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**Data
Zone
Page 6**

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Police Chief Michael Harrison Shares His Vision for NOPD

Page 2



Newsmaker

Civil Rights Groups
Demand Feds Investigate
the Sandra Bland Case

Page 4

Commentary

A Good Education
By Any Means
Necessary



Page 9

Police Chief Michael Harrison Talks to Data News About His Vision for NOPD and Solutions to Crime Problem in New Orleans



We need to talk about the hard issues of race and the disparities . We must be willing to talk about those things and the things we’ve done wrong in the past and the long way we have to go even though we have made progress ,” says New Orleans Police Superintendent, Michael Harrison. (Photo courtesy of Phoenix Patriot Magazine)

By Edwin Buggage

Crime, Violence and the Police

As cities across the nation try to find ways to quell the problems of police community relations. For in the last years we have seen questionable behavior by police come tongue forefront of dialogue regarding public

safety. It is enough that in some communities that are unsafe that those who are charged with serving and protecting sometimes are as much as the problem as those who commit crime. Creating a level of distrust that does not make anyone safer.

In New Orleans as is the case in many urban cities with mass amounts of poverty, joblessness and a poor

public education system, things that contribute to high rates of crime and violence. While understanding that crime is as much a social problem as a police problem, they are only one part of an equation that leads to solutions. So when there is a disconnect between the police and citizens things can easily go awry.

Cover Story, Continued
on next page.

INSIDE DATA	
Cover Story	2
Newsmaker	4
State & Local News . .	5
Data Zone	6
Commentary.	8
In the Spirit.	9
National News	10
Book Review	11

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.



"It is all about relationships, we need to be more inviting and I am training my officers to do that. We can walk side by side with our citizens. Also citizens you can help by inviting us to community events so we can hear your concerns and together we can figure out how to deliver the services you need and the best way to attack the problems."

Repairing the Breach Between Citizens and the Police

Recently, Data News Weekly had a conversation with New Orleans Police Superintendent Michael Harrison to discuss issues of how to make New Orleans safer, and how can the NOPD repair the breach between citizens and the police.

Outlining his Vision for NOPD Harrison says, "My vision is to make New Orleans an example of being one of the best departments in the country. While we are not there yet we are on our way. When it comes to some of the things that are happening across the country with police and community relations I feel we are doing much better than most cities."

Honest Conversations that Leads to Solutions

As we have seen the recent "Black Lives Matter" go from merely a slogan to a movement as a result of police and there sometimes excessive use of force among African-Americans. This is something Chief Harrison feels need to not be ignored by those in law enforcement if we are to have better relations between those who wear the badge and those they are supposed to protect.

"We need to talk about the hard

issues of race and the disparities. We must be willing to talk about those things and the things we've done wrong in the past and the long way we have to go even though we have made progress."

"Rather than be defensive I am open to listen to the complaints and concerns of citizens. Because they help in shaping the way we have to go about fixing the problems and becoming better."

Crime Prevention and Safer Streets: Cooperation is Key

Crime is something that impacts all people, but it has a more direct impact on the African-American community. Where unlike some of the myths and misconceptions the fact is the majority of people are law abiding citizens. But more recently, there seems among some a "no snitching" policy in place and a distrust and lack of confidence in the police.

Chief Harrison would like to change this and create open lines of communication between citizens and police.

"We need citizens to provide information when they see things out of place. Give us information and we can work with community members to prevent and bring people who are committing crime to

justice." "We need information and we can only get that through partnerships and trust between citizens and the police."

Increasing the Ranks: Why Should Someone Consider Joining NOPD

Prior to Hurricane Katrina the number of officers on the force was around 1500, but as the number of citizens in the City took a dip after the storm so did the ranks of those in NOPD. Today we see the numbers rising again and during the course of our interview I ask why should one consider joining NOPD? He then makes a compelling pitch to members of the community as to why they should consider becoming officers.

"I feel people should consider joining for the same reason I did 24 years ago. When I joined there was something in me that wanted to do something great with my life."

"It is a great opportunity to have a career, earn a decent wage and be able to help your community. To do something that touches other people's lives in a way you cannot do with most professions. And we don't just do a job we make a difference that's what we do as police officers."

Lessons from Katrina and Profiles in Courage and Compassion

It has been nearly ten years since Hurricane Katrina, a time where many were not prepared for a catastrophe of this magnitude. Recalling this time and assessing what happened and how today he feels NOPD is better prepared to handle a disaster.

was a sergeant working at the Public Integrity Bureau during Hurricane Katrina. It was a bigger department with 1500 officers when Katrina hit we were like many others not prepared to deal with something of that magnitude."

