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OK HOUSE DEM PURSUES WALTERS
IMPEACHMENT INVESTIGATION

House Democratic Leader Cyndi Munson, D–Oklahoma City, on Tuesday delivered the formal request. **A7**

VACCINATION EXEMPTION RATE
ON THE RISE FOR OK SCHOOLS

The latest survey of vaccination readiness to start the school year showed the exemption rate rising to 3.5% in the 2021-22 school year. **A8**



PHOTO PROVIDED

Oklahoma State
Department of Education
(OSDE) *has formed an “ongoing partnership” with PragerU – a self-professed right-wing ideological provider – to provide lesson plans, videos, and other educational material to public schools across the state.*

PRAGERU from A1

The working arrangement is the brainchild of Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters. In a statement to the media on Sept. 7, Walters said he was “thrilled” with the new partnership with Prager University (PragerU). Walters, who has sparked considerable controversy as head of OSDE, brokered the arrangement.

Prominent educational and political leaders in Tulsa – and elsewhere in Oklahoma - have attacked the partnership as the latest in a series of efforts by Walters and other OSDE board members to infuse their conservative cultural agenda into public schools across Oklahoma. School administrators in Tulsa and Bixby have said they will not use the PragerU materials in public schools.

In Tulsa, Black voices have led the way in decrying the use of PragerU playbook. A panel of Black leaders, including State Rep. Monroe Nichols (Dist. 72), State Rep. Regina Goodwin (Dist. 73), Tulsa District 3 school board representative Jennettie Marshall, and founder of Citizens United for a Better Educational System (CUBES), Darryl Bright, all roundly criticized the introduction of PragerU materials as an attempt to miseducate Oklahoma students. The panel was held on Sept. 9 at Vernon AME Church in Tulsa’s Greenwood District. It was part of a day-long teach-in organized by north Tulsa activist Kristi Williams to promote Black History Saturdays, a program Williams founded to teach African American history to Tulsa school-age kids and adults.

“This is indoctrination,” Nichols told the crowd in reference to the arrangement the OSDE has made with PragerU. “It’s part of a national

movement which pretends to criticize what they call efforts to indoctrinate our kids, but then turns around and tries to indoctrinate them. Nichols recently announced a bid for Tulsa mayor.

“The use of PragerU materials in schools is tantamount to an attack on our community,” Bright said. “We have to meet the moment.”

Critics charge that most, if not all, of the materials PragerU produces and pushes on students are wildly distorted propaganda. The misrepresentations start with the name PragerU. While it gives the impression that the organization is a university, it is a privately owned media outlet which provides educational resources and content through videos and other online resources.

The distortions and untruths in PragerU’s videos and other materials are designed to present an ultra-conservative Republican perspective. But in a Sept. 5 media release, OSDE said the material from PragerU Kids will expand “available resources” to teachers and students. It further characterized the curriculum as “educationally sound.”

Oklahoma became the second state to make such an arrangement with

PragerU, following Florida’s approval of PragerU’s “supplemental educational materials” in July. Florida partnered with Prager after enacting many radical right-wing educational measures, including a curriculum statement that enslaved people benefited from skills developed when enslaved.

While PragerU takes on a wide range of subjects in its attack on the

PRAGERU cont. A6

“Remedial provisions in
the agreement will open up
opportunities for building
generational wealth...”

KRISTEN CLARKE, Assistant Attorney General,
U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division

Clearview: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

By LARRY O'DELL , THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



The town was founded in 1903 along the tracks of the Fort Smith and Western Railroad. J. A. Roper, Lemuel Jackson, and John Grayson platted the town site and formed the Lincoln Townsite Company to attract settlers and advertise the settlement. The post office was originally designated Lincoln, but in 1904 a postal service order changed it to Abelincoln. This, however, was rescinded a month later. From its beginning the community supported a newspaper, the Lincoln Tribune, which evolved into the Clearview Patriarch. Grayson and Roper also organized the Abe Lincoln Trading Company to operate a

general store, deal in farm produce, and buy and sell real estate. Grayson also became the town’s first postmaster, and Roper owned a sawmill and lumberyard. By 1904 the town boasted a two-story hotel and a print shop. Very early in its existence Clearview residents enjoyed a brick school building and two churches. Around 1911 Roper and Jackson departed, and J. E. Thompson moved to Clearview. In 1914 at a Negro Business League meeting he announced to Booker T. Washington that he owned or managed a total of 5,800 acres of land in Okfuskee County. From 1916 to 1920 J. C. Leftwich

operated Creek and Seminole Agricultural College northeast of town. The 1907 population figure of 618 declined to 420 by the late 1930s. The Great Depression and the falling price of cotton had severely crippled the town. The 1990 census recorded only 47 inhabitants of Clearview. At the turn of the twenty-first century the community still hosted an annual rodeo and supported 56 residents. The 2010 U.S. Census counted 48 living there.

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma’s history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

A CHURCH said to have been located in Clearview, I.T. (20699.02.197.329, State Museum Collection, Currie Ballard Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



American Bank of OK Settles North Tulsa Redlining Charges



Victims Allege Corruption In Tulsa Criminal Justice System



Dangers and Deaths Around Black Pregnancies

The Oklahoma Eagle

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Media's *Strange Treatment of* **MISSING BLACK WOMEN**

DESPITE THE CARLEE
RUSSELL HOAX, BLACK
WOMEN GO MISSING
DISPROPORTIONATELY.
WHERE ARE THE NEWS
STORIES ABOUT THEM?

By **HIRAM JACKSON**, WORD IN BLACK

IN JULY, THE NATION WAS GRIPPED BY THE STRANGE CASE OF CARLEE RUSSELL, THE 29-YEAR-OLD ALABAMA WOMAN WHO FALSELY CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED AND HELD CAPTIVE FOR MORE THAN 48 HOURS. THE DAMAGE OF FALSELY REPORTING A CRIME, ESPECIALLY CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN, IS OBVIOUSLY A STAIN ON HER REPUTATION. BUT MOREOVER, IT UNDERMINES THE EFFORTS AND THE URGENCY TO INVESTIGATE REPORTS OF THOUSANDS OF MISSING WOMEN ACROSS THE NATION.

Surprisingly the Russell case received national attention from media sources who have historically provided lackluster coverage — if any at all — of the litany of Black women and women of color who have been lost to their families for years. According to the National Crime Information Center, despite making up only 7% of the U.S. population and 18% of the female population, Black women and girls accounted for nearly 34.6% of 300,000 missing women in 2021. For years the families and friends of these missing women have persistently expressed concerns about the lack of vigor displayed by law enforcement in conducting more robust investigations to find these mothers, daughters, and sisters. But given that Black women go missing at a rate double that of their representation in the overall population, shouldn't there be at least double the number of stories reported by media? On the contrary, abductions and disappearances of Black women get less than a quarter of coverage. This stark disparity is directly linked to the race of the victim and the racial composition of the law enforcement agencies tasked with resolving these crimes. So, when major media outlets neglect or selectively allow these cases to fall into the darkness of oblivion, we in the Black community and Black news have to keep these stories alive. Media outlets are key players in bringing public attention and putting pressure on police departments to prioritize these cases and allocate additional resources to locate the missing individuals. In my home state of Michigan, studies show that Michigan is ranked 49th in the nation in terms of missing persons — roughly 5.6 missing people per 100,000 residents. However, my home city, Detroit, ranks in the top five cities in the country with the most missing people. When combined with the fact that the timeline for initiating comprehensive missing persons investigations for Black women is four times longer than for other ethnicities, the prospects of locating these individuals diminish significantly. Ultimately, the ball is in our court, and the onus is on us, the Black Press, to bring and keep the faces of these women up-close-and-personal in the public psyche. In this era marked by overwhelming cynicism and floods of conspiracy theories, when people inquire about the rationale behind spotlighting a particular case, I can only speculate about why the Russell case garnered so much attention. Perhaps there is a shift underway. Recently the Detroit branch of the FBI joined the investigation for two missing Black teen girls who vanished from their adoptive parents' home in June — about 110 miles from Detroit in a northern Michigan community. The late great Gwen Ifill coined the phrase “white woman syndrome” to address the lack of attention to the cases of missing women of color, which basically means that in our industry, the stories of missing white women often supersede the stories of missing Black women, or Indigenous women, or Latinas. We, the Black Press, have the power to change that, and change that we must.

