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MUSLIM LAWMAKERS CONDEMN REPUBLICANS' INACTION AGAINST BOEBERT



Boebert's words are an attack on millions of American Muslims across this country, said Ilhan Omar, p3



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis introduced a budget that would create a militia. (Photo by Paul Hennessy/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis plans to establish a militia that answers solely to him

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis introduced a budget proposal on Thursday that includes plans to establish a militia that would answer solely to him.

Unlike the Florida National Guard, the Florida State Guard wouldn't receive federal funding or embark on federal missions.

DeSantis wants to use \$3.5 million of the \$100 million budget proposal to fund the state guard he said will "not be encumbered to the federal government."

The guard, made up of up to 200 volunteers, would support the Florida National Guard during state emergencies, the proposal says.

"The \$3.5 million to establish

the Florida State Guard will enable civilians to be trained in the best emergency response techniques. By establishing the Florida State Guard, Florida will become the 23rd state with a state guard recognized by the federal government."

DeSantis' proposal isn't completely outside of the norm. There are 22 states who currently have defense forces independent from the National Guard.

However, DeSantis' track record, including violently quelling protesters has some Democrats sounding the alarm over the governor's plan.

"No Governor should have his own handpicked secret police," said Rep. Charlie Crist, who represents Florida's 13th District in Congress.

CNN's Don Lemon blasted for not mentioning his role in Jussie Smollett drama

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CNN host Don Lemon is getting blasted for covering his pal Jussie Smollett's trial on his late-night show — without mentioning his own central role in tipping off the "Empire" star that he was being investigated by police.

As he took the stand Monday, Smollett, 39, had told the court that he first knew that police doubted his race-hate attack was real after getting a text message from Lemon, saying that was key in his decision not to hand his phone records over to cops.

The testimony quickly sparked comparisons between Lemon and his former CNN love—"brother" Chris Cuomo, who over the

weekend was fired for his own meddling in his brother Gov. Andrew Cuomo's sexual harassment scandal.

But while Cuomo refused to report on his brother's scandal, Lemon ended his Monday night show with a report on the latest news from the ex-"Empire" star's trial — with no mention of his own involvement.

He spoke on-air to CNN correspondent Omar Jimenez, who has been in court in Chicago covering the trial, promising "the very latest from the trial."

The pair then reported on Smollett's "really risky" decision to take the stand Monday, as well as the actor detailing his relationship with one of the men he is accused of hiring to stage his attack.

Omicron variant was in Europe before South Africa sounded alarm

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Dutch health authorities announced on Tuesday that they found the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus in cases dating back as long as 11 days, indicating that it was already spreading in western Europe before the first cases were identified in southern Africa. The RIVM health institute said it found Omicron in samples dating from November 19 and 23.

Those findings predate the positive cases found among passengers who came from South Africa last Friday and were tested at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport.

"It is not yet clear whether the people concerned [in the earlier cases] have also been to southern Africa," the RIVM said, adding that the individuals had been informed of their Omicron infections and that local health services had started contact tracing.

"In the coming period, various studies will be conducted into the distribution of the Omicron variant in the Netherlands," the institute said, noting that it would also re-examine more samples from previous COVID test results.

Belgium and Germany have also said that sample tests confirm the variant was in those countries before South African health officials alerted the world on November 24 to its existence.

South African scientists have been praised for first detecting the



People wait in front of an "Appointment Desk" for quarantine and COVID-19 test appointments inside Schiphol Airport, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on November 27, 2021. EVA PLEVIER/REUTERS

new variant and alerting global health authorities to it last week. But Omicron has now spread to about 20 other countries, and amid mounting concern that it could be significantly easier to pass from person to person, and that it could have at least some resistance to current treatments and vaccines, many nations have imposed travel restrictions on passengers from southern African nations.

South African politicians and scientists have said they feel as

though they're being punished for their advanced COVID-19 screening program, which caught the variant and enabled other nations to respond quickly to it, but has resulted in the travel bans which largely target southern African nations.

Japan and France confirmed their first cases of the new variant on Tuesday as countries around the world scrambled to close their doors, and scientists raced to test existing drugs against it.

Symone Sanders, VP Harris' Chief Spokesperson and Senior Advisor, plans to leave the Administration

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA

Symone Sanders, Vice President Kamala Harris' chief spokesperson and senior advisor, plans to leave the administration later this month.

"I'm so grateful to the VP for her vote of confidence from the very beginning and the opportunity to see what can be unburdened by what has been," Sanders wrote in a letter to Vice President Harris' staff.

"I'm grateful for Tina [Flournoy] and her leadership and confidence as well," Sanders continued.

"Every day, I arrived at the White House complex knowing our work made a tangible difference for Americans. I am immensely grateful and will miss working for her and with all of you."

In November, Ashley Etienne, who served as Vice President Harris' communications director, also stepped down. Prominent news reports suggested major issues between the White House and Vice President Harris' staff, but officials have dismissed such claims.

The daughter of Omaha Star Publisher Terri Sanders, Symone Sanders earned acclaim as "a

champion for women."

A seasoned political strategist, Sanders gained national prominence in 2016 as the National Press Secretary for U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders' then-presidential campaign.

At 25, she became the youngest presidential press secretary on record and was named to Rolling Stone Magazine's list of 16 young Americans shaping the 2016 election.

Sanders also worked as the principal of the 360 Group LLC, providing strategic communications guidance to organizations, businesses, individuals, campaigns and candidates and helps clients find sound solutions to tough political and social problems.

According to her biography, Sanders counts as "a communicator with a passion for juvenile justice," and served as the former chair of the Coalition of Juvenile Justice Emerging Leaders Committee and former member of the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice.

She worked diligently to raise the profile of young voices in the fight for juvenile justice reform and bring millennial perspectives



to policy conversations.

Sanders, 31, once worked as a political commentator for CNN and served in 2018 and 2019 as a resident fellow at Harvard's Institute of Politics at the Kennedy School and the University of Southern California's Center for the Political Future respectively.

"Symone has been working at the highest levels and in an extraordinarily intense environment for three years for Joe Biden and now Vice President Harris," Anita Dunn, a former top aide to President Joe Biden, said in a televised interview this week.

"When you look at the three years, two on the campaign, one in the White House, nobody can question her decision that she needs a break and it's time to move on. And she'll always be a member of the Biden-Harris family," Dunn asserted.

