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# ICONS WE LOST IN 2023



pages 4, 14

# Health crisis looms: CDC issues stark warning amidst rising tide of COVID and flu cases

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

By Stacy M. Brown  
NNPA Newswire

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

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

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

mirroring the levels witnessed this time last year. Emergency room visits for school-age children have undergone an alarming, nearly twofold increase, driven chiefly by a surge in flu cases.

The CDC said the spike follows a period of stabilized emergency room figures leading up to Thanksgiving.

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

Nursing homes also are reportedly witnessing a sharp uptick in reported COVID-19 cases, particularly in the Midwestern region, where infections among residents have already surpassed last year's peak. The emergence of the JN.1 COVID variant contributes significantly to the current wave of infections, estimated to comprise up to 29% of cases nationwide—a stark increase from 8.8% at the close of November.

According to the CDC's projections, JN.1, a direct descendant of



the highly mutated BA.2.86 variant, has become the swiftest-growing variant in the United States. While a World Health Organization panel asserts that JN.1's alterations do not warrant a revision to this season's vaccines, initial data raises concerns about reduced vaccine efficacy against this variant.

Despite the situation's urgency, the CDC said vaccination rates are experiencing an unprecedented decline. Adult flu vaccinations are trailing by approximately 8

million doses compared to last year, and children's flu shots have dipped by around five percentage points. Bridging this gap is anticipated to be a formidable challenge, according to discussions between vaccine manufacturers and the CDC.

With only a third of nursing home residents and less than 10% of staff receiving the COVID-19 vaccine this season, Dr. Mandy Cohen, Director of the CDC, expressed deep concern about the

sluggish vaccine uptake. Urging healthcare providers to intensify efforts, especially among high-risk groups, she emphasizes the crucial role of vaccinations as the peak of the respiratory virus season looms.

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

## Lawyers dump Trevian Kutti, lone Black woman indicted with Trump in Georgia RICO case

In this handout provided by the Fulton County Sheriff's Office, publicist Trevian Kutti poses for her booking photo at the Fulton County Jail on August 25, 2023, in Atlanta, Georgia. | Source: Handout / Getty

At this point, it seems like all the people who got behind Donald Trump's failed bid to overturn the 2020 election results are currently what we in the Black community affectionately refer to as "down bad."

Former Trump attorney Sidney Powell was indicted and was ultimately compelled to plead guilty turn snitch. Rudy Giuliani is now millions of dollars in debt and he just might go down as America's brokest ex-mayor. Sunken place Trump stooge Harrison Floyd keeps narrowly dodging legal officials' "throw that fool back in jail" list. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio was sentenced to more than two decades behind bars for his part in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot he didn't even attend.

Now, Trevian Kutti—another one of the initial 19 co-defendants indicted under RICO charges in Georgia—has been dropped by her lawyers.

From Fox 5 Atlanta:

The motion, submitted on Dec. 18 in Fulton County Superior Court, lists Darryl B. Cohen and the law firm Cohen Cooper Estep & Allen; Steven A. Greenberg and the law firm Greenberg Trial Lawyers; and Joshua G. Herman and the law firm Law Office of Joshua G. Herman.

The motion states that Kutti has been duly notified and must now either prepare for trial independently or hire new counsel for



the preparation. Kutti has a 10-day window to file an objection.

The submitted court documents don't specify why attorneys have opted not to represent QMoron America's new favorite MAGA mammy (move over, Candace Owens), but people on social media are already speculating that it's due to Kutti posting not-so-veiled threats aimed at former Georgia election worker Ruby Freeman, who Kutti is accused of—\*checks notes\*—threatening and harassing over nonsensical allegations that she and her daughter, Wandrea Arshaye "Shaye" Moss, conjured up fake votes for President Joe Biden. (Those allegations are why Giuliani is probably one more lawsuit away from driving for Uber Eats and selling his coffee-stained dentures on eBay.)

## Republican voter fraud crackdown is an effort to disenfranchise Black, Hispanic voters, analysis

*"At best, these 'election integrity' units are for show, designed to placate far-right election denialists in the conservative base," Sawyer told the researchers. "At worst, they are used to justify new voting restrictions and to intimidate people—especially racial minorities—from exercising their right to vote."*

By Stacy M. Brown  
(NNPA Newswire)

**T**he Republican Party's assault on suspected and unverified widespread voter fraud has come into view for what it is: an attempt to disenfranchise Black and Hispanic voters. According to a study by The Washington Post, Republican-led voter fraud crackdowns disproportionately target Democrats and minorities. The newspaper's analysis found that Black and Hispanic people made up over 75 percent of defendants accused of voter fraud, while registered Democrats accounted for nearly 60 percent of those charged. The analysis also revealed that the election integrity units established or expanded in six states after the

2020 election only obtained 47 convictions, most of which were for minor instances of voter fraud by individual voters. The analysis undermines claims by the twice-impeached and four-times indicted former President Donald Trump and Republicans that widespread voter fraud influenced the outcome of the 2020 election.

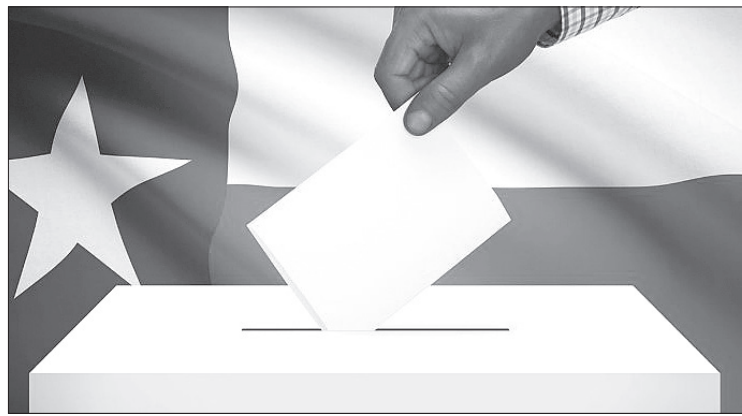
Among the key findings, registered Democrats comprised 58 percent of those charged with identifiable party affiliations, compared to 23 percent for registered Republicans. The remaining cases involved defendants not registered with a specific party. The researchers determined a defendant's race, ethnicity, or political party in approximately 70 percent of cases.

Contrary to assertions by Trump and some Republican allies, the analysis revealed that the election integrity units did not uncover widespread schemes that could significantly impact election outcomes. Instead, the convictions were typically the result of small-scale fraud or errors made by individual voters, such as casting

multiple ballots, falsifying registrations, or voting while disqualified due to a conviction.

The data also showed that many pursued cases ended in dismissal, acquittal, or dropped charges. Out of 115 resolved cases as of mid-December, 42 had such outcomes, nearly equaling the number of guilty verdicts. All convictions occurred in Florida, Texas, and Ohio, with Virginia, Georgia, and Arkansas failing to secure any guilty verdicts despite substantial resources allocated. Experts and advocates expressed alarm over the findings, with Heather Sawyer, executive director of the watchdog group American Oversight, describing the units as a waste of money undermining democracy. Republicans defended the units, emphasizing their role in ensuring election integrity and instilling confidence in voters.

Critics argue that the racial and political disparities in the crackdowns, along with the limited number of convictions, question the necessity and fairness of election integrity initiatives. The analysis has prompted concerns about potential voter suppression efforts under the guise of combating fraud, encouraging calls for reevaluating the allocation of resources in election integrity units. "At best, these 'election integrity' units are for show, designed to placate far-right election denialists in the conservative base," Sawyer told the researchers. "At worst, they are used to justify new voting restrictions and to intimidate people—especially racial minorities—from exercising their right to vote."



