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# Roaring Back in New Orleans

## The Revival of the Blue Lion Karate Academy

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# Roaring Back in New Orleans

## *The Revival of the Blue Lion Karate Academy*



Grandmaster Eric O'Neal (above) currently holds over 100 titles in karate. In his career, he has won the Karate World Championships 7 years in a row, four more times than Chuck Norris, he has won the International Karate Championship hosted in California; and he has been inducted in the International Karate Hall of Fame

by Eric Craig  
Multimedia Editor

Humbleness, discipline and character are the values that Grandmaster Eric "Lionman" O'Neal upheld in his career as a karate champion and a community organizer. Those same values helped him rebuild Blue Lion Karate Academy, a successful line of youth-centered karate dojos.

On Saturday, May 28, 2016, O'Neal and the Blue Lion Karate Academy Staff are hosting a celebration highlighting the reopening of academy in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina.

The celebration will take place at 10 a.m. The academy is located at 9954 Lake Forest Blvd in New Orleans East. The event is free and open to the public.

The celebration will feature music, games, a bounce house, a tour of the new facility Mardi Gras Indians

and more. Additionally, there will be guest appearances from the New Orleans City Council, Governor Edward's office and several renowned Blue Lion Alumni.

O'Neal currently holds over 100 titles in karate. In his career, he has won the Karate World Championships 7 years in a row, four more times than Chuck Norris, he has won the International Karate Championship hosted in California; and he has been inducted in the International Karate Hall of Fame along with

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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	Contributors	Art Direction & Production
CEO/Publisher	Eric Craig	MainorMedia.com
Edwin Buggage	The bookworm Sez	Editorial Submissions
Editor	Terry Jones	datanewseditor@bellsouth.net
Calla Victoria	Julianne Malveaux	Advertising Inquiries
Executive Assistant	John Slade	datanewsad@bellsouth.net
June Hazeur	Stacey M. Brown	Distribution
Accounting	Valerie Goodloe	On The Run
	Freddie Allen	Courier Services

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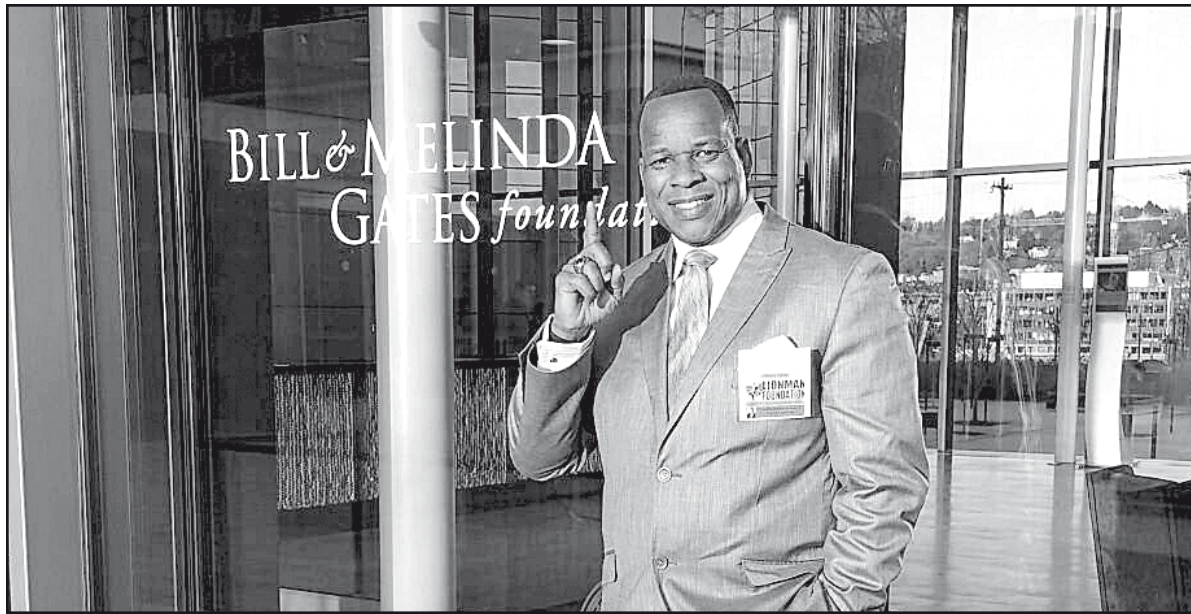
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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.



O'Neal (above), through his Kick Challenge, recruited millions of people to start kicking every day to promote physical activity. His initiative garnered support from The U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and several American families. By the end of the program he reached over 2.5 million people.

Martial Artist Bruce Lee.

O'Neal originally worked as an accountant with a strong background in Computer Programing and Real Estate Development. Though he had a successful career in accounting, O'Neal decided to

leave his occupation to mentor and guide youth through his passion: Karate.

"I grew up in the housing projects not being able to afford karate lessons," O'Neal said.

"When one opened in the hous-

ing projects I received a black belt in a year and a half. I was a white belt beating black belts, moving fast and learning quickly," he added.

While originally O'Neal joined Karate to learn fighting as a form of power, he quickly fell in

love with the art of the style.

"Learning the discipline and values changed my life. It just turned me into a real martial artist. I know it can help a whole lot of kids to make a difference," O'Neal said.

