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LA's historic Black community devastated by Eaton Canyon fires

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National Correspondent

As flames tore through the picturesque foothills of Altadena and Pasadena on January 7, 2025, the Eaton Canyon fires left a historic Black community—rooted in the Civil Rights Movement—nearly wiped out. Among the hardest-hit areas in Los Angeles County, Altadena has seen its many Black-owned homes, churches, businesses, and landmarks reduced to ashes.

The unincorporated community in the San Gabriel Valley, home to 42,000 residents, has long stood as a beacon of Black homeownership and middle-class stability. With 18% of its population identifying as Black, Altadena also hosts a diverse community that includes Latino and Asian American residents. Tragically, the Eaton Fire alone destroyed over 1,000 structures, killed at least five residents in Altadena and dis-



Among the hardest-hit areas in Los Angeles County, Altadena has seen its many Black-owned homes, churches, businesses, and landmarks reduced to ashes. (Wikimedia Commons photo via NNPA)

placed thousands.

"Obviously it's been a tough couple of days, but our family is making it through," Los Angeles Sentinel Publisher Danny Bakewell Jr. said in a text to NNPA. "Both my girlfriend & my son lost their homes & the devastation is unreal for so many

families -a lot of Black folks."

Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, a native of Altadena, lost his beloved childhood home on Loma Alta Drive to the blaze. His mother, Ruthie Hopkins, 81, and his son,

See FIRES, Page 12



Bad politics for climate science

- See Page 3



ACA hits record numbers before Trump

- See Page 4



Big news for women's basketball

- See Page 8



'The Brutalist' does not disappoint

- See Page 9



'Where do we go from here?'

- See Page 11



Sister Tarpley: Discovering Our Black Roots

- See Page 14

Inside...

People in the News	2
Op/Ed	3
Health	4
Community	5
Education	6
Feature	7-8
Entertainment	9-10
Marketplace	12-13
Religion	14-15
Dallas ISD	16



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People In The News ...



Melone Walcott



Rev. Al Sharpton

NDG Quote of the Week: "Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated."

- Coretta Scott King

Melonie Walcott

(Black PR Wire) ALBANY, N.Y. — University at Albany’s Melonie Walcott, assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy, Management and Behavior at the College of Integrated Health Sciences, has received \$1.4 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to lead a four-year study to address disparities in HIV prevention medication uptake among Black women in New York State.

Walcott’s team will develop and test a culturally relevant behavioral intervention, consisting of several educational modules,



to encourage uptake of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a medication proven to be highly effective at preventing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) when taken as prescribed.

“Black women are dis-

proportionately affected by the HIV epidemic, yet they are significantly less likely to be prescribed or use PrEP,” Walcott said. “This population experiences unique vulnerabilities including living in communities with higher HIV viral loads, systemic inequities and socioeconomic challenges, yet they are often overlooked in HIV prevention efforts, which tend to focus on same gender loving men.”

Walcott’s approach to HIV prevention is driven by lessons learned from her earlier work, including a study focused on women living with HIV in Alabama. This research

illuminated the ways in which social and community-related factors such as poverty, stigma, lack of employment opportunities and insufficient access to transportation influence HIV acquisition, engagement in HIV care and HIV health outcomes.

“Lack of transportation can undermine one’s ability to secure and keep a job, which further limits access to resources for daily living such as money, housing, health insurance and food,” Walcott said. “This can result in engaging in transactional sex, forming relationships with partners that sell drugs, or even selling drugs to gain access to

resources. These behaviors increase the likelihood of being incarcerated, which further impairs one’s ability to be employed in the future and increases vulnerability for HIV acquisition. This vicious cycle can significantly undermine both HIV prevention and treatment efforts.”

Walcott’s proposed study, called “PrEP-WISE” (short for pre-exposure prophylaxis for women in charge of sexual decision making and engagements), seeks to develop and test a culturally and contextually relevant behavioral intervention to motivate cisgender Black women to access and use PrEP.

An interdisciplinary team of researchers, HIV prevention experts, faith-based organizations and community collaborators will work together to develop the intervention, which will help women reduce their vulnerability to HIV, regardless of their social and economic circumstances.

A Community Centered Approach

The project’s first phase involves conducting in-depth interviews with 25 cisgender Black women and 10 healthcare providers across New York State. These discussions will explore experiences,

See WALCOTT, Page 7

Rev. Al Sharpton

(Black PR Wire) NEW YORK, NY – Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President of the National Action Network (NAN), will lead a series of events in Washington, DC and New York City during the week of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday to keep the Civil Rights leader’s dream and mission alive. The demonstrations come at a poignant point in which many questions remain on voting rights, economic opportunity, and criminal justice reform as a second Trump administration is set to take office.

“As we honor Dr. King’s legacy this year, our nation again stands at a crossroads in the fight for the soul of America,” said Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President of NAN. “On the eve of Donald Trump’s second term, we need to be clear as day: Dr. King did not march, preach and lay down his life so that we would one day again retreat



into the shadows of hatred and division.

The man who has made it his mission to suppress the vote, demonize diversity and roll back our rights will take the oath again, and this moment demands that we be louder, stronger and more determined than ever to keep Dr. King’s dream alive.”

The events will kick off with a legislative breakfast on Dr. King’s birthday, January 15th, and culminates on January 20th with a major Inauguration Day rally and march in Washington, DC. The MLK Day demonstration will be held at the historic Metropolitan AME

Church in Washington, where both Frederick Douglass and Rosa Parks were laid to rest. NAN’s Annual Policy Forum at the House of Justice in Harlem will this year be held on Saturday, January 18th, in which federal, state, and city leaders from the New York City area will join Rev. Sharpton to discuss how they will continue to advance Dr. King’s dream for a just, fair nation.

National Action Network is one of the leading civil rights organizations in the Nation with chapters throughout the entire United States. Founded in 1991 by Reverend Al Sharpton, NAN works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender.

For more information go to www.nationalactionnetwork.net.

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Special Projects to the Publisher

Clinique Hill

Published by

Minority Opportunity News, Inc.

Production

David Wilfong

Assistant Office Coordinator

Belda Ibarra

Contributing Writers

Jamal Baker
Katherine M. Brown
Allen Gray
Jackie Hardy
Lori Lee
Terri Schlichenmeyer



Publisher's Office:

publisher@northdallasgazette.com

Sales Department:

marketing@northdallasgazette.com

Editorial Department:

editor@northdallasgazette.com



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P.O. Box 763866 - Dallas, Texas 75736-3866

Phone: 972-432-5219 - Fax: 972-509-9058

Trump's team is coming for climate science. The timing couldn't be worse.



Ben Jealous
Sierra Club
Exec. Dir.
and U. Penn
Profeswsor

It is official: 2024 was the hottest year on record. Temperatures not only surpassed 2023 as the previous hottest year, they leapt – for the first time – past the goal set in the Paris Climate Agreement of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Whether you turn on the TV to news of the most recent super storm or raging wildfire, or can see these disasters firsthand just by looking outside, the climate crisis is all around us.

If there was ever a single worst time in history to undermine climate science and America's climate leadership, it is right now. So it is an outrage that incoming President Donald Trump's picks for key administration posts signal his intent to do just that. And the clear pro-fossil fuel, anti-science agenda extends beyond Trump's picks for the positions most obviously related to climate policy. We know that nominations like fossil fuel industry shill Lee Zeldin to lead the Environmental Protection Agency and oil executive Christ Wright as head of the Department of Energy spell disaster for the lives and livelihoods, and health and wealth, of countless communities and working families. But those are not the only foxes in the henhouse.

