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The Carolinian

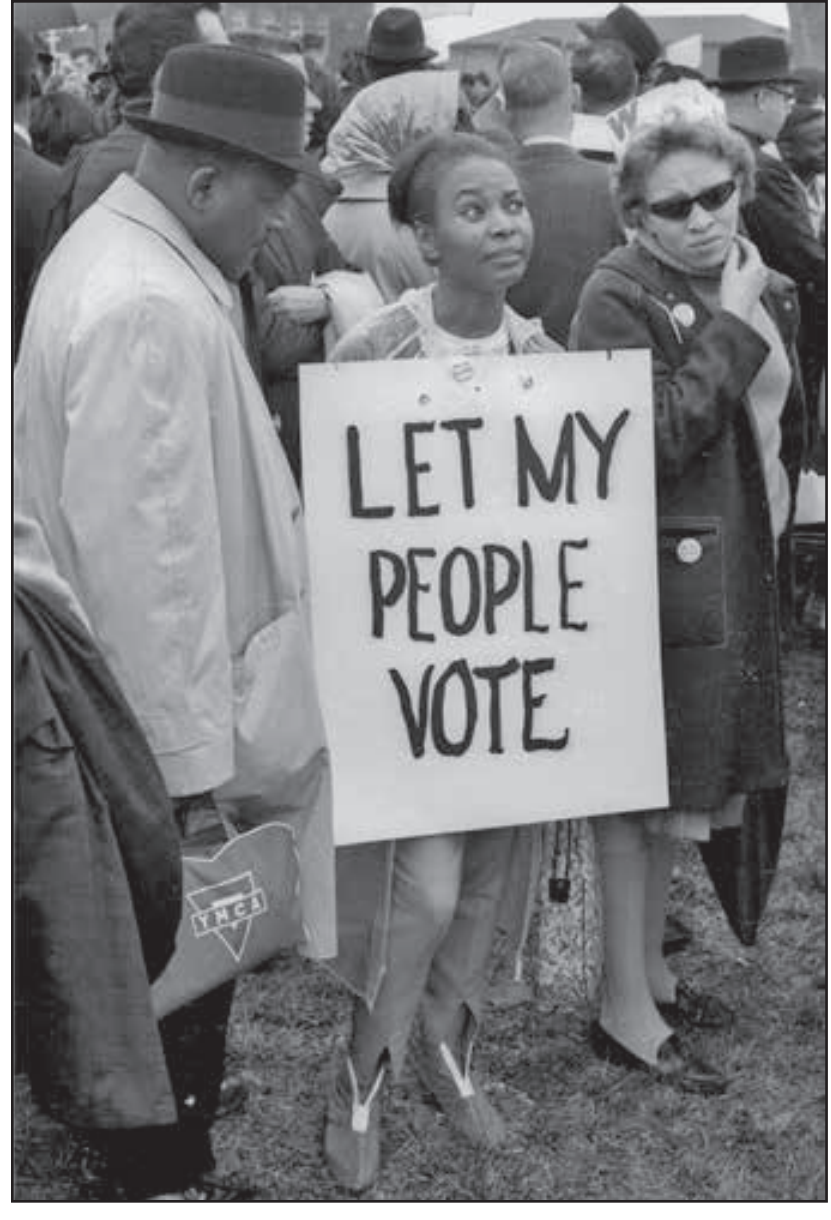
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Go Vote Today!

The North Carolina Primary elections have begun. Early voting opened on February 12th. Primary elections are often overlooked. Yet these early races, where political parties choose their candidates for the general election, play a decisive role in shaping who ultimately holds public office. In many races, especially in districts dominated by one party, the winner of the primary is all but assured victory in November. Despite this, turnout in primary elections is significantly lower than in general elections; only about one in five

registered voters participated in recent primaries nationwide. When turnout is this low, the electorate fails to reflect the diversity of the eligible population, particularly when it comes to racial and ethnic minorities. Primaries determine which voices appear on the general election ballot. If minority voters stay home on primary day, they effectively forfeit their chance to influence the choice of candidates who will represent their interests. Because primary electorates tend to be older, wealthier, and disproportionately

white compared with the broader pool of eligible voters, the issues and priorities that emerge from these contests may not reflect the concerns of minority communities. This dynamic can skew policy debates and lead to the nomination of candidates who are less responsive to the needs of diverse constituencies. When minorities vote in primaries, they help ensure that candidates address the issues that matter most to their communities. Research shows that when elections include a broader cross-section of

the electorate, candidates are more likely to adopt inclusive policy platforms and to moderate their positions to appeal to a wider range of voters. Conversely, low turnout among minority voters can empower a narrow subset of the electorate that may prioritize more extreme or unrepresentative positions. Our Elders fought too hard for our right to vote. It is your duty as an American to go vote! We can not plant ourselves firmly on the sidelines and then later complain about how the game is played. Go Vote Today!

What Is The American Dream, And Has It Become Harder To Achieve?

THE CONVERSATION – Few ideas are as central to the nation's identity as that of the American Dream. With the 250th birthday of the United States coming up in July 2026, it's worth stepping back to examine a concept essential to the nation's self-image. The term "American Dream" was actually coined in the 1930s by historian James Truslow Adams. Ever since the establishment of the Colonies, however, America has been viewed as a land where individual and collective hopes and aspirations can be realized. From the idea of America as a shining "city on a hill" to the Declaration of Independence's guarantee of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the nation has been premised on high aspirations. The concept of the American Dream has epitomized these hopes, and it continues to be present throughout our cultural landscape. As a social scientist, I set out to explore what Americans thought about the American Dream in to-



day's society. I interviewed scores of people, from an elderly man sleeping on the street to a billionaire entrepreneur. I wanted to know exactly how they defined the American Dream – and whether it has become harder to achieve today than in the past. Defining the dream From pickup trucks and lawn tractor

ads to the labeling of undocumented immigrant children as Dreamers, references to the American Dream in contemporary life are ubiquitous. Washington, D.C., is now home to a brand-new, US\$500 million museum, the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream, devoted to celebrating the idea and its history. It turns out that for most people

I interviewed, the American Dream consists of three basic ideas. The first is what might be called an economic bargain: If you work hard and play by the rules, you should expect to have a financially secure life. This includes owning a home, being able to afford raising



NC OFFICIALS TESTIFY, DEBATE CRIME AND SAFETY AFTER CHARLOTTE STABBINGS

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

The fatal stabbing of a Ukrainian refugee on Charlotte's light-rail system last summer continues to reverberate through North Carolina politics. The killing of 23-year-old Iryna Zarutska in August, followed by a non-fatal stabbing on the same transit line in December, has become a focal point for Republican criticism of Democratic leadership in Charlotte and statewide, particularly around criminal justice and mental health policy. On Monday, North Carolina Republican lawmakers pressed Charlotte-area officials during a House oversight hearing, questioning whether failures within the criminal justice system allowed DeCarlos Brown Jr., the man accused of killing Zarutska, to remain free despite a lengthy criminal history and reported mental health concerns. GOP Rep. Brenden Jones, co-chairman of the House oversight committee, opened the hearing by describing Zarutska's death as the result of systemic "incompetence". Democrats on the committee pushed back, arguing that the testimony showed no such incompetence and accusing Republicans of politicizing a tragedy. Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Estella Patterson, Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden, and District

ADVOCATES LAUNCH NEW CAMPAIGN URGING NC LAWMAKERS TO ADDRESS RISING COST OF LIVING

North Carolinians who suffered through an unseasonably cold and snowy January are just now beginning to see the true cost of trying to stay warm. Ty McFarland with the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters says residential customers are feeling the squeeze of higher costs even as Duke Energy is seeing record profits. "Today, Duke Energy announced their annual earnings, \$4.9 billion," said McFarland. "That's how much they delivered in profits to Wall Street shareholders, while hardworking families' bills go up and up." McFarland and other progressive advocates gathered outside the NC Legislature Tuesday to call on lawmakers to do more to help struggling families. Ahead of the 2026 short session, the Coalition Against Right-Wing Extremism (C.A.R.E.) is launching the "Cost We Carry" storybook, spotlighting first-hand accounts from North Carolinians who are being impacted by the rising costs. The coalition is urging lawmakers to finalize a comprehensive state budget, invest in food security and rein in runaway utility costs. In the case of Duke Energy, McFarland said lawmakers enacted legislation to allow Duke Energy to charge its customers for power plants they haven't built yet. That law, he says, is projected to increase residential energy bills by over \$23 billion over the next 25 years. "If that wasn't bad enough," said McFarland, "now Duke Energy is trying to raise our rates by \$23 to \$30 a month, depending on where you live." Public hearings for the proposed residential rate hike begin in March. Leslie Johnson of the Word of God Fellowship Outreach Food Pantry said the people she sees on a weekly basis are struggling with more than just utilities. "Food insecurity is at its all-time high, and that affects our elderly, our

White House Takes Down Racist Meme Of Obamas Posted On Trump's Social

WASHINGTON – The White House on Friday pulled down a social media post depicting former President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama as monkeys after members of Congress from both political parties expressed dismay and called it racist. A White House spokesperson told States Newsroom around noon that a "staffer erroneously made the post" that was shared on President Donald Trump's social media platform late Thursday night. But White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt wrote in a statement earlier in the day the video wasn't a real issue. "This is from an internet meme video depicting President Trump as the King of the Jungle and Democrats as characters from the Lion King," she wrote. "Please stop the



fake outrage and report on something today that actually matters to the American public." The White House press office also shared via email the full video, which was published in October. Trump shared a clip of the video on his social media account on Thursday at 11:44 p.m. Eastern within another video about allegations of 2020 election fraud in Michigan. The decision to delete Trump's social media post followed hours of pushback from lawmakers. "Praying it was fake because it's the most racist thing I've seen out of this White House," wrote South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott. "The President should remove it." Scott is chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee,

(See *COST OF LIVING*, P. 2)

1965 Was A Turning Point In The Struggle For Justice

The year 1965 stands out as one of the most pivotal, and violent years in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. It was a year marked not only by powerful acts of resistance and monumental legislative change, but also by a devastating wave of violence both within Black communities and waged against them by institutions, vigilantes, and deeply embedded systems of racism.

At the center of this turbulent year was the escalating struggle for voting rights. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed segregation, it did not dismantle the deeply entrenched system of disenfranchisement that kept millions of Black Americans from voting. When activists intensi-

fied efforts to register voters, they were met with brutal force — most notoriously in Selma, Alabama.

On March 7, 1965, a date forever etched in history as “Bloody Sunday,” peaceful marchers attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge were attacked by state troopers and sheriff’s deputies armed with clubs, tear gas, and whips. The violence was broadcast on national television, showing the country how far authorities were willing to go to suppress the political power of Black Americans. John Lewis, Amelia Boynton, and dozens more were beaten unconscious. The images shocked the nation, underscoring the deadly risks Black citizens faced simply for de-

manding basic rights.

But violence did not only come from the state. Throughout 1965, white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan intensified terror campaigns across the South. Shootings, arson attacks, and bombings targeted civil rights workers and Black families who dared challenge racial hierarchies. In March of that year, Reverend James Reeb, a white ally supporting the Selma movement, was beaten to death by segregationists. The act was meant to intimidate activists and halt the momentum toward change.

Simultaneously, Black communities were experiencing internal violence fueled by poverty, unemployment, housing discrimination, and the daily trauma of racism. These conditions contributed to the outbreak of the Watts uprising in Los Angeles in August 1965. Sparked by a violent encounter between police and a Black motorist, the six-day uprising reflected long-standing grievances against police brutality, inadequate housing, and economic exclusion. The uprising left 34 people dead, most of them Black, and exposed the profound frustration simmering beneath the surface in urban communities far from the Jim Crow South.

The violence of 1965 laid bare a critical truth: racism was not limited to southern sheriffs or extremist groups. It was woven into policing, politics, housing policy, and national consciousness. Yet the year also demonstrated the extraordinary resilience of the Black community. Despite the brutality, activists continued to march, organize, and demand justice. Their perseverance led directly to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one of the most significant civil rights achievements in American history.

Ultimately, 1965 revealed both the scale of violence required to maintain an unequal society and the strength of a community determined to dismantle it. It remains a stark reminder that progress in America has never been inevitable. It has always been fought for, often at great cost, by those who refused to accept injustice.

COST OF LIVING

Continued from page 1

children, all demographics, from rural to urban, everywhere,” said Johnson. Johnson says the cost of providing just soup and salad is up almost 12% from last year.

“This is not a Democratic or a Republican issue. This is a United States of America and a North Carolina issue,” said Johnson. “Let’s get this taken care of to support our state.”

Alexandra Sirota of the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center said financial insecurity is forcing North Carolinians to choose between basic needs.

“At BTC, we spend a lot of time analyzing numbers, but behind every data point is a person making an impossible choice — whether to fill a prescription or pay the power bill or put gas in the car to get to work,” Sirota said.

Sirota added that policy choices in Washington, including letting the Affordable Care Act premium tax credits expire, have caused health insurance premiums to jump by double digits.

“At least 200,000 of us, and the most of any state in the nation, have lost coverage altogether because it simply became unaffordable,” said Sirota.

Sirota said without support from the government, people pay more out-of-pocket, skip getting care, or drop coverage entirely. She said that’s bad for family budgets, and bad for the economy.

A Catawba-YouGov poll released last week finds 63% of North Carolina residents saying that prices are higher than a year ago, while 53% said energy and utility costs are unaffordable.

A separate poll by the nonpartisan health research organization KFF found the cost of health care, including paying for health insurance and out-of-pocket expenses, tops the list of the public’s economic anxieties. In the KFF poll, more than 4 in 10 voters said healthcare will have a major impact on their vote in this year’s midterm election.

TRUMPS RACIST TWEET

Continued from page 1

which is tasked with ensuring the GOP maintains its majority in that chamber following November’s midterm elections.

Nebraska Republican Sen. Pete Ricketts posted that, “Even if this was a Lion King meme, a reasonable person sees the racist context to this. The White House should do what anyone does when they make a mistake: remove this and apologize.”

New York Republican Rep. Mike Lawler wrote the “post is wrong and incredibly offensive — whether intentional or a mistake — and should be deleted immediately with an apology offered.”

Mississippi Republican Sen. Roger Wicker called the post “totally unacceptable.

“The president should take it down and apologize.”

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., described the video as something that “is dangerous and degrades our country” as well as “Racist. Vile. Abhorrent.”

“The President must immediately delete the post and apologize to Barack and Michelle Obama, two great Americans who make Donald Trump look like a small, envious man,” Schumer wrote.

Michigan Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin posted, “This is racist garbage from President Trump. If you’re finding yourself defending it, you’re on the wrong side of history.”

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., wrote that “President Obama and Michelle Obama are brilliant, compassionate and patriotic Americans. They represent the best of this country.”

“Donald Trump is a vile, uninged and malignant bottom feeder,” Jeffries added. “Why are GOP leaders like John Thune continuing to stand by this sick individual? Every single Republican must immediately denounce Donald Trump’s disgusting bigotry.”

New York Democratic Rep. Yvette Clarke, chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, wrote that while some people “still find Donald Trump’s behavior shocking, I do not.”

“This is the man who built his political fortune by way of a vile campaign of birther lies and harassment against President Obama,” Clarke wrote. “Bigotry has been his brand since Day 1, and the wretched ‘yes’ men who surround him enabling or endorsing this conduct aren’t going to change that.



American Dream — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

kids and retiring in comfort.

Second, the American Dream is centered on hope and optimism. It is about personal progress and the belief that the nation’s best days lie ahead. It’s the idea that each generation should do better than the previous one, and that upward economic mobility is essential for bringing this about.

The third and final idea people expressed was having the freedom to pursue their hopes to reach their full potential. For many, this is the epitome of the American Dream.

At its best, the U.S. is seen as allowing individuals the freedom to live the life they want. Liberty and rugged individualism have been hallmarks of America since its beginnings, so it should come as no surprise that they are also central to the American Dream.

Economically more elusive? Given this, has the American Dream become more or less difficult to achieve over time? Unfortunately, for a growing number of Americans, it appears to be more difficult.