# Biden commutes sentences, pardons marijuana offenses in sweeping criminal justice reform

By Stacy M. Brown  
NNPA Newswire

In what the White House called a decisive move echoing the core tenet of equal justice under law, President Joe Biden announced a set of substantial clemency actions aimed at addressing glaring disparities within the U.S. criminal justice system. The president, underscoring bipartisan consensus on the need for a fair and unbiased legal framework, declared a series of important measures toward realizing the promise of equal justice in American communities. "I am announcing additional steps I am taking to make the promise of equal justice a reality," Biden declared, emphasizing that equal justice is a "foundational principle on which America was built." The first measure involves commuting sentences for 11 individuals serving extended terms for non-violent drug offenses. Among the notable cases receiving commutations are Darryl Allen Winkfield of Augusta, Ga., Leroy Lymons of Pensacola, Fla., and Earlie Deacon Barber of Dothan, Ala., each of whom was sentenced to life in prison. Winkfield was convicted in

1998 of conspiracy to distribute and to possess cocaine. Biden commuted the sentence, leaving intact a 10-year probation when Winkfield is released in April 2024. In 2012, Lymons was sentenced to life for conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine. The commutation clears Lymons for release after 27 years. In 2009, Barber was sentenced in Alabama for conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms of a mixture and substance containing cocaine base. He will now be released in April 2024, with a remaining 10 years of supervised probation. In the president's words, these individuals "would have been eligible for reduced sentences" under current standards. He said the move underscores his administration's commitment to rectifying outdated and unjust sentencing practices. Drawing attention to the crack-to-powder sentencing disparity, Biden noted that he supports initiatives to eliminate the sentencing difference, asserting that it "does not advance public safety." He said

the move aligns with his broader push for criminal justice reform. "I have exercised my clemency power more than any recent predecessor has at this point in their presidency," Biden stated. "And while today's announcement marks important progress, my administration will continue to review clemency petitions and deliver reforms that advance equal justice, address racial disparities, strengthen public safety, and enhance the wellbeing of all Americans." The White House insisted that law enforcement and experts now recognize that the crack-to-powder sentencing disparity is not supported by science, does not advance public safety, and disproportionately impacts Black communities. Administration officials said Attorney General Merrick Garland has also expressed support for eliminating the crack-to-powder sentencing disparity and has directed federal prosecutors to promote the equivalent treatment of crack and powder cocaine offenses. "As the president proposed as a senator in 2007, a fair criminal justice system requires that Con-



gress end, once and for all, this unjust and racially discriminatory sentencing disparity," the White House said in a statement. "And Congress must make these changes fully retroactive." Building on his previous pardon of simple possession offenses, Biden added, "It's time that we right these wrongs." The move extends to marijuana offenses committed on certain federal lands, encapsulating a comprehensive approach to marijuana reform, to which the president also signed a proclamation to pardon additional

offenses related to the use and possession of marijuana under federal and D.C. law. "Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana. It's time that we right these wrongs," Biden insisted. "Just as no one should be in a federal prison solely due to the use or possession of marijuana, no one should be in a local jail or state prison for that reason, either. That's why I continue to urge governors to do the same with regard to state offenses and applaud those who have since taken action."

# Biden touts huge investments in Black America, yet campaign lags in African American support

*As the re-election campaign unfolds and despite historic achievements for the Black community, the Biden administration still faces the challenge of addressing the concerns within the African American community, particularly the perceived neglect of the Black Press of America. Balancing economic achievements with community-specific outreach will be crucial in securing support from this vital demographic.*

By Stacy M. Brown (NNPA Newswire)

As the 2024 presidential election race kicks into high gear, President Joe Biden's re-election campaign is facing a stall among African Americans, coupled with concerns over the campaign's perceived neglect of the Black Press of America—the community's trusted voice for nearly two centuries. Despite those reservations, the White House is eager to showcase the unprecedented accomplishments of the Biden-Harris administration, particularly in economic growth and equity.

President Biden with NNPA President & CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr./NNPA

"Data shows that the historic public investments that make up the Biden-Harris Administration's economic agenda in critical sectors for future growth, resiliency, and security are beginning to come to fruition," White House officials stated in a blog, adding that, nevertheless, there is more work to do to lower costs for American families and ensure Americans feel the benefit of continued real wage growth, a strong labor market, and



declining inflation. In the blog post titled "Ten Charts That Explain the U.S. Economy in 2023," the White House underscored historic gains for

women and Black workers, noting that the administration's economic agenda is beginning to yield positive results. However, amidst the achievements, there remains acknowledgment of the ongoing work required to lower costs for American families and ensure the widespread benefits of economic growth, labor market strength, and declining inflation.

The blog detailed key economic indicators, including surpassing the private consensus for real economic growth in 2023 and the positive impact on consumer spending. The Inflation Reduction Act was highlighted as a significant factor in the historic manufacturing boom, leading to record levels of real private manufacturing construction investment.

Job gains in 2023 continued

robustly, contributing to 14.1 million jobs added under the Biden administration through November. The unemployment rate, maintaining a streak below 4% for 22 months, achieved a milestone not seen in over 50 years.

The administration indicated a downward trend, along with real wage growth and a decrease in wage inequality, despite a peak in inflation in the summer of 2022. Historic union activity in 2023 was cited as a reason for optimism, contributing to the highest rate of prime-age women participating in the labor force since 1948.

African Americans' worries, however, continue to grow because of what they perceive to be the Biden campaign's underinvestment in the Black Press of America. The influential media conglomer-

ate, which the National Newspaper Publishers Association represents, has served as the community's most trusted voice for nearly two centuries, and its omission from the campaign strategy hasn't helped to quell questions about the administration's commitment to addressing the specific needs and concerns of African Americans.

Still, Biden's commitment to supporting Black entrepreneurs was emphasized in the blog, highlighting significant investments, including nearly \$70 billion in federal contracts awarded to small, disadvantaged businesses in FY 2022. Additionally, \$12 billion was allocated to community lenders to expand access to capital and resources for often sidelined entrepreneurs.

The U.S. Department of Treasury estimated that those investments in community lenders would result in a \$50 billion increase in lending to Latino communities and nearly \$80 billion to Black communities over the next decade. The administration earmarked another \$10 billion for states, tribes, and territories to launch and expand capital access programs for approximately 100,000 small businesses.

As the re-election campaign unfolds and despite historic achievements for the Black community, the Biden administration still faces the challenge of addressing the concerns within the African American community, particularly the perceived neglect of the Black Press of America. Balancing economic achievements with community-specific outreach will be crucial in securing support from this vital demographic.



# In Memoriam

## Remembering the icons we lost in 2023

Many others were also lost in 2023, and though too numerous to print, they too also are fondly recalled and their contributions not forgotten.

By Stacy M. Brown  
(NNPA Newswire)

In a year of achievements and setbacks, 2023 said goodbye to several significant personalities who left a lasting impression on the entertainment, sports, civil rights, and art industries. Their achievements have influenced countless generations. Here, we list just some of those losses.

• **Richard Roundtree: Iconic Star of "Shaft" (1942–2023)**

Hollywood said goodbye to Richard Roundtree, the iconic Shaft star. While forever tied to the role that made him famous in 1971, Roundtree remained active for more than four decades, leaving an enduring mark on cinema.

• **Tina Turner: Legendary Singer and Performer (1939–2023)**

The music world mourned the loss of Tina Turner, the legendary singer renowned for her sultry voice and a string of platinum hits. Turner's impact on the music industry and her boundless passion for life captivated millions worldwide.