Despite making up only 7% of the U.S. population and 18% of the female population, Black women and girls accounted for nearly 34.6% of 300,000 missing women in 2021.

- NATIONAL CRIME INFORMATION CENTER



PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

PRAGERU *from A3*

“dominant left-wing ideology in culture, media, and education,” according to its website, a significant part of its inventory is devoted to “slavery” and “racism.” In its 2023 Biannual Report, Dennis Prager, co-founder of the organization, describes Prager’s efforts as an attempt to debunk the “Marxist playbook we are all familiar with.” Previously, Prager has written, referring to African Americans as an illegitimate “victim group,” “From Marx until today, victim groups have played an indispensable role in Leftist success. Without victim groups, the Left cannot succeed.”

PragerU’s playbook

PragerU has no less than 26 five-minute videos on the subject, “Is America Racist?” In the videos and other “educational” materials, Prager consistently plays down racism in America in favor of its right-wing ideology. The Oklahoma Eagle sampled the Prager inventory of videos on racism and found the following themes, most often directly stated by Prager spokespersons:

- Blacks are more likely to have adverse police encounters because they commit more crimes.
- America is the least racist of any white majority country in the world.
- The woke left has manufactured systemic racism.
- Most alleged Black hate crimes are hoaxes.
- Don’t let toxic messages of racism stop you from your accomplishments.
- George Floyd: Black man who resisted arrest.
- Other problems are far more severe than racism.
- Why I don’t want and don’t deserve reparations.
- Issues plaguing Black communities are ultimately self-inflicted.

PragerU for Kids

PragerU Kids was added in 2021 and aimed at school children K-12. A word search by The Oklahoma Eagle for “racism” at the PragerU Kids website found three videos presented by Prager for third through fifth grades.

They all included fictitious interviews from the past with famous historic civil rights people in an animated format: Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., and Frederick Douglass. PragerU uses each of them to play down contemporary racism and recast the positions of prominent Black historical figures as more favorable to their ideological bent. Here are some select excerpts from the dialogue:

The video depicting a cartoon representation of Frederick Douglass has come under the sharpest attack. In it,

Douglass is quoted as saying, “Slavery has existed everywhere in the world for thousands of years. There was no real movement to abolish slavery before the American founding. The founding fathers knew slavery was evil and wrong. They made a compromise to make something great, the United States.”

In analyzing the video, Goodwin said, “People who view this have to be aware that those are not Frederick Douglass’ words and that was not Frederick Douglass. It’s a fictitious, made-up version of him with fabricated words. People who don’t know history might believe that Douglass said that.”

In the video featuring Booker T. Washington, the famous Black educator, is quoted saying: “I hate slavery, too, but it has been a reality everywhere in the world. I am still thankful and proud to be an American. Future generations are never responsible for the sins of the past. [Taking care of yourself] all starts with you making yourselves some snacks.”

In the depiction of Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights leader says, “Unfortunately, in my time, there were plenty of ignorant and hateful people. If your conscience tells you to apologize for yelling, listen to it. Thanks to my fame and notoriety, when I speak, many people hear my voice. I plan on

slowin’ down and spending some time with my family, but there is still a lot of work for me to do.”

What is PragerU?

Prager University Foundation was formed in 2009 by American screenwriter Allen Estrin and former conservative talk show host Dennis Prager. The organization has grown rapidly since its inception, raising \$65 million in revenue from over 100,000 donors in 2022.

In addition to its primary role as a media outlet, the organization has contributed significantly to political and advocacy issues. The Los Angeles Times reports that an independent analysis by Tubular Labs, a video measurement company, found that PragerU “consistently spends more on Facebook advertising than major political campaigns and national advocacy groups. It ranks among the ten biggest political spenders on the platform.”

Controversy has also followed the organization as it has fought to have its dubious content placed on social media platforms. For example, in 2021, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed a lawsuit brought by Prager against Google for its YouTube subsidiary, which flagged some of Prager’s videos as “inappropriate.”

Much of the “education” materials flow directly from Dennis Prager’s worldview, particularly regarding Blacks and other persons of color. He has consistently written that racism does not impede Black progress. Indeed, frequently, he has claimed racism and discrimination against Blacks is a hoax. PolitiFact, a fact-checking nonprofit organization, reported that Prager, on his ultra-conservative talk radio program, said, “When there is a noose on a college dorm of a Black student’ or a racial slur ‘on a dormitory, the odds are overwhelming that a Black student actually did that.”

Still, the organization is seeking more state-school relationships and forging new content. Walters and the OSDE have pledged to partner with PragerU Kids to develop that new content. As new content is created, critics expect more of its mainstream messaging to spill over into PragerU Kids. For example, one new video under development by Prager is called Myth Mash, which it describes as a “new series for middle and high school students that smashes the anti-American leftist lies infiltrating our classrooms.”

The day after his press release praising PragerU, Walters was featured in a nine-minute promotional video on PragerU’s website, continuing his attack on left-wing ideology.

He hailed Prager and claimed the “Left... don’t want our kids reading the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist papers or the Constitution.” The host of the video praised Walters as a “treasure to our nation.”



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Increase In Vaccination Exemption Rate Rises To 3.5% in 2021-22, Up From 2.4%

VACCINATION EXEMPTIONS *from AI*

Oklahoma's kindergarteners are now the least-vaccinated in the region.

More than three years into the COVID-19 pandemic that scrambled perceptions of routine public health measures and attitudes toward vaccinations, Oklahoma now has the highest rate of exemptions from immunizations for kindergartners, according to state and federal data.

The latest survey of vaccination readiness to start the school year showed the exemption rate rising to 3.5% in the 2021-22 school year. That's up from an exemption rate of 2.4% the previous school year, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Survey results from the 2022-23 school year are still being processed.

Public health officials pay attention to kindergarten vaccination rates because they are an important indicator of community immunity and allow officials to better target health resources if a disease outbreak occurs. Students with exemptions on file can be excluded from school or school-sponsored activities depending on the degree of risk to the school.

Dr. Steven Crawford, a family physician and board chairman of the Oklahoma Alliance for Healthy Families, said COVID-19's effects reached across all parts of society. Intense health and policy discussions have been hotly debated on social media, with some relying on Dr. Google, he said.

"A lot of misinformation has been promoted, primarily on social media," Crawford said. "Some people believe social media more than they believe clinical experts, and that's become a real challenge in our world for all kinds of things, whether for medical information or non-medical information."

Mass vaccinations, many developed in the 1950s and 1960s, have nearly eliminated smallpox, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, whooping cough and other diseases, according to World Health Organization data.

Parents or guardians in Oklahoma can sign a form if they want to declare an exemption to the state's requirement for vaccinations in schools. Oklahoma allows medical, religious or philosophical reasons to declare an exemption from the law. They can be for one or multiple vaccines.

The state's medical exemption rate has remained flat at less than 0.5% in the past decade. Those exemptions require a doctor's authorization. But higher numbers of religious and philosophical exemptions have pushed Oklahoma's overall rate higher. That doesn't include COVID-19 vaccines, which are not part of the recommended series of shots for kindergartners.

Oklahoma had the highest exemption rate in the region for the 2021-22 school year, according to federal survey data. In a seven-state region including Oklahoma, New Mexico's exemption rate was the lowest at 1.4%. Colorado, which has had the region's highest exemption rate in recent years, had an exemption rate of 3.2%, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and



Prevention.

Elsewhere, Maine and Mississippi are two states heading in opposite directions on kindergarten vaccination-exemption policies.

Maine got rid of philosophical and religious exemptions in 2021. Its vaccination coverage for kindergartners increased the next two school years, the state's health department reported. Mississippi has had one of the South's lowest vaccination-exemption rates, but a recent federal court injunction ordered state officials to offer a religious exemption. Mississippi requires parents or guardians to review a video about vaccine efficacy and safety before granting its new religious exemption.

