

New Orleans' economic reality improves

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

To the frustration of major news corporations, there is a steady and progressive improvement in the economic status of New Orleans. The Big Easy is, indeed, improving despite a major program to slam it as the "murder capital," "hopeless community," etc. Don't believe it. If you care, why not go visit this city that is rising from the devastation of two major hurricanes? It would totally surprise you and make you a very happy traveler.

This year's Mardi Gras had over 700,000 participants, which says that the good times have returned. Last month, the Essence Festival returned and participants were as happy as ever. It was a wonderful event that rivaled previous festivals. The hotels were swamped, the nightclubs were jammin' and the Super Dome was as rocking as ever.

Yes, it is coming back, and no matter what the Fourth Estate tries to put into your mind, progress is quite evident. The people of New Orleans who were betrayed by the federal government of the United States are showing a massive amount of resilience, faith and courage. Piece by piece, and step by step, the city is putting it all back together.

The National Black Chamber of Commerce held its annual convention in New Orleans for the second year in a row. The

NBCC is committed to repeatedly coming back until the rebuilding is complete.

Oh, how I wish other Black organizations would join in on that commitment. If not us, who? Last year we examined the mission before us. This year we examined our plans and how we shall implement them. It is our hope that next year we can take pride in the accomplishments that will come during the next 12 months. That's the beauty of coming back every year until the job is done. It holds us accountable and keeps us focused. Everyone noticed the activity all around our venue. The streets were well populated with tourists, and the restaurants were packed. The French Quarter is becoming more and more vibrant. We didn't hear one complaint from our participants.

The key word, as a local reporter noted after interviewing convention participants, was "Hope." We all believe that the comeback is coming, and we don't need to wait for any government activity to do it.

We have the interest of our "cream of the crop" — some of our largest developers, such as Don Peebles, KBK Enterprises, Columbia Residential and others are starting to either invest or seriously put together propos-



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als. Significant Black-owned construction managers have their executives on the ground looking for the right project and making partnerships with local contractors.

We have various NBCC members putting together training programs. Companies from Atlanta, Maryland, etc. are structuring training initiatives for people living in New Orleans public housing. We are going to take these graduates and put them in business as Section 3 companies, which make them eligible for set-asides for HUD-funded projects. Even the state of Louisiana has started a viable Section 3 program via the Road Home project, and we applaud and support that.

To our pleasant surprise, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has replaced personnel and has started a more aggressive initiative in contracting. They have already utilized one of our newly formed joint ventures and that encourages us to continue matching out-of-state businesses with local entrepreneurs trying to bounce back from the disaster. It is working and we have only just begun.

Engineering, architectural, telecommunications, construction, IT, etc. — it is all starting to take form. With continued growth and documented best practices, we are going to

turn this city into a boomtown. The opportunities are certainly there, and we can only go up.

During the convention, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Association of Minority Contractors so that we can merge their database into our plans for large venture formulation. With the large Black-owned developers starting to invest in New Orleans, we can present them with a ready construction base. This is going to generate recycled dollars for the city and provide a massive job market for those residents who want to be trained.

Our African entrepreneurs traveled to the convention, also, and the collaboration has begun between them and aspiring international traders within the NBCC ranks. All activities will keep the thought of the Port of New Orleans and local business activity in mind. I'm going to Ghana next month to follow up and make sure these new initiatives come to reality.

In essence, it appears that we have built a foundation and now we must seize upon the opportunity. New Orleans is going to be all right. Consider joining in on the greatest renaissance in the history of the United States. It's New Orleans baby!

Harry Alford is the Co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

Anyone remember Haiti? America has amnesia

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

One of the most striking features of the mainstream U.S. media is its ability to make certain issues and stories "disappear," irrespective of their importance.

Case in point: Haiti.

For all intents and purposes, Haiti has vanished from public view. With the notable exception of Randall Robinson's new and well-received book, "An Unbroken Agony: Haiti from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President," there is almost nothing out there that would give one any sense of what has been happening in Haiti since the 2006 electoral victory of Rene Preval, let alone the developments that transpired during and after the February 29, 2004, U.S.-assisted coup which overthrew democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Unless one is studying the actual situation in Haiti, the most that the casual — and even the interested — U.S. observer would gather is that Haiti is in near continuous chaos. The information provided to us here

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resources; they supported one another; they built their own "tennis courts," managed them, and wrote the rules for them as well.

