



# LATOYA CANTRELL

MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS

NationalJournal

## Life in Brief

**Born:** April 3, 1972

**Hometown:** Los Angeles, CA

**Current Residence:** New Orleans, LA

### Education:

- BA, Sociology, Xavier University of Louisiana, 1994

### Family:

- Married, Jason Cantrell
- One daughter

### Work History:

- Mayor of New Orleans, 2018-Present
- Member of the New Orleans City Council for District B, 2012-2018
- President, Broadmoor Improvement Association, 2003-2012

### Professional Associations

- Broadmoor School Board
- Broadmoor Development Corporation
- Regional Transit Authority

### Electoral Overview

- Won 2017 mayoral primary with 39% of the vote and won general election by margin of 20.7%
- Elected to city council in 2012 with 54% of the vote; ran unopposed in 2014

## Quick Summary

**Community organizer whose work after Hurricane Katrina launched her into city politics; emphasizes grassroots-driven solutions to housing, public works, and crime**

- Moved to Louisiana to attend Xavier University and fell in love with the state, settling in the New Orleans neighborhood of Broadmoor
- Rose to prominence as a community activist in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, working to save her neighborhood from being converted into a park, which helped earn her a seat on the New Orleans City Council
- Became the first female mayor of New Orleans
- Witnessed housing instability and a decline in public services after the hurricane; has made affordable housing and investments in infrastructure a priority, including through increased housing options for homeless and low-income populations, and investments in the city's sewage and water system
- On city council and as mayor, has focused on reducing crime, including through gun violence outreach
- Maintains ties to local organizations and individuals in the Broadmoor neighborhood and city's African American community

## Approach and Motivations

**Community-based approach; views policy through the lens of her experiences in Broadmoor**

- Saw how the needs of her own neighborhood were ignored after Katrina and learned the power of community organizing
- Believes engaging with people who live in a community is best way to identify what that community needs
- As an activist, largely relied on obtaining grants from private organizations to achieve policy goals; as mayor, creates partnerships between government, community groups, and the business and philanthropic sectors

**Policy Positions and Areas of Focus**

Policy priorities include housing security, improved public works, and crime reduction

**Housing:** *Persistent champion of housing security for displaced, low-income, and homeless populations*

- Led efforts as President of the Broadmoor Neighborhood Association to oppose city proposal to convert her neighborhood and five others into greenspace, securing \$5 million from the Clinton Global Initiative and saving thousands of residents from displacement
- As a city council member, worked to open a low-barrier homeless shelter and introduced legislation to register and inspect city rental units
- As mayor, announced increased funding for low-income housing credits and community development grants to create affordable housing

**Public Works:** *Focuses on providing modern and reliable infrastructure*

- At Broadmoor Neighborhood Association, led the effort to secure a \$2 million Carnegie grant to rebuild the local library after Hurricane Katrina
- As mayor, negotiated “fair share” deal to reallocate tax dollars from tourism revenue to improving the city’s aging infrastructure, particularly water and sewage
- Established an Office of Utilities to enforce utility franchise agreements and to serve as a conduit between residents and electric, gas, cable and telecommunications utilities

**Public Safety:** *Works to curb crime and gun violence through outreach and economic empowerment*

- As a councilmember, installed crime cameras in her district and worked to address understaffing at the New Orleans Police Department
- As mayor, founded Cure Violence Initiative to reduce gun violence, including through programming at public schools on bullying and the effects of gun violence
- Stated that the best way to stop a bullet is with a job; launched program to match youth with arrest records with minimum-wage summer jobs

**Core Communities**

**City Hall insider with ties to activists in Broadmoor and the black community**

**City Council:** *Currently presides over many of her former city council colleagues*

- When running for city council, received strong support from Councilwoman Kristin Palmer; the two also served together on the Board of the Regional Transit Authority
- As a councilmember, worked closely with at-large council member Jason Williams to introduce legislation; Williams still sits on the city council
- Enjoys friendly relationship with city council as mayor; initially clashed with former Mayor Mitch Landrieu as an activist but has since earned his support for her work on the city council

**Broadmoor Neighborhood:** *Lasting ties to neighborhood’s economic development group, schools, and religious community*

- Founding board member of the Broadmoor Development Corporation and Broadmoor School Board; oversaw local economic development and renovation of the Andrew H. Wilson school
- Created partnerships between the Broadmoor Improvement Association and local churches, to find office space for development work and to open the Broadmoor Art and Wellness Center
- Continues to engage with neighborhood groups, including inviting the Broadmoor Community Church Summer Camp to visit her office

