The Oklahoma Eagle

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AP African American Studies Course Set To Roll Out Nationwide

By JOHN NEAL & GARY LEE, A2

AP HISTORY

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BLACK HISTORY SATURDAYS: TULSA'S BLACK COMMUNITY RECLAIMS ITS LEGACY

Tulsans come together for one day a month, for lectures and discussions in various aspects of Tulsa, U.S., and international Black History. **A3**

HISTORY SETS THE CONTEXT FOR THE PRESENT

Black Tulsans have largely shouldered the burden of uncovering history, demanding the excavation of mass graves and accountability. **A5**

PHOTOS **ADOBE IMAGES**

OKLAHOMA — **The Advanced Placement African American Studies course**, first tested in a pilot program at **McLain High School of Science and Technology** in north Tulsa, will be launched in high schools nationwide in the upcoming 2024-25 school year.

AP History from A1

With leadership and contributions from Black authors, scholars, and teachers, the College Board developed this college-level Advanced Placement program to give U.S. high school students a solid enough grounding in African American history and culture to prepare them for deeper learning in the subject matter as they pursue higher education.

Several Oklahoma educators who have helped shape the curriculum for the course praised the project as a vital opportunity in secondary school education that every eligible student in Tulsa, statewide and nationwide, should take advantage of and enroll into the program. McLain High school teacher Darren Williams and University of Oklahoma Associate Professor Karlos K. Hill gave the course ringing endorsements in interviews with The Oklahoma Eagle. Williams, who has helped the College Board develop the course and teaches it at McLain, says that the curriculum should be bolstered in at least two key areas: music and religion.

And yet, the course content faces continued opposition from conservative idealogues and some state educational institutions.

The College Board, responsible for most college admissions testing, unveiled the latest curriculum for the course in December 2023. High school students taking the African American history course and passing a test can receive college credit or bypass introductory college coursework. Over one million students test for Advanced Placement (AP) through the College Board annually, and the African American Studies pilot course has been wildly popular among students across the U.S.

Conservative politicians and right-of-center activists in Florida and other states have sought to derail or curtail the course's curriculum. Some opponents have placed heavy political pressure on the College Board to constrain the "liberal" content. Others have enacted legislation in dozens of states to censor its concepts and outlaw its teaching.

Curriculum

The course consists of "essential events, experiences, and individuals crucial to a study of African-American history and culture," according to the College Board. The College Board produced a 294-page "operational framework" and "represents more than three years of rigorous development by nearly 300 African American scholars, high school AP teachers, and experts within the AP program." Readers can access the document here (https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/ap-african-american-studies-course-framework.pdf).

The Oklahoma Eagle has excerpted several key themes described by the Board. They are as follows:

MIGRATION AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DIASPORA

Migration is a critical theme in African American Studies. The concept of "diaspora" describes the movement and dispersal of a group from their place of origin to various new locations. This concept holds Africa as the point of origin for the shared ancestry of diverse people of African descent.

INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITY

AP African American Studies examines the interplay of distinct categories of identity (such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, region, religion, and ability) with each other and within society. [T]he course emphasizes how identity categories operate together to shape individuals' experiences and perspectives.

CREATIVITY, EXPRESSION, AND THE ARTS

AP African American Studies emphasizes creativity, expression, and the arts as a lens to understand the experiences and contributions of African American communities in the past and present. Students are encouraged to examine the context and audience of African American forms of expression, particularly their global influence and how they have changed over time.

RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

The themes of resistance and resilience spiral throughout the AP African American Studies course, [including] a range of methods African Americans have innovated to resist oppression and assert agency and authenticity - politically, economically, culturally, and artistically.

> African American history is world history; it's American history, and it has been excluded, written out, and left out.
>
> **Darren Williams**,
> McLain High school teacher

Tulsa Public Schools helped develop and refine the African American Studies course. By providing one of only 60 schools in the country to pilot the curriculum framework in the school year 2022-23. McLain High School was the only school to offer two separate classes taught by teachers Darren Williams and Shekinah Hall.

Williams and Hall lauded the program and its enthusiastic reception among students.

"African American history is world history; it's American history, and it has been excluded, written out, and left out," Williams told The Oklahoma Eagle. "For this (course) to come is a long time coming, and it's about time it happened." He added that the course is "a step towards educational justice."

In an interview with the news station CNN, Shekinah Hall added, "We have to know what's happening so we can do something better in the future."

Controversy

Lies and distortions of African American history and culture have well-known and well-documented antecedents. The modern attempt to derail its truthful articulation is evident in the opposition to the AP African Americans Studies project. Forces reacting to the initiative and other efforts to restrict topics such as race introduced no less than "137 education gag order bills in thirty-six states," as tabulated by Pen America in August 2022.

However, the AP African American Studies course was well on the way to a successful launch, having been tested in 60 schools nationwide in the 2022-23 school year. The system is currently offered in 700 school locations in 40 states. In Oklahoma, both McLain and Norman high schools offer the course.

AP History cont. A3

McLain Teachers Helped Develop Program

AP History from A2

The purpose of these pilot programs is to continue to develop the themes, refine the curriculum, and test the worthiness of concepts and author sources of information.

But behind the scenes, the state of Florida, in particular, was lobbying to restrict the use of certain concepts, scholarship, and authors. Having enacted restrictive educational legislation limiting Florida public schools' instruction, the state used those restrictions to pressure the College Board. Florida officials told the Board some of the course's materials "appear to include content that may not be permissible" and "could not be added…without revisions."

Although the College Board denied state influence, it issued what many critics deemed a watered-down version of the "course framework" in February 2023. Critics of the course in Florida claimed victory, saying they had successfully "removed 19 topics" from the course framework. Black and white history scholars nationwide cried foul. The College Board revised the framework and reissued it in December.

Updated course framework

The latest operational framework, released in December, made 70 changes from the February version, restoring many of the topics removed with "updates, new topics, and authors."

Williams, the McLain teacher, said that the part of the course about religion should be broadened. "Religion, particularly until the Civil Rights Movement, was a mainstay and anchor of the African American community," he explained. "That includes Christianity and Islam. It deserves a bigger place in the course than it currently plays."

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Williams feels that music should also be more significant in the course. "Music was -and is – the lifeblood of African American culture," he said. "Historically, there has been almost nothing that happened in the culture without music."

OU Associate Professor Hill, who again contributed to the course's development, is an author, educator, and chair of OU's Clara Luper Department of African and African American Studies. In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Hill said the course curriculum covers the critical aspects of African and African American history. While some critics note omissions in the curriculum, such as LGBT identity in Black culture history, Hill said, "No course includes everything. Creating a curriculum is a work in progress. That leaves the opportunity to revise or add subject matter later."

Hill noted that given the political climate in Oklahoma, it is unlikely that every high school in the state will initially embrace the course, but added, "All high schools in Oklahoma should offer this class."

In an attempt to jump over the restrictions Oklahoma officials have placed on the teaching of race, north Tulsa community advocate Kristi Williams is offering Tulsa students and adults a series of classes focusing on international, national, and local aspects of African American history. Williams is chair of the Greater Tulsa Area African American Affairs Commission and a descendant of Tulsa Race Massacre victims. The course, called "Black History Saturdays" was launched in 2023 and will start its second year in February. It will be offered on the first Saturday of every month for nine months. Those interested in the class can learn more here: https://blackhistorysaturdays23.carrd.co/.

An Oklahoma state law takes effect next school year, requiring each high school to offer a minimum of four advanced placement courses. The Oklahoma State Department of Education has posted this course among the Advanced Placement Course options. The College Board reports, "Students across the country are eager to take this course," with 13,000 taking it in the second pilot year.

Some Oklahoma high schools will likely follow Tulsa's example and offer this rich tapestry of African American history and culture to their curriculum.

JOHN NEAL, the author, is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city's planning pirector when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

GARY LEE is the managing editor and a key contributor for The Oklahoma Eagle, a stout advocate for the African American community and those that champion equity.

KRISTI WILLIAMS, founder, Black History Saturdays, shares a playful moment with two young pupils in a break between classes. PHOTO **KRISTI WILLIAMS**

Black History Saturdays: Tulsa's Black Community Reclaims Its Legacy

Black History Saturdays from A1

Dozens of students had just completed classes at Black History Saturdays (BHS) in north Tulsa, and several of them rose, one by one, to share what stood out in the lessons they had taken during the day.