Muslim lawmakers condemn Republicans' inaction after Boebert's Islamophobic remarks

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) and André Carson (D-Ind.) came together to condemn Republican lawmakers' inaction after Rep. Lauren Boebert's (R-Colo.) repeated Islamophobic remarks against Omar.

"When a sitting member of Congress calls a colleague a member of the 'jihad squad' and falsifies a story to suggest I will blow up the Capitol, it is not just an attack on me but on millions of American Muslims across this country," Omar said Tuesday at a news conference demanding accountability from Republican House leadership.

In late November, Boebert joked to a crowd about Omar be-



ing a suicide bomber, referring to the Muslim lawmaker as the "jihad squad." And in September, Boebert suggested Omar was a terrorist at another event, saying: "She doesn't have a backpack, she wasn't dropping it and running, so we're good."

"Condemning this should not be a partisan issue," Omar said

Tuesday. "This is about our basic humanity and fundamental rights of religious freedom enshrined in our Constitution."

Omar urged Republican Party leaders to "hold their members accountable" and "do something to confront anti-Muslim hatred in its ranks."

African Americans, Democrats say they still support BLM movement

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire

Following a recent poll that showed support for the Black Lives Matter Movement waning, conversations have commenced over the continued relevancy of the campaign.

Researchers conducted by the national polling site, Civiqs revealed that 44 percent of Americans support the Black Lives Matter Movement, while 43 percent said they oppose the campaign.

Approximately 11 percent of respondents reported that they neither support nor oppose the campaign, which began in 2012 in response to a jury's decision to acquit George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin.

However, hidden in the details of the poll are subgroups that show the movement still enjoys the overall support of African Americans and Democrats.

Eighty-two percent of African Americans said they support the campaign, while just 7 percent oppose. While 60 percent of Hispanic/Latinos still support the Black Lives Matter Movement, 51 percent of white Americans oppose.

Just 3 percent of who identify as Republican support the movement, and 86 percent oppose. Democrat respondents support

the campaign by an 86 percent to 4 percent margin.

The movement's support appeared to peak in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd as global protests joined in the cry of Black Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation co-founder Patrisse Cullors resigned earlier this year following allegations she parlayed her part in the movement into a multi-million-dollar lifestyle that included purchasing several properties in various locations.

Shortly before Cullors' resignation, the foundation released a 2020 Impact Report that claimed it had raised more than \$90 million. Reportedly, 10 Black Lives Matter chapter leaders called for financial transparency and an independent investigation into spending funds. In addition, EBONY reported that the claims of "financial impropriety were a source of constant concern for several parents whose children had been killed by police in controversial shootings."

EBONY cited Tamika Palmer, whose daughter Breonna Taylor was killed by Louisville police as she slept in her home. Samaria Rice, whose 12-year-old son Tamir, was killed on a playground by a Cleveland police officer.

Each has come out publicly and denounced the Black Lives

Matter foundation and accused the organization of raising money off the blood of their children.

Michael Brown Sr., whose son Michael was walking home from a store unarmed and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, called for Black Lives Matter to donate \$20 million to non-profit organizations in Ferguson that are working to empower residents in exchange for the millions of dollars they raised in using his son's name and image.

Cullors has countered that all the financial purchases she has made have come from her income, including a multi-year television deal with Warner Brothers, a book deal, speaking engagements, and consulting services.

Entertainer Tyrone Evans Clarke said during protests he participated in following Floyd's murder, and he noticed many individuals willing to make sacrifices for the cause.

"It seems the U.S. doesn't respect Black and Brown people's lives," Clarke stated.

"Cops were attacking peaceful protestors with tear gas and rubber bullets, and that didn't help. On top of that, look how long it took to put Floyd's murderer behind bars. It feels like there is a knee on our necks every day just by being Black," he said.

Stacey Abrams governor run provides a jolt for the 2022 midterms

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire

In an announcement that has provided a jolt to the 2022 mid-term elections, Stacey Abrams said she's running for governor of the Peach State.

The race, which could mean a second dual between Abrams and Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, promises to catapult Democrats into the position of favorites.

A Democrat and noted voting rights advocate, Abrams lost to Kemp by just over one percentage point in their controversial 2018 battle.

Her activism helped Democrats claim the majority in the U.S. Senate when Georgia Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff defeated Republicans Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue in the January 2021 runoff election.

"I'm running because opportunity in our state shouldn't be determined by zip code, background, or access to power," Abrams declared.

"That's the job of the governor – to fight for one Georgia, our Georgia," Abrams exclaimed. "And now, it is time to get the job done."

Abrams's work since her 2018 loss to Kemp has received praise across the political spectrum. In 2019, she launched Fair Count and Fair Fight Action to encourage voter participation in elections and educate voters about elections and their voting rights.

The PAC brings awareness to the public on election reform, advocates for election reform at all levels, and engages in other voter education programs and communications.

"Voter suppression, particularly of voters of color and young



In addition to her many other achievements, Stacey Abrams broke the glass ceiling as the first Black woman to become the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the United States and as the first Black woman and first Georgian to deliver a Response to the State of the Union

voters, is a scourge our country faces in states across the nation," Abrams noted on her website.

She said Georgia's 2018 elections "shone a bright light on the issue with elections that were rife with mismanagement, irregularities, unbelievably long lines and more, exposing both recent and also decades-long actions and inactions by the state to thwart the right to vote."

"Fair Fight Action was founded to organize collective efforts to expose, mitigate, and reverse voter suppression. We engage in voter mobilization and education activities and advocate for progressive issues," Abrams continued.

Fair Fight PAC has initiated programs to support voter protection programs at state parties around the country and is engaging in partnerships to support and elect pro-voting rights progressive leaders.

Continued on page 4

Suspect in fatal shooting of Jacqueline Avant charged with murder

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Police found Clarence Avant cradling the head of Jackie, his wife of 54 years, who later died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Ariel Maynor, the man accused of killing Jacqueline Avant last week in her home during a botched home invasion, has officially been charged with her murder.

Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón is also charging Maynor, 29, with attempted murder for firing at a security guard inside Avant's Trousdale Estates, Calif., home, according to The Los Angeles Times.

"Mrs. Avant was a treasured member of our community. Her generosity and goodwill touched so many lives," Gascón said Monday. "My office is working closely with the Los Angeles and Beverly Hills police departments in the investigation and prosecution of this case. We must continue to work together to hold accountable the people who commit violent crimes against our community."