First, the goal of leading an economically secure life in exchange for hard work has become more elusive. Data from the Census Bureau indicates that median wages for full-time male workers have essentially flatlined since 1973. The economy has been producing more low-wage and part-time jobs. Many of these lack benefits, such as health insurance.

Less-skilled workers, such as truck drivers and postal clerks, have actually lost ground in terms of income. At the same time, housing, medical care, child care and higher education costs have dramatically increased

over the past 40 years. What about upward mobility and the hope for each generation to do better economically than the previous one? There is some evidence that one reason the middle class is shrinking is that more people have entered upper-income tiers.

Still, younger generations will actually earn, on average, less as adults than their parents did. This is the first time in U.S. history that this is the case. The formerly taken-for-granted idea of generational progress and moving forward appears to have stalled.

Upward economic mobility for lower-income workers has also slowed over the past 50 years, making it harder to climb the ladder of opportunity.

Finally, what about personal free-

dom? Survey data indicates that greater numbers of Americans feel they have less control over their lives and futures than in the past.

For more than 20 years, Gallup has asked the question, “In this country, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?” The percentage of Americans reporting being satisfied has dropped notably over the past two decades. In 2007 it was 87%, but by 2024 it had fallen to 72%. For women, the number was even lower, declining from 85% in 2007 to 66% in 2024.

By comparison, the average for the wealthiest countries in the Gallup survey was 86%. Consequently, on all three counts it appears that the American Dream is becoming harder to achieve.

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Business & Finance

How To Build Better Credit With Your 2026 Tax Refund

By Kendall Little

Yahoo Finance

The 2026 tax season is officially underway, and if you're like many Americans, you may be expecting a refund when you file by the April 15 deadline.

The average tax refund in 2025 was \$3,167, based on more than 10 million total refunds issued by the IRS. This year, some filers may get even bigger tax refunds, thanks to recent tax law changes.

A large windfall can go a long way toward jump-starting your financial goals, including building a good credit score. Here's how you can best take advantage of your tax refund to build credit in 2026.

HOW TO BUILD CREDIT WITH YOUR TAX REFUND

Whether you're starting from no credit at all or you have a poor credit score, you can use your tax refund to make moves toward building long-lasting good credit.

1. Open a secured credit card

A secured credit card can be a useful tool if you don't have the credit to qualify for most credit cards. Secured cards require you to submit a security deposit when you open your account, which can reduce the potential risk for your credit card issuer. As a result, secured cards are often easier to get approved for, even with a poor credit score or no credit history.

Security deposits vary, but many secured cards require at least a \$200 deposit (which will act as your credit limit). That's where your tax refund can help. You can use a portion of your refund toward your security deposit and begin building credit with a secured credit card.

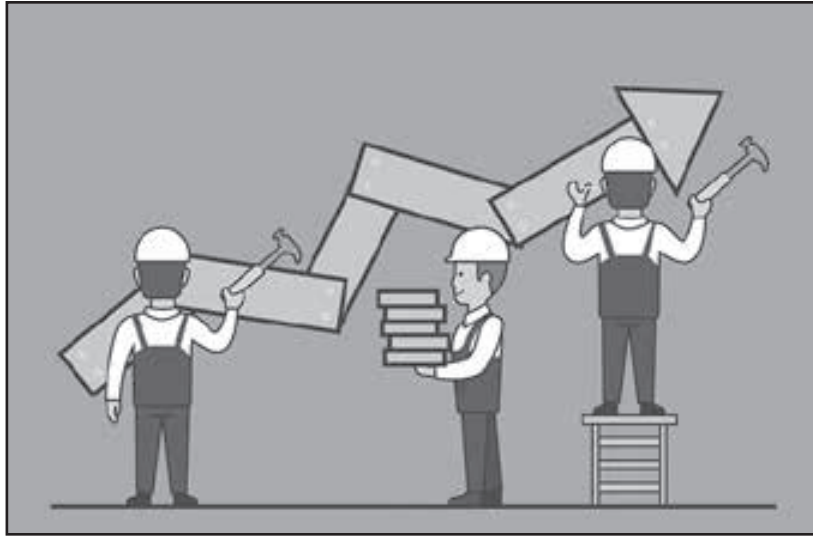
Once you're approved and start using your new card, your payment history gets reported to the credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) like any other credit card. As long as you make sure to pay on time each month and keep your credit utilization low, you can use the secured card to improve your credit score over time.

2. Catch up on late payments

Missing a credit card payment can have consequences for both your wallet and credit score.

Late payments often result in added fees and penalty APRs that can quickly drive up the cost of your debt. Depending on how long you leave the balance unpaid, your issuer may also report missed payments to credit bureaus. Not only can that hurt your credit score now, but the information remains on your credit report for years into the future.

If you have any past due payments when you receive your tax refund, use it to pay down what you can. That's one of the best ways to preserve your credit score and avoid additional fees.



3. Pay down existing debt

Your credit score may also benefit when you use your tax refund to pay down existing debt.

Carrying a credit card balance itself doesn't necessarily hurt your score as long as you're paying at least the minimum on time. But if you have a high balance that's keeping your credit utilization rate close to your credit limit, it could negatively affect your score. Reducing that credit utilization by paying down the balance, in turn, can boost your credit score.

Paying off debt is a smart option, even if your tax refund doesn't

cover the full balance. Any additional payment toward your balance can reduce your overall interest charges and help you get closer to paying down the debt in full.

If the credit score you have today is high enough to qualify, you might also want to consider a balance transfer credit card. When you transfer an existing card balance to one with 0% APR on balance transfers, you'll have several months to pay off the debt without adding any more interest charges. Balance transfer cards today can have intro periods lasting up to 21 months and charge balance transfer fees of 3% to 5% of

the transferred amount.

Do taxes affect your credit score? In general, the process of filing your annual taxes doesn't have any effect on your credit score. But you could see an impact on your credit score if you choose to pay your taxes with a credit card.

This isn't the most cost-effective way to pay, since you'll usually be charged a fee to pay with a card. Plus, charging a large tax payment to your credit card can impact your credit utilization rate, and if you can't pay the tax bill in full, you could also accrue high-interest credit card debt on the charge.

However, it could be worth it if you can earn more in rewards than the cost, or you have a 0% APR offer and want more time to pay your bill.

Like paying your taxes with a credit card, using a personal loan to pay your tax bill could also have an impact on your credit score. For example, opening a new account can lead to a temporary hit to your credit, though it's usually minor.

MORE WAYS TO USE YOUR TAX REFUND

Beyond building credit, there are plenty of smart ways to use your tax refund to get ahead of your financial goals. Here are a few to consider this year.

ADD TO YOUR EMERGENCY FUND

It's never a bad time to jump-start

your savings — especially when you can earn upwards of 4% on the amount you put into a high-yield savings account.

If you don't already have emergency savings to protect you against surprise expenses or periods of financial hardship, your tax refund is a great way to start. It's generally best practice to keep at least three to six months' worth of expenses in your emergency fund.

With your tax refund as a baseline, you can build your savings over time by making regular contributions in whatever amounts fit your budget.

SAVE FOR RETIREMENT

A tax refund windfall can also help with your annual retirement savings. For example, you can contribute your refund to a Roth IRA and grow that already-taxed money over time until you withdraw your contributions and earnings tax-free at retirement age.

Roth IRAs have income limits, so it's important to make sure you qualify. There's also a limit to how much you can contribute annually.

If you receive last year's average refund amount of \$3,167, you'd only need to contribute an additional \$4,333 over the rest of the year to max out your account in 2026 (\$5,433 with the catch-up contribution for those 50 and up). That's about \$542 per month for the eight months following Tax Day in April.

NC Expands \$208M Energy Savings Program Statewide

NC Newline — Energy and utility costs are a major concern for North Carolinians, with more than half saying they're unaffordable. But the state is making strides towards energy efficiency and lowering costs for residents, Gov. Josh Stein said on Tuesday.

Energy Saver North Carolina, a federally funded program targeting home efficiency, is now available to eligible applicants in all 100 counties, the governor told reporters at a press conference.

Stein said the program is a win for families who participate as well as the contractors who will do the work. "[Families] get significant savings

for upgrading their appliances and HVAC system, and then they save thousands of dollars on their utility bills over time," he said. "By funding these upgrades, we're keeping [contractors] working and supporting roughly 2,300 jobs."

As more households take advantage of the program, Stein said, it should benefit the environment by reducing carbon emissions and carbon pollution, and help ease strain on the energy grid. That issue has drawn attention lately with Duke Energy asking customers to reduce usage during recent winter weather events, lowering the risk of blackouts.

Energy Saver NC's funding of \$208

million through 2031 will cover two types of rebates to eligible households, which is determined through how much energy is expected to be saved and household income. The first type offers up to \$16,000 for home efficiency upgrades like installing energy-efficient HVAC units. The second provides up to \$14,000 for new appliances, such as electric stoves, that are more energy-efficient.

"In addition to helping families save energy and money, these energy efficiency measures will make their homes more comfortable and healthier," Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Reid Wilson said. "We will be creating less air pollution

and less carbon emissions."

The program initially launched in a few counties last January, and continued expanding across the state. Last month, the final two counties and the state's largest, Mecklenburg and Wake, joined.

In the past year, Wilson said the program has received 4,818 applications. Of those, 1,709 have been approved, and there's an estimated \$770,000 worth of projects in 51 households.

"Energy Saver North Carolina allows everyday people to see cleaner energy technology in their homes," Mazine Lowe, executive director of the Center for Energy Education,

said.

Out of all applications to the program, about 800 come from Halifax County, where Lowe works. She's been instrumental in spreading the word and encouraging participation.

Stein said the demand for power is expected to continue to grow as more businesses and people move to North Carolina. More data centers, which consume massive amounts of power, are also being proposed across the state.

"What we can do is make sure that whatever new costs are needed, whether it's in terms of generation of new power or transmission of that power by those data centers, they

should bear the cost," Stein said. "We should not be raising the cost of power on regular residential folk because of these new additional data centers."

In addition to providing updates on energy policy, Stein announced the launch of the 100strong.nc.gov dashboard, which allows the public to see how their county is benefiting from new jobs, medical debt relief and summer food assistance for children.

"We live in times when many people are disillusioned with government. They don't always know if the people they elect are serving and working on their behalf," Stein said. "As leaders, we have transparency on the progress we're making."

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US TikTok Users Rethink App Over Concerns About Privacy

THE GUARDIAN – Many TikTok users across the US say they're rethinking their relationship with the platform since its ownership and terms and conditions have recently changed, with some citing censorship and lack of trust as reasons why they're removing themselves from the app.

Keara Sullivan, a 26-year-old comedian, says TikTok jumpstarted her career and provided a pathway to getting a manager and a literary agent.

"I'm not one of those creators who's a TikTok hater," said Sullivan, who has more than half a million followers on the platform. "I'm very transparent about the fact that where I am in my career is largely because of TikTok."

That's why, she said, it's "really sad" for her to step away from the platform – at least for now.

TikTok, the short-form video platform owned by Chinese company ByteDance, has faced scrutiny after the decision to create a new US-based entity, TikTok USDS Joint Venture, in an effort to avoid being banned in the country. Investors in the majority US-owned venture include Oracle,

which is owned by Donald Trump ally Larry Ellison, the private equity-group Silver Lake and Abu Dhabi's MGX, who will own 80.1% of the new entity. ByteDance will own the remaining 19.9%.

The announcement was made five years after Trump first threatened to ban the popular app in the US during his first term in office.

TikTok's new deal has been accompanied by changes to app's terms and conditions, reports of technical issues and a growing debate among users and creators about privacy and censorship. The daily average of US users deleting the TikTok app has increased 195% from 22 January to 28 January compared with the previous 90 days, according to data collected by Sensor Tower, a market intelligence firm.

Many social media users have voiced concern over language in the app's terms and conditions, which specifically point out the types of data that TikTok may collect on its users, including "racial and ethnic origin" and "sexual life or sexual orientation, status as transgender or nonbinary, citizenship or immigration status, or



financial information".

That language was present in the previous version of platform's terms, which were updated in 2024, but one noticeable new feature in the terms is the explicit acknowledgment that TikTok collects precise location data (unless you opt out), as reported by Mashable.

TikTok user Julia, a 32-year-old

caregiver based in Washington, told the Guardian that she deleted the app as soon as she heard about the company's new agreement.

"I trust Oracle and Ellison about as much as I trust eating a raw burger on a hot summer day," she said.

After the killing of Alex Pretti by federal agents on 24 January, some content creators expressed concern that videos condemning the federal agency were being suppressed by TikTok.

Comedian Meg Stalter said in an Instagram post that a video she made urging fellow Christians to speak up against ICE tactics was not being uploaded to the app. In response, she decided to delete the app.

"[TikTok] is under new ownership and we are being completely censored and monitored," she wrote in her post.

California governor Gavin Newsom also voiced concern about potential TikTok censorship this past week, writing on X: "Following TikTok's sale to a Trump-aligned business group, our office has received reports – and independently confirmed instances – of suppressed content critical of Presi-

dent Trump." Newsom announced that the state will be launching an investigation into the platform and whether it is violating California law by censoring anti-Trump content.

TikTok USDS Joint Venture attributed the issues to a power outage at a US datacenter, unrelated to the weekend's events. On 27 January, the entity issued the following statement: "We've made significant progress in recovering our U.S. infrastructure with our U.S. data center partner. However, the U.S. user experience may still have some technical issues, including when posting new content. We're committed to bringing TikTok back to its full capacity as soon as possible."

A 21-year-old software engineer, who asked to remain anonymous, first encountered TikTok in 2020 as a high school junior.

"I was amazed how quickly it learned my interests, kept up with trends and recommended things I would've never sought out myself," he said. "For better or for worse, I was probably using it at least four hours a day."

He says he stayed on the app for so long due to the quality of his algorithm; but after TikTok's temporary shutdown in the US in January 2025, he began to notice differences.

"I didn't like how the pop-up message painted Trump as the 'savior' that would bring back TikTok once he was in office," he said. "After it was brought back, I noticed a significant decline in recommendation quality."

Sullivan also noticed major changes following TikTok's brief blackout, including a reduction in the income she was receiving through the company's creator rewards program. She ultimately made the decision to pivot away from TikTok after noticing potential censorship issues, including the banning of Palestinian journalist Bisan Omda, who had 1.4 million followers on the app. Even before TikTok found its US owner, Sullivan knew that it was in her best interest to disseminate her content far and wide.

"In the internet ecosphere, you kind of have to create these different avenues for yourself, because you can't rely on one platform," she said. "The algorithm could change at any time."



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Health and Wellness

What Exactly Is Atrial Fibrillation And How Is It Treated?

NEW YORK (AP) — Daniel Moore was about 30 the first time it happened. At the end of a long, hot, stressful day, he chugged an ice-cold glass of milk.

"It felt like a bunny rabbit trying to jump out of my chest," said Moore, now 60.

Moore, a radiologist, knew what it was: A-fib.

Short for atrial fibrillation, A-fib is a quivering or irregular heartbeat that is a worrisome stage-setter for blood clots, stroke and heart failure. Some researchers believe more than 10 million Americans have it — most of them older. And it's expected to become even more common in the years ahead.

Yet, University of Utah heart researcher Dr. T. Jared Bunch sees reason for optimism.

"Even though we see more of the disease, we're better at treating it," said Bunch, who co-authored a book on A-fib.

Symptoms can include shortness of breath

A-fib occurs when the heart's upper chambers, called the atria, beat out of sync with the lower chambers, the ventricles. Not everyone is aware something is wrong, but some people suffer alarming symptoms like a pounding heartbeat and shortness of breath.

"I definitely have no exercise tolerance when I'm in it," Moore said. "I can't run. Walking is tiring faster. I get a little light-headed standing up."

The heart can surpass 200 beats per minute for someone with A-fib, more than double the 60 to 100 beats typical for a healthy adult's resting heart rate.

Symptoms can come and go, and it's not usually life-threatening by

itself. But the erratic beating can lead to blood pooling in the heart that can become clots in days or even hours. Those clots, in turn, can travel to the brain and cause strokes.

A-fib also can increase the risk of developing ventricular fibrillation — a more serious condition.

Diagnosis is becoming more common

Experts say smartwatches and other devices that can detect erratic heartbeats are one reason A-fib diagnoses are increasing.

Many people who experience symptoms don't understand what is happening.

