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## Videos Show Black Man Shot In Head



By Anna Liz Nichols and Ed White

Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP)—A Black man facedown on the ground was fatally shot in the back of the head by a Michigan police officer, the violent climax of a traffic stop, brief foot chase and struggle over a stun gun, according to videos of the April 4 encounter.

Patrick Lyoya, 26, was killed outside a house in Grand Rapids. The White officer repeatedly ordered Lyoya to "let go" of his Taser, at one point demanding: "Drop the Taser!"

Citing a need for transparency, the city's new police chief, Eric Winstrom, last Wednesday released four videos, including critical footage of the shooting recorded by a passenger in Lyoya's car on that rainy morning.

"I view it as a tragedy... It was a progression of sadness for me," said Winstrom, a former high-ranking Chicago police commander who became Grand Rapids chief in March. The city of about 200,000 people is about 150 miles northwest of Detroit.

Video shows Lyoya running from the officer who stopped him for driving with a license

plate that didn't belong to the vehicle. They struggled in front of several homes while Lyoya's passenger got out and watched.

Winstrom said the fight over the Taser lasted about 90 seconds. In the final moments, the officer was on top of Lyoya, kneeling on his back at times to subdue him.

"From my view of the video, Taser was deployed twice. Taser did not make contact," Winstrom told reporters. "And Mr. Lyoya was shot in the head. However, that's the only information that I have."

State police are investigating. Kent County's chief medical examiner, Dr. Stephen Cohle, said

he completed the autopsy but toxicology tests haven't been finished.

The traffic stop was tense from the start. Video shows Lyoya, a native of Congo, getting out of the car before the officer approached. He ordered Lyoya to get back in the vehicle, but the man declined.

The officer asked him if he spoke English and demanded his driver's license. The foot chase began soon after, video shows.

Winstrom didn't identify the officer, a seven-year veteran who is on paid leave during the investigation.

"Me being from Chicago for

(See **SHOT IN HEAD**, P. 2)

PATRICK LYOYA, UNARMED, SECONDS BEFORE HIS LIFE WAS ENDED

## Echoes Of One Million Lost

By David Goldman

AP Photographer

Put your son in Sherman Peebles' barber chair and along with a buzz you could count on Peebles, a sheriff's deputy who cut hair as a sideline, to issue a fatherly warning about staying out of trouble.

Now, seven months after the dapper sergeant died of COVID-19, life goes on at the Columbus, Ga., shop owned by his best friend. But the aching emptiness of Peebles' absence lingers. The brotherly affection he brought to each day, gone missing. The jokes and stories that go untold.

The pandemic has claimed nearly 1 million lives in the U.S., leaving empty spaces in homes and neighborhoods across the country, whether we are aware of them or not.

In portraits of these places left behind, emptiness claims a chair at a nurses station in a busy Alabama hospital, long occupied by a caregiver co-workers recall as "like everybody's mama."

It fills the Arizona bedroom of a 13-year-old lost to COVID, his action figures lined up just as he left them, on the dresser.

It floats, silent, over a wooded path that a retired teacher, who died in the pandemic's early months, often visited with her daughter and granddaughter to enjoy North Carolina's flowers.

You have to look carefully to see the emptiness left by the loss of 1 million souls. But in the shadows, it is all too easy to feel it.

Sherman Peebles worked as a

barber on weekends, in addition to his full-time job as a sheriff's deputy. He died of COVID in September, at age 49. His best friend Gerald Riley, who owns the barber shop, still arrives each Saturday expecting to see Peebles' truck parked outside. At day's end, he thinks back to the routine he and his friend of 25 years always followed when closing. "I love you, brother," they'd tell one another. How could Riley ever know those would be the last words they'd ever share?

Donovan James Jones' mother can hardly bear to go into the room of her 13-year-old son, who died from complications of COVID in November. Teresita Horne was in the hospital battling the virus herself and never got the chance to say goodbye to her only son. "It's always difficult to go into his room because I always wait for the day for him to come back. I wait for him to come home after school," says Horne, of Buckeye, Arizona. "I would say to the world if they could know one thing about Donovan, he was very kind, especially in today's climate and culture where kindness is a lost concept. I would want people to show some type of kindness to someone for no reason at all, but to be kind."

Eddy Marquez spent 33 years cutting and arranging displays at his work station at US Evergreen Wholesale Florist in New York's flower district. He died of COVID in April 2020 during the deadliest week of the outbreak in the city. His brother-in-law, who lived in the same house,

died days earlier. Marquez, who was 59 and the father of three, loved plants, and the yard of the family's home is filled with the

(See **ONE MILLION**, P. 2)

## Meadows Axed From NC Rolls

By Tom Foreman Jr.

Associated Press

Mark Meadows, a former chief of staff to President Donald Trump, has been removed from North Carolina's list of registered voters after documents showed he lived in Virginia and voted in that state's 2021 election, officials said Wednesday.

Questions arose about Meadows last month, when North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein's office asked the State Bureau of Investigation to look into Meadows' voter registration, which listed a home he never owned—and may never have visited—as his legal residence.

A representative for Meadows, a former congressman from the area, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Meadows frequently raised the prospect of voter fraud before the 2020 presidential election, as polls showed Trump trailing Joe Biden, and in the months after Trump's loss, to suggest Biden was not the legitimate winner. In his 2021 memoir, he repeated the baseless claims that the election was stolen.

Judges, election officials in both parties and Trump's own attorney general have concluded there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud. Experts point to isolated incidents of intentional or unintentional violations of voter laws in every election.

Under North Carolina general statutes, "If a person goes into another state, county, municipality, precinct, ward, or other election district, or into the District of Columbia, and while there exercises the right of a citizen by voting in an election, that person shall be considered to have lost residence in that State, county, municipality, precinct, ward, or other election district from which that person removed."

Public records indicated Meadows had been registered to vote in Virginia and North Carolina, where he listed a mobile home he did not own as his legal residence weeks before casting a 2020 presidential election ballot in the state.

Meadows listed a mobile home in Scaly Mountain, N.C., as his

(See **MEADOWS AXED**, P. 2)

## Pagan Roots Of The Easter Bunny (Hare)

By Tok Thompson

USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

(THE CONVERSATION) The Easter Bunny is a much celebrated character in American Easter celebrations. On Easter Sunday, children look for hidden special treats, often chocolate Easter eggs, that the Easter Bunny might have left behind.

As a folklorist, I'm aware of

the origins of the long and interesting journey this mythical figure has taken from European prehistory to today.

Easter is a celebration of spring and new life. Eggs and flowers are rather obvious symbols of female fertility, but in European traditions, the bunny, with its amazing reproduction potential, is not far behind.

In European traditions, the

Easter Bunny is known as the Easter Hare. The symbolism of the hare has had many tantalizing ritual and religious roles down through the years.

Hares were given ritual burials alongside humans during the Neolithic age in Europe. Archaeologists have interpreted this as a religious ritual, with hares representing rebirth.

