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JUDGE REJECTS PROUD BOYS

FIRST AMENDMENT CLAIM



A Trump-appointed judge in Washington is the fourth judge to uphold obstruction of an official proceeding charge rejecting a motion to dismiss charges against the four Proud Boys leaders based on the First Amendment.

Happy New Year!



U.S. could soon see 1M COVID cases a day, says departing NIH Director

(TriceEdneyWire.com)

The U.S. could see one million coronavirus cases per day amid the recent omicron-fueled surge if Americans aren't proactive about preventative measures, warned retiring National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins.

Collins, during an appearance Sunday on National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition," cautioned against getting lax amid COVID fatigue.

"I know people are tired of this," Collins said, Axios reported. "I'm

tired of it too, believe me. But the virus is not tired of us."

The omicron variant, which has now been detected in 89 countries, has fueled worldwide spikes in cases. In some areas with community spread, cases have doubled every 1.5 to 3 days, according to the World Health Organization.

"We do not know what this virus is capable of doing," Collins said, Axios reported. "And even if it has a somewhat lower risk of severity, we could be having a million cases a day if we're not really attentive to all of those mitigation strategies."

Kim Potter's alleged remorse missing from smiling mugshot after conviction for killing Daunte Wright

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Kim Potter's new smiling mugshot following her convictions on Thursday for the first- and second-degree manslaughter killing of Daunte Wright provided even more reason to doubt the sincerity of the former Minnesota cop's histrionics during her emotional testimony during the trial.

The jury that decided Potter's fate apparently found her excuse for purportedly mistaking her Taser for an actual gun to be equally if not more implausible than her unconvincing dramatics while alleging remorse for the preventable shooting that took the life of a 20-year-old Black man who had been stopped for a minor traffic infraction.

Potter's mugshot — which

shows her smiling broadly; showing teeth, even — drew a glaring contrast between her countenance while she was testifying in her own defense last week. The difference was more than enough to suggest it was tantamount to confirmation the 49-year-old was acting on the stand, just like she also must have been acting in the immediate moments after shooting Wright on April 11, people suggested on social media.

The reason for being suspecting Potter's feigned remorse was clear: how could someone go from sobbing about being "sorry that it happened" six days earlier before pivoting to smiling shortly after being convicted for two serious felonies that carry prison time of up to 25 years and \$50,000 in fines?



How it's going vs. how it started for Kim Potter. | Source: Hennepin County Sheriff and Court TV screenshot

New NASA space telescope is a 'Christmas gift to humanity'

Philadelphiaobserver.com

NASA gave the gift that will keep on giving for generations. Saturday marked the launch of the James Webb Space

Telescope, an event 25 years in the making.

"Merry Christmas! We got you a new telescope," tweeted NASA. "The James Webb Space Telescope launched today, beginning a one-

million-mile journey to see 13.5 billion years into the past. Follow @NASAWebb and join the quest to #UnfoldTheUniverse: <https://go.nasa.gov/3qHIEKT>."

It has taken 25 years of planning and preparation for the James Webb Space Telescope to finally reach this moment. According to NASA, the revolutionary design of the telescope is constructed so that it will be able to detect past phases of "cosmic history." The most powerful telescope ever launched, The Webb Space Telescope will document the origins of the known universe and some of the most distant galaxies of its earlier iteration.

"The launch of the Webb Space Telescope is a pivotal moment — this is just the beginning for the Webb mission," Gregory L. Robinson, Webb's program director at NASA Headquarters, said in a statement. "Now, we will watch Webb's highly anticipated and critical 29 days on the edge. When the spacecraft unfurls in space, Webb will undergo the most difficult and complex deployment sequence ever attempted in space. Once commissioning is complete, we will see awe-inspiring images that will capture our imagination."



South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu dies at age 90

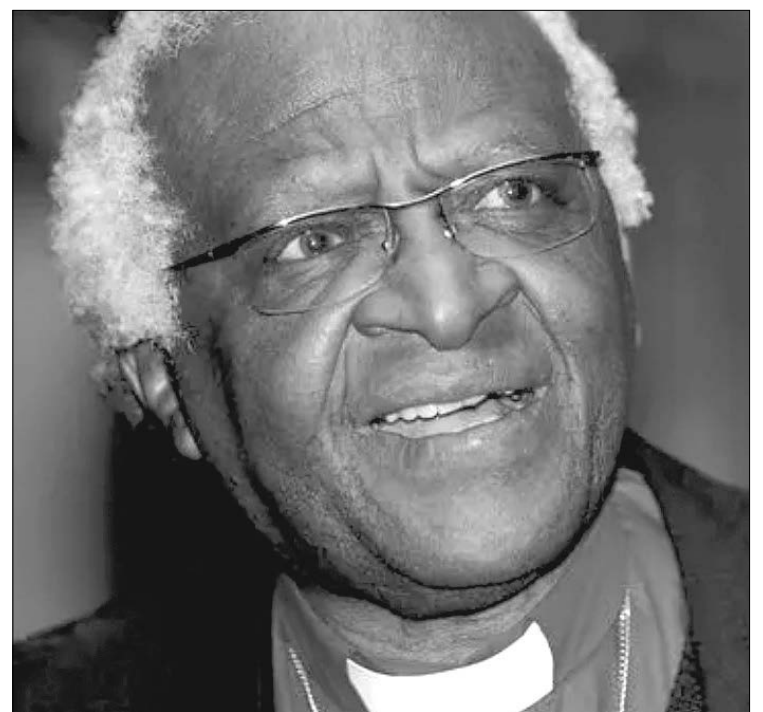
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South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu died on Dec. 26 at the age of 90. His passing was announced in a statement by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday. Tutu was one of the world's most well-known religious leaders, moral authorities and anti-racist advocates.

A religious and political leader of the anti-apartheid struggle and beyond

Born Desmond Mpilo Tutu in 1931, he became an Anglican deacon in 1960 and priest in 1961 before being named the first Black bishop of Johannesburg in 1984 and then archbishop of Cape Town in 1986. He also served as secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches from 1978-1985, using this platform to vocally oppose apartheid; Tutu also co-founded the United Democratic Alliance. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 "for his role as a unifying leader figure in the non-violent campaign to resolve the problem of apartheid in South Africa."

Tutu was allies and friends with Nelson Mandela, the famed South African anti-apartheid advocate and eventual Nobel Peace Prize winner. After first meeting as young men in the 1950s, Tutu and Mandela would not see each other face to face for nearly 40 years until Mandela was released from prison in 1990. It was Tutu



who accompanied Mandela for his first public speech in 1990 and stood next to him as Mandela was sworn in as the first democratically elected president of South Africa in 1994.

In turn, Mandela appointed Archbishop Tutu to head the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, leading them to exercise an ethic of restorative justice that maintained peace in South Africa and became a model for similar processes around the world. Tutu formally resigned his

post as archbishop in 1996 to lead the commission, though he was later named archbishop emeritus of Cape Town. Later in life, Tutu was a founding member and the first Chair of the Elders, a group of prominent world leaders drawn together by Mandela to intervene in some of the most challenging crises facing the world. Under Tutu's leadership, the Elders promoted dialogue between conflicting sides of conflicts such as those between Israel and Palestine and Sudan and South Sudan.

Biden's promise for diverse judges and federal court diversity

By Ben Jealous

Opinion

One of the most important reasons to vote Donald Trump out of the White House was to stop him from packing our federal courts with even more anti-voting-rights, anti-equality, pro-corporate judges. Stopping the flood of bad Trump judges was a huge accomplishment for every organizer and voter who helped elect Joe Biden as president. And that's only part of the good news. President Biden is making history with the most diverse set of judicial nominees ever.

President Trump's judicial nominees were overwhelmingly white men, often young and unqualified. They were almost always picked for their commitment to a right-wing judicial ideology that makes it harder for millions of Americans to count on the courts for justice. Thanks to Trump and his Republican enablers in the Senate, we will be dealing with hundreds of those judges for years to come.