The American Heart Association found that more than half of people with A-fib didn't know about the condition before they were diagnosed.

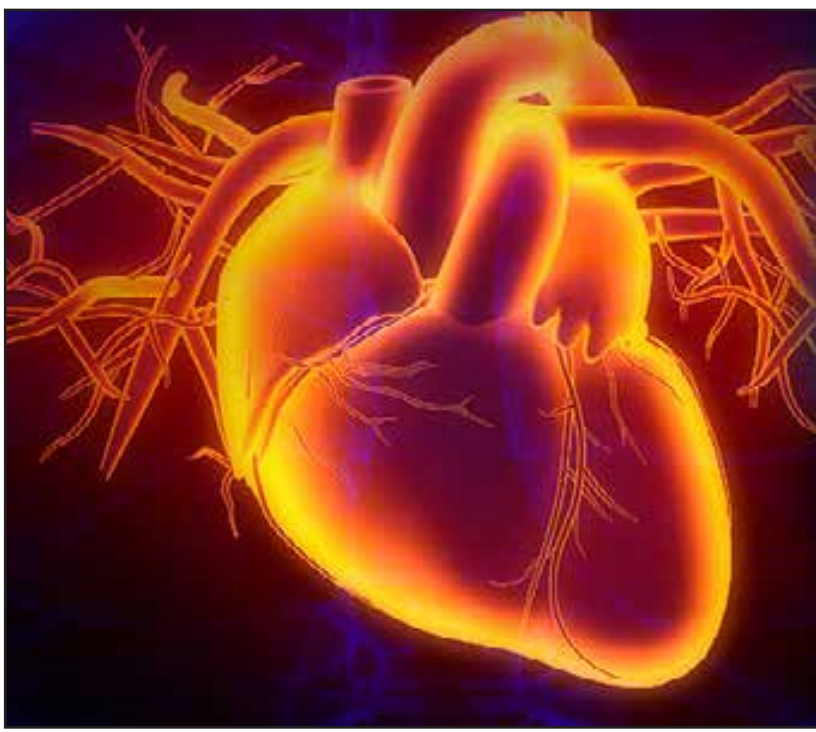
Studies have suggested 15% or more of strokes can be tied to A-fib, and that the percentage rises in older people. The condition is one reason that U.S. stroke deaths rose in the last decade, although the stroke death rate has dipped in the last few years.

What causes A-fib?

Researchers attribute A-fib to damage in the heart's upper chambers and its electrical signaling. Genetics can play a role, but other contributors include high blood pressure, diabetes, stress, sleep apnea, smoking and alcohol.

Those harms accumulate over time, which is one reason why the condition tends to hit older adults. About 70% of A-fib cases are people 65 and older, Bunch said.

Viruses can also pose a threat because they can affect the proteins behind the heart's electrical signals or prompt an immune response that damages heart tissue. COVID-19 is among the list of viral culprits, and



likely contributed to A-fib in some patients, experts say.

Studies have found no link to COVID-19 shots, said Dr. Jose Joglar, a Dallas-based expert who helped author American Heart Association

guidelines on A-fib diagnosis and management.

Doctors have a range of treatment options

There's no cure, but a number of therapies can help manage the prob-

lem.

"We're miles beyond where we used to be" in treating A-fib, said Dr. Laurence Epstein, of Hofstra University and Northwell Health. "The technology has really evolved."

One initial treatment is a cardioversion, which involves using a defibrillator to deliver an electric shock to the heart to restore rhythm. It's often successful, but sometimes only temporarily.

For some patients, doctors may recommend implanted devices. Pacemakers can regulate heart rhythm, and a device called a Watchman can close off a clot-prone area of the upper heart.

And then there's ablation. It's a procedure in which a doctor uses heat, cold or electric pulses to zap certain areas of the heart, creating scars that block faulty electric signals. Traditionally, ablation was used when other approaches failed, but in recent years ablation techniques have become more advanced and it has become a first choice for certain patients, including those with heart failure.

Medications to regulate the heart or thin the blood to reduce stroke risk can have problematic side effects.

How to lower your risk

People can lower their risk of developing A-fib by living a healthy lifestyle. That includes exercising, getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, managing high blood pressure, and avoiding tobacco products and alcohol.

Doctors also have long warned about excessive levels of caffeine, although some new evidence suggests that at least a little may be OK. One small study published recently found that patients who averaged one cup a day saw less recurrence of symptoms than those who abstained entirely.

If symptoms do develop, it's important to take them seriously, said Amy Stahley, who was first diagnosed three years ago.

She went to bed one night and her heart began racing to more than 150 beats per minute. She immediately went to a hospital.

"If you're feeling a little off, get it checked out," said Stahley, who is a nurse and dean of Davenport University's College of Health Professions in Michigan.

Moore, a radiology professor at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, agreed.

"The longer you stay in A-fib, the more likely you are to stay in it for life," he said.

Advocacy Group Says That Durham Is Failing In Its HIV/AIDS Housing

A group of housing advocates and physicians in Durham is accusing the city of mismanaging federal funds meant to help people living with HIV and AIDS in the community.

The Coalition to End the HIV Epidemic in Durham, or EHE Coalition, says the city of Durham has mismanaged the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS program, also known as HOPWA, a U.S. Housing and Urban Development program.

Over the last four years, the city has accumulated more than \$1.3 million in unspent HOPWA funds without any contractual commitments, according to a city staff memo to the city manager.

"The coalition went and found out there was money just sitting with the City of Durham," said Carolyn Hinton, director of Healing with CAARE, one of the organizations in the coalition and the city's first free HIV support and community health clinic.

Money sitting with the city

Since forming in 2023, the EHE Coalition and its members have spoken and met with city staff and council members at various times to call for the money to be used.

The group has issued several proposals — including detailed funding allocation plans — to help the city meet an urgent demand for housing for HIV patients, a particularly vulnerable minority statistically shown to struggle with stable housing.

But in interviews with WUNC News, coalition members say their efforts were met with indifference and bureaucratic inefficiency by the City Manager's Office and the Housing & Neighborhood Services Department.

"Instead of them being transparent, they're just continuing to say 'We know what's best,'" said Lanea Foster, a co-chair of the EHE Coalition, who previously oversaw homeless prevention work with Durham County for years.

"We have a lot of people who would have been eligible for HOPWA funding, who would have been eligible for rental assistance, for even a hotel room when they were coming out of the hospital or some other place. They could get a down payment for rent. They could get several different things that could have stabilized them," Foster said.

Few actually received help, reports show

Annual reports filed by the City of Durham evaluating the performance of housing programs and homeless services show few households have actually been helped by the city's HOPWA program across the five counties they serve.

MENTAL HEALTH

Continued from page 1

Attorney Spencer Merriweather all testified, emphasizing existing crime-reduction strategies, declining crime rates, and new safety measures implemented on the light-rail system since the attacks. Merriweather called for additional assistant prosecutors, earlier mental-health interventions, and stronger responses to serious juvenile crime.

Much of the lawmakers' scrutiny focused on the role of mental health evaluations and pretrial decision-making. Brown faces both state and federal murder charges, and courts in each system have ordered psychiatric evaluations to determine whether he is competent to stand trial. His case has renewed attention on how North Carolina law handles defendants found incapable of proceeding due to mental illness.

Under state law, the question of a defendant's capacity to proceed can be raised at any time by prosecutors, defense attorneys, defendants, or the court itself. If raised, the court must hold a hearing to determine capacity, but a forensic mental-health evaluation is not required, allowing judges to make determinations without professional input.

These issues were specifically examined Tuesday during a meeting of the House Select Committee on Involuntary Commitment and Public Safety, chaired by House Deputy Majority Whip Rep. Timothy Reeder, a Republican from Pitt County.

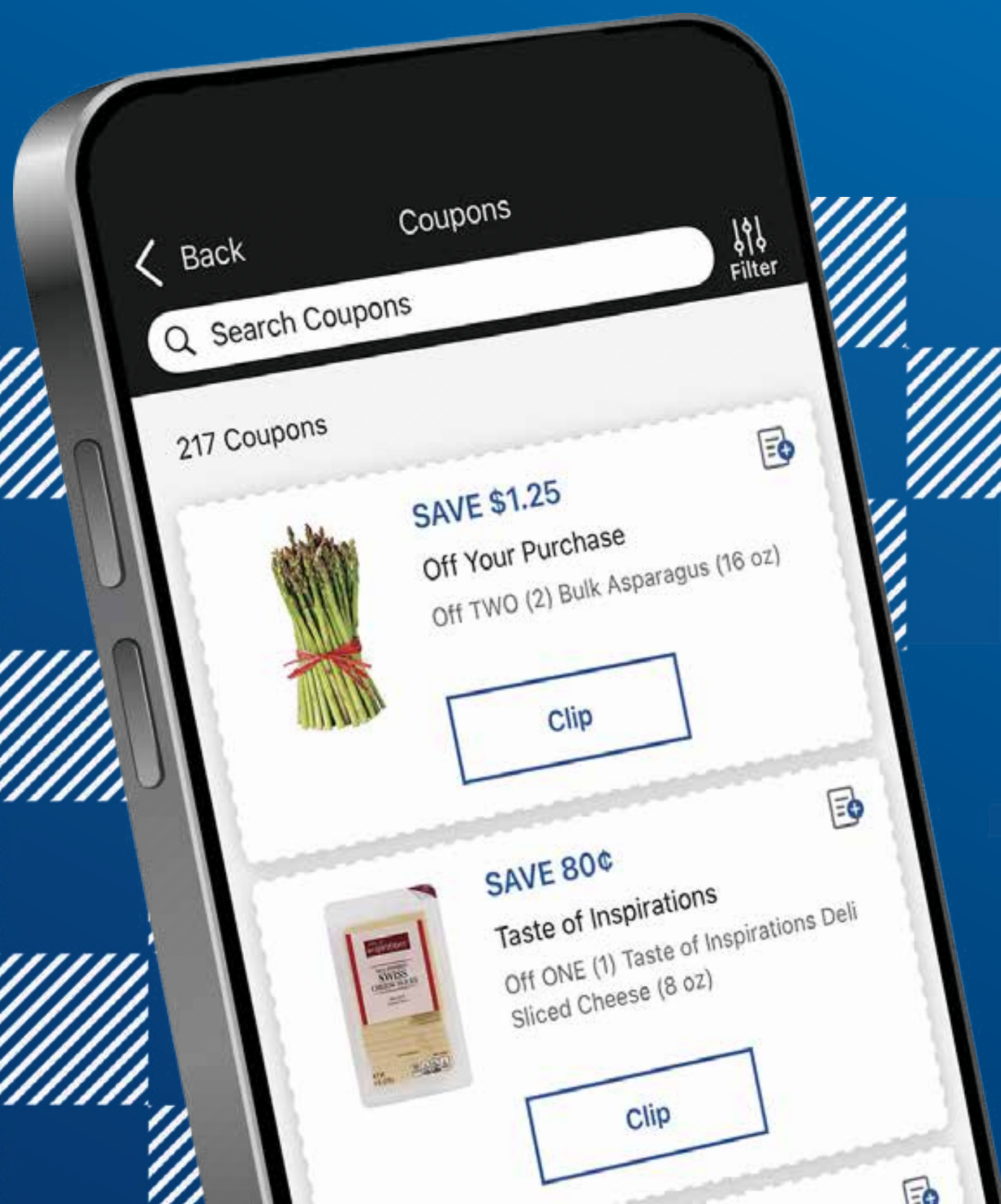
Lawmakers discussed statutory standards governing when defendants are deemed incapable of understanding court proceedings, comprehending their legal situation, or assisting in their own defense. The committee also reviewed criteria for assisted outpatient treatment, which applies to individuals experiencing serious mental illness who are unlikely to survive safely in the community without supervision, have a history of treatment noncompliance, or have engaged in recent violent behavior.

As part of the discussion, lawmakers heard about jail-based and community programs designed to address the intersection of mental health and public safety. One Wake County judge told legislators that courts are coordinating with District Attorney Lorrin Freeman and behavioral-health agencies through programs such as NC RISE, a jail-based initiative at the Wake County Detention Center that provides mental-health treatment to restore the legal capacity of inmates found unfit to stand trial. The program, operated in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, offers daily group and individual sessions and is intended to reduce wait times for state psychiatric hospital beds by providing local, voluntary treatment.

State lawmakers passed a new law barring cashless bail for certain violent crimes and repeat offenders, while also seeking to ensure that more defendants receive mental-health evaluations. Democratic Gov. Josh Stein recently issued an executive order aimed in part at improving mental-health treatment for people encountered by law enforcement and those who are incarcerated.

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Arts & Culture

Harnett County Holds 4th Annual Civil Rights Stories

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Lillington, NC - The atmosphere inside the county Resource Center was one of reverence and resilience as the Harnett County NAACP and the Harnett County Democratic Party convened for the 4th Annual Civil Rights Stories event. The program, which has become a cornerstone for preserving local history, honored five distinguished residents whose lives bridge the gap between the Jim Crow South and the ongoing fight for equity in North Carolina. The afternoon served as a vivid reminder that the Civil Rights Movement was not just a national headlines-maker, but a series of deeply personal battles fought on the streets of Shawtown, Erwin, Lillington, and Beaver Dam. Each honoree was given five minutes to share a "story of self," revealing the grit required to navigate a segregated world and the determination to improve it.

Lois Murphy: The Voice for the Vulnerable. Mrs. Murphy, a lifelong advocate from Erwin, was recognized for her pioneering work in mental health, a topic she noted has long been shrouded in silence within the community. "It is time for us to address that," the program noted. Murphy recalled her education at Shaw University and



the formative influence of community leaders like Mr. W.N. Porter at Shawtown School. Her story was one of continuous movement, from marching in the streets after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to personally ensuring local children had clothes and food.

Walter Williams: Lessons in Equality. Mr. Williams offered a candid and at times humorous look at the "separate but equal" era. He recounted the stark realization he faced during school integration. "I didn't want to go to the [integrated]



school," he admitted. "But once I got there, I said, 'What in the world are these?' I had never seen the things they had in those schools. Believe me, it wasn't equal." Williams' testimony highlighted the systemic underfunding of Black institutions and the "Oreo" labels he navigated while working to bring forth opportunity.

Grace Watts: The Power of the Vote. A cousin of Lois Murphy, Grace Watts spoke of the mentors who shaped her, including Rosa Parks and legends like Barbara Jordan. She shared the sting of political

hurdles, recounting a local election she lost by a mere 19 votes. Her message was clear: "We need the vote. That's where it stays. We cannot afford not to vote."

Ernest Smith: From "Diamonds in the Rough" to Global Citizen. Mr. Smith, a 1968 graduate of Shawtown High and a Fayetteville State University alumnus, shared his journey from the tobacco fields to teaching the classrooms of Brooklyn, NY. He spoke of the "Black Power" era and his work on the political campaigns of Shirley Chisholm and Jesse Jack-



son. Today, he focuses on building a 5,000-square-foot community resource center on Roberts Road to serve the youth and elderly of Harnett County.

Thesolonia McLean: Resilience and Faith. Mr. McClain shared a poignant story of the casual racism of the past, recalling a child in a Raleigh restaurant using a racial slur because they "didn't know any better" based on what they heard at home. McLean's candid comments were highlighted by his transparency, mentioning, "the light bulb came

on once I was in the right learning environment." Despite physical challenges and the memories of being passed over for promotions despite years of experience, McLean's story was one of unwavering faith and commitment to the NAACP.

While the stories were personal, the mission remains the same. People must vote and participate in civic activities to ensure growth in the right direction. The event highlighted the importance of representation in a county that is rapidly changing.

My Quest To Become A Dad Who Can Do His Daughters' Hair

THE GUARDIAN - In the basement of Larry King's salon in Marylebone, London, stylist and curly hair advocate Jennie Roberts is giving me a much-needed pep talk. "It's all about education and making everything simplified," she says, perhaps sensing my apprehension as I stand uneasily before her with a comb in hand.

"It's not a big effort, it is not going to cost a lot of money. Managing curly hair, once you know how, is easy," Roberts says. "It really is. It's easier than trying to hide it anyway."