Over a thousand years later,

during the Iron Age, ritual burials for hares were common, and in 51 B.C., Julius Caesar mentions that in Britain, hares were not eaten, due to their religious significance.

Caesar would likely have known that in the Classical Greek tradition, hares were sacred to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Meanwhile, Aphrodite's son Eros was often depicted carrying a hare, as a symbol of unquenchable desire.

From the Greek world through the Renaissance, hares often appear as symbols of sexuality in literature and art. For example, the Virgin Mary is often shown with a white hare or rabbit, symbolizing that she overcame sexual temptation.

But it is in the folk traditions of England and Germany that the figure of the hare is specifically connected to Easter. Accounts from the 1600s in Germany describe children hunting for Easter eggs hidden by the Easter Hare, much as in the contemporary United States today.

Written accounts from England around the same time also mention the Easter Hare, particularly in terms of traditional Easter hare hunts, and the eating of hare meat at Easter.

One tradition, known as the "Hare Pie Scramble," was held at Hallaton, a village in Leicester-

(See **PAGAN ROOTS**, P. 2)



### POLICE: 2 INJURED IN SHOOTING AT GREENSBORO MUSIC VENUE

GREENSBORO (AP)—Two people have been injured in a late-night shooting reported at a popular Greensboro music venue, according to police.

Officers responded to The Blind Tiger around 10:45 p.m. last Wednesday after a report of shots being fired, according to a news release.

When officers arrived, they found a person suffering from minor injuries from a gunshot wound. A second person with a gunshot wound arrived separately at a hospital. That person had injuries that were not life-threatening.

No further details were immediately released. An investigation is ongoing.

### POLICE: MAN WHO STALKED ATTORNEY BAKARI SELLERS ARRESTED

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)—Police in South Carolina have arrested a man who allegedly sent dozens of threats to Black civil rights attorney and former state lawmaker Bakari Sellers.

Grant Edward Olson Jr., of Asheville, N.C., is also accused of intimidating Sellers for exercising his civil rights as an attorney, television commentator and lobbyist, authorities said. Olson, 48, was arrested Friday and booked into the Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center in Richland County.

Arrest warrants from the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division show Olson sent dozens of messages to Sellers on Instagram that included racial slurs, indications that Olson was armed and mentioned the killings of African-Americans. Police said Olson admitted to sending the messages earlier this year.

Sellers thanked the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division for last week's arrest.

"This isn't just about me," Sellers said in a statement. "I have a wife, a teenage bonus daughter and twin three-year-olds and I take any threat against them very seriously. They shouldn't be subject to threats and intimidation like this. No one should. This isn't political debate. This isn't the 'new normal.' It's a crime, pure and simple."

Sellers, the son of civil rights activist Cleveland Sellers, was first elected to the South Carolina House as a Democrat in 2006 at the age of 22 and has also worked as an attorney and as a political analyst on CNN. He chose not to run for reelection in 2014, instead entering the lieutenant governor's race that year, where he lost to current governor Henry McMaster.

### 2 ACCUSED OF CARJACKING WOMAN, 74, CAUGHT IN NORTH CAROLINA

ASHEBORO (AP)—Two people accused of assaulting and carjacking a woman in eastern North Carolina have been apprehended, according to a sheriff's office.

Deputies with the Craven County Sheriff's Office said they responded to an assault and carjacking in New Bern. A 74-year-old woman told deputies she had been eating in her car when two people approached her and demanded that she get out. The woman refused, according to a news release, and then she was assaulted and taken from the car.

The woman is still under observation at a local hospital, the sheriff's office said.

Deputies issued warrants for Danny Lee Minor, 27, and Kimberly Elizabeth Woodell, 30, both from Asheboro. Minor and Woodell were found at a residence in Randolph County and taken into custody.

The two are in the Randolph County jail on felony charges of possession of a stolen vehicle, common law robbery, larceny of a motor vehicle and assault on a disabled person. Jail records don't indicate whether they have an attorney.

### EX-MICHIGAN AND N.C. MUSIC PROFESSOR GETS PRISON ON CHILD SEX CHARGES

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—A former University of Michigan violin professor has been sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to transporting a girl across state lines for sex.

A federal judge who sentenced Stephen Shippis, 69, on Thursday also ordered the Ann Arbor man to pay \$120,000 in restitution to his victim, federal prosecutors said. Shippis offered an apology and his lawyer had asked for no prison time.

Shippis pleaded guilty in November to one count of transporting a girl across state lines with the intent to engage in sexual conduct. The charges allege that he took the girl across state lines several times between February and July of 2002 with the intention of having sex with her.

The girl was born in 1985, according to court documents. Shippis' indictment in October 2020 and arrest in Ann Arbor came two years after the university placed the longtime professor on paid leave after former students accused him of sexual misconduct while he taught them in the 1970s and 1980s in Nebraska and North Carolina.

James C. Harris, III, acting special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Detroit, said he hopes Shippis' sentence "sends a powerful message to others in positions of trust that if you prey on the vulnerable you will be held accountable for your ac-

(See **STATE BRIEFS**, P. 2)



# Videos Show Black Man Shot In Head—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the last 20 years, I've handled many police shootings myself, so I do have a lot of experience in this," the chief said. "I was hoping to never have to utilize that experience here."

Video was collected from Lyoya's passenger, the officer's body camera, the officer's patrol car and a doorbell camera. Prosecutor Chris Becker, who will decide whether any charges are warranted, objected to the release but said Winstrom could act on his own.

Becker said the public shouldn't expect a quick decision.

"While the videos released today are an important piece of evidence, they are not all of the evidence," he said.

The officer's body camera was turned off before the shooting, which happens when a button is pushed for three seconds, Winstrom said. He said it appears it was deactivated unintentionally due to body pressure during the struggle, but he would not discuss any officer statements about it.

"That will come out once the investigation's complete," Winstrom said.

City Manager Mark Wash-

ington warned that the videos would lead to "expressions of shock, of anger and of pain." Several hundred protesters gathered outside the Grand Rapids Police Department following the release of the videos, with some cursing and shouting from behind barricades. The group demanded that officials make public the name of the officer in the shooting.

Some businesses closed early Wednesday. Some boarded up windows. But the demonstration remained nonviolent.

Lyoya had two young daughters and five siblings, said Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who spoke to his family.

"He arrived in the United States as a refugee with his family fleeing violence. He had his whole life ahead of him," Whitmer, a Democrat, said.

Prominent civil rights attorney Ben Crump, speaking on behalf of Lyoya's family, on Wednesday called for the officer to be fired and prosecuted.

"The video clearly shows that this was an unnecessary, excessive, and fatal use of force against an unarmed Black man who was confused by the encounter and terrified for his life," Crump said in a release.

"It should be noted that Patrick never used violence against this officer even though the offi-

cer used violence against him in several instances for what was a misdemeanor traffic stop," he added.