Case in point: Russel

Vought, Trump's choice to lead the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Vought is an architect of the notorious Project 2025 – the authoritarian playbook for decimating democratic institutions and checks and balances to serve up an extreme far-right agenda. Vought authored a chapter on the Executive Office, outlining ways Trump could increase his power. As head of OMB, Vought would oversee the office tasked with overseeing “the implementation of the president's vision across the Executive Branch.” It is an immensely powerful office with influence over a vast amount of the federal government. And Vought has climate policy squarely in his sights.

Vought has laid out his desire to attack civil servants who work to protect public health and address the climate crisis, saying, “When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains. We want their funding to be shut down so that the EPA can't do all of the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them in trauma.”

In his Project 2025 chapter, Vought suggests efforts to address climate change are merely “social engineering” and promotes reshaping the US Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). Now, the sharp edge of this particular attack has become clear with reporting that Vought

seeks to undermine the National Climate Assessment, which is produced by the USGCRP. The Assessment is the foundational report used by the federal government for policies addressing or related to climate change, the product of research by hundreds of scientists and a key to US climate leadership worldwide. Vought is calling for more White House control of the Assessment, and giving OMB a role in selecting the scientists who produce the report.

Climate scientist and director of the Center for Science, Sustainability and the Media at the University of Pennsylvania Michael Mann told E&E News the goal of the incoming administration “is to undermine any policies aimed at accelerating the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.” Attacking the National Climate Assessment is a means to that end.

Americans' health and economic wellbeing depend on not just continuing but speeding up our full transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy sources, as well as addressing the climate crisis in other ways. Undermining the science that serves as the underpinning for all our efforts to tackle the climate crisis is nothing short of a crisis in its own right.

This is Project 2025 in action.

On the campaign trail, Trump did all he could to distance himself from the people behind the abysmally unpopular Project 2025, saying he had “nothing to do with them” and had

“no idea” who they were. Now, in addition to Vought, Trump plans to nominate Project 2025 contributors to powerful posts throughout his administration.

Project 2025 also suggests dissolving the critically important National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), describing it as “one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry,” and “fully commercializing” the National Weather Service, which NOAA houses. These science agencies enable us to find effective approaches to curbing the climate disaster and warn people of dangerous weather events to come.

One week before Election Day, Congresswoman Sara Jacobs of California published a piece in Newsweek under the headline, “Project 2025 Is January 6's Attempted Coup Dressed in a Nice Suit.” Project 2025 represents not only a coup against democracy and checks and balances, but against our government's role in solving our nation's problems and America's leadership in solving the world's – chief among them, the climate crisis. For the sake of a livable planet and all the communities that continue to be devastated by extreme climate-fueled weather events, the Senate should vote to reject the nominations of Russel Vought and any other contributor to Project 2025.

Ben Jealous is the Executive Director of the Sierra Club and a Professor of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

Keep up with the news

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White House celebrates record ACA enrollment as Trump administration plans to overhaul health care

By Stacy M. Brown
WI Senior Writer

The Biden-Harris Administration has announced a historic milestone: nearly 24 million Americans—including approximately 64,000 District residents—have signed up for Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace coverage for 2025, with one week remaining in the open enrollment period. The record-breaking figure represents nearly doubling enrollment since President Joe Biden took office. Over 45 million Americans are covered through the ACA’s Marketplace and Medicaid expansion, marking an all-time high in health insurance coverage in U.S. history.

Biden hailed the achievement as a direct result of his administration’s efforts to make health care more affordable and accessible. “When I took office, I made a promise to the American people that I would bring down the cost of health care and prescription drugs, make signing up for coverage easier, and strengthen the Affordable Care Act, Medicare, and Medicaid,” Biden stated. “I’m proud that my administration de-

livered—even as Republican elected officials stood in the way. I urge Congress to double down on the progress we have made by extending the ACA premium tax credit this year.”

Over the past four years, the administration implemented initiatives contributing to record-breaking enrollment and reduced healthcare costs. Key measures included enhancing ACA premium tax credits, which saved consumers an average of \$800 annually on premiums, and simplifying enrollment processes, particularly for underserved and rural communities. Medicaid expansion in four additional states provided coverage for over one million people while eliminating bureaucratic barriers ensured millions could apply for or renew coverage seamlessly.

The administration also took aggressive steps to lower prescription drug costs, with the Medicare Drug Price Negotiation program achieving prices 38% to 79% lower than U.S. list prices for the first ten negotiated drugs. Medicare beneficiaries benefited from a \$2,000 annual cap on out-of-pocket costs and

a \$35 monthly cap on insulin. The White House said those initiatives put billions of dollars back into the pockets of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Despite these successes,

the ACA faces an uncertain future. President-elect Donald Trump and Republican lawmakers, who will control the House and Senate, have expressed intentions to overhaul the law. During

his campaign, Trump criticized the ACA as overly expensive and suggested retooling or repealing key provisions. Republican leaders have signaled plans to prioritize changes, which


could result in significant premium increases and coverage losses.

Officials noted that enhanced premium tax credits

See ACA, Page 8



The record-breaking figure represents nearly doubling enrollment since President Joe Biden took office. (Photo via NNPA)



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McKinney Housing Authority
2025 ANNUAL & FIVE-YEAR PLAN

PUBLIC MEETINGS NOTICE

The Quality Housing & Work Responsibility Act of 1998 requires the McKinney Housing Authority to submit an Agency Plan each year.

The PHA Plan is a comprehensive guide to public housing agency (PHA) policies, programs, operations, and strategies for meeting local housing needs and goals. There are two parts to the PHA Plan: the 5-Year Plan, which each PHA submits to HUD once every 5th PHA fiscal year, and the Annual Plan, which is submitted to HUD every year. Below is a list of meetings that are scheduled to review and discuss the Agency Plan documents for the 2025 fiscal year. Program participants, the public and staff are encouraged to attend the meetings.

Autoridad de Vivienda McKinney
PLAN ANUAL Y QUINQUENAL 2025

REUNIONES DARSE CUENTA

La Ley de Vivienda y Responsabilidad Laboral de Calidad de 1998 requiere que la Autoridad de Vivienda de McKinney presente un Plan de la Agencia cada año.

El Plan PHA es una guía completa de las políticas, programas, operaciones y estrategias de las agencias de vivienda pública (PHA) para satisfacer las necesidades y los objetivos de vivienda locales. Hay dos partes en el Plan PHA: el Plan de 5 años, que cada PHA presenta a HUD una vez cada quinto año fiscal de PHA, y el Plan anual, que se envía a HUD cada año.

A continuación hay una lista de reuniones que están programadas para revisar y analizar los documentos del Plan de la Agencia para el año fiscal 2025.

Se anima a los participantes del programa, al público y al personal a asistir a las reuniones

Tuesday January 28, 2025	4:30pm	Board of Commissioners Meeting	Merritt Homes Community Center	1200 N. Tennessee St. McKinney, TX 75069
Thursday February 13, 2025	4:30pm	Public Meeting	Newsome Homes Community Center	1450 Amcott St. McKinney, TX 75069
Tuesday February 25, 2025	4:30pm	Board of Commissioners Meeting	Merritt Homes Community Center	1200 N. Tennessee St. McKinney, TX 75069

A draft of the proposed ANNUAL and Five Year Plan is available for review at the MHA main office located at: 603 N. Tennessee St. McKinney, TX.

Comments can be submitted by hand delivery, mail, or email to McKinney Housing Authority Main Office; 603 North Tennessee Street; Attn: Roslyn Miller; McKinney, TX 75069 or info@mckinneyha.org. The final public hearing for plan adoption will be held on Tuesday, March 25th at 4:30pm – Merritt Homes community center.