• **Andre Braugher: Acclaimed Actor (1962–2023)**

The acting community bid farewell to Andre Braugher, an acclaimed actor known for his roles in "Homicide" and "Brooklyn-Nine-Nine." Braugher's extraordinary talent earned acclaim, particular as Det. Frank Pembleton on "Homicide." Nominated for an Emmy 11 times, Braugher won the award four times.

• **Harry Belafonte: Singer, Actor, and Civil Rights Activist (1927–2023)**

The world said goodbye to Harry Belafonte, a singer, actor, and staunch civil rights activist. Belafonte's lifetime of activism transformed the arts while advocating for civil rights, leaving an enduring legacy.

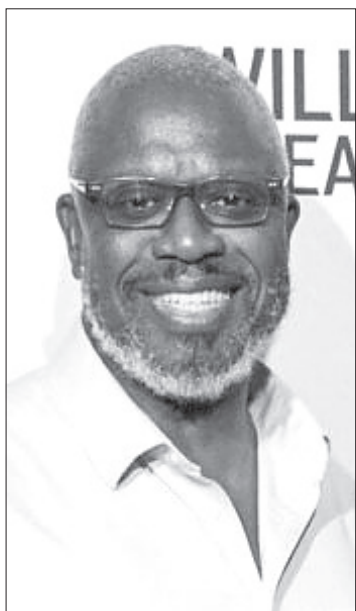
• **Richard Hunt: Visionary Sculptor and Art Pioneer (1935–2023)**

The art world bid farewell to Richard Hunt, a trailblazing sculptor and the first Black artist to receive a solo retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. With over 160 public sculptures across the U.S., Hunt's seven-decade career left an indelible mark on contemporary art, influencing generations.

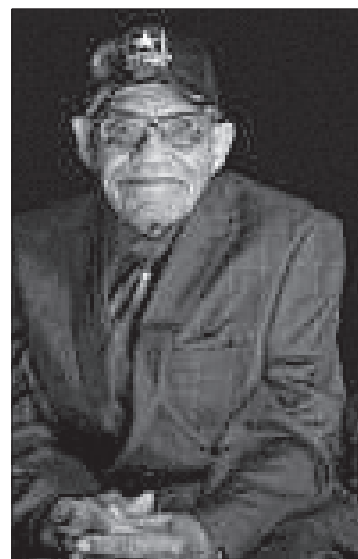
• **George McGinnis: Indiana Basketball Legend (1951–2023)**

Indiana mourned the loss of basketball legend George McGinnis, whose impact on the sport spanned from his All-American days at Indiana University to his championship runs with the Pacers. McGinnis will be remembered as a symbol of Hoosier basketball excellence.

• **Jean Knight: Soulful Song-**



Harry Belafonte



Hughes Van Ellis. Photo: Justice-ForGreenwood.org



Richard Roundtree/wikimedia commons

stress and Grammy-Nominated Artist (1943–2023)

The soulful voice behind "Mr. Big Stuff," Jean Knight, passed away, leaving a void in the world of R&B. Knight's legacy extends beyond her musical achievements.

• **George "Funky" Brown: Kool & The Gang Drummer and Songwriter (1949–2023)**

The rhythmic heartbeat of Kool & The Gang, George "Funky" Brown, left an indelible mark with his contributions to iconic songs like "Celebration" and "Ladies Night." Brown's musical genius and resilience were evident even in the face of a battle with stage-4 cancer.

• **D.J. Hayden: Former NFL Cornerback and Athlete (1989–2023)**

Tragedy struck the sports world with the untimely death of former NFL cornerback D.J. Hayden. The car crash that claimed his life has left the sports community in shock. Hayden's athleticism and contributions to the game will be remembered.

• **C-Knight (Arnez Blount): Rapper and "Cha Cha Slide" Creator (1971–2023)**

The hip-hop community lost a creative force with the passing of C-Knight, known for birthing the international dance craze with the "Cha Cha Slide." His legacy lives on

through the rhythmic beats that brought joy to countless dance floors, making him a lasting presence in music.

• **Walter Davis: NBA All-Star and UNC Basketball Legend (1954–2023)**

UNC basketball mourned the loss of one of its finest players, Walter Davis, a two-time All-ACC honoree and NBA All-Star. Davis, whose basketball prowess extended from the 1976 USA Olympic team to an illustrious NBA career, remains a symbol of skill and sportsmanship.

• **Bertie Bowman: Capitol Hill Veteran with a Legacy of Service (1931–2023)**

Capitol Hill bid farewell to Bertie Bowman, whose more than 60 years of service spanned roles from custodial to politically significant. Colleagues and the Capitol community will remember his legacy as a dedicated public servant.

• **Rudolph Isley: Founding Father of The Isley Brothers (1938–2023)**

The music world said goodbye to Rudolph Isley, a founding member of The Isley Brothers. His musical genius and timeless contributions to the industry, including hits like "Shout" and "Twist and Shout," cemented the Isley Brothers' place in music history.

• **Charles Porter Jr.: Houston's**

First Black Reporter and Resonant Voice (1942–2023)

Houston mourned the loss of Charles Porter Jr., a trailblazer who became the city's first Black reporter and anchor. His deep, resonant voice and coverage of significant events, including the swearing-in of late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, left an indelible mark on Houston's media landscape.

• **Hughes Van Ellis: Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor and WWII Veteran (1921–2023)**

The nation bid farewell to Hughes Van Ellis, one of the last surviving witnesses of the Tulsa Race Massacre. A proud US Army veteran who fought alongside the British in WWII, Ellis symbolized resilience and a living connection to a crucial chapter in American history.

• **Zoleka Mandela: Granddaughter of Nelson Mandela (1980–2023)**

South Africa mourned the loss of Zoleka Mandela, Nelson Mandela's granddaughter. Her battle with cancer came to an end, leaving behind a legacy intertwined with the struggle for justice and freedom.

• **Irish Grinstead: R&B Singer of 702 (1979–2023)**

R&B lost a soulful voice with the passing of Irish Grinstead, part of the award-winning trio 702. Fans all over the world will remember her contribution to the late 1990s R&B scene and her enduring influence on the genre.

• **Clarence Avant: "The Black Godfather" of Music (1931–2023)**

The music industry lost a true legend with the passing of Clarence Avant, known as "The Black Godfather." Those he inspired will always recognize Avant's contribution to the entertainment industry.

• **Sheila Oliver: New Jersey Lieutenant Governor (1952–2023)**

New Jersey mourned the loss of Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, the first Black woman to serve in a statewide elected position. Oliver's dedication to public service and pioneering role in New Jersey's polit-

ical landscape will be remembered.

• **John Beasley: Actor and Activist (1943–2023)**

Best known for his roles on Everwood and The Soul Man, died at 79. The actor died after being hospitalized in his hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, after his health took an "unexpected turn for the worst" following testing on his liver, according to reports.

• **Jim Brown: Football Legend, Activist, and Actor (1936–2023)**

The sports and entertainment world lost a multifaceted icon with the passing of Jim Brown, a football legend, activist, and actor. Brown's influence extended beyond the field, making him a prominent figure in popular culture.

• **Vida Blue: MLB Pitcher and World Series Champion (1949–2023)**

Baseball mourned the loss of Vida Blue, a former MLB pitcher who led the Oakland Athletics to three consecutive World Series victories in the 1970s.

• **Tori Bowie: Olympic Gold Medalist in Track and Field (1990–2023)**

The world of athletics lost Tori Bowie, an Olympic gold medalist in track and field. The track and field community celebrates Bowie's remarkable achievements and impact on the sport.