The curly hair in question isn't mine but that of my two daughters, aged three and four-and-a-half. After months of screaming and unsatisfying results, I've taken it upon myself to learn the basics of caring for their hair, which is a combination of my mixed-race afro curls and my wife's straighter Spanish locks.

Roberts, who has styled everyone from Thandiwe Newton to Mel B and now offers courses for handling Black curls, doesn't have an easy task in front of her as she needs to try to undo decades' worth of my own hair ignorance.

For me - and many other Black men - hair care begins and ends with the barber shop: a male-only space of unsolicited political opinions, fades and buzzing clippers. Black female hair, however, remains a mystery.

I barely know the difference between 4C curls and a 4B pencil. Hand me a pair of straighteners and I'd probably assume you toss salad with



them. Take me to a Pak's store and I'd be clueless.

My earliest salon experiences are of my sisters having their hair done before we travelled to Nigeria for the first time as four-year-olds. Our auntie would run a comb roughly through their hair, which produced yelps and questionable results. I checked in with them before writing this article and my memories are correct; in fact, there are more horror stories I wasn't privy to. My older sister also passed out after having her hair braided for hours, and both of them are emotionally scarred after having their hair "thinned" by a white stylist.

For many Black and mixed-race people, hair trauma is very real. A 2021 report by Pantene found that 93% of people with afro hair had faced discrimination, while painful experiences at salons are seen as something women with Black hair just have to go through. Roberts says that is rubbish. "I don't have trauma in my life around my hair," she tells me. "I've always embraced my curls, it's never occurred to me to straighten my hair, because I love it."

Roberts is an outlier. Black British women spend £168m a year on hair products, with an average Black woman spending between three and

six times more per year on their hair than their white counterparts.

In 2026 there is a growing movement of Black fathers who are learning to care for their children's hair. Jamelia Donaldson is the founder of Black beauty company Treasure Tress. She's been running crash courses for Black men who want to learn how to care for Black hair for a couple of years now. Despite there also being hair-braiding courses for Black women, Donaldson says it's the Black men who always get attention on social media. "I think it is the juxtaposition of being dad and hair," she says. "People don't associate the two, they feel like the mums will just do it."

The poet and author Yomi Şode took part in a workshop to lighten the load on his partner, who was caring for her own hair, Şode's and their two children's. He signed up for a class and was soon learning how to plait and do partings. "I wanted to learn, so I can cover and step in and have this skill," he says. "Also, if I can do a bad boy hairstyle, if I do the wick-est parting, I feel so proud. Even though it takes me 45 minutes to do what my partner can do in five minutes."

Şode sees hair care as a vital part of connecting with his daughter, and Donaldson says that sentiment is widespread among attendees. "A lot of them understood the significance of hair and the fact that it is an opportunity for bonding and they just wanted to be more involved," she

says. Black women have told her that their fondest memories are of their fathers doing their hair. "It's not celebrated enough," Donaldson adds.

Now it's my turn (we're mainly focusing on my eldest daughter, who has the longest hair at present, although the tips are applicable to both of them). Roberts starts by asking me how I look after the girls' hair. It's a mix of a Tresemme shampoo for curly hair and then a hair mask, which is applied and rinsed out. Then the combing begins, which usually results in our eldest daughter screaming as any knots are detangled. It's a laborious process that often results in both parents and children on edge and sometimes in tears. Afterwards, I apply a leave-in moisturiser from Black British brand Jim + Henry and plait or put her hair up in bunches using hair ties.

Turns out I'm making some fundamental mistakes. First, the hair ties I'm using are far too unforgiving. The tight, elasticated ones we favour are

a nightmare to remove. They cling to hair, meaning that when I attempt to extract them they pull, causing pain as the hair catches. The solution is to replace them with silky, looser hair ties that are cheap and, more importantly, slide off hair rather than clinging to every strand (Roberts doesn't even try to take out the old ties, opting to cut them off so as not to cause pain).

The other obvious flaw in my hair game is my brushing technique and the equipment I'm using. At present I'm applying detangler, then combing from the scalp down to the end of the hair. That causes yelps of pain from my eldest daughter, and is - as Roberts tells me - a terrible approach.

The brush I'm using is a non-starter: with hard short teeth, it is fine on my wife's straight hair, but far too inflexible on my daughters' curls. Jennie recommends a manta comb, which featured on Dragons' Den and has far fewer teeth, which are longer and spaced out.

History Of William And Ellen Craft

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

William and Ellen Craft's story truly inspires my relentless ambitions. I tell her story to anyone who will listen. Like Ellen and William, I feel determined to find a way even though the path is hazy or, like Langston Hughes says, "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, and splinters, and boards torn up, and places with no carpet on the floor, bare."

Ellen was born a slave in Macon County, Georgia. She was mixed-raced child of her master. The lady of the house was so disgusted with Ellen's presence that she gave her

away as a wedding gift to her daughter. Ellen was distraught, torn away from her family and all that she knew. She became a shell of herself



at her new plantation. One day, hope came in the form of love. Ellen met William, who was just as captivated with the thought of freedom as her. The like-minded couple married.

Ellen and William strategized freedom incessantly. Undoubtedly, as countless other enslaved, the thought of freedom kept them going. Time passed, and so did their grand exit ideas. Finally, something stuck. Ellen, mixed race and fairskinned, would dress as a white man, and her husband William would act as her slave. The idea was just as dangerous as it was brilliant. They planned over a period of time, collecting materials, working out their story,

and sewing in the dead of night by candlelight their clothing and supplies. When the night finally came, they knelt in prayer.

After an epic journey, William and Ellen reached the north. The couple rested in the free states briefly before word came that fugitive slave catchers were on their heels. They continued to Canada, then to London, even traveling as far as Northern Africa. William built a thriving business and Ellen continued to sew and share their story.

After the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the Crafts returned to America. Reluctant to have children because of her traumatic childhood, the Crafts waited until after slavery to welcome their own children into the world. Unlike many stories of the time period this couple lived as close to happily ever after as people of color in America during Reconstruction possibly could.

10 Places To Explore Black History In North Carolina

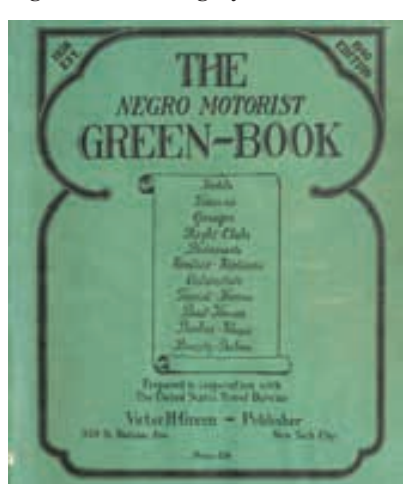
By Debbie Tullos

NC DNCR

African American culture and history have deep roots in North Carolina. Across the state, these stories are preserved in special locations dedicated to honoring the experiences and achievements of African Americans. Here are 10 places to explore Black history in North Carolina:

Green Book sites
"The Negro Motorist Green Book," published between 1936 and 1966, was both a travel guide and a tool of resistance designed to confront the realities of racial discrimination. The North Carolina African American Heritage Commission's Green Book Project documents this important history. While many original lo-

cations are long gone, some are still around. Plan a visit with this guide from Visit North Carolina highlighting Green Book legacy sites.



Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail, Asheville

Asheville is one of North Carolina's most popular places to visit. Rich with history, culture, and arts, this mountain city has much to explore. Asheville's Black community made significant contributions in the story of this place. The Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail honors these contributions from well-known landmarks to underrecognized achievements. The trail leads visitors through three areas of Asheville: Downtown, Southside, and the River Area. Allow approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes to fully explore this trail.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum, Gibsonville

(See 10 PLACES P. 7)

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Community

Raleigh Council Candidates Face Off at Shaw's Forum

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Raleigh voters had the opportunity to engage with candidates for mayoral, at-large, and district city council seats at the Non-Partisan Candidates' Forum held Saturday, February 7, 2026, at Shaw University. The event offered residents a chance to hear directly from candidates, ask questions, and discuss issues shaping Raleigh's future, including housing, public safety, transportation, and community resources.

The forum was divided into two sessions. This year, Raleigh voters will face primaries for some council seats for the first time. All city residents will vote for two at-large seats, while District C voters will select one candidate from a four-person field.

In the afternoon session for District C, which covers southeast Raleigh, incumbent Corey Branch faced challengers Jared Ollison, a North Carolina State Capitol police officer and former Wake County Detention Center administrator, and Diana Powell, a violence prevention specialist and founder of a criminal justice reentry nonprofit.

Branch highlighted his record on affordable housing and public transit improvements, noting his role in bringing the BRT corridor to New Bern Avenue. He also cautioned



against misrepresenting community desires, saying, "That's not what the community ever said they wanted. The community said they wanted retail," in reference to a proposed development near New Hope Road in Olde Towne Subdivision.

During the forum, tensions emerged over transparency and campaign funding. Powell criticized the council, stating, "I believe that's what's missing: you voted, but we don't understand why you voted."

Ollison emphasized ethics in fundraising, saying, "All City Council persons, all government officials, need to make sure that when they are campaigning and raising funds, they do not accept funds from anyone who has business with the city. I will not allow them to bulldoze our communities; I will not allow them to bulldoze Shaw University."

Branch responded, defending his record and campaign finances: "I'm a Raleigh native, born and raised.... Why in the world would I ever try to hurt the community that I grew up

in?" He added that all contributions to his campaign are fully accounted for and publicly disclosed.

For other Council seats, candidates included Megan Patton, Christina Jones, and Whitney Hill.

Patton, elected in 2022, emphasized transit, sustainability, and affordable housing, noting that despite setbacks to the Moore Square project, "It is true that the whole vision of that is not going to be able to be delivered the way it was originally afforded at the time. It is true that the changes in interest rates have shifted things. But that does not mean we're not going to deliver on the goal of putting affordable housing in the heart of downtown."

Hill, running for her third time, focused on public safety, tax reduction, and expanding housing availability. Patton and Hill also discussed solutions to homelessness, with Patton emphasizing mental health support, while Hill highlighted affordable housing initiatives.

Council member Christina Jones, a two-term incumbent, highlighted programs aimed at reducing homelessness and domestic violence, saying, "We started the CARES program to help work with mental health and issues with domestic violence," noting that the council approved \$5 million for workforce development and stability programs last year. She

emphasized collaboration with county agencies through initiatives like Bringing Neighbors Home to address homelessness comprehensively.

Jevon Smith, a candidate for the Raleigh City Council District D seat, also appeared at the forum, highlighting more than 15 years of experience leading large business and government initiatives at the state and federal levels. Smith said his campaign is centered on housing, transit, and environmental issues, and argued that current development laws limit the authority of local elected officials.

He told attendees that the city council is often "at the will of the developer" during negotiations and said Raleigh should work with the state to appeal portions of the law to expand local oversight, which he said

would allow the city to exert greater control over development decisions and growth.

Budget considerations and employee benefits were also discussed, with candidates emphasizing fiscal responsibility alongside support for city workers.

When asked about benefits such as depression pay for firefighters, Patton noted, "When I look at the budget, I say it's not about what's too expensive, it's about what your growing rates are — and we had email after email from people saying they want to support our firefighters. We want to give them this benefit."

The forum provided residents with a comprehensive view of the candidates' positions ahead of Raleigh's upcoming elections on Tuesday, March 3, 2026.



2026 is certainly making a name for itself in a number of ways. Apparently, the weather didn't get the memo: we're in the SOUTH! We don't do extended below freezing weather and reoccurring ice and snow. Especially NOT in the Triangle! Also, was it just me or was the build-up to the Super Bowl lackluster, to say the least? I usually watch long enough to see the commercials and maybe halftime. This year, it came and went, and I can barely tell you who played who.

This year is a year of change for me. I am all about learning new things like speaking Korean, making and selling candy, Tai Chi, chair dancing, and dental implants. For the first time in a long time, I have a list of experiences I want to have. I don't think of it as my "bucket list" as much as projects to be completed. And by completed, I mean actually begun, continued, accomplishments achieved.

It's no secret I want to visit Seoul in the fall. I want to understand and speak enough Korean to be able to navigate that week or two without dependence on some type of AI translation. Yes, there is a bit of vanity in this pursuit. I want people to wonder why this older than she looks Black woman speaks, reads, and writes Korean. To that end, I'm working with several learning apps online and hoping to make a new native Korean-speaking friend. So far, the most challenging part of this is getting my Southern/Mid-Western African American English brain and mouth to accept that this is not simply a matter of the same letters, sounds/shapes meaning something different. The more I hear and see it, the more likely I am to make it work. At this point, I can say "hello, yes, no, thank you." Yeah, I have a ways to go.

I also want to learn Tai Chi. I haven't found an instructor or class that works with my schedule. I guess all of the other Seniors interested in Tai Chi at the Active Adult centers are retired. I can't make a class at 2 or 3 in the afternoon. FYI Raleigh and Wake Forest Recreation: some of us are still working. I could use a class a few evenings weekly starting at 5:30 or 6 pm.

And then there's chair dancing. The promoters on the app claim this is great for helping those of us over 50 tighten our bellies, arms, and lose weight. I like the thought of it although I did a lot of chair dancing as a 300+ pound club patron through the 80s and 90s, and never lost an ounce. Maybe this will be different.

I share all of this to make the point that at almost 73 years old, I am vibrating at the thought of learning new things. Suddenly (if you can say suddenly at this age), I want to start and finish projects. I want to purge the mountain of accumulated miscellanea to make room for new interests. As my spiritual journey continues, I am gleeful I can turn over habitual anxiety, fear, doubt to God. I now know what it means to "lean on the everlasting arm." Laying these burdens down allows me to enjoy a feeling of freedom that new to me. I'm learning more about myself. Although not obsessed, I do give a thought or two to how I became the person I am. I'm not what I ought to be but I'm surely not what I used to be. I don't have a lot of regret however I do wonder how different my life would have been had I been driven by this insatiable desire for learning while I was in school. What would my life look like if I hadn't accepted that I was, "bad at math," as my seventh and eighth grade math teacher told me daily? Maybe he was just bad at teaching me.

Thank you for indulging my rambling. I'm excited about life. I'm actually more excited than I have been for longer than I can remember. My church celebrated our 20th year anniversary yesterday. Our newly built permanent Raleigh location will open in the spring. I have survived a year at my current job (they haven't run me off yet). I'm looking forward to fine-tuning my role with our team. Closets and contact lists will be cleaned out. I will carefully invest time, money and energy as precious assets. Do not bemoan aging. Most don't like the thought of the alternative.



Celebration—Hundreds attended the state employee's MLK event in downtown Raleigh. The program included speeches from Sec Mallette, Secretary Lilley, Gov Stein and AG Jeff Jackson presented the John R. Larkins Award to Tamika Henderson. The keynote speaker was Pastor Walter L. Bowers Jr. The audience was also treated to music from the State Employees' Choir. *Mathias Bishop Photo*

10 Places To Explore — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Founded in 1902 by Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Palmer Memorial Institute transformed the lives of more than 2,000 African American students. Today, the campus is preserved as a North Carolina state historic site. The Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum links Dr. Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute to the larger themes of African American history, women's history, social history, and education, as well as emphasizing the contributions of African Americans in North Carolina. Guided and self-guided tours are available.

International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Greensboro
On February 1, 1960, four African American college students sat down at the Woolworth's Department Store lunch counter in downtown Greensboro and asked to be served. They were refused, launching a sit-in movement that would spread throughout North Carolina and the South. That location is now preserved as the International Civil Rights Center and Museum. Visitors can view photography, artifacts, and interactive galleries that explore how the sit-in sparked an entire desegregation movement.

Freedom Park, Raleigh
Freedom Park, nestled in the heart of downtown Raleigh, is a quiet green space honoring the unyielding spirit of the African American struggle for freedom. This park stands as a timeless tribute to the universal ideals of liberty, resilience, and equality. Anchored by the Beacon of Freedom, the park features 20

"Voices of Freedom" inscribed along its walkways — powerful words of African Americans throughout North Carolina history. The park is open to the public and designed for you to experience at your own pace.