Racial disparities and youth sentencing mark U.S. life sentencing practices

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

The Sentencing Project, an advocacy organization promoting humane responses to crime, has released its report, "A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life and Long-Term Imprisonment in the United States." The report provides a detailed analysis of life sentences, revealing that nearly 200,000 people—one in six individuals in U.S. prisons—are serving life terms. The United States accounts for 40 percent of the world's life-sentenced population but represents



The United States accounts for 40 percent of the world's life-sentenced population but represents only 4 percent of the global population. (Photo via NNPA)

only 4 percent of the global population.

Life without parole, often referred to as "death by incarceration," has reached record levels in the United States. The report found 56,245 individuals serving

life without parole in 2024, a 68 percent increase since 2003. Another 41,398 individuals are serving virtual life sentences, which require at least 50 years in prison before release eligibility. Researchers noted that over-

all crime rates have reached near historic lows, yet incarceration rates persist.

The findings also highlight the racial inequities embedded in life sentencing practices. Nearly half of those serving life sentences and more than half of those sentenced to life without parole are Black. In seven states, including Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia, more than one in four Black individuals in prison is serving a life sentence. The disparities are particularly stark among younger populations, with 70,000 individuals currently serving life sentences for offenses committed before the age of 25. Among those sen-

tenced to life without parole for crimes committed before the age of 25, 62 percent are Black.

The report also draws attention to the growing number of elderly individuals serving life sentences. Nearly 40 percent of the life-sentenced population is aged 55 or older, many of whom entered prison decades ago. The Sentencing Project's researchers claimed that the aging process in jails, together with the lack of access to healthcare, makes this demographic even more vulnerable. They said the fact that more than half of those serving life sentences in Michigan are older than

55 highlights the structural issues with aging confinement.

Research cited in the report challenges the idea that extreme sentences serve as a deterrent. The authors assert that the severity of punishment has little impact on reducing crime, noting that most individuals serving life sentences have "aged out" of criminal behavior long before their sentences end. The report argues that resources currently spent on imprisoning elderly and rehabilitated individuals would be better used addressing the root causes of

See LIFE, Page 14

DOJ says that AG Merrick Garland plans to release the special counsel report on Trump's January 6 case

The Department of Justice has filed a detailed response to an emergency motion before the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, challenging the temporary injunction issued by U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon on releasing a final report prepared by Special Counsel Jack Smith. The report stems from Smith's investigations into President-elect Donald Trump's handling of classified documents and efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

In its filing, the DOJ argued that Cannon's injunction lacks legal merit and unnecessarily delays the release of critical information to Congress and the public. The DOJ stated that Attorney General Merrick Garland intends to release volume one of the report, which focuses on Trump's alleged election interference, to Congress in the

interest of transparency and accountability. However, volume two, which pertains to Trump's co-defendants Walt Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira, will remain under restricted review to protect ongoing legal proceedings.

"For the time being, Volume Two will be made available for in-camera review only by the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees upon their request and agreement not to release any information from Volume Two publicly," the DOJ stated in its response. Officials said the measure seeks to balance congressional oversight with safeguarding defendants' rights.

The DOJ's filing said there is "neither any need nor legal basis for an injunction" on the report's release. It also requested that the 11th Circuit vacate

Cannon's injunction, which delays the report's release for three days following any ruling from the appellate court. The DOJ argued that such a delay could allow Trump to seek intervention from the Supreme Court, further stalling information dissemination.

Legal analysts have criticized Cannon's prior rulings in Trump's favor, including her controversial decision to dismiss charges related to classified documents. Some of her rulings, such as those involving the search of Trump's Florida residence, have been overturned by higher courts, with criticism that her actions lacked legal justification.

The DOJ's filing also addresses the broader implications of this case, asserting that the release of volume one is vital to informing Congress and the

public about significant matters of national interest. "This limited disclosure will further the public interest in keeping congressio-

nal leadership apprised of a significant matter within the Department while safeguarding defendants' interests," the filing states.

The 11th Circuit's decision on the DOJ's request will determine whether the report's release proceeds as planned.

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From Head Start to HBCU to Harvard: One man's story

By National Head Start Association

Victor Jones graduated from Head Start over 30 years ago. Since then, Victor has built a career around his dedication to fighting for children, a passion he credits to his early education in Head Start. He has translated the Head Start mission into his work, first as a kindergarten teacher and today as an accomplished social justice attorney. Victor's commitment to lifelong learning and his everyday efforts to make the world a more equitable place for children make him a true inspiration for the Head Start community. Victor shared his story with the National Head Start Association.

We are excited to learn about your Head Start story, Victor! When and where did you attend Head Start?

I'm a 1989 graduate of West Tampa Head Start, located in Tampa, Florida.



Know that your child's involvement in Head Start will be the best investment in their educational experience that you can offer them. The holistic approach to learning — physical care for self, care for your peers, and learning how to exist in the world around you (Photos via NNPA)

My mother and I only lived in Tampa for two years, and these were the two years I attended Head Start. Thereafter, we returned to where I was born and raised, in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Do you have any memories from your time in Head Start? Favorite activities, classmates, teachers?

I remember my class was always out and about — going on field trips to Busch Gardens to see the animals, going to the park, taking trips to the grocery store, and learning about fruits and vegetables. I also

remember the times when doctors would visit us and check our eyes, ears and hearts, and I'll never forget the day a giant toothbrush walked into our classroom, and we learned about the importance of dental hygiene. I still remember a few of my classmates' names, though this was 30 years ago.

I can also still picture the uniform we had to wear on field trip days — it was a red shirt with an image of a panda bear hugging a bamboo tree, with black shorts or pants, and a black visor. And for the strang-

est reason, I remember that my classmates and I had to learn the song "Shower Me With Your Love" by an R&B group named "Surface," as part of our graduation ceremony. The few times I've heard that song, I immediately think of my time in Head Start. Head Start was also one of the very, very few instances from my pre-K to 12th-grade journey in which I was taught by teachers who looked like me. I think having such vivid memories of my experiences in Head Start is a testament to just how positively impactful the program was for me.

How do you think Head Start impacted your later school years? Or even your goals and career accomplishments beyond school?

Head Start directly impacted my professional trajectory. Because of the program, I've always wanted to serve children in some capacity. Before practicing children's rights

and disability law, I was a public-school kindergarten teacher!

What did your educational and career journey that led to your current position look like?

After graduating from high school in Mississippi, I attended Xavier University of Louisiana, a historically Black college located in New Orleans, where I majored in literature and double minored in history and political science. I then received a master's degree in education from Harvard University. I then taught kindergarten, and, thereafter, returned to New Orleans to attend law school at Loyola University. While in law school, I took courses in civil rights and child advocacy. I spent six years as a private practice attorney at multidisciplinary law firms in New Orleans, and then, in 2018, I returned to my original passion for serving children as an attorney representing their interests.

Victor, what advice do you have for current Head Start children and families?

Know that your child's involvement in Head Start will be the best investment in their educational experience that you can offer them. The holistic approach to learning — physical care for self, care for your peers, and learning how to exist in the world around you, is an approach that I, as a former early childhood educator, can say is unique. I'm now the father of two daughters and I always say that I wish that they were able to have received a Head Start education like I did.

Anything else you would like to share with the Head Start community?

I always say that I went from "Head Start to HBCU to Harvard." I'm eternally grateful for Head Start because it shaped me into someone who aspires to be a fierce advocate for marginalized children.

PVAMU's foodscaping venture targets importance of agriculture in daily living

(PVAMU) Food insecurity remains a pressing issue, with reports revealing that 1 in 5 families in the greater Houston area struggle to access sufficient food. This challenge extends to college campuses nationwide, where 40% of students regularly face difficulties in obtaining healthy, nutritious meals, according to the World Health Organization.