• **Willis Reed: NBA Hall of Famer and Knicks Legend (1942–2023)**

In basketball, fans mourned the loss of Willis Reed, an NBA Hall of Famer, and iconic Knicks captain. His contributions to the sport, including leading the Knicks to two NBA championships, made him a basketball legend.

• **Lola Chantrelle "Gangsta Boo" Mitchell: Rapper (1979–2023)**

Memphis and the hip-hop community mourned the loss of Gangsta Boo, one-third of the award-winning R&B trio 702.

Many others were also lost in 2023, and though they are too numerous to print, they are also fondly recalled, and their contributions are not forgotten.



# Worst crime of 2023? You won't believe what this Jersey mom did to her beautiful baby

Philadelphiaobserver.com

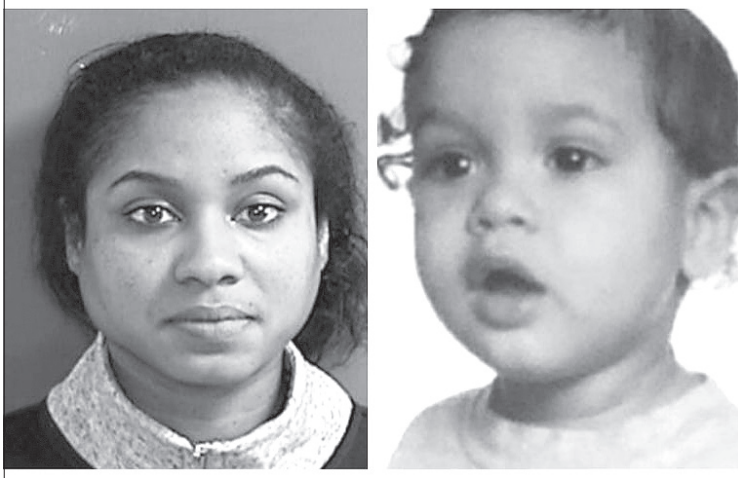
A woman from South Jersey began the year of 2023 with being sent to prison but for such a heinous crime, we're still reeling about it.

Nakira Griner, 28, reported her nearly 2-year-old son missing back in 2019. Griner claimed she was attacked while walking to a store in Bridgeton, Nj. and that little Daniel had been abducted from his stroller. The Bridgeton police embarked on a rigorous search, receiving help from State Police bloodhounds and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, according to NJ.com. The police dogs eventually tracked down the scent of the baby boy. The horrible twist? The dogs led police in Griner's own backyard.

Shortly after the discovery, Griner was charged in connection to her son's death.

The report says Daniel's autopsy revealed he died of blunt force trauma and his skull had been broken into 74 pieces. Also, when his body was found, his remains were dismembered and burnt to a crisp.

Where was his father? Completely out of of the loop.



Screenshot: Cumberland County Jail, Facebook

Read more from NJ.com: Daniel Griner Sr. works as a registered nurse at a hospital and told police he returned home at 7:30 p.m. the day before his wife reported the disappearance.

The next day, the day his son was reported missing, he spoke with his wife via FaceTime during his lunch break and she told him the kids were napping, the prosecutor said.

In phone calls Griner made from jail, she allegedly claimed

Daniel fell down steps and that she "did what she did to him" to cover up bruising on his body, [Senior Assistant Prosecutor Elizabeth] Vogelsong-Parvin said.

Originally, Griner told the police the child fell down the stairs, according to the criminal complaint obtained by CBS. She rejected then a plea deal insisting to take things to trial under the claim she only injured her son but left him alone in a stroller hoping someone would pick him up.

# White couple charged in cross burning on Black neighbors' lawn in South Carolina

White people are seemingly getting more bold in the South. Whether it's a white woman killing a Black man unprovoked, or a group of racist white men threatening a group of innocent Black women, it just doesn't seem to stop.

This latest example might be even more disturbing.

Last week, a white couple in Conway, South Carolina, was arrested after they allegedly erected and set fire to a cross outside the

home of their Black neighbors over Thanksgiving weekend.

According to the Horry County Police Department, Worden Butler and Alexis Harnett were both charged with second-degree harassment.

Even though this is their most blatant and disturbing act yet, Butler and Harnett allegedly have had a history of harassing their Black neighbors, Shawn and Monica Williams, with racist remarks, threats, disturbing claims, and now this.



Photo: J Rueben Long Detention Center

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# Jay-Z Day and the erosion of political substance

News Analysis

*Jay-Z, undeniably a cultural juggernaut, has made quite a mark on music, business, and some of the social causes he's undertaken.*

By Stacy M. Brown  
(NNPA Newswire)

In the hallowed chambers of New York City's legislative realm, a proposal has surfaced that could forever alter the way we perceive civic celebration. Farah Louis and other council members have proposed legislation to declare December 4 as "Jay-Z Day" in honor of Shawn Carter, the man who would later become a global phenomenon. While the intent is to honor Jay-Z's cultural contributions, it forces us to confront a disconcerting trend that has seeped into the very fabric of our political landscape—the fervent embrace of celebrity culture.

Jay-Z, undeniably a cultural juggernaut, has made quite a mark on music, business, and some of the social causes he's undertaken. However, the potential establishment of a dedicated day in his honor symbolizes a larger issue at play—a society where the boundaries between genuine recognition and celebrity worship are increasingly blurred. The question that looms is whether the nation's political leaders, those entrusted with the serious business of crafting laws and policies, should be active-

ly courting the favor of celebrities.

In the aftermath of Watergate and the Vietnam War, political scientist Scott Edwards lamented the shift away from the heroic political figure. Edwards argued that democracies require civic exemplars whose principled strivings serve as models for the average person. Fast forward to today, and we find ourselves in an era where politicians are not only courting celebrity endorsements but actively seeking approval from the glitzy entertainment world. The erosion of American democracy has also given way to a culture of celebrity appeasement. The proposed Jay-Z Day is emblematic of this trend, where recognition is bestowed not for political prowess or principled leadership but for well-knownness. The danger inherent in this shift is palpable, as surveys indicate a growing belief among Americans that celebrities make good politicians. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Matthew McConaughey, Zendaya, and Beyoncé—names that routinely grace our screens—are now considered for political leadership. However, their appeal lies more in their celebrity status than in any demonstrated understanding of policy intricacies. The danger becomes even more apparent when we consider that politicians, instead of delving into the complexities of governance, are bending to the whims of fame.

We stand at a crossroads where the allure of celebrity has infiltrated the very essence of governance. The desire to gain favor with well-known people increasingly influences decisions that affect citizens' lives. It's a perilous path where celebrity status triumphs over experience, wisdom, and a genuine commitment to public service.

As we contemplate the potential establishment of Jay-Z Day, politicians and everyday people should not merely celebrate cultural icons but critically assess how far Americans have strayed from the ideals that should define leadership. After all, shouldn't lawmakers resist the allure of celebrity, prioritize substance over spectacle, and reclaim a political landscape where true heroes are those dedicated to the service of the people, not those merely basking in the fleeting glow of the limelight? In the grand tapestry of democracy, leaders are supposedly chosen for their substance, not just their celebrity status. Jay-Z Day should prompt a reflection on the kind of leaders Americans should want—either individuals who embody the principles of governance or merely revel in their name's well-knownness. The choices made will shape the future of American democracy and determine whether people set their priorities straight or continue down a path where fame eclipses substance.