Historic Stagville, Durham

Historic Stagville was once one of the largest plantations in North Carolina, where the Bennehan and Cameron families enslaved more than nine hundred people. Today, this 165-acre state historic site inspires new understanding of the history of slavery through preservation, interpretation, research, genealogy, and descendant engagement. Visitors can see original slave dwellings (1850s), a massive barn (1860), a Bennehan family house (1799), and outdoor archeological sites. Guided tours are available, as well as an outdoor self-guided tour with an audio tour option.

Historic Halifax Underground Railroad Trail, Halifax

The fight for liberty was different for African Americans in Halifax during the Revolutionary War and beyond. Exhibits in the Historic Halifax State Historic Site Visitor Center tell the story of African Americans in Halifax through enslavement, fighting in the Revolution, and seeking freedom in the years beyond. While at Historic Halifax, take a drive or walk along the quarter-mile Underground Railroad Trail with waysides telling the stories of local freedom seekers.

Historic Edenton

One of Edenton's most notable figures was writer, abolitionist, and

educator Harriet Jacobs. The story of her life, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself, details her early years of enslavement in Edenton and her escape to freedom. The Harriet Jacobs tours highlight many locations mentioned in her book. Pick up a self-guided tour brochure at the Historic Edenton State Historic Site Visitor Center, or make a reservation for a guided tour on special scheduled tour dates.

Somerset Place, Creswell

Somerset Place State Historic Site offers a comprehensive and realistic view of 19th-century life on a large North Carolina plantation. Guided tours are available upon request. Of particular interest is a new tour entitled "Somerset Place in the New South: From Plantation to State Historic Site, 1865 - Present." Visitors will learn about the post-Civil War history of Somerset Place on this 75-minute tour, including the demise of slavery, the period after the Collins family's ownership, and the lives

of newly-freed African Americans. Check the site's Plan Your Visit page for details.

Freedmen's Colony at Fort Raleigh, Manteo

Roanoke Island is a place where many eras of American history have unfolded. All of this history converges at the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. This site explores the history of the first Algonquian-speaking people, the first English colonies, the Civil War, and the first radio technology testing. An important part of the history preserved at this nationally significant site is the Freedmen's Colony. After the Civil War Battle of Roanoke Island, many enslaved people sought refuge on the Union-controlled island. If you like hiking, check out the Freedom Trail that takes you through the loblolly pine forest from Fort Raleigh to Freedmen's Point. Along the way, silhouettes and waysides tell stories from the Freedmen's Colony, bringing the history to life.



Shaw University Dormitory Closed

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

A fire inside Shaw University's Dimple Newsome Living and Learning Center prompted the evacuation of students Thursday evening and forced the dormitory to close indefinitely as repairs and safety assessments continue.

The Raleigh Fire Department said the fire was reported around 7:15 p.m. and originated in room 313 on the third floor of the building.

Fire officials said the blaze was caused by a space heater powered by an extension cord. Authorities described the incident as an accidental electrical fire, though they could not immediately confirm the exact materials that were ignited.

Students complained of freezing temperatures inside the dorm and the need for a heater, which they acknowledged may have been left on too long and caught onto a bedsheet.

Within four minutes of the fire being reported, firefighters arrived on scene and found students al-

ready evacuating the building. Heavy smoke was present on the third floor, and damage to the room was described as moderate. City officials said the damage was confined to the third floor and confirmed the fire was not related to the building's electrical system.

Multiple students told local media outlets that when they attempted to activate the fire alarm, it did not work. Some said they were forced to alert one another manually as smoke spread through the hallway.

The incident has heightened concerns among students and parents who say the dormitory lacked heat and hot water prior to the fire. Students said university leadership told residents they needed to move out and go home on Friday, prompting some to move back in with their parents.

"We're pretty much being kicked out. We don't know when we'll be able to come back," a student said.

State records show the dormitory last underwent a state-mandated fire inspection on Dec. 30, 2025. That

inspection resulted in six violations related to maintenance and testing schedules and procedures for fire alarms and detection systems. Because it was the university's first violation, no fine was issued. As of Friday, the university had not yet scheduled a follow-up inspection.

Dimple Newsome Dorm was built in 1970 and has long served as a residential space for Shaw University students. The building was fully evacuated Thursday night and will remain closed while repairs are completed. University officials did not provide a timeline for reopening.

In a statement released to ABC11, Shaw University said, "The well-being of our students and campus community remains our highest priority. A fire occurred on campus last evening in one of our residential facilities. The incident was contained to a single room and was promptly addressed. The University is actively arranging alternative housing accommodations for the students impacted. The residence hall will remain closed while thorough as-

sessments and necessary repairs are completed."

Shaw later announced it would provide hotel accommodations for displaced students and instructed them to report to the student center to be assigned lodging and transportation.

University officials also acknowledged ongoing heating and hot water issues at the dorm, stating they are aware of the problems and are working to resolve them. "The University takes these concerns seriously, and the health, safety, and well-being of our students remain our highest priority," the statement read in part. Officials said extreme winter temperatures have placed unusually high demand on campus systems and that the university is responding with "an enhanced, around-the-clock support plan."

No injuries were reported in connection with the fire, and the Raleigh Fire Department continues to investigate the incident as the university proceeds with repairs and housing arrangements for affected students.



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Church

Sister Thea Bowman's sainthood moving forward to Vatican

(OSV News) — Servant of God Thea Bowman's canonization cause is moving ahead, with a Mass and ceremony marking the closure of the cause's diocesan phase to be held Feb. 9 at the Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle in Jackson, Mississippi.

Bishop Joseph R. Kopacz of Jackson will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving at noon followed by an official closing session of the diocesan phase of the canonization process, where the cause's leaders will seal the boxes containing the diocesan phase's documents and findings. Those boxes will be shipped to the apostolic nunciature in Washington for transfer to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, which will further investigate the cause.

In 2018, Bishop Kopacz opened the cause for Sister Bowman, a Mississippi native and the only African American member of her religious community, the Wisconsin-based Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Before she died of cancer in 1990 at age 52, she was a widely known speaker, evangelizer and singer.

Trailblazer and speaker
Sister Bowman was a trailblazer in



almost every role: first African-American religious sister from Canton, Mississippi, first to head an office of intercultural awareness, and the first African American woman to address the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Born in 1937 as Bertha Bowman in

Yazoo City, Mississippi, she was the daughter of a doctor and a teacher. Nicknamed "Birdie," she attended Canton Holy Child Jesus School, and at age 8 decided she wanted to become a Catholic, inspired by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration teaching at her school. She

knew by her early teenage years that she was called to consecrated life.

She took first vows in 1958 and perpetual vows in 1963. She studied at Viterbo College in La Crosse, Wisconsin — which was founded by her religious community — and later earned advanced degrees at The Catholic University of America in Washington. She returned to Canton to teach, care for her aging parents and inspire the people in her community.

Sister Bowman led the Jackson Diocese's Office of Intercultural Awareness, taught at several Catholic high schools and colleges, and was a faculty member of the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans.

Renowned for her preaching, she took her message across the nation, speaking at Church gatherings and conventions, making 100 speaking engagements a year until her spreading cancer slowed her. Music was especially important to her. She would gather or bring a choir with her and often burst into song during her presentations.

In addition to her writings, her music also resulted in two recordings, "Sister Thea: Songs of My People" and "Round the Glory Manger: Christmas Songs and Spirituals." Speech to US bishops

When Sister Bowman spoke at the U.S. bishops' meeting in June 1989, less than a year before her death from bone cancer and confined to a wheelchair, she was blunt. She told the bishops that people had told her black expressions of music and worship were "un-Catholic."

Sister Bowman challenged that

notion, pointing out that the Church universal included people of all races and cultures, and she challenged the bishops to find ways to consult those of other cultures when making decisions. She told them they were obligated to better understand and integrate not just black Catholics, but people of all cultural backgrounds.

Catholic News Service reported that her remarks "brought tears to the eyes of many bishops and observers." She also sang to them and, at the end, had them all link hands and join her in singing "We Shall Overcome."

That fall, the Thea Bowman Foundation was founded to support black Catholic education at all levels. In its first year, the foundation gave scholarships to 46 black students at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. It also established an annual award for outstanding contributions to black Catholic education.

Less than a week before her death at age 52 in March 1990, she was announced as the winner of the Laetare Medal, awarded by the University of Notre Dame. Other honors included the American Cancer Society's Courage Award, given at the White House in 1988, and U.S. Catholic magazine's U.S. Catholic Award in 1989 for contributions to the advancement of women in Church and society.

At her funeral Mass in Jackson, Father John Ford, a member of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity and a longtime friend of the nun who served as homilist, told the 1,000 mourners who packed the church: "We must find ways to imitate this woman. No other one is coming. We need to find ways to im-

tate Thea."

Last writing

In what was likely her last writing — a posthumously published column in Mississippi Today, the Jackson diocesan newspaper — she asked readers observing Holy Week to "see the Son of Man riding on an ass' colt, to feel the press of the crowd, to be caught up in the 'Hosannas,'" and then as Holy Week goes on, to "watch as Jesus is sentenced by Pilate to Calvary, to see him rejected, mocked, spat upon, beaten and forced to carry a heavy cross, to hear the echo of the hammer, to feel the agony of torn flesh and strained muscles, to know Mary's anguish."

By the mid-1990s, Catholic schools in Gary, Indiana, East St. Louis, Illinois, and Port Arthur, Texas opened bearing her name. Other schools and centers have also since adopted her name. In 2023, the Catholic student center at Howard University in Washington was also named in her honor.

Sister Bowman also was the focus of several books, including 1993's "Thea Bowman: Shooting Star — Selected Writings and Speeches," 2008's "This Little Light: Lessons in Living From Sister Thea Bowman," and 2010's "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman."

Sister Bowman was the focus of the 2022 documentary "Going Home Like a Shooting Star: Thea Bowman's Journey to Sainthood." She was among people featured in the 2025 documentary "Trailblazers of Faith," which tells the story of how African Americans have embraced the Catholic faith without abandoning their culture.

Practical Biblical Principles

UNFORGIVENESS — SLEEPING IN THE DEVIL'S BED

Read: Matthew 6:14-15

By John L. Caldwell, Pastor

New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral

You have heard that unforgiveness is extremely unhealthy. In addition to destroying relationships in your life, internalizing anger and bitterness can lead to many physical diseases and psychological problems. Being unforgiving is like drinking a deadly poison and you are expecting the other person you hate to die. God commands Christians to Forgive. Jesus taught us about forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4). "Lead us not into temptation" is a part of not being tempted to hold onto unforgiveness.

Psychologically speaking, some people who are unforgiving think by not for giving a person, you can somehow control them by feeling justified in feeling the angry and hateful way you feel and think about them. Such thinking only causes one to continue to react hatefully toward the person who has offended you. If you have been wronged by someone and is a child of God, God says to you, "Hold off, vengeance is mine, I'll take care of your offence in this situation" (Romans 12:19).

Unforgiveness is an ongoing, active sin. This sin stays with us if we do not forgive. When you hang onto unforgiveness you may not lose your

salvation due to Christ's death on the cross, but this will put one in an unforgiving state before God and will definitely disqualify one from being forgiven by God. Unforgiveness hinders one's prayers from being answered (Psalm 66:18). Forgiveness is not an unforgivable sin; however, it is serious. It can be forgiven, but not until you forgive (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). When Peter asked Jesus, "How often should he forgive a brother who offends him?" Jesus answered "Until seventy times seven" — all the time (Matthew 18:21-22).

The main work of the devil is to put all of God's children into a state of unforgiveness and keep them there. The devil's strategy is to do the opposite of what Christ's work on the cross was designed to do which is all about forgiving. The devil's work is to counter the forgiving work of Christ by tricking God's children to fall into a state of unforgiveness and hold onto it. All believers should be spiritually aware of not helping and not wanting to help the devil to accomplish his evil work in their lives. Call on the Holy Spirit to help you love.

Holding onto unforgiveness will make our daily lives miserable. Given the chance the devil will see to this happening. The devil wants to defeat the forgiveness part of Christ in you. God stops hearing our prayers and we become active in

breaking the fellowship bond with God. Then we are more than likely to receive chastisement intended to bring us to our senses and repentance to forgive. To restore fellowship with God is to repent, forgive and confess our sins of unforgiveness. God will help us to forgive the unforgiven. God will help us to forgive the unforgiven.

Whatever the incidents were which brought on the state of unforgiveness in one's heart, this is the work of the devil. Yes, it hurts but if you harbor the unforgiveness, coupled with anger and hate is the ongoing work of the evil spirit living in you. Make no mistake about it, the devil is now in control of your joy and most of your emotions. As a believing Christian, the devil has not possessed you at this point, because of the shed blood of Jesus is keeping your salvation. However, the devil will make one feel like he/she is qualified to hate, hold onto anger, while wishing the worst upon the offender, whether it be your ex-spouse, friend, or family member, thus not giving love or forgiveness a chance to take place as Jesus commands it. Let Christ's redemption work prevail in you.

When we are holding onto unforgiveness toward another, we are fighting against the shed blood and the forgiving work Christ accomplished for our soul's sake, which is the work the Father sent Him to do.

New Christian Artists Push Genre Boundaries With Rap

(AP)—A new wave of artists is transcending traditional notions of Christian music, drawing young global audiences to faith-based rap, Afrobeats and R&B.

Often boosted by social media, many of them got their start with independent labels or by uploading self-made songs to streaming platforms. Now, bigger labels and streaming services are catching on.

People are looking for "something soul-feeding, something forward-looking, positive," said James "Trig" Rousseau Sr., CEO of Holy Culture Radio. "They find a sonic coziness, but then a message that is feeding that need."

Interest in the music has proliferated since 2022, said representatives at Spotify and Amazon Music. However, breaking into the mainstream has been challenging for this group of mostly Black and/or African artists who are making music that can't always be defined and that hasn't been well-represented in the Christian music industry.

"Over the last two years, there's something happening momentum-wise, and it still feels underground, but now it's starting to get the visibility that it's deserving," said Angela Jolivette, who previously oversaw the Grammy Awards' Gospel/Contemporary Christian categories and runs Moonbaby Media, a music supervision and production company.

Christian rap's star rose around 2013 when rapper Lecrae Moore won his first Grammy. Today, newer

artists are modernizing Christian hip-hop. Florida rappers Caleb Gordon and Alex Jean are among those leaning into rap's subgenres as well as Afrobeats, the popular blend of West African music styles. Nigerian Christian Afrobeats pioneer Limoblaze is now signed to Moore's Reach Records label, and Afrobeats artists such as CalledOut Music and "The Voice UK" winner Annatoria are on the rise.

"I think the world is now like, we can hear ourselves represented," Moore said. "To me, that is a picture of the faith. We're a global faith."

Dallas-based Ghanaian Canadian artist Ryan Ofei, a former member of Christian act Maverick City Music, pivoted to Afrobeats-R&B fusion, releasing his first solo album in 2024. He said the growing vein of Christian music is less "preachy" but still a "massive evangelistic tool" for nonchurchgoers.

"You can bob your head, you can have a long drive," Ofei said. "But the whole time, you're still edified, and you can still feel the presence of the Lord."

Family-friendly but not childish Christian rap, R&B and Afrobeats artists say they want to write music they can play around their children — but without sacrificing the craft.

"I'm giving them sounds that are ghetto and cool, but not profane," said rapper Jackie Hill Perry. She called Christian rap today less intellectual and more "vibe-driven" than when she started more than a decade ago.

Rapper Childlike CiCi got her start as a secular artist recording in "trap houses," a term for drug-selling homes where some of hip-hop's biggest names also propelled trap music to popularity. A few years after becoming a Christian in 2019, Childlike CiCi sought to make music she couldn't find — rooted in faith but inspired by trap and its more aggressive counterpart, drill.

"When people think of Christian hip-hop, they expect it to just be like Kidz Bop," she said. "I think it's bigger than that. Like, the Bible is not Kidz Bop."

Some artists found Christian rap corny at first. But London-based Limoblaze said Moore's music transformed his faith "from a religious practice to an actual relationship with Jesus."

Capitalizing on Afrobeats' global popularity and his own growing audience, Limoblaze met with Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube and Amazon about three years ago. Months later, Amazon launched its first Afrogenre playlist, he said.

"I think Christian Afrobeats is slowly but eventually going to be on a mainstream level, at least in the African music scene," said Limoblaze.