More details emerged in the



Jacqueline Avant (left) and Clarence Avant (right) attend Netflix's world premiere of "The Black Godfather" at the Paramount Theater in June 2019, in Los Angeles. (Photo: Charley Gally/Getty Images)

case this week, including that Avant, 81, was shot three times in the abdomen after Maynor entered her family's home by breaking a sliding glass door with a rock.

Her husband, acclaimed music executive Clarence Avant, 90, reportedly did not see the shooting, but he heard an argument followed by the gunfire.

Additionally, The L.A. Times is reporting that when police entered the home, they found Mr. Avant cradling the head of Jackie, his wife of 54 years, who later died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.



Woods shut down questions about his car crash in first public appearance since accident

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Tiger Woods made his first public appearance since his single-car accident in February and refused to answer any questions related to the crash.

On Tuesday, Woods appeared for a press conference at the Albany Golf Club in Nassau, Bahamas and spoke on his healing process over the last nine months. The golf champion made it clear that he wanted to put any reminder of the February 23 crash behind him, NY Post reports.

"This year is a year I'd like to turn the page on," Woods said.

When asked what he remembered about the accident, the first place PGA tour winner shut down the prying and let it be known that he would not be reliving the traumatic experience.

"Yeah, all those answers have been answered in the investigation, so you can read about all that there in the post report," he said.

Woods suffered multiple injuries to his leg due to the "high-speed" single-car crash that took place just outside Los Angeles earlier this year. At the time, Woods had to undergo extensive surgery that included stabilizing his leg by inserting a rod into the tibia, Golf Digest reports. Screws and pins were also used to stabilize the bones in Wood's foot and ankle.

During the press conference, Woods explained how challenging the recovery process has been for him and all the work he still has to do.

"This one's been much more difficult," Woods said. "The knee stuff that I had on my left knee ... those operations were one thing, that's one level. Then you add the back, that's another level. And then with this right leg, that was ... it's hard to explain how difficult it has been just to be immobile for the three months, just lay there and I was just looking forward to getting outside."



Stacey Abrams governor run provides a jolt for the 2022 midterms

From page 3

After serving for eleven years in the Georgia House of Representatives, seven as Democratic Leader, in 2018, Abrams became the Democratic nominee for Governor of Georgia, winning more votes than any other Democrat in the state's history.

She broke the glass ceiling as the first Black woman to become the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the United States and as the first Black woman and first Georgian to deliver a Response to the

State of the Union.

"It's a very humbling experience to know that if I win this election, I would have achieved something that Black women as far back as Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm has fought about, not necessarily the same job, but transforming how we think about leadership in America and physically claiming that mantle of leadership and holding it signals that anything is possible, and we can re-define what leadership looks like and who we can lift up," Abrams said in a 2018 interview with the BI



The pedestal that once held the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee stands empty on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Va., Tuesday, Sept. 14, 2021. The pedestal has been covered in graffiti, with some describing it as a work of protest art that should be left in place. (AP Photo/Steve Helber, File)

Northam to remove Lee statue pedestal, transfer land to city

Philadelphiaobserver.com

The Lee statue was one of five enormous Confederate tributes along Richmond's Monument Avenue.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam announced Sunday that his administration will remove an enormous pedestal that until earlier this year held a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond.

The announcement marks a reversal in course from September,


when the statue was removed but the Democratic governor said the 40-foot-tall (12-meter-tall) pedestal, currently covered in graffiti, would stay.


His administration also announced plans to transfer ownership of the grassy island in the middle of a traffic circle where the statue was located to the city of Richmond. The move comes about a month before Northam leaves office and Republican Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin, who has expressed less enthusiasm

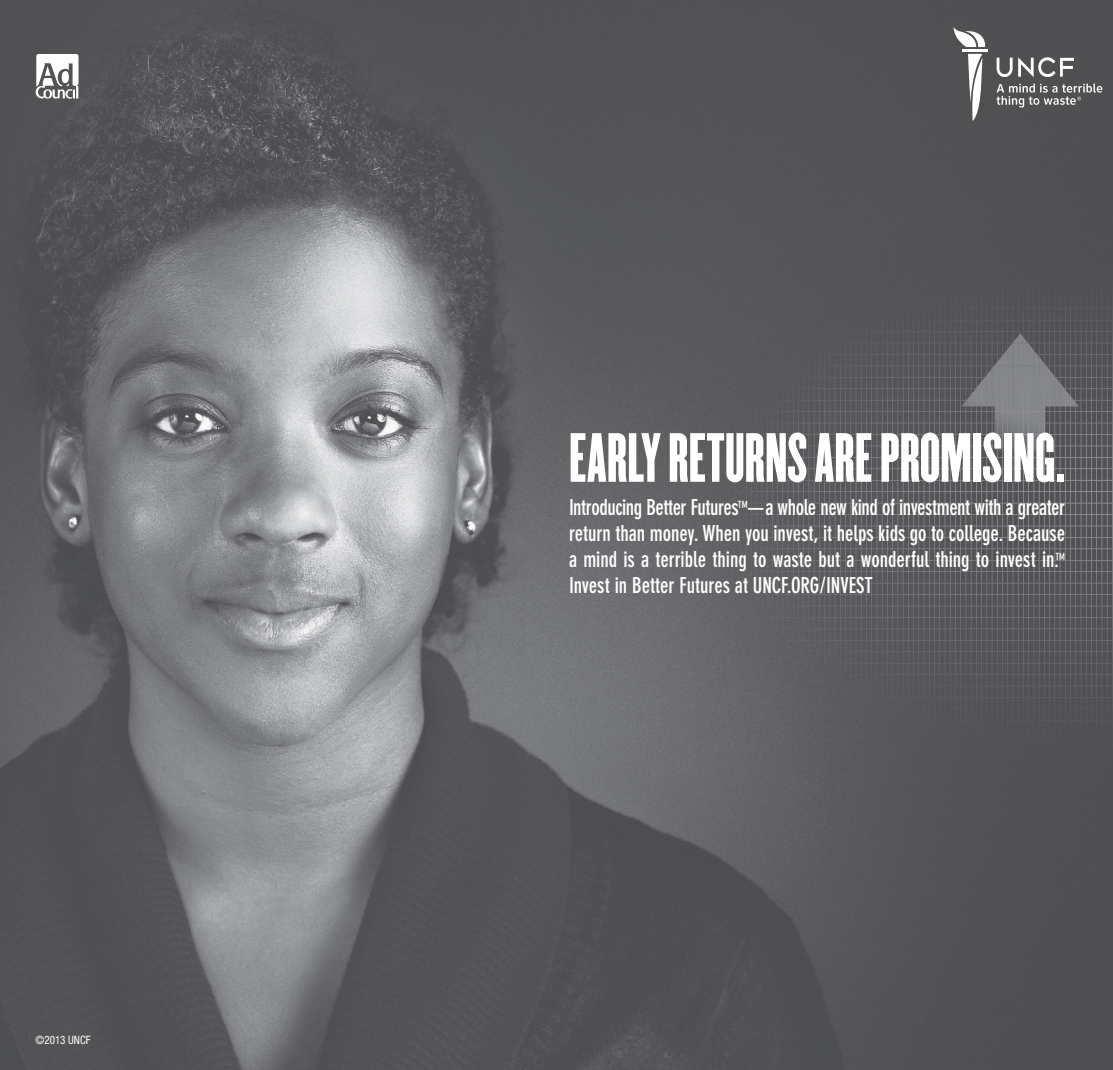
about the statue's removal, is sworn in.