Crawford said he suspects some of the increase in exemptions in Oklahoma may be coming from parents who still believe in the benefits of immunizations but who have taken the exemption because it's easier than taking time out of their home and work lives to get their child vaccinated.

It's been almost a decade since Oklahoma

lawmakers last contemplated changes to the state's exemptions for school vaccinations. At that time, the focus was to get rid of the philosophical exemption. But a coalition of vaccine-skeptical parents organized opposition to that effort into a group now known as Oklahomans for Health and Parental Rights. The group has transformed itself into a lobbying force at the Capitol and now claims more than 20,000 members.

Lawmakers in 2021 approved Senate Bill 658, which prohibited COVID-19 vaccines as a requirement for school attendance and required schools to tell parents and guardians about the state's three vaccine exemptions for kindergarten enrollment.

"The battle at the moment is a continued effort to expand exemptions and put more barriers in place to children getting adequately vaccinated," said Crawford, the doctor with the Oklahoma Alliance for Healthy Families. "It's all under the banner of parental choice. But not having philosophical exemptions have created the benefits that our

nation has had from vaccine-preventable diseases over many years."

Oklahoma's jump in the exemption rate comes as misinformation around vaccine safety continues to roil political campaigns. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is running for the Democratic nomination for president in 2024, is among the most high-profile figures to repeat debunked conspiracy theories about vaccines. A recent KFF survey on health misinformation found a polarized political and media climate can lead to different views on what constitutes misinformation.

"While exposure to misinformation may not necessarily convert the public into ardently believing false health claims, it is likely adding to confusion and uncertainty about already complicated public health topics and may lead to decision paralysis when it comes to individual health care behaviors and choices," the survey said. "In any case, this 'malleable middle' presents an opportunity for tailored interventions. Furthermore, reinforcing accurate information may need to go hand-in-hand with combating false health claims."

Crawford said majorities of both self-identified Republican and Democratic voters remain in favor of immunizations for school-age children. Almost 6 in 10 Republican voters and 8 in 10 Democratic voters have a favorable view of immunizations.

"COVID became such a touchpoint to people, and it was profoundly affecting social issues from school attendance to wearing a mask and got involved in presidential politics," Crawford said. "Because of those issues, it really created havoc, and it's going to take a while to resolve. Unfortunately, some in that camp will continue to feel that way because of the politics, not because of the medical issues."

Crawford said trust in institutions of all kinds is down across the board, but people still trust their own doctors when it comes to health information. He said several federal agencies monitor different parts of the vaccine-safety system, from the CDC to the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Vaccines are the most watch-over part of our healthcare system in regards to safety," Crawford said. "It's appropriate they do that because these (immunizations) are being given to healthy people." The state health department surveys public and private elementary schools between November and April to collect the kindergarten vaccination coverage data. The data for the 2022-23 school year is still being analyzed. Surveys are voluntary, although return rates are typically high.

PAUL MONIES has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2017 and covers state agencies and public health. Contact him at (571) 319-3289 or pmonies@oklahomawatch.org.

POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY JAIL OFFICIALS

Alleged To Have Withheld Public Records And Defied Court Orders



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

COUNTY JAIL COVER-UP from A1

Pottawatomie County jail officials apparently defied state laws and a judge’s order when they concealed information on the unexplained deaths of seven vulnerable detainees.

All seven people arrived at the jail with medical and mental health or substance use complications that required care. None of them made it home alive. Most of their families still don’t know why.

An Oklahoma Watch investigation found that the Pottawatomie County Public Safety Center withheld public records and defied court orders to produce them. It ignored families’ requests for medical records. And it reported only two of the deaths to state regulators — all under the charge of jail director Breonna Thompson, better known by her middle name, Rochelle.

“When you take the least of us and you treat them with this kind of disrespect to the point that it leads to their demise, that’s just inhumane,” said attorney Ronald “Skip” Kelly, who is suing the jail on behalf of one of the families. “I have never experienced the kind of ruthless disrespect to families that I’ve seen from this jail, refusing to give them any information. If there was ever a jail that needs to be under investigation by the U.S. justice department, it’s that one.”

Unexplained Bruises and Broken Ribs

When Shelly Cailler arrived at St. Anthony Hospital in Shawnee on July 10, 2021, her wife, Kellie Wright, was on life support. Wright had five broken ribs and was covered in bruises Cailler had never seen before.

A doctor told Cailler that Wright was brain dead after she went into cardiac arrest three or four times in the ambulance that delivered her from the Pottawatomie County jail. Cailler’s mind flooded with questions: Why was she in jail? What caused the bruises and broken bones? How could this happen?

Wright was the education chair for the Oklahoma Society of Accountants, which held its annual conference that weekend at the Grand Casino Hotel and Resort in Shawnee. That’s where she experienced a mental health emergency that led to her arrest and, ultimately, her death. Wright, 50, had a history of alcohol abuse, hypertension, depression and was treated for an episode of delirium in 2020. The episode “was a pandemic

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WHEN
YOU
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TO THE POINT
THAT IT LEADS
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DEMISE,
THAT’S JUST
INHUMANE.”

RONALD “SKIP”
KELLY, ATTORNEY



STACEY GARRETT. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH



MICHAEL MORTON. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH



RONALD GIVEN. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH



KELLIE WRIGHT. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH



JERRY GAGE. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH



CARRIE STEWART. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH

thing,” Cailler said.

Wright had been stable for nearly a year.

After Wright’s death, Cailler pleaded for medical records, video footage, incident reports, anything that would fill the gaps in her wife’s final hours. But the jail refused or ignored her calls.

Two years later, Cailler still doesn’t have the answers.

In July, Cailler sued the jail in search of information. She alleged in the lawsuit that jailers ignored signs of Wright’s mental health crisis and failed to provide treatment or even assess Wright’s condition; instead, Cailler said, they let her languish in a cell. A Tulsa judge ordered the jail to release video, medical records and other documentation of Wright’s detention by Aug. 5. No records were released. Cailler’s attorney, Dan Smolen, said it’s likely the jail will appeal the decision.

“We deserve to know what happened to her,” Cailler said. “She wasn’t no one. She was someone to us and we’re going to make them answer for what happened to her.”

Wright’s family isn’t the only one demanding answers from the Pottawatomie County jail. It took

four years and a federal appellate court ruling to pry free the video of jailers’ struggle with another detainee, Ronald Given, that led to his death.

Although Given’s family members finally have some answers, they still seek justice. No one was charged in his death. Cailler, and Russell Gage, whose father died after being beaten by his cellmate, have neither.

Details about how other detainees died and what role the jail played are scarce. Oklahoma Watch reviewed hundreds of pages of documents from arresting police departments, the state health department and the medical examiner. Here’s what we learned:

Stacey Garrett, 39, died at a hospital of a rare stroke in 2018, according to a report by a state medical examiner. The autopsy report listed substance use as a contributing factor and could not determine if her death was natural, accidental or intentional.

Michael Morton’s death was reported to the state health department. Jailers found Morton, 67, not breathing and without a pulse on the floor of a cell in 2018, according to the health department

report. He died of a heart attack, according to an autopsy report, which cited a seizure disorder as a contributing factor. Morton’s siblings said he struggled with mental illness.

Ronald Given, 42, had a history of alcohol abuse. He died at a hospital in 2019 one week after an altercation with jailers that began while Given was experiencing a mental health crisis, according to a report by a medical examiner who ruled his death a homicide.

Kellie Wright, 50, died the day after she was booked into jail in 2021 from a brain injury caused by cardiac arrest, according to a medical examiner’s report, which cites hypertension and alcohol use as contributing factors.

Cindy Salazar’s death was reported to the state health department. Salazar, 39, died at a hospital in 2021 after her cellmates told detention officers she was having seizures, according to the health department report. She was being held for the U.S. Marshals.