Crump and Lyoya's family were expected to hold a news conference Thursday afternoon.

Winstrom last week said he met Lyoya's father, Peter Lyoya, and that they both cried.

"I get it as a father... It's just heart-wrenching," the chief told WOOD-TV.

As in many U.S. cities, Grand Rapids police have been occasionally criticized over the use of force, particularly against Black people, who make up 18 percent of the population.

In November, the Michigan

Supreme Court heard arguments in a lawsuit over the practice of photographing and fingerprinting people who were never charged with a crime. Grand Rapids said the policy changed in 2015.

A downtown street has been designated Breonna Taylor Way, named for the Black woman and Grand Rapids native who was killed by police in Louisville, Ky., during a botched drug raid in 2020.

*White reported from Detroit. AP reporters Corey Williams in West Bloomfield, Mich.; David Eggert in Lansing, Mich.; and John Flesher in Traverse City, Mich., contributed to this story.*

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

tions."

The University of Michigan has faced intense scrutiny over how it protects people on the campus from sexual misconduct. The school was rocked by allegations that began to publicly surface in 2020 from hundreds of men who said they were sexually assaulted by the late Robert Anderson, who was a campus doctor for nearly 40 years. He died in 2008. In January, the school announced a \$490 million settlement with Anderson's accusers.

Shippis taught at the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre and Dance from 1989 until his retirement in 2019. He also directed a preparatory program that offered musical instruction to children.

Shippis also served on the faculties of Indiana University, the North Carolina School of the Arts, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the Banff Centre in Canada, federal authorities said.

### EX-NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE PROFESSOR CHARGED IN BABY'S DEATH

GASTONIA (AP)—Authorities have charged a former North Carolina college professor with first-degree murder after his adopted 6-week-old son died from injuries that investigators said resulted from physical abuse.

Gastonia police said in a news release last Thursday that Van Erick Custodio, 42, of Gastonia was previously charged with felony child abuse causing severe bodily injury.

According to police, officers and emergency personnel responded to a home on April 1 after a report of an infant in cardiac arrest. The infant was taken to a local hospital, and detectives determined that the baby's condition resulted from being physically abused.

The baby died last Wednesday, according to police.

On April 11, Custodio was arrested in York County, S.C. and extradited to Gaston County. He was jailed on a \$500,000 bond initially, and was scheduled to appear in court last Thursday. Records showed he didn't have an attorney.

Custodio was listed as a full-time assistant professor in computer studies at Belmont Abbey College, but his information was not available on the school's web page. His LinkedIn page also showed he was an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte at the start of 2022.

### SHERIFF'S OFFICE: SHOTS FIRED AT OFFICERS IN UNMARKED CAR

DURHAM (AP)—At least two people fired on law enforcement officers in an unmarked vehicle in Durham over the weekend, officials said.

Two on-duty officers were observing the area near Keystone Place and Dearborn Drive on Saturday night as part of an ongoing investigation when at least two unknown males fired multiple rounds, the Durham County sheriff's office said in a news release. The officers' vehicle and nearby occupied homes were struck, but no one was injured, officials said. The shooters have not been identified.

"This gun violence cannot go on and has to stop," Sheriff Clarence F. Birkhead said in a statement. "Innocent people who were sitting in their homes and enjoying a Saturday evening with family could have been seriously injured or killed."

### OPRAH, SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL TO EXPLORE HEALTH CARE INEQUITIES

LOS ANGELES, Calif. (AP)—Oprah Winfrey and the Smithsonian Channel are partnering to highlight racial disparities in the health care system through a new campaign and documentary.

The network revealed on Thursday the Color of Care campaign to create a solution toward health equity. The campaign will follow the premiere of Winfrey's *The Color of Care* documentary, which airs May 1.

Through Harpo Productions, Winfrey will executive produce the documentary that chronicles how people of color suffer from systematically substandard health care in the United States, with the COVID-19 pandemic being a catalyst to shed light on the issue.

The documentary will coincide with the campaign, which expects to take a broader look at the topic. The yearlong campaign will feature multiple activations in the coming months, including a digital series. It will bring together impacted communities, medical and nursing schools, health care workers and policymakers in hopes of finding a solution to inequities.

"The COVID crisis has exposed gross inequalities in our health-care system which, if left unaddressed, will again disproportionately impact people of color during the next health emergency," said James Blue III, the head of the Smithsonian Channel. "This campaign will work to address these inequalities."

# Echoes Of One Million Lost—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

hydrangea bushes and fruit trees he tended.

His daughter, Ivett Marquez, recalls that her dad worked long hours, but always set aside Sundays for family. "He was an amazing father. He was an amazing husband, an amazing person. My father was just our best friend. You know, I guess his daughter's first love," she says. "He was everything to us. A supporter, a friend, just everything. He loved his job. He loved this family. He loved his house, his plants. That was just Eddy." She now tends the plants in his place.

Mary Jacq McCulloch loved to explore the paths that wind through the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill, often visiting with her daughter and granddaughter. McCulloch's death in April 2020 at 87 came at the height of spring. Now, with the season arriving again, daughter Karen McCulloch is reminded of their drives together around Chapel Hill to gaze at the trees in blossom. Mary Jacq's favorite were the rebuds. "They are stunning magenta," Karen McCulloch says. "I can't see one in bloom without thinking, 'Mom would love this.' Kind of like her—brightly colored and demanding attention."

Arnie Kantrowitz got sick last winter when the omicron variant swept through New York, despite holing up in his home for most of the lockdown. The author, scholar and gay rights activist died of

COVID in January. He was 81.

"I'm not really grieving fully yet. That's going to go on for the rest of my life," said his longtime partner Larry Mass. "It's like I'm still caring for him. He's still with me." Sometimes when world events make him angry, he thinks about what Kantrowitz would have said to bring him back to earth. He was always good at that. "He's not totally gone," Mass says. "He's there in my heart."

Luis Alfonso Bay Montgomery worked straight through the pandemic's early months in Somerton, Ariz., piloting a tractor among lettuce and cauliflower fields. Even after he began feeling sick in mid-June, he insisted on laboring on, says Yolanda Bay, his wife of 42 years.

When he died, at 59, in July 2020, Bay was on her own for the first time since they'd met as teenagers in their native Mexico. In the months since her husband died, Bay, a taxi driver, has worked hard to keep her mind occupied. But memories find a way in. Driving past the fields he plowed, she imagines him on his tractor. "It's time to get rid of his clothes, but..." she says, unable to finish the sentence. "There are times that I feel completely alone. And I still can't believe it."

Jennifer McClung, a longtime dialysis nurse, was a central figure at the nurses station in her ward at Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield, Ala. In November

of 2020, McClung, 54, tested positive for COVID. "Mama, I feel like I'm never coming home again," she texted her mother, Stella Olive, from a hospital bed. Her lungs severely damaged by the virus, she died just hours before the nation's vaccination campaign began, on Dec. 14. If only the vaccine had come in time, McClung "might have made it," friend and fellow nurse Christa House says. Today, a decal with a halo and angel's wings marks the place McClung once occupied at a third-floor nurses' station. "It still just seems like she could just walk through the door," McClung's mother says. "I haven't accepted that she's she's gone. I mean, a body is here one day and talking and laughing and loving and then, poof, they're just gone."

