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Allegations of modern-day slavery emerge as Alabama inmates sue state officials and corporations

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

A group of current and former Alabama prisoners have filed a federal lawsuit, alleging that they were trapped in a "modern-day form of slavery" by being forced to work at fast-food chains for meager or no compensation. The comprehensive 129-page complaint, seeking class-action status, contends that the prisoners were victims of a "convict leasing" system, compelling them to work under exploitative conditions while the state of Alabama and its corporate partners reaped substantial profits.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama and first reported by the website Law & Crime, implicates over two dozen state officials, including Governor Kay Ivey and Attorney General Steve Marshall, alongside numerous government agencies and private employers, including the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC). The plaintiffs argue that these entities have violated the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

The complaint notes that while 26.8% of Alabama's population identifies as Black or African



The complaint notes that while 26.8% of Alabama's population identifies as Black or African American, double that percentage constitutes the Black incarcerated population. Drawing historical parallels, the group compares the alleged labor-trafficking scheme to the enslavement of individuals in Alabama's cotton fields and subsequent sharecropping and convict leasing practices post-Civil War. (Photo via NNPA)

American, double that percentage constitutes the Black incarcerated population. Drawing historical parallels, the group compares the alleged labor-trafficking scheme to the enslavement of individuals in Alabama's cotton fields and subsequent sharecropping and convict leasing practices post-Civil War.

In a video statement, jailed activist Robert Earl Council, also known as Kinetik Justice, asserts that Alabama's work programs are a continuation of pre-Civil War slavery. He accuses corporations and fast-food companies involved

in these programs as complicit "slave masters," condemning their participation in the exploitation.

The complaint alleges that Alabama generates an annual \$450 million from forced labor, with inmates compelled to work against their will. At the same time, the ADOC claims 40% of gross earnings purportedly for the cost of incarceration. In a recent finding, the U.S. Department of Justice announced significant deficiencies in ADOC facilities, prompting a

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Honoring those who struggle

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Both COVID and flu are on the rise

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Black man held after crash with motorcade

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People In The News ...



Judge Clarence Thomas

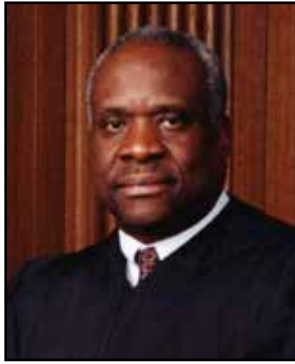


Karine Jean-Pierre

NDG Quote of the Week: "Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better."
— Martin Luther King Jr.

Judge Clarence Thomas

As Democrats intensify their call for Justice Clarence Thomas to recuse himself from the case scrutinizing Donald Trump's potential immunity, recent findings from legal advocacy group ProPublica have added a new layer of complexity to the ethical challenges surrounding the Supreme Court justice. ProPublica's investigative report titled, "A Delicate Matter," revealed that Thomas, previously under scrutiny for failing to report gifts from prominent Republican donors, raised concerns



about the financial strain on justices and advocated for removing a law prohibiting judges from receiving speaking and other fees.

Hank Johnson, a representative for the House of

Democrats, is calling for Thomas's recusal because of doubts about his objectivity in the case involving Trump's immunity from federal prosecution. The letter, dated December 15, underscored the Democrats' apprehension, particularly considering the activities of Thomas's wife and the couple's post-2020 election activities, raising questions about the justice's ability to remain unbiased.

"Faith in the Supreme Court has plummeted, and fewer than half of all Americans trust the Supreme Court," Johnson wrote in the letter to Thomas. "Public

perception is growing that the Supreme Court flouts the rules, in large part due to your recently reported ties to and luxury travel with billionaire Republican donors that you hid for decades. The public pressure has grown so intense that last month the Supreme Court announced a formal, though unenforceable, Code of Conduct."

Johnson reminded Thomas that he also signed the Code, publicly proclaiming that he subscribed to the rules, which state that "A Justice should disqualify himself or herself in a proceeding in which the

Justice's impartiality might reasonably be questioned, that is, where an unbiased and reasonable person who is aware of all relevant circumstances would doubt that the Justice could fairly discharge his or her duties."

The Code details such instances, including those in which "The Justice or Justice's spouse... is known by the Justice... to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding; or likely to be a material witness in the proceeding."

Johnson then detailed Ginni Thomas's involvement with the twice-im-

peached and four-times indicted former president's alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election and to obstruct its certification—the very conspiracies at issue in this case.

"Your wife not only attended the pro-Trump rally that preceded the January 6 attack on the United States Capitol, but she was also one of nine board members for a conservative political group that helped lead the 'Stop the Steal' movement," Johnson asserted. "If you want to show the American people that the Supreme Court's

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Karine Jean-Pierre

In an exclusive telephone interview, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre underscored President Biden's unwavering commitment to addressing the Black community's critical issues. Reflecting on promises made during the 2020 campaign, Jean-Pierre outlined key achievements and ongoing initiatives directly impacting African Americans and other historically underserved communities.

"At the onset of President Biden's term, the country faced economic turmoil and the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The President, true to his campaign commitment, prioritized equity, ensuring the Black community received fair access to COVID-19 vaccines," remarked Jean-Pierre.

"He made sure that small businesses got back on their

feet, our schools reopened, and the child tax credit put money into people's pockets. All those things were important to our community."

The more than 10-minute discussion also delved into the significance of the American Rescue Plan, which was pivotal in supporting various facets of the Black community. The first Black woman to serve as White House Press Secretary, Jean-Pierre, highlighted the impact of the Biden-Harris administration's policies on economic recovery, small business revival, and other measures that directly provided essential financial relief to individuals.

"Economic indicators demonstrate significant progress since President Biden took office. Black unemployment, which stood at 9.2 percent, has notably declined to 5.9 percent as of October," said Jean-Pierre, emphasizing the administration's commitment to economic revitalization.

Jean-Pierre also noted the importance of net worth,

noting a remarkable 60 percent increase for African Americans. She highlighted the historic investment of \$7 billion in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and the doubling of Black business ownership since the onset of the pandemic.

"The President has consistently prioritized equity across various policy areas,

including healthcare, education, and police reform," said Jean-Pierre, also the first openly gay person to helm the White House briefing room. "Executive orders were issued to ban chokeholds and implement strong use-of-force policies when congressional action stalled," Jean-Pierre stated.

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Angel Reese

The basketball world was abuzz as LSU's stand-out forward, Angel Reese, a luminary from the DC area, prepared for a highly anticipated return to the court in the faceoff against ninth-ranked Virginia Tech last Thursday night.

Reese's reemergence comes after a puzzling absence from four crucial games, fueling speculation and intensifying the spotlight on her comeback.

The enigmatic circumstances surrounding Reese's hiatus, vaguely attributed to "locker-room issues" by LSU coach Kim Mulkey, have left fans eagerly awaiting answers. A cryptic social media post



featuring Reese inside the iconic Pete Maravich Assembly Center added an extra layer of mystery to her return.

Despite Reese's absence, the LSU Tigers showcased their mettle with triumphant victories in the Cayman Islands Classic against formidable opponents like

Niagara and Virginia. Yet, the undeniable anticipation for Reese's return underscores the impact of the player who led the SEC in both scoring and rebounding. "It's a boost having her back, period, not just because we're playing Virginia Tech, it's just for our team. She's a tremendous player," Mulkey said. "One of the best players in the country. She gives us a good matchup with [senior forward Elizabeth] Kitley. I expect Angel to just be Angel. She's been really good in practice."

Reese's on-court exploits throughout the season have been extraordinary, with records shattered and mile-

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A Publisher's Christmas Message



Dr. John E. Warren
Publisher,
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We at the San Diego Voice & Viewpoint would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere desire for God's blessings upon you and your families. It is also a time to remind each of us why we have and celebrate Christmas.

This country, and most of our lives, were founded upon Christian principles that are at the very essence of this season. The fact that those of different faiths are allowed to exercise their religious beliefs does not negate that which many of us profess. Neither do we require others to acknowledge or share in our beliefs. This is the beauty of the Freedom of Religion Clause in our Constitution. But the differences in faith does not stop the Spirit of Christmas and here is the reason why.

The Gospel of John, recorded in the Bible at 3:16, states that: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,

that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The operative word is "gave". It is the gift of Jesus that is responsible for the desire we all have to "give" gifts. It is because that with the gift of Jesus to mankind came the Spirit of giving which is released each time we celebrate His birth. The angel of the Lord that appeared to the shepherds that night over Bethlehem made a pronouncement that we still feel each Christmas. The angel said: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."

Consider that Christmas is the only time in the year that just about everything shuts down; it is the one time of the year that we see an outpouring of kindness not seen at any other time. That kindness is the "good will" toward men that the angel spoke of. It was that which the angels spoke of that caused what is called the Christmas Truce of December 24, 1914. It occurred when soldiers in the muddy trenches on the Western Front of World War I put down their weapons on both sides, stepped

out of trenches, met each other face to face and sang Christmas songs because both sides missed being away from their families. In some areas the truce persisted until after New Year's Day. That same Spirit of Peace continues to settle on each Christmas season as God honors our recognition of the birth of his Son.