"I want to reach kids the way my instructor reached me," he added.

Overtime, O'Neal partnered with several churches, community centers, colleges and other learning institutions to host Blue Lion Karate Programs for Children.

In 1986, O'Neal opened his first Blue Lion Karate Academy. By 2005, he had over 37 locations with 30,000 participating students. The program grew until Hurricane Katrina hit.

After the storm, O'Neal lost nearly all of his members.

"I opened one up a dojo just after Katrina. I had over 300 students sign up, but only 14 to 15 could afford to pay. I was losing money back and forth," O'Neal said.

"The thing that was hurting to me when restarting was to see people that loved Blue Lion to death and couldn't afford it. I had to make an executive decision to leave and to come back," he said.

While it was a tough decision to make, O'Neal said that he was never one to give up.

"When things happen you don't have control, you can either crawl down and lay down the sword, or get up to fight. And I got up to fight," he added.

While unable to immediately come back to New Orleans as a Karate Instructor, O'Neal began to partner with several organizations to encourage the support of youth in various communities. His mission rapidly changed from solely teaching students martial arts to promoting a well-rounded understanding of health, fitness and education nationally under his Lionman Foundation, a non-profit O'Neal founded to support the development of youth.

O'Neal has worked with Disney, becoming a strong contributor in Disney's Martial Arts Festival. Their partnership highlights O'Neal's fictional creation of "The Legend of Lionman and The Seven Kurodos." The concept highlights multi-cultural superheroes that uphold the power of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and arts.

The Martial Artist has also worked with the White House, partnering with First Lady Michelle Obama, with its Let's Move initiative. Here he began The Legend of Lionman One Million Kick Challenge to encourage more physical activity in the lives of young people.

"The stats from the White House have scared me a lot," O'Neal said.

"Obesity was taking children out. I saw a kid that was 7-years-old and 140lbs. I began to engage in self speaking across the country at schools that really focused on health and physical conditions of youth," he added.

O'Neal, through his Kick Challenge, recruited millions of people to start kicking every day to promote physical activity. His initiative garnered support from The U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and several American families. By the end of the program he reached over 2.5 million people.

O'Neal has connected with Lenovo, a Chinese-based technology firm, to encourage personal development with youth. Both he and Lenovo work with over 130 countries to teach youth how to build and sell computers, driving more job development in countries.

The Martial Artist dedicated more of his time to engaging with children and speaking on the importance of physical condition. O'Neal has worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to combat child obesity and promoting healthy life styles nationwide.

As O'Neal comes back to New Orleans with Blue Lion Academy, he notes that his primary mission has changed.

"My whole objective is not to just teach the kids karate. I want to teach them how to be able to provide for their families. A lot of people need an opportunity where they will be able to make a difference. Now, through the Blue Lion Karate Academy, they can learn character, trade through Lenovo, and a lot of ways to keep them busy, not getting into trouble," O'Neal said.

Currently O'Neal is also developing mentor programs to work hand-in-hand with the Blue Lion Karate Academy. One plan is to start 100 for 100 where he will get 100 men and 100 women from the community to sponsor and mentor 100 boys and 100 girls in order to encourage proper development and to create a necessary support system for success.

The Martial Artist is also working on other new partnerships to increase the mentoring opportunities for children in New Orleans.

Overall, O'Neal is satisfied with his career and his outcomes.

"My success if not making me happy. It's making others around me successful and happy. I made it out of the projects, and I made it without doing drugs and drinking. I can mentor kids to do the same," he said.

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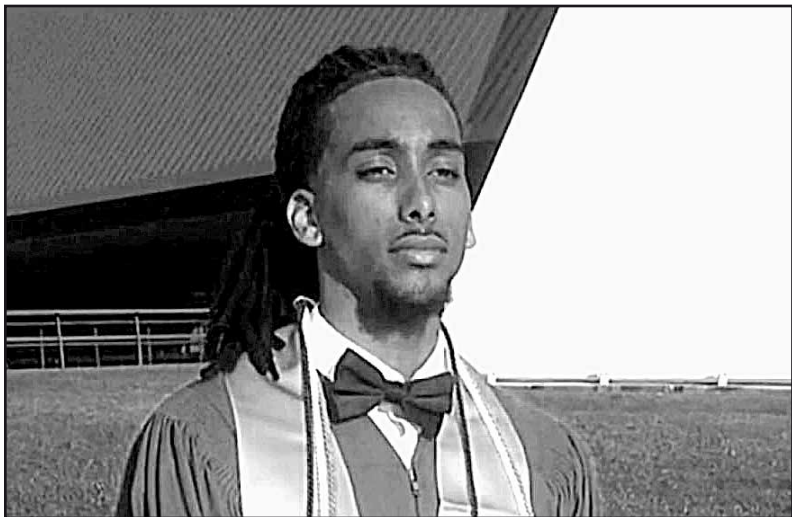
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# Amite Student Misses Graduation by a Hair



Andrew Jones graduated from Amite High School as a top athlete with a 4.0 GPA. (Photo courtesy of The Advocate)

By Eric Craig  
Data News Weekly  
Multimedia Editor

A college-bound high school student athlete with a 4.0 grade point average was denied the opportunity to participate in his graduation ceremony.