Larry Quackenbush worked as an audio and video producer for the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination based in Springfield, Missouri. He died in August after contracting the virus while caring for his then 12-year-old son, Landon, who came home from summer camp sick with COVID. "Even when he started feeling sick, he kept taking care of everybody," daughter Macy Sweeters said.

"It just hurts so much. He was my best friend."

Neil Lawyer loved to sing while his son, David, accompanied him on the piano in his living room in Bellevue, Wash. The elder Lawyer died at 84 in March

2020, among the first residents of a Seattle area nursing home who succumbed to COVID during the outbreak. At weddings, he joined his sons, grandson and nephew to serenade brides and grooms in a makeshift ensemble dubbed the Moose-Tones. Last October, when one of his granddaughters married, it marked the first family affair without Lawyer there to hold court. The Moose-Tones went on without him. "He would have just been beaming because, you know, it was the most important thing in the world to him late in life, to get together with family," David Lawyer says. "I can honestly tell you he was terribly missed."

Fernando Morales and younger brother Adam Almonte used to sit, always on the same benches, at New York's Fort Tryon Park, eating sandwiches together. On the deadliest day of a horrific week in April 2020, COVID took the lives of 816 people in New York City alone. Morales, 43, was one of them. Walking through the park, Almonte visualizes long-ago days tossing a baseball with his brother and taking in the view from their bench with sandwiches in hand. He replays old messages to just to hear Morales' voice. "When he passed away it was like I lost a brother, a parent and a friend all at the same time," Almonte says. "That's an irreplaceable type of love."

*Associated Press National Writer Adam Geller contributed to this story.*

# Pagan Roots Of The Easter Bunny—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

shire, England, which involved eating a pie made with hare meat and people "scrambling" for a slice. In 1790, the local parson tried to stop the custom due to its pagan associations, but he was unsuccessful, and the custom continues in that village until this day.

The eating of the hare may have been associated with various longstanding folk traditions of scaring away witches at Easter. Throughout Northern Europe, folk traditions record a strong belief that witches would often take the form of the hare, usually for causing mischief such as stealing milk from neighbors' cows. Witches in medieval Europe were often believed to be able to suck out the life energy of others, making them ill, and suffer.

The idea that the witches of winter should be banished at Easter is a common European

folk motif, appearing in several festivities and rituals. The spring equinox, with its promise of new life, was held symbolically in opposition to the life-draining activities of witches and winter.

This idea provides the underlying rationale behind various festivities and rituals, such as the "Osterfeuer," or the Easter Fire, a celebration in Germany involving large outdoor bonfires meant to scare away witches. In Sweden, the popular folklore states that at Easter, the witches all fly away on their broomsticks to feast and dance with the Devil on the legendary island of Blåkulla, in the Baltic Sea.

Pagan origins

In 1835, the folklorist Jacob Grimm, one of the famous team of the fairy tale "Brothers Grimm," argued that the Easter Hare was connected with a goddess, whom he imagined would have been called "Ostara" in

ancient German. He derived this name from the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, that Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk considered to be the father of English history, mentioned in 731.

Bede noted that in eighth-century England the month of April was called Eosturmonath, or Eostre Month, named after the goddess Eostre. He wrote that a pagan festival of spring in the name of the goddess had become assimilated into the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

It's interesting that while most European languages refer to the Christian holiday with names that come from the Jewish holiday of Passover, such as Pâques in French, or Påsk in Swedish, German and English languages retain this older, non-biblical word, Easter.

Recent archaeological research appears to confirm the

worship of Eostre in parts of England and in Germany, with the hare as her main symbol. The Easter Bunny therefore seems to recall these pre-Christian celebrations of spring, heralded by the vernal equinox and personified by the Goddess Eostre.

After a long, cold, northern winter, it seems natural enough for people to celebrate themes of resurrection and rebirth. The flowers are blooming, birds are laying eggs, and baby bunnies are hopping about.

As new life emerges in spring, the Easter Bunny hops back once again, providing a longstanding cultural symbol to remind us of the cycles and stages of our own lives.

*The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. The Conversation is wholly responsible for the content.*

# Jackson Is And Isn't First Black Female Justice

By Jessica Gresko

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Shirley Troutman, a judge on New York's highest court, was working last week when her daughter texted messages that included a clapping hands emoji.

Soon, her phone was buzzing with other celebratory messages. The applause and the excitement was for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who last week was confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court

and will become its first Black female justice.

Jackson will become the court's 116th member. That's special for Troutman, who is the 116th member of her court too.

"As a judge, as a Black woman, I am extremely proud and wish her the best," said Troutman, who took her seat earlier this year and is the second Black woman to serve on her court. She said she cried "tears of joy" when Jackson was confirmed.

Troutman is among 17 Black

women and 14 Black men currently serving on their state's highest court, according to the Brennan Center for Justice in New York, which has tracked diversity on those courts. A majority of the women joined the bench within the past five years and, like Jackson, shattered a barrier, becoming the first Black woman on their state's high court. In interviews, some of those women described not only their own delight at Jackson's confirmation but also suggested there's more work to be done to make America's courts more reflective of its citizens.

"I am so proud and optimistic about her accomplishment and what this means," said Justice Melissa Long of Rhode Island's Supreme Court.

Long, who joined her state's high court in 2021, also feels a "great sense of connection" to Jackson. They were born 10 days apart in 1970 in Washington, D.C. Long's parents had married in the city because laws against interracial marriage, struck down by the Supreme Court in 1967, prohibited them from getting married in Virginia.

Being the first Black woman and first person of color on her state's five-member court "feels like a responsibility," Long said. "It's an important responsibility, but it does feel like a responsibility."

That's in part because diver-

sity overall on state courts is lacking. People of color make up 17 percent of the judges on state supreme courts, but as of last year, 22 states had high courts where no member identified as a person of color, according to the Brennan Center. In 11 of those states, minorities make up at least 20 percent of the population, according to the Brennan Center. About 30 percent of all federal judges, meanwhile, identify as people of color.

Those numbers help explain why the Brennan Center's Madiba Dennie says she's wary of people thinking that Jackson's confirmation means: "We did it. We have a Black woman on the Supreme Court now." There's more work to be done, she said, with "huge disparities throughout the rest of the federal judiciary and at the state judiciary as well."

Other state high courts are more diverse. Maryland has two Black women on its highest court, the Court of Appeals, where members wear red robes with white collars and are called judge, not justice. Judge Shirley M. Watts joined the seven-member court in 2013 and Judge Michele D. Hotten in 2015.