"While we had good leadership that helped pull us together we could have performed a lot better if we would have been better disaster preparedness training. But in spite of the chaos it brought people together. I watched officers who loss everything show up to work every day performing better than when they had everything."

"During this time we were performing with 3 and 4 hours of sleep and we would go out and crank out another 20 hours saving people, pulling people out of water, out of their homes, walking through water to help rescue people. I saw people doing things that we didn't think we had in us to do but it came out when we had Katrina."

"While it was catastrophic and there were some negative things

that were reported you saw the best of us as well. We went from enforcement mode to rescue mode. Today I think because of the lessons we learned during that time we are better prepared for a disaster."

Working Together to Make New Orleans Better

Police Chief Michael Harrison Talks to Data News about His Vision for NOPD and Solutions to Crime Problem in New Orleans

Crime is all of our problem and getting to solutions is everyone's responsibility. This sentiment is echoed by Chief Harrison.

"It is all about relationships, we need to be more inviting and I am training my officers to do that. We can walk side by side with our citizens. Also citizens you can help by inviting us to community events so we can hear your concerns and together we can figure out how to deliver the services you need and the best way to attack the problems."

"It's my goal for citizens to see us as much more than law enforcement but as a partner in the community. Involve police in non-enforcement activities to see us as partners that can lead to conversations to and get to resolutions and solutions to the problems that plague our City, so it can be a better and safer City for everyone."

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Public Meeting Dates on Relocation of Confederate Monuments Announced

Meetings Part of 60-Day Public Discussion Period Outlined by Mayor

NEW ORLEANS – On Tuesday, the City of New Orleans announced the schedule for public hearings about the proposed relocation of the Robert E Lee statue at Lee Circle; the Jefferson Davis statue on Jefferson Davis Parkway; the P.G.T. Beauregard statue on Esplanade Avenue at the entrance to City Park; and, the Battle of Liberty Place Monument at Iberville Street. The HDLC and HRC hearings are part of a 60-day period of discussions and public meetings outlined by Mayor Landrieu, which are taking place ahead of the City Council's formal consideration of this issue.

Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) Public Hearing

Thursday, Aug. 13, 2015, 1pm-3 pm
1300 Perdido Street, New Orleans, LA 70112

City Council Chambers Human Relations Commission (HRC) Public Hearing

Thursday, Aug. 13, 2015, 6 p.m.
1300 Perdido Street, New Orleans, LA 70112

City Council Chambers

*Comment Cards must be received at the HRC meeting by 7 p.m. in order to speak.

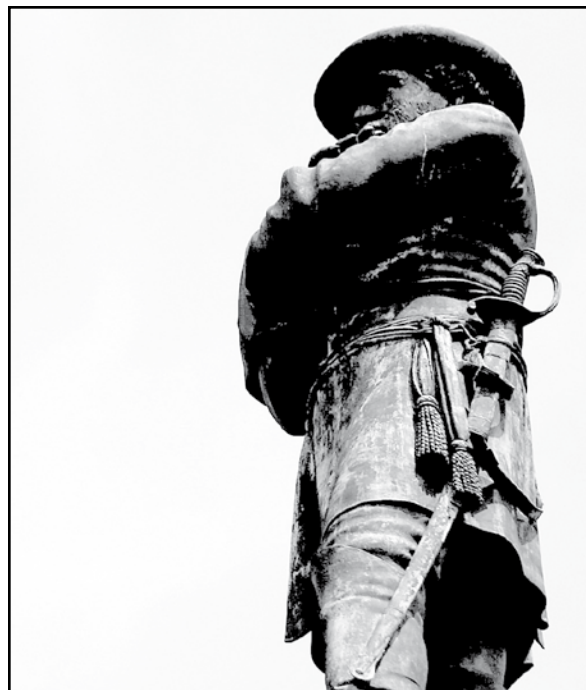
At the HDLC and HRC hearings, there will be a public comment period during which participants are encouraged to be civil and respectful of others. Similar to City Council meetings, comment cards will be distributed and participants will be called to the podium on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Those who cannot attend either the HDLC or HRC meeting can submit a comment online at www.nola.gov/HDLC or www.nola.gov/HRC. Comments submitted online must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 11 so that it can be shared with Commissioners in advance of the meetings on Aug. 13 to be included as part of the official pub-

lic record. The meetings will also be broadcast live from the City Council Chambers on the NOATV Government Channel 6.

