

Lighting The Road To The Future

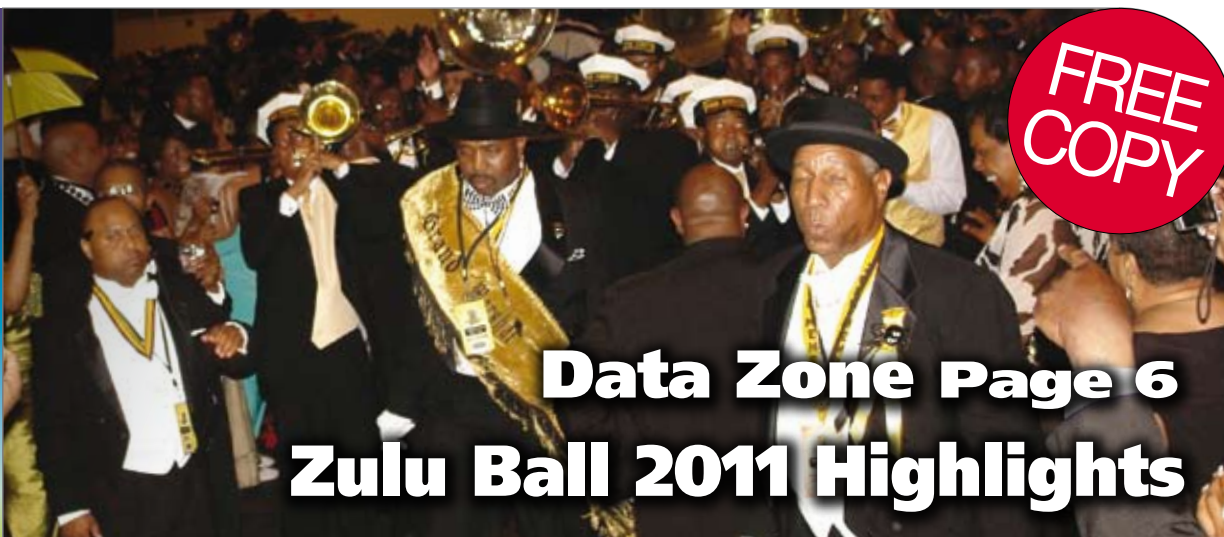
New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

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Zulu Ball 2011 Highlights

March 19 - March 25, 2011 45th Year Volume 40 www.ladatanews.com

Celebrating Women's History Month

The Ladies of Jazz



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On SUNO
Merger



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Celebrating Women's History Month

The Ladies of Jazz

By Cheryl Mainor

It can be said that Jazz music is at the heart and soul of New Orleans. This city, revered for its original song stylings holds the keys to the Jazz world, and its performers past and present are celebrated worldwide for their unique and tremendous influences in music and their mastery of the arts. In celebration of Women's History Month, Data News Weekly, is paying homage to the women who made their contributions to this music. Women whose velvet voices and smooth sultry stylings, helped endear Jazz music to the masses with their beauty and wide appeal. Starting with the First Lady of Jazz, Ella Fitzgerald to Nancy Wilson, Data Presents..... The Ladies of Jazz.



ELLA FITZGERALD

April 25, 1917 – June 15, 1996

Her first dream was to be a dancer. Growing up in New York, she was inspired by "Snake Hips" Tucker, studying his serpentine moves and practicing them constantly with friends. Then, one fateful night at the Apollo Theater in 1934, 16-year-old Ella Fitzgerald stepped on stage, but was too intimidated to dance. Instead, she sang "Judy," silenced the awe-struck crowd, and won first prize. It was the beginning of one of the most celebrated careers in music history. While still a teenager, she became the vocalist for the Chick Webb Band, where she sang such hits as her renowned version of "A-Tisket, A-Tasket." She matured into the most gifted jazz singer of all, excelling in bop-flavored scat singing, in ballads, and in recorded collections of the songs of America's greatest composers. Of Fitzgerald, Johnny Mathis said, "She was the best there ever was. Amongst all of us who sing, she was the best." From those early days on Harlem streets to the upper stratosphere of musical fame, Ella Fitzgerald's life was the quintessential American success story. Through fifty-eight years of performing, thirteen Grammys and more than forty million records sold, she elevated swing, bebop, and ballads to their highest potential. She was, undeniably, the First Lady of Song.

NINA SIMONE

February 21, 1933 – April 21, 2003

**"Sun in the Sky,
You know how I feel".....
It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good**

All over the country, American's are singing this song thanks to Michael Buble, Jennifer Holiday's latest rendition for Weight Watchers, but the one who made this song famous was the fabulous and mysterious Nina Simone. This one song has been sampled

by the likes of George Michael, 50 Cent's "Bad News", on New Orleans own Lil Wayne's song, "Birds Flying High" and Mary J. Blige's album "The Breakthrough" features several lines, sample lines during the chorus from "Feeling Good" as performed by Nina Simone. For this reason, Simone receives a credit as a feature artist. Nina Simone is as popular today as ever.

Throughout her career, Simone gathered a collection of songs that would become standards in her repertoire (apart from the civil rights songs). These songs were self-written tunes, cover versions (usually with a new arrangement by Simone), or songs written especially for Simone.

Her first hit song in America was a cover of George Gershwin's "I Loves You, Porgy" (1958). It peaked at number 18 in the pop singles chart and number 2 on the Black singles chart. During that same period Simone recorded "My Baby Just Cares for Me", which would become her biggest success; years later in 1987, when it was featured in a Chanel No. 5 perfume commercial.

She wrote and sang protest songs at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and left the United States for political and financial reasons, returning only occasionally to perform here. Her forthright musical style has influences from jazz, classical, soul, folk and world music.