North Carolina's Cheri Beasley served as the chief justice of that state's Supreme Court and is now a leading candidate in the Democratic primary for the 2022 U.S. Senate election.

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# Business & Finance

## In Virginia Beach, Black People Are Closing The Wealth Gap

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

Virginia Beach landed on the top spot of cities where African Americans fare best economically and where Black businesses thrive.

According to the personal finance website Smart Asset, Virginia Beach also has the seventh-highest median Black household income, at roughly \$65,600, and the sixth-highest Black labor force participation rate, at 78.7 percent.

The statistics reflect 2019, the most recent data available.

Grand Prairie, Texas, Aurora, Illinois, Pembroke Pines, Florida, and Miramar, Florida, comprised the other cities in the top 5.

Charlotte, North Carolina, Gar-

land, Texas, Durham, North Carolina, Enterprise, Nevada, and Elk Grove, California, rounded out the top 10.

The report noted the struggles of African Americans in homeownership and the overall wealth gap.

"Census data from 2019 shows that the median Black household income is 33 percent lower than the overall median household income.

Stephanie Horan wrote for Smart Asset that the Black homeownership rate is 22 percentage points lower than the general homeownership rate."

She noted the Federal Reserve's 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances data on wealth accumulation, depicting even starker disparities.

That data places Black fami-

lies' net worth at 87 percent lower than white families and 33 percent lower than Hispanic families.

For Virginia Beach, Census Bureau data revealed that the 2019 poverty rate for Black residents stood at 10 percent, the fourth-lowest in Smart Asset's study.

More than 5 percent of businesses are Black-owned in the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News metro area, the seventh-highest percentage overall for that metric.

Smart Asset officials reported that preliminary 2020 estimates show that Black Americans have been disproportionately affected by the health impacts of COVID-19 and its corresponding economic effects.

The authors wrote: "The regional economic effects of COVID-19 on Black Americans are difficult to determine due to insufficient localized data, but the available national data paints a grim picture: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data shows that as of December 2020, the Black unemployment rate was 3.9 and 3.2 percentage

points higher than the white and overall unemployment rates, respectively."

The Black labor force participation rate was about 2.0 percentage points lower than both white and overall participation rates.

Horan offered three financial tips for African Americans, including checking if home-

ownership made sense, opening a retirement account, and considering a financial advisor.

"A financial advisor can help you make smarter financial decisions to control your money better," Horan wrote. "Smart-Asset's free tool matches you with financial advisors in your area in five minutes."

## FIFA Takes On Streaming Channels With Its Own Soccer T.V. Platform

LONDON (AP) — FIFA is getting into the streaming platform business with a soccer version of Netflix and Amazon Prime.

The service is free and largely featuring documentaries and some live games at the launch but it could eventually be a way for FIFA to broadcast World Cup matches itself at a cost.

While increasingly positioning itself as a rival to existing media companies, FIFA+ will also be used by the governing body to promote its sponsors.

"There is no plan to charge a subscription fee for the service, that doesn't mean to say

that we may not evolve over time should there be a value proposition that allows us to charge subscription if we step into premium rights or adopt other kind of models," FIFA director of strategy Charlotte Burr said. "But there will always be a free experience on FIFA+."

Geo-blocking can be used to limit matches broadcast on FIFA+ to specific territories. FIFA was less clear if the platform will be an accessible means of watching World Cup qualifiers that are often not available to view widely as each federation is able to sell the rights and some confederations bundle them together.

FIFA said the live matches would be from competitions previously lacking coverage, initially with 1,400 games streamed each month.

The launch could see FIFA shift content off YouTube that it has previously used to broadcast classic matches and sports politics events. The recent FIFA Congress in Qatar was not streamed on the long-standing video sharing website unlike previously.

FIFA chief commercial officer Kay Madati said "we're a bit more strategic about what goes where and when."

## CA Aims To Triple Sales Of Electric Cars

By Kathleen Ronayne

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—California wants electric vehicle sales to triple in the next four years to 35 percent of all new car purchases, an aggressive target set as part of the goal to phase out the sale of gas-powered cars by the middle of next decade.

The California Air Resources Board's proposal would slowly raise the sale of new cars that are electric, hydrogen-powered or plug-in hybrids to 100 percent by 2035. About 11 percent of all new passenger car sales nationally happen in California, giving the state significant influence over the auto market. Californians would still be allowed to drive gas-powered cars and sell used ones, meaning planet-warming emissions will still spew from the state's roadways.

The hoped-for boost in electric vehicle sales will also require a major increase in charging stations. California has set a goal of 250,000 charging stations by 2025, and right now there are fewer than 80,000 stations in public spaces or in parking lots at office buildings, apartment buildings and other shared spaces. The California Energy Commission last year approved spending \$314 million over three years for passenger car charging stations and Newsom added more in his proposed state budget.

The release kicks off a months-long state review process and the plan requires approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The state is unlikely to face resistance from a Democratic White House. The Biden



administration recently restored California's power to set its own vehicle emissions standards under the Clean Air Act and the president has committed \$5 billion to build more charging stations around the country.

A group representing the auto industry said meeting the requirements will be "extremely challenging."

Passenger vehicles contribute about a quarter of the state's total greenhouse gas emissions—more than any other single source, according to the air board. The program is one part of California's efforts to drastically reduce carbon emissions. Between 2026 and 2040, state experts estimate the program would lower emissions by nearly 384 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually. That's a little less than all emissions across California's economy in a single year.

Elsewhere, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a law last month setting a goal of requiring

all new vehicles in the state to be electric by 2030, but regulators have until the end of 2023 to say how the state will get there.

California's rules would require 35 percent of new car sales for model year 2026 to be zero-emission vehicles, including battery or hydrogen powered, or plug-in electric hybrids. That's a sharp increase from 2021, when about 12 percent of all cars sold in the state were zero-emission, according to the air board. About 1 million of the 26 million cars currently on California roads are zero-emission.

That requirement ramps up to 100 percent of all new sales by 2035. Up to 20 percent of sales by 2035 could be plug-in hybrids that run on a combination of battery and gas power, though the regulations boost how far such cars must be able to travel on battery power alone.

Automakers including Ford and Toyota deferred to the Alliance for Automotive Innovation for a statement on the proposal. The group says the industry is "committed to electrification and a net-zero carbon transportation future" but raised questions about the drastic ramp up in the required zero-emission vehicle sales.

"Automakers will certainly work to meet whatever standards are eventually adopted, but these draft requirements will be extremely challenging even in California and may not be achievable in all the states that currently follow California's program," the group said.

Nine states follow California's current zero-emission vehicle rules, which set rules through model year 2025, and five states



## Cities Want Netflix To Pay Cable Fees

By Andrew Welsh-Huggins

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)—Should Netflix and other streaming services have to pay local governments the same fees levied on cable operators?

That was the question before the Ohio Supreme Court during a Wednesday hearing, as the court debates whether streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu are covered by a state law that would require them to pay to play.