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## Taraji P. Henson's candid revelation sparks industry support for equal pay

*The 53-year-old star, celebrated for her roles in "Empire" and "The Color Purple," opened up about the substantial pay gap that Black women face in the entertainment industry.*

By Stacy M. Brown  
(NNPA Newswire)

In a recent SiriusXM interview with Gayle King, iconic actress Taraji P. Henson bravely addressed the pervasive issue of pay inequality in Hollywood, triggering an outpouring of solidarity from her peers. The 53-year-old star, celebrated for her roles in "Empire" and "The Color Purple," opened up about the substantial pay gap that Black women face in the entertainment industry.

"I'm only human and it seems every time I do something, and I break another glass ceiling, when it's time to renegotiate I'm at the bottom again like I never did what I just did. And I'm just tired," Henson explained in an emotional SiriusXM interview. "It wears on you."

"When it's time for us to go to bat, they don't have any money," she added of her contract negotiations. "They play in your face. And I'm just supposed to smile and grin and bear and just keep going."

Support for Henson flooded social media, with Gabrielle Union, 51, taking to X (formerly Twitter) to affirm, "Not a damn lie told. Not. A. Damn. Lie." Union emphasized the collective commitment of industry veterans to usher in the change necessary for future generations, acknowledging the toll it takes on one's mental health, soul, and career.

Keke Palmer, known for her role in "Nope," joined the conversation on Instagram, delving into the intricacies of Hollywood paychecks. Palmer drew parallels between the entertainment industry and other businesses, shedding light on the collaborative efforts behind every successful actor. She discussed

the financial complexities of managing a team, including agents, publicists, and assistants, echoing the sentiment that "more money means more problems," a reality in any industry.

Palmer further touched upon the commonality of juggling multiple jobs in the entertainment sector, often out of necessity rather than choice. She highlighted the financial challenges faced by those pursuing success in America, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurship while acknowledging its inherent expenses.

Henson's revelations struck a chord as she detailed the financial strain actors endure, especially when negotiating contracts and managing the substantial expenses of their support teams.

"I'm just tired of working so hard, being gracious at what I do, getting paid a fraction of the cost," Henson replied. "I'm tired of hearing my sisters saying the same thing over and over. I hear people go, 'You work a lot.' I have to. The math ain't mathing."

She pointed out that behind every successful actor is a team of people supporting them. "Big bills come with what we do. We don't do this alone," she said. "The fact that we're up here, there's a whole entire team behind us. They have to get paid."

The actress conveyed frustration at consistently finding herself negotiating as though she had not already broken barriers in her career. Henson candidly shared the industry's tendency to lack financial support when it comes time for equitable compensation negotiations.

Despite these challenges, Henson emphasized the importance of diversifying income streams. Beyond acting, she has launched side projects, such as her TPH haircare line, to fortify her financial standing and safeguard her well-being in an industry that, as she put it, "if you let it, it'll steal your soul."

## Two African films make it to the 'Oscars so white' awards

(GIN) –

There's a burgeoning industry of great African films but you'll be lucky to see any of them at the Oscars.

"I'm sure the majority of the world doesn't even know we make movies," commented Likarion Wainaina, the 35 year old writer-director of Supa Modo, one of Kenya's most acclaimed films.

Kenya submitted the film for consideration in the Oscar category of "international feature films." It was not nominated.

The Seattle Times wrote about the film, "I straight-up bawled my eyes out."

Since the category of international films was introduced in 1956, only 10 films from Africa have been nominated, representing just 5 countries. Only 3 have won: Z from Algeria (1969), Black and White in Color from Ivory Coast (1976) and South Africa's Tsotsi (2005). Two of those Oscar winners were directed by Europeans and the third by a white South African.

Latin America has just one film on the shortlist: Mexico's Totem. That's down from two last year, with Chile's The Settlers and Argentina's The Delinquents missing out this year.

The list of overlooked films is impressive. The Senegalese film, Atlantique, directed by Mati Diop, won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival and was described as an allegory for the migrant crisis. Diop made history by becoming the first Black woman to direct a film featured in competition at

the festival.

Former President Obama named it one of his favorite films of the year. It was not nominated.

The Oscar has gone to a European nation 58 times over 74 years with Canada winning once. France has been nominated more times than any other country with 41 nominations. Of the 10 countries that have won the most Oscars in the category, all are in Europe with the exception of 5-time winner Japan.

And only a small club of countries is even in the running. Just 62 nations — fewer than a third of the countries on earth — have ever had a film nominated.

Cultural biases have a deep impact on all Oscar categories, say organizers of the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. And consider how few female nominees there are in the best director category. This year's slate is all male.

In a first-ever submission to the international feature film category, Namibia offered "Under the Hanging Tree." Starring Girley Jazama, David Ndjavera, Roya Diehl, and Dawie Engelbrecht, the film took on issues of colonialism, racism, and superstition in Namibia, alternating between Afrikaans, German, and English language in its 90-minute-runtime.

Last year, Uganda submitted its first-ever film for the Oscars, putting forward Morris Mugisha's Tembele in the international feature category.

The drama follows Tembele, a trash collector in Kampala suffer-

ing from mental illness who begins to lose his grip on reality after the death of his infant son.

"In Africa, men are told to hide their feelings and never show weakness because they will be thought feeble," Mugisha said. "Tembele suggests that it is OK for a man to cry and vulnerability is no crime especially if you're hurting. This is a film of hope, love and brotherhood."

Tembele premiered in Uganda this summer and swept the Uganda Film Festival Awards, winning best film, best actor and best supporting actor honors.

Finally, "La Mere de tous les Mensonges"—The Mother of All Lies—submitted by Morocco and "La Four Daughters," an Arabic-language docu-drama from Tunisia have both made it to the shortlist of the Best International Feature Film category, while Bobi Wine: The People's President about the Ugandan pop star/politician is shortlisted for the Best Documentary category.

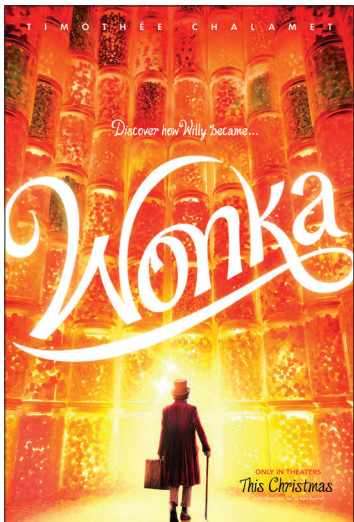
Finally, from Nigeria, a new wave of filmmakers is helping to change the depiction of LGBTQ characters. Babatunde Apalowo's debut feature—All the Colors of the World Are Between Black and White—is a tender portrait of two men as they experience the early moments of an uncertain relationship.

It joins the canon of select films by valiant Nollywood filmmakers, queer and otherwise, rebelling against the queerphobic stereotypes rife in older Nollywood flicks.



# Film

## Timothée Chalamet is Wonkaful in Warner Bros. sweet holiday treat — ‘Wonka’



By Audrey J. Bernard

**W**arner Bros. Pictures Presents, in Association with Village Roadshow Pictures, a Heyday Films Production, a Paul King Confection, “Wonka,” opened in theaters and in IMAX internationally in December 2023 and in North America on December 15, 2023; and distributed worldwide by Warner Bros. Pictures. The movie has been a tasty treat for moviegoers who have kept it at the top of the box office where it ended the year in the coveted #1 spot! Go Willie!! Based on the extraordinary character at the center of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Roald Dahl’s most iconic children’s book and one of the best-selling children’s books of all time, “Wonka” tells the wondrous story of how the world’s greatest inventor, magician and chocolate-maker became the beloved Willy Wonka we know today.