Elections matter. Right now, instead of more judges hand-picked by right-wing legal activists and their corporate allies, President Biden is making good on his promise to bring greater diversity to our federal courts. Biden is naming far more brilliant Black judges and women judges than any other president — including Barack Obama.

Let's look at some numbers. Because they are impressive.

More than 30 percent of Biden's judicial nominees so far have been Black. Fewer than 5

percent of Trump's judicial picks were Black.

More than a quarter of Biden's judicial nominees have been Black women. Under Trump, it was less than one percent. In fact, almost half of President Biden's judicial nominees are women of color.

Biden has been in office for less than a year, and he has already doubled the number of Black women judges on the circuit courts — the highest level of federal courts below the Supreme Court. Trump named zero Black judges to the circuit courts; nearly 40 percent of Biden's circuit court nominees have been Black.

There's also a lot more diversity in Biden nominees' life experiences and professional backgrounds. They aren't all corporate lawyers and law professors. Almost one-third of them have had experience as public defenders. Some of them have worked at respected civil rights organizations. Some have devoted their legal careers to protecting and representing workers. One started her career at the Legal Aid Society.

This is how we get federal courts that represent all of us, not just the most privileged and powerful.

And that brings us back to elections. President Biden has been able to get his nominees confirmed — more lifetime judges at this point in his term in office since Gerald Ford — because voters in Georgia elected Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff.

If Republicans still held a Senate majority, Mitch McConnell would be slow-walking and stopping Biden's judicial nomi-

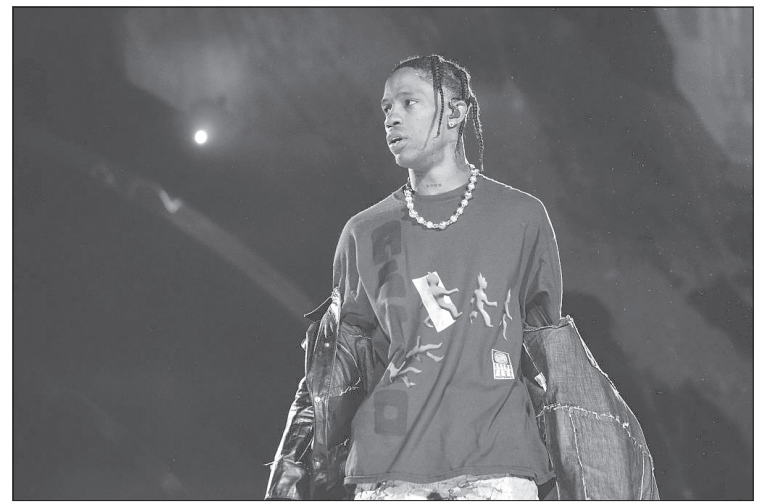
nees. When Trump was in power, McConnell laughed and bragged about how he kept so many of President Obama's nominees from getting confirmed so that Trump would have lots of vacancies to fill.

McConnell would love to regain the power to block Biden's judicial nominees. He would love to return to his practice of refusing to schedule hearings and votes on even the most qualified judges. He would love to abuse his power to keep hundreds of judicial seats vacant in the hopes that Trump or some other Republican will take back the White House in 2024. And bring back the flood of white, right-wing men determined to impose their ideology on the federal courts and on all of us.

We can't let that happen.

Let's praise the good work being done by the Biden White House and Senate Democrats. Let's thank them for bringing balance and diversity and a commitment to equal justice for all to the federal courts. And let's work as hard as we can to keep the Senate and White House in Democratic hands in 2022 and 2024.

Ben Jealous serves as president of People For the American Way. Jealous has decades of experience as a leader, coalition builder, campaigner for social justice and seasoned nonprofit executive. In 2008, he was chosen as the youngest-ever president and CEO of the NAACP. He is a graduate of Columbia University and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and he has taught at Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania.



Congress now involved in Astroworld tragedy, investigation underway

Philadelphiaobserver.com

A family and friends of those impacted by the tragedy at Astroworld last month come to terms with the loss of life and injuries that occurred, a congressional panel has been established as part of an official inquiry into what went wrong.

On Wednesday (Dec. 22) The House Committee on Oversight and Reform announced that leaders of the panel sent a letter about the investigation to Live Nation Entertainment Inc., the company that organized the concert.

"Recent reports raise serious concerns about whether your company took adequate steps to ensure

the safety of the 50,000 concertgoers who attended Astroworld Festival," the letter read. "We are deeply saddened by the deaths that occurred at Astroworld Festival and are committed to investigating what went wrong to inform possible reforms that could prevent future tragedies."

ABC is reporting that the committee is requesting that Live Nation provide documentation on the questions by Jan. 7 and that it provide a briefing to committee members by Jan. 12.

Live Nation said it was "assisting local authorities in their investigation and will of course share information with the committee as well."

Federal judge rejects Proud Boys First Amendment motion in capitol riot case

Philadelphiaobserver.com

The Proud Boys are buried under numerous lawsuits and criminal charges thanks to their poorly thought out insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. In one of the more major cases, a federal judge has ruled to allow a case brought by the Justice Department to continue, rejecting a motion to dismiss charges against four Proud Boys leaders based on the First Amendment.

Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Charles Donohoe and Zachary Rehl all pleaded not guilty to charges of felony obstruction, trespassing, destruction of property and more.

One of these days, y'all will realize "free speech" doesn't absolve you of literal crimes.

Court filings showed that Biggs was recruited by FBI agents in 2020 as an informant and Nordean penned an emotional rant aimed at Trump for abandoning the Proud Boys following his 2020 loss.

"No matter Defendants political motivations or any political message they wished to express, this alleged conduct is simply not protected by the First Amendment," Judge Timothy Kelly wrote in a 43-page opinion issued on Tuesday, according to CNN.



"Quite obviously, there were many avenues for Defendants to express their opinions about the 2020 presidential election, or their views about how Congress should perform its constitutional duties on January 6, without resorting to the conduct with which they have been charged," Kelly wrote.

From Bloomberg:

The four Proud Boys members argued that Congress's certification of the Electoral College vote on Jan. 6 couldn't have been obstructed by them because it was not an "official proceeding" under the law. They argued, for example, that witnesses aren't ordered to appear at the joint session like they are at impeachment hearings for other investigative proceedings.

"The Court is not persuaded," Kelly wrote. "The relevant actors here — Vice President Pence and

the members of Congress — were 'directed to appear' by both statute and the Constitution."

Kelly also rejected their argument that the law against obstructing official proceedings is too vague to be used in the Capitol riot case.

Trump drew bipartisan criticism during the 2020 presidential race when he told the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" during a debate with Biden rather than unambiguously condemn the militant group.

The case is U.S. v. Nordean, 1:21-cr-00175, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (Washington).

Nordean, Biggs, Rehl and Donohoe led local chapters of the alt-right group in Washington state, Florida, Pennsylvania and North Carolina respectively, according to Bloomberg.

White House promises major benefits to Black communities through infrastructure funds

By Hazel Trice Edney

Now that the long-awaited Bi-partisan Infrastructure deal has passed the U. S. Congress and has been signed into law by President Joe Biden, White House documents say Black and other communities of color have reason to celebrate the high-level benefits on the way.

"These critical investments are first steps in advancing equity and racial justice throughout our economy," says a "Fact Sheet," issued by the White House. "The Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act addresses economic disparities in our economy and the consequences of decades of disinvestment in America's infrastructure that have fallen most heavily on communities of color."

Among the benefits listed:

Through critical investments, the legislation increases access to good-paying jobs, affordable high-speed internet, reliable public transit, clean drinking water and other resources to ensure communities of color get a fair shot at the American dream. These critical investments are first steps in advancing equity and racial justice throughout our economy.

The agreement's \$65 billion investment ensures every American has access to reliable high-speed internet with an historic investment in broadband infrastructure

deployment, the White House says. The document explains, "There is a stark digital divide in America. Black families are 9% less likely to have high-speed internet than their white peers, and Latino Americans are 15% less likely. About 35% of individuals living on Tribal lands lack access to broadband service. Although studies suggest high levels of digital access for Asian Americans, these studies are often limited in scope and don't identify key inequities."