The argument is similar to one in several other states, where cities are trying to force streaming service companies to pay cable operator fees.

At issue in Ohio is the state's 2007 Video Service Authorization law, which directed the state Commerce Department to determine what entities must obtain permission to physically install cables and wires in a public right-of-way. Companies deemed video service providers must pay a fee to local governments under that law.

Officials with Maple Heights in suburban Cleveland contend that streaming services are subject to the fee because their content is delivered via the internet over cables and wires.

In Tennessee, the state Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next month brought by Knoxville against Netflix and Hulu. A similar case brought by the city of Creve Coeur is pending in Missouri. In 2020, four Indiana cities sued Netflix, Disney, Hulu, DirectTV and Dish Network to require them to pay the same franchise fees to local governments that cable companies must pay.

In related lawsuits brought in Arkansas, California, Nevada and Texas, Netflix and Hulu won their arguments last year that they can't be treated the same as video providers.

Streaming companies argue their distribution method is different from traditional video providers. They also say in the Ohio case, it's up to the Commerce Department to label them a video service provider, a process they say can't be done through a lawsuit.

The state is siding with the streaming companies, contending that Ohio's law only covers companies building infrastructure to carry cables.

"This is about those who dig,

they must pay," Mathura Sridharan, the Ohio deputy solicitor general, told justices on the state Supreme Court during oral arguments Wednesday. "If they don't dig, then they don't pay."

A court decision isn't expected for months.

Attorneys for Maple Heights argue that nothing in the 2007 law requires a video service provider to own or physically access wireline facilities in public rights-of-way to be subject to video service provider fees.

Without that equipment, streaming services "could not deliver their video programming to their subscribers," Justin Hawal, an attorney representing Maple Heights, said in a December court filing.

The "modest 5 percent video service fee" is not burdensome but instead represents a small return on billions of dollars in benefits that the streaming services receive nationwide from network infrastructure, Hawal said.

Justices seemed skeptical of Maple Heights' arguments, in particular questioning whether the argument was even one for the court to decide.

"Shouldn't you be up at the Statehouse a block and a half away instead of at a courthouse trying to get the law changed?" Justice Pat Fisher asked Hawal Wednesday.

Hawal said Maple Heights is trying to apply existing law to a new technology.

Attorneys for Netflix say the company doesn't have physical wires and cables and doesn't need them under its internet streaming business model.

Unlike broadcast TV stations, "users can watch content anywhere, anytime, and in any amount, so long as they have an internet connection," Amanda Martinsek, an attorney representing Netflix, said in a November filing.

Netflix argues a growing number of courts nationally have reached the conclusion that companies like Netflix and Hulu don't owe provider fees because they're not video service providers.



**ALL PACKED UP WITH NOWHERE TO GO—More and more prospective homebuyers are finding that their money is no good, unless they can pay cash.**

## Homebuyers Stymied By Few Homes, High Prices

By Alex Veiga

AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES, Calif. (AP)—Shortly after moving to South Florida for a new job with the U.S. military, Shannon Kaufman and his wife, Wendy, signed up for a whole other mission: buying a home.

For months, they scoured listings, strategizing late into the night on which homes to target and working out how much they could afford, even if it meant using some of their retirement savings.

After visiting 200 listings and making offers on 15 homes that ultimately didn't pan out, the Kaufmans finally found a home that fits at least some of their needs. They'll be renting it, how-

ever. "We found a place that's smaller than we want, but it'll work until we have something built or until the market cools off," said Shannon Kaufman, 47.

America's housing market has grown increasingly frenzied, and prices are out of reach for many buyers, especially first-timers. This spring, traditionally the busiest season for home sales, is more likely to deliver frustration and disappointment for aspiring homebuyers than it is homeownership.

The number of homes for sale nationally remains near record lows, fueling fierce competition among buyers vying for fewer homes. From Los Angeles to Raleigh, N.C., when a house does hit the market, it typically sells within days.

Bidding wars are common, often driving the sale price well above what the owner was asking. And would-be buyers planning to finance their purchase with a home loan are often losing out to investors and others able to buy a home with cash. A quarter of all homes sold in February were purchased with cash, up from 22 percent a year ago, according to the National Association of Realtors. Real estate investors accounted for 19 percent of transactions in February, up from 17 percent a year ago.

Nichol Khan, a project manager, and her husband Ed moved to Mesa, Ariz., from Phoenix two years ago to shorten their commute to work. Home prices in the Phoenix area have jumped 20 percent from a year ago to \$500,000,

according to Realtor.com. "The prices just keep going up and up," Khan said.

The couple has lost out on more than a dozen homes they bid on. Some of the homes ended up selling for less in cash than the couple had offered.

"We don't have \$500,000 in cash," said Khan, 42. "We just could not be competitive with that."

Fewer homes on the market and high prices have been the hallmark of the housing market for the past 10 years or so. Now, rising mortgage rates further complicate the homebuying equation. Higher rates could limit the pool of buyers and cool the rate of home price growth—good news for buyers. But higher rates also weaken their buying power.

# Opinion



## Save The Planet, Behead The Military Budget

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

Americans “need to imagine their vote has an impact on policy, an illusion the media encourages them to believe in.”

Ouch!

Peter Isaacson, writing in *Fair Observer*, seems to be saying... oh my God, democracy is a cliché, a big sham. I stand up, put my hand on my heart, pledge allegiance to the flag. This is America, land of the empowered voter. Then I read about our president's latest budget proposal, which includes \$813 billion for “national defense” —pushing the Pentagon budget's already record-setting enormity further into outer space—and I feel myself collapse (yet again) into nothingness.

Why, why, why, as our ecosystem collapses, as millions of refugees flee the horrors of war and poverty, as the pandemic continues, as World War III and the possibility of nuclear Armageddon rears its evil head, as the planet trembles, does ever-expanding, global militarism remain our primary national purpose?

This question stabs me anew every year, as President Whoever announces his latest proposed military budget, as Congress increases it, as the media shrugs. Every year I hear the voice of George W. Bush, telling the American public—telling me—not to worry: “Just go shopping.”

So what the hell is going on? Is our military insanity totally the work of the so-called military-industrial complex? Do Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, et al., rule the country via their lobbying muscle (which, ironically, is financed by the military budget for which they lobby)?

That's only part of it. The mystery is deeper—and, of course, classified. Consider the legacy of President Eisenhower, who went into office in 1953 speaking against increased militarism, yet was unable to control the nuclear arms race and expanding Cold War while in office (the CIA, for instance, helped overthrow progressive regimes in Iran, Guatemala and the Republic of the Congo); and eight years later, in his farewell address, regrettably sounded the warning about the influence of the military-industrial complex. This warning, however iconic, accomplished nothing. Waging or financing war has been the American way throughout my lifetime.

As William Hartung writes: “Perhaps the biggest source of over-spending on national defense is rooted in the U.S. ‘cover the globe’ military strategy, which attempts to sustain the capability to go anywhere and fight any battle. The United States maintains 750 overseas military bases and conducts counter-terror operations in at least 85 countries.”