On Thursday, May 19, Andrew Jones was dismissed from his graduation exercise for not having a cleanly shaven face. Jones refused to shave his face for the graduation.

"It doesn't make sense, every day of school I went with it, even more, I did shave. I had like sides and everything, but I shaved that for graduation," Jones told WWLTV in an interview.

Amite High School follows the Tangipahoa Parish School System's dress code, which does not allow its students to wear facial hair in any of its graduation ceremonies. Amite High School officials said they have warned Jones about the violation of the school's policy previously. Jones said that he wore his facial hair throughout high school and was never questioned.

When Jones refused to shave his facial hair, his robe was taken away on site and he was dismissed from the ceremony immediately.

The night before his graduation, 13 other students were warned against wearing their facial hair during graduation. Jones was the only one to keep his hair prior to the graduation ceremony, according to WWLTV.

According to the Washington Post, Jones had three reasons why he did not shave his facial hair. First, he wore it throughout his high school career; second, other students that graduated earlier

had facial hair; and third, he simply thought the rule was unfair.

On Monday, May 23, the Superintendent of the Tangipahoa Parish School System, Mark Kolwe, sent out a letter regarding the facial hair conflict at Amite High School.

"The Tangipahoa Parish School Board Student Dress Code Policy states that 'beards will not be allowed.' As superintendent, I am obligated to ensure that all Board policies are followed," said Kowle.

The letter also states that Jones was one of four students that attended the graduation unshaven. Three of them shaved on site with a razor provided by the school. Jones was the only one who refused to shave.

Following the letter, Patricia Morris, president of the Tangipahoa NAACP chapter, told The Advocate that she is calling for the resignation of the parish school board Superintendent Kolwe and other school board members supporting the parish dress code.

According to the Advocate, Morris believes that Jones' decision to wear his facial hair should be protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Currently, Jones is in support of Morris' motion for members of the Tangipahoa Parish school board to resign.

Sabrina Davis, Jones' aunt, is also in support of Jones' decision to wear facial hair. Davis told WWLTV that she was disappointed with the Administrator's decision.

"What was the real issue that he couldn't walk with his class? He was top of his class, you know, that moment was the most important moment of his life," Davis said.

Jones is attending Southern University in the Fall of 2016.

## Community Spotlight

# Sheika Square Brings Attention to Underfunded Schools

By Eric Craig  
Data News Weekly  
Multimedia Editor

Sometimes in going into business for yourself you can help others. Sheika Square, who holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration, has decided to dedicate her time to a cause that means the most to her: educational funding.

Originally a school administrator, Square thought she could do more to help students that attend underfunded schools. With a Child attending Elementary School, she was motivated to make a change.

"I've worked in school systems for over 10 years. In the classroom, administration, Elementary and Higher Education. I've always been passionate about providing information and knowledge to people. A large premise is to educate, disseminate and guide people," Square said.

As her first move, Square jump-started her entrepreneurial path by



Sheika Square

branding herself as a public speaker. She focuses on individual empowerment motivational speaking.

"The big push for me wanting to get into public speaking was that I wanted to make things better and give people an opportunity in schools," Square said.

"If I'm talking about knowledge and education then I think I should get some of that back," she added.

Currently, Square's newest initiative is Lyko Creations, a marketing and branding company that donates a small portion to schools in New Orleans.

One of her main motives for starting this company is to help public and charter schools that struggle with funding in the New Orleans area.

"In doing that I have noticed the short comings and deficits in the school systems in New Orleans. Schools have been allocated different budget, and they are losing a lot of money, she said.

"I hear a lot about what's going on in the schools. One of the issues I have in higher education, students come to school unprepared. I want to bring more awareness to the problem through this initiative," she added.

To learn more about Lyko Creations visit <http://www.iykocreations.com>.

## Liberty Bank Announces Winners of the Gentilly Online \$1,000 Cash Giveaway

Liberty Bank and Trust Company would like to congratulate all four of the winners of the Gentilly Online \$1,000 Cash Giveaway. The winners are:

Week 1 Winner: Jonathan Watkins of Montgomery, AL

Week 2 Winner: Nahun Castillo of New Orleans, LA

Week 3 Winner: Lucretia Williams of Montgomery, AL

Week 4 Winner: Cintrell Richardson of New Orleans, LA

Three of the four winners are current Liberty Bank customers and all were very happy and excited to have been selected as winners.

To celebrate the re-opening of the most used branch in the New Orleans network, Liberty sponsored an on-line giveaway of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) per week for the first four (4) weeks of the new branch's operation, Monday, April 18, 2016 – Monday, May 9, 2016.

Additionally, Liberty is offering you the convenience of being able to open a new checking or savings account online! Visit [www.libertybank.net](http://www.libertybank.net) for more information.