"We discovered that when the Tulsa Race Massacre occurred, other states and countries were discouraged from helping the victims," one Black adolescent female told the other students and teachers. A second young Black student said she, too, was struck by a new revelation about the 1921 incident. The story goes that a white mob initiated the violence after Dick Rowland, a Black shoeshine attendant, flirted with Sara Page, a white female elevator operator.

"We knew that the two of them knew one another, "the student said. "But we learned that they knew one another quite well," she added. A third participant, an instructor, recounted that the rich history of Creek Freedman – dating back to well before Oklahoma became a state – provided a memorable lesson.

This poignant ritual, in which students recount the high points of the day's lessons, is a regular feature of a powerful educational experience in north Tulsa.

200

Following a successful first run of classes in 2023, the program is set to start its second-year season in February 2024. More than 200 adults and school kids have signed up – at least a third more than in the first round.

Black History Saturdays is a program that brings Tulsans together for one day a month for lectures and discussions in various aspects of Tulsa, U.S., and international Black History and culture.

Following a successful first run of classes in 2023, the program is set to start its second-year season in February 2024. More than 200 adults and school kids have signed up – at least a third more than in the first round.

UNDERSTANDING OUR ANCESTORS

One of the biggest attractions of Black History Saturdays is that at its core it is about a community – the Black people of Tulsa – reclaiming its past. "What we are doing is creating a space for our people to learn about the events that impacted the lives of those who came before us," said Williams.

"By understanding our ancestors, we can make better decisions. And eventually, we will become better ancestors."

She explained the program's mission more thoroughly. It is "to educate young people, their families, and the wider community towards a more honest and comprehensive understanding of Black history in Oklahoma and across the globe."

Some teachers who are engaging in BHS view it as a revival of Black community tradition rather than a new concept.

"Black people teaching Black people about our past is not a new concept," said Michael Carter, a BHS instructor and principal of the KIPP OKC (Oklahoma City) College Prep.

"It's part of our tradition, a part of Old School Black community culture. But we've lost it for various reasons. With Black History Saturdays, we're recapturing that tradition."

Williams concurs. She recalls that Richard Roundtree, a former social studies teacher at Memorial High School, offered her and other students lessons in Black history that have stayed with her over the years.

"He taught that our legacy did not begin with slavery and so many other things," she explained. "I have never met a teacher more excited about teaching Black history," she added. "He's a big part of the inspiration for Black History Saturdays."

Black History Saturdays cont. A6

Zelia Page Breaux: Musician and Educator

By **Hannah D. Atkins,** The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture

Zelia Breaux, a renowned musician and educator, was born to Inman Edward and Zelia Ball Page in 1880 at Jefferson City, Missouri. Her father was principal of the Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City from 1888 to 1898. Zelia Page attained a bachelor's degree in music from Lincoln. On May 1, 1898, Inman Page became president of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University) in Langston and moved his family to Oklahoma Territory. He hired his daughter, Zelia, as a teacher of piano and instrumental music. She established and developed the music department. On December 6, 1905, she married Armogen Breaux. The couple had one son, Enimen, who became a vice president at Langston University.

The Oklahoma public schools were segregated in 1918 when she left Langston and accepted the position of supervisor of music for the African American schools in Oklahoma City. As head of the music department at Douglass High School, she placed a music teacher in each African American grade school in the system. In addition, she organized the Oklahoma City Community Band, which was composed of many of her former Douglass students.

The Douglass High School band, which she organized in 1923 with twenty-six participants, became one of the most outstanding in the United States. Appearing all over the nation, the band influenced both local and national musicians such as Duke Ellington, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Sherman Sneed, Edward and Charlie Christian, and Jimmy Rushing. In 1933 Breaux took the Douglass band to the Chicago World's Fair musical festivities, and they performed for a national radio broadcast while there. In 1915 she had bought a controlling interest in the Aldridge Theater on Northeast Second Street, and it became the main location for performances of high school operettas as well as prestigious traveling shows.

During her tenure at Douglass High School Breaux organized a twenty-four-voice chorus, an eighteen-piece symphony orchestra, and several boys' and girls' glee clubs. In 1932 she organized May Day celebrations, during which the Douglass band would play as the children wrapped the Maypole. In 1936 she took the Douglass band, which had grown immensely since 1923, to the Texas Centennial celebration in Dallas. In 1937 she started the Black State Band Festival, which began with seven participating bands and grew to eighteen.

In 1939 Breaux received a master's degree in music education from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She retired from Douglass High School in 1948. Zelia Breaux died in Guthrie on October 31, 1956, at the age of seventy-six. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Oklahoma Bandmasters Association Hall of Fame on July 25, 1991.

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ZELIA BREAUX, (18429, Elwyn Welch Collection, OHS).

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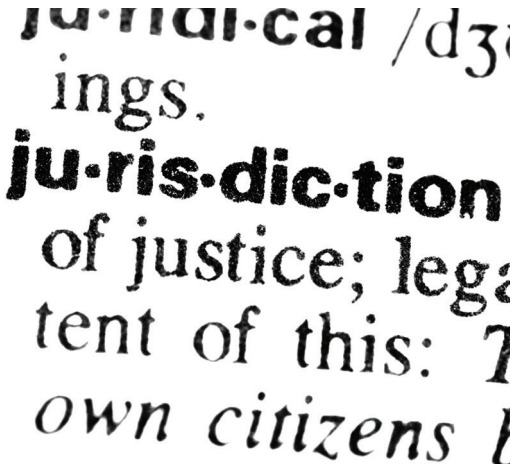

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COMMENTARY

History Sets The Context For The Present

History, represented fully, is a vivid reminder of our moral journey. In any form, when objectively recorded and shared, history considers not the perceptions of those who will later learn about the acts of either the victor or vanquished, enslaver or enslaved, moral or immoral. **Its [history's] purpose is to simply record and inform.** How we confront history, the complete scope of our shared experiences, reveals an exact measure of our willingness to ignore the impact of our transgressions, moral challenges, faith and accountability, as well as our commitment to learn from the past. **'What's past is prologue'** William Shakespeare's Antonio, of "The Tempest," in Act 2, Scene 1 of the memorable work, suggested that his intended acts of violence against the characters Alonso and Gonzalo were a natural progression of past events, destined. Antonio's explanation of how the moment came to pass was not one rooted in remorse, shame or fear of retribution, but affectively absolves him of personal accountability. Prospero's brother, Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan, places himself beneath moral judgement, as if history has somehow taken control of his future. History, from Antonio's shared perspective, is the master of fate, denying all men the ability to shape and guide their future. Antonio could not be held to account for murder or affected suffering, as history was the culprit. History, the faceless and blameless principal, according to Antonio, serves as a scapegoat of sorts, whose ledger records all but leaves no man accountable. **'What is past is prologue', in contemporary speech, has taken on a sense of warning throughout the last centuries, a harbinger of suffering to come, should we fail to consider the past.** With this evolved interpretation, we may be inclined to believe that all persons are eager to examine history and gain sufficient insight so that we may correct a failed course. We may be inclined to believe that countries, regions and states would champion every effort of introspection, assessment and corrective measure. Oklahoma, by every objective measure, resisted all attempts to embrace the virtue of learning from its history. **A truth hidden in plain sight** Eighty-one years after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, a days-long violent assault against Black Tulsans, leaving hundreds of residents murdered upon public streets, the state finally adopted academic standards that included discussions about the slaughter of innocent Black men, women, and children. **Black Tulsans have largely shouldered the burden of uncovering history, demanding the excavation of mass graves and raising their voices in opposition to legislation intended to stifle comprehensive approaches to teaching history.** Local creatives and innovators have crafted solutions for Tulsa children and adults to learn about the full arc of Oklahoma's history, their rise above oppression and determination to learn from the past. **Kristi Williams**, chair of the Greater Tulsa Area African American Affairs Commission and a descendant of entrepreneurs who survived the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, launched **'Black History Saturdays'** earlier this year, introducing Tulsans to a series of classes devoted to the rich chapters of Oklahoma Black's history. 'What is past is prologue' has also fueled the efforts of Oklahoma educators like Shekinah Hall, of McLain High School, who earlier this year piloted an initial version of the College Board Advanced Placement African American Studies. **"Children, especially like Black boys and girls, and all the students that we have, they need to be taught that it's okay to be Black and it's okay to see that we're not … just enslaved, we're not just always going to be oppressed,"** Hall shared with EducationWeek. College Board's recent release of the updated AP African American Studies framework is another step forward for Oklahoma children. But as 'what is past is prologue', many Tulsans are prepared for further attempts to silence the voices of educators and parents who believe in the virtue of learning about and from our history. In the coming weeks, Oklahomans must ready themselves to ensure that progress continues, the intent of opposition is exposed, and that our children are adequately prepared for a well-informed future.