"It was important to us that we do it now and before we leave office," said Alena Yarmosky, Northam's spokeswoman.

The deeding of the land, which was given to the commonwealth in the 19th century, was a request from the city so that the parcel could come under local control, Yarmosky said. State ownership has created logistical headaches with maintenance and security, she said.








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Editorial - Opinion

Calling all entrepreneurs, innovators for contracting opportunities

By U.S Small Business Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman

Last week, ahead of Small Business Saturday, I stopped by Lee's Flowers on historic U Street in Washington, D.C. – the oldest Black-owned florist in the city. During my visit, I picked up a beautiful floral arrangement and joined millions of Americans who shopped small this weekend to support our local economies.

Together, we contributed a record \$23.3 billion to Main Street businesses across the nation –

which was a more than \$4 billion increase over last year's Small Business Saturday. Every time we choose to shop small, dine small or entertain small we're helping to power America's greatest economic engine.

Small businesses create two-thirds of net new jobs and generate more than 40% of our economic output. With their creativity and grit, they define our neighborhoods and build thriving communities in every corner of our nation. At the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), we're working to nurture their economic po-

tential to deliver an equitable and sustainable economic recovery.

Under the leadership of President Joe Biden, we've partnered across the federal government to take "shopping small" to a whole new level by transforming how the U.S. government—the world's largest buyer—spends billions of America's tax dollars on goods and services each year.

An equitable federal procurement strategy that prioritizes small, disadvantaged businesses will help level the playing field and rebuild our economy from the bottom up and the middle out.



I asked what kind of family

Denise, adopted 17-year-old Amina



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Mother of accused Michigan school shooter praised President Trump for stance on gun rights in 2016 blog post

Philadelphiaobserver.com

The mother of a sophomore student accused of opening fire inside his Michigan high school previously wrote an open letter to former President Donald Trump praising his support for the Second Amendment.

Ethan Crumbley on Wednesday was charged as an adult with two dozen crimes — including murder, attempted murder and terrorism causing death — in connection with the massacre inside Oxford High School. Authorities said the attack unfolded over the course of just five minutes Tuesday afternoon, during which four people were fatally shot and seven more wounded.

Tate Myre, 16; Madisyn Bald-

win, 17; Hana St. Juliana, 14, and Justin Shilling, 17, were left dead in wake of the shooting.

The weapon used to carry out the violence, a 9-mm semi-automatic handgun, was legally purchased just days earlier by the 15-year-old's father during a Black Friday shopping trip. His family is seemingly adamant supporters of the right to possess firearms and guns, evidenced by a blog post uncovered by the Daily Beast reportedly written by Crumbley's mother about Trump.

"As a female and a Realtor, thank you for allowing my right to bear arms. Allowing me to be protected if I show a home to someone with bad intentions," she wrote in November 2016. "Thank you respecting that Amendment."



Mostly white jury chosen for Kim Potter trial in the death of Daunte Wright

Philadelphiaobserver.com

A mostly white jury has been chosen in the trial of former Minnesota Officer Kim Potter over the shooting death of Daunte Wright. Although split evenly by gender, nine jurors are white, two are Asian and only one is Black, all ranging in age from their 20s to 60s.

According to USA Today, the jurors had to answer a questionnaire before being chosen. All the jurors answered that they knew of the case because of media coverage and many said that they had already seen the body camera footage. Five jurors said they had a negative view of both Potter and Wright.

Daunte Wright was fatally shot and killed during a traffic stop in a Minneapolis suburb

after Potter says she mistakenly used her gun instead of her taser on April 11. Potter resigned two days after the shooting. She was charged with first and second degree manslaughter.

According to NBC News, Minnesota's sentencing guidelines call for minimums of over seven years for first-degree manslaughter and four years for second degree manslaughter, but prosecutors said they're looking for heftier sentences.

The defense used all five of their peremptory challenges, which means they can dismiss a juror without reason, and the state used all of three of theirs.

From NBC:

The defense on Thursday used one of its peremptory challenges to dismiss a first-year law student who has made com-

