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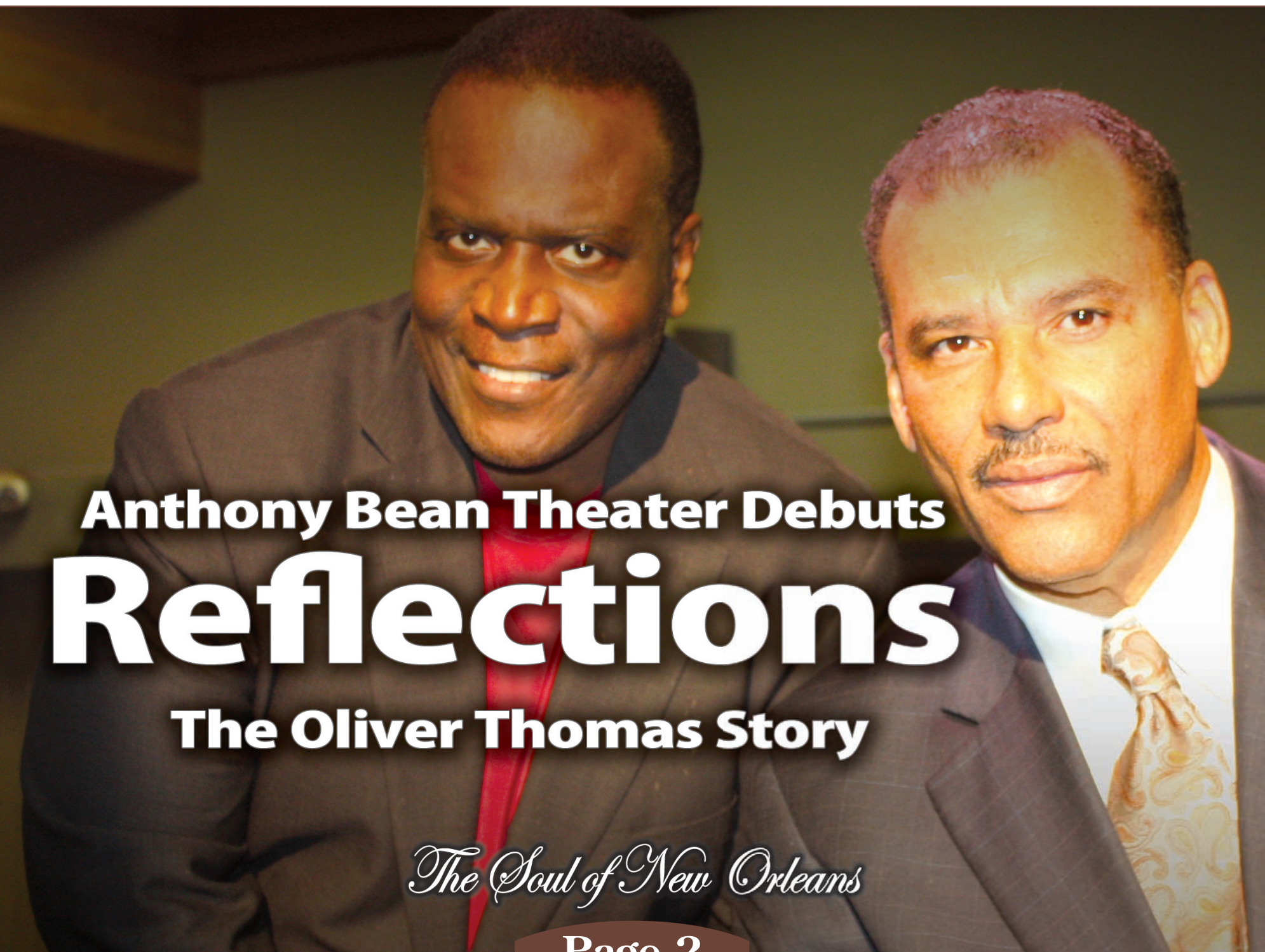
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# Anthony Bean Theater Strikes Gold with Reflections: A Man and His Time the Oliver Thomas Story



Oliver Thomas portrays himself in the moving and highly acclaimed Anthony Bean Theater production Reflections: A Man and His Time is the story of ex-city councilman Oliver Thomas and his fall from grace and his road to redemption.