At Prairie View A&M University, the College

of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Student Garden Club (CAFNR SGC) has been at the forefront of combating food insecurity. For years, the SGC has cultivated vegetables, including mustard, turnip, and collard greens, to supply fresh produce to both the PVAMU community and local residents.

This year, the club expanded its efforts by introducing the innovative concept of "Foodscaping."

This initiative integrates edible plants into ornamental landscaping, transforming planter boxes and nursery beds into sources of fresh, organically grown produce. They are visible in front of the Cooperative Agricultural Research Center and the Agriculture and Business Multipurpose Building.

"This ensures access to nutritious, locally sourced food and strengthens social connections," shared SGC

members and PVAMU students Jalin Freeman and Kerrington Thompson. "It is a great way for CAFNR to address food insecurity in our community and empower each other and students who attend PVAMU through shared responsibility and collective well-being."

During the holidays, the SGC partnered with the PVAMU Food Security Research Center to donate over ten pounds of fresh

herbs and greens harvested from the Foodscaping Project. The club aims to broaden its impact by collaborating with other organizations on campus to promote the adoption of planter boxes across the PVAMU campus, fostering greater awareness of agriculture's vital role in everyday life. "We are excited about interacting with other student organizations who are interested in enhancing the [already] beautiful

landscape on our campus," Freeman and Thompson said.

SGC co-advisors Dr. Richard Griffin and Dr. Laura Carson both expressed their gratitude to Dr. Gerard D'Souza, dean of CAFNR, Dr. Erdogan Memili, executive associate director for CARC, and other CAFNR Executive Leadership Team members.

A modified version of this story originally appeared in CAFNR Monday Minute.



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14 states awarded \$1 million grants to address mental health and substance use crises

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has awarded \$1 million in planning grants to 14 states as part of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Medicaid Demonstration Program. Funded through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022, the program aims to address the ongoing mental health and substance use crises nationwide.

The states receiving grants include Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana,



Funded through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022, the program aims to address the ongoing mental health and substance use crises nationwide. (Photo via NNPA)

Maryland, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and West Virginia. By 2026, up to 10 of these states will be selected to receive enhanced Medicaid reimbursements to sustain and expand behavioral health services.

“Everyone in this country

who seeks help for mental health or substance use issues should be able to receive it, regardless of where they live or their ability to pay for services,” said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra. “Thanks to the Biden-Harris Administration’s dedication to transforming our behavioral health care system,

we are working to build a better continuum of care and expanding access to mental health and substance use care for all Americans.”

Data from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) shows the scope of the mental health crisis varies across the country. In Colorado, 36% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2023, while in West Virginia, over 20% of adults experienced frequent mental distress in 2021. Montana, one of the grant recipients, has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, with 29.8 deaths per 100,000 people in 2020.

The CCBHC model requires clinics to provide 24/7 crisis care, timely outpatient treatment, and a full range of services to meet

community needs. These clinics must serve anyone seeking care, regardless of ability to pay, age, or residence. Since its inception in 2017, the program has grown from 67 clinics in eight states to over 500 clinics operating in 46 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

“The planning phase for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics will help states develop sustainable funding to expand access to care for their communities,” said Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use.

Substance use disorders also remain a critical issue. Louisiana reported a drug overdose death rate

of 52.6 per 100,000 people in 2021, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Alaska, alcohol use disorder remains a significant concern, with the state ranking among the highest for alcohol-induced deaths.

The CCBHC Medicaid Demonstration Program provides funding for a comprehensive range of services to ensure that care is accessible and coordinated. The first state planning grants were awarded in March 2023, and 10 states joined the program in June 2024.

Help is available for those in crisis. Call or text 988 or visit 988lifeline.org. To locate treatment facilities, visit FindTreatment.gov or call 800-662-HELP (4357).

WALCOTT, from Page 2

barriers and facilitators in HIV prevention and care, with a focus on identifying gaps and opportunities to improve PrEP uptake. Providers involved in the study will include medical professionals, pharmacists and peer navigators, representing diverse perspectives along the entire HIV care continuum.

“To effectively support Black women in assessing HIV risk and accessing care, we must engage the entire process,” Walcott said. “This includes raising awareness, helping women access HIV prevention services, and ensuring long term medication adherence and support.

“By involving a variety of stakeholders, our study

aims to identify and understand the nuanced challenges that Black women face, including systemic barriers within healthcare systems as well as social-cultural factors including gender norms and power dynamics in relationships. This comprehensive approach ensures that our intervention will reflect the real-world experiences of those it seeks to serve.”

Because the intervention is focused on prevention, Walcott is working to engage participants upstream.

“In addition to reaching out to medical providers, I’m also actively visiting community spaces such as salons, churches and corner stores to share information about the project,” Walcott

said. “I’ve been very encouraged by community members’ willingness to help spread the word.”

Planning a Comprehensive Intervention

The team will use information gathered during the interviews to develop educational and capacity-building modules addressing the medical aspects of PrEP, as well as broader factors influencing HIV risk. The four-part intervention will also include peer support.

“Our goal is to empower women holistically,” Walcott said. “By addressing systemic inequities and providing resources beyond medication, we aim to develop an educational program that enables achievable, sustainable care and overall wellbeing.”

The anticipated intervention will be peer-led and delivered either in person or online, depending on preferences expressed during the interviews. Based on reviews of existing literature, Walcott’s team proposes topics such as:

- Assessing HIV vulnerability: Helping participants evaluate their own personal level of risk, with respect to environmental and social factors, as well as the risk level of their partner/s.

- Gender norms and power dynamics: Building skills to communicate effectively with health providers and sexual partners about HIV prevention.

- PrEP basics: Combating stigma, understanding the medication and reducing barriers to its use.

- Financial literacy: Of-

fering tools to enhance financial stability and overall health security.

Improving communication between women and healthcare providers is a key aspect of the proposed intervention.

“This work is about more than preventing HIV — it’s about empowering women to take control of their health,” Walcott said. “Many women face challenges in accessing PrEP due to insufficient provider awareness or reluctance to prescribe the medication. By fostering dialogue and education, our intervention aims to help bridge these gaps between women and providers across the health care continuum.”

Once the intervention is finalized, Walcott’s team will evaluate the efficacy of

the intervention through a randomized controlled trial involving 160 cisgender Black women in New York State. Findings will provide insights for public health practitioners, policymakers and organizations aiming to advance HIV prevention and health equity.

Engaging community partners and stakeholders, such as cisgender Black women, HIV/AIDS organizations, healthcare providers and faith-based groups, is a key part of the project’s strategy to create a robust support network. Existing collaborators on the project include the New York State Department of Health, the Alliance for Positive Health and Callen-Lorde Community Health Center.

Source: University at Albany

Unrivaled women's basketball league prepares to premiere

If you have not heard of Unrivaled buckle up — WNBA athletes are about to give basketball fans pure ethical hoops. Unrivaled is a three-on-three women's basketball league created by WNBA superstars Napheesa Collier and Breanna Stewart. The league will launch Friday, Jan. 17, and air on TNT starting at 6 p.m. CST. The six teams that will compete are made up of six players on each team—featuring some of the biggest names in the WNBA All-Stars that will lace them up include Angel Reese, Jackie Young, Skylar Diggins-Smith, and Arike Ogunbowale. Expect an even playing field as each team was strategically put together in an effort to raise competition levels and create an exciting brand of basketball.

The Unrivaled facilities are state of the art and features a venue in Miami where all 850 fans will



have a courtside view of the games. The league raised 35 million dollars and garnered support from names like tennis superstar Coco Gauff, legendary college women's basketball head coaches Dawn Staley and Geno Auriemma, former NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, and Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps.

