

**VOTE'S MISSION:**

**VOICE OF THE EX-OFFENDER (VOTE)** is an organization dedicated to building the political power of people most impacted by the criminal justice system, especially formerly incarcerated persons (FIPs,) their families and loved ones. Through leadership development, community education and voter mobilization, VOTE will ensure that our constituents are at the center of transforming the criminal justice system.

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**Redistricting: Why It Matters**

Every ten years residents of this country are asked to participate in the Census for the purpose of redistricting. This year found our organization reaching out to poor and marginalize communities also referred to as “hard to reach populations” throughout this city. The most striking part of this process was finding how little people knew about this process. It was clear to us in the outreach team at VOTE that we had to explain how important this process is. People didn’t know the census decided everything from what, if any, schools and hospitals are in your neighborhood, to how much federal money your city gets to how much representation you get in local, state, and the US Congress.

Based on the Census numbers, State Legislators are charged with the redistricting process and had scheduled a tour of the State to announce the timeline in which this process was to take place. The “dog and pony” show only revealed that citizen participation in this process would be very limited if at all. There was never a clear message as to how everyday citizens could fully participate (one way is they are permitted to supply alternative maps) with the Legislative body. What became evident was that most of our politicians were only concerned about having a safe district in which they were sure to get reelected. In this case now instead of people being able to choose their representatives, the representatives are choosing who they want to represent.

V.O.T.E. members attended several of the meetings to glean not only the importance of this process but to also monitor if there was any prison-based gerrymandering (manipulating the boundaries of an electoral constituency so as to favor one party or class). The lessons taken away were that the process of redrawing the maps was not as open and transparent as we had hoped. In the end we knew our members, their neighborhoods, would lose political representation this way. The Louisiana Legislature has completed its process of redistricting the Congressional, House and Senate Districts with little fanfare and even less opposition to the redistricting process.

The City Council of New Orleans is charged with the redistricting process relating to the five (5) single member and Council at Large Districts. Their authority lies within the Home Rule Charter that was established in 1954. After attending several of the Single Member district meetings it felt like déjà vu, (More consultants giving presentations). Nowhere was there an opportunity to discuss community members being a part of the map drawing process.

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## Crystal & Gwen Smith

VOTE is fortunate enough to have two civic-minded individuals, Crystal and Gwen Smith, as new members. The Smith sisters are native New Orleanians who were introduced to VOTE by Donald Chopin and started being actively involved in May. Even though they have never been incarcerated, they decided to join VOTE so that they could increase their knowledge of civil rights, such as their awareness of street law. Crystal and Gwen Smith believe it is critical that high school students understand their rights like those relating to probable cause and the limits of frisk. Their hope is that by passing on the information passed onto them by the instructors, Norris and Biggy, young people will share this with people younger than them so that no generation gets left behind in the exchange of vital information that they may not learn about in the streets.

In their spare time, Crystal and Gwen like to listen to Christian music, cook, and try a variety of meditation and relaxation methods. They are also involved with the Central City Neighborhood Partnership, an organization that works to improve the quality of life for the vibrant residents and give them pride in the historic importance of their neighborhood. The Smith sisters joined the partnership after Katrina in the hopes of doing something significant for Central City in the long term.

Crystal and Gwen have really appreciated the well-mannered gentlemen of VOTE and the way that they offer to walk all the ladies to their cars and make sure every lady is brought home safely. They also enjoy the way that Biggy makes the paralegal class so fun. The Smith sisters compared Biggy to Kramer and Seinfeld, but made sure to state that Biggy is the most comedic person they know. They also feel that it is an honor to learn from Norris, who they see as a living legend. Overall, Crystal and Gwen feel that if we, as members of VOTE, continue to lock arms, we will create a stronger community and make New Orleans a better place to live for everyone.

### Partners' Success!

We would like to congratulate the Workers Center for Racial Justice and Puentes New Orleans for successfully educating the legislature on the impact of HB 59, the "Louisiana Citizen and Tax Payer Protection Act." Representative Harrison voluntarily deferred his bill due to the strong opposition from within the House Judiciary Committee, those who gave testimony, and those who filled out opposition cards. HB 59 stated that the presence of illegal immigrants has caused economic hardship and lawlessness. It would have made it "illegal to transport, harbor, conceal, or shelter undocumented persons in the state of Louisiana. First time offenders would have been fined no less than \$500 or imprisoned for up to 6 months, or both." VOTE considers this a legislative victory for us as well since HB 59 would have criminalized normal familiar behaviors, such as a lawful permanent resident taking an undocumented person to the doctor, leading to the more incarceration of our community members. HB 59 would have also increased Louisiana's prison population.