There are still so many without food or shelter, especially this Christmas season with two major wars underway and a people by the thousands seeking shelter and refuge in our land. Those without the basic necessities and comforts so many of us have are knocking at our doors and so many of us are responding in every way possible. This is a time for us to be thankful for what we do have as opposed to complaining about what we want or don't have. To many, the stable at Bethlehem would be a welcomed shelter as compared to the streets on which they sleep. For many of our families there are personal problems, an empty chair at a table because of a missing loved one, but we are still blessed

and should find comfort in helping others through this dark time in their lives.

While many of us do not have the shelter, food or comforts that so many others have, yet we are blessed with health or family or the meeting of our basic needs, if not our wants. Our families might have their personal problems, or many of us have an empty chair at the table this season due to the pandemic or other tragedies, yet we are still blessed. Let us remember those who lost so much during the recent storms. Let us seek ways to be of help to others and by doing so help ourselves.

We give thanks for those among us seeking to help and feed and shelter so many others. Let us commit to seeking what each of us can do to make a difference in the lives of others and by doing so participate in the gift that keeps on living. May God bless and keep you, regardless of your circumstances. Let us offer up prayers of praise and thanksgiving and sing glory to God in the Highest as well as peace on earth and good will toward all men.

Honoring those who struggle on International Migrants Day

By Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State



On International Migrants Day (Tuesday, Dec. 18), we recognize the hundreds of millions of migrants living outside of their home countries. It is imperative that countries expand lawful pathways, protect vulnerable migrants, promote inclusion, and advance policies and processes to promote safe, orderly, and humane migration. The United States is committed to leading these efforts globally.

The United States has led

the largest expansion in decades of lawful migration pathways to help vulnerable migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons. We commend other countries

that are likewise expanding regular pathways, creating safe options for migrants while respecting national sovereignty and security. Tens of thousands of individuals have benefited from rapid processing and support through the Safe Mobility initiative since its launch in June 2023. We have resettled more refugees than any other country in the world, welcoming more than 3.5 million refugees into communities across the country since 1975. Immigrants make tremendous social and economic contributions that

drive our nation's competitiveness and innovation on the global stage.

Worldwide, we are the largest single provider of humanitarian assistance reaching people in need, including refugees, conflict victims, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and vulnerable migrants. In FY 2023, the United States provided nearly \$15 billion in life-saving humanitarian assistance. Together with our partners we are working toward a future where migration is a safe, regular, voluntary, and informed choice.

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Health Crisis Looms: CDC issues stark warning amidst rising tide of COVID and flu cases

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

A looming healthcare crisis is on the horizon as hospitals and emergency rooms face the potential need to ration care by the month's end, according to a chilling advisory from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC's latest briefing underscores the swift escalation in COVID-19 hospitalizations, with a particular focus on the surge in multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). Simultaneously, influenza is gaining momentum nationwide, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) continues to pose a significant threat in multiple regions.

Several reports noted that pediatric hospitals are grappling with a near-maximum patient load, mirroring the



The CDC emphasized the importance of staying updated on vaccinations against respiratory viruses. Beyond COVID-19 and influenza, a global uptick in pneumonia cases in children is also under scrutiny, officials asserted. (Photo via NNPA)

levels witnessed this time last year. Emergency room visits for school-age children have undergone an alarming, nearly twofold increase, driven chiefly by a surge in flu cases. The CDC said the spike follows a period of stabilized emergency room figures leading

up to Thanksgiving. Strikingly, influenza-related emergency room visits have now eclipsed those for COVID-19 across most age groups, with seniors being the sole exception where COVID-19 rates remain markedly higher.

Nursing homes also are

reportedly witnessing a sharp uptick in reported COVID-19 cases, particularly in the Midwestern region, where infections among residents have already surpassed last year's peak. The emergence of the JN.1 COVID variant contributes significantly to the

current wave of infections, estimated to comprise up to 29% of cases nationwide—a stark increase from 8.8% at the close of November.

According to the CDC's projections, JN.1, a direct descendant of the highly mutated BA.2.86 variant, has become the swiftest-growing variant in the United States.

While a World Health Organization panel asserts that JN.1's alterations do not warrant a revision to this season's vaccines, initial data raises concerns about reduced vaccine efficacy against this variant.

Despite the situation's urgency, the CDC said vaccination rates are experiencing an unprecedented decline.

Adult flu vaccinations are trailing by approximately 8 million doses compared to last year, and children's flu shots have dipped by around five percentage

points. Bridging this gap is anticipated to be a formidable challenge, according to discussions between vaccine manufacturers and the CDC.

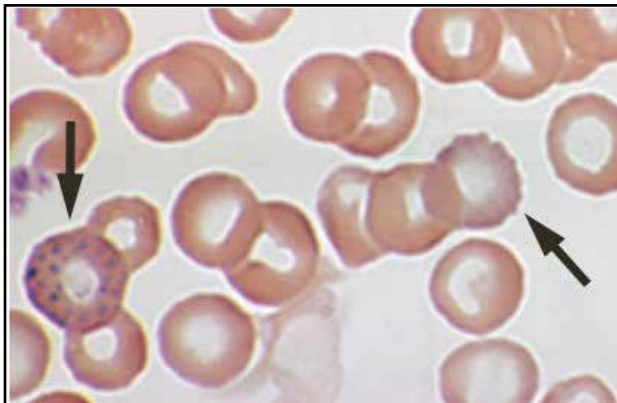
With only a third of nursing home residents and less than 10% of staff receiving the COVID-19 vaccine this season, Dr. Mandy Cohen, Director of the CDC, expressed deep concern about the sluggish vaccine uptake. Urging healthcare providers to intensify efforts, especially among high-risk groups, she emphasizes the crucial role of vaccinations as the peak of the respiratory virus season looms.

The CDC emphasized the importance of staying updated on vaccinations against respiratory viruses. Beyond COVID-19 and influenza, a global uptick in pneumonia cases in children is also under scrutiny, officials asserted.

Biden advances ambitious plan to eliminate lead exposure

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

In its effort toward creating safer communities, the Biden-Harris Administration said it is actively addressing the pervasive issue of lead exposure, with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) unveiling a proposal to fortify the Lead and Copper Rule, identified as a crucial step in achieving the president's vision of a lead-free future. The proposal mandates water systems to replace lead service lines within the next decade, aligning with the president's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—a groundbreaking \$50 billion investment in upgrading the nation's



The White House said the EPA's proposal goes beyond mere lead service line replacements, incorporating stringent measures such as enhanced tap water sampling requirements, comprehensive lead service line inventories, and streamlined actions to mitigate lead health risks. (Photo via NNPA)

water infrastructure. With over 9.2 million American households, particularly in low-income and minority communities, relying on lead pipes, this initiative is a pivotal move to ensure access to clean drinking water.

The White House said the EPA's proposal goes beyond mere lead service line replacements, incorporating stringent measures such as enhanced tap water sampling requirements, comprehensive lead service line inventories,

and streamlined actions to mitigate lead health risks. Already, the EPA has allocated over \$3.5 billion for lead service line replacements, significantly impacting homes, schools, and buildings. Further bolstering those efforts, the American Rescue Plan's State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, with an investment exceeding \$20 billion, supports water infrastructure projects, emphasizing the administration's commitment to clean water initiatives.

The newly launched Get the Lead Out (GLO) Initiative partners with 200 underserved communities, providing crucial technical assistance to access funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for lead

service line removal. Key financial commitments include a \$340 million investment in Philadelphia and a \$336 million loan for Chicago, both directed toward lead pipe replacement. In addition to comprehensively addressing lead exposure, the administration said it's tackling hazards in paint, dust, air, soil, food, and workplaces. Proposed EPA regulations aim to strengthen lead-based paint hazard removal standards, particularly crucial for protecting children and communities.

The administration's commitment extends to international collaboration, with partnerships between the CDC and the EPA's Office of International Affairs focusing on global initia-

tives such as the Global Child Thrive Act. The CDC's Lead Detect Prize, a \$1 million initiative to speed the development of sophisticated point-of-care blood lead tests, is one example of how the White House described innovations in blood lead testing as a priority.

This initiative reflects the administration's commitment to enhancing testing accuracy and lowering environmental contamination risks. "As the Biden-Harris Administration marks its first anniversary, these comprehensive efforts showcase an unwavering dedication to eradicating lead exposure and ensuring a healthier, safer future for all," officials stated.



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The incident occurred shortly after the Bidens departed from the Biden-Harris 2024 campaign headquarters in downtown Wilmington at 8:07 p.m. (Photo via NNPA)

Secret Service holds Black man at gunpoint after colliding with presidential motorcade

By Stacy M. Brown
WI Senior Writer

President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden emerged unscathed on Sunday night after a collision involving a car and an SUV in the presidential motorcade.

According to the Reuters news service, which had eyewitnesses on the scene,

the incident occurred shortly after the Bidens departed from the Biden-Harris 2024 campaign headquarters in downtown Wilmington at 8:07 p.m. The couple had just finished a meal with members of the re-election team when the collision occurred, as detailed in the White House press pool report.

As President Biden responded to a reporter's question, a silver sedan with Delaware license plates collided with a motorcade SUV at an intersection near the campaign headquarters. Television footage captured the moment when Secret Service agents swiftly escorted the president to his vehicle after the impact.