ROSS D. JOHNSON is the creative director and a contributor for The Oklahoma Eagle.

DR. ALICIA ODEWALE, Archeologist, a Black History Saturdays instructor, poses with three of her students. PHOTO **KRISTI WILLIAMS**

Black History Saturdays from A3

The dark, bloody history that Tulsa experienced during the 1921 Race Massacre and the successful attempts to cover up that event emphasizes how crucial it is for Black Tulsans to have a firm grounding in the historical events that shaped us, Williams added.

A Cadre of Experienced Teachers

The BHS classes are held the first Saturday of every month at the Edurec Youth and Family Fun Center, 5424 N. Madison Ave., in a predominantly Black sector of north Tulsa. There are around a dozen instructors, most of whom are professional teachers from Tulsa, Oklahoma City, or elsewhere in Oklahoma. Some, like Williams, are well-known figures in Tulsa's Black community. For instance, Tulsa Community College English professor Dewayne Dickens teaches ninth to 12th graders. City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper and Tri-City Collective founder and poet Quraysh Ali Lansana teach adults.

The subject matter ranges wide. The first few sessions are usually focuses on different aspects of the history of various African countries. As the school year unfolds, from the ongoing narrative of the mass graves of race massacre victims to the documentation of slavery in the U.S. and the Caribbean. Dr. Alicia Odewale, a nationally known archeologist, offers a class in archaeology via Zoom. This year an instructor will offer all students piano lessons.

As important as the subject matter of the classes is the vibe that Williams and the other leaders create. The classes are held in various rooms in the Edu Center. Lectures about Tulsa's tortured racial past ring out from one room. A talk about U.S. enslavers takes place in another. The atmosphere of Black people teaching Black students about the achievements and legacies of the forebearers makes for a palpable, positive aura.

Carter, the BHS instructor, said the popularity of the course buoyed him and other organizers.

"We learned that if you give people a platform and venue to share information about their past, people will come and partake in it," he explained in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. Carter says he and others are pursuing the possibility of offering Black History Saturdays in other cities.

Teaching People to Care About Black History

Black History Saturdays is the fruition of a dream that Williams harbored for years. Former chair of the Greater Tulsa Area African American Affairs Commission and a descendant of victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Williams has forged a career of advocating for the betterment of Black Tulsans.

"Of course, the objective of the course is to teach people Black history," Williams said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. "But my mission goes much further than that. I want to teach our people to care about Black history."

Williams created BHS in part as an act of defiance. She decided to launch the class after the GOP-dominated Oklahoma state legislature passed Oklahoma HB 1775 in 2021. The statute restricted how race and gender could be taught in Oklahoma's public schools. The state of Oklahoma, in HB 1775, banned teaching certain concepts around race and gender.

After the passage of HB 1775, teachers in Tulsa Public Schools and other school districts across Oklahoma began to self-censure their teachings. Many reported stepping back from classroom discussions on the themes of the history of Blacks for fear that students or parents would single them out and be criticized. Several teachers Williams initially asked to participate in BHS declined under worries that being part of the program would cost them their jobs.

"I had been thinking about organizing the classes for a long time," Williams said. "But the attempts to restrict what Black students should know about their past made it clear that something had to be done. We had to create a space to educate our people about our past.

Support From at Home and Afar

Many supporters, including educators in Tulsa and nationwide, parents, and students, have embraced Black History Saturdays wholeheartedly. National Geographic, an early supporter, is offering financial backing. The corporate giant General Mills and the social initiative 2892 Miles To Go (a National Geographic affiliate) are also among the sponsors. The funding, Williams says, goes to administrative costs, including paying teachers, providing meals, and administrative work.

BHS has also garnered media attention from across the U.S. National Public Radio (NPR), the OWN network, and other national news outlets, which have featured the history series in broadcasts.

Many adult students engaged with BHS are ecstatic about the classes.

Peggy Marbury, a north Tulsa grandmother, is one. Marbury hailed the course as "an incredible wealth of information about Black people and our culture."

"The most important thing I have learned is how many things I did not know about Black history."

Margaret Love, a retired teacher at Langston University, is another loyal BHS student. For her, one standout feature in the classes was the lesson about Black inventors, from George Washington Carver (inventor of the cotton gin and other tools) to Benjamin Banneker (who created an effective system of clocks.

"Black people have invented so many things that have been taken away from us," she told The Oklahoma Eagle.

For Carter, the instructor, that moment when students share the high points of the day's lessons is one of the most touching aspects of the Black History Saturdays experience. "It's kids teaching adults and vica versa, he said. "It's the community educating itself. It's very uplifting."

Tulsans interested in signing up for Black History Saturdays can do so here: https://blackhistorysaturdays23.carrd.co.

HB 1775

Oklahoma House Bill 1775 is a passed 2021 legislative bill in the U.S. state of Oklahoma that bans teaching certain concepts around race and gender. The bill is typically referred to as a ban on critical race theory.

GARY LEE is the managing editor and a key contributor for The Oklahoma Eagle, a stout advocate for the African American community and those that champion equity.

MIA QADRI, an Afghan refugee liaison hired by Tulsa Public Schools, stands ready to help fifth grade Afghan student Mohammed "Garis" Fáizy as he reads out loud to his classmates. PHOTO **LIONEL RAMOS/ OKLAHOMA WATCH**

Afghan Refugee Students Benefit from Generous Aid While Others Make Do

Refugee Students from A1

When fifth-grader Mohammed Fáizy walked into his Tulsa school, just months after fleeing Afghanistan, he didn't speak, read or write English.

He faced the prospect of learning the language while adjusting culturally and catching up on the core subjects of reading, writing, science and math.

Although government support of recent Afghan refugees is strong, refugee students from other countries face identical barriers without the same level of federal help.

Across Tulsa Public Schools, 261 Afghan children enrolled in Pre-K through 12th grades about the same time as Fáizy, and were thrust into the same challenge. More than 100 additional Afghan students enrolled in Putnam City, Edmond, Stillwater and Jenks Public Schools, state records show.

Federal policy changes since 2020 led to increased refugee arrivals, according to a June report by the Migration Policy Institute. State data shows that as of early November, about 40% of Oklahoma's 4,074 refugees supported with federal money over the last three years were school-aged children, mostly from Afghanistan.

261

Across Tulsa Public Schools, 261 Afghan children enrolled in Pre-K through 12th grades

But refugees arrived in Oklahoma from more than 20 countries in the past three years, and while schools have resources to help all refugee children, including specialized English Language Development teachers and books translated into various languages, there is federal money available to schools to help Afghans specifically, leaving students from countries such as Cuba, Haiti, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo without the same level of support.

Since 2020, the amount of money Oklahoma has received from the federal government for long-term refugee support services has increased by 3,142%. What used to be a funding pool of about $830,000 in 2020 grew to $26.8 million this year, state records show.

Of the $16 million awarded to nonprofit and state organizations for refugee support services, $1.3 million went to public school districts in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metros and Stillwater.

With few exceptions, that money is restricted to their Afghan students, forcing educators to spend creatively so they can help the most students without violating funding guidelines.

District officials hired additional English Language Development teachers and English-speaking Afghan refugees as family liaisons. They also funded summer school courses for students, training programs for teachers, family social events and field trips.

Toni Hill is a full-time English Language Development instructor at Tulsa's Patrick Henry Elementary alongside her colleague, Bethany Henretty, who was hired part-time in light of the recent increased number of English learning students. Together they support 100 children, including Fáizy, with in-class assistance on assignments, separate supplemental group classes and at-home tutoring.

Hill works with students in third through fifth grades on reading and writing skills. Henretty helps students in kindergarten through second grade develop very basic vocabulary and pronunciation. Both teachers said overcoming the language barrier early is essential to help students feel safe and like they are in an environment in which they can learn.