From Paul King, writer/director of the “Paddington” films, David Heyman, producer of “Harry Potter,” “Gravity,” “Fantastic Beasts” and “Paddington,” and producers Alexandra Derbyshire (the “Paddington” films, “Jurassic World: Dominion”) and Luke Kelly (“Roald Dahl’s The Witches”), comes an intoxicating mix of magic and music, mayhem and emotion, all told with fabulous heart and humor. Starring Timothée Chalamet in the title role, this irresist-



(L to r) CALAH LANE as Noodle and TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET as Willy Wonka



(L to r) TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET as Willy Wonka, MATHEW BAYNTON as Fickelgruber, PATERSON JOSEPH as Arthur Slugworth and MATT LUCAS as Prodnose

ibly vivid and inventive big screen spectacle will introduce audiences to a young Willy Wonka, chock-full of ideas and determined to change the world one delectable bite at a time—proving that the best things in life begin with a dream, and if you’re lucky enough to meet Willy Wonka, anything is possible.

Starring alongside Chalamet are Calah Lane (“The Day Shall Come”), Emmy and Peabody Award winner Keegan-Michael Key (“The Prom,” “Schmigadoon”), Paterson Joseph

(“Vigil,” “Noughts + Crosses”), Matt Lucas (“Paddington,” “Little Britain”), Mathew Baynton (“The Wrong Mans,” “Ghosts”), Oscar nominee Sally Hawkins (“The Shape of Water,” the “Paddington” films, “Spencer”), Rowan Atkinson (the “Johnny English” and “Mr. Bean” films, “Love Actually”), Jim Carter (“Downton Abbey”), with Oscar winner Olivia Colman (“The Favourite”). The film also stars Natasha Rothwell (“White Lotus,” “Insecure”), Rich Fulcher (“Marriage Story,” “Disen-



(L to r) MATHEW BAYNTON as Fickelgruber, MATT LUCAS as Prodnose, KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY as Chief of Police and PATERSON JOSEPH as Slugworth



(L-R) Paterson Joseph, Timothée Chalamet, Calah Lane, Hugh Grant and Keegan-Michael Key arrive for the premiere of WONKA at the Regency Village Theatre in Westwood, Calif. on Dec. 10, 2023 (Getty Images)

chantment”), Rakhee Thakrar (“Sex Education,” “Four Weddings and a Funeral”), Tom Davis (“Paddington 2,” “King Gary”) and Kobna Holdbrook-Smith (“Paddington 2,” “Zack Snyder’s Justice League,” “Mary Poppins Returns”).

Simon Farnaby (“Paddington 2”) & Paul King wrote the screenplay, based on a story by King and characters created by Roald Dahl. Michael Siegel, Cate Adams, Rosie Alison and Tim Wellspring are serving as executive producers. King’s behind-the-scenes

creative team includes director of photography Chung-Hoon Chung (“Last Night in Soho,” “Ah-ga-ssi”); Oscar-nominated production designer Nathan Crowley (“Tenet,” “Dunkirk”); editor Mark Everson (the “Paddington” films); Oscar-winning costume designer Lindy Hemming (the “Paddington” films, “Topsy-Turvy”); and composer Joby Talbot (the “Sing” films). Neil Hannon of the band The Divine Comedy writes original songs for the film. (Photos courtesy Warner Bros. Pictures)



A scene from Warner Bros. Pictures and Village Roadshow Pictures’ WONKA



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# Editorial - Opinion



by Julianne Malveaux

## Out with the old? 2023 news that will haunt us in 2024

**M**any of us go through the useless ritual of making New Year's resolutions and proclaiming "out with the old." Maybe that works for your eating habits or exercise routine, but 2023 news will be with us into 2024. From my perspective, these are the things we'll be paying attention to in 2024.

1. I'm an economist, so my top news carryover is The economy: Inflation is slowing, and unemployment rates are low. Good news, right? Some economists are still predicting a recession in 2024 and a "sharp hit," not a "soft landing." Either way, economic news will dominate in 2024, and the fact that it's an election year means there will be "alternate facts" and interpretations. Bottom line – stack your money. Recession hits Black folks harder, and recovery helps us more slowly than it helps others. And don't believe the hype that Biden didn't help the economy. He did!

2. Congressional gridlock: won't go away until the election of 2024. Republicans have a narrow majority and can't seem to get much done. A budget has to be passed in January, but neither side appears willing to compromise on immigration reform and border control, aid to Ukraine and Israel, and more. I don't think Republicans are eager to shut the government down, especially in an election year, but their brinksmanship has left their party in tatters (who knew who Mike Johnson (R-LA) was a year ago)?

3. While I hate to elevate the narcissistic former President: He dominates the news, and unfortunately, too many cover him uncritically. Look – he lost the 2020 election and inspired an insurrection. He's been indicted 91 times and is unfit for public office, but his hard-right supporters, including many Congressional Republicans, are too afraid of his influence to speak up. Can he win in 2024? Unless we invest in record turnout, very possibly.

4. Anti-blackness in education and legislation: While the mainstream media won't cover this much, it is alarming that 44 states have introduced legislation to restrict teaching about race. More than 1600 books have been banned, including works by lumi-

naries like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Couple this with the efforts of Edward Blum to dismantle affirmative action, going so far as to sue the government, the private sector, and even African American women who have developed race-specific efforts. This effort isn't going away. Conservative foundations fund Blum's efforts. These very predatory capitalists used racism to build their fortunes and now want to eliminate the use of race in repairing the racial wealth gap.

5. Additionally, there have been constant attacks on DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion): Efforts at universities, government organizations, and private companies. Anti-blackness is alive and well. The struggle continues.

6. Police violence: Nobody covers police violence better than Roland Martin, who very frequently highlights incidents of police violence that don't make the national headlines. Just because it isn't on the front page of the New York Times doesn't mean it isn't happening. Kudos to Roland for constantly lifting this up and to attorney Ben Crump for working with the families of those massacred at the hands of rabid police officers. Justice delayed is not always justice denied. Thanks to

Assistant Attorney General Kristin Clark, many of these massacres are being aggressively investigated.

7. Immigration reform and border control: Have been unfinished business since 1986, but the former President has denigrated and misrepresented immigrants. There's no easy solution to immigration. How do we deport millions who are now part of the fabric of our lives? How do we absorb the people at our borders who are only looking for a better way of life? How do we balance the needs of those coming in with those already here? Cities like Chicago and New York struggle to accommodate those whose putrid governors (like Texas' Greg Abbott) are shipping people to those states. Jingoistic rhetoric doesn't help a pressing issue. With Orange Man acolytes running the Congress, any solution seems grim, if not impossible.

8. Israel: People in the United States are firmly divided on how our country deals with the Middle East. It goes without saying that Hamas was wrong in its attack on Israel, which resulted in between 1200 and 1400 deaths and the taking of more than 200 hostages. It should also go without saying that the attack was a function of the apartheid state Palestinians were forced into, the land loss

that they experienced, and the desperation that many felt. Wading into this conflict is like touching kryptonite. If you say the wrong thing, you're dead. But while it is essential to condemn Hamas, it is also important to acknowledge their motivation. There must be a cease-fire. The hostages must be released. The United States must be much more measured in our approach.

9. Labor Power: Organized labor stepped up and showed out with strikes from the United Auto Workers, Los Angeles teachers and ancillary workers, and actors and writers in the entertainment industry. It's essential to black folks because when we are organized, we make about a third more Black folks who aren't organized. Economic issues have radicalized workers who thought they had no power. Now, as the economy tilts against workers, organizing tilts toward them.