The deal makes the largest investment in clean drinking water in American history, replacing all of the nation's lead pipes and service lines. From rural towns to struggling cities, the deal invests in water infrastructure across America as pipes and treatment plants are aging and polluted drinking water is endangering public health. There are up to 10 million homes with lead service lines and pipes. Children in up to 400,000 schools and child care facilities are at risk of exposure to lead. Across the country, families of color are at the highest risk for lead exposure at home and in schools.

The legislation's roughly \$65 billion investment is the single largest investment in clean energy transmission in American history. Black, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native com-

Continued on page 4

Medical examiner reveals cause of Vincent Jackson's death

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Earlier this year in February, we reported that former NFL star Vincent Jackson was found dead at the Homewood Suites in Brandon, Fla. He was 38.

At the time, a cause of death had yet to be determined, and police reported that there were no apparent signs of trauma. As is standard procedure, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office opened an investigation into the matter, and on Wednesday, the Hillsborough County Medical Examiner revealed the cause of Jackson's death.

From CBS Sports:

According to the Hillsborough County Medical Examiner's office, Jackson suffered from alcoholic cardiomyopathy, a condition that occurs when long-term alcohol use weakens the heart muscle. A toxicology report showed that three measurements of Jackson's blood alcohol content ranged from 0.28 to 0.32, about four times beyond what is considered impairment in the state of Florida.

Jackson was found to have several blunt contusions to his head, torso, and extremities, and



also had a mild case of atherosclerosis—a condition in which plaque buildup leads to a hardening of the arteries. While Jackson was found to have small cuts to his scalp and left big toe, there were no skull fractures.

According to a report by Jenna Laine of ESPN, other conditions that Jackson suffered from—all related to chronic alcohol use—included hepatic steatosis and fibrosis, esophageal varices, ascites, jaundice, remote pancreatitis, renal failure and hyponatremia dehydration, cardiovascular disease and intoxication by ethyl alcohol.

White House promises major benefits to Black communities through infrastructure funds

From page 3

munities are more likely to be burdened by pollution. Black people are almost three times more likely to die from asthma related causes than their white counterparts. And more than one in three—or over 23 million—Latinos in the U.S. live in counties where the air doesn't meet EPA public health standards for smog.

The legislation also includes a critical down payment on helping the more than 25 million children and thousands of bus drivers who breathe polluted air on their rides to and from school. Diesel air pollution is linked to asthma and other health problems that hurt our communities and cause students to miss school, particularly in communities of color and Tribal communities. The legislation will deliver thousands of electric school buses nationwide, helping school districts across the country buy clean, American-made, zero emission buses, replacing the yellow school bus fleet for America's children.

The cleanups of brownfields and superfund sites are also slated. Across America, 26% of Black Americans and 29% of Hispanic Americans live within 3 miles of a Superfund site, a higher percentage than for the overall population. Proximity to a Superfund site can lead to elevated levels of lead in children's blood. Recent studies demonstrate that cleaning up these sites can lead to a decrease in blood levels by approximately 13-26%.

The creation of good-paying jobs are among the keys to the

new plan. It provides \$21 billion to create good-paying union jobs plugging orphan oil and gas wells, cleaning up abandoned mines, and remediating Brownfield and Superfund sites. As we transition to a clean energy future, the Bipartisan Infrastructure deal will begin to remedy economic injustice for communities across the country that have relied on the fossil fuel industry and have been affected most by the impacts of climate change and pollution, including rural communities and communities of color.

Finally, the new law will safeguard communities of color from climate crises and extreme weather risks. People of color are more likely to live in areas most vulnerable to flooding and other climate change-related weather events. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, Black and Hispanic residents were twice as likely to report lost income. Tribal lands are significantly at risk to the effects of climate change and Alaska Natives are particularly vulnerable, as they face multiple climate impacts.

The list appears quite hefty, but there is much more that is needed, which is believed to come from the Build Back Better Act now making its way through the Senate. The White House has said, "The President has said additional investments are needed in the nation's caregiving infrastructure, housing supply, regional development, and workforce development programs to ensure that communities of color and other underserved communities can access economic opportunity and justice."



Ten-year-old girl dies from online 'Blackout Challenge,' parents caution others of dangers

In early December, Tawainna Anderson of Chester, Pennsylvania, checked on her daughter, 10-year-old Nyla Anderson, and discovered her unconscious. Nyla passed away days later after participating in the risky "blackout challenge," a veteran game that has recently resurfaced online.

According to TODAY, Nyla was admitted to the pediatric intensive care unit on Dec. 7. Her family acknowledged that their bright and happy girl might've accidentally injured herself while playing the game. The "blackout challenge," sometimes called

the choking game or fainting game, ultimately restricts the players' breathing, causing them to faint. After spending several days in intensive care, Nyla died on Dec. 12.


"We believe this was an (accident) and we know that she had a history of viewing these videos on social media," Elizabeth Wood, a licensed clinical social worker at Nemours Children's Hospital, Delaware, where Nylah received treatment, told TODAY Parents.


"Nyla's mom did not know there was any increasingly risky behavior. When Nyla was in the

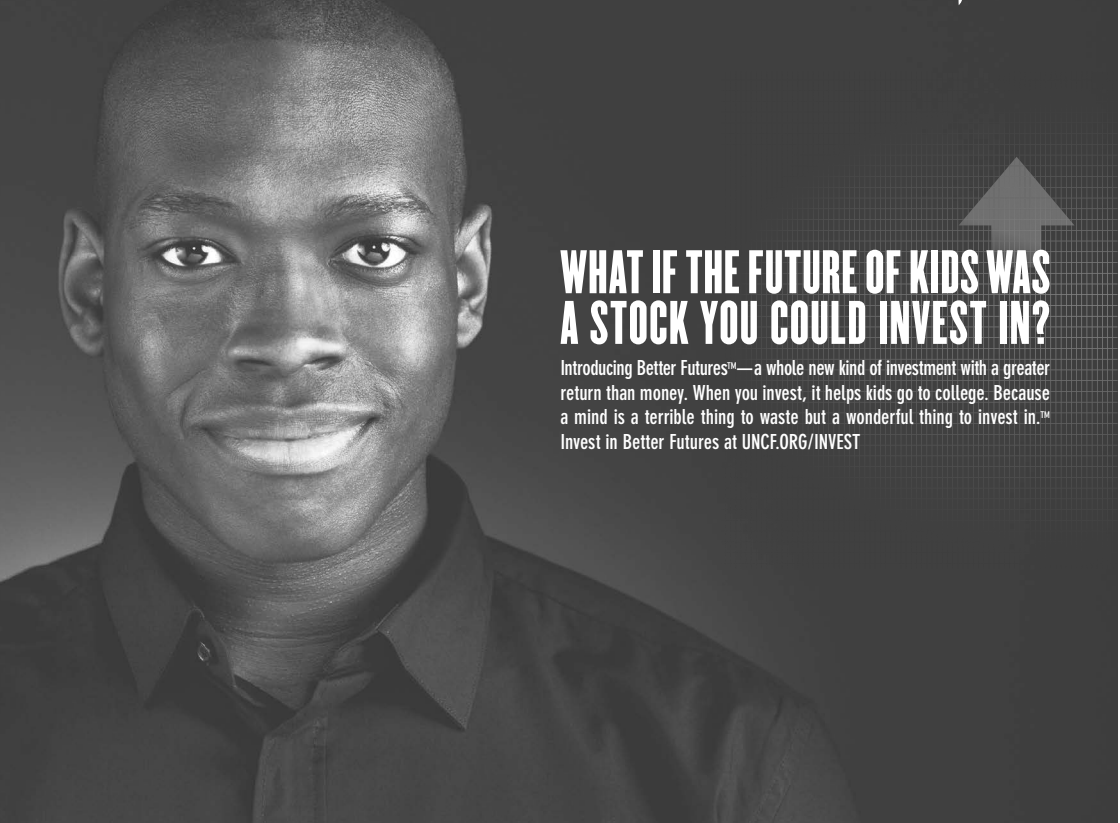
hospital, and they had discovered some of the videos that she had been watching and that she herself had made," she said.