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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

P.O. Box 57347, New Orleans, LA 70157-7347
Phone: (504) 821-7421 | Fax: (504) 821-7622

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

Terry B. Jones
CEO/Publisher
Glenn Jones
VP Advertising & Marketing
Cheryl Mainor
Managing Editor
Edwin Buggage
Editor
Dionne Character
Arts & Entertainment Editor
Melanie Mainor
Copy Editor Intern
June Hazeur
Accounting

Contributors
Danny Bakewell, Sr.
David Baron
Michael Brown
Edwin Buggage
Cheryl Mainor
Judge Greg Mathis
Glenn Summes
Micah Boyd

Art Direction & Production
MainorMedia.com
Editorial Submissions
datanewseditor@bellsouth.net
Advertising Inquiries
datanewsad@bellsouth.net

Please call (504) 309-9913 for subscription information. Dated material two weeks in advance.
Not responsible for publishing or return of unsolicited manuscripts or photos.

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NANCY WILSON

Born February 20, 1937

With more than 70 albums, and three Grammy Awards, Nancy Wilson has a cemented position among the list of the Greatest Female Jazz Artists. She has been labeled a singer of blues, jazz, cabaret and pop; a "consummate actress"; and "the complete entertainer." The title she prefers, however, is song stylist. She has received many nicknames including "Sweet Nancy", "The Baby", "Fancy Miss Nancy" Her musical influences include Dinah Washington and Little Jimmy

Scott. While trying to break into singing, the Columbus, Ohio native worked days as a secretary. She soon gained a reputation in jazz circles, and recorded classic albums with such stars as Cannonball Adderley and George Shearing. Nancy's debut single, "Guess Who I Saw Today", was so successful that between April 1960 and July 1962 Capitol Records released five Nancy Wilson albums. Her first album, "Like in Love", displayed her talent in Rhythm and Blues, with the hit R&B song "Save your Love for Me." Adderley suggested that she should steer away from her original pop style and gear her music toward jazz and

ballads. In 1962, they collaborated and produced an album Nancy Wilson/Cannonball which propelled her to national prominence. Between March, 1964 and June, 1965 four of Wilson's albums hit the Top 10 on Billboard's Top LPs chart. Wilson had her own series on NBC, The Nancy Wilson Show (1967-1968), which won an Emmy in 1975. In 1995, Nancy Wilson performed at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. In 1999, Wilson hosted a show in honor of Ella Fitzgerald entitled Forever Ella on the A&E Network.



LENA HORNE

June 30, 1917 - May 9, 2010

From Brooklyn, New York, Lena Horne was raised by her mother, an actress, and then by her grandmother, Cora Calhoun Horne. Elegant and wise, she personified both the glamour of Hollywood and the reality of a lifetime spent battling racial and social injustice. Pushed by an ambitious mother into the chorus line of the Cotton Club when she was sixteen, and maneuvered into a film career by the N.A.A.C.P., she was the first African-American signed to a long-term studio contract. In her rise beyond Hollywood's racial stereotypes of maids, butlers, and African natives, she achieved true stardom on the silver screen, and became a catalyst for change even beyond the glittery fringes of studio life. At age 16

Lena began working at Harlem's Cotton Club, first as a dancer, then in the chorus and later as a solo singer. She began singing with orchestras, and, while singing with Charlie Barnet's (White) orchestra, she was discovered. From there she began playing clubs in Greenwich Village and then performed at Carnegie Hall.

Beginning in 1942 Lena Horne appeared in films, broadening her career to include movies, Broadway and recordings. She has been honored with many awards for her lifetime of success.

Lena Horne's signature song, from a 1943 film of the same name, is "Stormy Weather." Her elegant style and powerful voice were unlike any that had come before, and both the public and the executives in the entertainment industry began to take note. By the mid-'40s, Horne was the highest paid Black actor in the country. Her renditions of "Deed I Do" and "As Long as I Live," and Cole Porter's "Just One Of Those Things" became instant classics.

LIL HARDIN ARMSTRONG



February 3, 1898 - August 27, 1971

Jazz musician, pianist, composer, singer, band leader, manager and promoter; Lil Hardin Armstrong was the first major woman jazz instrumentalist; part of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. While traveling with King Oliver's Band, she met and eventually married a young cornet player, Louis Armstrong and went on to become the promoter of his career. In 1925, Louis Armstrong recorded with the Hot Fives Orchestra, followed by another the next year. Lil Hardin Armstrong played piano for all the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens recordings. The piano at that time in jazz was primarily a percussion instrument, establishing beat and playing

chords so that other instruments could play more creatively; Lil Hardin Armstrong excelled at this style. Louis and Lil eventually divorced, in July of 1971, Louis Armstrong died. Seven weeks later, Lil Hardin Armstrong was playing at a memorial concert for her ex-husband when she suffered a massive coronary and died.

While Lil Hardin Armstrong's career was nowhere near as successful as her husband's, she was the first major woman jazz instrumentalist whose career had any significant duration.

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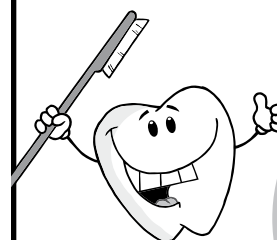
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New Orleans And Haiti

Two Places Joined In Glory And Tragedy

By David Baron
Contributor

David Baron, a native New Yorker, moved to New Orleans in 1979, where he served as film critic for the Times-Picayune for the next two decades. He made his first trip to Haiti, in search of art, in 1986, traveling there frequently in ensuing years and teaching at a high school in Port-au-Prince from 1999 until 2003. In 2004 he began teaching writing at Delgado Community College. He spent six weeks "in exile" from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and was visiting friends in Port-au-Prince five years later when the catastrophic January 12th earthquake leveled most of the Haitian capital. The essay that follows (excerpted from a forthcoming memoir) gathers impressions of the people and cultures of the Crescent City and the Black Republic by an eyewitness to events that have only solidified the deep connection between these two unique places.