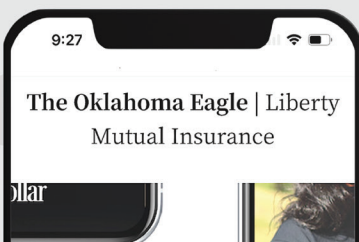
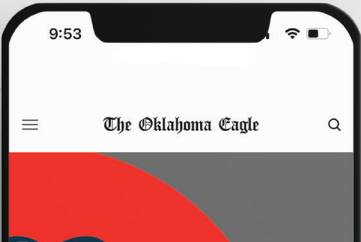
Jerry Gage, 78, had trouble breathing, had hypertension and gastrointestinal complications. He died at a hospital after being

COUNTY JAIL COVER-UP cont. A10

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beaten by his cellmate in 2022, according to a medical examiner’s report that ruled his death a homicide.

Carrie Stewart, 48, died at a hospital from infections caused by intravenous drug use in 2022, according to a medical examiner’s report.

Pottawatomie County prosecutor Adam Panter’s investigators are reviewing Given’s death to determine whether any jailers will be charged, he said. Gage’s cellmate was charged with murder. He was found incompetent to stand trial and remains incarcerated at the Pottawatomie County jail where he is receiving treatment, according to the jail’s website and court documents.

Lethal Consequences

About 30 miles east of Oklahoma City, the jail, which can house up to 366 people, sits south of I-40 in Shawnee, which acts as a gateway to the rural communities of eastern Oklahoma. This summer, Red Rock Behavioral Health Services opened an urgent care center aimed at meeting the needs of small-town Oklahoma where long commutes hinder mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Like those who died in Pottawatomie County, people often arrive in jails with untreated physical and mental health conditions worsened by incarceration, according to a 2019 report from the Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit that studies mass incarceration.

“Even a few days in jail can be especially devastating for people with serious mental health and medical needs, as they are cut off from their medications, support systems, and regular healthcare providers,” researchers found. “Jailing people with serious mental illness and substance use disorders has lethal consequences.”

According to the nonprofit, Oklahoma jails admit about 96,000 people each year, many in the midst of a mental health crisis or substance use withdrawals. That was the case for Morton, Given, Wright and Gage.

People behind bars are disproportionately poor and reliant on social services for medical and mental healthcare. In November, the U.S. Department of Justice launched a federal investigation to determine whether those services are adequate in Oklahoma. Sheriffs across the state have pointed to their jails as evidence they’re not, calling them de facto mental health hospitals that are underfunded and ill-equipped to care for detainees who often need treatment, not incarceration.

Jeff Dismukes, who recently retired from the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse and now runs a nonprofit that supports people with mood disorders, agreed. He said in order to create solutions, we need to examine why they ended up there, whether police were needed and what could be done to prevent the crisis that triggered their emergency.

“We aren’t treating people like people,” Dismukes said. “We aren’t understanding that these are our friends and neighbors. These are people in the community who deserve opportunities to be productive members of our society, but we’re labeling them as something different and depriving them of the care they need.”

‘This is a Safe Place’

Wright needed care when her crisis began inside a hotel elevator. Instead, she got police.

Wright was yelling into the lobby when Citizen Potawatomi Nation police officer Orrin Beckham asked for her identification, Beckham’s incident report states. According to court records, Wright refused to provide her identification and said, “I have talked to God about this. I’m going to die.”

Beckham persuaded Wright to exit the elevator and join him in the lobby, but as the elevator began to close, Wright turned and ran toward it. Beckham restrained her on the ground and handcuffed her, court records show. Wright kicked Beckham’s left calf six times, according to court records. Wright was still yelling when McLoud police officer Stephanie Nappier arrived, her body camera video shows.

Wright alternated between cursing at officers and begging them not to hurt her as they loaded her into the back of a police truck, video shows. Wright, who lay face down across the seat with her wrists and ankles bound, didn’t answer when officers asked what drugs she had taken. It must have been methamphetamine, they said.

“The only thing I can get her on right now is public intox,” Beckham said in the video.

Seconds later he told Wright she was under arrest for public intoxication. Nappier suggested charging Wright for kicking him. According to Beckham’s incident report, he arrested her for assaulting an officer.

Nappier’s body camera was still recording at the jail when detention officers carried Wright inside the Pottawatomie County jail with minor visible injuries. Beckham assisted by holding the chain restraining Wright’s feet. Wright begged officers not to kill her. Beckham wiped blood off of himself in the video but its source is unclear.

“You ain’t gonna get hurt,” Beckham said. “This is a safe place.”

The following day, Wright was found unresponsive in a cell and died hours later at a hospital, according to an autopsy report. Cailler’s lawsuit alleges Wright’s broken bones and bruises were a result of excessive use of force by jailers or another detainee.

Wright’s blood alcohol level was less than half the legal limit, according to the autopsy report. The only drugs found in her system were from prescriptions she was taking at the time.

Deaths Not Reported

When a detainee dies, jails are required to report the death to the State Health



COUNTY JAIL COVER-UP from A9

LIKE THOSE WHO DIED IN POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY, PEOPLE OFTEN ARRIVE IN JAILS WITH UNTREATED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS WORSENER BY INCARCERATION, ACCORDING TO A 2019 REPORT FROM THE PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE, A NONPROFIT THAT STUDIES MASS INCARCERATION.

Department’s jail division, which triggers a safety inspection. An inspection was not conducted after Wright died because her death wasn’t reported. Neither was Garrett’s, Given’s, Gage’s or Stewart’s.

“The (health) Department shall be notified no later than the next working day if any of the following incidents occur,” the law states. Five incidents are listed, the last of which is death.

State Rep. Dell Kerbs, R-Shawnee, said some argue that jails don’t need to report the death of a detainee who dies somewhere outside of a detention facility, such as a hospital. The language needs to be clarified, he said.

Dr. LaTrina Frazier, who runs the health department’s quality assurance and regulatory division, said in a July interview that the department was unaware of the unreported detainee deaths at Pottawatomie County jail. Inspectors typically investigate complaints within a year of the alleged violation, but not after. Failure to report is a violation of state law, but a difficult one to enforce because inspectors don’t know what they don’t know, she said.

The goal is educating and working with jails to improve conditions, Frazier said.

Consequences for violations are rare, placing the burden on lawyers to hold jails accountable, said Kelly, who represents Gage’s family.

“Jails don’t feel like they have to answer to anyone because there aren’t any impacts so why would they change anything?” Kelly said. “Somebody has to stand up to them or nothing is going to change.”

Health department employees found no violations during an annual health inspection on May 25, according to the latest inspection report. No violations have been found at the jail since at least 2018, according to health department records.

The jail’s oversight authority, that jail trust, is ultimately responsible for inmate safety and required to report deaths, Frazier said.

The Pottawatomie County Public Safety Center is one of 18 jails in the

state overseen by appointed trustees instead of elected county sheriffs and commissioners. Five men appointed by county commissioners oversee the jail and the \$7.6 million in public funds that last year paid for its operations. Although jail officials have not responded to a request for the names of the trustees, Oklahoma Watch was able to identify them through other sources and confirmed their identities at the trusts’ monthly meeting on Aug. 23.

Chairman Rick Stiles is an automotive paint supply dealer who developed a gun safety device. David Henry is a pastor at Higher Ground church. Bill Torbett served on the Shawnee city council in the 1980s. Bill Horacek is a retired Air Force pilot and horse rancher. Victor Lee is a former Shawnee police officer and state highway patrolman.

At the meeting, Stiles, Henry, Horacek and Lee refused to discuss the unreported deaths or respond to questions. Torbett was absent from the meeting and did not respond to calls or messages.

The Pottawatomie County Board of Commissioners relinquished its oversight of the jail to the trust in 2002, prompted by efforts to fund and build a new jail and lessen the county’s liability when the jail is sued.

The Married Couple That Runs the Jail

Eva Kopaddy, Given’s aunt, is suing the jail trust, jail employees, and police who arrested Given at a hospital where they had taken him for a mental health evaluation. While Given was waiting for a treatment bed to become available he began hallucinating and pushed an officer who arrested him for assaulting an officer and took him to jail where he was restrained by jailers.

For four years, the family fought for video footage showing what happened to Given in the jail’s care. The video of Given’s altercation was released in January after an appellate court judge affirmed a ruling in favor of The Frontier, which sued to obtain the video.

The jail has refused to produce similar records of the other six detainees who died. Their families are looking to the courts for help.