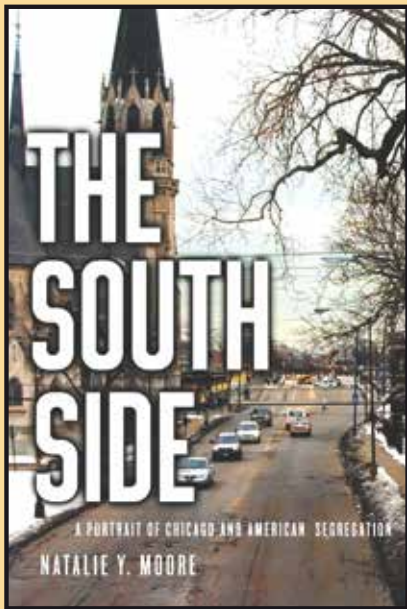
Liberty Bank, headquartered in New Orleans, LA, was founded in 1972. Liberty Bank has grown from

an initial asset base of two million dollars (\$2 million) to more than six hundred million dollars (\$600 million). Liberty Bank is among the top 3 largest AfricanAmerican owned financial institutions in the United States. Liberty now operates financial institutions in eight (8) states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri and now Alabama) and ten (10) major urban areas (New Orleans, Baton Rouge,

LA – Jackson, MS – Houston, TX – Kansas City, MO/KS – Chicago, IL – Detroit, MI – Tuskegee, and Montgomery, AL).

# The South Side

*A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*



**"The South Side:  
A Portrait of Chicago and  
American Segregation"**  
by Natalie Y. Moore  
c.2016, St. Martin's Press  
\$27.99 / \$32.50 Canada  
250 pages

By The Bookworm Sez  
Data News Weekly Contributor

**Be it ever so humble, there's  
no place like home.**

Shut the door, and what's inside is familiar and comfortable. It's yours, and it's where you want to be at the end of the day. Or maybe not: in "The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation" by Natalie Y. Moore, you'll see how one city's housing affects black lives.

In 1779, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, a black man, founded what would eventually become Chicago. African Americans, therefore, lived in Chicago from the beginning but the "Great Migration" (early-twentieth-century flight from Southern racism) and a "secondary wave" (post-World War II) brought "more than 1 million" new black faces to the Windy City by the 1970s.

Almost from the start, those black Chicagoans were barred, via covenants and rules, from living in neighborhoods that were mostly white or perceived as desirable. Red-lined maps denoted areas where blacks could live, mostly on Chicago's south side. Moore says that new residents didn't see overt "whites only" signs in their new hometown, but "the city designed a way for blacks not to fully participate in the freedoms of the North."

Moore's own grandparents were part of the Great Migration, and settled in areas they grew to love. After Moore's parents were married, they bought a small house in a neighborhood full of middle-class black families, put their children in integrated schools, and shopped at lo-

cal, black-owned businesses.

Still, then as now, "the black middle-class is not the same as white middle class." In this book, Moore cites examples: 70 percent of Chicago's "food desert" population is black; retailers seem reluctant to open stores in mostly-black neighborhoods; there's an often-unfair perception of high crime on the South Side, Chicago schools aren't at all well-integrated, and Moore herself was victim to discriminatory lending.

And yet, she says, "Change is possible" but it won't be easy or quick. It's entrenched - some residents of segregated housing don't want to leave - and it's "a regional and a hyperlocal issue," but it can be fixed...

It took me awhile to see "The South Side" as more than a biography with incidental facts: author Natalie Y. Moore makes the first many pages of her book so very personal that it's somewhat hard to determine where it's going, other than with tales - albeit, interesting ones, particularly to Chicagoans - of Moore's family and upbringing.

Slowly, though, the reason for this book comes into focus, as does the reason why you should read it: Moore weaves her own experiences into that of black history and segregation in general. She shows how the government is involved, how segregation is mythologized, and what, more importantly, can be done to lessen it. On that note, the advice Moore offers is rather Chicago-centric, but useable nation-wide.

Exploring this book, though it's good reading, is going to take patience; yes, it contains info you can use, but only if you endure the wandering. Only then, those with tolerance (of all kinds) may find that "The South Side" has a place on their bookshelf.

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# Shoot Ya Best Shot!

## Mid-City Bayou Boogaloo!

Photos by Terry Jones  
Data News Weekly Publisher

The 2016 Mid-City Bayou Boogaloo was a great event for music fans from near and far. As New Orleans' annual late spring festival Bayou Boogaloo picked up where the soggy Jazz Fest left off, with plenty of music, food, art and fun. Featuring local favorites like Mike Soulman Baptiste and a featured performance by Low Rider, the festival did not disappoint. What a blast, and of course, Data was there!



Visit [www.ladatanews.com](http://www.ladatanews.com) for more photos from these events



# Bernie and Donald are Two Sides of the Same Angry, White Coin



**Julianne Malveaux**  
NNPA Columnist

For all their dueling ideologies, Senator Bernie Sanders and “presumptive Republican nominee” Donald Trump are two sides of the same coin. Both of them are angry, so intensely so, that they are inciting a destructive anger among their followers. When Republicans brawled and pushed and shoved at Trump rallies, I never anticipated the flip side – the fisticuffs and rhetoric at the Nevada state Democratic convention, the likes of which might have put Trump terrorists to shame. Both the Chump Trumps and the Burning Bernies are being led by

whining, angry, entitled White men, separated by ideology, but joined by both outrage and naïveté.

I don’t think either Bernie or “Duh” Donald planned to get as far along in the presidential process as they have so far. Senator Sanders proudly carries the redistributionist flag with rousing rhetoric about social and economic justice. His agenda seems to have been to raise these issues aggressively and he did. His presence in the campaign pushed Hillary hard to the left and made her engage with constituencies she might otherwise have ignored. For all his success, I don’t think Sanders expected to have more than 1500 delegates to his credit. And now that he has them he doesn’t know what to do with them. Both he and “Duh” Donald are publicly floundering, signaling that they never had a winning, or graceful losing, plan.