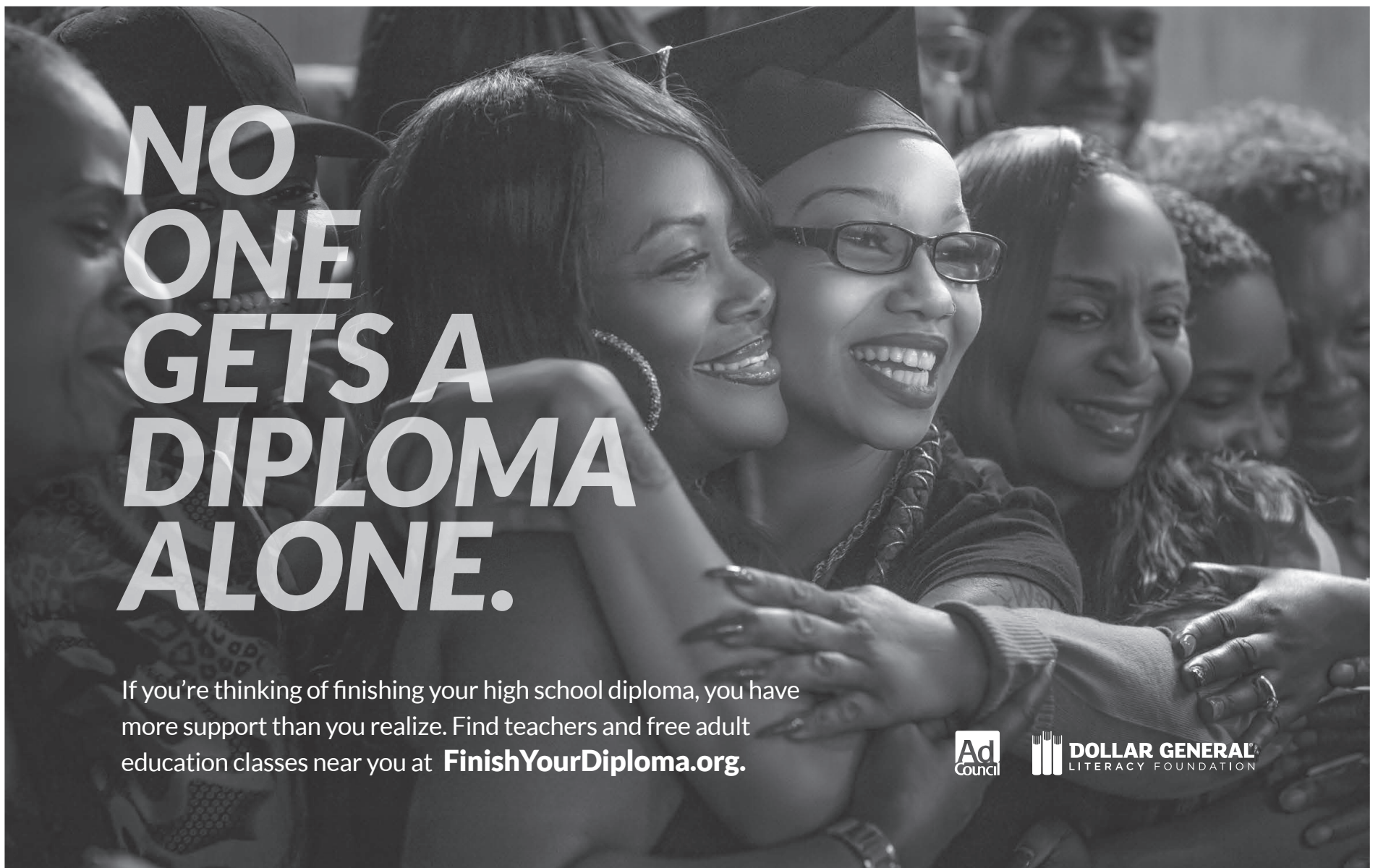
ments on social media about cases in which police officers have been convicted. Such challenges cannot be made solely because of a person's race, ethnicity or gender, and prosecutor Matthew Frank objected to the dismissal of the law student, an Asian woman.

Judge Regina Chu dismissed Frank's objection, ruling there was no evidence that the defense strike was based on race or gender.

One of the jurors seated the first day was recalled for questioning Thursday after Chu said he had expressed concerns that his identity was revealed when he was first questioned. The jury is anonymous by order of the judge. The man remained on the jury after he told Chu he was willing to continue serving.

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Reel

Steven Spielberg's 'West Side Story' garners rave reviews & Oscar buzz

By Audrey J. Bernard

The world premiere of Academy Award winner Steven Spielberg's long-awaited reimagined West Side Story took place on Monday, November 29, 2021, at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City. The reimagining of the beloved musical tells the story of two New York City teens who fall in love, despite having affiliations with rival street gangs. Spielberg was joined on the red

carpet along with his leading cast members Ansel Elgort, Ariana DeBose, David Alvarez, Mike Faist, Corey Stoll, and Rita Moreno who also executive produced; along with Brian d'Arcy James, Josh Andrés Rivera and Rachel Zegler. Also in attendance: screenwriter and executive producer Tony Kushner, producers Kristie Macosko Krieger and Kevin McCollum and choreographer Justin Peck.

Poignantly directed by Spielberg from a screenplay by Pulitzer

Prize and Tony Award winner Tony Kushner, "West Side Story" tells the classic tale of fierce rivalries and young love in 1957 New York City. Although everyone was happy that the movie was finally going to be released after a 2 year delay because of Covid, the death of Stephen Sondheim overshadowed the festivities. However, Spielberg's moving tribute to Sondheim lifted the crowd.

"Stephen was a big part of the making of our film 'West Side

Story,' from the earliest screenplay drafts to every recording session, which Steve attended without fail. Listening with his eyes closed, he'd sway, he'd swoon or he'd grimace and flinch. So, I caught myself watching myself watching Steve's expressions sometimes more than the actors, because they perfectly reflected what everyone was doing."

"West Side Story" was released nationwide by Disney on December 10 to rave reviews.



Ansel Elgort and Rachel Zegler star in Steven Spielberg's 'West Side Story' (Photo courtesy 20th Century Studios)



Scene from West Side Story (Courtesy 20th Century Studios)



Cast and creative team for 'West Side Story' at the New York Premiere (Getty Images for 20th Century Studios)



Cast of West Side Story (Photo courtesy 20th Century Studios)



Rita Moreno and Steven Spielberg at the New York premiere of 'West Side Story' (Getty Images for 20th Century Studios)




Leading cast (L-R) Ansel Elgort, Rachel Zegler, Steven Spielberg, Rita Moreno, Ariana DeBose and David Alvarez attend the New York premiere of 'West Side Story' (Photo by Getty Images for 20th Centu)



Ariana DeBose, Steven Spielberg and Rachel Zegler attend the 'West Side Story' premiere in New York (Photo by Charles Sykes-Invision-AP)

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U. S. decision to impose restrictions on African visitors called ‘Travel Apartheid’

(GIN) –

Southern African countries are facing new travel restrictions after the discovery of a handful of coronavirus variants, first found in Botswana. For some African leaders, it's the classic case of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

"Despite the repeated warnings of health leaders," declared former British prime minister Gordon Brown, "our failure to put vaccines into the arms of people in the developing world is now coming back to haunt us. We were forewarned – and yet here we are."

