

# Essence Music Festival boosts New Orleans

**By Gordon Jackson**  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
NEW ORLEANS, La. (NNPA) - Spirits soared at the Essence Music Festival, revealing a formidable level of self-determination and solidarity and an "all for one and one for all," attitude.

People gathered in the city not only to enjoy the entertainment but also to do their bit to help rebuild the city of New Orleans from the ravaged conditions caused by the infamous Hurricane Katrina.

According to the office of Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, the festival dropped \$140 million into the local economy.

"Essence being back in New Orleans is a psychological salve to the wound that's

much needed," said New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin at the opening press conference.

"When people see all of us come together this weekend, they are going to see a city on a rebound; they are going to see a community, a family across the nation saying to the world that New Orleans is special and it deserves more support as it continues to struggle and rebound from the greatest devastation that any city has gone through."

But about eight miles east of downtown New Orleans, at least two residents were not seeing anything or feeling any healing from any salve. They were residents of the city's Ninth Ward, the



ESSENCE Editorial Director Susan Taylor, left, Louisiana Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, and ESSENCE President Michelle Ebanks share a light moment at the press conference opening the ESSENCE Music Festival in New Orleans. Crowds partied big, but immeasurable suffering in New Orleans' Ninth Ward continues.

much-publicized predominantly Black, low-income community Katrina hit, and hurt, the hardest.

Ask Henry Bickham about the renaissance spirit at Essence; he's not feeling it.

"It's not going to be a neighborhood no more," Bickham predicts about the Ninth Ward. "In two years, they haven't done nothing!" he emphasized.

Bickham, 70, speaks with

a definite tone of frustration, throbbing to anger at certain points, as he sits outside of his home at 3408 Metropolitan Street. Memories are still vivid from 22 months ago, when Hurricane Katrina and

Rita engulfed his neighborhood, with the controversial breaking of the levees in between. Water covered two-thirds of his already small, old house, forcing him and his wife to a New Orleans shelter the first week after Katrina, then to a motel in Houston for almost a year. His home was unlivable by most people's standards but "I made it livable," the retired construction worker said with a smirk on his face.

Bickham's nephew's house at 2507 Piety Street could not be refurbished. He now lives in a trailer house on a friend's nearby yard. Johnnie Bickham, 48, got the \$2000 that FEMA sent to most hurricane victims soon after the disaster, but has received nothing else since.

"FEMA said that too many people use my address," said Johnnie, but he says only he and his wife resided there. "They didn't do nothing for me."

Gordon Jackson writes for the Dallas Examiner.

## BET exec defends 'Hot Ghetto Mess'

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) - "Hot Ghetto Mess," a BET series that has provoked criticism and sent advertisers fleeing before it has even aired, will prove detractors wrong, BET entertainment head Reginald Hudlin said.

"It's unfortunate that people are making an erroneous presumption based on absolutely zero information," Hudlin told a meeting Sunday of the Television Critics Association.

"Hot Ghetto Mess," making its debut July 25, combines viewer-submitted home videos and BET-produced man-on-the-street interviews that the channel said are intended to challenge and inspire "viewers to improve themselves and their communities."

The six-episode series is hosted by comedian Charlie Murphy ("Chappelle's Show").

It is based on a website that features photos of men and women, mostly Black, with extreme hairstyles and clothing typically linked to hip-hop fashion.

At least two companies, State Farm Insurance and Home Depot, asked BET to drop their ads from the series' debut. Sponsors had yet to see the show, Hudlin said Sunday.

Observers, including What About Our Daughters, a blog and audio podcast that focuses on how Black women are depicted in popular culture, have accused the site and the show of demeaning Blacks.

Hotghettomess.com was created by Jam Donaldson,

34, a Black lawyer from Washington, D.C., who is an executive producer on the BET program. On her site, Donaldson calls for a "new era of self-examination."

The show builds on the website's effort to take "a hard look at some dysfunctional elements of our community," Hudlin said.

"The intent of the show is no different than what Bill Cosby is doing as he's going across the country and lecturing as he talks about the problems of the (Black) community that we need to address," he said.