The silver sedan displayed visible damage to its bumper. Security officers quickly surrounded the car and drew their weapons on the unidentified African American male driver, who raised his hands in compliance.

The Bidens returned safely to their home in Wilmington following the incident.

Biden-Harris launches a National Law Enforcement Accountability Database to advance police reform and strengthen community trust

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National Correspondent

In what the White House called a significant step towards enhancing police accountability and rebuilding trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris announced the establishment of the National Law Enforcement Accountability Database. The initiative marks the first-ever federal database designed to track official records of law enforcement officer misconduct.

"Every person in our na-

tion has a right to be safe. And trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve is essential for public safety," Harris asserted. "Police misconduct undermines that trust and threatens the right to equal justice under law."

The database aims to provide federal agencies with readily accessible records of serious misconduct when hiring federal law enforcement officers. The White House said the move is part of a broader effort to strengthen the bonds of trust and accountability within law enforcement agencies nationwide.

"Protecting public safety

depends on trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve," Biden remarked. "By building trust, we can strengthen public safety and more effectively fight crime in our communities."

The initiative is an outgrowth of the Executive Order Biden signed in May 2022, focusing on police reform—the most significant in decades. The order mandated federal law enforcement agencies to ban chokeholds, strengthen use-of-force policies, and restrict no-knock warrants, among other critical reforms.

"As part of my admin-

istration's executive order on policing, we committed to create a first-of-its-kind database to track records of law enforcement misconduct so that agencies are able to hire the best personnel," Biden affirmed. "I am fulfilling that promise by launching the National Law Enforcement Accountability Database."

The president and vice president stressed their dedication to advancing police accountability, renewing their call for Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. Harris, pivotal in authoring the act as a United States Senator, reiterated the administration's commitment to fostering nationwide transpar-

ency and public trust in law enforcement.

Biden also urged Congress to act swiftly. "I urge Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act to advance accountability, transparency, and public trust in law enforcement across the nation," Biden insisted. "Send it to my desk, and I will sign it."

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Congrats to Campus Teachers of the Year!



Joyce Foreman
Dallas ISD
District 6

As we prepare for our winter break, I congratulate each and every one of the Campus Teachers of the Year, in District Six and across Dallas ISD. Our teachers are the key to the future for our students, and I appreciate them all for the diligence and compassion they exhibit every day. Those selected to represent

their individual schools as Campus Teacher of the Year have earned the recognition and respect of their peers, and we salute them for their accomplishments.

I can't wait to see which of them will be honored as districtwide Teachers of the Year for elementary, secondary, and choice/magnet schools, to be announced in the spring. See the full list here.

Male residency program cohort launching soon

The district's Black and Latino Male Resident

Teacher Program is about to launch its eighth cohort, and is looking for men who want to serve as teachers and role models for our students, especially our boys.

If you or someone you know are interested in becoming an educator and helping to inspire our students, you are invited to apply to the program, which launches in the spring semester.

Applicants should have a bachelor's degree in any field with a grade point average of 2.5 or higher. Start

the process at dallasisd.org/springadjunct.

Homegrown star continues to shine

Sha'Carri Richardson continues to impress, not only with her speed and athleticism but also with her grace as she makes her mark in the world and adds to a growing list of accolades.

Besides being named the fastest woman in the world, seeing her hometown track named in her honor, and having the City of Dallas proclaim a "Sha'carri

Richardson Day" last month, she has now been named the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Female Athlete of the Year and one of Forbes Magazine's "30 Under 30" for 2024. Keep on shining, Sha'Carri!

Coach of the Month

Congratulations to Carter High School's Coach James Spencer for receiving October's Coach of the Month Award. He pushes his Cowboys to achieve in the classroom as well as on the field.

Meals during the holiday break

District schools and offices will be closed for the winter break from Dec. 25 until Jan. 8. Students return on Jan. 9. To make sure that all our students have access to nutritious food during the break, the district will distribute pop-up meals at no cost for kids 18 and under, and for students up to 21 years old with disabilities, at select schools. Each package will include three breakfast and lunch options. For dates and school locations, please visit www.dallasisd.org/FCNS.

Academic freedom and fight against bigotry on campus go hand in hand

WASHINGTON — American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, Alabama State University professor Derryn E. Moten, University Council-AFT President Katie Rodger, Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York President James Davis, and Henry Ford Community College Federation

of Teachers President Eric Rader issued the following joint statement as attacks on faculty freedoms and students' identity continue to roil campuses:

"We do not accept the toxic rhetoric that pits standing up to antisemitism and Islamophobia against the fight to preserve academic freedom and the free speech rights of students, faculty

and staff. We can and must do both. Conditioning job offers on one's views of this conflict is wrong. Doxxing is wrong. Threatening the jobs of employees who are exercising their free speech rights is wrong. Limiting debate and freedom of expression is wrong. Terrorizing Jewish or Muslim staff or students because of their religion is wrong.

"Our two- and four-year colleges and universities must promote intellectual freedom and free speech. This is an essential role of higher education in a democracy. Our institutions have an obligation to keep students and employees safe and to stand up against bigotry—and they must honor it.

"The AFT will continue

to defend our members' and students' academic freedom and First Amendment rights while at the same time protecting their right to a safe environment free of antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of hate."

The 1.7 million-member AFT represents 70 percent of the organized higher education faculty in the United States. On Nov. 9, the union

passed a resolution, "Condemning Hate and Affirming Freedom of Speech on Campus." As we move into 2024, we are stepping up our efforts to provide our members and the campus community with the tools they need to do both, including by partnering with Faculty First Responders to develop resources to support our affiliates and members.

Martha Salazar-Zamora Selected as TASA's Texas Nominee for 2024 National Superintendent of the Year

Tomball ISD Superintendent Martha Salazar-Zamora, Ed.D., has been selected by TASA as Texas' nominee for 2024 National Superintendent of the Year, an award given by AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

Salazar-Zamora has served as superintendent of Tomball ISD, a fast-growing district of more than 22,000 students northwest of Houston, since 2017, when she became the first female and the first Hispanic to hold the position in the district's history. Prior to that, she served as the district's chief academic officer for three years.

Salazar-Zamora says what makes her most proud of Tomball is the staff's dedication to students and commitment to working as a team to the benefit of everyone in the district. She



Courtesy photo

works to cultivate "Team Tomball," a sense of community and teamwork and a culture of learning in the district that helps benefit individual learners day in and day out.

"I make it a goal to lead Tomball ISD with a results-oriented attitude supported by strong relationships,

management, accomplishments, and, of equal importance, heart," she says.

Salazar-Zamora, who has worked in education for 36 years, previously served in Round Rock ISD as the deputy superintendent of curriculum and administration. Prior to that, she was Houston ISD's assistant

superintendent of school support services. She also worked in Spring ISD as an area superintendent, an assistant superintendent, and the executive director of student/school services. Salazar-Zamora led Kingsville ISD as superintendent for three years. Prior to that, she worked in that district as an assistant superintendent for curriculum/instruction and human resources, as well as a speech/language pathologist. While working in Bishop Consolidated ISD, she served as a principal and director of federal programs/special education. She began her education career in Alice ISD as a teacher, educational diagnostician, and speech and language pathologist.

Salazar-Zamora holds a doctorate of education from Texas A&M University,

a master of education in educational administration and a master of education in special education from Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and a bachelor of science from Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville).

She currently serves as TASA president-elect and will lead TASA as president in 2024-25. She is also the president of the Fast Growth School Coalition and vice president of The Council of Women School Executives. She is a past president and founding member of the Texas Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents. Salazar-Zamora serves on the TASA Commissioner's Cabinet and on the executive committee of AASA. She is a member of the boards of trustees for both the Greater

Tomball Area Chamber of Commerce and the Hospital Corporation of America Tomball.

In September 2023, following Salazar-Zamora's selection as Region 4 Superintendent of the Year, the Texas Association of School Boards named her the 2023 Texas Superintendent of the Year. She is the first Hispanic female to receive the honor. Now, as a state nominee for AASA National Superintendent of the Year, Salazar-Zamora will be considered by a panel of judges from across the U.S. that will select four finalists to be interviewed in January. The 2024 National Superintendent of the Year will be announced, and the state nominees honored, at AASA's National Conference on Education, February 15-17, 2024, in San Diego, Calif.

118th Congress marks new low in productivity amidst partisan strife and leadership vacancies

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

As the curtain draws on 2023, the 118th Congress stands as a testament to political paralysis, one of the least productive in modern history. Information from Quorum, a data analytics firm, revealed a historic low tally of just 20 bills signed into law, with an additional four awaiting President Biden's signature. The stark reality is not only a result of the familiar partisan divisions in Washington but also an outcome of internal strife within the House Republican majority, causing routine disruptions to legislative proceedings.

A particularly turbulent period during the fall encapsulated the dysfunction gripping Congress, with Republicans unable to find



The stark reality is not only a result of the familiar partisan divisions in Washington but also an outcome of internal strife within the House Republican majority, causing routine disruptions to legislative proceedings. (Photo via NNPA)

a replacement for ousted Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.). The deadlock halted legislative momentum for three weeks, contributing to the abysmally low number of bills passed this year.