Hill said the first weeks and months children from Afghanistan were arriving at Patrick Henry were the most difficult.

"During that time, these students were coming in with a lot of trauma," Hill said, "We had students that were trying to run out the doors that were not understanding what we were trying to do, that we were friends and that

Refugee Students cont. A8

PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

Refugee Students from A7

we were here to protect them."

She said it's important to consider the students' perspectives when trying to teach them.

"If I was in a strange country and I'm sitting in a classroom and I'm hearing all these things and I have no idea what's being said, and I'm trying to communicate, wanting people to understand, I'd be frustrated too," Hill said.

To help Afghan students, Tulsa Public Schools hired eight Afghan refugees to facilitate communication among the district, schools, students and families.

Two of the refugees are navigators, who help with district-level communication to families. They translate things such as bus routes and any correspondence and documents sent home with students. The other six, known as liaisons, work inside schools and bridge understanding gaps between school staff and students.

Mia Qadri is the refugee liaison at Patrick Henry. Hired last March with federal money, he took the opportunity to use his English proficiency and experience as an educator in Afghanistan to help make life easier for the Afghan students in Tulsa.

Qadri follows a daily schedule, visiting four to five classrooms of various grade levels, and helps Afghan students with their assignments in real-time. He is also on call while on campus, just in case he is needed to help translate when students are being disciplined, or there is an emergency and non-English speaking family members need to be contacted.

He said most Afghan students received an education while living in their home country. The exceptions being some who lived in remote areas.

"Especially in south and southeastern Afghanistan, there were no schools," Qadri said. "If there were schools, they didn't have buildings, they were studying in tents."

He said Afghan students enrolled at Patrick Henry have made noticeable improvements in their English skills in the past year, and consequently improved in other core subjects such as science and math. One reason is the encouragement they get from their parents, who want their children to take advantage of the opportunity to get an education, he said.

"Most of the parents are not educated," Qadri said. "So they are happy their kids will be educated and will have a bright future."

Students such as Fáizy are on a path to that future, said Patrick Henry's principal Jene' Carpenter, during a short tour of some of the classrooms where Afghan students participated seamlessly alongside their peers.

Fáizy, who Carpenter said knew only a few English words when he enrolled in Patrick Henry, was reading aloud about how matter can change physically and chemically in Michele Fischer's fifth-grade class. All educational materials provided to refugee students, regardless of their country of origin, are in English. While the school's Afghan refugee liaison can help translate some classwork for Afghan students, most translations occur when teachers, counselors, nurses and other school staff need to communicate with parents about their children.

03

Educators at Stillwater Public Schools used federal money to hire three language-interpreting teacher assistants and pay E.L.

Hill and Henretty agreed that Qadri's help has been the most important element in ensuring the success of the Afghan children in the classroom. But of the 100 English learners at Patrick Henry, only 35 are from Afghanistan. The rest are from Latin American, African and Asian countries.

While the school has a robust curriculum to help students from places other than Afghanistan, Hill said, teachers don't have designated liaisons to help them communicate with students or their families. Instead, the English Language Development teachers use over-the-phone translation services, which are less reliable.

"We have a special curriculum through National Geographic that we utilize in the classroom to teach the basics of the English language," Hill said. "We get dictionaries and books translated in the languages Afghans speak, for example, but we have those same books translated into Spanish, Chinese and various other languages."

Educators at Stillwater Public Schools used federal money to hire three language-interpreting teacher assistants and pay E.L. Achieve, a consulting and curriculum company, for cultural training for teachers to help them build lesson plans that are suited to English learners from Afghanistan.

Stephanie Coca, the district's multilingual program coordinator, said the increased money was immensely helpful. The district has 25 Afghan students and an increasing number of students from Spanish-speaking countries, she said, and the training helps them all.

Professional development is helping teachers present subject matter in a way that acknowledges every student is learning each subject's jargon

"Science has a specific language: laboratories, beakers, the scientific method, all those things are new terms for everyone," Coca said. "It's looking at your lesson plan, at the language that you're teaching students, and helping them prepare to understand that language and practice it."

She is one of two educators undergoing the training now, but more teachers will get the training as Afghans age and enroll in their classes.

Coca said that while many Afghan students enrolled in Stillwater Public Schools in 2022, and the money to support them provided necessary resources, most refugee students enrolling in Stillwater Public Schools today are Venezuelan.

But the kind of help afforded to Fáizy and other Afghan students doesn't extend to them.

"Gosh," Coca said. "If I could do this for our Venezuelan families, for all of our new families, it'd be a game changer."

LIONEL RAMOS is a Report for America corps member who covers race and equity issues for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at 405-905-9953 or lramos@oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at @LionelRamos_.

AARON "AJ" JOHNSON, OASIS Fresh Foundation executive director PHOTO **BASIL CHILDERS**

"Material Breaches" & "Questionable Expenses."

OASIS FRESH FOUNDATION, TULSA, OK

Oasis from A1

Citing "material breaches" and questionable expenses, Tulsa County officials are asking Oasis Fresh Foundation to return more than 30 percent of the $500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding provided to the nonprofit organization to improve "food distribution resources, transportation and workforce training" in high-poverty areas.

"FROM THE RECORDS PROVIDED by Oasis, very little of the funds appear to have been spent in a manner remotely related to the funding mission," Assistant District Attorney Andrew Mihelich wrote in a letter to Oasis director Aaron "AJ" Johnson on Dec. 4.

The same day, the Tulsa County Board of Commissioners approved a "formal demand" for $156,911.85 as "remedy of these breaches."

Mihelich concluded his four-page letter with a request for Johnson to direct all future correspondence to the District Attorney's Office, noting that four "conditions for suspension and termination have been met."

In 2021, the Tulsa County Board of Commissioners approved a $1 million award of ARPA funds to Oasis Fresh Foundation, a nonprofit Johnson established and rebranded as Oasis Projects to support his for-profit Oasis Fresh Market at 1725 N. Peoria Ave. However, only the first $500,000 was provided to Oasis, and county officials have spent months requesting reports and documentation about how the public dollars have been used.

"Oasis was first awarded the contract with Tulsa County on November 2021 and began work immediately due to the need," Johnson wrote in an email to NonDoc on Dec. 11. "Fourteen months later, Oasis received additional guidelines with Tulsa County in January 2023 and was asked to sign it. As we work through what was disallowed under the contract we hope to be able to provide further documentation that will substantiate the costs. Costs that cannot be substantiated and remain disallowed will be paid back in full."

Mihelich's letter marks the third time this year Johnson has faced questions about his use of funds while running Tulsa nonprofits, and the demand for about $157,000 is the latest in a string of notable financial situations involving the charismatic pastor, who left Victory Christian Church's employment in April 2021 and assumed control of efforts to open a new grocery store in north Tulsa.

During this year's regular session, members of the Oklahoma Legislature nearly provided Johnson's nonprofit $30 million to build additional grocery stores, but lawmakers stopped short after tax documents revealed Johnson paid nonprofit money to his other for-profit company, DreamCo Solutions. Meanwhile, people listed as members of the Oasis Fresh Foundation board of directors stepped forward to say they had never attended a board meeting and that they were unaware of being listed on the organization's Form 990.

Concern that lawmakers might provide $30 million to the Oasis Fresh Foundation spurred several people to contact NonDoc about Johnson's tenure as executive director of the Tulsa Dream Center, a nonprofit founded by Victory Christian to support low-income families primarily in north Tulsa.

Among issues reported by whistleblowers to Victory Christian leaders in 2021 stood a small house on North Boulder Avenue that had been donated to TDC as a "dream home" for a family in need. While he was director of TDC, Johnson deeded the house to his DreamCo Solutions company, which took out a $32,500 mortgage on it within weeks of Johnson taking out a pair of separate mortgages to finance his nearly $600,000 new home in Bixby.

The difference between the other two mortgages and the Bixby home's sale price was close to the amount of the loan Johnson took out on the Boulder home.

Now, Tulsa County also wants Johnson to pay back ARPA funding for a myriad of questionable payments, including upgrades to a van the store purchased.

"Records indicate payments of $5,830.18, for installation of subwoofers, window tinting, smoked tail lights, and other amenities for a van purchased for the funding mission," Mihelich wrote. "These modifications are plainly unrelated to the funding mission, and an ineligible use of funds under the agreement."

