the smallest parish in the state, and the parish with the state's fastest declining population. The area schools remain mostly segregated, with nearly all the Black students attending public schools, and nearly all the white students attending private schools. With a median household income of \$10,250, Waterproof is also one of the poorest communities in the US. The only jobs for Black people in town involve working for white farmers, according to Chief Jenkins. "Unless you go out of town to work," he says, "You're going to ride the white man's tractor. That's it."  
Bobby Higginbotham was elected mayor of Waterproof in September of 2006. The next year, he appointed Miles Jenkins as chief of police. Jenkins,

*Continued next page.*

INSIDE DATA	
Cover Story . . . . .	2
Commentary. . . . .	6
Data Zone . . . . .	4
State & Local News . .	7

### DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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*Cover Story, Continued from previous page.*

who served in the US military for 30 years and earned a master's degree in public administration from Troy University in Alabama, immediately began the work of professionalizing a small town police department that had previously been mostly inactive. "You called the Waterproof police for help before," says Chief Jenkins, "He would say, wait 'til tomorrow, it's too hot to come out today." The new mayor also sought to reform the town's financial practices, which Chief Jenkins says were in disorder and consumed by debt.

Ms. Annie Watson, a Black school board member in her 60s who was born and raised in Waterproof, worked as a volunteer for the mayor. She says that the mayor and chief, who had both lived in New Orleans, brought a new attitude that Parish officials didn't like. "The Mayor and the Chief said you can't treat people this way, and the Sheriff and DA said you got to know your place. If you're educated and intelligent and know your rights in this parish, you are in trouble," she says. "They are determined to let you know you have a place and if you don't jump when they say jump you are in trouble."

Ms. Watson explains that Parish Sheriff Rickey Jones and District Attorney James Paxton were threatened by Chief Jenkins' efforts to professionalize the town's police force. Aside from representing a challenge to Sheriff Jones' political power, this also took away a source of his funding. "Before Mayor Higginbotham, all traffic tickets went to St. Joseph," she says, referring to the Parish seat, where Sheriff Jones is based. "So he cut their income by having a police department."

Jack McMillan, an African American deputy sheriff who works with Sheriff Jones, says he tried to warn Chief Jenkins to back down. "You've got to adapt to your environment," he says. "You can't come to a small town and do things the same way you might in a big city. Like the song says, you got to know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em."

Chief Jenkins asserts that the white-led political infrastructure, led by the Sheriff Jones and DA Paxton, were threatened by their actions. This group immediately sought to orchestrate a coup against the two Black men, including clandestine meetings, false arrests, harassment, and even physical violence. Court documents describe how Paxton, Jones, and their allies formed an

alliance "designed to harass intimidate, arrest, imprison, prosecute, illegally remove plaintiff from his position of police chief, prevent plaintiff from performing his law duties as police chief and/or force plaintiff to leave the town of Waterproof."

Tensas Parish

Prior to the registration of 15 voters in 1964, there was not a single Black voter registered in Tensas, despite having more than 7,000 African American residents (and about 4,000 white residents), making it the last parish in Louisiana to allow African Americans to register. Tensas and the nearby parishes of Madison and East Carroll all share the sixth judicial district – currently represented by District Attorney Paxton. It is a small but influential district – Buddy Caldwell, DA for the sixth judicial district from 1979 to 2008, is now Attorney General for the state of Louisiana. The sixth district parishes all have majority Black populations and mostly white elected officials, which Chief Jenkins and Ms. Watson attribute to political corruption and disenfranchisement of Black voters.

Waterproof is "Reminiscent of the bygone days of southern politics," with a white power structure maintaining political power over a Black majority, according to veteran civil rights attorney Ron Wilson, who is representing Jenkins in his civil rights lawsuit. "At any and all costs, even jeopardizing the life and freedom of my client, they will ruin him to maintain power. This case is ultimately about whether an African-American can be guaranteed the rights that are assured to him in the constitution." According to court papers, this Jim Crow alliance dominates elected power in the area, and "even on the local level, where the office holders tend to be African American, they are powerless to control their own destiny." According to Chief Jenkins, the District Attorney once boasted that he controlled the votes of Waterproof's Black aldermen.