PART ONE: New Orleans

Delgado reopened the year after Katrina, though initially with only one building; the campus had suffered grievously from the overtopping of the levees along Lake Pontchartrain, and the flooded library was now a watery mausoleum. Teaching classes that summer and fall of '06, I quickly learned to exercise caution when dealing with traumatized youngsters in no mood for my New York-style ribbing. A girl who'd been plucked from a rooftop by a Coast Guard 'copter, practically delirious, wasn't the only student to remind me how fortunate I'd been compared to some of them.

Tim Dandridge, a bright, high-spirited kid who had dropped out of high school not long before, was a soon-to-be-recruited college hoops prospect who bonded during class one morning with a former student of mine from teaching days in Port-au-Prince. The Haitian had stopped for a couple of nights in New Orleans, en route



Above, The Villa Manrese -Grande Seminaire and below, The Villa Manresse stands today in ruins.

to a branch of the state university to which he'd won an athletic scholarship, and the two boys made plans for a basketball game later that afternoon. When class let out, I was done for the day, and the next thing I knew I was speeding with the guys across the Industrial Canal in Tim's battered, rusty convertible. By the time we reached the far side, descending into the eerie desolation of the Lower Ninth Ward, the teenager's usual infectious smile was gone. We crept along the empty streets of his old neighborhood, Tim pointing out the ghastly concrete slabs that marked like tombstones the sites of his own home, that of his school chums and relatives, and of his first sweetheart. Once, we stopped and he alighted as the Haitian kid and I stood standing by the car; Tim said he wanted to have a closer look inside the not-quite-pulverized house of a for-

mer teammate, thinking he might stumble across some memento his friend had missed. Minutes later he emerged from the garish ruin, shaking his head from side to side, and one sensed that he might have cried if he weren't, by this time, beyond crying. "Nothing," he said, perching precariously against the car alongside the other youth. When the Haitian kid put an arm around him to steady him, he just went on shaking his head.

As fireworks on the Mississippi River proclaimed the arrival of 2010, New Orleans was nearing the fifth anniversary of the Flood. To an outsider – a visitor who never ventured much beyond the fortunate neighborhoods on high ground near the river – signs of a painstakingly slow but nonetheless measurable recovery might make it appear that the Big Easy was substantially itself again. To

those who had known the pre-Katrina city as Tim had, however, a deeper reality gave the lie to that impression. A quarter or even a third of the population before the hurricane had never returned, in the wake of the greatest out-migration since the Dust Bowl, and while a substantial number of other, newer citizens arrived to help swell the dwindling numbers, the future of a place that was the product of a unique *mélange* of colors and traditions was still in grave peril. The *mélange* had created an artistic, culinary, and sociological kiln in which America's most strikingly original urban culture had been fired, and families whose contributions to that one-of-a-kind experiment had been made over the course of several centuries simply couldn't be "replaced" by families from the bland and generic American culture beyond its borders. People like most of my friends, regardless of age, whose genealogical ties to the core New Orleans zeitgeist were profound, feared for the loss of the city's very soul – or went even farther, and simply acknowledged its passing – while daring to hope that with the sort of vision the city's leaders had seldom provided, some different but worthwhile incarnation of "home" might yet be born.

For all who, like myself, hadn't been raised here – yet felt shaped in a distinctive way by our adopted city – it was tough to face the nagging reality that the New Orleans which had nurtured us was a diminished place – one that for many folks existed most vividly now in blessed memory. After twenty years as an entertainment reporter at the Picayune, I knew first-hand that it was always risky to suggest in print that there were truths about the town that were anything but entertaining. The world came to know many of those things when CNN and the rest of the Katrina media invasion ripped the roof, so to speak, off the lie of a "City That Care Forgot". But in the years that had passed like highway markers after the storm, many of those harsh truths had grown even grimmer. "There is

no 'New Orleans,'" rued the Historian Douglas Brinkley, while the death of the "old" New Orleans appeared increasingly irreversible, both for better and, sadly, for worse. It was as though a stanza or two had been torn from a Keats sonnet, or a John Coltrane solo axed from a recording still echoing in one's ear. What endures may still be a masterpiece, but the fact remains that it's an altered work of art.

PART TWO: Haiti

For a variety of strictly practical reasons, I hadn't visited Haiti since Christmas of '07, and two years later I was itching to return. Thanks to Katrina as well as the inevitable losses wrought by time, I now had as many close friends there as I did in New Orleans, and they were clamoring for me to come around New Year's, which is when Haitians traditionally exchange gifts. Accordingly, I was in a keen state of anticipation when I arrived on Sunday, January 10th and was reunited with all my former colleagues at the high school the next day. On Monday afternoon, after an impromptu "college pep talk" with the senior class, two twin brothers chatted animatedly about themselves and their ambitions, and one of them, Steeve Simbert, asked if I'd be willing to help him practice for the SAT essay. So the following day I met up with the 12th grader just as the tinkling of the bell sounded the end of classes, and we made our way on foot and then by taxi up the hill from downtown to the grandly named Villa Manrese, a spacious French-Canadian religious facility where I was staying. He didn't know, nor did I, that we wouldn't be going far anytime soon.

Not often for the next five days did Steeve leave my side, and when he did stray much beyond the grassy meadow where shocked and frightened Haitians were pitching tents in ever-greater numbers, it was usually on a mission he'd undertaken on my

*Special Feature,
Continued on next page.*

Special Feature, Continued from previous page.