**African American Community:** *Strong support from black community; organizes events to celebrate black history and culture*

- Engages with leaders in the black community, including organizing the city’s MLK Celebration with community activist Sabrina Mays
- Strong campaign support from BOLD, a political organization that elevates black community leaders to elected office
- Introduced annual Black Film Festival; vocal enthusiast of city’s ESSENCE Fest, which celebrates African American singers

**Relevant Financial Information**

**Attracted donations during mayoral campaign from local companies and in- and out-of-state business owners**

**Biggest Corporate Donors (2017)**

- St. Ann Investments (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000
- Wisznia Company (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000
- Citigroup Investments (Gretna, LA), \$5,000
- Orleans Properties (Harahan, LA), \$5,000
- Richard's Disposal (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000

**Biggest Individual Donors (2017)**

- William & Wendy Reily, CEO of Reily Foods Company (New Orleans, LA), \$10,000
- Doug Ahlers, Self-Employed Business Owner (Ringfield, CT), \$5,000
- Di-Ann Eisnor, Director at Google (Palo Alto, CA), \$5,000
- Robert D Reily, Retired (Metairie, LA), \$5,000
- Charles Kennedy Jr., Owner of the Kennedy Financial Group (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000

**Political Donations**

- Cantrell donated \$2,000 to the Democratic State Central Committee of LA in 2017

**Publications, Media, and Speaking**

**Public appearances center around views on equality, crime, and infrastructure; primarily appears in local cable news and at non-profits**

**Publications:** *Has authored a few op-eds in local and African-American focused newspapers on crime and Southern Democratic leadership*

- Favorite Subjects: Reducing violent crime, the role of the South in the 2020 election
- Preferred Outlets: NOLA.com and The Root

**Media:** *Appears in Louisiana cable news to discuss housing, infrastructure, and equality initiatives*

- Favorite Subjects: Inclusivity, public works, affordable housing
- Preferred Outlets: NOLA.com, WWLTV, WDSU, WLAETV
- Social Media Habits: Active on Twitter since her election to mayor

**Speaking:** *Speaks about equity and her personal background before college students, civil rights organizations, and community organizers*

- Favorite Subjects: Experience as first female mayor, disaster resilience, inclusivity
- Preferred Audience: Universities including Bard College, civil rights groups including Human Rights Campaign, and community groups including NeighborWorks America

## Family and Personal Background

**Louisiana transplant with early exposure to the importance of social services and community involvement**

- Born in Los Angeles, CA and raised by a social worker mother and a law enforcement-employed stepfather; father left the family when he became addicted to drugs
- Grandmother took in Cantrell when her mother could no longer take care of her
- Her grandmother would bring her to neighborhood meetings, and by the age of 13, she was serving as secretary for her local chamber of commerce
- Dates her political awakening to the early 1990s; her commute to Xavier University took her past the Magnolia public housing development in Central City, where she witnessed poverty and government neglect

## Criticisms and Controversies

No notable controversies

**COVID-19 Response**

---

**Hardline stance on social distancing and criticizes federal government for delay in notifying states of COVID-19 risk; emphasizes keeping basic public services operational**

**Relevant Positions**

- Mayor of New Orleans, which is seeing a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases

**Actions: *Discourages public gatherings with legal and policy initiatives; supports impacted businesses and populations***

- Announced stay at home order on March 16, establishing penalties for people or businesses who ignore the order
- Declared city evictions illegal until the courts re-open; conducted cleanup of homeless encampments and temporarily transferred homeless residents to alternative locations
- Announced pilot program of expanded testing, setting up drive-through testing sites run by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- With Governor John Bel Edwards, announced conversion of New Orleans Convention Center into a surge hospital
- Postponed ESSENCE Festival of Culture; launched virtual “Embrace the Culture” series to support local artists
- Waives all fees and penalties associated with late sales tax payments from businesses

**Statements: *Advocates for reducing contact while keeping city running; criticized federal response to outbreak***

- Stresses the need to keep basic city services running, including public works
- Urged residents to take the virus seriously and practice social distancing
- Says the city saw no reason to cancel Mardi Gras, because federal leaders did not give any indication of the risk; has criticized the Administration’s delayed response