Secretary Clinton and her followers shouldn’t be so hard on Bernie, though. While they should not demand that he get out of the race,

he is well advised to tone is rhetoric down. I sat with women at the 2008 campaign who sobbed their way through then-Senator Clinton’s concession speech and appeal for party unity. I debated a PUMA (Party Unity My “Hind Parts”) activist who swore she would not support nominee Obama. In 2008, Hillary devotees were as passionate as Bernie devotees are now. The kumbayaa moment comes in July in Philly, not just yet. It reflects poorly on the Hillary camp to dismiss or ignore those who are passionate about Senator Sanders.

At the same time, it is important to note that extreme anger is a unique privilege of White men. Imagine then-nominee Obama raging at Hillary in the way that Bernie has. His temperament would have been sliced and diced and parsed and inspected and he would have been so damaged by the conversation that it might have affected his electoral results. If Secretary Clinton ever managed to get her voice to Bernie’s decibel, if she ev-

ery managed to project such rage, she’d be written off as a crazy lady and peripheralized. But when the angry, White men yell and scream and whine and lie, they are celebrated not condemned. That sounds like a double standard to me.

Both Bernie and “Duh” Donald are whining about rules they say are rigged against them, but the rules may have favored them. Donald Trump has garnered a greater percentage of delegates than votes because of the way some states have chosen to award delegates. He wants more, but he failed to invest as much time learning the rules as some of his competitors did. Senator Sanders says he should have more delegates, but if he had to play under republican rules, he’d have fewer. Democrats are more likely to award delegates on a proportional basis, which means that a close race might give each candidate nearly the same amount of delegates. Sanders has no standing to call the system rigged. He has kept his distance from the Democratic

Party for most of his career, never participating in the rules process. If he wanted to write his own rules, he should have run for President as an independent.

Sanders and Trump have positioned themselves as outsiders, but they want insiders to roll out the red carpet for them, because they jumped into a game they haven’t mastered. They haven’t worked at establishing a foundation, but they are demanding the keys to the house. They aren’t willing to put the work into reforming our flawed, two-party system. Instead, they are finding unfairness when none is there, whining when work might make a difference, and leveraging their angry, White maleness into voter approval.

Julianne Malveaux is an author and economist based in Washington, D.C. Her latest book, “Are We Better Off? Race, Obama and Public Policy” is available via amazon.com and juliannealveaux.com.

## “Black History Via Pop Culture May Be the Way To Go”



**John Slade**  
Data News Weekly Columnist

On April 21, 2016, humanity lost one of the greatest entertainers in the music industry, Prince. On that day, people grieved over one of the greatest musical minds. While reflecting over Prince’s career, many people discussed the fate of the music industry. Prince, known for giving performances

that society deemed as inappropriate, used his talent to express himself. The entertainer, who recently tested society with their music, is Beyoncé.

Beyoncé’s recent “Formation” video and Super Bowl performance challenged the idea of appropriation and the artist’s right to use images of the Black struggle. Some viewers took offense to the serious pictures of Katrina floodwaters, police cars, and Black Panther liberation. They found Beyoncé highlighting these events belittling because it is her job to entertain. However, I found her art appropriate and approved her imagery.

During my adolescent days, African-Americans were hardly rec-

ognized in television. When I was nine years old on Friday nights, there was a Science Fiction TV show called “Time Tunnel”. The premise was that the United States had built beneath the Arizona desert, a gigantic complex to teleport men back and forward through time. The two stars of the show would uncontrollably land at some random yet historical point in time. I loved it, but I would always wonder why the two-time travelers never met any famous Negro people from history. “Time Tunnel” showed episodes with Abraham Lincoln, but not Fredrick Douglas.

Growing up during White supremacy, the media advertised

cartoons of happy slaves, shuffling Negroes, brave White men, and dead Indians. This is why I want our struggle put into popular culture. It is important that the story of the Black Protest, struggle, and our never ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way is woven into the fabric of the American Story. This history needs to be recognized beyond the month of February.

It is time for Black American History, along with the rest of the diaspora, to be given out with as much pop culture sugar as needed. That’s why I do not mind Beyoncé using Black History in her music video, that will be viewed by millions around the world. The

history of the struggle can no longer be left to academicians and the truly woke. I think it is time to teach the Black side of the story everywhere, through mediums like science fiction shows, nighttime dramas, and motion pictures. This answers the question of why we need to celebrate Black History, beyond Black History Month. We all know Amelia Earhart, but what about Bessie Coleman. Her story would have made a great episode in “Time Tunnel”.

John Slade is a Political Cartoonist, Satirist, WBOK Daily Radio Host of “Showtime in the Afternoon” and he can be seen on Cox Cable Orleans Wednesdays at 6:30 am and pm on Ch76 as the host of “Political Cartoons By John Slade”.



# It Can Wait



**Sonia Perez**  
AT&T Louisiana President

From the moment we begin preparing for our learner's permit test, we are taught the importance of being safe and responsible drivers. Parents, Driver's Ed teachers and other seasoned adults caution new drivers and share just how dangerous taking your eyes off the road can be, even if just for a second.