The Refugee Camp on the grounds of the ruined Villa Manrese.

behalf. Each day, it seemed, he'd perform at least one minor miracle – none more urgent than when he ventured out onto the main thoroughfare, the morning after the quake, to find blood pressure medicine for my already-disquieted heart. Everything I'd brought with me, except for a small supply of U.S. dollars and the keys to Room 25, was now trapped inside a pancaked concrete landmark that had entombed four souls in the rubble of its ground floor. A serious threat to my health was posed by the loss of my entire stash of pills. When Steeve returned, after roaming the neighborhood for about an hour, with a folded envelope containing an abundant supply of Catapres – a gift, he smiled, of an elderly bourgeois lady whom he'd charmed into opening a bottle hidden in her fractured house – the sight of dozens of tiny orange tablets was enough to make my spirits leap for the first time since the sunrise.

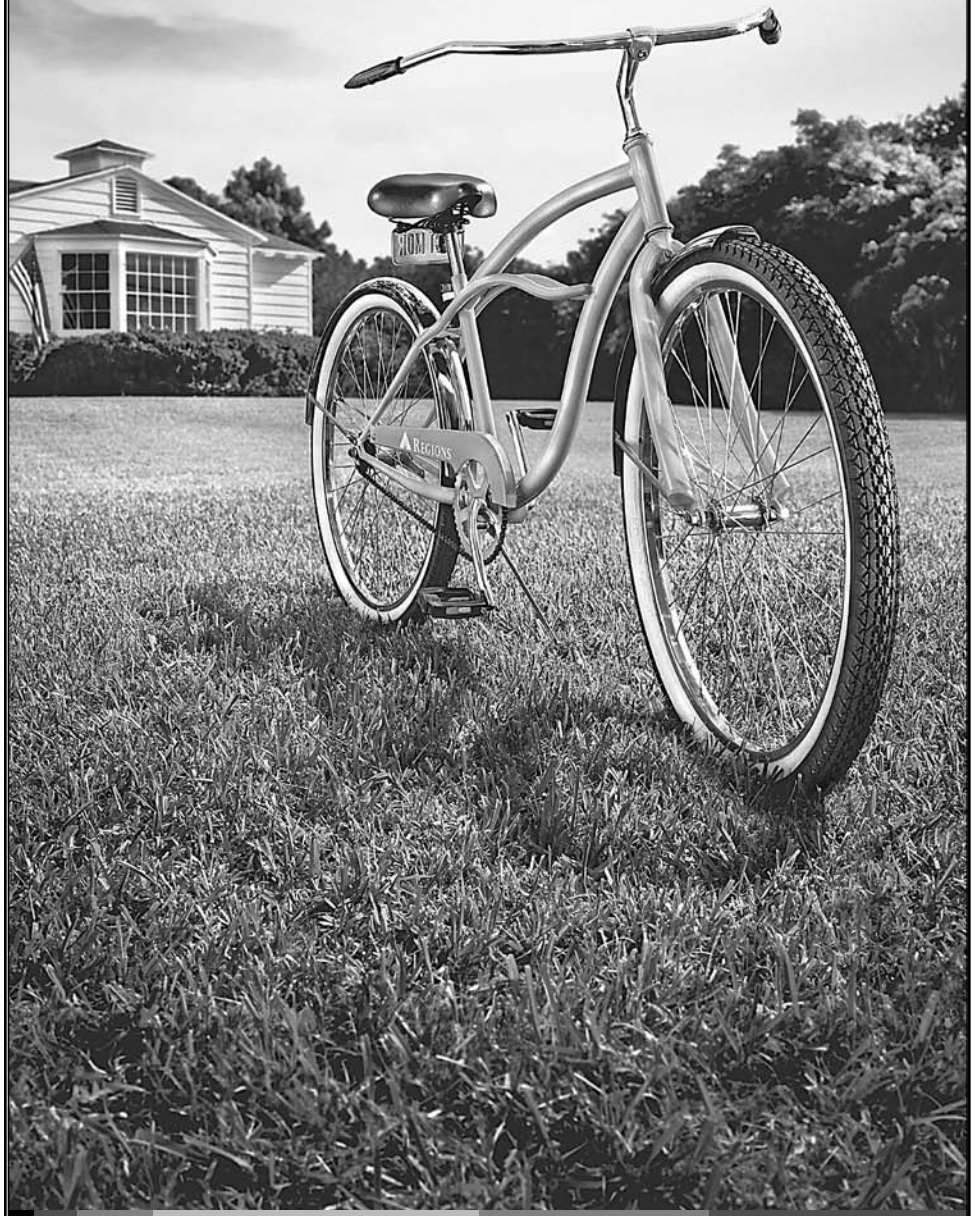
Shortly after dawn we'd left the spot where we'd hunkered down, on the hillside behind the seminary, shuddering through scores of terrifying aftershocks and listening to urgently recurring waves of Creole prayer songs and the staccato wails of women receiving news of loved ones' deaths. We'd made our way back inside the gates to confront the spectacle of a pitifully transformed Villa Manrese. A swelling stream of residents from the tranquil quarter of Haut-Turgeon had begun creating a village in the palm-shaded gardens of the ruined seminary. Family members were repairing to their quake-imperiled houses to fetch food, water, blankets and kitchen implements, or to cook outside their dwellings, then returning to the barricaded Villa's unharmed fields to create improvised domiciles for their many children. They shared humble local delicacies with others in the compound, including me, and the sense I felt immediately of a coming-together for the common good gave the lie to base American stereotypes of a "naïve" people and their "primitive" ways. Certainly there was nothing naïve or primitive about the decency and caring that were practiced almost unflinchingly near the shadows of the crumpled retreat. Quite the opposite, in fact. For despite the tragedy that had befallen them and the uncertain fate that lay ahead, the

people of this vibrant and tolerant make-shift community responded with a respect for one another and a joy in the scant blessings that remained that was contagious in its affirmation of brotherhood and love.