Fasten your seat belts, y'all. 2023 left us with much in the trunk for 2024. May we use this election year to struggle for economic and social justice?

Dr. Julianne Malveaux is an economist and author. The second edition of *Surviving and Thriving: 365 Facts in Black Economic History* is available through [mahoganybooks.com](http://mahoganybooks.com)

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## African National Congress faces party members demanding change

(GIN) –

**T**he historic African National Congress, leader of the decades-old struggle against apartheid, governing party of the Republic of South Africa since 1994, is having a family feud.

Deep divisions are coming out into the open as when former South African president Jacob Zuma recently declared he would not vote for the ruling ANC in national elections in 2024.

"I have decided that I cannot and will not campaign for the ANC of Ramaphosa in 2024. My conscience will not allow me to lie to the people of South Africa and to pretend that the ANC of Ramaphosa is the ANC of Luthuli, Tambo and Mandela," said Zuma, referring to previous leaders of the ANC.

Zuma said he would vote for the radical new left-wing Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) party, named after the ANC's old armed wing, and urged all South Africans to reject the ANC.

"I call on all South Africans to join me in taking the important step and to vote for the MK Party and any other progressive party which seeks total liberation," he said.

Zuma's remarks added to a growing pile of critiques—often from former ANC officials such as ousted ANC secretary general Ace Magashule who recently an-

nounced the formation of a new party—the African Congress for Transformation (ACT).

A close ally of ex-president Zuma, he was expelled from the ruling party in June for allegedly personally benefiting from money meant to be used to remove asbestos from the homes of people in the Free State province where he was the premier from 2009 to 2018. He also faces charges of corruption in a criminal case.

Another breakaway was announced last month by seven opposition parties including the country's main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, and a string of small parties who agree on what they call a Multi-Party Charter for South Africa.

Support for the ANC has slowly waned over the years amid criticism that it has failed to provide basic services and ease poverty for millions of the country's Black majority. Widespread corruption in state-owned institutions and local and national government has further eroded its popularity.

Other problems include the highest levels of unemployment in the world, a failing electricity supply that's led to regular blackouts, a broken public transport system and high violent crime rates.

In an effort to bring the opposition together, a multiparty national convention was organized, led by William Gumede, founder of

the Democracy Works Foundation and assoc. professor, School of Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Participants at the first meeting included party leaders from the Democratic Alliance, Inkatha Freedom Party, Freedom Front Plus, among others.

Herman Mashaba, president of ActionSA, explained his presence at the convention.

"ANC will lose its majority, and all South Africans know this, but they have never seen opposition parties putting aside differences to give them hope," he said. "We must define this agreement with a positive vision for South Africa, not against other political parties."

Freedom Front Plus leader Pieter Groenewald asked the parties to set an example by paving a way forward to help to save South Africa.

"I don't think there is anyone in South Africa who will not agree that we are not at a good point in the history of our country. There must be change," Groenewald said.

Prof William Gumede, who is chairing the discussions, encouraged party leaders to rise above egos and squabbles.

"Every decision the group makes has to be in the best interest of South Africa. It has to be for the future of all of us and for those still to be born." w/pix of J. Zuma in green shirt

## Ex-Credit Suisse CEO to lead Ivory Coast opposition

(GIN)

**A** former CEO of Credit Suisse, Tidjane Thiam, was voted by a wide margin to head the opposition Democratic Party.

He received 95% of the vote while his opponent, Jean-Marc Yace, the mayor of Cocody in the de facto capital, Abidjan, received 3.2 percent.

Thiam, 61, an Ivorian and French businessman and the executive chairman of Freedom Acquisition Corp, served in the cabinet of ex-President Henry Konan Bedie in the 1990s before leaving the West African country almost 25 years ago when Bedie was ousted in a coup.

In March 2020, he left the Swiss bank after it was learned that the bank had hired private detectives to spy on the former head of wealth management, Iqbal Kahn, after he left for arch rival UBS.

Thiam denied any involvement in the spying scandal even while Switzerland's financial regulator said that Credit Suisse had misled it about the scale of the spying. The regulator said the bank planned seven different spying operations between 2016 and 2019 and carried out most of them.

In a rare rebuke, the regulator said there were serious organizational shortcomings at Credit Suisse and that the bank had even tried to cover its tracks by doctoring an invoice for surveillance.

In response, Credit Suisse said it condemned the spying and had taken "decisive" steps to improve its governance and strengthen compliance. Thiam resigned shortly after.

The PDCI election was held at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Foundation for Peace Research in Yamoussoukro, the de jure capital of Ivory Coast.

Côte d'Ivoire may be one of West Africa's biggest economies, but the majority of its people have no share in the country's economic success. Almost 40 percent of the country's about 27 million people are living below the national poverty line; more than 40 percent are

food insecure.

According to UNICEF, the birth of 230 million children under the age of 5 are not registered. These "ghost children" are thus deprived of access to fundamental rights. In Ivory Coast, despite the efforts of the authorities, the problem is persistent, and even seems to be increasing with 35% of children unregistered.

Earlier this year, child welfare advocates filed a federal lawsuit asking a judge to force the Biden administration to block imports of cocoa harvested by children in West Africa that can end up in America's most popular chocolate desserts and candies.

The lawsuit, brought by the U.S.-based International Rights Advocates, seeks to have the federal government enforce a 1930s era federal law that requires the government to ban products created by child labor from entering the U.S.

The nonprofit group says it filed the suit because Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Homeland Security have ignored extensive evidence documenting children cultivating cocoa destined for well-known U.S. candy makers, including Hershey, Mars, Nestle and Cargill.

The major chocolate companies pledged to end their reliance on child labor to harvest their cocoa by 2005. Now they say they will eliminate the worst forms of child labor in their supply chains by 2025.

Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest producer and exporter of cocoa (30% of the world production), one of the three biggest producers and exporters of cashew and a major exporter of palm oil, coffee and oil. The country's economy is mainly based on agriculture.

With this election, the Democratic Party (PDCI) hopes to rejuvenate its image following the death of its former leader Henri Konan Bedie, in early August at the age of 89.

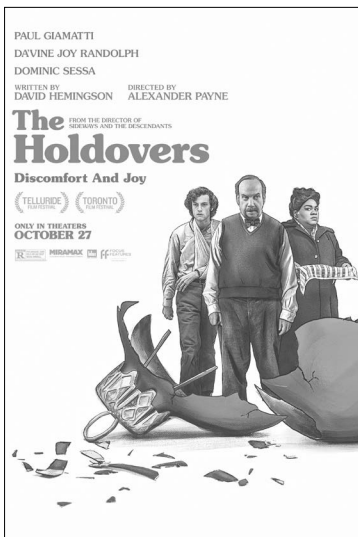
Ouattara, 81, has not stated his intentions for 2025. w/pix of T.Thiam



# Audrey's society whirl



Audrey J. Bernard



**D**a'Vine Joy Randolph is the talk of the award season having won several prestigious awards and racked up 28 Best Supporting Actress wins and 27 nominations for her phenomenal performance in Focus Features hit holiday film "The Holdovers" which she starred in with Paul Giamatti and Dominic Sessa under the direction of Alexander Payne. The film was one of the best films of the 2023 award season. Randolph has been cited repeatedly for her winning role as the cook at a New England prep school over Christmas in the 1970s. Some of the distinguished awards include New York Film Critics Circle award for Best Supporting Actress (2023); the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award (2023); the NBR Award Best Supporting Actress; and the BSFC Award Best Supporting Actress (2023). She is a 2024 Nominee Critics Choice Award for Best Supporting Actress; Nominee Golden Globe Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role in Any Motion Picture; and the 2023 Nominee Gotham Independent Film Award Outstanding Supporting Performance. She is

## The critics are not holding back giving Da'Vine Joy Randolph her awards!



Da'Vine Joy Randolph stars as Mary Lamb, the head cook of the school whose only child Curtis was killed in Vietnam, in a scene from Focus Features' 'The Holdovers'



Director Alexander Payne enjoys a moment with 'The Holdovers' stars Dominic Sessa, Paul Giamatti, and Da'Vine Joy Randolph



also up to receive Palm Springs International Film Festival's esteemed Breakthrough Performance Award for her memorable

performance. "The Holdovers" which was released in November with acclaimed reviews is in theaters everywhere and screaming on Peacock.