Johnson denied using ARPA funds to modify the van in a statement sent to Deon Osborne of The Black Wall Street Times. In his Nov. 22 response letter to Tulsa County, he said the van transports people for food, services and workforce opportunities.

"The van was purchased to help residents get access to the services and organizations that support transforming north Tulsa that operate out of Oasis, all free of charge," Johnson wrote. "One out of six residents within north Tulsa's qualifies census tract have transportation, so it was purchased to remove one of the many barriers within north Tulsa."

Man in Johnson's letter to county: 'He did not help me'

Buried within Tulsa County's correspondence about Oasis' ARPA grant is an expense category called "Benevolence," which Johnson told analysts partially included "checks made to families in crisis."

In letters dated Sept. 29 and Nov. 22 to Program Management Group — which county officials contracted with to examine ARPA grant expenditures — Johnson and OASIS chief operating officer Charlie Love described how more than $6,900 of "Benevolence" funds were used.

"There are no invoices for these expenditures, however, all were for families experiencing a variety of crises from homelessness, to house fires," Johnson and Love wrote Nov. 22. "For example, one individual's sister was in a coma, and he had to assume responsibility for her four young children and didn't have suitable accommodation. He needed help to be able to pay a deposit for a bigger place to live so the children weren't taken into DHS custody."

That individual was Kshon Camp, a former store manager at Oasis Fresh Market who publicly criticized Johnson in a September article by Deon Osborne of The Black Wall Street Times. In late March, Camp's sister had a series of seizures and ended up on life support, which left Camp with the challenge of caring for his nieces and nephews while working morning shifts and night shifts at Oasis.

In a Dec. 11 interview with NonDoc, Camp called Johnson's claim that he helped him this spring after his sister's seizures "a bold-faced lie."

"That's all he does is lie. Any time you question anything from that man in reference to where money is going for that store, it's always, 'Let me get with my accountant, let me have them review, I will follow up with you, oh, I had no knowledge of that.' That is literally always that man's excuse for everything," Camp said. "That man did not do anything to help me housing-wise at all."

Soon after his sister became incapacitated when she had a pair of eight-minute seizures, Camp said he "started to get a little bit overwhelmed." He said he approached Johnson about taking "a few days off" to meet with DHS about the children and the Tulsa Housing Authority about the possibility of finding a larger home.

While Johnson had given him a $100 gift card for groceries, Camp said his bigger need was flexibility and understanding.

"I had one day off a week, which was supposed to be on Tuesdays, which was a truck day, and it was a 90 percent chance I would get called into work every Tuesday that I was supposed to be off," Camp said. "I had missed an order for the truck on a Tuesday, and I got called into work. He addressed me on that and put me on a final warning when all of this was happening, when I had never had any issues or mistakes. I had never been coached — no verbal or written warnings. Just straight to a final (warning). He kept asking me, 'Your head is just not in it right now,' and he was like, 'What do you need?' So I repeatedly, again, advised him, 'I just need a few days off work. Like, you have not listened to me. You have not accommodated for me. I need some time so I can get this all situated.'"

Camp said Johnson gave him one day off. After spending that entire day at DHS where he "barely got anything done," Camp said he decided to "call in" the next day at Oasis. At that point, Camp said Johnson became "really upset" and called him into his office when he returned to work.

"During that conversation, he had made the comment that he could no longer be empathetic to my situation with my sister, and that he couldn't accept any mistakes that were being made at work, and I basically needed to get my head in the game," Camp said, noting that Johnson suggested an unpaid week of family leave.

But Camp, who had worked in human resources during his U.S. Army service and also for DISH Network, said he requested to use paid time off as a full-time employee under the Family and Medical Leave Act. Camp said Johnson told him the leave would be unpaid, at which point Camp interviewed at a national retail outlet and took a new job in May.

"It made me feel horrible," Camp said.

It was not Camp's first time feeling that way while working for Johnson at Oasis. In September 2022, Camp started at the store part-time, eventually leaving his full-time, work-from-home position to join Johnson at what he considered an important community business.

Oasis Projects

Oasis Projects is a nonprofit organization funded by grants, donors, and investors.

- Utility + Rent Assistance
- Housing Application Assistance
- Job Placement & Workforce Development
- Financial Literacy
- Family and Children's Services
- Immunization Records
- On-Site Vaccines
- Free Legal Help
- Health Screenings
- Record Expungement
- Oasis Holiday Giveaways

> **"There are no invoices for these expenditures, however, all were for families experiencing a variety of crises from homelessness, to house fires.**
>
> **Writtten response to Program Management Group** from Aaron "AJ" Johnson, OASIS Fresh Foundation executive director and Charlie Love, chief operating officer.

Soon thereafter, however, Camp said promises about his hourly pay rate went unfulfilled, and he approached Johnson in December to say the difference between his $17.50-per-hour salary and the $19-per-hour salary he'd been promised left him "struggling" and unable to cover the cost of his vehicle registration.

"I really felt disrespected. I felt lied to. I still tried to stay loyal to the company and just work through it," Camp said. "But every time I followed up with him, his response was always, 'Let me get with the accountants. Let me have them review some numbers for me and see what increase I can give you,' and that never happened."

Camp said Johnson eventually gave him a $1,200 "Christmas bonus" so he could pay for his car tag.

"From that point, it was just like he felt I owed him something. That is how it came across, or how I perceived he would react and respond to me," Camp said.

Three months later, when Camp's sister became hospitalized and he assumed responsibility for her children, Camp said Johnson did little to help him, despite listing Camp's situation as the only specific example of using ARPA funding for "benevolence" in his letters to Tulsa County.

"I can tell you 100 percent, right-hand to God, that man helped me do absolutely nothing. I am still in the same two-bedroom townhouse that I was in when I started working for that company. And I did mention to him that, yes, DHS is involved, and

Oasis cont. A10

A Community In Need, *And A Solution In Peril*

Oasis from A9

yes, I do need to try to locate a bigger residence. But there was no support from Oasis Fresh Market, from Oasis Projects or Aaron Johnson in reference to that. The only thing that man did for me was help me get my tag in December 2022 after I came back to him frustrated about the fact that he didn't have my pay right and that I was still struggling and I needed to get my tag because I had gotten pulled over about it," Camp said. "Again, he didn't help me with any housing. He didn't help me with anything outside of giving me $100 in groceries. That was the only support that he provided outside of helping me get my tag, which was a 'Christmas bonus.'"

Camp said learning his story was referenced by Johnson as an example of Oasis "benevolence" made him "angry."

"In no way shape or form did he provide any support at all, and I'd come up there in person to tell you that. I'd say it in front of a judge if I had to," Camp said. "He did not help me with housing support or any other support outside of the $1,200 I received for my Christmas bonus."

Asked about Camp's comments, Johnson said by email Dec. 13 that Camp did receive "benevolence assistance" and that he was paid for all of his time off.

"In this entire journey, of trying to bring fresh and healthy food access to all, and additional resources in food deserts, maybe there are things that we could have been done better," Johnson said. "I am sorry and sincerely apologize to anyone that may have been hurt, and we are also so grateful for the thousands of people that have been helped. We are committed to being focused on what we are called to do and that's serving people. We have some of the best experts in the space leading us and know that we are better positioned to help families in need, especially in times, like today, where the needs are so great."

Consultant Marc Jones sees 'pain' in Oasis situation

One of those experts was Marc Jones, a former CEO of Homeland and a grocery consultant who did contract work for Oasis until May.

Mihelich, the assistant district attorney, questioned the use of ARPA funds to pay Jones' consulting fee in his letter to Oasis and Johnson.

"In total, you have spent approximately $145,000 of ARPA funds on Marc Jones. These expenses are not eligible for ARPA funding. The associated lack of documentation allowing taxpayers to see how their money is spent, and the lack of prior approval, are wholly unacceptable," Mihelich wrote.

According to his LinkedIn page, Jones focuses on advising clients in the grocery business and "improving food access and equity." When Johnson was seeking $30 million of ARPA funds from the Oklahoma Legislature to build four new Oasis Fresh Market locations, Jones attended meetings and presentations at the State Capitol.

In an interview with NonDoc on Dec. 11, Jones said he was "surprised" to see his fee included in the list of expenses Tulsa County deemed unallowable by Oasis. He said he did not originally know he was being paid with ARPA money.