Compared to mainstream counterparts, streaming numbers for these subgenres remain smaller, but their fanbases' dedication is outsized, said Lauren Stellato, programming lead for Christian and gospel music at Amazon Music.





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SERMON of the WEEK



him to the "Talley". So, we all piled up in his Astro van without seats and went to NC State to party at the Talley Center.

At the end of the night, that song by Frankie Beverly and Maze played, and it signaled the end of the party. Well, I could not help but think of the first time this statement was made. I imagine Jacob had a similar song verbiage but a very different meaning.

Jacob was faced with the potential consequences of his past actions. Understanding that he could not face his upcoming appointment without the Lord on his side, he struggled to get a blessing from the Lord.

Don't quit. Even with the limp, Jacob was wrestling with the angel, and the angel touched the hollow of his hip and wounded him. Jacob was injured but kept holding on to the angel.

Let me be clear. We are often injured when wrestling with different things. We are holding on to the hope of our next miracle, and in the process, our feelings get hurt. We ask our children to hold on to the church, but if we are honest, we injure them daily because they hear less of Jesus and more of drama in the church. Just know that you can't quit just because you're injured.

Paul said he prayed three times for the thorn in his side to be removed. He wanted to preach better and do

more work for the Lord. God replied to the request that his Grace was sufficient. See, sometimes we need that limp and that scare to remind us of how good God is. Just know that you can win injured. Yes, it hurt, but your blessing is right around the corner. He will make you right.

Now Frankie said that he had to make sure he was right before he let go. The text shows that the angel asked Jacob for his name. Afterwards, he changed his name to signify the change in nature that Jacob had made. See, it was not enough for Jacob to escape his brother's wrath. He needed to be changed in order not to repeat his past mistakes.

Jacob said he had the same thought; he had to make sure he was right before he let go. In other words, don't leave here the same way that you came. Don't let go because your breakthrough is on the way. It won't be just another blessing; it will be a change. Hold on because He will change things. He will change you from midnight into morning. He will change your "no" into "yes." He will change your curses into blessings. Hold on, your change is coming.

Please visit www.youtube.com/@lincolnparkholinesschurch1913 to watch this week's sermon on video. We invite you to Like, Subscribe, and Share your comments. We would love to hear from you.

Before I Let Go
Sermon by Elder Demetrius Hunter

Genesis 32: 26-28 NIV

Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

I was watching a documentary the other day on Frankie Beverly and Maze. As the documentary ended, they closed with the hit song "Before I Let Go." It brought me back to 1998, when I was walking around Wake Tech, and a good friend of mine told me I needed to go with

Editorials

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials in this space are the opinion of the newspaper. All other opinion pieces, including those from regular columnists, are the opinion of the writers themselves. The Carolinian strives to provide provocative commentary that is likely to spur thoughtful debate, regardless of whether we agree with it.

Trump's Affordability Crisis Is Catching Up to Republicans As Black and Brown Voters Shift



By Kevin Harris and Richard McDaniel

Donald Trump won 48% of Latino voters in 2024 – the best Republican showing in half a century. Fourteen months later, 70% disapprove of his performance as President. What changed? The price of groceries.

Pew Research found 68% of Latinos say things are worse for them today than a year ago – the first time most Hispanics said this in nearly 20 years of surveys. Trump's support among Hispanics has fallen to 28%, down 13 points since February, said The Economist/YouGov. And the U.S. Hispanic Business Council reports 42 percent of Latino business owners say things are worse for them under Trump.

Black working-class voters face the same squeeze. Trump's support with Black voters has fallen to just 10%, reports the New York Times. Among Blacks, high prices now poll higher than civil and voting rights concerns.

When Black and Brown families can't get ahead economically, social justice issues like civil rights and immigration tend to fall on their priority list. When rent hikes eat up raises or grocery bills climb 20% while pay stays flat, social issues become a luxury instead of a necessity.

Democrats used this to their advantage in 2025 to reverse Trump's gains with Black and Brown voters. In key races across Virginia and New Jersey, Democrats focused on high prices and showed pocket book messaging works strongly when it's centered rather than mentioned as an add-on to social issues.

Latino voters swung hard toward Democrats - backing Democratic governors by 37 and 34 point margins in New Jersey and Virginia. Kamala Harris only carried Latinos in these states by a razor-thin 3-point margin in 2024. Among Black voters, 89% voted for Democrats for governor in New Jersey and 86% in Virginia, while Harris carried Black voters by a much smaller margin at 68%, according to the Pew Research Center.

Trump is many things, but he is not politically oblivious. He sees the data. He sees working-class voters frustrated by debt traps and high prices. And he sees Democrats gaining trust by offering real answers to high prices, while he pivots to foreign policy side shows like military action in Venezuela – an issue that doesn't pay anyone's rent.

But if Democrats remain disciplined and deliver results, Trump's recent pivot to affordability won't be enough.

Republicans still oppose the very policies that could lower costs. Take insulin prices. Democrats capped costs at \$35 per month for Medicare, saving diabetic seniors thousands yearly. House Republicans voted against it 215 times. When voters see one party cutting prices and another blocking them, the choice becomes clear. Republicans can't run as champions of working-class families while protecting the corporations that squeeze them. Voters are increasingly sophisticated about that contradiction, and this creates an opportunity for Democrats.

Republicans are realizing affordability is not a niche issue or a Democratic hoax. It is the issue. It cuts across race, ideology, and geography. When people feel economically trapped, they will abandon any party that seems indifferent, no matter their personal feelings on cultural or identity politics.

Republicans built gains with working-class Black and Brown voters by presenting themselves as insurgents against an unfair system. But when the bills keep rising, and their party offers no real relief, that image collapses.

Democrats meanwhile have rediscovered that when everyday life becomes unaffordable, cultural politics cannot cover the bill. The working class doesn't experience inflation, rent hikes, or credit-card interest rates as abstract economic data, nor do they have the luxury of worrying about cultural issues when bills are due.

And across the country, affordability is beginning to reshape political loyalties, including among groups of working-class Black and Brown voters where Republicans had been steadily gaining.

As we head into the 2026 midterms, Democrats must remember we won't win back Black and Brown working-class voters by becoming more progressive or more moderate. We win them back by becoming more relevant to daily life. And that is what now has Trump scrambling.

Kevin Harris and Richard McDaniel are veteran Democratic strategists with over 100 political campaigns between them, including the past five presidential elections and several congressional races. They co-host "Maroon Bison Presents: The Southern Comfort Podcast."



FIGHTING BACK WITH BLACK HISTORY

It continues to amaze me that there are people who believe the history of a people can be suppressed or erased. Those who think this way misunderstand both history and God. Their greatest mistake is believing that history exists only on paper, captured by cameras, or recorded in books. Yet they can walk through Egypt and other ancient places and see history written on cave walls, in images, and in structures that have endured for centuries.

Every day, they use inventions created by Africans, by enslaved Africans, and by African Americans during Reconstruction and Jim Crow. They witness children excelling, winning awards, achieving academic success, surviving illnesses, and thriving across generations. And still, some try to hide the truth, erase it, or twist it into a lie.

This week, on the first day of the month, a friend who received my morning inspiration asked if I would share it in a different voice. I thought that was a good idea. So here it is.

Good morning. God is welcoming us to a new day, a new week, and a new opportunity to be renewed once again. On February 1, 1960, brave college students from North Carolina A&T University sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, to stand up against discrimination. No organization sponsored them. No adults urged them on or gave them permission. They were guided by the knowledge of who they were created to be.

That brave act ignited a movement. By February 11, students from Shaw University here in Raleigh had replicated their actions. Our country, and the world, has wronged a people for far too long, denying us our rights. If only they understood that Black history is world history. If only they could connect with the truth, they would not be fighting against God's truth.

God made us all to reflect His glory among humanity. He made us to be light for our children, to illuminate their paths. What God creates, He equips. And what He equips will be victorious, no matter what evil intends. We must tell our story and allow the light and love of God to shine through us every day.

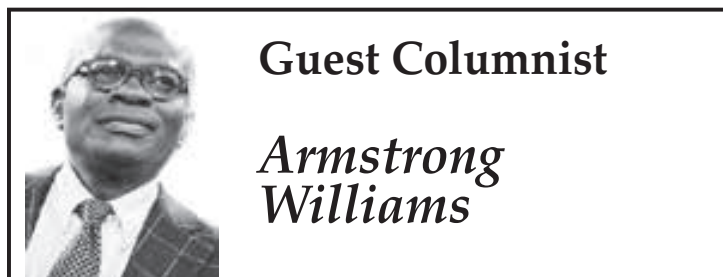
Blessings to all who know the truth and have been set free. To me, this is simple. God does not make mistakes. So how could any of His people be inferior? Racist ideas that claim people are "burnt," "undercooked," or "overcooked" are not only foolish, they insult the Creator Himself. God knows exactly what He is doing.

Those who believe they have the right to judge, hate, or lie about God's creation are the ones who are truly ignorant. Genius comes in every color. Learning differences come in every color. Illness comes in every color, and so does health. None of this is earned or assigned by worth. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made to do God's will and serve God's people.

African people have given the world countless gifts that make life safer, healthier, more intelligent, and more humane. These include advances in medicine such as chemotherapy, innovations in communication like the cellphone, breakthroughs in science, aviation, film, art, security systems, and life-saving medical procedures. This is only a small glimpse of contributions that have shaped the modern world.

So who, then, would call us inferior? Only foolishness would do that. What Black person would be ashamed of Africa, of survival through slavery, or of being Black? Only someone disconnected from truth. God challenges that ignorance at every turn, and so should we.

We are blessed to be a blessing. If you have not understood that already, now is the time to begin being who you were created to be.



Guest Columnist

Armstrong Williams

WHO JEFFREY EPSTEIN REALLY WAS AND WHY THE STORY STILL MATTERS

For years, the public conversation about Jeffrey Epstein has been flattened into a single, horrifying dimension: sex crimes. Those crimes were real, brutal and unforgivable. The women and girls he exploited, often coerced, drugged and manipulated deserve justice, dignity and lasting accountability. Nothing in this discussion should ever diminish their suffering.

But to understand who Epstein really was and why his case continues to unsettle institutions across the world, we must confront a larger, more uncomfortable truth: Sex was not the center of his power. It was a by-product.

Epstein operated as a global broker of influence. He was not merely a wealthy predator hiding behind money; he was a facilitator, someone who trafficked in access, leverage, secrecy and exemption. His value to powerful people was not rooted in pleasure alone but in what he could unlock: favorable tax treatment, regulatory blind spots, offshore financial structures, legal insulation and proximity to decision-makers who shape laws and markets.

He moved easily among financiers, politicians, royalty, academics, scientists, intelligence-linked figures and corporate elites. That access was not accidental. Epstein cultivated an image of indispensability as an informal adviser on tax policy, currency flows and financial engineering. Whether formally credentialed or not, he positioned himself as someone who understood how power actually works and how to bend it quietly.

This is why his world was so carefully guarded. Epstein's ecosystem functioned like a private club – exclusive, extravagant and insulated from consequence. Entry signaled status. It also carried risk. The very secrecy that attracted powerful figures also bound them together. Mutual exposure created mutual silence. In that environment, accountability became negotiable, and the rule of law was treated as flexible.

Sex, in this system, served multiple functions. It gratified some. It compromised others. It created leverage. It blurred moral boundaries and ensured discretion. It was never random. It was woven into a broader architecture of control, one that rewarded loyalty and punished defiance, often without a word being spoken.

That architecture drew in the greedy, the ambitious, the reckless and the vulnerable alike. Some sought financial advantage. Others sought protection. Still others wanted proximity to power without the scrutiny that normally accompanies it. Epstein offered a shortcut, one that bypassed transparency and replaced it with trust built on shared secrets.

This is why focusing solely on the sexual dimension of Epstein's crimes, while emotionally understandable, ultimately obscures the full truth. People did not simply pay for women. They paid for access to Epstein himself and to the doors he claimed he could open. They paid for influence without fingerprints, outcomes without accountability, and insulation from consequences others would face.

The most disturbing question is not why Epstein abused power but why so many institutions failed or chose not to act despite warnings, evidence and patterns that were visible long before his arrest. His longevity was not the result of one man's cunning alone. It was the product of a system that protected itself.

Justice, therefore, cannot stop with a single villain. Epstein did not operate in a vacuum. His influence required clients, beneficiaries, enablers and protectors: some active, some passive, many silent. To confront only the crimes without examining the network that sustained them is to guarantee repetition.

CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT: IN CONVERSATION WITH CONGRESSMAN EDOLPHUS TOWNES By Jheri Hardaway

In the annals of North Carolina A&T State University history, certain names are etched in stone. But for former U.S. Congressman Edolphus "Ed" Townes, those names—Bluford, Gibbs, Harrison—aren't just buildings; they are the backdrop of a radical political awakening. I sat down with the Congressman to discuss his journey from Chadbourn, NC, to the halls of power in Washington D.C., and the pivotal, sometimes heart-stopping moments at A&T that defined his life's work.

For Townes, the road to Greensboro was a familiar one. "That's where I always wanted to go," he recalls. "A lot of folks from Chadbourn went to A&T." Studying sociology and economics, Townes found more than just academic rigor; he found a supportive ecosystem. However, his most profound lessons didn't come from a textbook, but from student government. Having the opportunity to be involved in something, to lead something—that's the thing. There are a lot of things you learn just through that process."

One of the most dramatic stories Townes shared involves a confrontation between the student body, the Chancellor, and the Governor of North Carolina. The Governor had arrived on campus to dedicate new buildings but refused to use the word "Negro," opting instead for the derogatory "negrus." The tension was palpable even before the Governor arrived. Chancellor Dr. Ferdinand Bluford called the student leaders—including Townes—into his office.

"Dr. Bluford said, 'If there is any kind of demonstration or anything, you are going home. Sign here that you will not do anything,'" Townes says. The students refused. "We were insulted that he would bring this up and say that to us. We didn't believe the Governor should be allowed on campus."

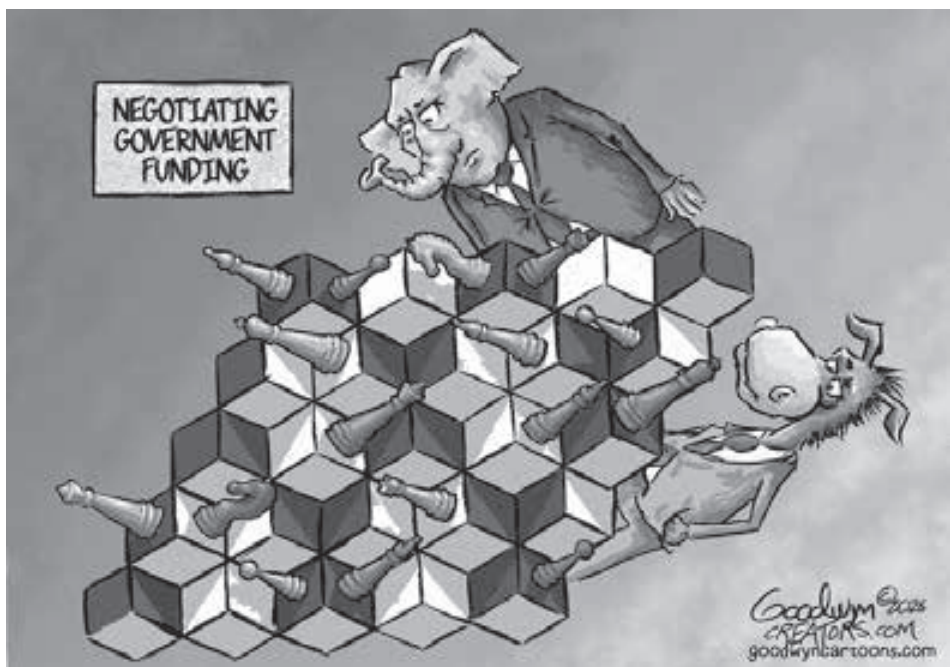
During the speech, the students executed a subtle, powerful protest. "All of a sudden feet started shuffling. ROTC boots, high heels... they didn't know where it was coming from." The Governor, frustrated, turned to Bluford and asked if he should continue. Moments later, in a tragic twist of history, Dr. Bluford suffered a heart attack on the stage, passing away just days later. The headlines the next morning were sensational: "Students Kill President."