"We are concerned that there seem to have been attempts to stigmatize the country where it was detected," said Botswana Health Minister Edwin Dikoloti while criticizing derogatory reports of a so-called "Botswana variant".

South Africa will remain on the lowest 'Level One' of its five-level lockdown strategy to fight the Covid-19 pandemic despite the global panic around the detection of the Omicron variant in the country, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced.

Ramaphosa also called on more than 20 countries that have imposed travel bans to and from South Africa and its neighbors to immediately end the ban to avoid further harm to the economies of these countries, which have already been battered by the pandemic.

"The only thing the prohibition on travel will do is to further damage the economies of the affected countries and undermine their ability to respond to, and recover from, the pandemic," he added.

Matshidiso Moeti, regional director for Africa for the World Health Organization, also criticized travel curbs and called on countries to follow science and international health regulations in order to avoid such measures.

Shabir Madhi, a South African vaccinologist, told Al Jazeera it was "naive" for countries "to believe they can stop the spread of this variant with a blanket ban on countries in southern Africa".

"The virus has already found its way into these societies from individuals that haven't even travelled to or come into contact with anyone from southern Africa," he said. "In South Africa, we have one of



Covid testing in Namibia.

the globe's best COVID sequencing capacities based on our experience with treating HIV and TB. We have been ahead of the game for a while now and we are thus a victim of our success."

In the absence of mass vaccination, Covid is not only spreading

uninhibited among unprotected people but is mutating, with new variants now threatening to unleash themselves on even fully vaccinated people in the richest countries of the world.

As the new variant was spotted Saturday in Britain, Germany and

Italy, one country after another shut their doors to southern Africa.

Countries slapped with new travel restrictions by the UK include South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Angola.

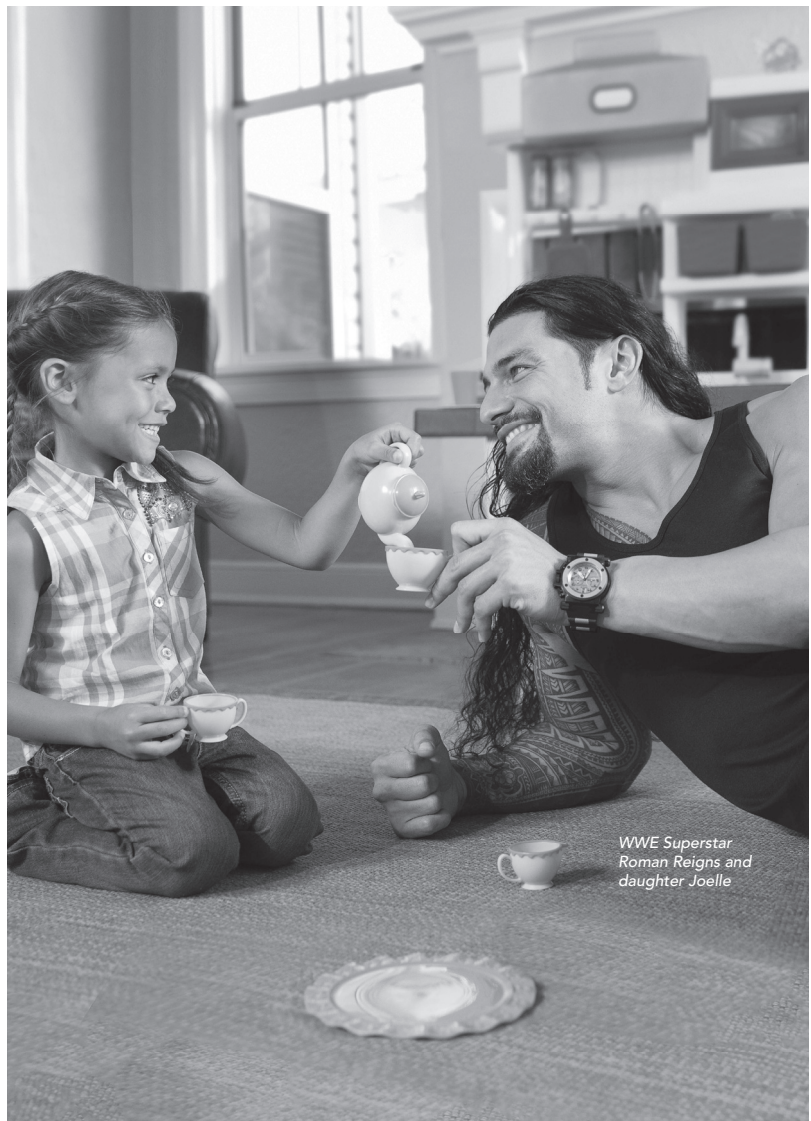


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Audra McDonald producing doc on young Whitney Houston

Philadelphiaobserver.com

A new documentary will show a different side of late singer Whitney Houston. Per Deadline, Whitney Houston in Focus highlights the young Whitney before she became a superstar.

Directed by Benjamin Alfonsi, the film is based on a book by photographer Bette Marshall, who the Houston family allowed to follow Whitney's early career.

Six time Tony winning Broadway legend Audra McDonald is executive producing and narrating the documentary.

"Whitney Houston is an artist I worshipped from the moment I first heard her sing. Her voice was simply miraculous and her artistry was perfection," McDonald said. "We all witnessed her superstardom, and I'm honored to help tell this part of Whitney's story, before it all began."

Silk Sonic recreates 'Soul Train' set for Soul Train Awards performance

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak recently released "An Evening with Silk Sonic," their debut album, and are now making the rounds.

Supergroup Silk Sonic, whose sound is inspired by the soul music of the 1970s, gave a rousing performance during Sunday night's airing of the 2021 Soul Train Awards.

The duo of Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak, performed "Fly as Me" early in the broadcast and returned later to perform "Smokin

Out the Window."

During "Fly as Me," they donned white jackets and black pants, adding seductive choreography to their performance in front of an audience of '70s-inspired dancers.

The set — which recreated the iconic Soul Train television show surroundings — even featured the memorable jumble board. Vulture reports that it's been previously duplicated for the first Charlie's Angels movie, as well as the video for "Walk It, Talk It," by Migos featuring Drake.

Mars and .Paak released their

debut album An Evening with Silk Sonic earlier this month. They are making the rounds on the awards-show circuit, having performed at The American Music Awards last week.