On July 9, 2015, Mayor Landrieu formally asked the City Council to begin the legal process to relocate four prominent Confederate monuments, as well as a 60-day public comment period. As per City Code Section 146-611, the City

Council must receive comments and recommendations from the Human Relations Commission, the Historic District Landmarks Commission, the chief administrative officer, the City attorney,



the superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department, and the director of the Department of Property Management before taking action to relocate or remove a monument or structure.

Following the required public hearings and receipt of recommendations, the City Council may hold its own public meeting and, by ordinance, declare a monument or structure a nuisance and start the process of its removal or relocation.

Landrieu also asked that highly-facilitated discussions among residents take place as part of the City's Welcome Table New Orleans (WTNO) initiative. The WTNO, which was launched in April 2014, regularly brings together diverse residents to have thoughtful, open, honest and civil discussion about important community issues. The WTNO process provides a safe space for neighborhood and community leaders, faith-based leaders and other engaged residents to learn, listen and consider the possibility of other perspectives on the monuments question. The roundtable discussions were facilitated by the William Winter Institute from the University of Mississippi. WTNO has also engaged young people on the monuments issue.

Data News Weekly is Hiring

Data News Weekly Newspaper, The People's Paper, is hiring for two positions in our New Orleans Office.

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About the Job

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Dillard University Mourns the Loss of One Its Trailblazers

*Dr. Barbara Guillory Thompson Former Chair,
Division of Social Sciences, Dillard University*

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of one of Dillard's trailblazing daughters, Dr. Barbara Guillory Thompson, who died on Sunday, August 2, 2015.

Barbara Guillory Thompson served Dillard University in many capacities for 42 years. She retired from the university as chair of the Division of Social Sciences, chair of the sociology department, University Marshall, and chair of the tenure and promotions committee. Thompson also served as director of institutional research from 1974-1976. She is a native New Orleanian, a product of the public school system, and a cum laude sociology graduate from Dillard's Class of 1957. She earned an M.A. in sociology from Louisiana State University in 1960. She was the

first Black female student to live in the dormitory at LSU. She wrote a thesis on the "Career Patterns of Negro Lawyers in New Orleans." By 1960 she was ready to challenge another educational barrier, and became a litigant in a class action suit against Tulane University. The court decision made possible the attendance of Black students at the graduate and undergraduate levels. She completed the requirements for the Ph.D. degree by writing a dissertation on "The Black Family: A Case for Change and Survival in White America." Thompson made a tremendous impact outside the academy by advocating equity for voiceless government workers.

The City Council of New Orleans appointed her a member of the New Orleans Civil Service Commis-



Pictured above is the late Dr. Barbara Guillory Thompson, Former Chair, Division of Social Sciences, Dillard University

sion from 1981-1992, and chair of the august body from 1989-1992. She was the first Black, the first woman, and the first non-attorney to be named chair. Thompson was active in numerous professional and learned societies, such as the American Sociological Association and the Southern Sociological Association. She has numerous publications, some written independently and some co-authored with her late husband Daniel C. Thompson.

In 2004, Dillard University awarded her an Honorary Doctorate

of Humane Letters and in 2013 she received a Presidential Citation. At that time, the University also replaced her honorary degree that was lost in Hurricane Katrina. She was the recipient of numerous other honors and awards ranging from membership in the Louisiana Black History Hall of Fame, to citations from the governor, mayor, and UNCF. She was a board member for Chatham School for Girls, a consultant for Minority Issue with Innovations Consulting, Inc., and a proposal reader for the Department of Education.

Funeral services will be held at Noon on Thursday, August 6, 2015 in Lawless Memorial Chapel on Dillard's campus. Visitation is from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

It's time to celebrate our 49th Anniversary

Data News Weekly 49TH ANNIVERSARY Gala

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June 2014 – Derek Rabb
July 2014 – Karl Washington
August 2014 – Shareef Cousin
September 2014 – Tyra Barabino
October 2014 – Karen Hence
November 2014 – Kendal Francis
December 2014 – Alexis Sakari
January 2015 – Harold Baquet
February 2015 – Bill Summers
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April 2015 – James Andrews

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15th Annual Satchmo SummerFest Highlights

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

The 15th Anniversary of the Satchmo SummerFest held July 30th - August 2nd was three days of music and seminars featuring an unveiling of new Louis Armstrong exhibit; a special presentation to commemorate Katrina's 10th Anniversary and the new "Spirit of Satch" Awards was presented to Brenda Thornton (pictured below) for her dedication to preserving our culture. Of course with this much going on, you know Data was there!!!