Wood, who supports the Anderson family, urges that these challenges can result in consequences that children of Nyla's age and even adolescents and young adults do not understand.

"There's been different variations of (blackout challenge), but the idea is that an individual stops the flow of oxygen," Wood explained. "People may think that they can get sort of a high from it."







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Editorial - Opinion

We should not let the deeper meaning of Christmas be lost in the wrappings



By Jesse Jackson

- On Saturday, millions of people across the world celebrated Christmas. Even with COVID-19 still plaguing the world, families will gather; bells will ring; music will be in the air. Each year, I use this column to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas has become a holiday, a time to exchange presents and cards, to see friends and family. Yet Christmas is literally the mass for Christ, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, a time for prayer, for reflection, for service. The story of Jesus speaks to us still this day.

He was born under occupation. Joseph and Mary were ordered to

go far from home to register with authorities. The innkeeper told Joseph there was no room at the inn. Jesus was born on a cold night, in a stable, lying in a manger. He was an "at-risk" baby. His earthly father was a carpenter, a worker, not a prince or a banker. He was born at a time of great misery and turmoil.

Prophets predicted that a new Messiah was coming who would rout the occupiers and free the people. Many expected a mighty warrior like the superheroes of today's movies. Fearing the prophecy, King Herod, whose authority stemmed from the Romans, ordered the "massacre of the innocents," the slaughter of all boys two and under in Bethlehem and the nearby region. Jesus confounded both Herod's fears and the people's fantasies.

He was a prince of peace, not of war. He gathered disciples, not soldiers. His ministry was guided by Isaiah 62:1: "the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." We will be judged, he taught us, not for our wealth or our finery

or our armaments, but by how we treat "the least of these," how we treat the stranger on the Jericho Road. He called on us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, comfort the refugee. He became a great liberator, by his teachings and his example, not by his sword. He converted rather than conquered.

He threw the money lenders from the temple. He did not accumulate worldly wealth. His brief ministry led to his crucifixion. And yet he succeeded beyond all imagination to transform the world. Today his teachings are more important than ever. The pandemic threatens us all. It respects no boundaries. We can only defeat it together, by organizing across the world to ensure that all are vaccinated, that care is available for those who get sick, that safety precautions from masks to ventilation are universally available. No one is safe until we all are. Yet too often, our instinct is to turn away from one another, not toward one another. For example, the Omicron

variant that is now spreading across the world was discovered first by a scientist, Dr. Sikhulile Moyo, working in Botswana in Africa. He and his colleagues found the new strain in international visitors from the Netherlands.

They immediately alerted public health authorities across the world, shared their research and findings, and helped mobilize immediate action to counter the new variant. Sadly, the reaction of the world was to lock the scientist and the countries of his region out. He was not brought to the U.S. to help further the work. The administration joined some European nations in imposing travel bans on Botswana and neighboring countries, with devastating effect on their economies. Cooperation was punished, not rewarded. Worse, while Europeans and Americans are lining up for booster shots after being vaccinated, only a miniscule percentage of Africans have access to vaccination.

Even though none of us will be safe until all are safe, nationalism,

drug company profits and patents and inadequate global assistance have combined to abandon millions in poorer nations without the treatments and public health capacities that they need. We put ourselves at risk even as we leave them at risk.

Once more the practical imperative of Jesus' teachings is clear. Jesus demonstrated the astonishing power of faith, hope and charity, the importance of love. He called upon us to care for the stranger on the Jericho Road. In an age of global pandemics, good will to all is not merely a holiday slogan, it is a survival imperative. In this secular age, we should not let the deeper meaning of Christmas be lost in the wrappings. Jesus called us to turn to one another, not on one another. He demonstrated the power of summoning our better angels, rather than rousing our fears or furthering our divisions. This Christmas, this surely is a message not merely to remember but to practice. Merry Christmas, everybody.

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Former University of Southern California linebacker charged with fraudulently receiving COVID unemployment benefits

Philadelphiaobserver.com

On Monday, a college football player was arrested for allegedly defrauding the government concerning COVID-related unemployment benefits.

According to ESPN, Abdul-Malik McClain was arrested and charged with developing a plan to fraudulently get hundreds of thousands of dollars in COVID-related unemployment benefits from the government. McClain colluded with other football players at the University of Southern California (USC) when he reportedly committed the fraudulent act.

The 22-year-old has since transferred to the highly-regarded HBCU Jackson State University from the USC last year, where he reportedly planned and executed the scheme.

According to the Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office Central District of California, on



Dec. 16, a federal grand jury indictment was returned and unsealed on Monday. McClain is charged with 10 counts of mail fraud and two counts of aggravated identity theft. McClain has pleaded not guilty to the charges and was ordered released on a \$20,000 bond. His next scheduled

court date is Feb. 15.

Each mail fraud count charge carries a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. The other two aggravated identity theft counts carry a two-year mandatory prison sentence consecutive to any sentence imposed on the mail fraud counts.

Harvard professor found guilty of concealing his links to China's government

Philadelphiaobserver.com

On Tuesday (December 21), a Harvard University professor was convicted on all counts stemming from the concealment of his involvement in a Chinese-run recruitment effort.

Charles Lieber (pictured), 62, pleaded not guilty to two counts of filing fraudulent tax forms, two counts of making false statements, and two counts of failing to register a foreign bank account in Chinese territory.

After five days of deliberations in a federal court in Boston, the jury deliberated for two hours and 45 minutes before reaching a verdict.

Lieber's defense attorney, Marc Mukasey, had claimed that the allegations were unfounded. He said that detectives did not retain any documents of their conversations with Lieber prior to his arrest.

Prosecutors would be unable to prove Lieber behaved "knowingly, willfully, or voluntarily," or made any materially false statement, he said. According to Mukasey, Lieber was not charged with illegally transmitting technology or proprietary information to China.

Prosecutors allege that Lieber, who was arrested in January, lied

about his role in China's Thousand Talents Plan, a program aimed at luring international technology and intellectual property experts to China, in order to protect his career and reputation.

According to prosecutors, Lieber denied his involvement throughout investigations by US authorities, including the National Institutes of Health, which had awarded him millions of dollars in research funding.

Prosecutors believe that Lieber concealed his income from the Chinese program, which includes \$50,000 per month from Wuhan University of Technology, up to \$158,000 in living expenses, and over \$1.5 million in rewards.

They claim that in exchange for pay, Lieber agreed to publish papers, organize international conferences, and submit patent applications on behalf of the Chinese organization.

This is one of the most high-profile lawsuits to come out of the US Justice Department's so-called "China Initiative."

The campaign against Chinese economic espionage, which started in 2018, has been condemned as undermining academic research and amounted to racial profiling of Chinese scientists.

Two teens face hate crime charges after wearing Klan outfits, tasing Black classmate

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Two teenagers in Woodsboro, TX are facing hate crime charges after dressing in Klan outfits, harassing and tasing a Black teenager while a White female classmate recorded the incident.

According to Texas Monthly, all four kids involved in the incident attend Woodsboro High School. The three boys all played on the football team together. The Refugio County District Attorney indicted the two boys Noel Garcia Jr. and Rance Bolcik on charges of engaging in organized criminal activity and tampering with evidence. A hate crime designation has been added to each charge. The name of the victim and the girl were not released.

According to cellphone footage obtained by Texas Monthly shows the Black teenager backpedaling through a field while a figure wearing a White sheet with



the eye holes cut out approaches him.

"That's not funny. Stop!" says the Black teenager.

The girl, who is recording the incident, then tells the Black teenager "If you say their names, they're gonna tase you." After which the crackle of a stun gun being fired. "Get closer," the girl says, and the gun is fired again as the Black teenager continues to

back away.

"Surround him," the girl says. "Surround him!"