Chief Jenkins says he faced an immediate campaign of harassment. "They just wanted this town to be white-controlled," explained Chief Jenkins. The police chief described being arrested multiple times under the order of DA Paxton and Sheriff Jones. The charges, says Jenkins, range from charges of theft for a pay raise he received from the town's board of Aldermen to criminal trespass for going to the home of

a citizen who had been stopped for speeding without a valid driver's license, to disturbing the peace for an incident where individuals threatened the police chief with violence for issuing traffic citations. Ms. Watson says the charges were invented out of thin air. "It was a sad case of lies," she says, adding that, "The majority of the town of Waterproof supports the chief and supports the mayor."

Chief Jenkins says he was arrested and declared a flight risk by District Attorney Paxton, despite living and owning property in the Parish. "In all my years," says attorney Ron Wilson, "I've never seen a police officer, and certainly not a police chief, charged for something like this." Chief Jenkins alleges he was attacked and choked by a deputy sheriff, who he says shouted, "Shut up...We are in charge...We are the sheriff and the sheriff controls Tensas Parish. The sooner you all learn this the better off you will be," an action that Ms. Watson says she

also witnessed.

Chief Jenkins says his police car was shoved in a ditch, and when he arrested the people who had committed the act, the DA refused to press charges. In fact, he says the DA refused almost all charges he presented and released anyone he arrested. The chief was even charged with kidnapping for one incident in which he arrested the former town clerk for illegal entry. "That's the most ludicrous notion I've ever come across," says Wilson. "That a police chief can be arrested for kidnapping, because he placed someone under arrest who was breaking the law."


A grand jury has returned indictments of Chief Jenkins and Mayor Higginbotham, and Higginbotham's trial is scheduled to begin this Monday. The mayor faces 44 charges, including multiple counts of malfeasance in office and felony theft. The charges appear to be based on the results of a state audit of Waterproof that found irregularities in the town's

record keeping going back to before the election of Higginbotham – irregularities that the mayor and police chief say they had repaired.

Patterns of Violence

Mayor Higginbotham was elected at the same time as two other Black mayors of small Louisiana towns, both of whom also received threats based on race. In December of 2006, shortly after Higginbotham was elected mayor of Waterproof, Gerald Washington was shot and killed three days before he was to become the first Black mayor of the small southwest Louisiana town of Westlake. An official investigation called his death a suicide, but family members call it an assassination. Less than two weeks after that, shots were fired into the house of Earnest Lampkins, the first Black mayor of the northwest Louisiana town of Greenwood. Lamp-

*Continued on page 6.*



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# Remembering The Blues Queen of New Orleans



Dionne Character, Author  
Entertainment Editor & Columnist

Marva Wright, the Queen of Blues left so many memories behind for those who had the privilege to share the stage, space, and time, in her company. She expired after suffering two strokes in 2009. She was 62, and had traveled the world after quitting her job as a secretary to become a singer, in her youth.

Marva followed her dreams and the footsteps of her mother who was a pianist in church. The last time we spoke was during the Grand Opening of the Mahalia Jackson Theatre. This event was very emotional for Marva, as she expressed how she recalled Mahalia and her mother's friendship as a child.

As the Blues Queen of New

Orleans laid to rest at Gallier Hall on March 30, in her silver glitzy jacket, a rhinestone bracelet, rings that enhanced her favorite fingernail polish, with a squirt of her favorite perfume, to her own tunes, which were pre-recorded, the crystals in all the chandeliers seemed to embrace the shine of her headband.

The Queen of Blues seemed to be at rest, after sharing her God given talents with the world for many years.

Marva Wright will be missed but joined by many who have already received their crowns, for a job well done.

Dionne Character can be reached at [dasolediva@yahoo.com](mailto:dasolediva@yahoo.com).



Marva Wright, Queen of the Blues

# KBK Foundation Cigars and Saxophones Spring Gala

Photos by Lawrence Martin

**Dionne Character, Author  
Entertainment Editor & Columnist**

The KBK Foundation held its Cigars and Saxophones Spring Gala on Friday, March 26, at the historic Basin St. Station, located at 501 Basin Street. This event was a grand celebration with a purpose, as proceeds from the night benefited the Resource Center at Marrero Commons, formerly known as the B.W. Cooper/Calliope Housing Development, as well as help sponsor youth programs focusing on education and leadership.