By Edwin Buggage  
Photos by Gary Michael Smith

## Reflections....

It seems that the Anthony Bean Theater has another hit on its hands with a play that has the whole city abuzz playing to sold-out crowds and is also garnering national attention. Reflections: A Man and His Time is the story of ex-city councilman Oliver Thomas and his fall from grace and his road to redemption. "This is the story of my life and I thought it was important to give people an inside view of my life and gain a greater insight behind why I did what I did, but at the same time use it as a moment to teach people about love, forgiveness, understanding, and the power of redemption," says Thomas of the play.

Originally slated to be a one man show, the cast grew to nearly twenty people with this talented ensemble of actors giving a rousing performance that took the audience on a winding roller coaster ride of emotions that left them, crying, laughing, and reflecting with Thomas down his road to redemption. "Oliver's story is an important story that needed to be told, because in a sense it is a story we can all relate to and I am glad to see the response the play is getting in all sectors of the community," says Bean who directed the play and sat for many hours with Thomas to craft the story. "As Oliver sent me his writings that went from only a few pages to what resembled a book length account about his life and what he was going through and I told him your story should be shared with others and we collaborated on the project."

Oliver Thomas gives a memorable performance telling his story in a very upfront and honest way.

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## DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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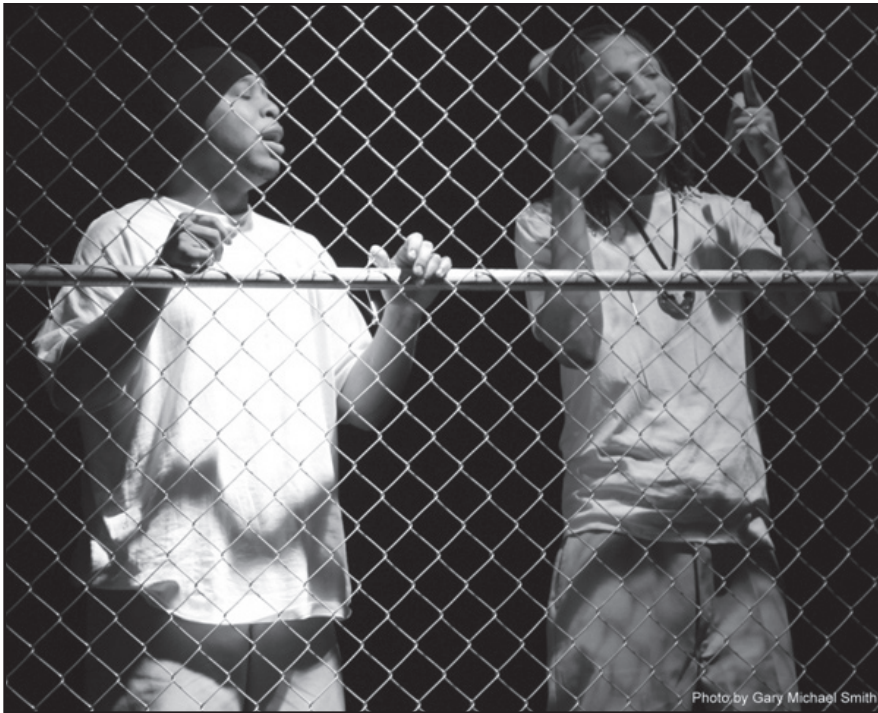


Photo by Gary Michael Smith

His understated approach to acting shows honesty and integrity he brings to his character, "As we were going through the scenes sometimes I find myself breaking down for I am reliving everything that went on and the stuff I saw is still very real but also it is cathartic for me." Continuing he says, "By performing in this play it is part of my path to healing and reflecting and to hopefully come out a better Oliver Thomas."