"My understanding was Oasis had funding to cover my fees," Jones said. "My understanding and knowledge was that our agreement with Oasis had been reviewed and approved by their board of directors."

But after multiple people listed on the nonprofit's Form 990 as board members said they had never been to a meeting and did not know they were identified as part of Oasis Fresh Foundation's governance structure, Jones said his contract was ultimately approved once a real board was formed.

Jones said that while the initial scope of his work with Oasis Fresh Foundation was to address food insecurity, he and Johnson began to focus more on securing money from the Legislature to expand the grocery concept. When it became clear Johnson would not be awarded the money in May, Jones stopped working with Oasis.

In his demand letter, Mihelich particularly highlighted a trip to New Orleans that Johnson and Jones took together during which they paid for "several costly meals." Jones said his personal expenses on the trip — for a conference to learn about New Market Tax Credits — were limited.

"I think I only expensed three meals over the course of four days. There is no alcohol on any of them," Jones said of the trip. "And I think it averaged — like maybe I think it totaled to $120 — so $30 a day I guess is the lavish expense?" Jone said. "As a professional, I would want any of the folks that I work with — whether I'm an employer or consultant — to feel like travel isn't an opportunity to upgrade your lifestyle, and I certainly don't approach it that way."

OASIS FRESH MARKET, North Tulsa grocery store. PHOTO **FILE**

> People can't lose sight of the fact that there are hungry people and a food system that does not address everybody's needs, and it needs to be challenged or adjusted or improved... Regardless of what you think of individual players or individual grants or individual situations, it persists.
>
> **Marc Jones**, former CEO of Homeland and a grocery consultant

Jones also emphasized the need for a grocery store serving north Tulsa.

"To me, that's the pain of all of this," Jones said. "Regardless of individual situations or how different things were handled, the need is probably as desperate or more desperate as it ever was in terms of people being unable to afford basic groceries, communities not having access to fresh fruits and fresh vegetables — things that a lot of your readers will take for granted, that I often probably in my past had taken for granted being in the industry. And that problem unfortunately doesn't get solved either by giving food away or by hoping that it gets better. It gets solved by people actively trying to change things. So yeah, I hope none of this takes away from that effort."

Camp agreed that his community needs the access to groceries and services that Oasis aims to provide, but he called Johnson "a scam artist." Camp said he still has questions about how Johnson used "gift cards" at the store, which Mihelich also highlighted as a "material breech" of the ARPA contract in his letter.

"Accounting records indicate you have given away $30,000 in gift cards to Oasis, with no backup documentation submitted," Michelich wrote. "The county thus cannot determine their eligibility whether these funds were used for an eligible ARPA expense or even if the cards exist."

Camp said cards existed in the store's safe and would sometimes be used to cover groceries for customers whose totals at checkout were higher than the money they had. However, he said the origin and use of other cards were less clear.

"We would make 500 $50 gift cards, but none of those gift cards were ever actually paid for. They were just created as 'a guest purchased it online,' is how we would put those into the system," Camp said. "But I don't know where the money actually came from for those or if they were ever actually taken care of or not. I just know that I did those gift cards as 'online tenders' for him."

Camp said the cards were used for large store events, such as a Thanksgiving celebration. He said he has not been contacted by anyone from Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler's office about how Johnson handled the $500,000 in ARPA money.

"He won't have any documentation (for the gift cards)," Camp said. "If he gets any documentation submitted, it's going to be falsified documents, because I can 110 percent tell you that there was nothing that man did legit with those gift cards other than having me at the register creating those."

Camp said the questionable financial practices, internal conflict and "hostile work environment" he witnessed at Oasis Fresh Market were disappointing.

"I wouldn't be surprised if that store actually closed," Camp said. "I honestly feel like that would suck for north Tulsa, because I do believe the mission of the store is a solid mission. I believed in the mission. I wanted to make sure I could provide whatever help I could to the community from Oasis, but I don't believe in Aaron Johnson. I believe he is a manipulator. So like I said, I had to get out of there."

Jones reiterated his desire for people to separate their concerns about one grocery operator from the bigger social need for food access and equity.

"People can't lose sight of the fact that there are hungry people and a food system that does not address everybody's needs, and it needs to be challenged or adjusted or improved," Jones said. "Regardless of what you think of individual players or individual grants or individual situations, it persists."

WILLIAM W. SAVAGE III (TRES) has served as the editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in September 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and covered two sessions of the Oklahoma Legislature for eCapitol.net before working in health care for six years. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor. **BENNETT BRINKMAN** became NonDoc's education reporter in August 2022 after completing a reporting internship. He holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma and is originally from Edmond. Email story tips and ideas to bennett@nondoc.com.

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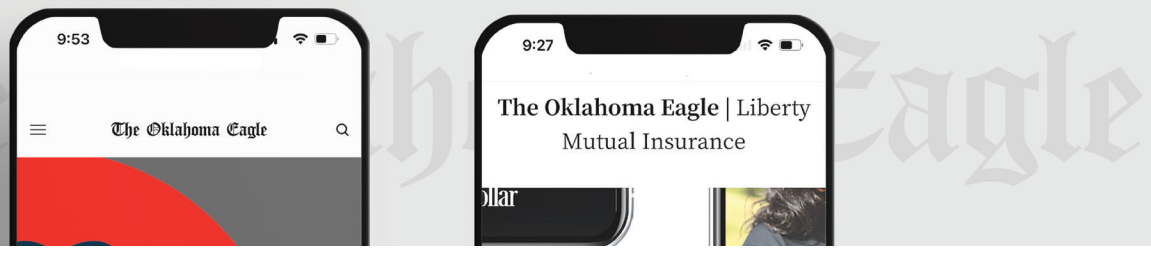
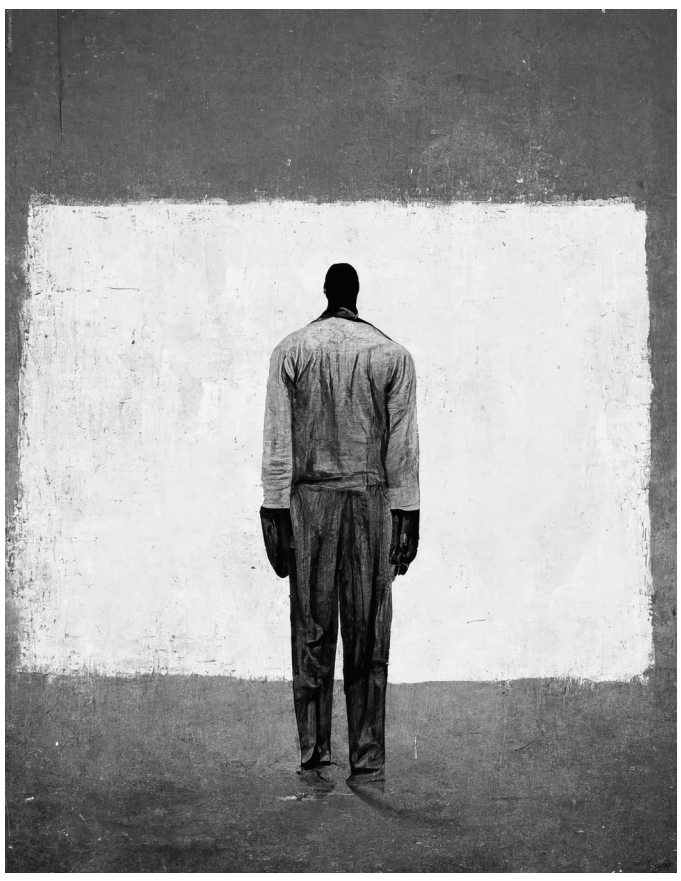


Critical Race Theory & The Educators' Dilema



PHOTOS **ADOBE IMAGES**

HB 1775 from A1

Two years after their lawsuit was filed, lawyers for a group of plaintiffs made arguments in federal court during a two-hour hearing today seeking an injunction of the state's purported ban on critical race theory, HB 1775, which they said has a "chilling effect" on educators because it is too vague.

Meanwhile, lawyers for some of the defendants — which include a variety of public bodies and officials — argued the law is sufficiently narrow in interpretation but could be challenged because of how it has been enforced.