Then a second figure in a white sheet and hood comes into the frame. In one hand, he's holding a small purple device. A rapid-fire crackle rings out.

"Chill!" the Black teenager yells as the hooded figure with the purple device lunges at him.

"KKK," the girl announced.

The girl then tells the two boys to surround him after which one of the boys reached out and hits the Black teenager with the taser. The Black teen tells the other to "chill," again sounding agitated before walking away as the video ended.

A civil attorney Matthew Manning, who heard about the incident from another client is now representing the Black teen according to Yahoo News. Meanwhile, the principal of the school released a statement saying the school could not discipline the three students because the incident did not occur on school grounds.



Photo credits: Charles Krupa/AP

Pretty Rickey's Baby Blue sentenced to 20 months in prison for PPP loan fraud

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Baby Blue from Pretty Rickey was sentenced on Dec. 16 to 20 months in prison for conspiring to commit wire fraud and fraudulently obtaining loans from the Paycheck Protection Program, according to court documents, XXL reports.

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan was initiated to provide financial assistance to businesses to maintain the employment of their workers and to keep them solvent during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to U.S Small Business Administration. However, some people took advantage of the program, and the Justice Department has been attempting to retrieve funds that were fraudulently acquired, The Washington Post reported.

The "Grind with Me" artist confessed to procuring a PPP loan of \$426, 717 for his business, Throwbackjersey.com LLC, by forging documents and providing fallacious information. The singer also applied for another PPP loan for his second company, Blue Star Records LLC, receiving an addition-



al \$708, 065.

Baby Blue, whose real name is Diamond Blue Smith, admitted to federal authorities of misappropriating PPP loans to finance his opulent lifestyle. He used the funds at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in South Florida and to purchase a Ferrari which was confiscated when he was arrested, as well as other luxury items.

He's accused of drafting accomplices James R. Stote and Phillip J. Augustin, paying both men more than \$250,000 to assist him in producing and submitting the falsifying loan applications, Baller Alert reports.



On the scene

'The Matrix Resurrections' premiere leaves onlookers green with envy!



Premiere at Castro Theater (L-R) Jada Pinkett Smith, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Ellen Hollman, Jonathan Groff, Jessica Henwick, Priyanka Chopra, Neil Patrick Harris, Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss and Lana Wachowski



Historic Castro Theater



Jada Pinkett Smith

By Audrey J. Bernard

"The Matrix Resurrections," the highly anticipated fourth installment of the Matrix franchise and the first film in the groundbreaking franchise in over 18 years, has finally hit theaters garnering rave reviews. Warner Bros. pulled out all stops for the U.S. Premiere replacing the usual red carpet with green carpet in front of the historic Castro Theater in San Francisco — where many of the scenes were shot — on December 18, 2021. In addition

to the green carpet, many SF's landmarks participated in the Light San Francisco Matrix Green project by sporting a green hue, including City Hall, in honor of the cinematic event. In further tribute to the film, SF's Mayor London Breed attended the premiere along with hundreds of fans and onlookers that got a glimpse of the stars as they walked the plush green carpet dressed to the nines!

"The Matrix Resurrections" is a gripping psychological thriller steeped in mind-blowing chal-

lenges which TMR's fans have grown to love and expect of their favorite franchise. Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss, are back in their iconic roles as Neo and Trinity trying to navigate and survive a totally different reality than the one they know as home. Also back is alum Jada Pinkett Smith, reprising her role as Niobe. Look for Yahya Abdul-Mateen II who will be taking over the character Morpheus, made famous in the first trilogy by Laurence Fishburne. Writer, director and producer Lana Wachowski's action-packed installment is as overwhelming as ever! Bottom line, Matrix 4 is a fan pleaser which will have them hankering for more; and hoping they won't have to wait another 18 years to satisfy their craving!

SYNOPSIS: "The Matrix Resurrections" is a continuation of the story established in the first MATRIX film. It reunites Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss as cinematic icons Neo & Trinity in an expansion of their story that ventures back into the Matrix and even deeper down the rabbit hole. A mind-bending new adventure with action and epic scale, it's set in a familiar yet even more provocative world where reality is more subjective than ever and all that's

required to see the truth is to free your mind.

ASSETS: Lana Wachowski directed from a screenplay by Wachowski & David Mitchell & Aleksander Hemon, based on characters created by The Wachowskis. The film was produced by James McTeigue, Lana Wachowski and Grant Hill. The executive producers were Garrett Grant, Terry Needham, Michael Salven, Karin Wachowski, Jesse Ehrman and Bruce Berman.

CAST: The film stars Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Jessica Henwick, Jonathan Groff, Neil Patrick Harris, Ellen Hollman, Telma Hopkins, Eirendira Ibarra, Toby Onwumere, Max Riemelt, Brian J. Smith, Jada Pinkett Smith and newcomers Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Christina Ricci.

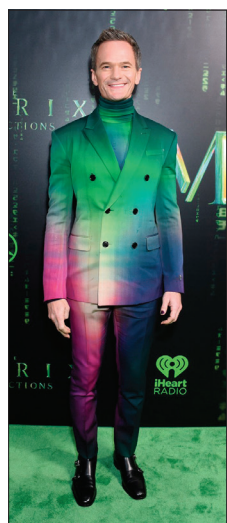
CREATIVES: Wachowski's creative team behind the scenes

included "Sense8" collaborators: directors of photography Daniele Massaccesi and John Toll, production designers Hugh Bateup and Peter Walpole, editor Joseph Jett Sally, costume designer Lindsay Pugh, visual effects supervisor Dan Glass, and composers Johnny Klimek and Tom Tykwer.

CREDITS: Warner Bros. Pictures Presents, In Association with Village Roadshow Pictures, In Association with Venus Castina Productions, "The Matrix Resurrections." The film will be distributed worldwide by Warner Bros. Pictures. The film is in theaters nationwide and on HBO Max via the Ad-Free plan on December 22, 2021; it will be available on HBO Max in 4K UHD, HDR10, Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos (English only) on supported devices for 31 days from theatrical release. (Photos by Getty Images and Shutterstock)



Carrie-Anne Moss, Lana Wachowski, and Keanu Reeves



Neil Patrick Harris



Jonathan Groff



Jessica Henwick



Carrie Anne Moss



Mayor London Breed



Yahya Abdul-Mateen II



Priyanka Chopra Jonas



Ellen Hollman

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International



A book fair blossoms in Mogadishu

(GIN) –

A Book Fair is flowering in Mogadishu—bringing the world of literature and other areas of learning to a region challenged by the coronavirus pandemic and political tension linked to disagreements over the ongoing parliamentary elections in the country.

The event had been suspended last year due to Corona-19.

This year's event was limited in size but according to the founder of the fair, Mohamed Diini, organizers are already working to accommodate more people next year.

Book fairs are a popular event across the continent. Every summer, for example, the Hargeisa International Book Fair is held in Somaliland, bringing writers, poets, artists and thinkers from around the world to share and discuss their literary works with a wider audience.

The goal of the event, say organizers, is to promote a culture of reading and writing in the region by producing and

publishing high quality Somali literature and translating international classical literature—fiction, poetry and drama into the Somali language.

The event is considered the main cultural event in Somaliland and one of the largest public celebrations of books in East Africa. Organized by the Redsea Online Culture Foundation, the event aims to stimulate the revival of all forms of art and human expression, including painting, poetry reciting, story-telling, drama composition and writing.

The Somali Moving Library Tour is the Book Fair's flagship outreach event. It takes place a week before the opening of the festival in Hargeisa and is held across all regions of Somaliland.

Other countries with upcoming book events are South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. An African Book Festival will be held Aug. 19-21 in Berlin, among others.

Ghana holds a special place on the continent as Unesco's World Book Capital to be held April 23, 2023. w/pix of Somali book fair

Lawyers for democratic opposition in Benin cry foul as another popular leader is jailed

(GIN) –

Reckya Madougou, one of the strongest challengers to Benin's autocratic leader, Patrice Talon, will be observing the next election from her cell in jail. The 47 year old activist was found guilty of conspiring to assassinate political figures and sentenced to 20 years behind bars.