#### Ensemble Cast Leaves Audience Spellbound

This is a stellar cast including Big Easy Award Winner Gwendolyn Foxworth who gives an amazing performance as Angelle Thomas the wife of Oliver Thomas. She does an excellent job capturing the spirit of her character and as one of Bean's regular players she has again shown why she ranks amongst the elite who is hailed as one of the best and most versatile actresses of stage in the Crescent City.

Another actor who gave a standout performance is Darryl Lutchter having been with Bean for ten years since he was 14 he has now matured into a young adult actor with the depth and breath of a veteran onstage. In the dual role as Rev. Jones and Donte a young inmate who was mentored by Oliver Thomas during his incarceration. It is in this role that Lutchter shines, with a multi-layered performance that shows a young man who has lived a tough life that finds him behind bars. In this cautionary tale of a young Black male Lutchter at times shocks the audience going from menacing to vulnerable creating sympathy with a character that has gone down a road to destruction.

Another standout performance came from a young man who is a true



talent that showcased his acting chops in addition to extreme musical talent. Alvin Green plays Devoida a cross dressing inmate in a very convincingly way that was as comical as it was controversial. Green took a leap to get outside of his real self where he is a singer/rapper to play a role that tested his acting ability taking a risk, gambling and coming up with a royal flush of a performance. He was also able to display his musical talent with a rap that explained why some young Black men get involved in crime and violence. Through his insightful and powerful lyrics accompanied by the soulful and inspirational singing of Stephen Burke, Sr. he was able to capture in an honest way the anguish and bleakness of urban life to a round of rousing applause. The cast is rounded out by veteran actor Harold Evans, and the young phenomenon Tony Felix and a supporting cast that kept the audience captivated during this two hour show.

#### A Story Beyond Black and White

Oliver Thomas and his fall from grace left many people disappointed in both the Black and White community. He was someone who was well-loved and seen as a bridge builder bringing the people together to the table of understanding in a city that experienced a widening gulf of racial polarization after Hurricane Katrina. He says of this play and its universal appeal, "I look out into the audience and it is wonderful to see people from all walks of life and races come together to support the play and I hope it can lead to a dialog that can help heal the wounds of our great cCty."

The story is more than just a play about Thomas it is a story about people making mistakes and correcting them to live a better more fulfilling meaning-

that I will try to find what is positive about all people and I believe that the things that unite the people of the City are greater than the things that divide them and that hopefully we can begin to go down that road rather than the road that some are trying to take us down and it's my hope that this play can have a positive impact and bring people together."

#### Man In the Mirror: A Reflection of All of Us

The late great King of Pop Michael Jackson recorded a song that touches the heart strings of many. As a plea for people to change from within, the hit song "Man In the Mirror" and its unforgettable lyrics, 'I'm gonna make a change for once in my life/ It's gonna feel real good gonna make a difference/Gonna make it right.' These words echo the sentiment of the play Reflections. "As I talk to people about the play they say my story makes them look in the mirror at themselves and their lives," says Thomas.

As Thomas goes down his road to redemption on stage and in his real life it is a journey we all take during different times in our lives. Except we do not have the cameras rolling and the ink drying on the page or in our ever-present electronic media universe that's chronicling our every move, for we all have had shortcomings and obstacles we must overcome. And Thomas' story is all our story.

In this play it is a journey on the road to redemption. It is a reflection of the life of a human being that has looked in the mirror and trying to change his ways. Oliver Thomas is a reflection of everyone and their struggle to conquer themselves. Reflections the play is a serious thought provoking piece of theater that is entertaining, insightful and delightful to watch. And as I walked out of the packed theater I found myself thinking the play left me playing the words that should be a mantra for all who are at the crossroads of life seeking a new direction down their own personal road to redemption. And again I go to Michael Jackson's poignant and powerful lyrics. I'm starting with the man in the mirror/I'm asking him to change his ways/And no message could be any clearer/ If you wanna make the world a better place/Take a look at yourself and make the change.'

ful life. Bean says of the teachable moments in the play, "I felt it was essential to look at Oliver's story as not simply just his journey down the road to redemption but all of us because there are times we all need to reflect and look at ourselves, so through Oliver's eyes we can begin to take a better look at ourselves."

