

Greetings, all-

I am just back from the Essence Music Festival in New Orleans, which was a grand success, contributed more than \$120 million to the city and raised the hope and spirits of our people throughout the region. While there, Tommy Dortch and I, our spouses Carole Dortch and Khephra Burns, Marcia and Michael Eric Dyson and PR guru Terrie Williams met privately with Mayor Ray Nagin about the deplorable and shameful conditions that the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region are still suffering under, the obstacles the mayor has faced in trying to marshal resources for the recovery and the actions we all can and must take on August 29, the second anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

There must be a national outcry, a day of outrage, a day of protest, pray and possibility that the media cannot ignore; a day during which we demand that our national decision makers redirect our tax dollars away from war and war profiteering to create a regional Marshall Plan that restores New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

8/29: A DAY OF PRESENCE

We Matter. We Care. We Act.

We are all weary, and our lives are overscheduled. But taking a stand at this crucial moment is something we must do. As Frantz Fanon said, Each generation must discover its mission and, having discovered its mission, either fulfill or betray it. Our generation is at grave risk of the latter. There's not an issue killing our community that African Americans have stood solidly together on and remedied since the Civil Rights Movement. Let's write a new history. Let's stand together on this and win social and economic justice for the people of the Gulf Coast region. With the hope and courage garnered from that victory we can then address the failing schools, the over-incarceration of our young and the other ills sucking the life out of our community.

This is the call: On 8/29 the tens of thousands who can travel to New Orleans will gather for the massive demonstration being planned there. (The exact time and place to follow)

Millions of Black people, our White, Latino, Native and Asian brothers and sisters all who are committed to social and economic justice are to call their congressional and state representatives and the White House to demand the restoration and betterment of New Orleans, Gulf Port, Biloxi and the entire Gulf Coast region. The

telephone number for the White House switchboard is (202) 456-1414; the U. S. Congressional switchboard operators at (202) 224-3121 connect callers directly to their Senators' and Representatives' offices, after asking for a state of residence and zip code.

America will inundate Washington with a storm surge of phone calls, emails and faxes, loudly protesting this administration's shameful disregard for the people elected officials are supposed to protect. We want the state and national headquarters of both the Republican and Democratic parties to get a startling and disturbing wake-up call: Black people will not be taken for granted.

On 8/29 we must be fully present with all of our caring, compassion and determination. Present on that day we must have our national leaders, presidential candidates and elected officials, faith communities, fraternities, sororities, union members and celebrities present in full force.

Tyler Perry, Kimberly Elise, Regina King, Victoria Rowell, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Blair Underwood and others are with us in spirit, checking their schedules and awaiting details. CSI's Hill Harper is taping and is requesting the day off. Comedian and festival host Jonathan Slocumb, who kept the 8/29 initiative alive each day and evening before the tens of thousands of festival goers, cares and will be present on that day. Tom Joyner will be broadcasting from New Orleans on 8/29. We need Harry Belafonte and Danny Glover; we need Oprah, Spike, Halle, Angelina, Brad and Bono, Sean Penn, Wynton Marsalis, the hip-hop community et al.

And of course, we need a huge turnout from the people of New Orleans and the Gulf region and as many thousands of displaced evacuees as can manage to return and have their presence register in Washington, in the media and the national consciousness.

We want all presidential candidates to take heed of the national discontent and our resolve to hold them accountable.

Americans are unaware of how gravely people of the Gulf Coast region are still suffering. Mayor Nagin said, "We are physically, emotionally and spiritually tired." A flood of media nonsense has washed over the facts of life for the people of New Orleans: Nearly two years later, 200,000 people are still living in trailers. More than 250,000 evacuated residents are still scattered throughout the nation. Two year later, 70 public schools in Orleans Parish remain closed.

There are no mental health services, no hospitals to serve the uninsured poor.

And yet, as Barack Obama pointed out the evening he spoke at the festival, \$165 million a day is being spent on the war in Iraq. Other research puts the number at an average of \$259 million each day - an amount that could pay for a full year in Head Start pre-school programs for 35,000 three- and four-year-olds. For less than the amount spent in one month in Iraq, all of New Orleans could have been completely rebuilt.

Marian Wright Edelman noted that the Day of Presence is taking place at an opportune moment, just before Congress reconvenes to make its final decision, along with the President, on whether or not to fund the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and help the dispersed children of Katrina get the mental health support and health coverage they desperately need.

Regional co-conveners include Mayor Nagin; Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis, who represents the Ninth Ward; committed activist lawyers Tracie Washington, president and CEO of The Louisiana Justice Institute, and Judith Browne, co-director of the Advancement Project; and the Rev. Norwood Thompson, Jr., president of the New Orleans chapter of SCLC. The Louisiana Justice Institute is the lead organization and is forming a broad coalition of regional and community-based groups to plan the day's program and work on the regional turnout.

Marian Wright Edelman will help to organize our faith communities, and Marcia Dyson is working on a framework to sustain the movement beyond 8/29.

Who will step up as national co-conveners, along with Melanie Campbell, executive director and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, ESSENCE Cares and those leaders who joined me in meeting with the mayor? Please contact Melanie Campbell at melaniec@ncbcp.org <mailto:melaniec@ncbcp.org>.

On August 28 The Louisiana Justice Institute, Mississippi Economic Policy Center, Gulf Coast Young Leaders Network and a coalition of regional organizations, with support from Oxfam, Rutgers University and other institutions, are also convening a policy forum: Recovery and Renewal for Gulf Coast Working Families. For more information about the policy forum and the time and place of the 8/29:

A Day of Presence rally, log on to the Institute's Web site, louisianajusticeinstitute.org, after July 17.

We need all hands on deck. Our job " all of us " is to mobilize the masses to act. Together we have the compassion, the will and spiritual resources to help our sisters and brothers in the Gulf region to reclaim and better their lives. They matter and deserve to be treated with the dignity and respect due every human being, none more than tax-paying African Americans, whose ancestors helped build and make the nation the wealthiest on earth.

Please give this email, and the related ones that will follow, the widest possible distribution. Let's organize our community to stand up and stand together as we haven't done in decades. With the needs of our people - not our egos leading the way, we will win.

No forces arrayed against us can withstand our unity and love.

OneLove,

Susan

Susan L. Taylor
ESSENCE

This email is being sent from my handheld device. Please excuse any typos.