Brenda Thornton



Million Dollar Baby Doll, Spy Boy Ricky Al "Carnival Time" Johnson



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Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events

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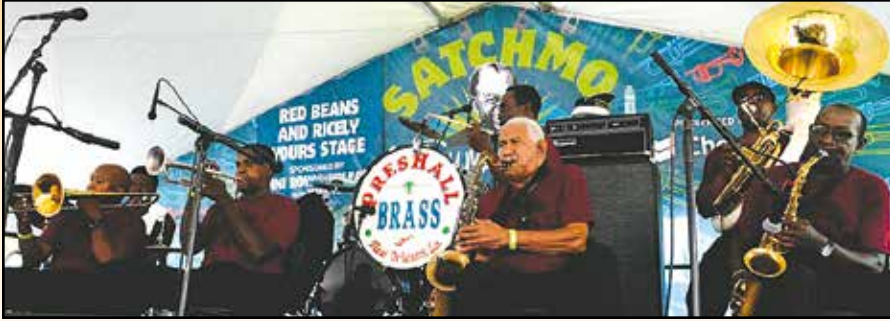
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I Am Sandra Bland



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

Had I ever met Sandra Bland, I am sure I would have liked her. She is described as an advocate for justice who had embraced her purpose to fight racism. She is described as a sister who knew her rights. She was well-educated, assertive, and a resource for her people. She was dragged out of her car for failing to signal a traffic lane change because Texas Highway Patrol Trooper Brian Encinia chose to abuse his power and violate her rights. Because he could.

Three days later, Sandra Bland was dead. The police call her death a suicide. Her family is disputing the autopsy. Brian Encinia is responsible for what happened, since

there was no reason to arrest Sandra Bland and put her in jail.

Sandra Bland was an “uppity” Black woman from suburban Chicago who I not kowtow to Trooper Encinia. Perhaps he preferred a woman who said “yes, sir,” who humbly accepted her ticket. Certainly, while it was not against the law to take a smoke, he preferred that Sandra put her cigarette out. Why? Because he needed to order a woman around who asserted her rights. Because she knew what her rights were.

Sandra Bland, the Prairie View A&M University graduate, was stopped in Waller County, Texas for failing to signal at a lane change. She was ordered to put out her cigarette, and she refused. She was told to get out of her car, and she had the nerve to assert her rights and to ask why.

Trooper Encinia was clearly exceedingly and outrageously out of order. His voice escalated to unnecessary shouting when he yelled, “I will light you up. Get out. Now. Get out of the car.” He grabbed her, threw her on the

ground, and shoved his knee in her back so sharply that evidence of bruising was visible in her autopsy three days later. He arrested her with the false charge of assault because she did not acquiesce to his brutality.

Sandra Bland’s You-Tube posts show her as a strong, assertive Black woman who is keenly aware of racial disparities, and committed to social and economic justice. Former police officer Harry Houck, commenting on this case on CNN, described her as “arrogant” because she would not extinguish her cigarette. Houck did not know Sandra Bland, so how did he surmise that she was arrogant? Isn’t that how some Whites describe Black people when we fail to grovel in the face of their power?

What did Trooper Encinia see when arresting Sandra Bland? Did he, like Houck, see a woman who was not intimidated, a woman who, though not rude, was not “humble”? Did she scowl when she was stopped? Probably. Was she unfriendly or ungracious?

Possibly. Was she deferential? Not at all. But there is no law that says that someone who gets a ticket is supposed to be grateful. Most folks who get a ticket are annoyed, and have a bit of an attitude. She did not bow and scrape, or say, “Yes massa,” so now she is dead, and Encinia is, at minimum, partly responsible for her death.

African American women are often stereotyped as angry Sapphires with chips on their shoulders and a penchant for confrontation. A Black woman doesn’t have to raise her voice or swivel her neck to be considered angry. All she has to do is to express herself, or fail to smile. Perhaps the officer would have preferred a deferential and obedient Sandra Bland. It didn’t happen. So he retaliated.

I know Sandra Bland, because she is every woman. She does not conform to the majority culture’s stereotype of what a woman should be. We, Black women, rarely conform. As the late Dorothy Irene Height, president of the

National Council of Negro Women, once said, “Black women don’t do what we want to do, we do what we have to do.”

Forty-six percent of African American families are female-headed. We do the work. Black unemployment is higher than White unemployment, and Black wages are lower. We do the work. We work harder for less pay than other women. In the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, we are “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” Sandra Bland accepted her calling to fight for justice. Her posts show a woman who would not yield to racism. She is not dead because she failed to signal when she changed lanes. She is dead because she knew and asserted her rights.