Silk Sonic evolved as a group after .Paak opened for Mars on the European leg of his 24K Magic World Tour. According to Rolling Stone, the two friends formed the group as a joke on the road. After the success of their first single, "Leave the Door Open," they began to take things a little more seriously.



The superduo Silk Sonic, made up of Anderson .Paak (front left) and Bruno Mars (right), gave a rousing performance during Sunday night's airing of the "2021 Soul Train Awards." (Photo: Screenshot/BET)



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International

Barbados officially declares Rihanna a national hero

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Rihanna may already be the queen of many things, but now she's officially a national hero.

Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley awarded the singer, beauty mogul and philanthropist with the honor of National Hero of Barbados during an overnight ceremony Monday night where the country was declared a republic for the first time.

"On behalf of a grateful nation, but an even prouder people, we therefore present to you the designee for National Hero of Barbados, Ambassador Robyn Rihanna Fenty," Mottley said at the event, held in Bridgetown, the nation's capital.

The prime minister then referenced Rihanna's 2012 song "Diamonds," telling the singer: "May you continue to shine like a diamond, and bring honor to your nation, by your words, by your actions and to do credit wherever you shall go."

Rihanna, whose full name is Robyn Rihanna Fenty, was born in the St. Michael parish in Barbados. Over the years, the country has celebrated and recognized the extraordinary influence and philanthropy of the nine-time Grammy Award winner.

In 2018, Rihanna was appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary for Barbados. Ten years prior to that, she'd been appointed as one of the country's



Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley awards Rihanna with the honor of National Hero during a ceremony to declare Barbados a republic in Bridgetown, Barbados, Nov. 30. RANDY BROOKS VIA GETTY IMAGES

cultural ambassadors.

Rihanna in 2012 founded the Clara Lionel Foundation, which supports and funds education, health and emergency response programs around the world. She received Harvard University's humanitarian

of the year award in 2017.

Harvard recognized her at the time for funding the "construction of a state-of-the-art center for oncology and nuclear medicine to diagnose and treat breast cancer at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in

Bridgetown."

Monday's overnight ceremony in Bridgetown marked Barbados' new status as a republic, concurrent with its 55th Independence Day on Nov. 30. The country officially removed the U.K.'s Queen

Elizabeth as its head of state, though it remains part of the Commonwealth.

Governor General Sandra Mason, who was elected the first president of Barbados last month, was sworn in early Tuesday.

Ghanaian actress gets prison time for posting nude pic with son

Philadelphiaobserver.com

AGhanaian actress will go to prison (for 90 days) for taking a nude photo with her son on his 7th birthday, according to reports.

After her appeal was denied Wednesday, Rosemond Brown — known as Akuapem Poloo — shared a post on Instagram: "SON I LOVE YOU AND GOD IS WITH YOU

ALWAYS YOU KNOW ... BE GOOD TILL MUMMY COMES BACK ... GOD IS IN CONTROL ALWAYS."

"The court is bothered with posting nude photos on social media. There is no doubt that apart from the canker of rape, defilement, physical assault, the publication of obscene materials is on the increase," Judge Christina Cann ruled in April, according to the agency Newsflash. "A



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Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater raises over \$1.7 million at 2021 Anniversary Gala

By Audrey J. Bernard
Society Editor

New York City Center's Principal Dance Company and America's beloved cultural ambassador to the world, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, kicked off its highly anticipated three-week homecoming season — December 1 to 19, 2021 — with glitz, glamour and dance! AAADT's long-awaited program, which was delayed due to the pandemic, put Ailey back on stage captivating audiences with its breathtaking dance style. The stellar #Reunited-WeDance Opening Night Gala Benefit welcomed back the revered

dance company with a fabulous evening of elegance and dance!

The special stellar program included a one-night-only performance of Ailey Ailey's Artistic Director Robert Battle's tour-de-force duet "Ella" featuring live music; Company member Clifton Brown and students from The Ailey School in the jazzy 'Bird' Lives!; Battle's exuberant Love Stories finale; and Alvin Ailey's timeless masterpiece, "Revelations," followed by a festive dinner dance at the plush Ziegfeld Ballroom where guests dined and danced the night away with live music. The event raised over \$1.7 million which will support the creation

of new works, scholarships for talented students at The Ailey School, and Ailey's innovative educational programs for children.

The exquisite evening was attended by many A-listers from the worlds of entertainment, business, sports, philanthropy and politics including Dario Calmese, gymnast Nia Dennis, Jillian Hervey (Lion Babe), Sunny Hostin, Freddie Jackson, Harry Lennix, Ally Love, Julia Stiles, Pose's Ryan Jamaal Swain, Lorraine Toussaint, Danielle Moné Truitt ("Law & Order: Organized Crime"), Jamila Wignot ("AILEY" director), Larry Wilmore, Ricardo A. Zayas ("West Side Story") and many more.

The Opening Night Gala Benefit was co-chaired by Emily & Len Blavatnik, Paulette Mullings Bradnock & Howard Bradnock, Daria L. & Eric J. Wallach, Joan & Sandy Weill, and Pamela D. Zilly & John H. Schaefer. Vice chairs were Jill & Gunther Bright and Anthony A. Lewis.

The Ailey magic continues to be recognized for excellence. On Monday, December 6, 2021, at 7:30pm, Artistic Director Robert Battle will receive the prestigious 2021 Dance Magazine Awards for the artistry, integrity and resiliency demonstrated over the course of his career. Presented by the legendary Judith Jamison, with

a special performance of Battle's gripping solo In/Side performed by Ailey's dancer, Yannick Lebrun, the awards ceremony will be held at Works & Process at the Guggenheim in New York City and simultaneously livestreamed.