Director Rochelle Thompson refused to open the door when an Oklahoma Watch reporter showed up to the jail Aug. 7 to request public records related to the seven detainees who died and the trust. The jail accepts such requests only between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., a jail employee said, though its business hours were posted on the jail wall as 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

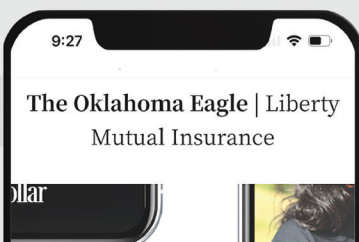
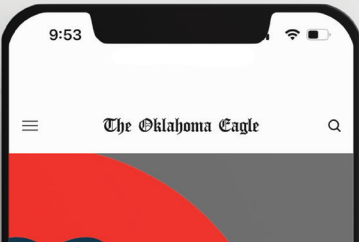
The Oklahoma Open Records Act says, “At least one person shall be available at all times to release records during the regular business hours of the public body.”

One week later, that sign was removed when Oklahoma Watch reporters returned before 1 p.m. to submit requests, which were accepted after Thompson consulted an attorney. The jail provided a handwritten receipt stating, “We will research and obtain legal advice for the records which meet open records law.”

After weeks of not answering Oklahoma Watch’s calls and messages, Thompson agreed to an interview, which she canceled 30 minutes before it was scheduled to begin. Thompson’s assistant explained that the cancellation was at the recommendation of the jail’s attorney. Jail employees refused to provide the name of the attorney and no one at the jail has responded to a recent open records request that would provide the attorney’s name.

Oklahoma Watch submitted eight requests for public information in August, including minutes from trustee meetings, booking information, incident reports, and video of the detainees. The jail has not responded to the requests.

Thompson began working at the jail as its assistant director in June 2009, according to her LinkedIn profile. Her husband, Capt. Bobby Thompson, COUNTY JAIL COVER-UP cont. A11





COUNTY JAIL COVER-UP *from A10*

was hired as the jail’s investigator four months later, according to his profile. Rochelle Thompson was promoted to jail director in May 2017. Second in command is her husband, who trains and supervises detention officers and conducts internal investigations when an inmate is injured or dies.

A sergeant who accompanied Given to the hospital after his fatal altercation with jailers told state investigators that Bobby Thompson directed her to exclude bruises and swelling on Given’s face from her written report.

State investigators also assisted the jail in its investigation of Gage’s beating but did not look into the other five deaths, according to State Bureau of Investigation spokesman Hunter McKee.

Panther, the county’s prosecutor who was elected in November after the deaths occurred, said in an emailed statement that his office will investigate the unreported jail deaths.

“Information provided to my office by Oklahoma Watch concerning multiple deaths at the Pottawatomie County Safety Center from 2018-2022 raises obvious concerns,” Panther wrote. “Due to potential litigation, I cannot comment on the facts of the alleged incidents. But I can affirm that the allegations are taken seriously and will be investigated by the appropriate law enforcement agencies.”

Along with the deaths of Morton and Salazar, the jail reported an inmate injury to the health department after Gage was beaten by his cellmate but did not report his death.

Dodging Responsibility with Medical Releases

Gage was arrested by Oklahoma City Police on Jan. 12, 2022, on a warrant for failing to appear in court. Police were called to a nursing home where Gage used to live and receive treatment for his disabilities and mental health conditions, said Kelly, the family’s attorney. According to Kelly and court records, Gage’s cellmate was arrested for felony assault of a police officer and was awaiting a competency hearing when the pair were housed together.

Jailers were unaware of the attack on Gage until his cellmate notified them using an intercom, the health department report states. Kelly said he plans to file a lawsuit against the jail soon.

While Gage was in the hospital, a county judge released him from detention at the jail’s request with the agreement Gage would appear at his next court date, court records show. Kelly said the request should have been denied because Gage was unconscious and unable to agree to anything.

The jail made the same request for Stewart while she was hospitalized, which was granted, according to court records.

Attorneys Kelly and Smolen said jails across the state use medical release bonds to deflect responsibility and medical costs for the sickest and most vulnerable detainees.

One Bad Night

Wright was a mother who owned an accounting business and spent weekends at Keystone Lake with family and friends. But video footage shows that’s not the person that law enforcement and jailers met the night Wright needed their help. They met someone they suspected drank too much and used drugs. Someone who threatened and disrespected law enforcement. Someone who was violent, paranoid and uncooperative.

State law requires police academies to provide prospective officers at least 600 hours of training. A minimum of four hours must focus on recognizing and managing people who may require mental health treatment or services. The state Department of Mental Health has trained nearly 2,900 officers in crisis intervention, a specialized 40-hour program that teaches officers to identify mental illness and substance abuse, and respond by taking people to treatment instead of jail whenever possible.

Wright was taken to jail.

Wright was kind and funny, Cailler said. She loved going to the casino with her daughter and volunteering at Tulsa’s annual arts, chili and bluegrass festivals.

“She was a good person,” Cailler said. “She had one bad night and she needed help. She didn’t deserve this. None of them did.”

Oklahoma Watch is part of the Mental Health Parity Collaborative, a group of newsrooms that are covering stories on mental health care access and inequities in the U.S. The partners on this project include The Carter

Center, The Center for Public Integrity, and newsrooms in select states across the country.

POLICE VIDEO SHOWS KELLIE WRIGHT’S first moments in the Pottawatomie County jail. Wright died less than 24 hours after this image was recorded at a nearby hospital with unexplained bruises and broken bones. PHOTO **POLICE VIDEO**

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Criminal Justice Reform Advocates PRESS STATE LEADERS TO CUT TIES WITH PRIVATE PRISONS

By KEATON ROSS, NonDOC | **ELIMINATING PRIVATE PRISONS** *from AI*

Assaults against prisoners and staff inside Davis, which houses hundreds of high-risk offenders who are gang-affiliated or have been convicted of violent offenses, have spiked in recent years.

Change is coming to a southeast Oklahoma private prison plagued with violence and staffing shortages, but advocates for corrections staff and prisoners say further efforts are needed to improve conditions.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections will take control of the Davis Correctional Facility, a medium-to-maximum security prison in Holdenville, on Oct. 1. CoreCivic, a Tennessee-based private corrections company, has owned and operated the prison since it opened in 1996. The state pays CoreCivic \$55 per day for medium-security prisoners and \$68 per day for prisoners in maximum-security and behavior-modification units.

Corrections officers, medical personnel and other Davis staff will retain their salaries and start receiving state benefits, corrections department spokesperson Kay Thompson said. The Lawton Correctional Facility, owned and operated by The GEO Group, will remain as the state's only private prison after the changeover.

"By taking over operations at DCF, we can more efficiently and effectively care for the men incarcerated there," Department of Corrections Director Stephen Harpe said in a written statement. "We are changing lives in our facilities daily and want to continue to offer the same high standard of professionalism and respect to all Oklahoma inmates."

Assaults against prisoners and staff inside Davis, which houses hundreds of high-risk offenders who are gang-affiliated or have been convicted of violent offenses, have spiked in recent years.

On July 31, 2022, Davis prisoner Gregory Thompson fatally stabbed 61-year-old corrections officer Alan Jay Hershberger. An Oklahoma Watch investigation published weeks after Hershberger's death found that stabbings at the facility more than tripled from 2021 to 2022.

In late February, a prisoner fatally attacked another man housed at the facility with a homemade weapon. Another stabbing in mid-August prompted a lockdown and hospitalization of a prisoner.

Asked if the state takeover of Davis is related to the uptick in violence, Thompson said CoreCivic has been a good partner over the years but the agency believes it has the resources to better run and manage the facility. She said the corrections department has plans to establish new programs, possibly for job training or mental health, after an evaluation period.

"Everything has a season, and it's time to move on from private facilities," Thompson said.

Faced with a soaring prison population in the mid-1990s, Oklahoma officials turned to private companies to relieve overcrowding in state facilities. By early 2018, more than a third of the state's male prison population was housed in a for-profit facility.

Criminal justice reform advocates have long pressed state leaders to cut ties with private prisons, raising concerns about conditions inside the facilities and the profit motive of the companies who run them. A Department of Justice investigation into federal private prisons released in 2016 found that the facilities tended to be more violent, less secure and not as effective in reforming prisoners as government-run facilities.