Every woman who is an activist is Sandra Bland, the Christian, the organizer, the advocate for justice. She is dead because she dared talk back to a brutal officer. Sandra Bland is every assertive Black woman. I am Sandra Bland.

Julianne Malveaux is an author and economist. She can be reached via www.julianne-malveaux.com

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Lucky No More, Blessed Always



James Washington
Guest Columnist

I have to say I've been feeling pretty lucky lately and, not necessarily from a financial, physical or even an emotional point of view. When I look at my life from a worldly perspective now, it can sometimes still appear stacked against me. Life happens and well, you know the rest. These days my spiritual resolve kicks in, if I'm fortunate,

and I keep coming back to this one thing. It's not about luck anymore. I'm blessed because there are not enough hours in the day to say thank you to the Almighty for that simple transformation of thought. I'm blessed because from where I sit and I could be wrong about this but, I don't think I missed my wake up call from God. I confess. It was a long time coming but instead of pushing the snooze button, I got my behind out of bed and started paying attention to God's agenda rather than my own. Think about it. That's a question anybody should ask of oneself. Have I missed God's wake up call? All I can say is did you call the front desk and ask/pray for one? My bible is full of not yet saints and prophets who, when called, tried their very best to sleep

through it, ignore it or pretend the call was for someone else. Most just denied it. What about you? Remember in the bible God simply played past the "you talking to me?" He gave marching orders and that was it. Hello Moses. At times He even lets you think you know more than He does. Say what Jonah? Even when you doubt what God is saying, He still, with appropriate consequences, rings your phone again. How 'bout that Zechariah?

Imagine missing your wake up call from God and never getting another one. Like I said, I'm feeling pretty blessed today. I would have loved to have seen the look on my mother's face to hear me say I'm saved. The following conversations would have been the stuff dreams are made of. There are people who

have been a part of your life who are or would roll over in their graves to hear that about you. Can you say Holy Ghost party?

I know this for a certainty because I believe I woke up on the last ring of my last wake up call. I could be wrong, but everything A.S. (after saved) is more optimistic for me. I find myself ridiculously giddy with the reality that God said, 'ring him up one last time.' It gives my every waking moment and inevitable death new meaning. You know when you miss your wake up call, it has a tendency to ruin your whole day. I kinda think if you miss God's wake up call, it has a tendency to ruin your whole life and the next one and the one after that. I'm sure there is someone reading this that knows the feeling of just getting in

under the wire; either catching a plane, making an important meeting or beating the bill collector minutes before everything gets turned off. The negative anticipation is replaced with relieved enthusiasm because you made it in the nick of time. Whew, thank God I made it. I may yet not get to heaven, but I can at least say I know the way. That's worth shouting about. The bible counts it all joy. Life and death look a whole lot different to me now. Actually, they're both the same to some extent. God is in both worlds. And it's pretty nice to recognize and follow Him in this one.

Have a nice day and may God bless and keep you always,

James,
jaws@dallasweekly.com

A Good Education By Any Means Necessary



Kevin Chavous
Contributing Writer,
Urban News Services

At age 6, Mical spent the majority of his first school year kicked out of class for behavioral issues, including angry and violent outbursts. His Great Aunt and legal guardian, Martha Presley, was worried sick about Mical and his future. At such a young age, he seemed destined for failure and even worse, prison some day.

"He would go to school on Monday and get suspended, then he would go to school on Wednesday and get suspended again," Milwaukee's Martha Presley is remembering her nephew Mical's kindergarten year at his inner-city neighborhood public school.

By second grade, he couldn't even read. Martha had taken custody of Mical after his grandmother passed away. His grandmother was all he had. Mical's father was never in the picture, and his mother had relinquished custody because she wasn't ca-

pable of properly caring for him.

"There were domestic violence issues, numerous times when she couldn't feed him, and they moved from house to house," Martha says.

Martha was overwhelmed and at her wits end. She kept switching Mical's school, but he continued to get into trouble. He hated school and wasn't learning anything.

While families like Martha and Mical live in the daily, inner-city life struggle, federal lawmakers have been debating the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), an act that determines how and under what guidelines the federal government help fund America's schools. The last reauthorization of ESEA occurred in 2002 under former President George Bush and was called No Child Left Behind. During the most recent reauthorization debates, various members of Congress have offered an array of proposals and amendments relating to ESEA, such as creating a clear definition of the concept of "bullying."