Throughout the New York City Center engagement, Ailey's remarkable artists will unveil two premieres, four new productions and a variety of returning favorites, classics, and special programs. The Company will dance from coast to coast on a National Tour to over 20 cities from January–May 2022. For more information, please visit alvinailey.org. (Photos by Christopher Duggan)



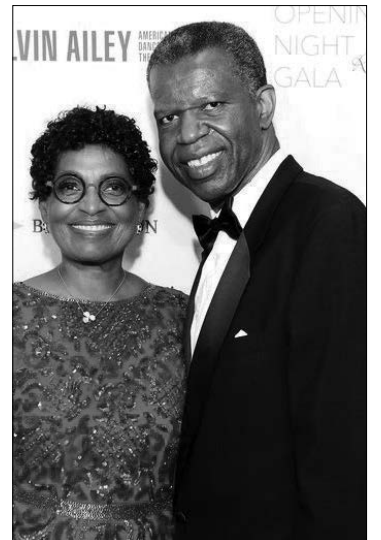
Aerial view of Ailey's 2021 Opening Night Gala reception at Ziegfeld Ballroom



Board Chairman and Gala Co-Chair Daria Wallach greets guests onstage at Opening Night Gala



AAADT in Alvin Ailey's Revelations



Gala Co-Chairs Paulette and Howard Bradnock



Former AAADT Artistic Director Judith Jamison



New York City Center President & CEO Arlene Shuler



Artistic Director Robert Battle welcomes guests onstage at New York City Center 2021 Opening Night Gala



Former Associate Artistic Director Masazumi Chaya, Former dancer Elizabeth Roxas and Marc Manigault



Former Ailey School student Ally Love and The Ailey School co-director Melanie Person



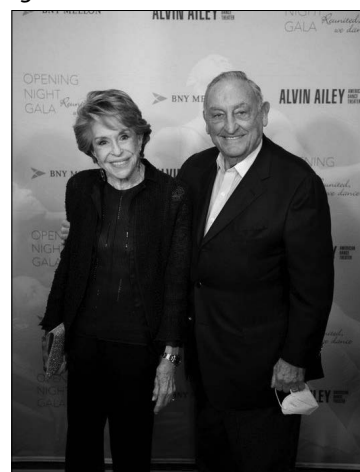
AAADT in Robert Battle's excerpt from Love Stories



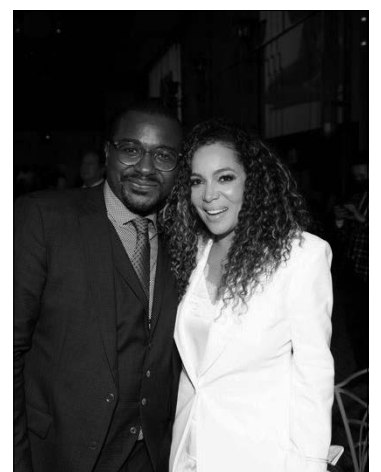
Executive Director Bennett Rink and Artistic Director Robert Battle (Photo by Donna Ward)



Ailey Executive Director Bennett Rink, Board Chairman and Gala co-chair Daria L. Wallach, and Artistic Director Robert Battle

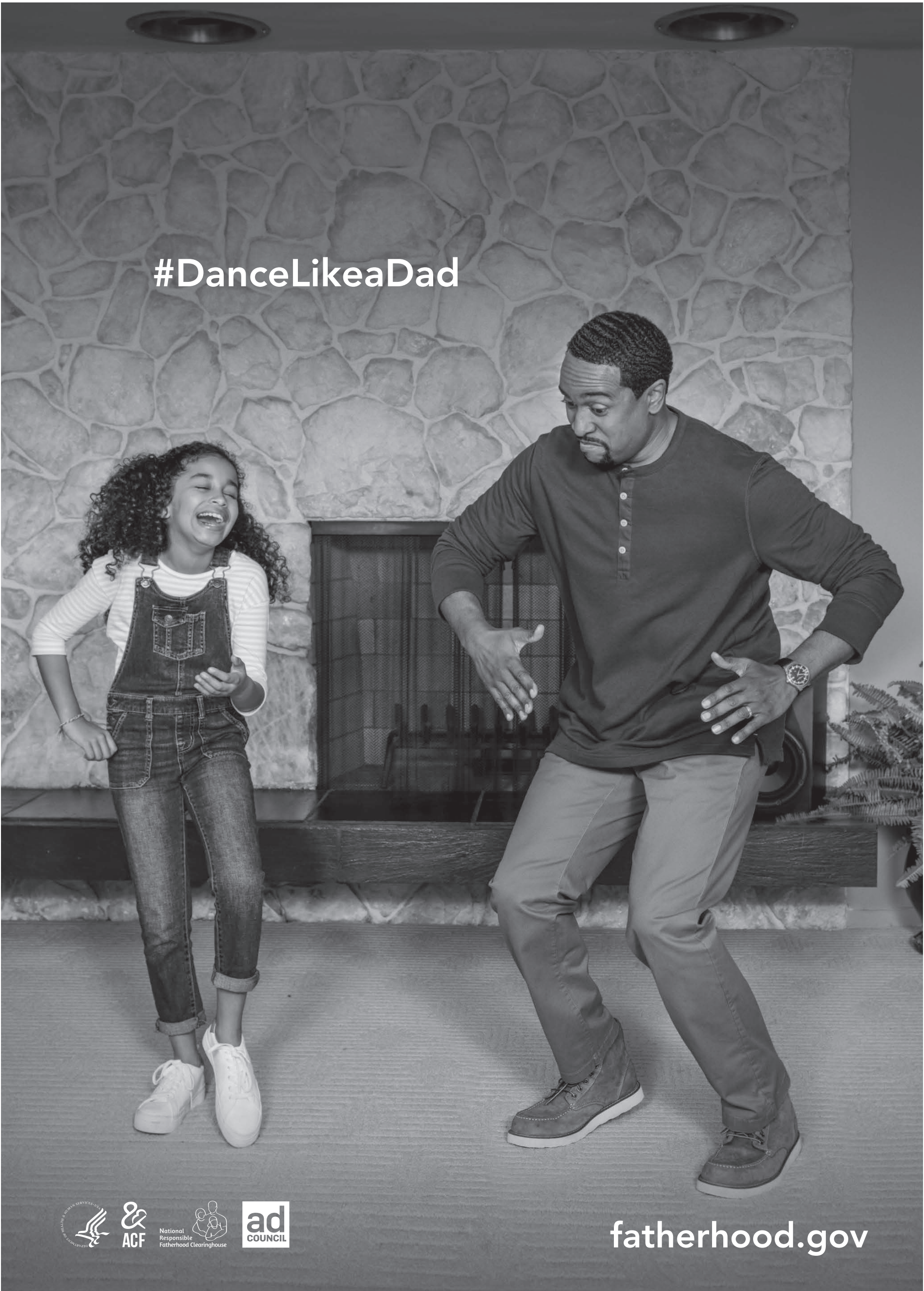


Gala Co-Chairs Joan and Sandy Weill



Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle and Sunny Hostin

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