Madougou was the head of the party Les Démocrates and had been the face of "Don't touch my constitution!"— a civil society campaign that rallied against leaders seeking to extend their reign under the guise of constitutional reform.

The movement spread across West Africa. Supporters say she could have been Benin's first female presidential candidate from a major party.

But Madougou's historic bid for the presidency ended abruptly when security agents arrested

her after a rally protesting the president's controversial electoral reforms.

Madougou was one of several Benin opposition leaders banned from running in an election in April in which Talon won a second term with 86 percent of the vote.

Critics say Talon, one of the richest men in Francophone Africa today, has eliminated almost all possibility of legitimate opposition. The judiciary's independence has evaporated. Talon's former personal lawyer became president of Benin's Constitutional Court.

A new judicial body, the Economic Crime and Terrorism Court, or Criet, has targeted Talon's political rivals. After the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights repeatedly ruled against his administration's policies, Talon's government prevented the court from hearing cases brought against him by individuals and

nongovernmental organizations. "The arbitrary arrest of opponents has led to the degradation of democracy in Benin," said Oumar Ndongo, academic director of the African Center for Strategic Intelligence in Dakar, Senegal.

"There was no justice," said Essowe Batamoussi, the judge who fled Benin and has applied for asylum in France, in an interview with the Washington Post. "We received an empty file and a threat: If we did not put her in jail, we were in danger."

Benin was long praised for its thriving multi-party democracy in a troubled region. But critics say the West African state's democracy has steadily eroded under Talon, a 63-year-old cotton magnate first elected in 2016.

"It's a sad day for our justice system," one of her lawyers, Robert Dossou, told the AFP news service. "I maintain there is no proof."



#DadJokesRule

Black women capture record share of S&P 500 board seats: report

Philadelphiaobserver.com

When it comes to corporate board representation, 2021 was a record-setting year for Black women.

The number of S&P 500 seats held by those women rose over 25% this year, up from a 16% gain in 2020, a new report by data and analytics provider ISS Corporate Solutions reveals, per Bloomberg.com

The uptick was reportedly fueled by an extraordinary number of new Black women directors, helping them gain a record share of the seats.

Some 168 Black women hold 231 spots of the over 5,500 seats at S&P 500 companies this year, Bloomberg.com reported. Yet even with the gain, they still only hold 4% of S&P 500 board seats.

Etsy Inc., Caesars Entertainment Inc. and HP Inc. were among companies that added Black wom-

en to their boards in November, with females gaining a net 14 seats overall, data gathered by Bloomberg reveals.

The November growth of 14 more seats on the boards of companies in the S&P 500 was the biggest gain in two months, based on the Bloomberg data. The outlet reported the average number of female directors was unchanged at 3.4, out of an average board size of 11.1.

"It appears to be at an all-time high in terms of the number of board seats that Black females are holding today, as well as the number of unique Black female directors," stated Brian Johnson, executive director at ISS Corporate Solutions.

Corporate boards have been pressed hard to add more directors, including some for the first time, after the 2020 murder of George Floyd as well as national protests. Conditions that confronted society around the



COVID-19 pandemic and other events over the last year have too help propel more diverse boards.

Named to Etsy's board in November, Marla Blow reflected on the report. "Even when there is still significant work to be done, and that is still the case, I do think that it's also important to step back and notice that there has been movement, and that matters. She is the president and chief operating officer of the Skoll Foundation, which invest social entrepreneurs and other social innovators.

Regina King to star as Shirley Chisholm in upcoming Netflix biopic

By Ryan Steal

The Shirley Chisholm biopic, starring Regina King, has finally begun filming. According to MADAMENOIRE, the initiative was first publicized in February. King will not only star with Terrance Howard in the starring role, but she will also serve as the project's producer. Regina and her sister, Reina King, own and operate Royal Ties Production Company, which is producing the biopic.

At the start of production in November, King tweeted her delight saying "You would think we planned this! Happy 97th Worthy Mrs. C! Look at God #ShirleyChisholm."

Regina King and Netflix have proven to be a good combination. King's excellence is acknowledged even by Netflix.

"Maaaaan Listen! Y'all got me out here blushing and smiling hard like I just got my braces off.," Netflix tweeted.

King's star will undoubtedly soar much higher as a result of the biopic. Following the success of



her directorial debut, *One Night in Miami*, King pledged to hire at least 50% women and non-binary people on all future productions. This is an addition to her Golden Globes acceptance speech for Best Leading Actress in a Motion Picture for *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

King said in an interview with *Insider* that she has already surpassed the target.

"well over 50% of our crew were people that did not identify as cis white male[s]," she recalls in reference to the set of *One Night*

in Miami.

Idris Elba and King recently featured in *The Harder They Fall*. The film received a 93 percent audience rating and an 83 percent critics rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

With her strong on-screen presence and tremendous behind-the-scenes advocacy, King is surely benefiting us all. The biopic doesn't have a release date yet, but we'll be watching with bated breath to see how King handles the subject of the nation's first Black congresswoman and presidential candidate.

Joan Elizabeth Murray

RIP

Joan Elizabeth Murray, who in her extraordinary life was the first African American female television news reporter in the United States, as well as an entrepreneur, small plane pilot, and writer, died on December 18, 2021 in Ithaca, New York. She was 84.

She was born November 6, 1937 and raised in Ithaca, New York, alongside her twin sister, June, and younger sister Rythma Jane.

In 1959, Joan was hired into the CBS Television Network Press Information Department. She was involved in publicity for such events as Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev's visit to America, the Kennedy-Nixon debates, the premiere of CBS News with Walter Cronkite, and Jacqueline Onassis's televised White House tour. Joan also served as a production assistant on TV program *Candid Camera*, and was later promoted to CBS's Corporate Affairs staff.

During the 1960s, Joan appeared in a number of television and print advertisements and starred with her twin sister in the first advertising campaign specifically targeted at an African American audience.

Joan left CBS in 1963 for a job as a writer and on-air commentator for the NBC television program, *Women on the Move*. She was subsequently hired again at CBS as an on-air news correspondent and also appeared on public affairs programs *Two at One* and *Opportunity Line*. With her new job, Joan became the first female African American television news reporter and anchorwoman in the United States.

Her life included a string of "firsts" and awards including the Mademoiselle Award for Outstanding Achievement, the Urban League's Certificate of Merit, and awards from the National Council of Negro Women. An accomplished aviator, she was the first African American woman pilot to participate in the famed *Woman's Air Derby* and served as the official WCBS-TV news reporter for the race. Her appearance on the panel for the "classic" CBS program *What's My Line?* was also notable. During this period she even interviewed *The Beatles*.

In 1968 Joan published her book, *The News*, an autobiography and guide to television news



reporting. Continuing to write, the following year she authored recommendations to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Committee on Employment of Minority Groups and Women in the News Media.

In 1969, Joan co-founded Zebra Associates Inc., an advertising and marketing firm that focused on Black, Hispanic, and other consumer markets. The firm was the largest Black-owned and managed advertising agency at the time, and worked with Fortune 500 companies and numerous national advertisers.

Joan began work with the United States Department of State in the early 1970s, where she reviewed and recommended films for distribution in Africa. While there, Joan embarked on an international lecture tour of Africa for the Department.

In the late 1970s, Joan was asked to assist in opening Western Park Hospital Medical Center, a new trauma facility in Los Angeles, California and served as its Director of Public Relations and Media/Communications.

In 1980, Joan was married to Richard L. Atkins, a real estate developer in Los Angeles, and operated a fragrance and skin care boutique in Beverly Hills.

After retiring to Ithaca, she donated her archival materials to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in Harlem, New York City. At heart, she always remained the consummate news woman whose relationships and interviews included high society, the Wall Street elite, government officials, entertainment stars, and the major luminaries of the civil rights movement.

Joan leaves her loving memory to her sister Rythma Jane and her nephew Ray Wall. Joan joins her twin sister June, and her beloved mother Amanda Pearl Murray and father Isaiah Murray.