“Coming to Unrivaled I

knew what to expect. High standards from the top to bottom. I would stay here forever, everything I need is here—from massages to cold tubs, to being able to have resources, from workouts to everything. Just being able to be here and value women, it's just really important right now especially with the growth of women's basketball,” Reese

said in her Unrivaled team's presser.

Unrivaled also allows players to stay sharp during the WNBA offseason while being fairly compensated. Salaries for participating athletes are guaranteed to be over six figures, and they will have the opportunity

to compete in a one-on-one tournament in February that will see the winner get paid a minimum prize of \$250,000.

“So it's a single elimination tournament to determine the best 1v1 player in the world. And I'm ACTUALLY not supposed to say

this but...first place gets minimum \$250k,” Collier tweeted in August 2024.

The three-on-three games will be played in four seven-minute quarters on a 70'-by-50' court. Here is a breakdown of each team:

See HOOPS, Page 9

ACA, from Page 4

are set to expire without Congressional action. If that happens, premiums could skyrocket. For example, a single parent earning \$50,000 annually could see their premiums increase by \$1,600, while a retired couple earning \$85,000 could face an \$18,000 increase. Experts estimate that between three and five million Americans could lose health insurance entirely.

The White House noted that the ACA's impact extends beyond Marketplace coverage. Today, Medicaid covers approximately 80 million Americans, with the administration driving initiatives to simplify enrollment and expand post-

partum coverage for hundreds of thousands of new mothers.

Other healthcare advancements under the Biden-Harris Administration include a 17% reduction in overdose deaths in the 12 months ending July 2024—the largest decline in U.S. history—and a significant decrease in new HIV infections following the launch of a national strategy to end the epidemic by 2030.

Administration officials said Biden and Harris's comprehensive efforts to improve healthcare access, affordability, and equity have also addressed mental health and maternal health

crises. The 988 mental health lifeline, created under Biden's leadership, has answered over 11 million calls, chats, and texts that have provided immediate support to individuals in crisis. Additionally, 46 states and the District of Columbia extended Medicaid postpartum coverage from two months to 12 months.

While Biden praised the progress made during his presidency, he warned of the risks ahead. “If Republicans in Congress take away the enhanced premium tax credits, premiums will skyrocket, and millions of Americans could lose coverage,” he said. “We cannot afford to let this progress slip away.”

Film Review: 'The Brutalist' is brutally good

By Dwight Brown
NNPA Film Critic

(****) It only takes a few minutes to ascertain that *The Brutalist* is a brilliant work of art.

Soon after it begins, this fictional bio/drama exhibits an artistry and craftsmanship usually rendered by French, Italian or Mexican directors. But surprisingly, this auteur is Arizona-born Brady Corbet. An actor (*Thirteen*) turned director (*Vox Lux*) whose talent and skills led up to this unique moment, but not in any obvious way.

Shadowed figures move around in the darkness. Hard to distinguish who, what and where. A slight bit of light emerges. A tiny bit of color. It could be a man. Hard to distinguish. There are voices. Murmurs, like animals stirring after hibernation in a cave. There's movement. Finally, a stream of light. A door is flung open. There's sunshine. There's America.

These cryptic, mesmerizing images introduce the weary but hopeful central character László Toth (Adrien Brody, Oscar winner *The Pianist*). He's a Jewish Hungarian architect who fled post-WWII Europe in 1947 seek-



Isaaq de Bankolé costars in *The Brutalist* (Photo by Lol Crawley via NNPA)

ing refuge in the land of the free. Leaving behind his wife Erzsébet (Felicity Jones) and daughter Zsófia (Raffey Cassidy, *Vox Lux*) until they can reunite. The very symbolic opening scene signifies the darkness of the past, a desperate path forward and a vision of hope.

Everything on view is beautifully lit, composed and filmed (cinematographer Lol Crawley, *Vox Lux*). Every detail (set decorator Krisztina D. Nagy), interior (production designer Judy Becker, *American Hustle*), bit of clothing (costume designer Kate Forbes, *Fair Play*), earthtone hue (art directors Csenge Jávári Alexander Linde, Virág Tyekvicska), sound effect (Steve Single, Andy

Neil) and musical note (composer Daniel Blumberg) is impeccably placed. It all gives Corbet the paints and brushes he needs to fill his canvas. To recreate an era and feel from 77 years ago. The parade of beauty peaks in a scene when Toth treks to Carrara Italy and walks among mountain sides of sumptuous marble. Stone so precious, mystical and seductive you can almost hear it calling. Like siren.

The writer/director, with his co-writer Mona Fastvold, tells a slow building, slowly revealing story many refugees can recognize. A professional in another land be-

See FILM, Page 10

HOOPS, from Page 8

Mist

- Breanna Stewart (capt.)
- Jewell Loyd
- Courtney Vandersloot
- DiJonai Carrington
- Rickea Jackson
- Aaliyah Edwards
- Coach: Phil Handy

Laces

- Alyssa Thomas (capt.)
- Jackie Young
- Tiffany Hayes
- Kayla McBride
- Kate Martin
- Stefanie Dolson
- Coach: Andrew Wade

Rose

- Chelsea Gray (capt.)
- Brittney Sykes

- Kahleah Copper

- Lexie Hull
- Angel Reese
- Azurá Stevens
- Coach: Nola Henry

Phantom

- Satou Sabally (capt.)
- Sabrina Ionescu
- Natasha Cloud
- Marina Mabrey
- Katie Lou Samuelson
- Brittney Griner
- Coach: Adam Harrington

Vinyl

- Arike Ogunbowale (capt.)
- Jordyn Canada
- Rhyne Howard
- Rae Burrell
- Aliyah Boston

- Dearica Hamby
- Coach: Teresa Weatherspoon

Lunar Owls

- Napheesa Collier (captain)
- Skylar Diggins-Smith
- Courtney Williams
- Allisha Gray
- Cameron Brink
- Shakira Austin
- Coach: DJ Sackman

A total of 14 games will be played by each team and the top four teams will advance to a single elimination semifinal in the playoffs. The winners of the semifinal games will compete for the championship that will take place Monday, March 17. When it is all said and done, the Mist Basketball Club will be hoisting the championship trophy.

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Dallas CASA's CASAblanca Casino Party planned for Feb. 7

The Dallas CASA Young Professionals will host the annual CASAblanca casino party February 7, 2025. Named one of the top spring events every philanthropic young professional in Dallas should attend, CASAblanca attracts some of Dallas' most fun and involved young professionals coming together for casino games, dancing, cocktails, appetizers, a silent auction, prizes and more, all for the benefit of child victims of abuse or neglect. All proceeds benefit the children served by Dallas CASA. Individual tickets and underwriting opportu-



Maurice Tisbe and Anuka Dhakal enjoy last year's signature event. (Ray Carlin / Courtesy photo)

nities are available at DallasCASA.org, or contact Jordan Cheek at jcheek@dallascasa.org for more information.

The party will run from 8 to 12 p.m. on Friday, Feb.

7 at The Hall on Dragon(1500 Dragon Street in Dallas).

CASAblanca is hosted by the Dallas CASA Young Professionals, a vibrant group of volunteers

whose mission is to increase awareness for Dallas CASA, while providing charitable and social opportunities for people ages 21 to 40 years. The group hosts happy hours, networking events, a pickleball tournament and more and allows young professionals from a variety of different fields who share a commitment to improving the lives of child victims of abuse and neglect the chance to connect. Event co-chairs are Brooke Farrelly, Hannah Harpole, Vivian Satterfield and Seth Stukalin.