From the red carpet entrance to the hand-rolled Cuban cigars provided by The Cigar Factory New

Orleans many got a chance to sample on the rooftop, the air was filled with ambition, culture and successful Black men, with a few ladies who enjoyed the strong flavor of the night overlooking Canal St., the Central Business District and the French Quarter.

The event featured a silent auction, live jazz music by Irvin Mayfield, Kermit Ruffins, Judy Spellman, Michael Ward and Clark Knighten, that of whom I had a chance to perform with, along with an open bar.

Guest supporters were New Orleans Saints Super Bowl Champions Deuce McAllister and Jonathan Vilma, retired National Football League (NFL) play-

ers Eddie George and Eric Hill (owner of Eric Hill Nissan in New Orleans East), rapper turned community activist Percy Miller (formerly Master P), and actor Wendell Pierce, who currently stars in the New Orleans' based HBO series Treme.

For more information on The KBK Foundation, log on to [www.kbkfoundation.org](http://www.kbkfoundation.org). For information on KBK Enterprises, log on to [www.kbkenterprises.net](http://www.kbkenterprises.net).

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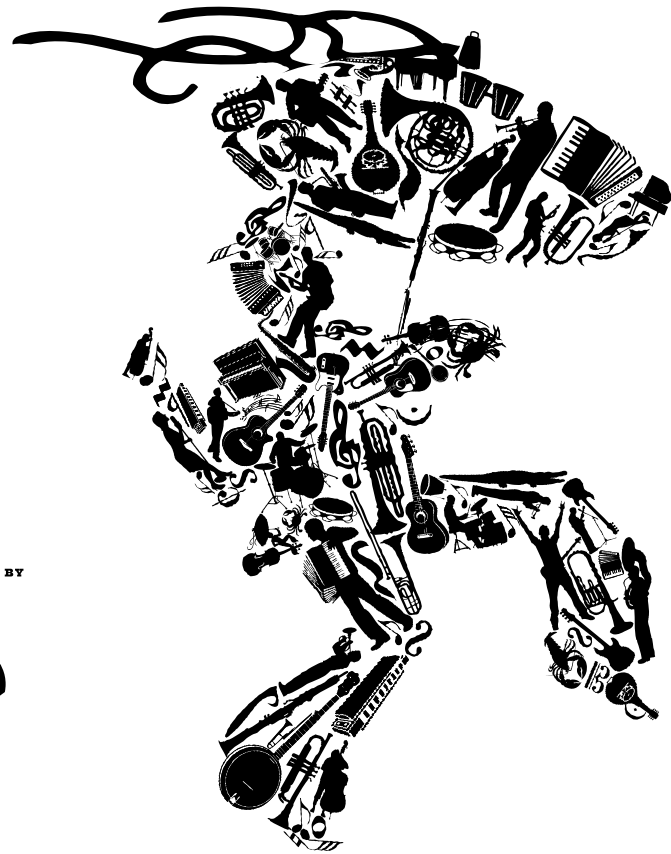


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# The Hate Spasm in American Politics



Ron Walters  
Data Columnist

Speaking at the recent conference of the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, Mississippi, I constantly ran into questions and comments drawing comparisons to the racial harassment faced by civil workers in the 1960s and what is occurring today. Most said there was very little comparison to the intensity of the racism faced by those who attempted to vote or eat at a lunch counter, and we know that many sacrificed their lives.

Yet it was ironic that these were Congressman John Lewis' colleagues and he and other Black members of Congress were spit at and called the N... word as they passed by some Tea Baggers on Capitol Hill recently.

The spate of hate crimes that came

as President Barack Obama signed the Health Bill into law that has featured shots being fired at Democratic campaign offices and bricks thrown through their windows and other things have a familiar ring to me. Not the 1960s, but in the Reagan era of the 1980s, and '90s the rise of the militia movement found White males arming themselves and practicing in the woods on weekends for some kind of mythical confrontation. The Branch Davidian cult shoot-out with Treasury Department agents in 1993 at Waco, Texas became their rallying cry against government oppression and interference.