John Carl, a criminology professor at the University of Oklahoma who studies the U.S. prison system, told Oklahoma Watch in 2020 that private prisons tend to restrict prisoner movement and offer fewer programs than state or federally-run facilities.

"The easiest thing to do when managing a prison is to just keep it locked down all the time," Carl said. "But eventually these people get out and they're hot and they get into fights."

Criminal justice reforms, most notably the voter-approved enactment of State Question 780 that reclassified several drug and property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, have

helped Oklahoma lower its prison population and reduce its reliance on private facilities. The state vacated the Cimarron Correctional Facility in Cushing in September 2020, citing decreased need for medium-security prison beds.

Emily Shelton, founder of the Oklahoma prisoner advocacy group Hooked on Justice, said the men housed at Davis and their loved ones should benefit from cheaper state rates for commissary items and phone calls. She said the transition also marks a win for justice reform advocates who have rallied against the privatization of prisons and jails for decades.

But implementing a culture change could prove difficult, said Shelton, whose son was previously incarcerated at Davis.

"At the end of the day, we still have the gang members in the prison," she said. "All these deaths and overdoses, how drugs are coming in, none of that is going to change under DOC."

Bobby Cleveland, a former state lawmaker and executive director of the Oklahoma Corrections Professionals group, said he's concerned an expedited transition at Davis could further stress a prison system struggling to recruit and retain corrections officers.

Department of Corrections budget documents show the agency employed 1,277 state correctional officers as of April 30, down from 1,501 in March 2021. The Davis Correctional Facility operated at about 70% of its promised staffing level throughout 2021, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

"Right now we're robbing Peter to pay Paul," Cleveland said. "We take four officers out of one prison and send them to another one for a week or two to try and solve that. Well, that prison is now down. It's a train wreck."

State Rep. Justin Humphrey, a Republican from Lane who chairs the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee, said he doesn't believe the state has received good service from private corrections companies and supports the effort to phase out for-profit prisons. But the former probation officer said he's concerned corrections officials aren't giving themselves enough time to evaluate the prison's operations and condition and ensure a smooth transition.

He cited the recent state takeover of the Great Plains Correctional Facility, a former federal private prison that began housing Oklahoma prisoners in mid-May, as a cautionary tale.

"They had a lot of physical problems with the facility with things like doors and electric and phones," Humphrey said. "When you move that quick, you also can have issues with food service and staffing. There are lots of issues we don't have worked out of that yet, so I have concerns about jumping onto another facility."

In a written statement, the Department of Corrections said operations at Davis will remain consistent with current CoreCivic practices immediately after the takeover.

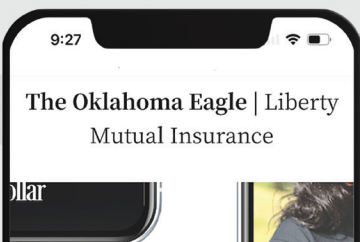
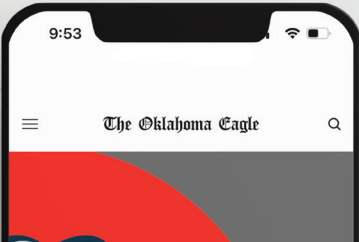
Thompson, the corrections department spokesperson, said the agency is weighing a similar takeover of the Lawton Correctional Facility. Per the agreement inked between the agency and the GEO Group in June, the state could opt to purchase the 2,700-bed facility outright or terminate the contract altogether with at least 180 days' notice. The Lawton prison, which houses about 12% of Oklahoma's prison population, has its own violent history. On Aug. 16, a prisoner was airlifted to a hospital after a fight broke out. Four prisoners were taken to the hospital in mid-May after a large-scale fight broke out, local news station KSWO reported.

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HBCU OR PWI
There’s no one-size-fits-all answer. Instead, individual needs and aspirations, financial considerations, generational roots, or a desire to stay close to home (or move away!) play a significant role in where students apply — and where they end up. **A14**



These Are the Top Books Black Teachers Want This School Year



STUDENTS in deeper learning environments are excited about coming to school and engaged in the subjects they are learning. PHOTO **ALLISON SHELLEY/THE VERBATIM AGENCY FOR EDUIMAGES**

By **MAYA POTTIGER**, WORD IN BLACK

From “Pete the Cat” to “The Poet X,” these are the top books Black teachers are requesting at every grade level.

IT’S no secret that teachers spend a lot of their own coins on classroom supplies — sometimes racking up to thousands of dollars. So when it comes to more expensive items, like books, educators turn toward crowdsourced funds to help fill in their classroom bookshelves and make sure their libraries are curated, engaging, and reflect their students.

“My students have already begun to fall in love, with some already reading the majority of my library,” Mr. Joyner, a middle school teacher in New Jersey, wrote on his DonorsChoose project page looking to vary his offerings so students can connect to the stories on a personal level. For some students, their classroom or school library is the only place they can access reading materials. Out of the 97,568 public schools in the United States, 82,300 had school libraries in 2019, according to the American Library Association. That’s why it’s so important for teachers to have books in their classrooms. And, with the connectivity of a classroom, teachers are able to personalize the collections, making it more likely for students to find things that interest and engage them.

Here are the top books Black teachers are requesting for the 2023-2024 school year.

Top Requested Books by Elementary School Teachers

The elementary years are key for students to gain literacy skills. Third grade is often considered the make-or-break year, where students are no longer learning to read, but reading to learn.

So it’s really critical for students to have books they engage with and enjoy.

In her third-grade classroom in North Carolina, Ms. Pines knows that her students are in a “vital time” for reading, and is requesting books to stock her classroom library. Her list includes the “Pete the Cat” collection and “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” series.

“My plan is to fill our library with popular titles and series,” she wrote on the project page. “Having access to more chapter books will continue to grow their love of reading and build reading stamina. Having books [in] a series will allow them to continue reading books they love.”

Mrs. O’Keefe in Massachusetts is requesting the National Geographic Readers so her students can research specific animals and habitats as part of the project-based learning curriculum.

“With these materials, our students will be able to dive even deeper into animals and their habitats by researching and creating their own enclosures for animals to not only make sure they survive but thrive,” she wrote on the project page.

In New York, Ms. Lennon’s third- through fifth-grade students need books for independent reading time. She wants to bring them the popular “Fly Guy” series.

“What I most love about my students is their ability to recommend their favorite books to classmates,” Lennon wrote on the project page. “I often see them pause at a funny part of the book they are reading to show the page to the classmate next to them. Watching young readers giggle and point to a sentence warms my heart.”

Top Requested Books by Middle School Teachers

Students’ reading levels and interests are all over the place in middle school, meaning middle school teachers request series ranging from “Percy Jackson and the Olympians” to “The Elsewhere Chronicles” to sets of author Jerry Craft’s books, including “New Kid” and “Class Act.”

In Hillside, New Jersey, Mr. Joyner is the only English/Language Arts teacher at a brand new school, meaning he’s low on resources. He wants to make sure his classroom is stocked with books for students to not only have options, but ones that interest them.

“With these new book collections, my students will be able to choose from a variety of genres, characters and themes that will allow them to read independently and connect to them on a personal level,” he wrote on the project page.

Mrs. Jackson wants her sixth-graders in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to become life-long readers — even though she teaches math.

“Challenging scholars to read everyday in every class allows scholars to develop consistent, sustainable reading habits,” she wrote on the project page. “Inspiring a new generation of life-long readers will directly affect the ability of my scholars to become more proficient in mathematics.”

And Mrs. Hines wants to “cater to different interests and abilities, ensuring that all students can find something to read,” she wrote on the project page.

“Access to a wide range of books can motivate students to develop a love for reading, fostering a positive reading culture within the classroom,” she wrote.

Top Requested Books by High School Teachers

Around the country, high school teachers are facing problems getting their students to read. From not reading on grade level to “hating” reading to only having outdated books, these teachers are hoping that refreshed shelves catered to their students will make an impact.