However, none of these suggestions would help parents and guardians, like Martha Presley, who are desperate to find high-quality educational alternatives for their at-risk kids forced to go to schools where they just aren't performing well, whatever the reason may be.

Then again, Congress has the

luxury of debating ideas that don't work for real people - a luxury Martha Presley and others like her do not have. Each passing day, each passing week, each passing year, Mical's future was becoming bleaker and bleaker.

Fortunately for Martha and Mical, Milwaukee offers school choice options for them beyond the designated neighborhood school. One of those options is the Milwaukee Parental Choice program. This scholarship opportunity was created in 1990 and is the first voucher program in the nation. The program offers scholarships for low-income students to attend one of the participating private schools - at no cost to the student's family. It began 25 years ago with 300 students and has now grown to 27,000 kids.

"I heard all about that scholarship program and said we've tried everything else, lets give this a try," Martha says. Mical became a scholarship recipient, and she was able to enroll him in Milwaukee's HOPE Christian School. Life changed for the better from that day on.

"I sent him there, and they worked with him," Martha tearfully remembers Mical's first days at HOPE. "He wasn't getting sent home anymore. Mical had to buckle down and work hard with his teachers to get caught up, but now his favorite subject is reading."

"I pay attention, I listen to my teachers, and I don't get suspended anymore," Mical proudly says. "I read, I'm really good at reading!"

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, Congress continues to debate ESEA, and no one knows for sure what the final bill will look like. Since it's passage in 2002, the debate around ESEA has become a political cesspool. Some Democrats seem dead set on making sure that relaxing the Dept. of Education's involvement in punishing state systems for failing to meet standards curtailing the use of standardized testing in evaluating whether a school is "good" or "bad". On the other side of the aisle, some Republicans want to completely remove the federal government from the process by eliminating the "Common Core" standards altogether and reducing the Dept. of Education's ability to punish failing schools. Keep in mind that each side needs to be able to claim some legislative victory when the bill ultimately passes, often times determined by semantics.

Maybe, however, as the political posturing over ESEA escalates, lawmakers could benefit from conversations with working class families like Martha's family. These families are not tied to the political party caucus platforms, legislative wins and losses or grandiose policy proposals that promise change in

the far distant future. Nor do they care about how they are viewed by others as they fight to find a good school for their kids.

Without the options provided through the Milwaukee Parental Choice program, young Mical would be trapped in a failing school. In reauthorizing ESEA, Congress needs to create an environment where similar school choice options will be made available for other kids as well. For these kids, being on the right school dictates whether they thrive, flourish and develop the love of learning that will serve them for life.

As Martha Presley said, "I wanted to know why Mical was suddenly enjoying school, so I started sitting in on his classes and just saw so much love there. They let the kids know that they are important, that they are somebody and that they have the ability to accomplish great things," says Martha. "Mical is now in the third grade and has grown leaps and bounds. I'm really grateful for this school."

While the debate over ESEA continues, let's hope that the members of Congress grasp the immediate benefit of school choice for families, like Martha's family, who just want their kids to succeed - by any means necessary.

Go to <http://youtu.be/xynykxN-sQDc> to view the whole story.

Civil Rights Groups Demand Federal Investigation into the Death of Sandra Bland

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Senior Washington
Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – A broad coalition of civil rights groups delivered more than 500,000 signed petitions to the Justice Department (DOJ), demanding that Attorney General Loretta Lynch launch a full investigation into the death of Sandra Bland and into the practices and policies of the Waller County, Texas police department and the prosecutor's office immediately.

While visiting Prairie View A&M University, a historically Black college and university (HBCU), in preparation for taking a job there, Bland, a 28 year-old graduate of the school, was pulled over for a minor traffic violation on July 10. That traffic stop esca-

lated to an arrest and on Monday, July 13, Bland was found dead in a Waller County jail cell.

As news spread of Bland's mysterious death while in police custody spread across social media, civil rights groups decried another example of driving while Black and police brutality.

The #IfIDieInPoliceCustody hashtag trended on Twitter following Sandra Bland's death.

During the press conference about the petition last Thursday, Lois Wilkins, a Freeland, Mich. resident and mother of four who started the petition on MoveOn.org, recounted a conversation that she had with her daughter Ebony Joy, who felt a strong connection with Bland's life and tragic death. Ebony also admired Bland's work as an activist and her decision to return to



(Left-Right) Eugene Puryear of the Stop Police Terror Project in Washington, D.C., Lois Wilkins, the Freeland, Mich., resident and mother of four who started the petition on MoveOn.org, and Reverend Graylan Hagler, the senior pastor of the Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ carry boxes of signed petitions to the visitor's entrance of the Department of Justice. (Freddie Allen/NNPA News Wire)

her alma mater to mentor the next generation of Black leaders.