"Hot Ghetto Mess" approaches its goal in a lively way that will engage BET's young audience, Hudlin said.

Donaldson told reporters that the series has "exceeded my expectations."

"Everyone that sees the show will be pleasantly surprised. ...I think they will learn something. There's Black history. We go to the community and ask what their opinion of some of these images are," she said.

"The show is so much more than the name," Donaldson said. She started the site because of "images of Black dysfunction" that were being distributed on the Internet without discussion of the need for change.

With shows such as "Hot Ghetto Mess" and "Hip-Hop vs. America," Hudlin said, BET is trying to be part of the solution.

"At the end of the day, the most responsible thing we can do is create a dialogue about those things," he told The Associated Press.

## Your Horoscope Says... July 19-25

### ARIES

Happiness is the order of the week as a relationship improves in a way that you did not think was possible. It just goes to show you the power of positive thinking. Be happy and keep a happy outlook all week long.

Soul Affirmation: I let positive emotions carry me through the week.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 21, 53

### TAURUS

You are free to love and laugh, and you're free to criticize and complain. It's all in how you want to feel about yourself. Do what feels best to you in the situation that you find yourself in this week. Remember that you have many options!

Soul Affirmation: I keep money on my mind this week.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 19, 30

### GEMINI

All of your planetary indicators lead to one conclusion, Party! Get together with some of your closest friends for a gab-fest and snack food feast. It doesn't have to be fancy to be loads of fun for all involved. This is your week to let loose and laugh.

Soul Affirmation: I let my spirit light my path this week.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 29, 31

### CANCER

You can rejoice in every new experience this week, because you know the secret to your happiness. What? You don't know? Sure you do. Just take your time, sit quietly somewhere this week, and simply think about it.

Soul Affirmation: I stand firm for what I believe in.

Lucky Numbers: 29, 38, 41

### LEO

Your unique energy is urging you in a new direction. Listen to your inner voice and go! You'll be very happy with the outcome if you give your worries up to the universe. Many blessings are available to you if you let go and let the blessings come.

Soul Affirmation: I let children supply my life with wisdom this week.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 15, 20

### VIRGO

A relaxing week at home might be just the cure for what seems to be troubling you this week. Set aside some time to attune yourself to the sound of truth. You are an extraordinary teacher; teach yourself a new way of being with yourself this week.

Soul Affirmation: I keep in mind the practical side of life this week.

Lucky Numbers: 25, 45, 51

### LIBRA

Your ideas are windows into the future. You may be feeling a bit off-center in the present moment, but all you need to do is refine your presentation. Your truth is sound and solid. You can teach with beautiful words.

Soul Affirmation: Cooperation with others is the key to success for me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 21, 39, 45

### SCORPIO

Surprises are on tap this week, and you may be the messenger. Or a new message may come to you; whatever happens, it's going to be pleasant. Base your sense of reality on the pure vision you have in your head.

Soul Affirmation: This week is a gift that I deserve.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 26, 32

### SAGITTARIUS

This week you need to balance keeping your eyes on the heavens and your head here on earth. Much work needs to be done before you can accomplish the task before you. If you let yourself, you can get a lot done this week.

Soul Affirmation: I reward myself with high opinions of myself.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 21, 30

### CAPRICORN

Details might trouble you early in the week, but you don't have to go with that flow of energy. You can choose to focus your attention on the here and now and work through each task patiently. Things will clear up quickly if you forego idle dreams.

Soul Affirmation: I search for ways to improve the way I see life.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 17, 30

### AQUARIUS

A slight adjustment in your attitude could create a whole new vista for your outlook. What you think is not in conflict with what you do; it simply describes it. Look for a new way to describe your ideas and thoughts.

Soul Affirmation: Happiness rules my week this week.

Lucky Numbers: 36, 39, 53

### PISCES

A spirit of rivalry may have you envious this week. Forget about competition. Celebrate your uniqueness and know that no one really ever competes with you in the matter most essential — your good feelings about yourself. A good friend is waiting with a great surprise.

Soul Affirmation: I allow the world to bring me my surprise.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 23, 41