In New Orleans, Mrs. Davis wants to help her 9th and 10th graders build confidence with their reading skills. She wants to expand their access to young adult literature that “engages and empowers them to be stronger readers, more critical thinkers, and more efficient communicators,” she wrote on the project page.

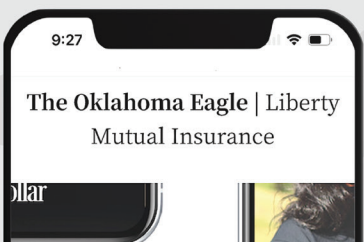
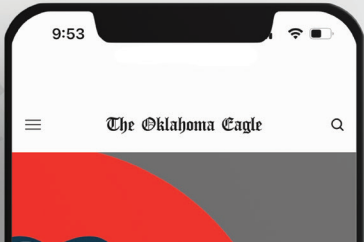
Further west in the state in Baton Rouge, Mrs. Givan says her students find books boring because they don’t reflect their realities.

“The stories that my students want to read are stories about people who look and behave like them,” she wrote on the project page. “Students want to read books with relatable characters. When we enjoy what we read, we comprehend the story better and increase fluency, increase comprehension and you increase achievement.”

For Mr. Griff in the Bronx, it’s a simple wish but more complex task: He wants to help students get lost in books. He’s making independent reading a requirement for his students, and he wants to make sure the classroom library has plenty of choices.

“By the time kids get to high school, students who enjoy reading for pleasure are a rarity, or so it seems,” he wrote on the project page. “I have shifted through the lists of classics, contemporaries, comics and requests and hope to restock my library once again. My current, former and future students will be able to check and borrow books from my class to expand their love of reading.”

MAYA POTTIGER is a data journalist for Word in Black. She was previously a data journalist for the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the University of Maryland, where she earned both her BA and Master of Journalism.



HBCU or PWI What Should High School Seniors Consider

By AZIAH SID, WORD IN BLACK

FALL brings college application season, and high school seniors are probably hearing the never-ending question: “Where are you applying?”

That, of course, brings up the age-old debate over what institution can best serve Black students: a PWI — Predominantly White Institution — or a HBCU — a Historically Black College or University.

There’s no one-size-fits-all answer. Instead, individual needs and aspirations, financial considerations, generational roots, or a desire to stay close to home (or move away!) play a significant role in where students apply — and where they end up.

Laniya Harris, college office coordinator at Uncommon Prep Charter High School in Brooklyn, serves as a liaison between her students and their higher education options. Part of her role is to host college admissions visits at the high school, as well as take students on campus tours in and out of state.

“I felt like when I was in college, I had more experience working with students, so I decided to come back to where I went to school,” Harris says. “I’m able to provide extra resources; I’m able to take them on small group trips.”

Harris, who gave up her own chance to go to a HBCU, attended the University of Albany. She returned to her high school to give students an opportunity to connect with the schools of their choice.

A Track Record of Success

Black high school seniors should consider how HBCUs are well-known for producing successful Black graduates. As a 2022 Proclamation on National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week from the White House stated, “HBCUs have produced 40 percent of all Black engineers and 50 percent of all Black lawyers in America. Seventy percent of Black doctors in our country attended an HBCU, and 80 percent of Black judges are alumni of these schools.”

According to a working paper published in May by the National Bureau of Economic Research, “HBCUs punch significantly above their weight, especially considering their significant lack of resources.” The paper notes that when compared to similar schools, HBCUs have higher graduation rates for Black students than PWIs.

The paper also cites that “data from the National Survey of Black Americans found that Black students who attended a historically Black institution scored more highly on self-esteem and Black identity.”

Following the Money

“Coming to college, the biggest thing was the price,” says Destin Branch-el, a freshman at SUNY Brockport and a student-athlete pursuing a major in sports management.

Unlike the traditional college process for some students, schools were recruiting him just as much as he was looking at them.

“My college process, I was very confused,” Branch-el says. “There’s so much things you have to look at like the football team, how far is it from home, what majors they have, and do I want to study the majors?”

“I was lost because this isn’t really the environment that I’m used to,” Branch-el says. “If a HBCU did come out and contact me, I would be more comfortable going to a HBCU. But college options are limited, so I chose what was best for me.”

An opportunity to pursue his passions while receiving an affordable education was definitely a deal breaker.

“Somebody going to college — a lot of people’s goal is to not pay. I’m not going to get into specifics on how much I pay, but it’s not nearly as much as what other people pay,” he says.

Anysa Dormoy, a freshman at the University of Albany, says she gave up her Spelman College acceptance because her mom didn’t want to take on such a heavy debt.

“I’m studying to be in the medical field, so I have a lot of years in school to pay for,” Dormoy tells Word In Black. “The best option for us was to go to the school that offered me the most money for my bachelor’s, and follow up elsewhere.”

For the 2021-2022 academic year, the average total cost of attending an HBCU was \$26,138 to \$29,990 for on-campus students. Tuition and fees make up the majority of that cost, ranging from \$11,391 for in-state students to \$15,262 for out-of-state students.

Seventy-two percent of Black students take on debt as they seek their degrees, as opposed to 56% of their white peers. While the number of Black students enrolled in college has increased over the last few decades, African-American enrollment at the nation’s most elite colleges — often toting the biggest price tags — has remained mostly the same. In March 2022, the Biden Administration announced a breakdown of funding that would be awarded to HBCUs under the American Rescue Plan. Under the plan, HBCUs received more than \$2.7

“HBCUs have produced 40 percent of all Black engineers and 50 percent of all Black lawyers in America. Seventy percent of Black doctors in our country attended an HBCU, and 80 percent of Black judges are alumni of these schools.”

2022 PROCLAMATION ON NATIONAL HISTORICALLY
BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WEEK,
White House, United States

billion in federal funding.

What’s the Experience?

“At first I wanted to go to a school that wasn’t far, and a PWI,” Tiara Branch, 17, a freshman screenwriting and animation major at Morgan State University tells Word In Black. That changed when she began reflecting on how much she loves being around Black folks.

“I don’t think I would’ve been fully comfortable with it,” she says of attending a PWI. Plus, “Morgan has my major.”

Ultimately, a HBCU may be a great experience for some Black students to find community support as well as academic excellence, while others may prefer attending a PWI.

The bottom line? It’s a personal choice, and visiting campuses can help get a feel for the right fit.

“I originally wanted to go to a PWI because I was raised in a Black community so every school I went to it was always mainly Black people,” Branch says. But, at an HBCU, “they focus on Black people, Black film, Black experiences, and I don’t think I can get that at a PWI, especially when it comes to film.”

PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



Tulsans
Recognized
And
Highlighted
At National
Association
Of Black
Journalists'
Convention,
Aug. 2-6

Victor Luckerson, noted journalist and author of “Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa’s Greenwood District, America’s Black Wall Street,” provided an overview and excerpts from his book at the National Association of Black Journalists national conference in Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 2-6. The workshop title was “The Spirit and Fire of Greenwood: Reenactment of the Legacy of Black Churches and 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.”

The pages of the book came alive with living history dramatizations by Rebecca Marks-Jimerson. Additionally, Dr. Jerry Goodwin shared information from his recent doctoral research, “Rising from the Ashes: A Transformative, Narrative Analysis How a Faith-Based Community Survived an Existential Crisis, 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.”

Marks-Jimerson is in community engagement with the Tulsa County Sheriff’s Office and an adjunct faculty and curriculum developer at Southern Nazarene University, and Goodwin is a college professor in journalism and mass communication at Tulsa Community College. The trio received rave reviews during the discussion following the presentation.

Luckerson’s book is online at Amazon and locally at Barnes and Noble, Fulton Street Books and Coffee, and Magic City Books. To schedule a presentation, contact Dr. Jerry Goodwin at drjerrygoodwin01@gmail.com or (918) 584-4414.