Following Bluford's passing, Dr. Warmoth T. Gibbs—a Harvard-educated WWI veteran—took the helm. Congressman Townes remembers Gibbs as a man of immense backbone. During the height of the Sit-In movement, the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce attempted to bully Gibbs into expelling the activists to protect the city's "economic situation."

Dr. Gibbs' response remains one of the most famous defenses of academic and civil freedom in HBCU history. When pressured to send the students back to "where they came from," Gibbs pointedly noted that many were locals. He famously told the Chamber: "I'm not here to teach students what to think, I'm here to teach them how to think."

For Congressman Townes, the atmosphere at North Carolina A&T provided the perfect crucible for a career in public service. The support he received, combined with the "fearless leadership" he witnessed from figures like Dr. Gibbs, paved the way for his 30-year tenure in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Today, as we look at the leaders of tomorrow, the Congressman's story reminds us that the spirit of Aggie Pride isn't just about the buildings—it's about the courage of the people inside them.



Classifieds

CHATHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHATHAM COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the General Court of Justice
District Court Division
File No: 26CV00047-180
To: EDGAR PERALES CASTRO, Defendant.
Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed. The nature of the relief being sought is for child custody. You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than March 3rd, 2026 said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, LEVY MORALES RAMIREZ, will apply to the court located at 40 E Chatham St, Pittsboro, NC 27312 for the relief sought.
This, the 16th day of January 2026.
Aneta Paval
Paval Law Offices, PLLC
Telephone: (919) 410-6690
1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026

DURHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E001341-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR, ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of NELLIE RUTH BURROUGHS, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Albert Burroughs Jr.
Executor, Administrator
c/o The Law Offices of Gregory Reynald Williams, PLLC
2232 Page Road, Suite 203
Durham, NC 27703
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000119-310
Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of STELLA WEBB, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Renee Lyons, Administrator
c/o DSR Legal
P.O. Box 51596
Durham, NC 27717
(919) 533-2441
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 26E000117-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 6th day of February 2026, as Executor of the ESTATE OF GENE MORGAN PRESSON, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 12th day of February, 2026.
JOSHUA NOVAK, EXECUTOR
ESTATE OF GENE MORGAN PRESSON
c/o Jennifer Dalman, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC

Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 24E002561-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of THOMAS WAYNE MURRAY, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Danny Murray, Executor
3217 Bahama Rd.
Bahama, NC 27503
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000091-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of BOBBY WALLACE GOSS, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Eva Lynn Sigmon, Executor
3240 Pleasant Green Road
Durham, NC 27705
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE OF YOLONDA LAWRENCE
FILE NO. 25E001474-310
All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Yolonda Lawrence, deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before May 19, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 19th day of February, 2026 . Ayana Simon, Executor C/O Midtown Legal Group P.O. Box 18175 Raleigh, NC 27619.
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 25E001433-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 11th day of December, 2025, as Administrator CTA of the ESTATE OF PAULA TERRY THOMPSON, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the May 8, 2026 or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 5th day of February, 2026.
Juanita T. Rose, Administrator CTA
Estate Of Paula Terry Thompson
c/o Shirley M. Diefenbach, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 13E001332-310
Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of OTIS REID PULLEY, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Georgina Nicole Moreno
Administrator
404 Idlewood Drive
Durham NC 27703
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000106-310
Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CURTIS G. DAYE, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Carla Alston Daye, Administrator
12603 Hampton Rd.
Rougemont, NC 27572
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 25E001576-310
Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of DAVID JUNIOR DOWDY, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned Administrator does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the Estate of said decedent to present such claims to Stella Jones at 215 Omega Road, Durham, NC 27712 on or before the 7th day of May, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said Estate will please make immediate payment to the Estate.
This, the 5th day of February 2026.
Stella Jones
215 Omega Road
Durham, NC 27712
C. Terrell Thomas, Jr.
Kirk, Kirk, Howell, Cutler & Thomas
Post Office Box 729
Wendell, NC 27591
Attorney for the Estate
(919) 365-6000
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000090-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of WILLIAM WITT, JR., deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Larissa Witt Griffiths, Executor
1616 Kent St.
Durham, NC 27707
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File Number 26E000092-310
ALL PERSONS, firms and corporations having claims against MARJORIE HUITT HAWKINS, deceased, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before 5-6-2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This 2-5-2026.
Vincent Michael Micelotta, Executor of the Estate of Marjorie Huitt Hawkins
c/o Lori M. Bernstein, Attorney at Law
2726 Croasdaile Dr. Suite 202
Durham, North Carolina 27705
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000073-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARLOW P. SEVERIN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims

against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Marlena Yates, Executor of the Estate of Marlow P. Severin
c/o Zachary A. Marks, Esq.
Wyrick Robbins Yates & Ponton, LLP
4101 Lake Boone Trail, Ste. 300
Raleigh, NC 27607
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000068-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ROBERT PRICE SNEED, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Robert Price Sneed Jr., Executor
3407 Windsor Way
Durham, NC 27707
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000069-310
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of SARAH KOPP SNEED, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Robert Price Sneed Jr., Executor
3407 Windsor Way
Durham, NC 27707
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 25E000975-310
Having qualified as Public Administrator of the Estate of GEORGIEON TISDALE STEELE, deceased, of 1011 Da Vinci St., Durham County, Durham, NC 27704, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before May 6, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Jeffrey L. Austin
Public Administrator
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000081-310
Having qualified as EXECUTRIX of the Estate of CHARLES JOSEPH OFSONKA, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Judith Benedek, Execurix, c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr., 4 Consultant

Pl., Durham, NC 27707
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File Number 26E000089-310
ALL PERSONS, firms and corporations having claims against LINDA ANN NEAL-NYANGENA A/K/A LINDA ANN NEAL, deceased, of Durham, Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 30, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the Decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This 29th day of January, 2026. Carima Eticha Neal, Administrator, c/o Caroline B. Denning, Esq., Womble Bond Dickinson (US) LLP, 555 Fayetteville Street, Suite 1100, Raleigh, NC 27601.
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
26E000062-310
ALL PERSONS, firms and corporations having claims against LOTTIE MAE WALTON, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 30, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 29th day of January, 2026.
Lisa Bullard
1502 Pomona Drive
Durham, NC 27707
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 26E000063-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 14th day of January 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ROBERT BRADSHAW JONES, SR., late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
Nichole J. DeWeese, Executor
212 Smith Dr.
Durham, NC 27712
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 26E000044-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 14th day of January 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of PETER ALAN LODIEWICK, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
Victoria A. Lodewick, Administrator
c/o Law Office of Anne Page Watson, 3400 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 205, Durham, NC 27705.
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 26E000024-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 6th day of January 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of SHARON J. SABRAW, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
John Collier Sabraw II, Executor
74 S. Shannon Ave.
Athens, OH 45701

1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002018-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 9th day of August 2024, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CAROL JEAN MORRISON, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
Calvin Morrison, Administrator
3820 Vesta Dr.
Raleigh, NC 27603
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001416-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 6th day of January 2026, as CO-EXECUTORS of the Estate of HELEN R. GAMBLE, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
Janie V. Harrell, Co-Executor
1915 Southview Road
Durham, NC 27703
Frances R. Mizzell, Co-Executor
2901 Blue Grass Lane
Decatur, GA 30034
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File 25E001560-310
All persons, firms and corporations having claims against THOMAS THOMPSON WEAVER, deceased, of Durham County, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 23, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.
This the 22nd day of January, 2026.
JONI PIERCE, EXECUTOR, C/O BETH W BOWEN, BOWEN LAW FIRM PC 590 New Waverly PI Ste 120 Cary, NC 27518
1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001585-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 30th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JOHN THOMAS GRAY, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 23rd day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 22nd day of January, 2026.
Faye Harris Gray, Executor
4621 Holloman Road
Durham, NC 27703
1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001375-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 29th day of October 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JAMES DAVID LORE, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 23rd day of April, 2026, or this notice will be

DURHAM COUNTY

WAKE COUNTY

pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 22nd day of January, 2026.
John C. Wainio, Executor
109 Presque Isle Lane
Chapel Hills, NC 27514
1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
The undersigned, having qualified on the 27th day of January, 2026 as Personal Representative of the Estate of ANITA DAVIS PEARSON. (25E002191-910), deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against said Estate that they must present them to the undersigned at 554 New Bern Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27610 on or before May 12, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February 2026.
Megan Pearson-Mason, Personal Representative of the Estate of Anita Davis Pearson
554 New Bern Ave.
Raleigh, NC 27610
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E005002-910
Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of MARY SANDRA GREEN, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026.
Henry M. Read Jr., Executor
3092 Main Street, P.O. BOX 507
Walkertown, NC 27051
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Terri Green Wagner, Administrator
341 S. Walker St.
Cary, NC 27511
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000098-910
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of FRANCES ADER READ, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Henry M. Read Jr., Executor
3092 Main Street, P.O. BOX 507
Walkertown, NC 27051
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 13, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 12th day of February, 2026.
Rebecca Ashley Russell, Executor
2150 Carpenter Upchurch Road
Cary, NC 27519
2/12, 2/19, 2/26, and 3/5/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25CV039346-910
To: DEBRA D. POOLE
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is for child custody. You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than March 24, 2026, said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, DEWEY O. HEDGEPEATH, will apply to the court for the relief sought.
This, the 12th day of February, 2026.
Dewey O. Hedgepeth, Plaintiff
530 June Lane
Raleigh, NC 27610
2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the District Court Division
File No. #25CV037546-910
To: CINDY CARYLE JEREW, Defendant

Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is for Complaint for Divorce and Equitable Distribution. You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than March 17, 2026, said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, MICHAEL JEREW, will apply to the court for the relief sought.
This, the 8th day of January, 2026.
Michael Jerew, Plaintiff
c/o New Direction Family Law
150 Fayetteville St., Suite 500,
Raleigh, NC 27601
2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the District Court Division
File No. 25CV007590-910
To: STACI BYRD
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is for child custody. You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than March 17, 2026, said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, JAMES STREET III, will apply to the court for the relief sought.
This, the 5th day of February, 2026.
James Street III, Plaintiff
623 Pony Club Circle
Cary, NC 27519
2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF WAKE
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk

File No: 25E002109-910
Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of MAY SADAK, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before April 30, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 27 day of January, 2026.
Fida Sadak Nehme, Administrator
4020 Woodbine RD
Raleigh, NC 27612
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E004552-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 5th day of January 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JAMES LOVELACE BULLOCK, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wish to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 30th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.
This, the 29th day of January, 2026.
Bethel Clay Bullock, Executor
2521 Sweetgum Drive
Apex, NC 27539
1/29, 2/5, 2/12, and 2/19/2026

ON SLOW COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
ON SLOW COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E002681-660
Having qualified as Administrator CTA of the Estate of PHILLIP GLENN CHRISTMAN, deceased, late of Onslow County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before May 5, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.
All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 5th day of February, 2026.
Phillip Scott Christman
Administrator CTA
267 Pleasant Rd.
Griffin, GA 30224
2/5, 2/12, 2/19, and 2/26/2026

Working With Women & Minority Business Enterprises

Construction Connect—So, you're a general contractor bidding a project and the contract requires an MBE participation goal of 8% and you aren't sure where to turn. Maybe you're a minority or woman owned company working in the realm of the construction industry and want to find more work.
Today we're going to look at some of the various programs available for contractors, subcontractors and construction suppliers that are women and minority-owned business enterprises. We'll discuss programs from the federal level all the way down to local municipalities.
USDOT DBE Program
The US Department of Transportation (USDOT) has established a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program that was created by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users.
The program was established to provide opportunities and increase participation for state and local transportation agencies that receive financial assistance from the USDOT which includes the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Transit Administration.
Each agency receiving federal funds for projects are required to set annual DBE participation goals as well as contract-specific DBE subcontracting goals. To fulfill those goals, the DBE subcontractor must provide a commercially useful function. In instances where the participation goal is not met, the prime contractor must prove that they made Good Faith Efforts to meet

the goal.
DBE Certification
A DBE is classified as a for-profit small business, as defined by the US Small Business Administration, that is at least 51% owned by one or more individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged or if it's a corporation, then 51% of stock is owned by one or more such individuals and whose management and daily business operations are controlled by those individuals.
Another item that factors into DBE certification includes the personal net worth of the owner(s) excluding their ownership interest of the business and interest in their primary residence. Minority Business Enterprises (MBE) and Women Business Enterprises (WBE) both fall into this category with an MBE being at least 51% owned and controlled by a minority group and a WBE being at least 51% owned and controlled by women. Net worth limits can vary greatly from agency to agency.
The USDOT also requires that all agencies in a state receiving federal funds must create and maintain a Unified Certification Program (UCP) with mandatory reciprocity throughout all agencies in the given state. The UCP will be responsible for certifying companies and maintaining a DBE directory that will be publicly available electronically, on the internet as well as in print.
Other Federal DBE Programs
The USDOT is not the only federal agency that requires MBE participation. The Small Business Act requires that all contracts solicited that



may result in an award over \$1 million for construction and \$500,000 for any other contract, the prime contractor must submit a subcontracting plan detailing how they will use MBEs on the project.
Now let's look at a small sample of programs available on the state and local levels. These programs are generally designed to increase the use of MBEs by providing training and networking opportunities, helping agencies identify MBEs that provide services and supplies they procure and in some instances setting participation goals on contracts. They also are responsible for certifying companies and maintaining directories.
State DBE Programs
The Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation in 1978 to create an MBE program. Currently, it requires state agencies to make every effort to achieve an overall goal of 29% MBE participation on the total dollar amount of all procurement contracts and is overseen by the Office of Minority Affairs.
In North Carolina, the program is overseen by the Office for Historically Underutilized Businesses. The state has verifiable goals of 10% on construction projects and requires local agencies to set goals on projects receiving state funds.
Massachusetts has a similar policy to North Carolina. They have a 10.4% combined M/WBE participation goal for construction contracts and a 17.9% combined goal on design contracts. Massachusetts also requires that local agencies requiring state funds for projects set goals for construction projects.
In New Jersey, the Division of Minority and Women Business Development has recently merged with Department of Treasury and while they don't have specific MBE participation goals they do have a small business set-aside program with a goal of awarding 25% of contracting dollars to small businesses.

Virginia has a 42% goal for participation through their Small, Women-owned, Minority-owned Businesses Program (SWaM). Some agencies within the state do have separate MBE and WBE participation goals.
Some states have MBE offices to promote and increase the participation but don't have any statewide MBE or WBE goals for construction procurement.
In New York, the Division of Minority and Women-Owned Business Development's mission is to "promote equality of economic opportunities for MWBEs and to eliminate barriers to their participation in state contracts."
The Florida Office of Supplier Diversity has advocacy and outreach initiatives like their MatchMaker Conferences to connect MBE's with state agency purchasing specialists. Consequently, while the state government doesn't have participation goals for contracts, cities like Orlando have goals of 18% for MBEs and 6% for WBEs and the City of Tallahassee has goals based on the types of services being solicited. They also offer a Mentor-Protégé Program to support women, veteran and minority small businesses.
Not all states have an agency or department dedicated to promoting MBEs. The District of Columbia doesn't have anything dedicated solely to minority businesses but they do have a Department of Small and Local Business Development that requires an overall participation goal of 50% by local Small Business Enterprises which covers MBEs and WBEs.
Tips for General Contractors

If you are a general contractor you should make sure you understand the rules and regulations regarding MBE participation for the Federal, state, or local agency you are submitting bids to, including those on commercially useful functions and Good Faith Efforts. These agencies are also a great source for locating MBE contractors as they are required to keep directories on certified subcontractors.
Other ways to locate MBE subcontractors is to publish advertisements in ethnic and minority publications and with your local minority contractors' associations. Consider attending outreach programs sponsored by state and local MBE Program offices or local contractors' associations.
Tips for MBE Contractors
If you are an MBE contractor and are looking for ways to grow your business, you should ensure your company is certified with your state and local agencies as well as any states where your company is licensed to do work. In addition to certification, these agencies can also assist in training, networking and compliance.
Another excellent source for finding subcontracting opportunities for your MBE are contractors' associations like the National Association of Minority Contractors, National Hispanic Construction Association, National Black Contractors Association, and the National Association of Women in Construction. These organizations have local chapters that are familiar with the construction industry in your area and prove a valuable resource for your company.