Comparing the productivity of the 118th Congress to historical benchmarks exposes a troubling trend. The 20 bills passed

this year are far from the 70 to 73 laws enacted during the historically unproductive first years of the 104th, 112th, and 113th Congresses, when Republicans shared control with Democratic presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. The current gridlock marks the nadir of a trend toward increasing legislative inertia, with five of the six most

unproductive first years occurring since 2011.

An unsettling pattern emerges from a closer examination of the legislation that the 118th Congress passed. The overwhelming majority of bills were uncontroversial, sailing through either by unanimous consent or with minimal opposition. Examples include multiple measures to rename Veterans Affairs clinics and a bill commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Marine Corps. These modest accomplishments underscore the inability of Congress to address more pressing and contentious issues.

The composition of the 118th Congress did reflect a diverse range of backgrounds. The House of Representatives comprises 221 Republicans, 213

Democrats, and one vacant seat, while the Senate consists of 49 Republicans, 48 Democrats, and three Independents who caucus with the Democrats. The average age of House members at the beginning of this Congress was 57.9 years, and Senators averaged 64.0 years. An impressive 96% of Congress members boast a college education, with public service/politics, business, and law being the predominant professions.

Religious diversity is also evident, with most members identifying as Christians. Roman Catholics form the largest single religious denomination, but numerous other affiliations are represented, including Jewish, Mormon, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Pentecostal Christian, Unitarian

Universalist, and Adventist. The average length of service for Representatives was 8.5 years, equivalent to 4.3 House terms; for Senators, it was 11.2 years, corresponding to 1.9 Senate terms.

The 118th Congress has seen an increase in diversity, with 155 women, 61 African Americans, 61 Hispanic or Latino members, and 21 Asian or Pacific Islander Americans serving. Additionally, five Native Americans hold seats, contributing to a total of 11.5 percent Black representation in Congress, closely mirroring the U.S. Census Bureau's demographic data.

Critics have argued that the rise of MAGA Republicans in Congress has

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In a press call, top White House officials attributed the surge in Black entrepreneurship, the fastest in 30 years, to Bidenomics, which the president pledged would receive further support through new investments targeting underserved communities. (Photo via NNPA)

Biden celebrates Black small business boom, announces new investments

During President Biden's visit to the Wisconsin Black Chamber of Commerce today, he showcased the unprecedented growth of Black small business ownership under his administration. In a press call, top White House officials attributed the surge in Black entrepreneurship, the fastest in 30 years, to Bidenomics, which the president pledged would receive further support through new investments targeting underserved communities.

Hero Plumbing, a Black-owned business in Milwaukee dedicated to removing lead pipes, is at the forefront of this success story. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's historic \$15 billion funding allocation will help the company fulfill President Biden's promise to do away with all lead service lines by the end of the decade.

While highlighting his administration's significant investments in small businesses, particularly those owned by Black entrepreneurs, President Biden still

faces opposition from some Republicans in Congress. However, administration officials said, despite GOP resistance, the American Rescue Plan played a vital role in sustaining small businesses during the pandemic.

Biden's commitment to fostering opportunities for working families and small business owners is contrasted with Republicans in Congress advocating a return to failed trickle-down economics. Officials said Biden remains steadfast in his belief that diversity is crucial for economic security, making unprecedented investments in Black communities to safeguard the American dream.

Investing in Black Entrepreneurship and Opportunity

Administration officials noted that Biden's "Investing in America" agenda has catalyzed historic gains in small business creation and entrepreneurship. They reported that a record 15 million applications to start new businesses had been

filed since he took office, with Black business ownership growing faster than in three decades.

The administration's investment in Black entrepreneurs has yielded positive results, including:

- A new record of nearly \$70 billion in federal contracts awarded to small, disadvantaged businesses in FY 2022.

- \$12 billion allocated to community lenders to expand access to capital, resulting in an estimated \$50 billion increase in lending to Latino communities and a nearly \$80 billion increase in lending to Black communities over the next decade.

- \$10 billion in support for states, tribes, and territories, with \$79 million dedicated to Wisconsin for capital access programs benefiting around 100,000 small businesses.

New Investments and Local Community Growth

Officials also said Biden

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played a pivotal role in the legislative standstill. According to Navin Nayak, president of the Center for American Progress (CAP) Action Fund, "They will not make any attempt to actually find common ground

or find common-sense solutions to problems."

Further, the 118th Congress is projected to be in session for just 117 days this year, well below the average of 151 days per Congress from 2001 to 2022, in

sharp contrast with the remarkably productive 117th Congress, during which Democrats controlled both chambers and the White House, successfully passing key legislation such as the bipartisan infrastructure law and the Inflation Reduction Act.



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The best the silver screen had to offer in 2023

By Dwight Brown
NNPA Film Critic

As 2023 ends, this year's best films are vying for awards that will crescendo with the Oscar race. Film fans don't have to watch from the sidelines. They can join the fun and view them all in theaters, VOD or on streaming services.

Pictures, directors, screenwriters, actors and behind the lens talent have given their all. Now you can experience the results of their work. These are the best and the brightest...

10 BEST FEATURE FILMS 2023

The Color Purple (**1/2)

Steven Spielberg adapted a version of Alice's Walker's classic novel in 1985 and caused a rift. Women found their voice in the lead character. Black men were portrayed as devils. This modern version, based on the Broadway musical, is a new and much welcomed interpretation by screenwriters Marsha Norman and Marcus Gardley. Director Blitz Bazawule (video director for Beyonce's Black is King) aces the the song and dance routines, pulls stellar performances from the cast and give this new spin on a tale about two separated sisters verve. Fantasia Barrino's captivating performance of the blossoming protagonist Celie is superb. Supporting cast of Coleman Domingo, Taraji P. Henson and Danielle Brooks adds zest. Redemption is this film's secret weapon in this feminist fable that's inspiring in all ways possible. A very surprising triumph.

Eileen (****)

She didn't see it coming. Eileen (Thomasin McKenzie), a small-town young Boston-area woman works as a secretary in a boys' prison. The day a blonde bombshell psychologist (Anne Hathaway) walks into the building, she's smitten and led astray down a path of self-destruction. Credit novelist/screenwriter Ottessa Moshfegh and co-screenwriter Luke Goebel for spinning this twisted, flabbergasting tale. Director William Oldroyd (Lady MacBeth) delivers shocking, ensuing drama so hot that it heats up the placid winter snow scenes. McKenzie excels as the quintessential blue-collar worker. The incorrigible Hathaway is wicked



beyond belief. Her best performance ever.

Flamin' Hot (**1/2)

Sometimes a film's greatest accomplishment is that warm-hearted feeling you take away from a story you couldn't fathom. Richard Montañez (Jessie Garcia), a janitor at Frito Lay, turns the munchy food industry on its ears by climbing the corporate ladder and creating a snack that appeals to his Latino community, and the world. Garcia carries the film's weight and is aided by costars Annie Gonzalez, Dennis Haysbert, Emilio Rivera and Matt Walsh. Controversy followed this bio/film, due to an embellished resume. But put this story in the narrative/nonfiction category, and the sting of exaggeration fades while pure joy prevails. Actress turned director Eva Longoria takes a very basic story about the human spirit and makes it wondrous.

John Wick: Chapter 4 (****)

The best action film of the year features Hollywood's most laconic actor in an iconic role surrounded by friends who are foes and foes who could be friends. John Wick (Keanu Reeves), a badass hired killer, works under the mandates of a clandestine council, "The High Table." He's done them wrong, and they send assassins to hunt him and snuff him

out. Extremely evocative settings, especially in Paris. Mindboggling stunts are brilliantly shot by cinematographer Dan Lausten. An elaborately choreographed, gorgeously crafted slaughter fest. A blood-thirsty spectacle all expertly and exquisitely assembled by director Chad Stahelski.

Killers of the Flower Moon (***)

To appreciate this western classic, first you must address the elephant in the room. Why in the 21st century is anyone making films about the Native American experience, which is not from their point of view? Or with them as the lead protagonists? If you want to learn something about America's indigenous people check out the enlightening documentary Lakota Nation vs United States. Still, this masterwork by veteran filmmaker Martin Scorsese is an engaging crime/thriller. It's based on a bestselling, narrative nonfiction book that's centered around the murders of wealthy members of the Osage Nation back in 1920s Oklahoma. Can't deny the film's artistry or fine acting. Cast includes a haunting performance by Lily Gladstone.

Maestro (**1/2)

Who knew that the guy who clowned his way through the Hangover franchise was an artiste? Now everyone does. Bradley Cooper, as director, writer,

producer, actor, brings the story of famed New York symphony conductor/composer Leonard Bernstein to life in shades and tones not seen in a film before. Gorgeously crafted. Brilliantly acted by Cooper and Carey Mulligan as his long-suffering but always loving wife. 2023's definitive art film.

Oppenheimer (**1/2)

Quantum physics and a race against the Nazi's motivated J. Robert Oppenheimer to be the big man on campus. This retelling of the development of the ultimate, war-ending weapon—the atom bomb—is spellbinding. It's cryptic subject matter is made discernible by genius writer/director Christopher Nolan. He pulls out all the visual stops as he catalogues government intrigue, rivalries among scientists and the hangers-on who were part of that fateful day in Nevada when a flash of light and power changed everything. Noland and the ensemble cast of Cillian Murphy, Emily Blunt and Matt Damon were on a mission. Their mission is completed in the most visually stunning ways.