Filed in October 2021 in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, the case has a lead plaintiff of OU's Black Emergency Response Team, a student organization that advocates for Black students on campus. The organization's members say they were harmed by the law because it allegedly prevents race-based training requirements in universities. Other plaintiffs include the Oklahoma chapter of the American Association of University Professors, the Oklahoma chapter of the NAACP, the American Indian Movement Indian Territory, an unnamed former Millwood High School student, Millwood High School teacher Anthony Crawford, and Edmond Memorial High School teacher Regan Killackey.

"As Oklahoma educators were reckoning with our nation and our state's past to build a more just future, Oklahoma legislators were seeking to eradicate all discussion of institutional racism and gender diversity in Oklahoma classrooms from K-12 to the university through broad, sweeping language that has left Oklahoma educators unsure of whether they can include any material that addresses race, sexual orientation or gender in the classroom," ACLU of Oklahoma legal director Megan Lambert told reporters after the hearing. "Therefore, we argue that House Bill 1775 is unconstitutionally vague (…) resulting in arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement against educators across the state."

Lambert, who is an attorney in the case, summarized the argument her team made in federal judge Charles Goodwin's courtroom Monday.

"We argue [HB 1775] is an overbroad restriction on academic freedom of university professors in violation of their First Amendment rights, and that it restricts students' access to critical perspectives and information in violation of their First Amendment right to receive information, and that it discriminates against Black and Indigenous students who no longer see themselves reflected in class curricula in violation of their 14th Amendment right to equal protection under the law," Lambert said.

Solicitor general: Alleged harms are 'overblown'

The lawsuit names the Oklahoma governor, attorney general, state superintendent of public instruction, State Board of Education, state regents for higher education, University of Oklahoma regents and Edmond Public Schools as defendants. Lawyers for EPS, the state and OU made arguments Monday in front of Goodwin.

Oklahoma Solicitor General Garry Gaskins — who represents the state of Oklahoma defendants — did most of the talking Monday while OU's lawyer argued that the university should not be a party in the case.

Gaskins argued the state's interpretation of the law has been narrow enough that an injunction on a facial reading of the law is not necessary. He also said a provision of the law stipulates that the Oklahoma academic standards, which do require discussion of race and gender in classrooms, take precedent over HB 1775.

"It's clear from the Oklahoma academic standards that teachers can discuss [race and gender topics]," Gaskins said during the hearing. "A lot of the alleged harms that the plaintiffs have asserted are overblown."

While Gaskins argued against enjoining the law based only on its language, he did seem to suggest that either Tulsa Public Schools or Mustang Public Schools might have reason to challenge the law as it has been enforced.

> "People can't lose sight of the fact that there are hungry people and a food system that does not address everybody's needs, and it needs to be challenged or adjusted or improved... Regardless of what you think of individual players or individual grants or individual situations, it persists.
>
> **Marc Jones**, former CEO of Homeland and a grocery consultant

"We don't have anyone here from Tulsa Public Schools to challenge the law, but if they were to make an as-applied challenge, I think they would win," Gaskins said.

Both TPS and MPS saw their accreditation statuses downgraded in July 2022 over supposed of violations of HB 1775, which prohibits "mandatory gender or sexual diversity training or counseling" at higher education institutions and bans the teaching of several concepts related to race or sex in public schools.

After Monday's hearing, Lambert commented on the state's position that, while the law is clear as written, it still deserves to be challenged because of how the Oklahoma State Department of Education and State Board of Education have enforced it.

"So that was news to us as well. We are not aware of the state's position on those enforcement actions," Lambert said. "And yes, that does speak to the fact that two branches of the state's government — two entities of the state government (the attorney general's office and the State Department of Education) — are disagreeing about what the law means is exactly what we mean when we say it is vague."

Although the written arguments of the parties for or against the requested injunction have been pending before Goodwin for nearly two years, he did not issue a ruling Monday, nor did he offer a timeframe for when he might rule.

"Typically, motions for preliminary injunction — once they are fully briefed — pend for about three months," Lambert said after the hearing. "This is certainly outside of the standard, and — at least in part — what we have heard from the court for the reasons for the delay is the complex nature of these claims."

During the hearing, Goodwin seemed to float a number of possible outcomes from the proceedings. If Goodwin determines the law passed in HB 1775 is too vague, he could issue an injunction against the entire statute or just some of its provisions.

Goodwin also suggested Monday that he could ask the Oklahoma Supreme Court to weigh in on all or some of the law's provisions. If he decides to ask a state court to weigh in, lawyers for the plaintiffs asked that Goodwin still issue a temporary injunction to prevent the law from being enforced while courts decide the matter.

Background on HB 1775

Signed in May 2021, HB 1775 has been controversial from the start, as Republican legislators across the country took aim at banning critical race theory, an academic perspective usually found in higher education settings that emphasizes how racism has shaped and continues to affect public policy in America.

Concepts listed in HB 1775 as prohibited for Oklahoma public schools are claims that:

- one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
- an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
- an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex;
- members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
- an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex;
- an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
- any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex; and
- meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race.

Educators across the state — including plaintiffs in the case — have said the law has created a culture of fear for teachers who are unsure if their classroom discussions will violate the law and cause their teaching licenses to be revoked or their districts' accreditation to be downgraded.

One of the plaintiffs in the case — Oklahoma NAACP chapter president Bernard Allen-Bey — said after Monday's hearing that the law is racist against students of color.

"It's only the latest in the state's attempts to segregate these students and to prevent them from sharing (their) background and histories. The law threatens our members across the state — both teachers and students," Allen-Bey said. "We are encouraged by the court's hearing. We're happy even though it was delayed significantly, and we are encouraged by the outcome today, and I'm encouraged to think that it's possible that we're going to get a just ruling on this matter."

Rep. Kevin West (R-Moore) authored HB 1775 in 2021, and he has maintained that its language does not prohibit discussions of historical events like the Tulsa Race Massacre.

"It's the concept that any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, etc.," West told KFOR in August 2022. "If the lesson plan is designed to incite a certain feeling that's what the bill addresses."

BENNETT BRINKMAN became NonDoc's education reporter in August 2022 after completing a reporting internship. He holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma and is originally from Edmond. Email story tips and ideas to bennett@nondoc.com.

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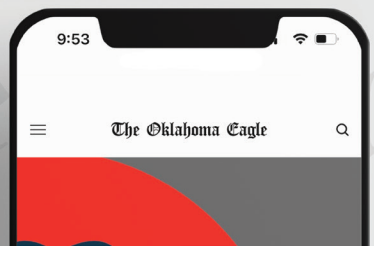

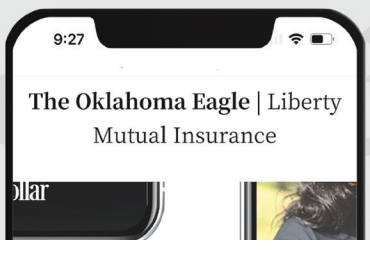

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The Oklahoma Eagle **publishes news and annoucements for churches currently listed in** ***The Oklahoma Eagle's*** **Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124**

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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

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Elder Julius W. Bland Sr., Pastor
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Tulsa OK 74106
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Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

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Wed- Healing School: 6:30p – 8p

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Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.

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Sunday Morning Worship 11 a.m.
Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.

Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

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

Pastor Rick Bruner

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Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
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Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School 9:00 a.m.

Church Services 11:00 a.m.

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
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Wednesday worship – 8pm

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F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

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Worship Service 10:00 am
Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

Pettie Chapel CME

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

Rev. Robert Givens

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Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

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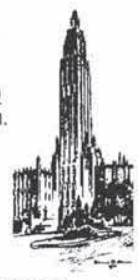
Senior Minister



Sunday Worship 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.
Sunday School 9:40 a.m.
Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.

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Fax: 918-584-1958
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 10:45
Wednesday Bible Study Noon and 7:00

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CIRCLE CINEMA, PRESS RELEASE

SHARED LEGACIES FILM EXPLORES BLACK AND JEWISH STORIED RELATIONSHIP

CIRCLE CINEMA

Circle Cinema originally opened in 1928 and now operates as the only nonprofit cinema in the area.

As Tulsa's oldest movie theater, we celebrate creativity, the arts and filmmakers from around the corner and across the world. Circle Cinema educates, enlightens, and entertains guests 365 days a year through selected features and programs that expose and connect our community to global issues, environments, and cultures.