**SYNOPSIS:** "The Holdovers" reunites Sideways alums Paul Giamatti and director Alexander Payne in a Christmas story of three lonely, shipwrecked people at a New England boarding school over a very snowy holiday break in 1970. The comedy stars Giamatti as Paul Hunham, an odiferous, optically-challenged adjunct professor of ancient history who is universally disliked by students and faculty; Da'Vine Joy Randolph as Mary Lamb, the head cook of the school whose only child Curtis was killed in Vietnam, and Dominic Sessa, in his film debut, as Angus Tully, a student at the school—a smart, damaged, troublemaker but a good kid underneath who's just trying to make his way. Left to their own devices in the empty school, there are adventures, a little calamity and finally, a semblance of family.

**CAST:** Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, and Dominic Sessa.

**CREDITS:** Directed by: Alexander Payne. Written by: David Hemingson, Produced by: Mark Johnson p.g.a., Bill Block, and David Hemingson. Executive Producers: Andrew Golov, Thom Zadra, and Chris Stinson. "The Holdovers" is in theaters and streaming on Peacock. (Photos by Seacia Pavao/Focus Features)



## About Randolph

Pennsylvania native Da'Vine Joy Randolph made her Broadway and West End debuts starring as Oda Mae Brown in Ghost the Musical (2012 Tony Award Nomination, Best Featured Actress in a Musical). A Philadelphia native, she received her bachelor's from Temple University in classical vocal performance and transitioned into acting by attending Yale School of Drama for her Masters. Regional stage credits include Servant of Two Masters at Yale Repertory Theater and Hair at Prince Music Theater. (IMBD)



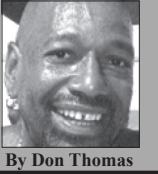
Da'Vine Joy Randolph attends the 2023 Gotham Awards (Photo by Bryan Bedder-Getty Awards)

#DanceLikeaDad



fatherhood.gov

# Entertainment



By Don Thomas



By Bruce Haring

**M**aurice Hines, who tap danced his way to a Tony nomination during a long stage career and was a frequent TV guest, has died at the age of 80,

according to reports from friends and family. He began working in show business at age five. He made his Broadway debut in "The Girl in the Pink Tights" in 1954, and went on to appear in "Eubie!," "Sophisticated Ladies," "Bring Back

Birdie," and "Uptown...It's Hot!," the latter winning him a Tony nomination. Hines was Nathan Detroit in a 2001 tour of "Guys and Dolls," working with Debbie Allen, Leslie Uggams, and Richard Roundtree.

## Maurice Hines 80, tap dancing star of stage, TV and film

The capstone to his career was the show "Maurice Hines: Tapping Through Life," a tribute to his family that was filled with anecdotes about working with Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Duke Ellington, and others. He staged the Radio City Christmas Spectacular in 1990, becoming the first African American to direct at the famed venue.

Born in 1943 in New York City, Hines and his younger brother, Gregory were trained at an early age. Their father, Maurice Hines Sr., joined his sons in Hines, Hines & Dad, an act seen regularly on "The Pearl Bailey Show" and "The Tonight Show," among other programs. Maurice film resume included appearing with his brother in the Francis Ford

Coppola film "The Cotton Club," playing a tap dance act modeled on the Nicholas Brothers. The film marked the last time Maurice and Gregory performed together, as a dispute kept them apart until their mother's death. Their careers still intersected during the estrangement, and Maurice toured in "Jelly's Last Jam," the show that earned Gregory a Tony Award on Broadway.

Maurice Hines eventually paid homage to his brother in "Maurice Hines Is Tappin' Through Life." He was also the subject of the documentary "Maurice Hines: Bring Them Back," currently available for rental on demand. No information on survivors or memorial plans was immediately available.

### Rest In Peace

## Sandra Reaves-Phillips 79, actress/singer of stage and screen

**S**andra Reaves-Phillips, the actress and singer who appeared in the films "Round Midnight" and "Lean on Me" and portrayed six legendary divas in a one-woman, tour de force stage show, has died. She was 79. Reaves-Phillips died at her home in Queens, family spokesperson Sandra Lanman told The Hollywood Reporter. She had been in failing health since falling off a stage during a performance of "Raisin" in St. Louis in 2004 and enduring serious auto accidents in 2014 and '15 in New York.

The South Carolina native worked opposite Maurice Hines in his 2006 Broadway musical "Hot Feet," and she portrayed Mama Younger and Bertha Mae Little, respectively, in "Raisin" on Broadway and national and European tours and in a 1999 off-Broadway production of "Rollin' on the T.O.B.A."

Reaves-Phillips was featured with Saxophonist Dexter Gordon in Bertrand Tavernier's "Round Midnight" (1986) in the role of Buttercup, and in the Morgan Freeman-starring "Lean on Me" (1989), directed by John G. Avildsen, she was Mrs. Powers, the music teacher who leads her students in the title song.

The production that best showcased the breadth of her considerable talent was "The Late, Great Ladies of Blues & Jazz," where she captured the music and personas of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Billie Holiday,

Dinah Washington and Mahalia Jackson. She toured around the country and abroad with the show for more than two decades. She also created and toured with three other one-woman shows, "Bold and Brassy Blues," "Heart to Heart," an R&B revue and a tribute to Mahalia Jackson.

Born on Dec. 23, 1944, in Mullins, South Carolina, to a single teenage mother, Rosa Lee, Reaves-Phillips was raised by her grandmother Mathilda, joining her in the fields to pick fruits, vegetables and cotton. "You go six in the morning, leave six in the evening, and you get up the next morning and do the same thing," she told an interviewer years later.

When she was 15, she moved to New York to live with her mom and had her first child a couple of years later. She began performing at amateur nights in local clubs and lied about her age in order to earn \$15 for three shows a night.

Reaves-Phillips signed a recording contract that never gained traction, but an impulsive decision to sign up for the Al Fann Theatrical Ensemble in Harlem marked a turning point in her career. Reaves-Phillips also stood out in the national tour of "One Mo' Time" and in its 1990 off-Broadway sequel, "And Further Mo'." She played Bessie Smith in "Champeen," was in "Ain't Nothin' but the Blues" and the original Paris premiere of "Black and Blue," and performed in international jazz festivals and



in a gospel concert at the Vatican for Pope John Paul II.

On television, she was on "Another World," "Law & Order," "Homicide: Life on the Street" and "Strangers With Candy" and worked alongside Ann-Margret in

the 1994 NBC telefilm "Following Her Heart." Survivors include her son, Lacy Darryl Phillips, a recording artist, director and choreographer, and her daughter, Marishka Shanice Phillips, an actor, singer, writer, director and acting coach.

Two of her last performances came at Marian's Jazz Club in Bern, Switzerland in 2014 and at the Triad Theater in New York for her son's birthday celebration in 2019. Article appeared in The Hollywood Reporter.

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