Dallas CASA (Court Ap-

pointed Special Advocates) seeks to protect children, restore childhood and help child victims of abuse or neglect achieve their full potential. The agency's trained and supervised community volunteers are assigned by judges to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect and are living in the protective care of the state. For many children in foster care, their Dallas CASA volunteer is the only consistent, caring adult in their lives during a frightening, uncertain time. Dallas CASA envisions a

day when all children experience safe childhoods and grow into resourceful, healthy adults. Now in its 44th year, Dallas CASA serves more children than any of the more than 900 CASA programs nationwide. In 2023, 1,088 Dallas CASA volunteers were assigned to advocate for 2,151 children in protective care. For the past five years, the agency has been able to provide an advocate for every Dallas child in need, but each year more advocates are needed. To learn more, visit www.dallascasa.org.

FILM, from Page 9

comes a laborer in the U.S., just to make ends meet. Toth is helped by his cousin Attila (Alessandro Nivola) and his wife (Emma Laird). Then he takes menial jobs in Pennsylvania with his new friend Gordon (Isaac De Bankolé). He struggles until a wealthy benefactor (Guy Pearce) gives him a chance to regain his profession and dignity. The architect is hired to create a community center and has chosen to do so in The Brutalist style. An architectural motif that forgoes flamboyance for minimalist construction with an emphasis on materials, texture and function. Often using raw concrete.

Nothing is easy for the central protagonist. The footage shows problems, misery, moments of indiscretion, feelings of joy and a steady angst. It's a torment many genius artists experience as they create, impose their opinions and wrangle others into helping them fulfill their dreams. There's a long transition. A long period of growth. A blossoming and withering that's exhibited for 3h 35m. Audiences shouldn't be deterred by the epic length. There's an intermission. Time to collect thoughts and get a second wind.

Toth reconstructs his life, does interior design and builds structures. He's as temperamental as a three-star chef. In Brody's hands, the strengths and weakness of the flesh, uncontrollable opium addiction ("It's for my injury."), sorrow and happiness feel lived in. He inhabits the mind and troubled soul of László Toth. The accent, strong emotions, despair and bursts of rage feel real. Brody isn't afraid to bear Toth's naked truth. His fine performance is not alone.

Pearce, as the rich controlling patron, shows how money can bring the devil out in people. His son, well played by Joe Alwyn (The Favourite), is as deceitful and has the empathy of a stone. De Bankolé gets his character across in few words, strong and silent.

Art film fans will pilgrimage to theaters to see The Brutalist. In the first few minutes they'll recognize exquisite artistry and then bear witness to superlative filmmaking that doesn't quit.

While Jones, as Toth's wife, appears physically weak but has the strongest aura. The main and supporting actors are perfectly cast in a film that could bring them Academy Award nominations. Kristina Erdely, the casting director, should be proud.

Visit Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

Visit Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

Visit Film Critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.

As Dr. King once asked, where do we go from here?

By Charlene Crowell

The year 2025 marks the nation's 39th observance of a national holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ironically, the still-beloved minister and martyr was only 39 years old age when an assassin's bullet took his life on April 4, 1968.

While many will rightly recall his valiant civil rights activism, his equally vigilant call for economic justice remains as urgent today as it was decades ago.

Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s fourth and final book was published in 1967 after a decade of activism that led to the enactment of federal laws

on civil rights (1964), and voting rights (1965). Despite notable and significant victories, he wrote of the unfinished journey that America still faced, and was morally-bound to pursue.

"There is nothing to prevent us from paying adequate wages to school-teachers, social workers and other servants of the public to ensure that we have the best available personnel in these positions which are charged with the responsibility of guiding our future generations," wrote Dr. King.

"Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the out-

er city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the fires of justice."

Multiple and recent research reports highlight in precise terms many of the ways Black America remains economically short-changed.

Across the country, local communities continue to struggle with the still-rising costs of housing and homelessness. In 2024, about 23 of every 10,000 people in the United States – experienced homelessness in an emergency shelter, safe haven, transitional housing program, or in unsheltered locations across the country, according to the most recent report by the Department of Housing & Urban Development

(HUD). Further, although Blacks comprise just 12 percent of the nation's population, and 21 percent of the country's poor, we bear a disproportionate 32 percent of all people experiencing homelessness.

In times past, America's homeless were frequently veterans. But in the past year, children under the age of 18 represented a 33 percent increase in homelessness, the single largest surge, while that of veterans dropped by eight percent, according to HUD.

"Sadly, we know exactly how we got here", said Congresswoman Maxine

Waters in reaction to the disturbing findings. "For decades, a lack of investment in affordable housing has forced countless families out of their homes and onto the streets. This is a crisis in every county and city across America, whether they be rural, urban, or suburban communities."

For generations of Black Americans, higher education has long been viewed as a ladder away from poverty. But today, millions who dedicated time and energies in pursuit of higher education remain mired in unsustainable and long-

term debt. Among Black college graduates, the detrimental effects of historic economic disparities are particularly severe for those who attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

"Paying from the Grave": Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Alumni and the Burden of Student Loan Debt, a 2022 report by the Center for Responsible Lending tracked nagging and extensive economic hardships borne from heavy student debt.

See KING, Page 12

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KING, from Page 11

“Representing only 3 percent of the nation’s colleges and universities, HBCUs enroll 9 percent of all Black students and award 13 percent of all bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students,” states the report.

“HBCU graduates are more likely to use loans to pay for college and to borrow greater amounts than non-HBCU graduates,” the report continues. “Taking on a large debt at an early age impacts lifetime

earnings and generational wealth by delaying or preventing the opportunity to buy a home, start a business, or invest in retirement, thereby widening the racial wealth gap.”

Unfortunately, Black America’s saga with student debt extends into the older years of many consumers, according to the New York Federal Reserve Bank. Its analysis of indebtedness by generation showed although borrow-

ers ages 35 to 49 (\$635 billion) and those ages 25 to 34 (\$490 billion) held the highest debt in dollars, significant billion-dollar debt was still owed by borrowers ages 50 to 61 (\$284.5 billion), and 62 and older (\$116 billion).

This high level of debt that extends over multiple decades makes building wealth or some measure of financial stability that much harder for Black America. As this column recently reported, a report by the National Associa-

tion of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) detailed how owning a home – the nation’s most reliable building-block to wealth – shortchanges Black America yet again. In fact, the 400 wealthiest Americans control the same wealth as all 48 million Blacks.

These and other contemporary economic challenges were prophetically championed by Dr. King.

“When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important

than people the giant trip-lets of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are incapable of being conquered,” Dr. King foretold in a speech entitled, *The Three Evils of Society*. “A civilization can flounder as readily in the face of moral bankruptcy as it can through financial bankruptcy.”

In a few weeks, Congress must wrestle with both a recurring debt limit and budget priorities as authorization on each face a ticking time clock.

“Freedom is not won by a passive acceptance of suffering,” wrote Dr. King in his final book. “Freedom is won by a struggle against suffering. By this measure, Negroes have not yet paid the full price for freedom. And whites have not yet faced the full cost of justice.”

Amen, Dr. King.

Charlene Crowell is a senior fellow with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org.

FIRES, from Page 1

Joshua, narrowly escaped thanks to the swift actions of Hopkins’ older brother, who evacuated them to safety.

Hopkins described the devastation in a GoFundMe post, writing, “This isn’t just a loss for our family; it’s a loss for a community that has thrived despite challenges.”

Ruthie Hopkins, the former editor and co-owner of *The Pasadena Journal*, a Black-owned newspaper, has been a cornerstone of the community for decades. The newspaper is a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), which represents the Black Press of America and is celebrating its 198th anniversary in March.