How to Become a Certified Minority-Owned Business in N.C.

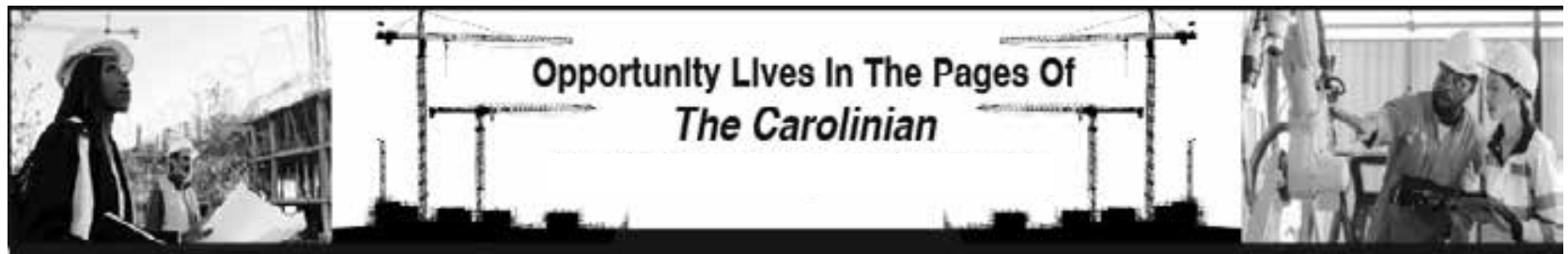
For entrepreneurs in North Carolina, becoming a certified Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) opens doors to state contracts, corporate supplier programs, training resources, and new business opportunities. Certification helps level the playing field by increasing visibility, providing access to procurement networks, and ensuring minority-owned businesses are fairly represented in the marketplace.
North Carolina offers a clear path to certification, but many business owners are unaware of the process or how to navigate it efficiently. Below is a comprehensive guide on how to become a certified minority business in the state, the benefits of certification, and tips for making your application successful.
UNDERSTANDING MWBE CERTIFICATION
In North Carolina, minority business certifications are overseen primarily through:
1. The NC Office for Historically

Underutilized Businesses (HUB)
This is the state-level certification used for contracting with North Carolina government agencies, universities, and public institutions.
2. Third-party certifications recognized statewide
These include:
• NMSDC – Carolinas MSDC (National Minority Supplier Development Council)
• SBA 8(a) Business Development Program
• DBE Certification (for transportation-related contracting)
Each certification serves different procurement markets. Most small businesses begin with the HUB certification, which is free and widely accepted across state and local agencies.
Who Qualifies as a Minority-Owned Business?
To be certified as an MWBE in North Carolina, a business must meet the following criteria:
Ownership Requirements

- At least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by one or more individuals who are:
 - Black/African American
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Asian American
 - Native American
 - Or other ethnic minority recognized by the state
- Business Requirements
 - Must be a for-profit business.
 - Must be properly registered with the NC Secretary of State (for corporations, LLCs).
 - Must be headquartered in North Carolina or have a significant presence in the state.
 - The minority owner must have day-to-day management and operational control.
- STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS TO GET CERTIFIED**
 1. Gather Required Documentation
Prepare the documents you'll need before starting the application. These may include:
 - Articles of Incorporation or Organization
 - Operating Agreement or Bylaws
 - Stock certificates and ledgers (if applicable)
 - Proof of capital contribution
 - Business licenses
 - Tax returns
 - Resumes of owners
 - Driver's license or ID for minority owners
 2. Apply for HUB Certification Online
The North Carolina HUB application can be completed through the Statewide Uniform Certification (SWUC) Program.
Website: <https://ncadmin.nc.gov/businesses/hub>
The application includes:
 - Ownership verification
 - Business structure review
 - Uploading required documents
 - A notarized affidavit confirming the accuracy of the information

Cost:
State HUB certification is free.
Processing Time:
Usually 30–90 days, depending on application volume and completeness.
3. Prepare for a Site Visit
The HUB Office may conduct an on-site visit or virtual interview to verify:
• Daily management by the minority owner
• Physical business location
• Operational records
• Equipment ownership (if applicable)
This is common and should be approached as a standard part of verification.
4. Receive Certification
Once approved, you will be issued an official HUB certification that is valid for:
• 4 years, with an annual update
• Required renewal at the end of

the 4-year cycle
You will also be placed in the HUB Vendor Directory, which procurement officers across the state use when searching for minority-owned businesses.
Additional Certifications to Consider
1. NMSDC Certification – Carolinas MSDC
Large corporations often require NMSDC certification to participate in supplier diversity programs.
Ideal for:
Businesses seeking relationships with large private-sector companies.
2. SBA 8(a) Certification
A powerful federal program offering:
• Sole-source contracts
• Mentor-protégé relationships
• Federal procurement preference
Ideal for:
Growing businesses seeking federal contracts.



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Sports

Bad Bunny's Super Bowl LX Halftime Show Celebrated America – All Of It – With A Message Of Honor & Unity

New York (AP) — To better understand some of the significance of Bad Bunny's historic Super Bowl halftime performance on Sunday night, start at the end.

"God Bless America," were the first and few English-language words uttered by the Spanish-language performer, who then proceeded to list countries in the Americas, including the United States and Canada. Behind him, a screen read: "The only thing more powerful than hate is love," a direct reference to his speech at the 2026 Grammy Awards where the Puerto Rican superstar took home the top prize.

America, he seemed to be reminding his global audience including viewers in the U.S., makes up a number of countries in the Western Hemisphere.

It was a poignant gesture for an artist whose performance was politicized the moment it was announced, labeled un-American by his detractors despite the fact that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Most recently President Donald Trump described his set as "an affront to the Greatness of America."

A roll call of American nations In the final moments of his performance, Bad Bunny was joined by a crowd waving flags of different countries in the Americas, but also "territories of other countries like Bonaire or the U.S. Virgin Islands," said Petra Rivera-Rideau, associate professor of American studies at Wellesley College and co-author of "P FKN R: How Bad Bunny Became the Global Voice of Puerto Rican Resistance."

He was also surrounded by plena musicians — a Puerto Rican genre associated with community and protest — and held a football that read, "Together, we are America."

"This is a really profound statement of Latino belonging in the United States and immigrant belonging in the United States," Rivera-



Rideau said. "Bad Bunny is obviously very aware of the backlash against this halftime show. And a lot of that backlash has to do with this assumption that because it's in Spanish, it's somehow excluding people. And I think what we saw last night with Bad Bunny's halftime show is that he was actually including people, inviting people into his world and at the same time, making a case that immigrants and Latinos are as much a fabric of the United States as anything else."

Simultaneously, he made the argument for "America" as a larger, hemispheric identity.

"He is trying to reframe America as this continent-spanning container," said Reanna Cruz, music critic and senior producer for Vox Media's music podcast Switched on Pop.

"The main takeaway I have from the performance is the highlight of community. ... If we have nothing else in times of hardship, we have community and we have joy, and a way to access that is to not shut out your fellow humans in whatever country it may be. The reframing of America as

something that spans half the globe is really radical."

There's a long history of that idea. "Everyone from Rubén Lárez to Los Tigres del Norte have created songs that have used this idea of all of the Americas coming together ... of America being a kind of a cohesive unit," said Rivera-Rideau. "But I think what it really boils down to is a statement that Latinos, Latin Americans, Caribbean people, immigrants, they belong and they're just as American as anybody else."

"He's presenting a very capacious definition of what it is to be American," said Christopher Campo-Bowen, assistant professor of musicology at Virginia Tech. "And within that, the idea of Puerto Rican sovereignty."

"He is presenting everything that he finds that makes Puerto Rico unique. And what makes Puerto Rico an autonomy culture and actor in the hemisphere — and presenting it all at once — and then also broadcasting this unifying message of 'We are all Americans,'" he added. "He's encouraging us all to recognize that uniqueness but not to let that difference be-



come a source of enmity or hatred."

American identity for Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans are Americans in both ways Bad Bunny's show explored — they are U.S. citizens, and the island nation is situated in the Americas. But it is complicated: Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens no matter where they are born and have been since 1917. But Puerto Ricans who live on the island have limited citizenship rights; they cannot vote for President, they have no representation in Congress and they can be drafted into the military.

"What it boils down to is that Puerto Rico is a territory," said Rivera-Rideau, an idea she says Bad Bunny explored when he waved the Puerto Rican flag with a light blue triangle, a color repeated on Lady Gaga's dress.

"That's considered the original Puerto Rican flag. And once the U.S. takes over Puerto Rico in 1898, they change the color blue to match the U.S. flag. And so that light blue color on the Puerto Rican flag has become affiliated with Puerto Rican independence," she explained. "So, I think we

see him commenting on this colonial relationship at the same time that he's insisting on full recognition in the United States as a Latino, as an American, in the continental sense. Both things are happening in that halftime show."

That is also reflected in the music of Puerto Rico, and of course, Bad Bunny. Think of the genre salsa as an example, which "represents the kind of unique status of Puerto Rico vis-a-vis the mainland United States, in that salsa would not have been possible without this relationship," said Campo-Bowen. He noted that in the late 1940s and early '50s, Puerto Ricans migrated to New York in large numbers because of massive changes on the island. "They start communities there, encounter other people from Latin America, and then salsa comes about out of that mixture."

"It is based in the long history of colonialism and that carries those issues with it. But despite that, Puerto Rico has developed this unique culture with these unique musical signifiers which Bad Bunny is more than

happy to draw on and celebrate."

A political message Bad Bunny's "God Bless America" contrasts certain conservative messaging of American identity. Consider the fact that there was an alternative halftime performance, organized by Turning Point USA and headlined by Kid Rock, called the "all-American Halftime show."

"Bad Bunny turns this upside down and he says, 'No, 'God bless America' and 'America' is all of these Latin American and Caribbean nations and the U.S. and Canada. We're all a part of it," said Vanessa Diaz, associate professor of Chicano and Latino studies at Loyola Marymount University and co-author of "P FKN R."

"It was about unity, but it was also about staking Latinos' claim in this country," she said, particularly in a charged political moment as Trump's immigration policies and executive actions have vastly expanded who is eligible for deportation, routine hearings have turned into deportation traps for migrants, detentions are prolonged and opposition for the Trump administration's immigration crackdown grows.

In her view, Bad Bunny's performance was "profoundly political" — just as it was when he said "ICE Out" at the 2026 Grammys — but on this stage, for its message of joy and unity.

"It was wildly imaginative and extremely educational. And yet we had fun and we danced and we cried," Diaz said of the performance. "It was Bad Bunny at his best, being super specific about his homeland and its history and also welcoming people in to let themselves see themselves reflected in Puerto Rican culture and history."

"Joy is resistance and dancing is resistance," Cruz said. "For people in the Latino community, the show is very clear in how political it is."

Four Players Ejected Following Pistons-Hornets Dustup

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — A fight between the Detroit Pistons and Charlotte Hornets in the third quarter of Monday night's game, resulted in four player ejections.

Charlotte's Moussa Diabate and Miles Bridges were tossed, along with Detroit's Jalen Duren and Isaiah Stewart. Hornets coach Charles Lee was ejected in the fourth quarter after he had to be restrained from going after an official while arguing a call.

The Pistons won the game 110-104.

Duren had the ball and was driving toward the basket with just over seven minutes left in the third period when he was fouled by Diabate. Du-

ren turned around to get face-to-face with Diabate and the two appeared to butt heads. Duren then hit Diabate in the face with his open right hand, starting a confrontation that lasted more than 30 seconds and ultimately ended with a brief police presence on the floor.

While Pistons forward Tobias Harris was holding Diabate back, Diabate threw a punch at Duren. Duren walked away and Bridges charged at him, throwing a left-handed punch. Duren retaliated with a punch. Diabate attempted to charge again at Duren and had to be held back.

Stewart left the bench to con-

front Bridges, who responded with a punch, and the players tussled. At one point, Stewart got Bridges in a headlock and delivered multiple left-handed blows to his head.

Duren called it an "overly competitive game."

"Emotions were flaring," Duren said. "At the end of the day, we would love to keep it basketball, but things happen. Everybody was just playing hard."

Duren said that opposing NBA teams have been trying to "get in our head" all season.

"This isn't the first time that people have tried to be like extra aggressive

with us and talk to us, whatever the case may be," Duren said. "But as a group we have done an OK job of handling that energy and intensity. At the end of the day, emotions got high with everybody being competitive. Things happen."

Duren did not say how the fight started, referring the video replay instead.

The Hornets did not make Bridges and Diabate available for interviews after the game.

"It looked like two guys got into a

heated conversation and it just kind of spiraled from there," Lee said.

Crew chief John Goble said in a pool report after the game that the players were ejected because they "engaged in fighting activity during the dead ball. After review, we assessed fighting fouls and by rule they were ejected from the game."

Pistons coach J.B. Bickerstaff defended his players after the game.

"Our guys deal with a lot, but they're not the ones that initiated, they're not the ones who crossed the

line tonight," Bickerstaff said. "It was clear, through frustration, because of what J.D. (Duren) was doing, that they crossed the line. I hate that it got as ugly as it got."

"That's not something that you ever want to see," Bickerstaff added, "but if a guy throws a punch at you, you have a responsibility to protect yourself. That's what happened tonight. If you go back and watch the film, they're the ones who initiated crossing the line and our guy had to defend himself."

Kenneth Walker III Becomes 1st Running Back To Win Super Bowl MVP In 28 years

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) — Kenneth Walker III is running into free agency with a Super Bowl MVP.

Walker capped a prolific postseason with another big performance on the ground to help the Seattle Seahawks beat the New England Patriots 29-13 on Sunday night for a championship.

While the defense carried Seattle for much of the postseason, Walker was once again the engine of the offense by rushing for 135 yards and adding 26 receiving for his third straight 100-yard game from scrimmage in the postseason. He became the first running back since Terrell Davis 28 years ago to win Super Bowl MVP.

"If I would tell myself as a kid right now I wouldn't have guessed I would have been the one to win MVP," Walker said. "It's a surreal moment and it doesn't happen without the guys in the locker room."

Walker stepped up his game after backfield mate Zach Charbonnet went down with a season-ending knee injury and it couldn't have come at a more important time for the Seahawks or a more opportune time for Walker.

The 25-year-old running back is in the final year of his rookie contract and is slated to become a free agent in 2026. Thanks to his playoff run, Walker figures to be in line for a significant pay bump.

Walker gained 413 yards from scrimmage in the three wins for Seattle this postseason. He became the first player to top 100 yards from scrimmage in every playoff game for a Super Bowl champion since Terrell Davis did it in back-to-back seasons in 1997-98 for the Broncos.

"It means a lot," Walker said. "It means a lot to me and I know it means a lot to my teammates. We went through a lot of adversity



throughout the season. To be able to make it this far is a blessing, with the noise really. As a team we know the only thing that matters is what's talked about in the organization. So all the outside noise we really ignore. We stuck together throughout the season and we won a Super Bowl for that."

Making it even sweeter was the fact that his father was in attendance to watch him for the first time in the NFL. Walker said his dad comes to Seattle a lot but doesn't go to games because of the crowds.

But Walker said his agent convinced his father to come on Sunday and he got to see his son shine.

"I didn't think he would come," Walker said. "They ended up miking him up and everything. He got out of his comfort zone."

While fantasy football owners and Walker were sometimes frustrated that he didn't carry a bigger load of the offense, especially in the red

zone, in the regular season, the job share with Charbonnet did mean Walker was fresh for the playoffs when he was at his best.

Walker averaged less than 15 touches from scrimmage per game in the regular season when he delivered his first 1,000-yard rushing season since his rookie year.

But he averaged nearly 25 touches per game in the playoffs when he showed he's capable of being a bell-cow back.

"When Charbs goes down everyone was hurting for him because he's an instrumental part of this team," receiver Cooper Kupp said. "For (Walker) to be able to shoulder the load and step up his game to another level, I'm so proud of him."

Walker started fast with a 10-yard run on the opening snap and had 55 yards on the ground on a field-goal drive later in the first half for the most by any player on one drive in the Super Bowl in 20 years.

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