British publisher posts apology to Meghan Markle after losing privacy lawsuit

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Meghan Markle was blessed with the ultimate Christmas gift over the weekend. The Duchess of Sussex recently won her privacy infringement case against the Associated Newspapers, the same publishers who produced the UK's *Mail on Sunday*. According to PEOPLE, the publisher finally offered a public front-page apology to the 40-year-old mother of two, "as re-

quired" by multiple court rulings, buried in the holiday shuffle.

In February 2019, *The Mail on Sunday* breached Markle's privacy by printing a few sensitive excerpts from a five-page letter she wrote to her father, Thomas Markle, shortly after her wedding to Prince Harry in May 2018.

"The Duchess of Sussex wins her legal case for copyright infringement against Associated Newspapers for articles published in *The Mail on Sunday* and posted

on *Mail Online*," the publication's notice read. "Following a hearing on 19-20 January 2021, and a further hearing on 5 May 2021, the Court has given judgment for the Duchess of Sussex on her claim for copyright infringement," the statement continued. "The Court found that Associated Newspapers infringed her copyright by publishing extracts of her handwritten letter to her father in *The Mail on Sunday* and *Mail Online*. Financial remedies have been agreed."

The Associated Newspapers tried to challenge the decision at the Court of Appeal, but Judge Geoffrey Vos dismissed the motion. NPR previously reported the judge found that "the Duchess had a reasonable expectation of privacy in the contents of the letter. Those contents were personal, private and not matters of legitimate public interest." The publisher said they were "very disappointed" by the ruling and considered bringing an appeal at the U.K. Supreme Court.



Entertainment

New Edition's The Culture Tour 2022 with Charlie Wilson and Jodeci

NEW EDITION

THE CULTURE TOUR

WITH CHARLIE WILSON

AND SPECIAL GUESTS JODECI

BLACK PROMOTERS COLLECTIVE

BPCTickets.com

NewEditionLegacy.com

Veteran R&B group New Edition headlines a lineup with the Legendary Charlie Wilson, along with special guest Jodeci, (the bad boys of R&B). The Culture Tour kicks off a 30-city engagement on Feb., 16, 2022, in Columbus, Georgia, with stops in Los Angeles, New York, and New Edition's hometown of Boston.

In 1983, New Edition released their debut single "Candy Girl" off their self-titled album, hit No.1 on the Billboard Hot Black Single Charts, jumping ahead of Michael

Jackson's "Beat It." Since then, the group has released more than six studio albums, received multiple Soul Train and American Music Awards, and a Grammy Award nomination.

BET Network released their three-part Biopic: The New Edition Story in 2017, airing over three consecutive nights. The mini-series attracted 29 million total viewers. That same year, the network honored them with the BET Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing the group as one of

the innovators of R&B.

The gents have remained one of the most influential R&B groups of the last 30 years and counting, catapulting the solo careers of Bobby Brown, Johnny Gill, and Ralph Tresvant, and Bell Biv DeVoe.

Viewers experienced a sense of nostalgia during the American Music Awards in November 2021, when New Edition performed alongside 80s boy band New Kids on the Block. Often credited as the creators of the modern-day boy bands, New Edition will attract

fans old and new. Starring all six members, Ronnie DeVoe, Bobby Brown, Ricky Bell, Michael Bivins, Ralph Tresvant, and Johnny Gill, this is the group's first tour in more than five years.

With a career spanning over four decades, Charlie Wilson, also known as "Uncle Charlie," is one of the few names in music that resonate with multiple generations of music lovers. Beginning as the co-founder/lead singer for The Gap Band ("Outstanding," "Burn Rubber On Me,"

"Yearning For Your Love,") Wilson later embarked on a successful solo career garnering himself 13 Grammy Award nominations, 11 NAACP Image Awards (including two wins), the BMI Icon Award in 2005, and the 2009 Soul Train Icon Award.

Wilson's #1 solo hits include "Charlie, Last Name Wilson," "There Goes My Baby," and "You Are," to name a few. In 2020 and 2009, he was named Billboard magazine's No. 1 Adult R&B Male Artist and remains the Top Adult Male Artist with the most #1s in three decades. Additionally, he was honored by BET with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013 with an all-star tribute by Justin Timberlake, Pharrell Williams, and Snoop Dogg.

Representing the sound that shaped 90s R&B, the group Jodeci joins the tour as a special guest. The group debuted their first album, "Forever My Lady," in 1991 and has sold more than 20 million records worldwide. They have been the soundtrack to many music lovers' most memorable moments for over 30 years with hit songs "Forever My Lady," "Stay," and "Come And Talk To Me." After a several-year hiatus, the group has reunited and is ready to show fans why they reign supreme as one of the most iconic R&B groups of all time.

In partnership with The Black Promoters Collective, a 100 percent Black-owned promotions company composed of veteran live entertainment promoters, The Culture Tour 2022 tickets are currently on sale. The Black Promoters Collective (BPC) is a coalition of six of the nation's top independent concert promotion and event production companies. As a 100% Black-owned business, their mission is to be the world's leading producer and provider of culturally relevant live entertainment experiences. To learn more, visit <http://www.blackpromoterscollective.com>



New Edition performed with 80s New Kids on the Block at the American Music Awards in November 2021

Ponder this

Trouble will not last always



By Hazel Rosetta Smith

As we shake our heads wondering how we slipped into a muddy sinkhole of profound uncertainty that includes misinformation, govern-

ment goofing, and ego tripping in high places; many of us have had to find a source of positivity somewhere; a song, a prayer, or familiar phrase to help maintain peace of mind.

Whenever some unexpected dilemma would raise its ugly head in my family, my Granny would say “trouble won’t last always” and then raise her hand to the heavens reciting the words of Psalm 30:5 “for his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Those words have been a guiding mantra for me through many unsettling predicaments.

A new year is just hours away and many are weeping throughout the night. The anguish of millions still coping with coronaviruses is real. The variants keep on coming.

Steadfast, we hope that help is on the horizon, that a resolution is possible and there is a light in the tunnel to show the way. We believe even in the heartbreak and loss of life that the vaccines and boosters are the saving graces. We push and pull others to follow precautionary measures and practice protection protocols.

Reason with wisdom as its foundation will offer the guidance that will reveal the way. We cannot expect to survive thinking the old way is the only way. This is a new day, and we must be ready for a new year. A new year is not just another digit to change the count. Set new goals by letting go of 2021 and accepting the possibilities of 2022. Those who are not willing to move forward will be left behind.

The climate is changing, those

governing the laws of the land are seeking change, and the people must change. None of it is doomsday news, but an awakening of minds in those chosen to render the most diverse and mandatory services for the good of all.

Good must outweigh the bad; the strong must uplift the weak; the unsure shall seek discernment of the truth; and the believers will pray for God to lift his mighty hand and heal the land. The struggle shall cease because the wicked ones shall decrease.

When the need for help is screaming loud, we must pay attention and heed its call of desperation as quickly as possible. Do what you can, because it is the right thing to do, not for fame or fortune. Share what surplus you have, make calls to inquire about the welfare of others; resolve an

issue so that peace can begin with you.

It is my belief that cooperation with patience will prevail. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will hold up under the trials and tribulations of unraveling the mess they inherited.

Furthermore, it is my prayer we will walk into a new year with better health and better wealth to build back better what has been broken far too long. Harambee! Let us pull together and make it a Happy New Year from start to finish.

[Hazel Rosetta Smith is a journalist, playwright, and artistic director for Help Somebody Theatrical Ministries; retired former Managing Editor and Woman’s Editor of the New York Beacon News, Contact: misshazel@twc.com and visit website online at www.hazel-rosettasmith.com]

When the ball is in your court

By Hazel Rosetta Smith

The ball is in your court is an idiom. An idiom is a phrase which people use in everyday language that may have non-literal meaning, yet we understand what it means. It is estimated in English alone, there are approximately twenty-five thousand idiomatic expressions.