In the play there is a scene where a group of ministers debate about a conspiracy to unseat all Black leaders in a White takeover of the City. And while the city has its racial problems Thomas says his demise was more an issue of personal weakness than racial conspiracy. "Is there racism of course, but what happened to me was that I was a victim of myself and my own personal failing and I accept that and now I am on the road to correcting that and hope the people can find it in their heart to forgive me." In respect to race and politics of the city he says, "It has been for me and always will be

# HELD-OVER January 28, 29 & 30

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## REFLECTIONS: A MAN AND HIS TIME

Written and directed  
by Anthony Bean.  
As told by  
Oliver Thomas

HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR, EVEN  
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## Embracing 2011

### 21st Century Black Woman



Dionne Character, Author  
Entertainment Editor & Columnist

In the 21st Century, Sisters have already broken many boundaries, as many of us have learned the art of making a living embracing creativity, earning wages from what we enjoy most in life. We've started foundations, written books and opened businesses as we empower the community, becoming artists who can liberate the minds of many.

The recent loss of a friend who gave her life to making a difference in the industry has somehow bulldozed its way into my psyche, giving me a revelation that life is really short when you grind all day and never wake up at the tender age of 40.

It's a new year and as I reflect on my life in entertainment, Lord knows, I know,

A Diva is a female version of a Hustler...

I've written four books, signed at Essence Music Festival, have many accolades, started my own publishing company, recorded music, walked red carpets, interviewed stars, and even traveled the world as a professional singer, but clearly, if it's hard out here for a pimp, then the 21st Century Black Woman has to work double-time on a constant grind, at an all-time speed to conquer the world, after being liberated to the point that some of us must find our way back to enjoying the Little Things India Arie speaks of in her music.

Perhaps we have taken liberation as far it can go becoming heads of households as single parents. Maybe the 21st Century Beautiful Black Woman has outdone herself in the year, 2011 and can finally take a rest from the evil force of the game of success in wanting it all.

This year, my quest is to embrace love, have peace and continued harmony, take strolls in the park, listen to good music and work at a pace slow enough for me and not the world who will offer me nothing but those same fresh flowers I didn't have time to enjoy because I was moving too fast to take a moment to inhale life.

This 2011, I plan to tell one Sista a day how I appreciate her friendship, as I "slow my roll" enjoying the beautiful things life has to offer.

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

# Shoot Ya Best Shot!

## Data Around Town

At the premiere of “Reflections: A Man and His Time” presented by Anthony Bean Theater



Friends having fun all over the city is just the New Orleans way, and last week was no exception. Whenever there is fun going on, Data News Weekly, “The People’s Paper” is there!



# National Urban League Announces 12-Point Blueprint for Urban League Jobs Rebuild America Plan



**Marc Morial**  
President and CEO  
National Urban League

## To Be Equal

*"Freedom has always been an expensive thing. History is a fit testimony to the fact that freedom is rarely gained without sacrifice and self-denial."*  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Last Monday, the nation celebrated what would have been the 82nd birthday of the 20th Century's great drum major for justice, Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King understood that economic justice was the most crucial question confronting Black

people, as well as poor and middle class people generally throughout America. In fact, at his death, he was on the brink of launching a nationwide campaign for jobs and income.

As America enters the second decade of a new millennium, and the National Urban League begins its second century, our organization is introducing a new blueprint for achieving that goal.

The nation remains mired in a great recession. The National Urban League has seen the impact of this crisis first-hand. Our more than 100 local affiliates across the country are economic first-responders in the ongoing effort to help ease the burden of those most profoundly affected by this recession, serving some 2.1 million citizens in 2010 alone.