And then, of course, Biden's proposed budget remains horrifically generous regarding the country's nuclear weapons, allotting further billions of dollars to the Department of Energy to modernize the nuclear triad of ballistic missile submarines, bombers and land-based missiles. Now! As the world shudders over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Putin's placement of the Russian nuclear arsenal on high alert. Yet this has not ignited a serious interest, at the national level, to rid the world of nukes: to disarm. Are we not trapped in a world of insanely limited thinking?

Rather: “Russian aggression in Ukraine spurs demands for more military spending,” Reuters tells us with a vague shrug. The world is what it is.

*New York Times* columnist Farhad Manjoo begins pulling open the door of awareness. “(S)houldn't we ask,” he wonders, “whether it remains wise to keep handing the military what is effectively a blank check? Are such lavish resources even good for national defense, or might the Pentagon's near-bottomless access to funds have encouraged a culture of waste and indulgence that made it easier to blunder into Iraq and contributed to its failures in Afghanistan?”

And Bernie Sanders, part of the congressional minority that isn't owned by the military-industrial lobby, put it this way: “This shameful spending makes the U.S. less secure.”

While he noted that “we do not need a massive increase in the defense budget,” I wish he had said what we do need: a massive decrease in the defense budget, a flip in humanity's collective consciousness. There are ways to address conflict without going to war, without dehumanizing and giving ourselves permission to kill “the enemy.” Our ecosystem is crashing and burning, for God's sake! The actual problems humanity faces, from climate change to nuclear disaster to the pandemic, have precisely nothing to do with national borders.

Knowing this, what could possibly be stupider than declaring those borders sacred and devoting limitless energy (and money) to their so-called defense? Once again, I throw the question wide open: Why? Why? Why? Joe Biden is smart enough to know this. Can you at least explain to the public, Mr. President, what is actually motivating your \$813 billion military budget proposal? You don't want to go to war with Russia. You don't want World War III. Yet you feel committed to ensuring that such a war remains a possibility for the future.

What is preventing you from using the power bequeathed to you by a majority of American voters to work on unity, both political and ecological, at the global level? I ask this knowing that such work is enormously complex. Is that the problem? Or is the problem that you have no more impact on national policy than the people who voted for you?



## Is This The Best We Can Do?

By Winslow Myers

War Preventive Initiative

There's been a lot of “whataboutism” muddying the dialogue around the deeper causes of the cruel and pointless Ukraine invasion. What about the eastward expansion of NATO? What about the many arbitrary and unnecessary invasions of sovereign nations by the United States? While this back and forth may provide a momentary sensation of righteousness, it generates more heat than light, recalling playground shouts of “You started it! No, you did!”

The real issue is not who started it, but rather preventing regression to a level of violence which destroys everything while resolving nothing. “Whataboutism” implies a semi-realization that all parties are enmeshed in competitive power games that lead to violent military “solutions.”

Wouldn't it be more helpful if the community of nations could begin from a humbler starting-point: instead of endless chauvinist justifications, me good/you bad, to admit that we all have rationalized our violence on the basis of national self-interest, we all, to the special delight of arms merchants, have ensured that we and our allies are provided with the most advanced weaponry, we all have violated or cancelled hard-won arms agreements, we all have dehumanized adversaries into enemy stereotypes—and this paradigm has not worked to bring us the security for which the toiling masses of this small planet yearn.

In spite of a dire risk of slipping over the nuclear edge, so far the global community prefers to stick with balance-of-power models of statecraft even as nuclear weapons only increase mutual paranoia and cancel out any potential “victory.” Where is the sane common sense that impressed itself upon Gorbachev and Reagan back in 1986, as they seriously considered getting rid of nukes entirely?

Deterrence is the sacred cow that rationalizes the status quo, but deterrence asserts that it will work forever and that there will be no mistakes—surely a bit much to ask of fallible humans. And what does it mean for the U.S. or Russia and others to refuse to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons? Isn't this a clue that we are only semi-committed to deterrence while secretly still planning nuclear war-fighting?

There is a fatalistic insanity in the willingness of nations to throw trillions of dollars into ensuring that each “wins” the great game of superpower competition and prestige, while they remain unwilling to give real decision-making power, and the relatively tiny amount of resources it would take, to diplomatic processes based in the reality that we are drifting downstream toward a nuclear waterfall.

After WW3 will be too late; prevention is everything.

Why can't we conceive of deterrence as a temporary stopgap as we move beyond it toward the cooperation required to mitigate climate change and pandemics? In the nuclear age, self-interest has fundamentally changed: every nation shares with every other nation, nuclear or not, a common interest in avoiding planetary annihilation, and that shared interest can form the basis of new agreements.

Who will lead? Where to start? Is the leverage-point in some kind of restructuring of the U.N.? Is it in a more forceful appeal to the nine nuclear nations from the 60 countries that have ratified the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (with another 26 processing ratification)? Is it in the convening of some new permanent conference of the nine nuclear countries, or however few or many of them that might be willing to lead?

Or will we resignedly accept the rationalizations of the lobbyists, the politicians in the pockets of the arms dealers, the narcissistic autocrats, all of whom form a self-perpetuating system that does nothing to address our real challenges?

Can we go outside the box, with the compassion of millions of NGOs like Rotary International, Doctors Without Borders, and the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (name—and support—your own favorite) all of whom are forging new connections in the context of what Teilhard de Chardin called the “noosphere,” a kind of global brain working outside the tired old structures of war-thinking?

Which of these parallel universes of thought will prevail? Putin's brutality, whatever its outcome, has only pointed up the stupidity and futility of violence and the perennial possibility of its opposite—a world that chooses survival, takes the risk of cooperation, and ensures a further stage in the unfolding human story.

Winslow Myers, author of “Living Beyond War: A Citizen's Guide,” serves on the Advisory Board of the War Preventive Initiative.



## Standing Together For The Sacred

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

The soul of humanity cries out from the crowded streets of Moscow, from steps near the Kremlin, as a man—an artist in the deepest sense—brings the slaughter of civilians in Bucha back to the home country... not by killing a bunch of Russians, but by posing, publicly, as dead himself, with his hands tied behind his back.

Let this man's spirit flow across the whole planet.

War is hell, and when we wage it—when we dehumanize an enemy, thus allowing ourselves to commit mass murder—we dehumanize ourselves. This unknown Russian man, in posing as someone killed in Ukraine, is bringing awareness home: Look what we're doing! Let us reclaim our humanity.

Such awareness is an affront to those in power. In Russia, under Putin, it's illegal. Thousands of Russians have been arrested for protesting the Ukraine invasion. I believe this matters with an enormity well beyond the scope of conventional reporting, especially war reporting. War is about much more than strategy and tactics, winning and losing. To wage war is to be infinitely less than who we truly are, yet this is how the world has organized itself.