While many of us Louisianians do our best to stay focused behind the wheel, there are always distractions. These distractions come in many different forms: passing a post-wreck clean up, loud music, friends, pets, navigation systems and smartphone apps.

Mobile devices have changed the way we communicate. The ability to connect with any one, any time — is truly a remarkable thing. As convenient and useful as these new technologies may be, they should be used wisely and safely, leaving drivers distraction-free behind the wheel.

For many people, smartphones are an extension of their fingertips, and, for some, that makes it

more tempting to be dangerously distracted while driving. As technology has evolved, the number of driving distractions stemming from our smartphones has grown beyond texting to include social media posts, email, web browsing, video calling and even taking selfies behind the wheel.

A recent AT&T study found that 7-in-10 people engage in smartphone activities while driving and 62 percent keep their smartphones within easy reach.

And, while there is near universal agreement that texting while driving is dangerous, research shows three-fourths of drivers have done it.

In a moment, posting a funny

photo or sending an email may seem urgently important, but, the truth of the matter is, no text, selfie, email or web search is worth a life. That's the simple, yet impactful message behind AT&T's It Can Wait® campaign.

Six years ago, AT&T launched the national It Can Wait movement to drive awareness of the importance of keeping your eyes on the road and not on your phone, asking people across the country of all ages to take the pledge to stay safe while driving. In that short time, 8 million people have taken the It Can Wait pledge.

While we have had success in raising awareness of the dangers of distracted driving, there

is more we all can do to stay safe on the road, especially at a time of year when new drivers are getting their licenses and millions of families hit the road for summer vacation. We — all Louisianians — must remind ourselves to be responsible and avoid distractions while behind the wheel. It is important to remember the risk you pose to yourself and others when you reach for your phone while driving. There is no text, email, post or selfie that is worth a life. I encourage drivers across Louisiana to keep our message in mind and take the pledge to keep your eyes on the road, not on your phone at [www.ItCanWait.com](http://www.ItCanWait.com).

## Congressman Richmond on the Record: Federal Takeover of Jail Would be "Unprecedented"

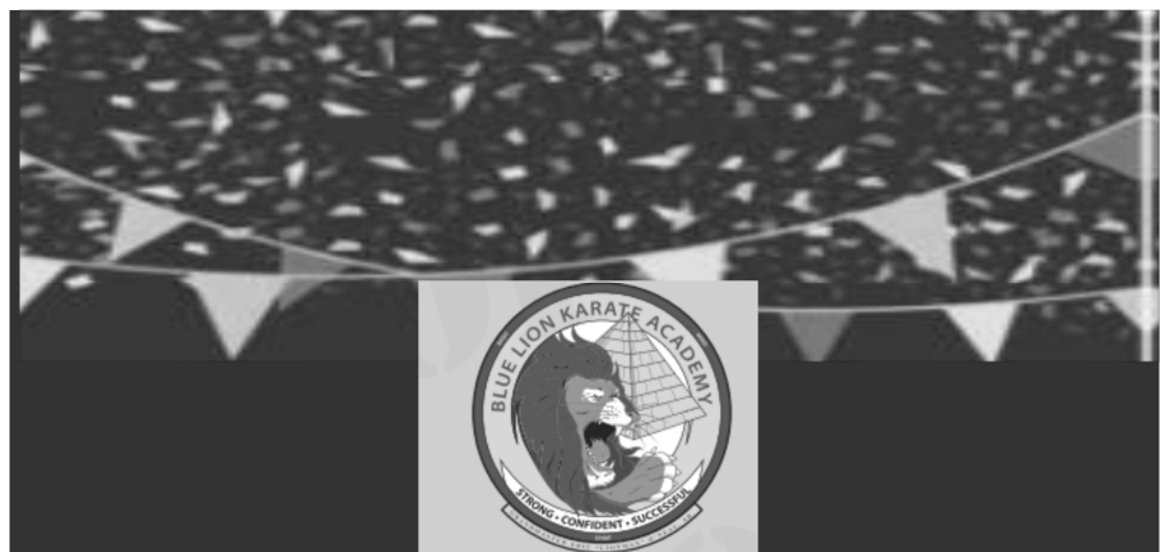


### Data Staff Report

U.S. Rep. Cedric Richmond is asking the U.S. Department of Justice to halt its attempts at a federal takeover of the Orleans Parish Jail. The Congressman wrote a letter to the head of the DOJ Civil Rights Division, saying the "unprecedented move has far-reaching implications and could unintentionally roll back some of the hard-fought civil rights

and voting gains that have been in achieved in Orleans Parish."

Representative Richmond also said in his letter that he has personally toured the newly opened Orleans Justice Center, and it was "an impressive, clean and modern facility. The medical clinic rivaled most clinics in our community and the mental health services greatly exceeded those being offered in Orleans Parish outside of the jail."