Oddly, the handling of this incident put the government on the defensive and allowed the militia movement to draw Republican members of Congress into the incident on their side. Then the Justice Department backed off.

What we saw then was the creation of unity between native White nationalist operating at the neighborhood level being reflected in their representatives in Congress who opposed government intervention, using this to elevate the right to bear arms as the signal issue in the case.

This union between native White nationalists and public officials and political leaders is still going on and the danger is that they are giving legitimacy to the madness occurring at the base of society. That is what happens when a Republican member of Congress, Rep. Joe Wilson of South Car-

olina, shouts out to the President, "you lie" or when another, Rep. Randy Neugebauer from Texas, shouts "baby killer" as he did at Rep. Bart Stupak of Michigan's right in the Congress.

Then comes Sara Palin, former Republican Vice Presidential candidate, telling her crowd "don't retreat, reload" as her website features members of congress she wanted to defeat, sited on a map in rifle cross-hairs. Words are powerful and these tell the base of the Republican Party that it is OK to oppose Democrats by any means necessary.

In this debate, the media shuns the truth because it wants to practice a "both sides do it" theory which absolves them from saying clearly where the hateful rhetoric and thus, the violence, is coming from. As it was in the Reagan era this is clearly a feature of the radical conservative movement, the base of the Republican Party. Yet, the media – and the Richmond Police – have allowed conservative Rep. Eric Cantor of Virginia, who just happens to be a Republican spokesman, to pretend that his office was also shot at in order to keep alive the "both sides" theory.

The fact that bringing those to justice who perpetrated crimes against Blacks in the 1960s is still going on through the "Cold Case" unit of the Justice Department means that law enforcement was either lax or non-existent then. Today there is a popular concept that police forces around the country use "Zero Tolerance" policies

which they say has been responsible for the reduction of crime in various periods of history.

They believe "Zero Tolerance" for small infractions of law suppress larger problems. This Justice Department needs to practice "Zero Tolerance" against political violence just as it does against neighborhood violence that has locked up to many of our youth. To continue to tolerate such speech and acts of violence only makes it more legitimate.

The major media wants us to believe that this is a "fringe" phenomenon or that it is all about health care. But the death threats and vandalism moving across the country shows us it is more than that. I agree with Frank Rich of the New York Times that it may be about the conjunction of factors such as immigration (read Hispanics), the presence of a Black man in the White House, a female Speaker of the House, a powerful gay man Barney Frank regulating the capitalist system. So, for those whose anger is directed at "taking their country back" it ain't going to happen, the demographics are against it.

So, buckle up. We may be in for a very bumpy ride as a nation.

Dr. Ron Walters is a Political Analysts and Professor Emeritus of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland. One of his latest books is: White Nationalism, Black Interests (Wayne State Univ. Press) [rwalters@umd.edu](mailto:rwalters@umd.edu)

Cover Story, Continued from page 3.

kins reported that he continued to receive threats throughout his term, including a "for sale" sign that someone planted outside his house.

Waterproof was Klan country from the reconstruction era until well into the 20th century, and racist violence was common in the region. Eight Black men in Madison Parish were lynched over a period of three days in 1894 for the charge of "insurrection," apparently because one man refused

to follow an order from a sheriff. "The Klan was very active here," says Ms. Watson, recalling her childhood in Waterproof. "We had crosses burned on people's lawns. The school principal had a cross burned on his lawn. A man named Sun Turner was shot and killed on the streets by the Klan."

Waterproof is an hour south of Tallulah, the site of a notoriously abusive youth prison, and a little more than hour east of Jena, where accusations of systemic racism

brought 50,000 people from around the country, including many civil rights leaders, to a 2007 march. Like Jena, Waterproof is also home to a prison that contracts to

hold federal immigration prisoners.

When asked for comment on Chief Jenkins' lawsuit, Tensas Parish Sheriff Jones denied that race was a factor, claiming that Jenkins had abused his office and that many of the local citizens who filed complaints against him were Black. "I'm not going to support any type of corruption," said Jones. "Certainly not from him." District Attorney Paxton, also named as a defendant in the lawsuit, disputed all accusations from Jenkins, suggesting that he had tried to help Jenkins when he was first elected. "A lot of this will become clear when the case against Mayor Higginbotham goes to trial on Monday," he added.