To wage war is to destroy the planet.

So the question here is how should the Western world, including NATO, respond to Russia's Ukraine invasion, which, if addressed solely with the impulse to wage war back, could result in the onset of World War III: Mutually Assured Destruction, a.k.a., MAD, could come to life! If the West merely keeps shipping weapons to Ukraine, but stays out of the conflict otherwise, the bloody conflict will just go on, the slaughter will continue.

Ramzy Baroud, noting the total failure of the wars that NATO—led, of course, by the U.S.—has perpetrated in the past three quarters of a century—from Korea to Vietnam to Afghanistan, to Iraq, to Libya, etc., etc.—ponders the West's hypocrisy in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Not only have they lost all their wars, but they have ravaged the countries they attacked, killed millions, displaced millions more . . .

“Yet,” he writes, “enthusiasm for war remains high, as if over seventy years of failed military interventions have not taught us any meaningful lessons... Billions of dollars have already been allocated by Western countries to contribute to the war in Ukraine.

“In contrast, very little has been done to offer platforms for diplomatic, nonviolent solutions.”

Perhaps even more unsettling is the West's: “eagerness to fund war and the lack of enthusiasm to help countries rebuild.

“After 21 years of U.S. war and invasion of Afghanistan, resulting in a humanitarian and refugee crisis, Kabul is now largely left on its own. Last September, the UN refugee agency warned that ‘a major humanitarian crisis is looming in Afghanistan,’ yet nothing has been done to address this ‘looming’ crisis, which has greatly worsened since then.”

This paradox has not been addressed. War remains a whoop and a whistle. Onward, Christian soldiers. The consequences are somebody

else's problem—and more to the point, from a journalistic perspective, they aren't that interesting. Or they're too complex. Unless Russia does it.

It's so easy to get corralled into the notion that there's only one choice: Kill back.

To counter this notion, I begin by quoting from the manifesto written of an organization called Defend the Sacred. It was written by LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and one of the founders of the movement to resist construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a movement that became global.

“Humans,” the manifesto states, “have begun to separate themselves from nature, and to stand as a dominant species that is trying to control the natural world, unleashing global devastation. The result of this fundamental separation is an environmental crisis and an inner crisis, violence against the Earth and interpersonal violence, which are two sides of the same coin. We now unite as a planetary community to stand together for the sacred; to midwife a transition to a world in which humanity will no longer dominate but cooperate with all life.”

We now unite as a planetary community to stand together for the sacred...

Is this not the heart of the matter, the opposite of killing and killing back? Ending the Ukraine invasion is a global hope, a global cry; and nonviolent resistance to the weapons of war is a larger part of the process than is usually acknowledged or understood. This means diplomacy, of course, but it also means courageous non-cooperation on the part of as much of the public—Russians, Ukrainians, global citizens everywhere—as possible.

We do not truly know how powerful this sort of opposition can be, but ask yourself: Why did the Russian parliament recently pass a law prohibiting protest against the war? Why have thousands of protesters been arrested, possibly brutalized, and may face consequences as dire as 15 years in prison? Because the leadership is scared. Public compliance is crucial to the waging of war. The power we commoners wield is enormous, if only we knew it.

As Gene Sharp has written: “Ultimately, therefore, freedom is not something which a ruler ‘gives’ his subjects.” Freedom is claimed, though often at a cost.”

The global war machine is berserk. Power and profit think they rule, and too often those who stand in the way know only one choice: weaponize, fire back, feed the God of War. This usually has an opposite effect, prolonging the war, expanding the death toll. Many fear the West's shipment of weapons to Ukraine will have this result and simply leave another country in ruins.

Robert Koehler (koehlerc@gmail.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor. He is the author of *Courage Grows Strong at the Wound*.



## Conflict Dynamics

By Melinda Burrell

National Association for Community Mediation

Russian atrocities in Ukraine horrify us all, particularly knowing many Russians consider Ukrainians family.

How did it come to this?

Having worked in war zones, I have wondered if that violence could happen again here. One way to prevent it is to understand how conflict escalates.

Let's look at dynamics of two conflicts, one interpersonal and the other political.

One: John is late meeting Tim for coffee. Tim texts John: “Where are you? I have to leave soon.” No response. Ten minutes later, John arrives and launches into a story about his morning. He doesn't apologize or explain his tardiness.

Tim fumes quietly. John is often late, and hasn't picked up a check in a while. John's downright disrespectful. Tim concludes, and decides to tell their mutual friend Mary that it is time to stop seeing “Slacker John” so much. John, for his part, is embarrassed he was late. He feels silly describing his morning, but doesn't want to talk about real stuff like his fear he might get laid off.

Two: Protesters gather in a city square the day after a local police officer shot an unarmed man. They're angry, carrying signs and shouting slogans—even some very anti-police slogans—but remain nonviolent. The crowd grows. Police form a tight line across the street. Protesters feel the police are constricting their space. “Pigs!” they yell. The police call for backup.

As in both of these scenarios, conflicts often start about one thing, but expand in issues and actors. Identifying the stages of an escalating conflict can help us stop it.

•**Entrenched perceptions.** As conflict grows, we become convinced we are absolutely right, interpreting everything through the lens of our righteousness.

•**Emotions take over.** We lose the ability to think rationally. We fall back on default stress behaviors we learned as children—usually not constructive.

•**Communication decreases.** We refuse to think, let alone converse, about the other's perception of the situation—even though that is key to de-escalating and possibly resolving the situation.

•**Bones of contention and parties proliferate.** Dispute around one issue metastasizes to include others. We pull in allies, involving more people.

•**Parties start to change.** As one side introduces stronger tactics, the other side may change structurally in response—altering how they think, communicate, or organize—in ways that intensify the conflict.

This last dynamic is particularly worrisome, as we see in Ukraine. Russia's initial narrative was around ridding Ukraine of “Nazis” in their midst. When Ukrainians resisted more fiercely than expected, Russia changed its narrative to one claiming that the strong resistance meant Nazis had completely taken over and all must be eliminated. Worse, some Russian forces changed not only their narrative, but also their tactics—now committing atrocities.

If we understand how conflict escalates, we're better able to spot it, and ideally stop it. In our own country, we can be alert for its signs: overly emotional and self-righteous language, especially likening the “other side” to animals or something evil; ending communication across a divide; forcing legal changes without even attempting to find agreement.

Then we can de-escalate. We can pause, consider the impact of our words and actions, ask questions about how the other party sees the situation and what they need to de-escalate.

I'm encouraged by positive structural changes in our country. Dozens of groups now promote cross-divide conversations. City councils are launching “kindness campaigns.” Polls show most of us want the sniping to end. We each can choose to be part of positive change.

Melinda Burrell, PhD, @MelindaCBurrell is a humanitarian aid worker who studies polarization and trains on the neuroscience of communication and conflict. She is on the board of the National Association for Community Mediation, which offers resources on cross-divide engagement.