"She said, 'Mom, I could have been Sandra Bland,'" Wilkins remembered, "And if I die in police custody, I want you to know that I did not commit suicide."

Wilkins continued: "It was at that moment that I had no choice but to act."

Wilkins, who described herself as an educator and a small business owner, said that she started the petition because it is time for change.

"As an African American mother, I am appalled at the stealing of our children and our future leaders and this is totally unacceptable to me," said Wilkins.

Eugene Puryear, who works with the Stop Police Terror Project in Washington, D.C., a group committed to ending racist, militarized policing in the U.S., said that activists don't need to appeal to institutions, they need to transform institutions.

"The petitions are not just names on pieces of paper, they represent the power of a potential mass movement in this country that has already changed the conversation," said Puryear, referring to the on-going dialogue about criminal justice reform.

Wilkins said that as a mother, she was tired of these untimely deaths at the hands of police officers and that she was also tired of being afraid for the lives of her four adult children.

"As a mother, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired," Wilkins said, quoting Fannie Lou Hamer, the late Mississippi civil rights activist.

Rev. Graylan Hagler, senior minister of the Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ and the executive director of Faith Strategies, a human and civil rights group in Washington, said that the abuse that Blacks suffer at the hands of police is nothing new. He said the only difference is that now everyone has a recording device in the palm of their hand, ready to expose police misconduct.

Bland attempted to record her interaction with Texas State Trooper Brian Encinia before he commanded her to put her cell phone down. However, another bystander managed to capture the encounter on video.

"If you look at the video of Sandra Bland closely, she was locked up, because she asserted her rights," said Rev. Hagler. "The rights that anybody should have to ask the questions, 'What are you doing? Why are you stopping me? Why are you arresting me?'"

Rashad Robinson, the executive director of ColorOfChange.org, an online civil rights organization focused on criminal justice and police reform, said that, from the beginning, Waller County officials have failed to expose the truth about what happened to Sandra Bland.

"From the police killings of Michael Brown, Rekia Boyd and the countless other Black victims of police violence, Waller County and Sandra Bland are no different," said Robinson.

Elton Mathis, the district attorney for Waller County, said that the events surrounding Sandra Bland's death will be investigated thoroughly. However, the county's history of

racial discrimination has left many activists doubtful that they will ever learn what happened to Bland between the time she was booked into the Waller County jail on Friday, July 10, and when she was found hanged on Monday morning, July 13 in her cell.

Waller County officials, who contend that Bland consumed a large amount of marijuana just before she was detained or while she was in jail and committed suicide by hanging herself with a trash bag, have released hours of video footage to dispel the myth that Bland was dead in her booking photo or that there was any foul play involved in her death.

The video footage from Bland's arrest also showed that Trooper Encinia chose to escalate the encounter from a simple warning for failure to signal before a lane change to an arrest for assault on a police officer after he commanded Bland to exit her vehicle and she refused. After Encinia attempted to drag Bland out of her car and threatened to use his Taser on her while she sat in her car, she complied.

"What we know for sure is that police cannot police themselves, especially with a long history of racism," said Robinson. "Her death was not an isolated tragedy. Waller County has serious problems with systemic racism."

And those problems with racism span Waller County's post-Civil War history.

Following the U.S. Civil War, at one time Waller County was home to a Freedmen's Bureau office, protected by federal troops, and a Ku Klux Klan chapter. The Atlantic reported and the county's population was majority Black according to the 1880 census.

When that majority population status flipped, Blacks lost any political power they had in the county. According to the Equal Justice Initiative, Waller County ranked third in the state for the number of Blacks lynched between 1877 and 1950.

Robinson said that Black residents make up 26 percent of Waller County, yet represent more than 50 percent of the jail population.