During the past two years, much of the work of the Obama Administration and the 111th Congress has been nothing short of heroic. From the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to the passage of the Dodd-Frank Consumer Protection Act, the Affordable Healthcare Act, and the extension of middle-class tax relief and unemployment benefits, the Administration has taken historic actions to restore America's economic vitality.

But, the persistent nature of the recession

has brought little relief to families either out of work or stretching part-time wages to meet full-time financial commitments. Record numbers of Americans were forced into foreclosure in 2010, and many urban families in communities already long beset by economic stagnation are enduring unemployment rates as high as 20 percent.

That is why the National Urban League is proposing a new 12-point Blueprint for Quality Job Creation. Our plan offers a dozen dynamic and imaginative measures to both rescue those most profoundly affected by the ongoing economic emergency, while also remedying many of the underlying causes behind the recession's inordinate and seemingly-amplified impact on the communities we serve:

1. Restore the Summer Youth Jobs Program as a Stand-alone Program Employing five-million Teens in the Summer 2011.
2. Create 100 Urban Jobs Academies to Implement an Expansion of the Urban Youth Empowerment Program.
3. Develop a Dynamic National Public-Private Jobs Initiative to Create Jobs and Train Urban Residents and Stimulate Economic Growth in the areas of Technology and Broadband, Health

Care, Manufacturing, Transportation and Public Infrastructure and Clean Energy.

4. Boost Minority Participation in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Industries.
5. Reform, Revise, and Reauthorize Workforce Investment Act to prepare and retrain workers for 21st century jobs.
6. Create Green Empowerment Zones.
7. Expand Small Business Lending.
8. Initiate Tax Reform that reduces rates across the board and eliminates tax loopholes.
9. Establish and Promote Multilateral International Trade Policies that expand the market for American goods and services.
10. Enact the Urban Jobs Act (H.R. 5708).
11. Expand the hiring of housing counselors nationwide.
12. Fund Direct Job Creation in cities and states.

We urge the Congress and the White House to adopt these measures without delay.

Marc H. Morial is President and CEO of the National Urban League

# Haiti: One Year Later



**Judge Greg Mathis**

## Mathis' Mind

It's been a year since a violent earthquake shook the poor nation of Haiti, killing hundreds of thousands of people and causing billions in damage. In the days that followed the quake, non-profits, corporations, and individuals from around the world donated money and time in an overwhelming show of support. As the media marks this tragic anniversary, we should all be aware that, although time has passed, there still is

much to be done to not only rebuild Haiti but to also make it prosperous.

It's been no secret that organizations working on the ground in Haiti have struggled to determine priorities and allocate resources. Billions of dollars were raised following the earthquake; Americans alone gave \$2 billion to various charities. Unfortunately, less than 40 percent of this money has actually been spent. To be fair, it would have been irresponsible for the charities to have gone through the donated funds too quickly. There should be, however, a plan – one that is made available to the public – for directing the funds to the areas they are most needed.

One of those areas badly in need of funding is housing. Nearly one million Haitians still call temporary camps, set up after the earthquake, home. One of the first steps in creating a sense of normalcy for the people of Haiti and showing progress in the country is to ensure that safe housing is available. Building the homes, however, is difficult if there is no clear space to build. To date, only five percent of the ruins the earthquake left behind have been cleared

away. Not only is this a hindrance to the rebuilding process, it is also a safety hazard. Charities working in this area must allocate their resources appropriately and make sure they have the funds on hand to better address the housing needs of the Haitian people.

In the days following the earthquake, those working on the ground were focused on finding survivors, treating the injured, and providing emergency services. Today,

they are working to curb a cholera outbreak that has hit the tiny nation, while continuing to provide shelter, food, and medical care to countless people.

The work in Haiti is difficult, there is no doubt. And, everyone working in the trenches should be commended. However, a more concentrated and collective effort to both address the current needs of the Haitian people and to plan for their future is needed.