The fire also destroyed the family’s SUV, which was vital for Ruthie’s medical appointments. Now, she and Joshua are left with only the clothes they wore when escaping.

A Legacy Reduced to Ashes

Altadena’s Black community flourished during the Civil Rights Movement, growing from 4% of the population in 1960 to

27% by 1970, following the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. It became a haven for Black families seeking to escape discrimination elsewhere, offering homeownership opportunities unavailable in most parts of the country.

Before the fire, Altadena boasted a Black homeownership rate of 81.5%, nearly double the national average for African Americans. Families like Kenneth Snowden’s embodied this legacy. Snowden’s family purchased their first Altadena home in 1962, and nearly 20 years ago, Snowden bought his own home in the area. Both properties were destroyed in the fire.

“Your \$40 million home is no different than my \$2 million home,” Snowden told reporters. “Give us the ability to rebuild, restart our lives. If you can spend billions of dollars fighting a war, you can spend a billion dollars to help us get back where we were at.”

Shawn Brown, founder of Pasadena Rosebud Academy, lost her home and the public charter school she built to serve the community’s children. Brown is

working to raise funds to rebuild the school while seeking temporary locations in local churches—though some churches, like Altadena Baptist Church, have also burned.

Only the bell tower remains at Altadena Baptist. The Rev. George Van Alstine is helping church members navigate the challenges of insurance claims and federal aid. He fears the destruction will lead to gentrification, pushing out long-standing Black residents.

“We’re seeing families who may have to leave because rebuilding here will be too expensive,” he said.

Brown urged her fellow Black homeowners to hold onto their properties despite developers’ offers. “Stand strong, rebuild, and continue the generational progress of African Americans,” she said.

Widespread Loss and Displacement

The destruction in Altadena mirrors the broader devastation caused by the wildfires sweeping Los Angeles County. Across the region, more than 12,300 structures have been destroyed, and at least 24 lives have been lost. Eco-

nom ic losses are estimated between \$250 billion and \$275 billion, making this disaster one of the costliest in U.S. history.

Much of the media coverage has focused on celebrity mansions and wealthy neighborhoods, but Altadena’s plight highlights

the profound impact on middle-class communities of color. Residents returned to find homes passed down through generations reduced to rubble.

Even the Mountain View Cemetery, where pioneering Black science fiction novelist Octavia E. Butler

is buried, caught fire. Butler’s novel *Parable of the Sower* chillingly predicted wildfires caused by climate change, starting on February 1, 2025. Her legacy and connection to the community remain a stark reminder of the fragility of Altadena’s history.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Thursday, January 23, 2025

5:30 p.m.

Turney W. Leonard Governance
and Training Center
Conference Area
5151 Samuell Blvd.
Dallas, TX 75228

Annual Report of the Performance on Texas Academic Performance Report for 2023-2024

The Dallas Independent School District will hold a public hearing to share information with the community regarding the educational performance of the district. The Meeting will take place at 5:30 p.m., Thursday, January 23, 2025, Conference Area, 5151 Samuell Blvd.

Persons interested in making comments at the public hearing must register to speak by contacting Board Services at (972) 925-3720. Registration will begin at 7:30 a.m., Tuesday, January 21, through Wednesday, January 22, at 5 p.m.

New study reveals the devastating impact of biased heirs' property policies on Black families

WASHINGTON, DC (NAREB) -The National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) recently released a study entitled "Heirs' Property in the United States - Its Destabilizing Structure and Contribution to Black Property and Wealth Erosion." Conducted by a team of experienced researchers, the study meticulously documents the

discriminatory policies and practices that have facilitated the loss of property, farmland, and generational wealth for African Americans from the end of slavery to the present day.

When land is maintained as heirs' property, all descendants hold fractional ownership, making the property vulnerable to legal challenges, forced sales, and

exploitation by developers or outside parties. Exploitative and illegal actions resulted in Black families losing 90% of the land held in 1910 because of limited access to legal advice, discriminatory

actions by federal, state, and local governments, and violence and hate crimes.

"As this comprehensive study demonstrates, public

See **STUDY, Page 16**

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Ugly is as Ugly Sees

Dr. James L. Snyder

I was drinking a cup of coffee in the middle of the shopping mall. I don't like going to shopping malls, but The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage sent me to get a new dress shirt for Sundays.

I told her I could wear the same one I wore last year, but she has different ideas about the dress code.

I was drinking coffee to settle my nerves and then pick up a dress shirt for the year. I don't know why I need one every year because they all look the same to me, but The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage supervises my dress code.

While enjoying my coffee for a moment, I watched people as they walked by. It took me a while, but I began noticing the people walking by me.

One person was walking toward me, and I almost fainted. I have seen ugly people before, but this one baked the cake. Maybe it was my glasses, but I had never seen anybody as ugly as that before. Of course, I try not to look in my bathroom mirror.

Then, another person was coming my way who looked as ugly as the first person I saw. I begin to see ugly people all over the place. I didn't know if I died and was transported to some planet or something but a lot of ugly people surrounded me.

I will admit that among these ugly people were some very nice-looking people, but there were not quite as many as I would have liked to see.

An older woman walked by very slowly, and I saw her face. From what I could tell, 50 years ago she had a complete facelift. I'm sure it looked okay at the time, but over the years, that beautiful face developed into a very ugly, wrinkly one.

I will never know why people have facelifts, tummy tucks, and all that kind of plastic stuff. When somebody young gets a facelift, they don't realize that if they live for the next 50 years, they're going to look very bad. A facelift is not forever.

I read about a woman going for a complete makeover. I don't know what

they call it, but it was going to cost her over \$150,000. If I had \$150,000, I would not put it on my face!

Why are people so obsessed with how they look? Why are looks so important to most people?

I thought about that as I sat there drinking my coffee, wondering how my life would change if I got a facelift, a tummy tuck, or whatever else they do.

The longer I sat there, the uglier people were as they walked by. But I got to thinking—maybe they were looking at me and thinking I was the ugliest person they'd seen all day. At that moment, whenever anybody walked by and looked at me, I smiled—just in case.

When I got home that night, I hung up my new shirt and went into the living room, where The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was setting.

"Did you get the dress shirt I sent you to get?" She said very sarcastically.

"I did," I said with a smile.

Then I sat down, looked at her, and said, "Do you think I should go and get a

facelift? And if so, where do you recommend I ought to go?"

As soon as she calmed down from laughing, she said, "The recommendation I would give you is that antique store just around the block." Then she laughed some more.

I was quiet for a moment, and then heard her say, "Is anything wrong with the mirror in your bathroom? Maybe you need to get a new mirror."

Around our living room are pictures of our children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. Looking at them, I responded, "Aren't those children cute? They look so lovely, don't they?"

Of course, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was on my side with that and agreed that our grand-

kids were all very cute.

I then got serious and asked her, "What if some of them grow up to be as ugly as me?"

I heard a loud gasp from her side of the room, and when it quieted down, she said, "That's not possible!"

I then went to my computer, where I had a bunch of photographs. I pulled up one and showed it to her. "What do you think of that picture?"

She looked at it and said, "That's a very cute young boy."

"That picture is of me when I was young. Now look at me."

I brought up another cute picture and showed it to her. "Do you know who this is?"

She smiled and said, "That's a picture of me when I was young."

"I wonder," I said sarcas-

tically, "if ugly runs only in my family."

All I heard from her side of the room was snickering, and I wasn't going to ask any more questions.

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

My heart is more important than my face.

Dr. James L. Snyder lives in Ocala, FL with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. Telephone 1-352-216-3025, e-mail jamesnsnyder51@gmail.com, website www.jamesnsnyderministries.com.