The concept of the “ball” comes from sports, such as tennis, basketball or any activity that involves passing a ball from one side to the other. Where the ball lands is the court and it is now the responsibility of the person who is occupying that court to make the next decision as swiftly as possible, or not. That being said, the ball in your court means it is your turn to act, move, speak, etc.

This particular idiom can be used and associated in other ways than moving a ball back and forth in sports. As a matter of fact it is the major concept in the process of our everyday functionality. Every decision to be made has been placed in somebody’s court. For example, have you heard this threat—I have done all I can, now the ball is in your court? Those few words are a straightforward confirmation

that the next move can only come from you.

Perhaps further examples apply: If you receive an invitation to an event, the request for your presence has been made so now the ball is in your court as to whether you accept or reject the invite. If a bill due statement arrives in your mailbox and you open it, the ball is in your court and the payee is waiting for your response into their court.

Most responsibilities placed upon us are not by request. All responsibilities will have ramifications. Another idiom reminds us – you will pay to the piper, meaning to accept and to bear the consequences for some action, usually something you’ve done wrong or badly.

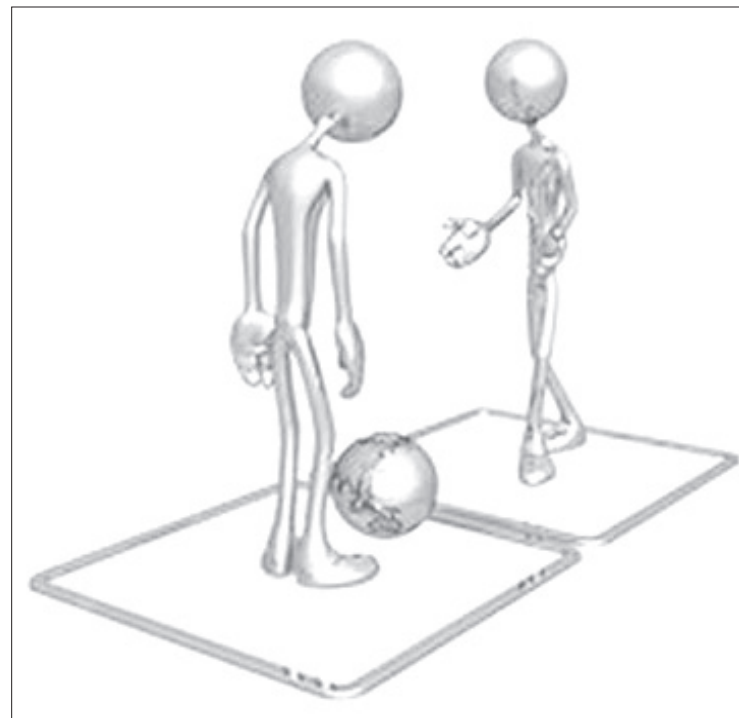
If we neglect to respond when a ball makes its way in our direction, there is a price to be paid. However, do not dismay too quickly, the ball can be returned for more information and clarification and the possibility of negotiation.

There has been no better example of how it feels to have an unexpected ball grand slam its way in your court, than this pandemic period we are still trying to fight and figure out. When the COVID

ball came flying in our court as if it was being shot from a cannon, responsibilities the likes of which we had never imagined in our lifetime on this planet polarized our thinking and paralyzed our very existence.

Decisions had to be made instantaneously with government mandates to shut-in and shut-down. Home remote schooling appeared on computers. Next came the nose swatting COVID testing, then vaxxing and now boosting. Those who have complied to the health guidances have returned the ball to other courts for further instruction and updates, while those who still refuse to comply have decided to accept the pandemic slam dunk and let it ride out in their court. This kind of indecisiveness goes far beyond the perimeters of the individual who has jeopardized the game in which multitudes are health minded partakers. The ball is laying deflated on far too many courts.

When any ball reaches the confines of your court, it is within your grasp to do the right thing. Hold it close to your heart, mold and shape the circumstance into an object of clear understanding. Pray on it, have a little talk about it,



Ball in your court

do proper research around it. At no time should you let fear keep you from letting it go. When the ball is in your court, you have the chance to make a change. Go for it. [Hazel Rosetta Smith is a journalist, play-

wright and artistic director for Help Somebody Theatrical Ministries (HSTM) and Hazel Rosetta Speaks! (HRS). Contacts: Email misshazel@twc.com and online at www.hazel-rosettasmith.com]

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Changemakers

Last Call for Applications for Disney Dreamers Academy Teen Mentorship Program

Application period closes Oct. 31 for a mentoring experience of a lifetime provided by Walt Disney World

Posted by Audrey J. Bernard

The deadline to apply for Disney Dreamers Academy, an inspiring and transformational mentorship program for high school students, is fast approaching. The application period closes Oct. 31, 2021, as planners continue to set the stage for the popular program to return to Walt Disney World Resort in Florida March 3-6, 2022.

Program applicants must answer essay questions about their personal journeys and dreams for the future. Students are selected based on a combination of attributes, including strong character, a positive attitude and determination to achieve their dreams. Students must be enrolled in high school in the continental United States and from ages 13-19 to be eligible for consideration. A parent or guardian accompanies each student on the trip.

For more information or to apply visit DisneyDreamersAcademy.com.

This ever-popular, outside-the-classroom program is designed to inspire young leaders to dream beyond their imaginations and jump-start their life goals. One hundred high school students will be selected to receive the trip to Walt Disney World to take part in the mentoring program.

Disney Dreamers Academy returns in-person just in time for its 15th anniversary year. The 2020 program was cut short due to the pandemic and transitioned to a very successful virtual program series in 2021.

Remaining consistent for the 100 students selected for the 2022 class is the opportunity to learn in the vibrant setting of Walt Disney World.

"We're looking forward to hosting our next class of Disney Dreamers again," said Tracey D. Powell, Disney Signature Experiences vice president and Disney Dreamers Academy executive champion. "The powerful life lessons, career guidance and face-to-face connections the students enjoy at Disney Dreamers Academy can be career-defining and even life-changing," she added. To celebrate our return, we'll be adding extra touches of magic throughout the event."

For 15 years, Disney Dreamers Academy has inspired more than 1,300 students from across the country by fueling their dreams and showing them a world of possibilities as they prepare for their futures. Students participate in hands-on, immersive career seminars in a wide range of disciplines found at Walt Disney World. Participants learn how to improve their communication, leadership



Mickey and Tracey D. Powell, Disney Signature Experiences vice president and Disney Dreamers Academy executive champion congratulate DDAs

and networking along with other valuable personal and professional development skills.

Students also participate in a series of sessions and workshops designed to help them imagine bright futures, make exciting discoveries and learn how to put their

goals into action. Disney Dreamers engage in a wide variety of experiences at Walt Disney World while working side-by-side and hearing inspirational stories from celebrities, community and industry leaders, Disney cast members and other special guests.

Past celebrity participants have included stars from the big screen and television, noted sports figures, popular musicians as well as personalities and cast members from across the Disney corporate family including "Good Morning America," ESPN, Disney Channel

and the TV series "black-ish" and "grown-ish." The exciting line-up of participants for the 2022 event will be announced at a later date.

Disney Dreamers Academy is focused on challenging young people to relentlessly pursue their dreams through the "Be 100" campaign – to be positive, to be "all in" and to apply lessons from their experience to help relentlessly pursue their dreams and make a difference in the lives of others. This motto is inspired by the powerful impact Disney Dreamers Academy has made on graduates who have gone on to become doctors, nurses, engineers, pilots, journalists and more.

About Disney Dreamers Academy:

Established by Walt Disney World in 2008, Disney Dreamers Academy's mission is to inspire young leaders to dream beyond imagination by providing life-long access to personalized support for the Disney Dreamer, their caregivers and community through insightful content and uplifting experts, mentors and sponsors. Each year, 100 high school students are awarded a trip to Walt Disney World Resort in Florida to experience the immersive and transformational program. For more information, visit www.disneydreamersacademy.com



Disney Dreamers participate in parade in Magic Kingdom

Classified

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