Past Lives (****)

Creating three-character movies is a tough assignment. But somehow Korean-born writer/director Celine Song manages to do that in the most simple, graceful and romantic way. As kids

back in Seoul, South Korea, Na Young and Hae Sung where kindred spirits. Life separated them. She (Greta Lee), as an adult, lives in New York, is a writer and goes by the name Nora. He (Teo Yoo), smitten and forlorn, tracks her down. He's so enraptured he pursues the now married old friend endlessly. Luckily her husband (John Magaro) is patient as the two sort out their feelings. Song's script is never less than poetic. The performances are delicate and nuanced in this most loving and ethereal ways. What a touching story. A very striking way to look at relationships and the ways that love lingers.

Rye Lane (****)

If Love Actually and Love Jones had a child, this would be it. Dom (David Jonsson), a twentysomething, is ugly crying in a toilet stall in the unisex bathroom of a bar in South London. Yas (Vivian Oparah) overhears the wailing. Fate pulls them together as they discuss their exes while on an afternoon jaunt. Their mutual happiness may be the best revenge, but they're oblivious. First-time director Raine Allen-Miller creates the wittiest, coolest and most contemporary rom/com in ages. Her breezy, moment-to-moment directing never loses its energy. Lovely.

A Thousand and One (****)

Black urban dramas have long been stained by dehumanizing tropes and stereotypes. Somehow, first-time filmmaker A.V. Rockwell steers clear of that quicksand, which is a credit to her creativity and social consciousness. When her central character (Teyana Taylor) kidnaps her son from NYC's social welfare system and tries to raise him on her own, her plight and journey become a riveting experience that shatters the way films tell tales about those living under constant stress. Rockwell tells stories like a shaman imparting wisdom. Brilliant on every level.

BEST OF THE BEST 2023

If you're looking for reasons to go to the movies and want to home in on strong performances, astute directing and behind-the-lens, use this "Best of the Best 2023" as a guide. This roundup

See FILM, Page 10

Norman Lear, producer of 'Good Times' and 'Sanford and Son' dies at 101

By Lauren Victoria Burke
NNPA Contributor

Legendary television visionary and producer Norman Lear has died at 101.

Lear was known for creating television shows featuring characters from an America that hovered closer to real life experiences and real relationships than what was previously aired on American television before his career took off at the start of the 1970s.

Lear's career breakthrough arrived in the 1970s when he produced several highly successful and influential television sitcoms that tackled social and political issues including race. One of Lear's most famous shows was "All in the Family," which premiered in 1971. The show was a massive hit with viewers and critics. It depicted the blue-collar family of Archie Bunker with all of the blunt



Norman Lear, 2017 Kennedy Center Honoree delivers remarks after receiving his Kennedy Center Honor medal at the Kennedy Center Honor Dinner at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. on December 2, 2017. (Photo: U.S. State Department Photo / Public Domain)

realities of American history and culture that included racism, sexism, and other societal issues through the lens of Bunker's New York family.

Before "All in the Family," television families were displayed as Brady Bunch bubblegum perfect with few, if any, societal or political issues ever being discussed.

Norman Lear then went on to produce over 10 se-

ries through the 1970s. Many of the TV shows featured Black families and characters. They include "The Jeffersons," which ran from 1975 to 1985 and was a spin-off from "All in the Family."

"The Jeffersons" followed the fictional lives of George and Weezy Jefferson as they "moved on up" to the upper east side of

See LEAR, Page 14

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of honorable mention films, best acting nods and great artistry from a diverse set of today's top talent is a great starting point.

Honorable mention films: Air, All of Us Strangers, Barbie, The Blackening, Blue Beetle, The Burial, Chevalier, Creed III, Guy Ritchie's The Covenant, Equalizer 3, Fair Play, Flora and Son, The Holdovers, Joy Ride, Missing, Mutt, Passages, Saltburn, Somewhere in Queens, Talk to Me.

Best Directors: Blitz Bazawule (The Color Purple), Greta Gerwig (Barbie), Christopher Nolan (Oppenheimer), A.V. Rockwell (A Thousand and One), Chad Stahelski (John Wick: Chapter 4).

Best First Films: Fair Play (Chloe Domont), Flamin' Hot (Eva Longoria), Past Lives (Celine Song), Rye Lane (Raine Allen-Miller), A Thousand and One (A.V. Rockwell).

Best Foreign Language Films: Godland, Godzilla

Minus One, Joyland, The Teacher's Lounge, Shayda.

Best Documentaries: Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project, Going Varsity in Mariachi, Lakota Nation vs United States, Little Richard: I Am Everything.

Best Animation: The Boy and the Heron, Elemental, The Little Mermaid, Migration, Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse.

Best Actors: Bradley Cooper (Maestro), Leonardo DiCaprio (Killers of the Flower Moon), Colman Domingo (Rustin), Jesse Garcia (Flamin' Hot), Jeffrey Wright (American Fiction).

Best Actresses: Fantasia Barrino (The Color Purple), Lily Gladstone (Killers of the Flower Moon), Greta Lee (Past Lives), Carey Mulligan (Maestro), Teyana Taylor (A Thousand and One).

Best Supporting Actors: William Catlett (A Thousand and One), Ryan

Gosling (Barbie), John Magaro (Past Lives), Tatanka Means (Killers of the Flower Moon), Chris Messina (Air).

Best Supporting Actresses: Anne Hathaway (Eileen), Taraji P. Henson (The Color Purple), Vanessa Kirby (Napoleon), Annie Gonzalez (Flamin' Hot), Da'Vine Joy Randolph (The Holdovers).

Best Screenplays: Barbie (Greta Gerwig, Noah Baumbach), Eileen (Ottessa Moshfegh, Luke Goebel), Joy Ride (Cherry Chevapravatdumrong, Teresa Hsiao, Adele Lim), Past Lives (Celine Song), A Thousand and One (A.V. Rockwell).

Best Cinematography: Godland (Maria von Hausswolff), John Wick: Chapter 4 (Dan Laustsen), Killers of the Flower Moon (Rodrigo Prieto), Maestro (Matthew Libatique), Oppenheimer (Hoyte van Hoytema).

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Largest US Credit Union scrutinized over significant gaps between approval rates for white and Black borrowers

Navy Federal Credit Union, the largest credit union in the United States, is under fire for exhibiting the most substantial racial disparities in mortgage approval rates among major lenders. The disparities, reaching new heights in 2022, underscored a pronounced contrast in approval rates for white and Black borrowers.

Recent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau data indicated that Navy Federal approved over 75% of white applicants for new conventional home purchase mortgages in 2022. In stark contrast, the approval rate for Black borrowers applying for the same type of loan was less than 50%. The nearly 29-percentage-point gap in approval rates at Navy Federal stands out as the widest among the top 50 lenders originating the most mortgage loans last year.

Even when considering similar incomes and debt-to-income ratios, the racial disparity persisted. Navy Federal approved a higher percentage of applications from white borrowers earning less than \$62,000 annually than Black borrowers earning \$140,000 or more.

A detailed statistical analysis conducted by CNN revealed that Black applicants



Navy Federal approved a higher percentage of applications from white borrowers earning less than \$62,000 annually than Black borrowers earning \$140,000 or more. (Photo via NNPA)

to Navy Federal were more than twice as likely to be denied compared to white applicants, even when multiple variables, including income, debt-to-income ratio, property value, down-payment percentage, and neighborhood characteristics, were identical.

Navy Federal, initially founded in 1933 to serve Navy employees and now open to all armed forces members, Department of Defense personnel, veterans, and their relatives, boasts about 13 million members and holds over \$165 billion in assets. Last year, the credit union rejected approximately 3,700

Black applicants for home purchase mortgages, potentially impeding their path to homeownership, notably as interest rates spiked.

Bill Pearson, a spokesperson for Navy Federal, defended the credit union's lending practices. "Navy Federal Credit Union is committed to equal and equitable lending practices and strict adherence to all fair lending laws," Pearson stated. However, experts in mortgage lending and advocates for fair housing express concerns about the institution's practices, emphasizing that the racial gaps in approval rates raise questions about Navy Fed-

eral's commitment to fairness.

The widening gap in homeownership rates between white and Black Americans, exemplified by Navy Federal's 2022 approval rates of 77.1% for

White applicants, 55.8% for Latino applicants, and 48.5% for Black applicants, mirrors a broader national issue. In comparison, other major lenders like Wells Fargo, US Bank, and Bank of America exhibit smaller racial approval rate gaps.

CNN reported that advocates have urged lenders to improve automated underwriting systems to reduce racial disparities in decision-making. Some experts pointed out that Navy Federal's unique member base may have different financial characteristics than large banks, potentially influencing the observed racial differences.

While federal regulators review banks' lending under the Community Reinvestment Act, the network reported that credit unions like Navy Federal are not subject to the same scrutiny. Calls for legal revisions to

ensure credit unions adhere to similar rules as banks have continued.

Sara Pratt, a lawyer at Relman Colfax, noted that racial disparities in mortgage lending may also be linked to loan officers assisting white borrowers more than Black ones. Despite having no evidence of such practices at Navy Federal, Pratt emphasized that the approval rate gaps demand explanations from the lender.