LIFE, from Page 5

crime, such as poverty and lack of access to education and healthcare.

The Sentencing Project provides several recommendations to address the systemic issues surrounding life sentences, including abolishing life without parole, implementing sentence reviews after ten years of incarceration, capping sentences at 20 years for adults and 15 years for youth, and reforming parole systems to

ensure fair evaluations. The report's authors concluded that reducing excessive sentences would promote fairness and redirect public funds toward effective community safety measures.

"Communities will not be safer unless we build stronger public health, education, and services for vulnerable people," said Kara Gotsch, Executive Director of The Sentencing Project. "The release of elderly and reha-

ilitated people from prison will not impact crime rates but will reserve public dollars for more effective safety solutions."

The report also critiques the United States' approach to life imprisonment compared to international standards. Life sentences are rare in most countries and typically capped at shorter durations. The study calls on U.S. policymakers to adopt reforms that reflect a more humane and practical approach to justice.

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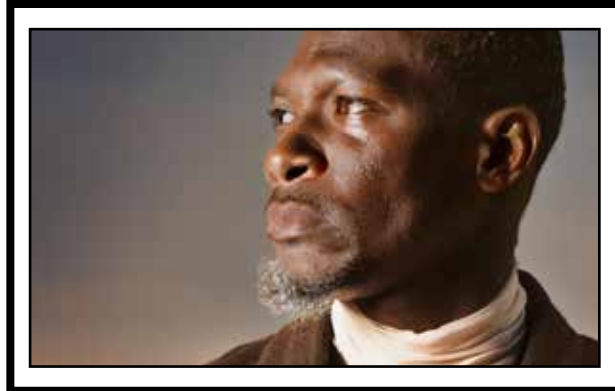
Discovering Your African-American Roots



Sister Tarpley
NDG
Religion
Editor

In January 2003, Mr. Thurman Jones, Publisher of North Dallas Gazette asked me to review a book. I found after looking through the book and reading some chapters that *Discovering Your African-American Ancestors: How to Find and Record Your Unique Heritage* by Franklin Carter Smith & Emily Anne Croom (Houston) is a book that many genealogist need to add to his/her home library.

In completing my son's "baby book," I called upon the wisdom and knowledge of my entire family on both



sides. And on the home going of my mother, Mrs. Ceddella Baker Demus in 1984, the search and recording of my family history became urgent and very important to me. Since no one else in my family was compiling our family history, I realized that there is no greater gift that I can leave to my heirs and other family members than to research and publish our family history.

I witnessed that after

writing *ROOTS*, Mr. Alex Haley (1921-1992) caused people of every race, creed and color to begin searching all kinds of records to put their family history on paper.


I am reminded of a saying that I picked up some place; the author is unknown to me but if you have a name, please email, fax or mail it to me so that I may give credit to the individual. "There is some-


thing unique about being at a family gathering, you can see a link to the past by watching the young

children, perhaps a walk, a smile, a stand, a laugh, or just the way someone hold his or her head. You may

see an aunt, uncle, cousin, or another relative in some

See **TARPLEY**, Page 16

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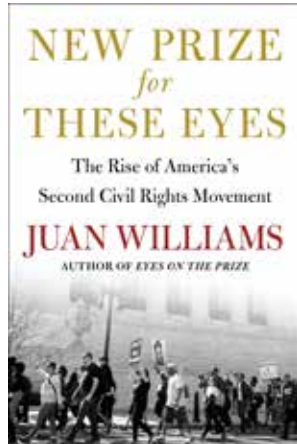
NDG Book Review: 'New Prize for These Eyes is a must-read and a keeper

By Terri Schlichenmeyer

You're not letting go that easily.

No, you're on the right side of justice and you're not letting go of the issue. Your heels are dug in, your back is straight, and your resolve is steely. You have a plan and you'll keep it, and see it to the end no matter what happens. As in the new book "New Prize for These Eyes" by Juan Williams, there are some who've gone before you but your effort is what matters now.

History disagrees on the exact catalyst for the civil rights movement, but Juan Williams says that "the second Civil Rights Movement" sparked at the 2004 Democratic National Con-



vention, and it took less than twenty minutes.

Not long after young Senator Barack Obama, whose presence was meant to attract Black voters, began his speech at that convention, he had the audience cheering. He was positive, energetic, and en-

ergizing, and spoke of "a new sense of common purpose," which spurred a Second Civil Rights Movement and a mandate to "deal with... cultural issues that the First Movement had left unresolved..."

The speech thrust Obama onto the national stage and, with the endorsement of many old guard Civil Rights Movement figures, ultimately put him in the White House. His presence there wasn't without issues, both politically and racially, however: the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Philando Castile absolutely affected Obama's terms, in part because "he acted only as a referee" and didn't "take any special level of

response as a Black man." Still, early civil rights leaders agreed with him that America was "better" than it was sixty years prior.

Before Obama's second term was over, a "right-wing backlash" that was "fueled by grievance" ushered Donald Trump into office but by then, young Black Americans had flocked to social media and gave root to the Black Lives Matter movement. "Covid-19 would also transform" the situation.

By the summer of 2024, "the Second Civil Rights Movement was far from completing its agenda,"

says Williams, but "it had still achieved remarkable success."

Play very close attention while you're reading this book. It's filled with politics, but there's a pay-off in it: author Juan Williams does a little forecasting toward the end of "New Prize for These Eyes," promising readers a new movement, a third one, to come.

Even if you're not particularly a politics-watcher, Williams commands your attention to the last twenty years and how they keenly shaped racism and racial issues in America. Sometimes, he seems to invite

argument, using Obama as a singular catalyst for this "Second" movement and its current continuation, fairly or unfairly; and he places other credits on people and events that will make readers want to find someone to discuss it. The tantalizing idea of a third movement will only underscore that desire.

As a sequel to Williams' *Eyes on the Prize*, this is a must-read for anyone who knows where we've been or wonders where we're going. Find "New Prize for These Eyes."

You won't want to let it go.

STUDY, from Page 13

policies have aided private and public entities in the unscrupulous and predatory acquisition of land owned by Black families, creating a long history of land theft from the Black community," asserts Dr. Courtney Johnson Rose, NAREB's President. "Heirs' property issues disproportionately impact Black households, thereby making the need for urgent reforms as important today

as they were a century ago."

The study, conducted by James Carr and Michela Zonta, finds that historical and contemporary loss of Black heirs' property is a significant contributor to the Black-White racial wealth gap, joining federally mandated housing discrimination and other damaging federal urban policies in contributing to the loss of billions of dollars of Black wealth.

It states that farmland once owned by Black farmers has routinely been absorbed by White owners and has often merged into larger estates that would attract the attention of Wall Street investors. "One historically significant example is Kiawah Island, South Carolina, known today for its luxurious resorts but previously home to Blacks after the Civil War when many formerly enslaved people acquired land there," the study states.

TARPLEY, from Page 15

of the children, especially if that relative has passed away."

You see, a family never really dies. It is like looking into the future and seeing the past at the same time. Precious moments like this would be missed if you failed to attend a family gathering without just cause.

I challenge you to ask other family members if they haven't found this to be true. One year my sister, Evangelist Ida Eggins, saw the likeness of her granddaughter in an old family picture of some cousins. She just had to have a copy of the picture. Also, two cousins, Jackie & Sharon, found that people were

commenting how much they looked alike and was sure that they were sisters, even though, at that time, they had never met at a family gathering.

Thought for this week: If the roots are deep and strong, the tree need not worry about the wind. Jeremiah 17:7 & 8 paraphrased.

(Editor's Note: This column originally ran in January 2012.)

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