News outlets have reported that Waller County Sheriff Glenn Smith was suspended then fired in 2007 from his previous position as the

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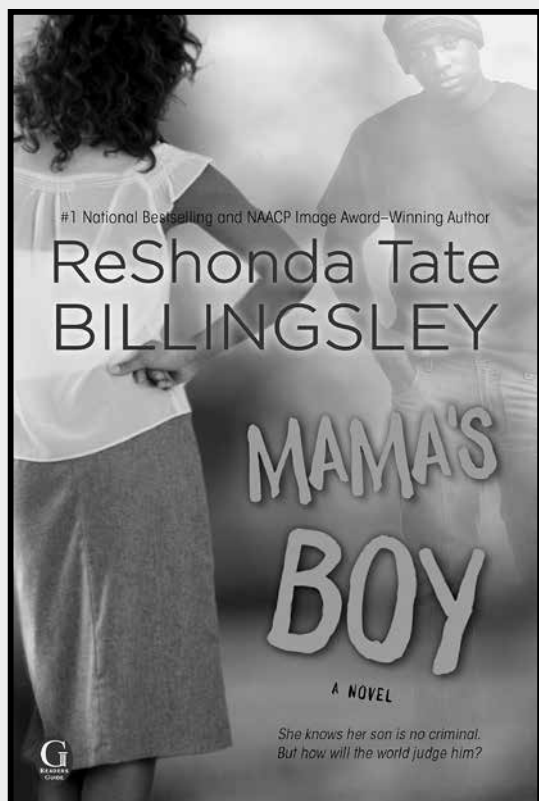


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"Mama's Boy"



"Mama's Boy"
by ReShonda Tate Billingsley
c.2015, Gallery Books
\$15.00 / \$20.00 Canada
313 pages

By The Bookworm Sez

You think about it all the time.

The child making headlines in the news could be yours. He could be the kid wrapped up in trouble he never meant to have, the one whose name is known for the wrong reasons. And what would you do? You've thought about it, and in the new novel "Mama's Boy" by ReShonda Tate Billingsley, two mothers act.

The video on TV was so disturbing that Gloria Jones couldn't bear to watch.

In the clip, there was an altercation. A black boy. A Jasper, Texas, policeman. A scuffle followed by gunshot. Gloria couldn't watch – but she couldn't look away, either.

The boy in the video was her teenage son, Jamal.

He'd always been a good boy, her Jamal, until he started hanging out with troublemakers. Gloria blamed her husband, Elton, for that; he'd been hard on Jamal lately, always yelling, always criticizing. She knew that was part of the reason why Jamal never came home sometimes, and now the authorities were looking for him. Her brain refused to wrap around the thought that her son was a cop killer...

Madam Mayor.

Kay Christianson liked the sound of that. As the front-runner in a heated election, she quietly felt confident for a win but she had no time to think about it much. Kay was Houston's leading prosecutor, a devoted mother, and wife of defense attorney, Phillip Christianson. Folks often wondered how that last part worked, how

two people could be on opposing sides and still be happily married but Kay loved her husband's passion, in the courtroom and otherwise.

Being the Mayor of Houston would add another level to her perfect life, and Kay was looking forward to it. With the election nearing, she only had one case to complete, a big one from Jasper in which a teen was accused of murdering a policeman.

Gloria Jones just couldn't look away from the video. She knew her son had shot a policeman, but it had to have been an accident. She couldn't look away from that clip – or the other one, the one from Houston. Gloria recognized the prosecutor who could put her baby boy away for a long time – and when their secret came out, it could change everything...

Every literary cliché in the book. That's what you'll find in this book, which is unfortunate. "Mama's Boy" could have been so much more.

I had a lot of hope, in fact. Author ReShonda Tate Billingsley snatched a piece of headline we're all familiar with, and started her tale of a black teen, a white policeman, and an altercation that led to violence. From there, however, we rarely see Jamal except to move the story along; instead, this tale becomes a run-of-the-mill, same-old drama between two women, their husbands, and one another.

Yes, I finished this book, so it wasn't torturous. It wasn't very unique, either. It was okay, and you might like it. If you're looking for something different to read, though, look at "Mama's Boy" and think again.

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Commentary, Continued from page 8.

chief of police in Hempstead, Texas for accusations of racial discrimination.

Clarise McCants, the campaign manager for UltraViolet, a women's rights group, echoed Robinson's concerns about police abuse and accountability.

"We know that there is a history of racism and violence in Waller County," said McCants. "And what we know about Sandra Bland's death shows that we can't rely on Waller County to investigate Waller County."

Robinson said that civil rights groups shouldn't have to protest every time police kill a Black person, but in a rousing speech, Hagler urged the groups to soldier on.

"We're standing up today and tomorrow and next week and for however long it takes," said Rev. Hagler. "We need to keep our feet marching, we need to keep our spirits high, we need to keep our voices clear, we need to continue to demand justice."

Justice Department officials accepted the signed petitions from the activists and told Wilkins that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is monitoring Waller County's investigation into Bland's death.

"I need to know what happened to Sandra Bland," said Wilkins. "And so do the other 500,000 [people] that signed the petition."

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