Federal law stipulates that lenders can be in violation of fair lending rules without intentional racism, as a "disparate impact" on minorities can lead to discrimination claims. This is not the first time Navy Federal has faced scrutiny over racial disparities, as a previous analysis in 2019 indicated significant gaps. This trend appears to have only intensified since then.

← SLAVERY, from Page 1

2020 lawsuit against Alabama, citing widespread violence among prisoners and guards.

Individual plaintiff stories further underscore the harsh realities. Lakiera Walker, incarcerated from 2007 to 2023, recounted years of uncompensated work, including house-

keeping, floor stripping, and employment at Burger King for a paltry \$2 per day.

Walker details enduring sexual harassment, being forced to work while unwell, and the intimidation preventing many women from speaking out.

The lawsuit contends

that the work programs create a paradoxical situation where inmates are denied parole for public safety reasons while simultaneously working without supervision at local businesses. The plaintiffs demand justice for what they describe as forced labor and aim to expose and rectify systemic exploitation within Alabama's prison system.

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The FTC recently mailed materials to thousands of organizations nationwide to educate more communities on the free resources it provides. (Ian Hutchinson / Unsplash)

The FTC expands its resources

By Lori Lee
NDG Contributing Writer

As the nation's consumer protection agency, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) works to stop fraud, deception and unfair business practices. As Deputy Director for the Bureau of Consumer Protection, FTC, Monica Vaca explained, the Commission does this through enforcement, through education and through outreach. It explains to people their rights and to businesses their responsibilities, and it provides this information online, virtually, in print, and in person.

The FTC is encouraging people if they spot a scam or suspicious activity, to report it even if they did not respond to the scam with money, Vaca noted. This is important not only to inform the FTC's law enforcement efforts, but because it can help the agency spot activity and educate others about the potentially harmful activity that is happening around them.

The FTC recently enhanced its call center and Consumer Sentinel Network, the FTC's reporting database that collects reports from consumers and businesses. The agency has long been able to take reports in both English and Spanish, though taking information in other languages has presented many challenges.

Through the agency's new Language Access Initiative, it is now able to take reports in twelve different languages and translate in up to 80 languages. The agency hopes that by overcoming language barriers, the initiative will improve the accuracy of reporting.

Because people tend to believe

words spoken in their own language, communication in one's native tongue helps establish trust, said lawyer and journalist Jongwon Lee. This trust will inspire people to come forward, expressed Lee, and it will help immigrants learn about the government agency that is there to help them.

Vaca added, the initiative will help the FTC spot potentially harmful activity in diverse communities, such as in the wake of the Hawaii wildfires. It is common for scammers to target victims of disasters. Requests for wire transfers, gift cards, cryptocurrency and cash played on the hopes of the people of Maui during a very alienating time.

The FTC gathered data about the activity, including requests for currency for clean-up and construction and to obtain FEMA funds, and then offered advice on how to avoid the scams and how to get back on track financially, Vaca noted.

The FTC is encouraging consumers to makes reports of financial abuse and scams. In return, the FTC will explain the steps needed to regain their money, said Vaca. Because laws are structured to support consumer rights, which flow from different forms of payment, recommended responses will depend on how a payment was initiated. A person who pays with a credit card has a different set of rights than one who used cash or a check, explained Vaca.

Sometimes, the solution may be as simple as filing a report with a credit card company to dispute a charge. But when a person puts

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TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



NOTICE OF RECEIPT OF APPLICATION AND INTENT TO OBTAIN AIR PERMIT (NORI)

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APPLICATION Huntsman Building Solutions (USA) LLC, has applied to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) for:
Issuance of Permit 174770

This application would authorize construction of the Spray Polyurethane Foam Insulation Plant located at 3315 East Division Street, Arlington, Tarrant County, Texas 76011. **AVISO DE IDIOMA ALTERNATIVO.** El aviso de idioma alternativo en español está disponible en <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/air/newsourcesreview/airpermits-pendingpermit-apps>. This link to an electronic map of the site or facility's general location is provided as a public courtesy and not part of the application or notice. For exact location, refer to application. <https://gisweb.tceq.texas.gov/LocationMapper/?marker=-97.0491,32.7427&level=13>. The facility will emit the following contaminants: exempt solvents, hazardous air pollutants, organic compounds and particulate matter including particulate matter with diameters of 10 microns or less and 2.5 microns or less.

This application was submitted to the TCEQ on November 30, 2023. The application will be available for viewing and copying at the TCEQ central office, the TCEQ Dallas/Fort Worth regional office, and the East Library and Recreation Center, 1817 New York Avenue, Arlington, Tarrant County, Texas beginning the first day of publication of this notice. The facility's compliance file, if any exists, is available for public review in the Dallas/Fort Worth regional office of the TCEQ.

The executive director has determined the application is administratively complete and will conduct a technical review of the application.

PUBLIC COMMENT. You may submit public comments to the Office of the Chief Clerk at the address below. The TCEQ will consider all public comments in developing a final decision on the application and the executive director will prepare a response to those comments.

PUBLIC MEETING. You may request a public meeting to the Office of the Chief Clerk at the address below. The purpose of a public meeting is to provide the opportunity to submit comments or ask questions about the application. A public meeting about the application will be held if requested by an interested person and the executive director determines that there is a significant degree of public interest in the application or if requested by a local legislator. A public meeting is not a contested case hearing.

After technical review of the application is complete, the executive director may prepare a draft permit and will issue a preliminary decision on the application. If a draft Air Quality Permit is prepared, a Notice of Application and Preliminary Decision is required and it will then be published and mailed to those who made comments, submitted hearing requests or are on the mailing list for this application and will contain the final deadline for submitting public comments.

OPPORTUNITY FOR A CONTESTED CASE HEARING You may request a contested case hearing if you are a person who may be affected by emissions of air contaminants from the facility. If requesting a contested case hearing, you must submit the following: (1) your name (or for a group or association, an official representative), mailing address, and daytime phone number; (2) applicant's name and permit number; (3) the statement "[I/we] request a contested case hearing"; (4) a specific description of how you would be adversely affected by the application and air emissions from the facility in a way not common to the general public; (5) the location and distance of your property relative to the facility; (6) a description of how you use the property which may be impacted by the facility; and (7) a list of all disputed issues of fact that you submit during the comment period. If the request is made by a group or an association, one or more members who have standing to request a hearing

must be identified by name and physical address. The interests the group or association seeks to protect must also be identified. You may also submit your proposed adjustments to the application/permit which would satisfy your concerns.

The deadline to submit a request for a contested case hearing is 30 days after newspaper notice is published. If a request is timely filed, the deadline for requesting a contested case hearing will be extended to 30 days after the mailing of the response to comments.

If a hearing request is timely filed, following the close of all applicable comment and request periods, the Executive Director will forward the application and any requests for contested case hearing to the Commissioners for their consideration at a scheduled Commission meeting. The Commission may only grant a request for a contested case hearing on issues the requestor submitted in their timely comments that were not subsequently withdrawn. If a hearing is granted, the subject of a hearing will be limited to disputed issues of fact or mixed questions of fact and law relating to relevant and material air quality concerns submitted during the comment period. Issues such as property values, noise, traffic safety, and zoning are outside of the Commission's jurisdiction to address in this proceeding.

MAILING LIST. In addition to submitting public comments, you may ask to be placed on a mailing list to receive future public notices for this specific application by sending a written request to the Office of the Chief Clerk at the address below.

AGENCY CONTACTS AND INFORMATION. Public comments and requests must be submitted either electronically at www14.tceq.texas.gov/epic/eComment/, or in writing to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Office of the Chief Clerk, MC-105, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas 78711-3087. Please be aware that any contact information you provide, including your name, phone number, email address and physical address will become part of the agency's public record. For more information about this permit application or the permitting process, please call the Public Education Program toll free at 1-800-687-4040. Si desea información en Español, puede llamar al 1-800-687-4040.

Further information may also be obtained from Huntsman Building Solutions (USA) LLC, 3315 East Division Street, Arlington, Texas 76011-6832 or by calling Mr. Neil Luciano, EHS Manager at (817) 640-4900.

Notice Issuance Date: December 7, 2023

BUSINESS, from Page 8

continues to prioritize local, community-led economic development and small businesses. In Milwaukee, a city experiencing economic revitalization under his administration, the Grow Milwaukee Coalition is a finalist for the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration Recompete Program. The CHIPS and Science

Act funds this program to foster small business development, high-quality job creation, and economic opportunity in underdeveloped areas.

The Grow Milwaukee Coalition's proposal aims to revitalize the historic 30th Street Industrial Corridor and connect the historically segregated Black community to economic opportu-

nities across the city. This initiative aligns with President Biden's commitment to building the economy from the middle out and the bottom up.

Historic Progress and Investments in Black-Owned Businesses

Further, the White House said Biden's American Rescue Plan (ARP) has been pivotal in supporting small businesses, including Black-owned enterprises, in

Wisconsin and nationwide. Key investments include:

- A \$10 billion fund, including \$79 million for Wisconsin, to help small businesses access capital.
- The Small Business Community Navigators Pilot Program provides \$100 million to organizations supporting small businesses, significantly impacting Black-owned businesses.
- The Minority Business Development Agency

(MBDA) Capital Readiness Program is awarding \$125 million to 43 non-profit organizations, including \$3 million for Wisconsin.