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# Russell Simmons Repays Rushcard Holders, Pushes for Credit Reforms

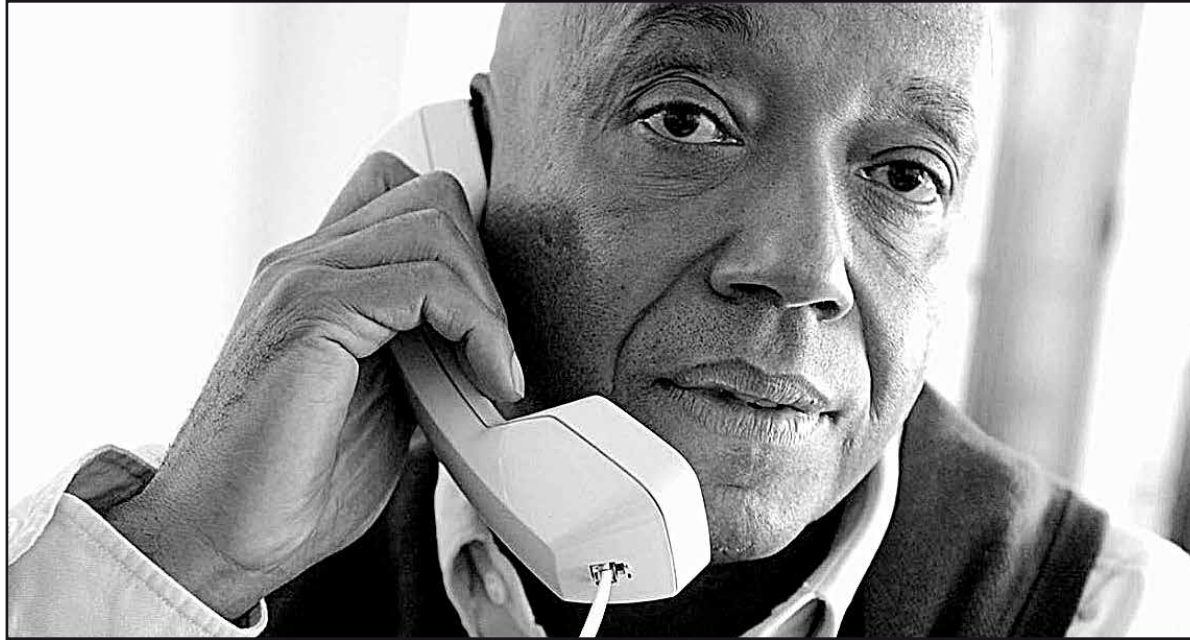
By Stacy M. Brown  
NNPA News Wire Contributor

Russell Simmons is just starting to regain a little normalcy in his life.

He's back at yoga and the hip-hop and business mogul is even able to run some errands without worrying about whether a disgruntled RushCard holder might verbally attack him or worse.

Simmons never hung his head despite mounting – if unfair – criticism that rocked the music impresario when his innovative pre-paid RushCard experienced a computer glitch last fall that prevented hundreds of thousands of card holders from accessing their money.

"I took full responsibility. It's my card and I made sure to reach out to card holders personally and I reached into my own pocket to help people with their rent, their medi-



Simmons said that he is going to spend a lot more money in the Black community in peacekeeping programs, and on art education, following the settlement his company reached over the class action lawsuit over the well-publicized computer glitch that affected thousands of RushCard users. (Valerie Goodloe/NNPA News Wire)

As Simmons pushes for changes in policies in the credit industry, he's leaving the door open for starting his own credit reporting agency.

In the aftermath of the much-publicized computer glitch – which Simmons still refers to as a "tsunami" – the business leader provided free service to card holders for five months, sacrificing all of his company's profits to do so. He also reached a more than \$20 million settlement from a class action lawsuit filed against RushCard, because of the glitch.

"I'm glad to do it. I had put aside \$25 million," Simmons said, noting that the card isn't just for communities that have been forgotten and underserved by banks. "There's no reason why small businesses can't use a Rush Business Card. We just added a feature, just now where if you lose your card, you can turn your card off instantly through an app. Then you can turn it back on."

Simmons continued: "This card should be for affluent people as well as underserved community members and it should be the wave of the future for millennials. This is the bank for millennials and the growth rate for our company is 70 percent millennials, when it used to be single mothers. Millennials who don't like banks are coming in our direction and we haven't even begun the branding exercise to speak to them."

Simmons said that he didn't mind paying the \$20 million settlement.

"I don't mind paying the \$20 million. I don't mind that that was our cost. I am going to spend a lot more money than that in the community, in my peacekeeping programs, in RUSH and art education," he said.

Simmons said so much more will soon be announced and he's confident that RushCard holders and others will be pleased.

"We are going to be in the community in a way that we've never been," Simmons said.

cine or whatever emergency that may have come up," Simmons said.

"All I knew how to do was to make good on it and try to make the people that were damaged whole again," he said.

Simmons has done even more and he continues his push to have the underbanked and the underserved benefit.

"My mission is to eventually see that when someone pays their rent on time, pays their light bill on time, that these things go on their credit reports," Simmons said. "It should be and if I can't get regulators and the credit bureaus to do it, then I will have to start my own credit bureau."

If that sounds like a bit of a stretch, Simmons points to his starting the RushCard as proof that real change can happen. "I was first, no one else did this until I came out with my card," he said, noting that he's not only the face of RushCard, but along with his American Express and other items in his wallet is his own RushCard that he regularly uses.