Yes, divide and conquer soon came in the form of fear of being physically destroyed and murdered, as in the case of the Tulsa atrocities in 1921.

Then the divide and conquer tactic came in the form of expressways through every Black community, under the mantra of "Urban Renewal," creating dividing lines that pushed us farther apart.

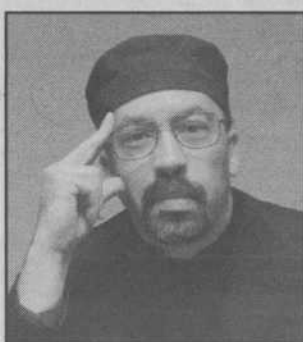
Now the game has been elevated to an even more sophisticated level. Some Black people are made to feel as if they are better than other Black people because of their sta-

tus, their material possessions, their abilities, and their education. We have acquiesced to having so many strata among our people that it is hard to figure out who is where — the broad categories being, of course, the haves and the have nots.

Divided, we have fallen to a low level of respect from others, as well as among ourselves. Divided, we have gone from a people who would take things into their own hands and do for themselves, to a timid, tepid, tired people who depend on "programs" and outsiders to "rescue" us — after they were the ones who put us in this situation in the first place. Divided, we have come to the point of now having to make a final decision on the future of our children.

Guy Philippe, one of the principal leaders of the coup against President Aristide, appears to have begun a new career — singing: he has been 'singing' about the individuals and organizations that helped to back the 2004 coup against Aristide.

Philippe, and his former aid Wilfort Ferdinand, alleged that they were currently being pressured to take up arms and overthrow the Preval administration. For whatever reason, Philippe went on to name names, including many prominent individuals from



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within the historic ruling elite of Haiti, as well as additional forces that had been involved in the supposed "peaceful" opposition to President Aristide pre-February 2004.

Interestingly enough, shortly after Philippe began to 'sing,' Haitian police and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration apparently decided that Philippe was part of an illegal narcotics operation. They then moved to have him arrested. It appears that Philippe has been on the run ever since.

There are several things interesting about this story. The first is that it starts to sound a lot like that of Panama's former President Manuel Noriega who, after being a very loyal U.S.-paid operative, was turned upon by his former sponsors and illegally snatched from office in 1989. History definitely seems to repeat itself.

The second piece of interest is that Philippe confirmed what many of us thought

Are we going to continue to play tennis on that sloppy, mud-filled end of the court? Are we going to continue taking those monster serves and volleys without the slightest chance of returning them?

Will we keep playing the game with a worn-out, 45-year-old political racket, rather than arming ourselves with a brand new economic racket?

If we don't change the way we play the economic game, we will soon be hearing the umpire say, "Game! Set! Match!"

And we will have lost the game of our lives.

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all along, i.e., that much of the alleged "peaceful opposition" to President Aristide was nothing of the sort, but was rather one wing of a combined U.S.-backed destabilization operation aimed at the ouster of the democratically elected chief of state.

Once again, the mainstream U.S. media served the interests of the dominant forces in U.S. foreign policy who seek the removal of any leader deemed to be the slightest bit independent and prone towards policies that the U.S. finds objectionable.

Rather than taking a critical eye towards events, the mainstream U.S. media, when it came to Haiti, largely served as the mouthpiece of the Bush administration as it ratcheted up the pressure on Aristide, ultimately swooping him up and into a brief forced exile in the Central African Republic. (Note: President and Mrs. Aristide currently reside in exile in South Africa, conditions far different — for the better — than those they encountered in the Central African Republic.)

The third piece takes us full circle. When U.S. policy has been discredited, it is often easier for the mainstream U.S. media to ignore completely the "facts on the ground." Thus, we get this "cone of silence" over Haiti, which only the most dedicated observers (particularly within the Haitian exile community in the USA) are able to penetrate. Even then, with facts in hand, these voices are largely ignored. It is for these and other reasons that African-American media outlets, whether printed, radio, television or Internet, become so vital in revealing the truth.

Haiti has not faded away. Rather, the crimes that have been perpetrated against the people of Haiti, in our name, continue only with a veil of secrecy and indifference. The time has certainly come to rip away that veil.

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