Continued Support and Future Prospects

Biden's Small Business Administration delivered \$50 billion to small businesses in Fiscal Year 2023, with a focus on supporting underserved businesses, officials stated on the call. Federal contract spending

on small, disadvantaged businesses reached a record-breaking \$163 billion in 2022, exceeding the Administration's goals.

"The president's commitment to supporting small and minority-owned businesses extends to the clean energy sector, with investments in initiatives to grow disadvantaged clean energy businesses in underserved communities," a senior official stated.

THOMAS, from Page 2

recent Code of Conduct is worth more than the paper it is written on, you must do the honorable thing and recuse yourself from any decisions in the case of United States v. Trump."

Meanwhile, ProPublica's latest revelations amplify the existing ethical concerns surrounding Thomas. The report detailed a 2000 conversation between Thomas and Republican congressman Cliff Stearns, where Thomas expressed worries about the financial well-being of justices. In the discussion, Thomas suggested that one or more judges might contemplate resigning without a salary increase.

Further, the investigation disclosed Thomas's lobbying efforts to eliminate a law prohibiting Supreme Court justices from receiving speaking fees.

Thomas' 2000 comments to Stearns, a vocal conservative who'd been in Congress for 11 years and occasionally socialized with the justice, set off a flurry of activity across the judiciary and Capitol Hill. "His importance as a conservative was paramount," Stearns said in a recent interview, according to ProPublica. "We wanted to make sure he felt comfortable in his job, and he was being paid properly."

Worried, Stearns wrote a letter to Thomas after their flight, promising "to look into a bill to raise the salaries of members of the Supreme Court." "As we agreed, it is worth a lot to Americans to have the constitution properly interpreted," Stearns wrote. "We must have the

proper incentives here, too."

According to ProPublica, "Stearns' office quickly enlisted the assistance of a lobbying firm working on the issue, and he delivered a speech on the House floor about how inflation is eroding judges' salaries." Thomas' warning about resignations was relayed at a meeting of the heads of several judges' associations. L. Ralph Mecham, then the judiciary's top administrative official, fired off the memo describing Thomas' complaints to Justice Rehnquist, his boss.

"I understand that Justice Thomas clearly told him that, in his view, departures would occur within the next year or so," Mecham wrote of Thomas' conversation with Stearns. Mecham worried that "from a tactical point of view," congressional Democrats might oppose a raise if they sensed "the apparent purpose is to keep Justices [Antonin] Scalia and Thomas on the Court." (Scalia had nine children and was also one of the less wealthy justices. Scalia, Mecham and Rehnquist have since died.)

During his second decade on the court, ProPublica noted that Thomas' financial situation appears to have markedly improved. In 2003, he received the first payment of a \$1.5 million advance for his memoir, a record-breaking sum for justices at the time. Ginni Thomas, who had been a congressional staffer, was by then working at the Heritage Foundation and was paid a salary in the low six

figures.

Thomas also received dozens of expensive gifts throughout the 2000s, sometimes coming from people he'd met only shortly before. Thomas met Earl Dixon, the owner of a Florida pest control company, while getting his RV serviced outside Tampa in 2001, according to his biography, "Supreme Discomfort." The next year, Dixon gave Thomas \$5,000 to put toward his grandnephew's tuition. Thomas reported the payment in his annual disclosure filing.

Larger gifts went undisclosed. Crow paid for two years of private high school, which tuition rates indicate would've cost roughly \$100,000. In 2008, another wealthy friend forgave "a substantial amount, or even all" of the principal on the loan Thomas had used to buy the quarter-million-dollar RV, according to a recent Senate inquiry prompted by The New York Times' reporting. Much of the Thomases' leisure time was also paid for by a small group of billionaire businessmen, who brought the

justice and his family on free vacations around the world. (Thomas has said he did not need to disclose the gifts of travel and his lawyer has disputed the Senate findings about the RV.)

By 2019, the justices' pay hadn't changed beyond keeping up with inflation. But Thomas' views had apparently transformed two decades before. That June, during a public appearance,

Thomas was asked about salaries at the court. "Oh goodness, I think it's plenty," Thomas responded. "My wife and I are doing fine. We don't live extravagantly, but we are fine."

"A few weeks later," ProPublica concluded, "Thomas boarded Crow's private jet to head to Indonesia. He and his wife were off on vacation on an island cruise on Crow's 162-foot yacht."



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Cultivating the Fine Art of Listening

By Dr. James L. Snyder

If confession is good for the soul, I must confess here, I have not been successful at everything in my life. Oh yes, there are a few things I have been successful at, which I won't mention right now. But many things I have failed to succeed at.

One thing I have failed to succeed at, even though I have tried all my life, is listening.

My ears work, and I can hear many things, but it's listening when I fail.

My first experience in this area of listening was when I met The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. At that time, we were students at a Bible Institute studying for the ministry.

We met in September, and we had become a couple by January.

One night, we were traveling with a group, and she casually asked, "Wouldn't it be nice to get married?"

Having failed in womanology and thinking it was just a casual question, I said, "It sure would be nice to get married." I thought that was all there was.



The next day, in the school halls, everybody congratulated me, and for the life of me, I did not know what they were talking about. I just thought I passed a test for the first time.

Later, I realized they congratulated me on my engagement to get married. I was the last one to know.

Sure, I heard what she said, but I wasn't listening to what she said. I have learned through life that there's a big difference between hearing and listening.

Not long after that incident, we married and have been blissfully married for over 53 years.

As a husband, I had to learn many things, and I wasn't very successful.

I assumed when your wife asks a question, she is asking to get an answer. It took me a long time to realize that was never the case.

Early in our marriage, she said, "Correct me if I'm wrong..." Then, she explained the situation from her perspective.

Thinking she was asking for my evaluation, I usually would do what she asked and correct her.

The first time I did this, I was not prepared for the outcome.

Looking at me, she graciously said, "If I want your opinion, I will ask for it."

I thought that's what she asked for. I was only doing what I thought she said.

It took me a long time to understand her meaning when she said, "Correct me

if I'm wrong." And believe me, I paid a heavy price for learning that too slowly. I only wish I would have known it earlier in our marriage.

Early in our marriage, I was busy correcting her when she asked to be corrected.

That's when I began to understand that hearing and listening are two different occupations. I can hear everything she is saying, but I'm not listening to what she is saying. I'm not quite sure how to connect these two things.

Finally, I began to understand what she meant. When she said, "Correct me if I'm wrong," she was not asking for a correction but something completely different. She wanted to hear from me, "My dear, you are absolutely correct."

I remember the first time I responded to her in like fashion. I still see the smile she had on her face when I said it. It was then I realized what she was looking for. She was not looking for my opinion but rather for my approval.

I began to understand what people meant when

they said, "A happy wife is a happy family."

It is like the old joke about Abraham Lincoln and his wife. Lincoln's wife came to him and said, "Abe, does this dress make me look fat?" Fortunately, Honest Abe understood hearing and listening.

Throughout life, I have met many people obsessed with always being right. No matter what they are doing, they want to be recognized as doing it right.

Even though I'm still trying to develop a learning curve in this area, I have learned that my happiest days are not when I am right. I used to think they were, but I have graduated to a different understanding.

Recently, I noticed that The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has used the phrase, "Correct me if I'm wrong," more times than I've ever heard her say that. I'm not sure if it's intentional, but at my level of understanding, I'm going to accept it and say to her every time, "Oh, my dear, you are absolutely correct."

The smile on her face when I say that is very satis-

fying and worth my effort. I must make a choice in life: her smile or my being right. At my level of experience, I always choose the former.

She asks some other questions that I'm working on, and hopefully, I will accomplish my goal before I die. I will need to learn how to connect my ears with my brain. That will be my challenge for the New Year.

While thinking about this recently I remembered a very wonderful verse in the New Testament. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (James 1:19).

I need to cultivate the fine art of listening. That simply means that I'm going to be slow to speak and only speak when I have thought through what I am hearing.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail jamesnsnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com.

REESE, from Page 2

stones achieved. From a historic debut to multiple 30-point games and a jaw-dropping 28-rebound performance, her absence left a void that only intensified the speculation surrounding her return. As the LSU Tigers prepare to face Vir-

ginia Tech, Reese's comeback injects a palpable sense of drama into the narrative. The undisclosed "locker-room issues" loom as a subplot, heightening the intrigue surrounding this pivotal moment in the season. Moments like the

"Shoe Block" against Arkansas and the viral "Tik Tok Dance" have solidified Reese's status as a captivating force on the court. Fans and basketball enthusiasts are looking forward to the upcoming matchup against Virginia Tech because it is more than just a game.

JEAN-PIERRE, from Page 2

She noted that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have regularly worked to uplift Black and Brown communities, including their fight for voting rights, police reform, and cutting prices at the cash register.

"Lowering prices is what the president works on every day," the press secretary asserted. "The prices of eggs, milk, and [other items] are lower than last year. Used cars and truck

prices are down, and we will do everything we can to continue to lower prices. The work continues." The conversation extended to Biden's recognition of the Black Press's significance, with Jean-Pierre assuring ongoing access to the president for regular engagement and discussions.