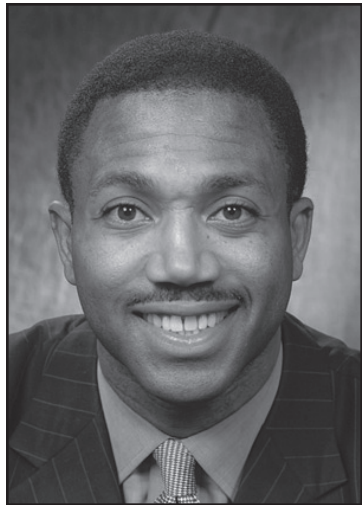
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# Voters in District 101 Go To Polls on Saturday January 22nd

By Eric Connerly

With the ascendance of Cedric Richmond to the U.S. House of Representatives a Special Election is being held for the 101st District seat of the Louisiana House of Representatives. Three contenders are vying for the vacant seat in the January 22 primary.

Willie Jones, a Democrat, is a community activist who has worked with youth and seniors across the city. He belongs to several civic organizations including the Desire Florida Area Community Council as well working with the Desire Community Housing Corporation. He is a board member and Chaplin of Armstrong Family Services. Also he is a member of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Jones says the District is in need of a new breed



Wesley Bishop

of bold leadership and feels he has a record of serving his community and the vision to lead his constituents into the future.



Willie Jones

Wesley Bishop presently serves as the Associate Vice Chancellor of Southern University at New Orleans. He sits on several civic

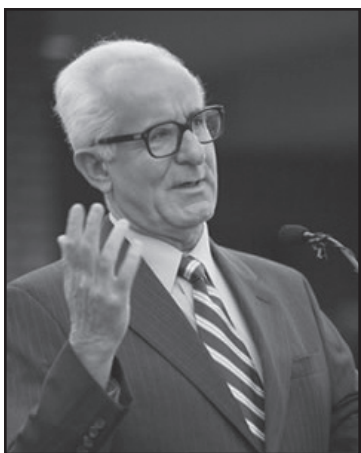
boards and has been named one of the Top 30 Future Leaders by Ebony Magazine. Bishop has racked up endorsements including those of Mayor Mitch Landrieu, the previous officeholder in District 101 Cedric Richmond and District E Representative Jon Johnson among many other elected leaders. Bishop has served in many capacities working with the residents of District 101 and across the New Orleans community. With a wealth of civic, business and educational credentials Bishop feels he can bring the district what it needs to fully recover getting the wheels turning in a district that five years later is still limping down the road to recovery without many basic services.

Roland Barthe, owns an accounting business and is an ac-

tivist in his community who has worked vigorously to bring back his neighborhood since the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He considers himself the people's candidate, as one who is willing to roll up his sleeves and get the job done. He has successfully worked to have new homes built in his community. He says of his opponents that endorsements from the establishment politicians does not matter it is about will the people endorse you with their votes. In his second run for political office he feels it is time for District 101 to have a representative who puts the needs of the people first and not the business as usual approach he feels taints much of politics today.

Candidate Roland Barthe not pictured.

## Southern University at New Orleans and LSU System President Address Jindal's UNO/SUNO Merger Proposal Recommendation



This week, Dr. Victor Ukpolo, SUNO Chancellor and Dr. John Lombardi, LSU System President issued statements on Governor Bobby Jindal's recommendation to the Board of Regents to consider merging Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO) and the University of New Orleans (UNO) and place the merged institution in the University of



Louisiana System.

"For decades various leaders have proposed a merger between SUNO with UNO. The University's focus at this time is to continue increasing our enrollment as we did in the Fall 2010 with the advent of selective admission criteria, continue campus development, and continue our work of providing students with an

affordable quality education."

- Dr. Victor Ukpolo, Chancellor

"The LSU System is proud of the accomplishments of the University of New Orleans in its 50-year history. It has emerged as a major urban public research university over those years. This success testifies to the commitment of the New Orleans region; the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the institution; and the state and donors during this period of growth and development. The LSU System remains firmly engaged in the support of UNO's mission, and will work closely with UNO, its many constituencies, and the Board of Regents on any proposals to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of this fine institution."

- Dr. John Lombardi, LSU System President

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