In the days immediately following my return – back safely in my hundred-year-old house near the heart of a city that was once half-Haitian itself, following the slaves' victorious rebellion against Napoleon – I still found myself awakening to the disorienting sensation that I was asleep on a blanket a mere stone's throw from the rubble. In time, I imagined, the surrealism of being in my own bed again would pass. What wouldn't dissipate, I suspected – unless the earthquake prompted a radically new appreciation of Haiti – was an abiding fury that a people capable of astonishing grace under pressure could have been the target of such blindly insensitive scorn. For if the reconciliation of incompatible realities was the worthiest ambition of a seeker after truth, and then the Black Republic was a place in which to discover wisdom. It was a country in which garbage had piled so high on Dessalines Street that one imagined it would continue to putrefy into the third millennium, a country home to neighborhoods no human being should dwell in. Yet it was also a crucible in which startling acts of generosity were forged by folks who owned nothing but their immortal souls ... a dustbin of dreams in which hope continued to burrow even when all had concluded optimism was madness.

Maya Deren, the avant-garde American film director of the '50s whose masterpiece, *Divine Horsemen*, captured the beauty of a Haitian spirit ceremony on the water, once wrote that Erzulie, the benevolent vodun goddess of love, is prone to weep for her lost children. Surveying the carnage wrought by a cruel act of nature, I felt she must surely be weeping as never before. Still, if there is solace to be found anywhere in the country's present misery, it doubtless springs from one's stubborn conviction that Haitians – as they have long done against all odds and with precious little encouragement from their grandiose neighbors – will find within themselves the defiant courage to endure.

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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

2011 Zulu Ball Highlights

Photos by Glenn Summers

People from everywhere came out to the party of all parties party of all parties when the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club held its Mardi Gras Ball with special guests, Maze featuring Frankie Beverly and the Mighty O'Jay's. A packed house enjoyed food, fun and music, men were dressed to the nines and the women were adorned in spectacular gowns, and Data News Weekly was there during the celebration!

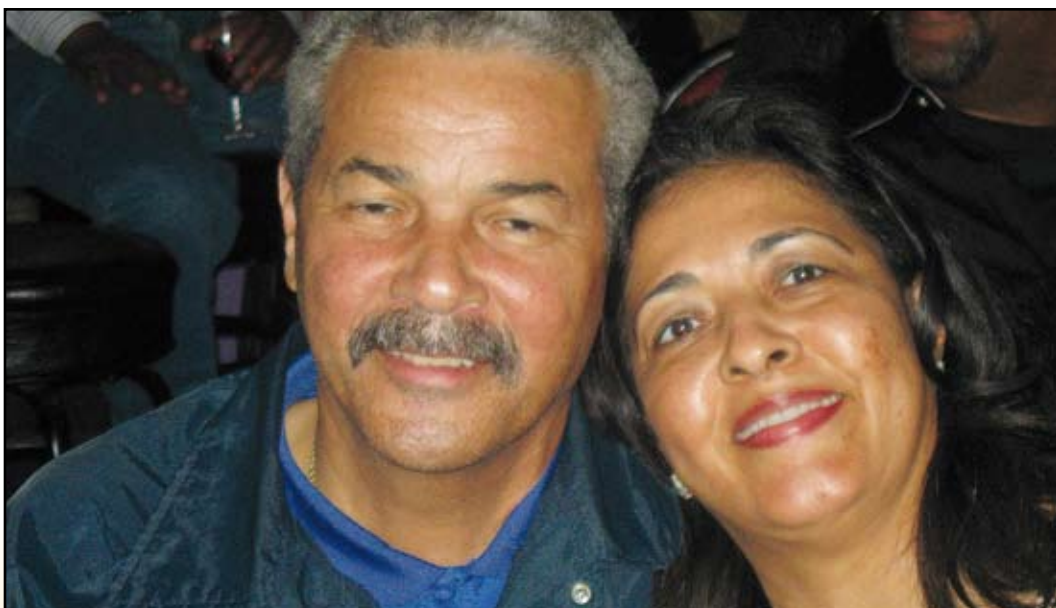


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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

New Orleans Own Jazz Jewel Sharon Martin at the Prime Example

We highlighted our nations pioneering Jazz Ladies, New Orleans Jazz Jewel Sharon Martin put on a show which was nothing less than spectacular at the Prime Example and Data Was There!



For more pictures check us out on Facebook.

Toyota Motor Company Disrespects and Devalues the Patronage of their Black Consumer



By Danny J. Bakewell Sr.
Chairman of NNPA

MESSAGE TO MR. TOYOTA...

I have recently been shocked and appalled by ads that I and other Black publishers saw in several major newspapers (The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, etc.) confirming that Toyota spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to advertise in White mainstream daily newspapers "THANKING" their general market consumers for their loyalty and patronage to Toyota during their time of major controversy and concerns over the safety of Toyota's vehicles.

Thanking their customers is a smart move on Toyota's behalf and one that I applaud. However, we can't overlook the fact that Black people represent almost 10% of Toyota's American market share, and with a \$1.2 billion annual advertising budget it

is not unreasonable for the Black Press to always expect to have a stake in Toyota's advertising (including Black advertising agencies). Nevertheless, Black newspapers were left off Toyota's latest marketing campaign, sending a clear and direct message that the Black consumer is still being taken for granted and Black people are still being disrespected and undervalued. This is disappointing behavior from a company who was all too eager to send us their press releases and ask us to write stories and editorials to influence Black America to stay with them in their time of trouble. But now that Toyota's pain has been essentially eased (for now) by a report issued by the Federal Transportation Department and NASA that found no faults with Toyota's electronic accelerator controls, the Black press has once again been forgotten along with the Black consumer.