"Look, we were the ones who invented this and what I don't like is when people refer to us as a celebrity company," Simmons said. "All of what American Express is doing, all of what Chase Manhattan did, we did first. We're a virtual bank. The other thing is that we didn't build this company to make money when we started and, really, I didn't think it would become a business but it did and I go to work every day to try and improve the service we provide."

Simmons said his fight for credit building is an uphill battle, but it's a battle that can be won.

It's as much part of his life as yoga, he said.

"You pay rent every month for eight years on a RushCard, why can't you get a mortgage? I think that's a travesty. I think a lot of the big companies like MasterCard, the Visas, the others that do the processing and infrastructure work; a lot of us could come together and force them to accept this information on credit reports of the world," Simmons said.

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# CBC Members Worry Proposed FCC Rule Could Hurt Black Media Companies

By Freddie Allen  
NNPA News Wire National  
News Editor

In an unpredictable, disruptive media environment featuring new ways for consumers to receive video content over Wi-Fi, apps and live streaming, established media companies are bracing for a future driven by big tech and consumer choice with new profit models.

It happened in the newspaper industry. It happened in the music industry. It happened in the book publishing industry. And now it's happening slowly, but surely in broadcasting as a host of new entrepreneurs are set to arrive on an increasingly competitive scene.

In February, Tom Wheeler, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), moved to free consumers, who are now collectively paying \$20 billion every year, from buying or renting a set-top box for cable TV. The FCC wants to "unlock the box" and allow others to provide video content such as Google and Apple.

The move would be a shakeup of the status quo. The technology around video-on-demand is clearly changing as seen in companies such as YouTube, Hulu, TiVo, KweLi.tv, Netflix and Ustream. On April 15, President Obama signed an executive order backing Wheeler's efforts to open the cable set top box.

"The cost of cable set-top boxes has risen 185 percent while the cost of computers, televisions and mobile phones has dropped by 90 percent," FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said on the issue.

Last week on Capitol Hill, Congressional Black Caucus Chair G.K. Butterfield and Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-N.Y.) announced a new Congressional Caucus on Multicultural Media that will "focus on the state of diversity and inclusion in the media and in the telecommunications industry."

Clarke said that the potential harm that the proposed FCC rule could do to multicultural media companies is very real.

She suggested delaying action on the proposed rule, "until the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Government Ac-



Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-N.Y.) joined Congressional Black Caucus Chair G.K. Butterfield and minority media executives to announce a new Congressional Caucus on Multicultural Media at a recent press conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Freddie Allen/AMG/NNPA)

countability Office (GAO) complete their prospective studies on the impact on multicultural media under this proposed rule."

Clarke and Butterfield were joined by TV One CEO Al Liggins and BET Networks Executive Debra Lee at the press event announcing the new caucus. Both Clarke and Butterfield serve on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

"While we must be open to the rising cultural expectations to make programs available on-demand or through streaming services, we also have to balance these interests with the assurance that we are not pitting the few diverse programmers out there against each other or allowing some to pick winners and losers," Butterfield said.

The phrase, "few diverse programmers" is an understatement. African Americans own less than 1 percent of all TV properties and less than 2 percent of radio as reported by Pew Research.

"We think that the marketplace is robust enough as it is and [the proposed FCC rule] is unnecessary," said Liggins. "We believe competition should be there, but we believe it should happen in an app form which protects all the rights and the license agreements that we've made with the existing paid TV providers."

Butterfield expressed concerns

that the FCC's plan to "unlock the box" might risk the progress in diverse programming that television audiences have seen in recent years.

Despite that progress, minority-owned media companies represent a minuscule portion of all broadcast media and many Black media company owners are pushing for the FCC change, saying that the status quo has done little to affect the ownership disparity.

On a conference call an hour after Reps. Clarke and Butterfield announced the new caucus, Peggy Dodson, the CEO of the Urban Broadcasting Company offered an alternative view and supported the FCC "unlocking the box."

"We're about creating a producing urban content, but that content has to be searchable, it has to be found and it has to be monetized," Dodson said. "The genie is out of the box. The hourglass has been turned over. I think what is being missed between Comcast and Time Warner fighting with Google and thinking that Google is going to take over, is the minority-owned producers and content creators. We're being swept under the rug. We need diversity. We do not own anything."

Dodson continued: "Opening the box is inevitable. It is the answer. It's happening. We can't stop it.

People are choosing what platforms they want to see programing on and how they want to see it and when they want to see it. Everyone can make money."

Dodson said that she's not trying to put TV One or anyone else out of business.

"That is not my goal. My goal is to have the opportunity to monetize and have people see the content on a platform that is searchable and that can be monetized," Dodson added.

Clifford Franklin, CEO of GF-NTV, said that he was shocked to hear the comments from BET and TV One.

"It's shocking to me to see the comments from BET and TV One because they know this has been a very anti-competitive situation that we're in. At the end of the day we have to disrupt this industry," Franklin told reporters.

"We've been inundated with ba-boonery and thugs and anti-social behavior and some of that has come from our urban channels," Franklin added. "We need a lot more diversity of thought from our content creators. They have pretty much been shut out of the game."

Lauren Victoria Burke is a political analyst who speaks on politics and African American leadership. She can be contacted at [LBurke007@gmail.com](mailto:LBurke007@gmail.com) and on twitter @LV-Burke.

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