Flood Caldwell, one of the town's aldermen, is currently serving as the town's mayor. Jenkins points to Caldwell's appointment as further evidence of a coup, saying that the town aldermen, under the direction of DA Paxton, illegally voted to remove Mayor Higginbotham. "No one recognizes Caldwell as mayor except the DA and his friends," says Chief Jenkins. The office of the Louisiana Secretary of State confirms that they still have Higginbotham listed as mayor, adding that they cannot comment further because of pending litigation.

Wilson says this case is ultimately about the repression of Black political and civil rights. "I think this has been going on in Tensas for a while," he says. "I think they've gone too far in this case, and someone finally has come along and says they won't go along." Wilson hopes this lawsuit will bring federal attention. "We hope the justice department will look into this and bring some much-needed reform to this part of the world," he says.

Chief Jenkins says he took the Sheriff's job to serve the community, "You've given this country the best years of your life and you get treated like an unwanted stepchild," he says. "I didn't realize there was so much politics to just doing your job."

Ms. Watson believes that this is a struggle for self-determination and basic civil rights. "I was born in 1948," she says. "Ever since I was born, Blacks never had a say in this parish, until Chief Jenkins and Mayor Higginbotham. They spoke up, and tried to change things. That's why the parish is going after them."

Jacques Morial of the Louisiana Justice Institute contributed to this story.

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# Is that Luda At My Door?

Atlanta Rapper Chris "Ludacris" Bridges has teamed up with the U.S. Census.

The collaboration could mean that the artist, who has teamed up on numerous projects – rhyming with Usher on the hit "Yeah" or opening for The Black Eyed Peas during their concert tour, for example – might be paying you a visit.



Ludachris

In a statement, Ludacris explained why he's gotten on board with the Census, a partnership meant to encourage people to fill out their forms. Census data help direct federal dollars to various

communities.

"I look at our communities now and I see many empty lots, closed clinics, dilapidated schools and an overall breakdown of social services for the poor and elderly," he said. "Today is a day for change."

He plans appearances in a number of cities including Dallas, New Orleans, Orlando, New York and Washington as well as Atlanta,

where he'll be pounding the pavement on April 9th.

"I plan to knock on doors in various neighborhoods around this country to try and dispel any myths about the Census," Ludacris said. "It's important that we all stand up and be counted so we can help create potential financial opportunities for our dying communities."

## Federal Court Validates Environmental Review For Medical Center Projects

In a comprehensive 58-page ruling, Judge Eldon Fallon today dismissed challenges to the environmental analysis supporting the proposed Veterans Affairs and University Medical Center projects.

Judge Fallon granted the City of New Orleans' motion for summary judgment and rejected all efforts by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to halt progress on these crucial public health and

economic development projects.

"We are extremely grateful that the court agreed with the City that all of our citizens' concerns were fully and completely addressed," said Mayor Ray Nagin. "The City remains committed to working with the VA and FEMA to implement all mitigation measures designed to reduce any impacts related to the construction and operation of the two hospitals."

The court found that the City

and its federal partners, the Department of Veterans Affairs and Federal Emergency Management Agency, properly analyzed the potential environmental and socio-economic impacts of the proposed Medical Centers. The court further ruled that the City and the agencies had reasonably concluded that an extensive program of mitigation would address any impacts to cultural and historic properties at the Mid-City site

selected for development of the Medical Centers.

"The City is one step closer to re-establishing a system of first-class health care for all its citizens, and especially those veterans who call New Orleans and the surrounding area home," Mayor Nagin said.

In light of this ruling, there will be no interruption of site preparation activities currently underway. Working together with our federal partners and the State of Louisi-

ana, the City will work diligently to ensure that the projects proceed in a timely and efficient manner.

"This is a huge win for the City of New Orleans and its citizens. I commend our entire legal team for their zealous representation of this case," said City Attorney Penny Moses-Fields. "We appreciate Judge Fallon's thorough review of this case, which is reflected in his comprehensive ruling."

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