Toyota should note that it is going to take more than a passing grade on a Federal Transportation report card to bring back the consumer safety confidence enjoyed (for years) by Toyota from American consumers prior to one of the largest vehicle recalls in U.S. history.

So when the decision was made to advertise in mainstream newspapers from coast to coast "THANKING" their customers for their loyalty, where was Toyota's loyalty to the 10% of African-American consumers? DON'T WE ALSO DESERVE A GREAT BIG THANK YOU?

Historically, there has always been an imbalance between what goes out of the Black community and what comes into the Black community relative to retail goods, services and representation. Despite the fact that the buying power of America's Blacks is reported to be roughly \$1 trillion this year! And it is highly doubtful that Black-owned businesses will report revenue numbers that are the same and/or reap any of the benefits proportionate to our buying power.

However, the question still remains, why is Toyota undervaluing the Black consumer and showing our community such blatant disrespect? Tried, True, and Tested — the NNPA (Black Press of America) remains the gatekeeper for reaching the Black community. Corporations and advertising agencies wanting and needing to reach the African-American consumer must understand the relationship of the Black Press with Black people. They must remember to place their advertising messages on the pages of Black newspapers throughout America, and Black consumers will respond in kind (Black advertising agencies could help them with this). The days of being silent and complaining among ourselves regarding these unethical and immoral business practices are over.

When Toyota wanted our help, it had no problem seeking all 200 Black newspapers in America to do just that. Their message to Black people was — PLEASE HELP US,

WE VALUE YOUR BUSINESS. We do not want Toyota to use us for editorial coverage and then overlook us with their advertising dollars.

Black newspapers are not afraid to demand fair representation and a seat to dine at Toyota's table, especially when their food is purchased with approximately 10% of Black consumer dollars. We are not interested in fighting with Toyota however, Toyota has enjoyed healthy African-American consumer support, and despite last year's set back we have remained loyal. If you want to thank Black consumers for our loyalty and keep our business, do it on the pages of the Black newspapers that Black people READ, RESPECT, TRUST AND OWN!! As Chairman of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, I represent 200 Black publishers throughout America. I am challenging Toyota's Chairman and CEO to do the right thing and meet with me to discuss the future of their relationship with Black consumers and whether or not we as Black newspaper publishers should continue supporting Toyota or should organize a campaign to take the African-American's brand loyalty to Toyota elsewhere. WE WILL NOT BUY WHERE WE ARE DISRESPECTED...THAT IS A PROMISE! Danny Bakewell Sr. is the Chairman of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, parent organization to more than 200 independently owned Black newspapers.

Class Size Matters



Judge Greg Mathis
NNPA Columnist

Mathis' Mind

The struggling economy has, unfortunately, forced state and local governments across the country to make cuts in much needed services and programs. The nation's public schools have been hit particularly hard by these cuts. First, some districts reduced or completely eliminated physical

education classes and arts programming — programming that has been proven to enhance student academic performance. Then, others began to eliminate teachers, slowly growing classrooms sizes. Now, it seems even more school districts are looking to reduce the number of teachers on the payroll and combine classrooms...all in an effort to save money.

A recent article in the New York Times shed light on this disturbing movement toward larger class sizes. According to the article, the size of 11th and 12th grade classes in Los Angeles has increased by more than 40 students. Detroit is considering increasing the size of its high school classes to 60 students. Though school officials there say it's unlikely classes will grow that large, it's disturbing the conversation has even turned in that direction. It doesn't end there. Georgia, Nevada, Ohio, and Wisconsin have all relaxed their restrictions on class size. Idaho and Texas are deciding whether or not they are going to grow their classrooms.

Those who see cutting back on teachers and increasing class sizes as a solution to budget woes are the same people who don't believe class size matters when it comes to student achievement. However, multiple studies have shown us that class size does matter. Research shows that, overall, students perform better in smaller classes. Poor and minority children seem to do best in smaller classes and improve at twice the rate of the average student when the student-teacher ratio is low. But, who needs research?

Common sense tells us that more students mean more distractions for the

teacher and less individual attention for the students. During his State of the Union Address, President Obama called on America to invest in education. By putting our resources toward our children, we will, in effect, be putting a down payment on a more prosperous future for America. School districts should not sacrifice student performance during a time of education crisis. America has fallen behind other countries when it comes to producing skilled workers; our nation is no longer a nation of innovators. To jeopardize our children's future is to jeopardize our nation's future.



The Royal Comedy Tour

An Odyssey into the World of Black Comedy



Data News Weekly Editor Edwin Buggage with Comedienne Sommore

By Edwin Buggage
Photos by Glenn Summers

Many greats in the world of African-American comedy have come and gone, gracing the stage with their comic gifts. From Redd Foxx, Rudy Ray Moore, Jackie "Moms" Mabley to Lawanda Page bringing their brand of bawdy humor to Black audiences in smoke filled bars across America during the sordid days of a nation founded on liberty but stained by the strain of segregation.

As African-Americans marched towards freedom during the Civil Rights Era breakthrough comics such as Bill Cosby, Dick Gregory, Flip Wilson and the incomparable Richard Pryor delivered a less diluted flavor of Black comedy to the masses. With their irreverent wit they challenged social norms as a new breed of comic emerged, funny, flippant, dignified and socially conscious. Then in the 1980's we saw Eddie Murphy single handedly turn his brand of comic genius into box office gold. Since then we have seen many comics come and take the world by storm

being seen in living rooms and packing movie theaters becoming household names.

It has been throughout the history of African-Americans during their sojourn in America that they have used humor to combat the lashes of unfairness and lack of human recognition. Wearing the social mask of subterfuge that the great African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote about so poignantly in his seminal poem "We Wear the Mask" about Blacks using humor and laughing in the face of oppression; using double entendre where Whites found themselves laughing at the performer, while Blacks conversely, are laughing with them.