## Masquerade Party



Left: The Baby Boys brass band, Right: Ricky Gettridge, Donald Chopin, Bernadette Rabuy, and Norris Henderson

## Congratulations Norris!

On June 4, 2011, the NAACP held its 2011 Freedom Fund Banquet at Xavier University. At the annual event, our very own Norris Henderson received the Daniel Ellis Byrd Award. Fortunately, Norris was able to give out eight tickets to interested members at the June Membership Meeting to accompany him at this black-tie affair. In the event's program, Norris was described as someone who "has had tremendous success in his work impacting public policy and public discourse about police accountability, public defense for poor and indigent people, and reforming the notorious Orleans Parish Prison (OPP)."

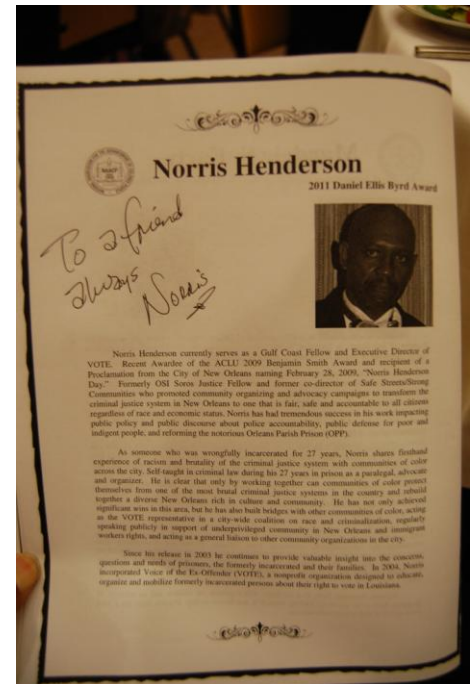
The NAACP Freedom Fund began in 1953 on a national level as a ten-year program focused on completing emancipation. Right before the end of the program, a NAACP Field Secretary was killed by an assassin's bullet. In order to pay tribute to the life of Medgar W. Evers, the NAACP Chairman Bishop Stephen Spottswood proclaimed at the convention in July 1963 that the Fighting Fund for Freedom would continue until the job of emancipating our people was complete. Congratulations Norris!



Carol Galloway and Kenneth "Biggy" Johnston pose for a picture in their black-tie attire.



Norris and Mary Joseph from the Children's Defense Fund holding an award from the CDF



The write-up about Norris in the event's program

### *Redistricting Continued...*

The upside of this was that V.O.T.E. established a partnership with several local community members to have a more active voice in the redistricting process for the City of New Orleans. This endeavor ended with the newly formed Coalition of Concerned Citizens presenting a seven (7) single member district map. Although we know this map will not be considered for the Justice Department's approval, it set the stage for a future Home Rule Charter change to create smaller districts before the 2014 elections.

V.O.T.E. would like to thank all of the community members who participated in this process and our national partners the Advancement Project for its legal guidance and support. Though not an exhaustive list of community leaders involved in the development of this plan, the following organizations worked collaboratively to develop this plan: Advancement Project, Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable, Kwanza Abdul-Khaliq, Louisiana Justice Institute, Louisiana Unity Coalition - National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, One Voice Louisiana, Rosedale Neighborhood Association, Upper Ninth Ward Bunny Friend Neighborhood Association and V.O.T.E. These groups have been working together through a series of community meetings with local and national expertise to develop a more equitable map that is representative of their constituents.

## Remembering Leonard Cressy...

Our long time member and close friend of VOTE, Leonard Cressy recently passed away. This has been a very sad loss for our organization. We remember Mr. Leonard fondly and send out condolences to all his family and friends. Mr. Leonard was a member of VOTE and Safe Streets/ Strong Communities. He was a warm and jovial person who could always be counted on to lend a hand in our various events, often volunteering to be the runner or help giving people rides. We will miss his easy going manner, his sense of humor and his warm smile. He was an avid sports fan and had an ability to be the calm voice of reason in many debates. His obituary is below.



Mr. Leonard Cressy, pictured in April 2009 with Earl Truvia at the VOTE Open House

CRESSY Leonard Cressy passed away peacefully on July 5, 2011 at the age of 62 years old. Loving and devoted father of Erica Ann Jeanpierre. Grandfather of Eric, Denzell, and Mathieu Jeanpierre. Great-grandfather of Zerica Jeanpierre of Nashville, TN, Samuel King, and special friend, Bridgett Miles. Relatives, friends, employees of the Orleans Parish Sheriff's office and residents and employees of Gus High rise apts are invited to attend the funeral at Doyle's Funeral Home, 2430 4th St., Slidell, La., at 10am Saturday, July 16, 2011. Burial will be at Slidell Memorial Park.

vote Issue 14 July 2011



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**JOIN US FOR THE NEXT MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 3<sup>rd</sup> AT 7PM AT THE RAE HOUSE**