By **DR. JERRY GOODWIN**



LEFT TO RIGHT **VICTOR LUCKERSON**, author of “Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa’s Greenwood District, America’s Black Wall Street,” **ANGELA WINBURN**, **REBECCA MARKS-JIMERSON** AND **DR. JERRY GOODWIN**. PHOTOS PROVIDED

Annual Eddie Faye Gates
Program To Showcase Oral
History Collection Process

The annual Eddie Faye Gates will feature noted speakers on the topic of conducting oral history interviews. The program honors the noted author, historian, and educator whose career was highlighted by her collection of oral histories of survivors and descendants of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and other noted Tulsans. Gilcrease Museum and its Helmerich Center for American Research will host the workshop on Sept. 26 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. The free workshop, which will provide refreshments, requires registration at <https://my.gilcrease.org/28342>.

The title of the workshop is “Capturing the Past: An Oral History Workshop with Sarah Milligan and Dr. Autumn Brown.” According to Gilcrease Museum, the program will review the work of Gates “as a model for documenting community history and provide an overview of oral history project planning, interview techniques, recording equipment, and address

topics of ethics and archival considerations.” Milligan and Brown will also emphasize “why capturing the living past through oral history is important today and (offering) best practices for producing (one’s) own oral histories.”

Milligan is the Hyde Family Endowed Professor and oversees the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at Oklahoma State University. Brown is an assistant professor with the OOHHP. Both presenters have extensive experience in oral history research.

The address for the Helmerich Center is 1400 N. Gilcrease Museum Rd. You are directed to enter at Newton Street and park in the Brannin Lot on the south side of Newton while construction of the new museum building is being completed.

For more information, contact (918) 631-6449 or jana-gowan@utulsa.edu.

By **DR. JERRY GOODWIN**



ROBERT FAIRCHILD AND EDDIE FAYE GATES seated on a porch. PHOTO COURTESY OF GILCREASE MUSEUM, 4327.10604

Ball Recognized As The Only
African American Female
Certified Financial Planner
In Oklahoma

Jasmine Renae Ball has received the distinction by the Certified Financial Planner Board Center for Financial Planning (CFP Board) in Washington, D. C., as the only African American female to be registered as a certified financial planner (CFP) in the state. According to the CFP Board, Ball attained her certification in March 2022. Prior to receiving her CFP qualifications, she distinguished herself by completing the requirements for eight different licenses issued by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), two federal securities licenses, and two additional designations, including Certified Retirement Counselor (CRC) and Accredited Behavioral Financial Professional (ABFP).

A native of California, Ball opened her business, Bamboo Financial Partners, in Tulsa in 2021. She has 11 years experience providing monetary and investment counseling. She said she selected the name of her company because the bamboo plant spends years building its

foundation and she wants to help give her clients, who she calls her partners, the proper tools and support to grow a healthy relationship with their finances.

Her goal is to help people by “making someone’s life better.” She has started not only by helping individuals, but she is also proud of her efforts by contributing to a host of programs in the Tulsa community. Within a year, she has quadrupled her office size and increased her donations to local non-profits.

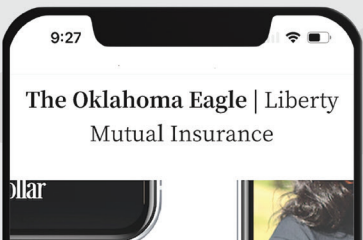
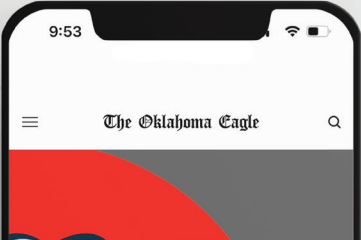
As the first member in her family to attend college, she is a graduate of the University of Southern California with a master’s degree in social work and Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn., where she obtained two bachelor’s degrees each in education and psychology with a minor in philosophy.

For more information or to contact Ball, you can contact her at (918) 324-2625 or jasmine@bamboofinancialpartners.com.

By **DR. JERRY GOODWIN**



JASMINE RENAE BALL. PHOTO COURTESY



THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE CHURCH DIRECTORY



The Oklahoma Eagle publishes news and announcements for churches currently listed in *The Oklahoma Eagle's* Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124

Church Of The Living God

1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK
(918) 584-3206

Minister RJ Smith

Sunday school - 9:30am
Sunday Worship - 10:45am
Monday Worship - 6:00pm
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1962 N. Sheridan Rd.
(918) 834-4747

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

Sunday School
10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.

Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.
For Transportation (918) 402-6027

Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriott 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK
(918) 230-3022

Pastors Wesley & Alfie Gray would like to invite you to come and experience the Word of God in action this Sunday! God has a word for you, He Guarantee's it! You'll be glad you did!!!

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GTOMi

Gospel Tabernacle Outreach Ministries, Inc.
Traveling Outreach Ministries

609 E. Zion Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Elder Julius W. Bland
Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882

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MOHAWK FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

Sunday School
9:30 a.m.

Sunday Morning
Worship 11 a.m.

Bible Study
Wednesday
7 p.m.



Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr.
Pastor

Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North
(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School
9:00 a.m.

Church Services
11:00 a.m.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library
1520 N Hartford Ave.
Tulsa OK 74106
(918) 409-4899

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p

"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

123 E. 59th St. North
Ph: (918) 425-2077

Pastor Rick Bruner

Sabbath School (Saturday)
9:30-10:45 a.m.
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal
Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

3101 N. M.L. King Jr. Blvd.
Tulsa OK
(918) 625-2374

Sunday School - 10 am

Sunday Morning
Worship - 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.

P: 918-587-1428
F: 918-587-0642

vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday
Church School
8:30 am

Worship Service
10:00 am

Wednesday
Bible Study
6:00 pm



Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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Sunday School - 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship - 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting - 6:30 p.m.
Bible Study - Noon & 7:00 p.m.

1414 N. Greenwood Ave.

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Senior Minister

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Sunday School
9:40 a.m.

Sunday TV
Worship
11:00 a.m.

KTUL Channel 8



TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH

821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021

REV. TWAN T. JONES

Sunday School
9:45 a.m.

Sunday Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.

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2247 N. Peoria
Tulsa, Okla. 74106
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Warren Blakney, Minister

Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

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19364 S. S. Mingo Road.
Bixby, 74008
Phone: (918) 366-8870

Rev. Robert Givens

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

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Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.

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Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

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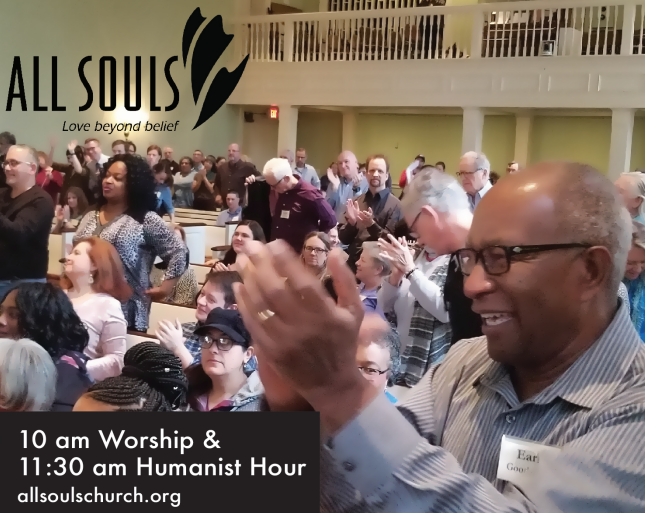
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419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Office:

918-584-0510

Fax:

918-584-1958

Prayer Line:

918-584-PRAY

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9:30 a.m.

Morning

Worship 10:45

Wednesday

Bible Study

Noon and 7:00



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Fax: (918) 836-6833



Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis,

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5:30 p.m. Support Groups
6:30 p.m. Community Dinner
7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Sunday Worship
Church School
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Worship
11:00 a.m.

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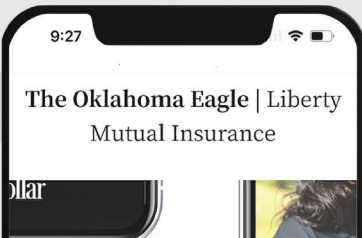
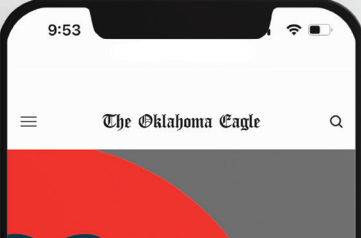
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