Today some would say African-American comedy is at its nadir due to oversaturation and a low bar for entry. And while this is partially true, there are many comics who are outstanding at their craft with funny original and thoughtful material. Some of them were on display at a recent stop during the Royal Comedy Tour as it made its stop through the Cres-

cent City. Funny Man D.L. Hughley served as the emcee serving up a heaping helping of jokes between acts. The audience was treated to short but dynamic sets from standout comedians Damon Williams, George Willborn and Tony Rock blazed the stage with jokes that kept the crowd roaring with laughter. Unrestricted and unrestrained from television censoring they cut loose with reckless abandon with no subject being taboo and were reminiscent of Redd Foxx with their blue comedy of adult risqué material bringing down the house.

The Royal Comedy Show had many Kings sharing the stage but the night belonged to the sole female performer. The headline act Sommore is a true talent with her show stopping set that lends itself to a more female brand of humor, a voice that is sometimes not as prominent in the world of stand-up comedy. With a show that took on topics of race, sex, family, relationships and female empowerment, Sommore captivated the audience with a well-rounded dynamic show; and was truly the nights most stellar performer as women high-fived, yelled amen and yeah girl throughout her thought provoking and provocative performance. While other female comics may receive more face time in the mainstream Sommore is truly a force to be reckoned with; and as one of the original Queens of Comedy she has earned her crown. She is just that a gifted artist whose added to the tradition of using humor as a bridge to exploring the depths of Black humanity. In her and the others performing they prove that the world of African-American comedy is alive and well and the tradition continued on this night with the Royal Comedy Tour.

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Michelle Obama

First Lady, Health Advocate, Role Model

By Michael Brown
L.A. Watts Times

NNPA Newswire - As Barack Obama took the oath as the 44th U.S. President, standing by his side and holding the Bible he used to be sworn in office was Michelle Obama.

Not only did millions of people across the world watch history unfold in 2009 as the United States' first African-American ascended to the Presidency, but those same eyes witnessed the nation's First Lady, a direct descendant of slaves, take center stage as well.

Michelle's impact on America has taken on even more of a special meaning for some during March, which is Women's History Month.

"Michelle's place with regards to the month is especially relevant, due to the fact that Women's History Month speaks directly to Black women," said Ange-Marie Hancock, an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Southern California. "We use the struggles of the past to fight and get through the problems we're facing now. Michelle Obama is the epitome of Women's History Month."

Michelle Obama's role in the administration

Similar to first ladies of the past, Michelle Obama's role during her husband's Presidency has been in the background.

However, during presidential administrations the first lady typically takes on a cause, usually centered on charities.

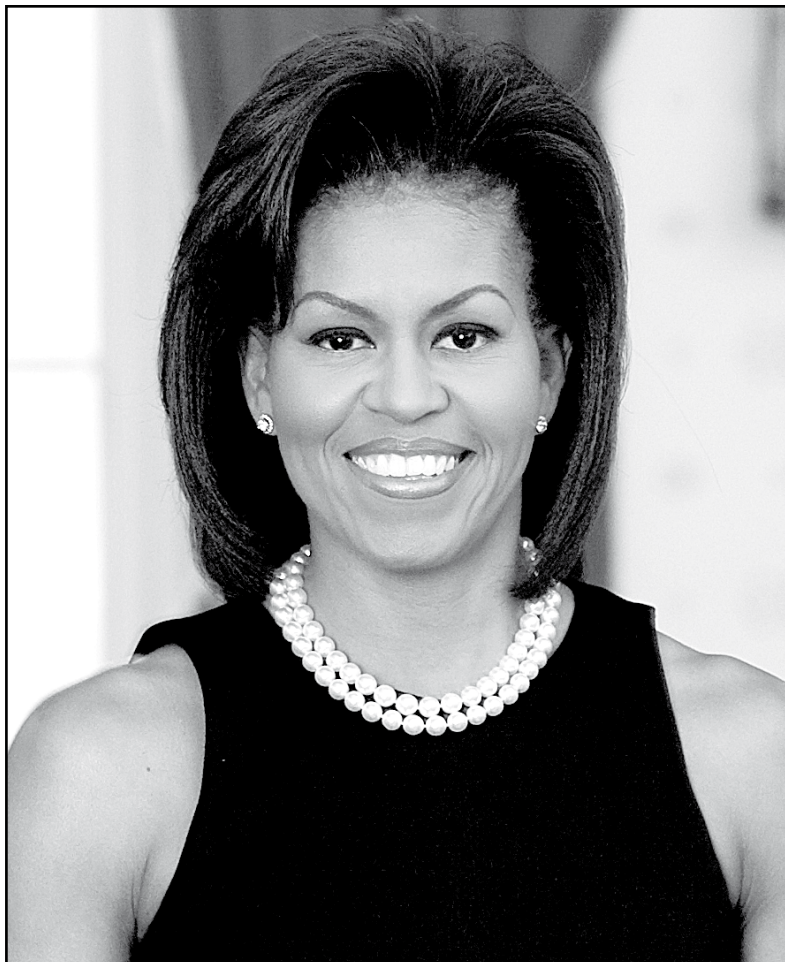
Nancy Reagan's cause became D.A.R.E., which stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education.

Michelle has also taken on a cause: fighting childhood obesity through her initiative, Let's Move! The initiative also encourages healthy eating habits and increased physical activity.

"One of the reasons Michelle has a high approval rating among people, even when the administration's is down, is due to initiatives like Let's Move!" Hancock said. "The work she does with military families along with Move is non-controversial and things everyone can stand behind."

Hancock added that Michelle coming under fire by some critics for comments made during the campaign "probably has something to do with her now focusing on non-controversial issues."