"The President understands the credibility and importance of the Black Press in conveying messag-

es directly to the community. We are committed to ensuring continuous access and engagement," affirmed Jean-Pierre. "We're going to ensure [The Black Press] has access to the president. That's what he wants—he wants to speak directly to you.

"This president understands the importance of speaking to the Black Press, and he wants to have regular engagement with all of you, and we're going to make sure that happens."

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The 'Watch Night' Tradition



Sister Tarpley
NDG
Religion
Editor

December 30th is my first born and only son's birthday. I didn't know that I had so much love in me until my children were born.

But now that I have four grandchildren, Tyanna, David, Deven and Philip, I have discovered an even deeper love within me.

When Jarrell Edwin Tarpley was born and I held him in my arms, I thought about how much God loved His earthly children.

As the year is coming to a close, I truly thank God for all of my blessings, both naturally and spiritually.

Until a few years ago I did not know how the tradition of "Watch Night Services" in churches got started. I only knew that my family always celebrated them.

Another tradition that this brings fond memories



to my mind is when my parents, Mr. Lloyd David & Mrs. Cedella Baker Demus, my siblings and I would visit our grandparents.

At the home of Deacon David N. & Mother Ida Rutherford Demus during the summer and the Christmas Holidays; everybody in my grandparents home, gathered in the living room; got on their knees and prayed prior to starting the day.

This seemed to strengthen "family unity and love"

within the household. My parents never did this in Dallas; I guess this is because we lived in the "Big City" and not the "Country Town of Mexia, Texas."

One year one of Floyd Erving's "Short Stories" was the history of Watch Night Service. Not only did I learn something new about a tradition that I had been doing since childbirth, but I recalled a lot of fond memories in the process of listening to the story.

My cousin, Vickie Terry

Byrd emailed me the same story, I am grateful because now I get a chance to share the story with you.

Perhaps this story will educate and enlighten you, or at the very least bring back fond memories of times past.

WATCH NIGHT SERVICES -- Many of you who now live, or grew up in Black communities have probably heard of "Watch Night Services," (the gathering of the faithful in church on New Year's Eve.)

The service usually begins anywhere around 10:00 p.m., and ends at midnight with the entrance of the New Year. Some people go to church first, before going out to celebrate.

For others, church is their only New Year's Eve celebration. Like some people, I always assumed that Watch Night Service was a fairly standard Christian Religious Service – a bit more Afro centric because that's what happens when elements of Christianity become linked with the Black

Church.

Still, it seemed that predominantly White Christian churches did not include Watch Night Services on their calendars, but focused instead on Christmas Eve Programs.

The Watch Night Services in Black communities can be traced back to gatherings on December 31, 1862, also known as "Freedom's Eve."

On that night, Black people came together in churches and private homes across the nation, anxiously awaiting the news that the Emancipation Proclamation had actually become law.

Then, at the stroke of midnight, this meant that all slaves in the Confederate

States were declared legally free.

When the news was received, there were prayers, shouts and songs of joy as people fell to their knees and thanked God.

Black folks have gathered in churches annually on New Year's Eve since; and there are praises to God for bringing Black people safely through another year.

It's been 153 years (January 1, 1863) since that First Freedom's Eve and many of us were never taught the Black history of Watch Night, but tradition still brings us together at this time of the year to celebrate, "How we got over."

(Editor's Note: This column originally ran in December 2016.)

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LEAR, from Page 10

Manhattan. The show addressed issues of race and class and was a first of its kind by featuring a financially successful businessman navigating the racial stereotypes in American life. George Jefferson was a brash and confident character played by the late Sherman Hemsley in a way that had not been seen on television before.

The show was a contrast to another Lear depiction of the Black family: "Good Times." Centering a Black working-class family in Chicago, "Good Times" dealt with social and economic issues while incorporating humor and memorable characters. But it also had its fair share of stereotypes which was a throwback to the Hollywood days of minstrelsy as depicted in the character of J.J. Walker.

Cast member John Amos, who played the patriarch of the Walker family, famously departed "Good Times" because of the stereotyping around the J.J. Walker character. "Good Times" ran from 1974 to 1979).

"We dealt with our differences a number of years ago," Amos said in 2021 of Lear.

"Norman was one of the most dominant and creative forces on television at the time. He had several of the top 10 shows at the time, and there were some people that were quite jealous of him," Amos added.

A third Black show created by Lear was "Sanford and Son" which broadcast from 1972 to 1977. The sitcom starred Redd Foxx as Fred Sanford, a junk dealer in Los Angeles. The show was known for its hu-

mor and an extensive cast of veteran Black actors and actresses that left a memorable cultural mark.

Lear is not only known for his contributions to television but also for his activism. He has been an outspoken advocate for social and political issues.

Lear was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and attended Samuel J. Tilden High School in Brooklyn, New York before dropping out in 1942 to join the United States Army Air Force in World War II.

Lauren Victoria Burke is an independent investigative journalist and the publisher of Black Virginia News. She is a political analyst who appears regularly on #RolandMartinUnfiltered. She can be contacted at LVBurke007@gmail.com and on twitter at @LVBurke

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NDG Book Review: 'Our Secret Society is a hidden gem of a book

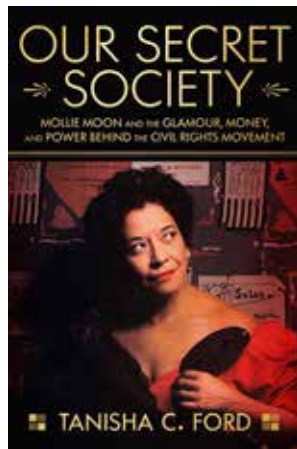
By Terri Schlichenmeyer

The One Percent has everything you do not.

A fancy house in a posh place. Designer clothing, fast cars. Friends in high places that know how to get things done. And money, they have lots of that. The One Percent has it all, and more – and as you'll see in "Our Secret Society" by Tanisha C. Ford, they once wanted you to have it, too.

Mollie Moon knew what it was like to struggle.

Born in 1907 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, she and her mother lived in a boardinghouse meant for migrants when Mollie was



a baby. Later, Mollie's new stepfather moved the family to Gary, Indiana, where Mollie witnessed "economic instability" caused by mill shutdowns. When she was ready to attend college,

her mother hoped Mollie would become a pharmacist, which was "one of the most prestigious careers a Negro... could have in the 1920s" but that wasn't what Mollie wanted.

As a young woman, she left Gary and moved to New York City, to Harlem, hoping to "make a deep social impact." There, she met some of Harlem's elite performers and thinkers, whom she joined in Moscow, then on to Berlin. Rising Nazi influence forced Mollie home to New York where she met Henry Lee Moon, who would one day be her third husband.

With the contacts she'd

made in her travels, the strategic friendships she enjoyed with both Black and white elites, and the feeling that "Negroes deserved a taste of the good life too," Mollie honed her skills as a fundraiser for the Harlem Community Arts Center, and then for National Urban League. She and Henry were "a racial-justice power couple" and they used that power to help large organizations to better the lives of Black people all over the country.

As time passed and viewpoints changed, however, some "found it difficult to define the role Mollie played." She still had influ-

ence, Ford says, yet "she did not fit the mold of a civil rights leader." But someone waiting in the wings did...

Reading "Our Secret Society" is a little like taking a trip through time.

Author Tanisha C. Ford first transports readers back to a more genteel era when Jazz-Age folks dressed for dinner, upper-crust youth enjoyed a new permissiveness, and higher-class citizens held salons in their homes to discuss world affairs. Ford makes this seem like a movie script from a period film, and it's oddly soothing.

But as the world changed, so does Ford's story and it's

quite fascinating to see how Mollie Moon seized the social power she needed with determination, moving easily across racial boundaries at a time when such boundaries seemed like solid walls. Given this, it's with dread that you'll approach the latter third of this book, as Ford takes readers to the 1960s and a little slippage of Mollie Moon's influence.

Still, you'll wish you knew Miss Mollie and for sure, you shouldn't miss "Our Secret Society." You need to know about this almost-hidden slice of history. You'll like this book one hundred percent.

FTC, from Page 12

cash in a Federal Express envelope and mails it, the situation becomes more complicated. The FTC then can help make sense of things in a variety of payment scenarios, she said.

The FTC recently mailed materials to thousands of

organizations nationwide to educate more communities on the free resources it provides. All of the FTC's resources live in the public domain, explained Larissa Bungo, senior attorney in the Division of Consumer and Business Education of

the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, meaning there is no need for copyright concerns or permissions to use the information.

The FTC's "How to Avoid a Scam" resource includes four warning signs of a scam, explained Bungo. Its fraud handbook for

recent immigrants and refugees warns about common scams targeting people with immigration and job scams, she explains, and they offers guidance for business on how to avoid business impersonation and fake invoice scams.

The FTC encourages people to share the information. From [FTC.gov/languages](https://www.ftc.gov/languages), people can make copies or share links, and there are shareable graphics for use on social media, explained Bungo. The FTC encourages the public to

share the information.

To report fraud or identity theft, the public can now call the FTC and select option 3 to report in their preferred language. To report fraud, call 877-FTC-HELP and to report identity theft, call 1-877-438-4338.

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