"That's no surprise," said Hancock, who followed the 2008 presidential election closely. "Part of Barack's success has been her



First Lady Michelle Obama

keeping a healthy distance from the partisan side of things. Politics is his job. None of us go to our spouse's place of business and try to make decisions."

Changing Perceptions

"The most important thing Michelle Obama has done to change America's perceptions of Black women is to offer a counter balance," said Hancock. "Of course, one woman can't possibly change an entire nation's view-

point, but I think she's done an admirable job."

Hancock mentioned the images of Black women on reality shows as an example of what professional Black women like Michelle battle against daily.

Congresswoman Karen Bass noted Michelle's accomplishments, potential to reach young people, and her status as a role model as some of her attributes.

"First Lady Obama is in so many ways, a woman that young girls across America can aspire to be like," Bass told the L.A. Watts Times in an e-mail. "She is intellectually and professionally accomplished, and she has proven

to be a leader in her own right with her 'Let's Move' campaign to combat childhood obesity."

Michelle's knack for fashion flair routinely causes a media frenzy among the tabloids, entertainment shows, and bloggers. Her attire and style has not only garnered her attention from fashion critics, but others as well who have compared her to a former First Lady. "She has become a fashion icon on the world stage the likes of which we haven't seen since Jacqueline Kennedy, and I greatly admire her championing of up and coming designers," said Bass.

The Future

Prior to being the nation's First Lady, Michelle was an accomplished professional. Armed with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from Princeton, and later on obtaining a degree from Harvard Law, the Ivy Leaguer from the South Side of Chicago worked in both the private and public sector.

Michelle founded a non-profit organization, Public Allies Chicago, which helps young adults foster leadership skills.

During her time in the private sector, the First Lady served as the University of Chicago Hospitals' Executive Director of Community and External Affairs.

Whether Michelle pursues politics after her husband's Presidency or leaves the spotlight is anyone's guess.

"I don't see her being a person that's that interested in pursuing politics," Hancock said. "People would like her to go into politics because she's a likable person, but I think she'll probably concentrate on seeing her daughters grow up and possibly continue with charitable events and causes."

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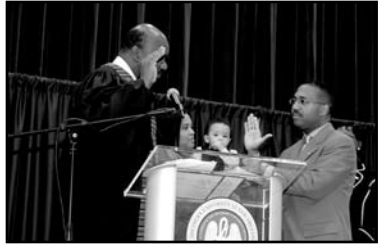
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Wesley Bishop Sworn In as State Representative



By Edwin Buggage

Surrounded by city leaders, family and friends newly, elected State Representative for District 101 Wesley Bishop was sworn in by Judge Harry Cantrell at a ceremony held at Southern University of New Orleans where he presently is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. He was elected in a special election held after the previous officeholder Cedric Richmond was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for Louisiana Second Congressional District.

Rev. Jesse Jackson Against Possible Merger Between SUNO and UNO

By Micah Boyd
Rev. Jesse Jackson Against Possible Merger Between SUNO and UNO

New Orleans, La- Rev. Jesse Jackson was the guest speaker at a Monday rally held in a gymnasium on the Southern University New Orleans campus to protest the merger of the all black Southern University at New Orleans and the majority white University of New Orleans.

Jackson greeted a gymnasium full of SUNO supporters with chants of "SUNO Yesterday, SUNO Today, SUNO Forever". The supporters at the SUNO rally were encouraged by Jackson to use social activism and protests to do everything possible to keep their beloved SUNO alive.

The rally was, donned by many



community activists and concerned alumni, as the Save Our Southern Community Rally, was attended by SUNO alumni, current faculty and students, local religious leaders, as well as several local and state officials.

As the rally came to a roaring close, Rev. Jackson chanted "Keep HOPE Alive. Keep SUNO OPEN" to a crowd of energetic SUNO supporters. Rev. Jackson called for "a spirit of unity" as he referenced scenes from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Rev. Jackson continued to inspire hope by saying to rally attendees, "We will stand strong together. We will not

back down."

As hundreds of SUNO supporters packed the gymnasium and were rocked by Rev. Jackson words, plans were made for Tuesday for students and faculty to be bussed to the Louisiana Board of Regents Hearing of the proposal. At the hearing, passionate pleas were made to prevent from what many call "nothing more than an example of modern day inequality in the education system." The board, completely divided, passed a proposal by 9:6 margin to merge UNO and SUNO.

The Louisiana Board of Regents will send the recommendation to the state legislature where the exact details of the merger will be decided later next month.

Cover Story, Continued from page 3.



SHIRLEY HORN

May 1, 1934 – October 20, 2005

This Washington, D.C. native started singing and playing piano as a child. She developed a following among jazz musicians and fans for her sultry voice and economical style, but chose to stay in Washington while raising her daughter, and ran a popular jazz club there for years. In the 1980s, she started to perform more outside her hometown, and her recordings gained her a worldwide audience. Miles Davis once said that his friend was "long overdue" for recognition, and she won a Grammy Award for an album she did in his memory.



SARAH VAUGHAN

March 27, 1924 – April 3, 1990

As a child, she sang and played piano for her church. While she was still in her teens, Earl Hines hired her for his big band. She made her recording debut when she joined Billy Eckstine's bebop big band, where she came under the musical spell of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. In a long and distinguished career, she used her almost operatic voice to sing every style from bop to pop, showing a wide range and great musical ability equaled by few other singers.



BILLIE HOLIDAY

April 7, 1915 – July 17, 1959

Her childhood was a nightmare, but in her teens she found that she could sing, and she made her first recordings when she was 18 with a group that included Benny Goodman. She developed a very personal and dramatic style, and worked with such stars as Lester Young, who gave her the nickname of "Lady Day." Even while battling racism and personal problems, she gave the world music that influenced countless later singers that is unrivalled for musicality and honesty of expression.

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