We believe deeply in our mission of fostering community consciousness through film. We were honored to be recognized by the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice as a community leader in 2018. We are grateful for the kind words leaders of other community organizations shared for our co-founder Clark Wiens, his wife Michelle, and the theater as a whole. We strive to fulfill our mission every day by making Circle a welcome and open space for everyone through a diverse variety of film screenings and events.

History is a record of triumphs and tragedies. History is a documentary of victors and victims. And history is a collection of the people of the past and present and their relationships.

"Shared Legacies: The African American-Jewish Civil Rights Alliance" is a film that captures the history and the stories of select peoples and events. The film highlights the often-forgotten stories of the coalition between the Jewish and African American communities from the Civil Rights Movement to today.

Additionally, the film presents a compendium of evidence that underscores the familial connection between the two communities. Several local organizations and individuals are coming together to sponsor the showing of the film and to participate in a community discussion after viewing it.

The documentary that has toured the country has a special presentation scheduled at Circle Cinema on Jan. 11. It begins with a reception at 6 p.m., followed by the film at 7 p.m., and ends with a panel discussion. In partnership with Circle Cinema, the program is co-sponsored by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society, Jewish Federation of Tulsa, and the Tulsa County Sherriff's Office. It is an official event of the local events commemorating the MLK Holiday on Jan. 15.

"We are honored to be part of the events leading up to Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Tulsa," said Ryan Thomas, communications manager and programmer at Circle Cinema.

The award-winning film includes chronicled materials and narrations from eyewitnesses, activists, Holocaust survivors, leaders, and many others of the Civil Rights Movement. The members of the King family add a rich perspective to the discussion. The non-fiction account has particular significance because of the divisiveness and dissension that is permeating among so many across the American landscape today. Sponsors of the program hope that the occasion to see the film will be an opportunity to emphasize unity and celebrate our common interests.

"The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was a symbol of unity, hope, and peace for people of all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds. It is important to acknowledge what the inspirational civil rights leader did for communities across the United States and globally," said Pleas Thompson, president of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society in Tulsa.

In addition to viewing the film, Coretta Scott King will be represented by Chautauqua presenter Rebecca Marks-Jimerson. Dr. King's wife was a political activist in her own right and played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, Ms. King was instrumental in the planning of marches, boycotts, and speeches all over the country, sometimes standing in for her husband. Marks-Jimerson is also a board member of the MLK Commemoration Society.

"A first century rabbi famously said, 'You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.' I'm excited to not only explore through film the history of the African American-Jewish civil rights alliance, but also to be in conversation about how we can continue the work to build a more just and equitable Tulsa for all," said Brae Riley, chair of the Jewish Federation of Tulsa Social Justice Committee.

Riley will join Thompson, Marks-Jimerson, and Tulsa County Sheriff Vic Regalado for a panel discussion that will follow the film. The question-and-answer session will be moderated by Dr. Jerry Goodwin, assistant professor at Tulsa Community College, and president of the Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists Pro Chapter.

"Bringing people together for powerful films like this while also providing tools and resources about how to carry that message forward in daily life is what we strive for at Circle," said Thomas.

For ticket information, call (918) 585-3456 or visit circlecinema.org. For more information about other local MLK holiday observance events, visit MLKTulsa.com.

PHOTO **CIRCLE CINEMA**

3 BLACK WOMEN FARMERS FIGHTING FOOD INJUSTICE

1 in 5 Black Americans live in a food desert. In response, Black farmers are buying land and harvesting produce in those communities. **A16**

The Future of Reparations and Economic Equality

Dedrick Asante-Muhammad says reparations and change are possible but will take a "large, long-term commitment from the federal government."

Bria Overs, Word In Black

PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

From the racial wealth gap to the Black women's pay gap, many terms have cropped up to describe the financial state of Black Americans. One word stands out: economic equality.

At the current rate of progress, Black Americans will reach economic equality more than 500 years from now. That's according to "Still A Dream: Over 500 Years to Black Economic Equality," a report issued this year for the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

An estimated 250,000 people came to the nation's capital in August 1963, according to the National Park Service. (The NAACP puts the number closer to 260,000.) A partnership between the National Community Reinvestment Coalition and the Institute for Policy Studies spurred the report, which looks at the progress of Black Americans in the 60 years since the event.

Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, vice president of research and racial economic equality at the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, is one of four report co-authors. He has over 20 years of experience researching and reporting on the racial wealth divide.

"I've been working with one of the co-authors, Chuck Collins, for almost 20 years and trying to help highlight that the dream at the end of King's speech — the context — was economics and sociopolitical equality," Asante-Muhammad tells Word In Black. "I think, too, in this post-George Floyd era, there have been many conversations around corporate and government commitments to racial equity. We wanted to note: 'Well, how far have we come?'"

****

Bria Overs: What sparked the idea to create this report? I know it is tied to the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, but are there any other reasons why this report felt necessary at this particular time?

Dedrick Asante-Mohammad: As you know, it is the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, a time when the country generally likes to reflect on racial equity. But also, a lot of people haven't focused on it as much, but this March on Washington was a march for jobs and freedom. So, it always had, at its base, an economic focus.

I think many people assume we've come remarkably far in terms of racial equity since the March on Washington, and there's some truth to that. But when you look at the economics, you see a lot of spaces where there hasn't been much progress. Though, this report does highlight where there has been economic progress.

BO: Speaking of economic progress, a term that's popped up in recent years is economic equality or equity. The Federal Reserve calls it equity, and your report calls it equality. But what is this term really about? What is economic equality, and is it different from economic equity?

DAM: Often, equity is more about the process of making policy or some type of analysis that tries to be inclusive or address issues of racial economic equality. I think

Reparations cont. A16

PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

3 Black Women Farmers Fighting Food Injustice

Alexa Spencer Word In Black

Around the United States, hundreds of Black farmers have risen to the forefront of the food justice movement. Many harvest crops in areas categorized by the federal government as "food deserts" — communities that lack access to fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables.

Living in a "food desert" is a reality for 1 in 5 Black Americans. Oftentimes, there are few healthy food outlets in the area, such as grocery stores and farmers markets. Meanwhile, fast food chains and convenience stores are oversaturated.

Inadequate access to nutritional food raises the risk for obesity, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and other conditions. That's why Black farmers are buying land in underserved communities and sharing the harvest with residents. Here are three urban farmers plotting food justice in their cities:

Ivy Lawrence-Walls (Houston, Texas)

In August 2020, Ivy Lawerence-Walls started Ivy Leaf Farms in Houston's Sunnyside neighborhood, a historically Black community designated as a food desert during the launch. She repurposed her family's 5-acre plot into a community farm and vegetable garden. The farm grows and delivers okra, broccoli, carrots, collards, and other produce to local residents within specific zip codes.

Beyond the farm, Lawrence-Walls co-founded Fresh Houwse Grocery, a farmer-owned, community-operated store in Sunnyside, and Black Farmer Box, a weekly box of seasonal, farm-raised products.

Gail Taylor (Washington, D.C.)

Gail Taylor is the owner and operator of Three Part Harmony Farm, a 2-acre plot of land in Northeast Washington, D.C. She established the farm in 2012 to "learn more about where good food comes from" and "understand how produce finds its way from a farm to the grocery store."

Taylor spearheaded the three-year "I Want DC to Grow" campaign that led to the D.C. Urban Farming and Food Security Act of 2014, a bill that incentivized the use of privately-owned land for farming and community gardens. At Three Part Harmony, she grows crops using organic practices and markets the produce in the area.

She is also a member of the Black Dirt Farm Collective — a Maryland-based community of farmers, educators, scientists, agrarians, seed keepers, and organizers committed to food justice education.

Jamila "Farmer J" Norman (Atlanta, Georgia)

A first-generation American daughter born to Caribbean parents, Jamila "Farmer J" Norman has a personal history rooted in agriculture. She founded Patchwork City Farms in Atlanta in 2010 and operates the 1.2-acre farm full-time.

Patchwork is certified naturally grown. All vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers grown on the land are chemical fertilizer-, pesticide-, and herbicide-free. The seasonal veggies are sold through local farmers markets and at the farm's weekly seasonal shop.

Norman is a founding member and current manager of South West Atlanta Growers Cooperative (SWAG Coop), a cooperative with a mission to strengthen Atlanta's Black farmers and community.

She is also nationally recognized for her work. For three seasons, she's been featured on HBO Max's Homegrown, where she helps families transform their outdoor spaces into backyard farms.

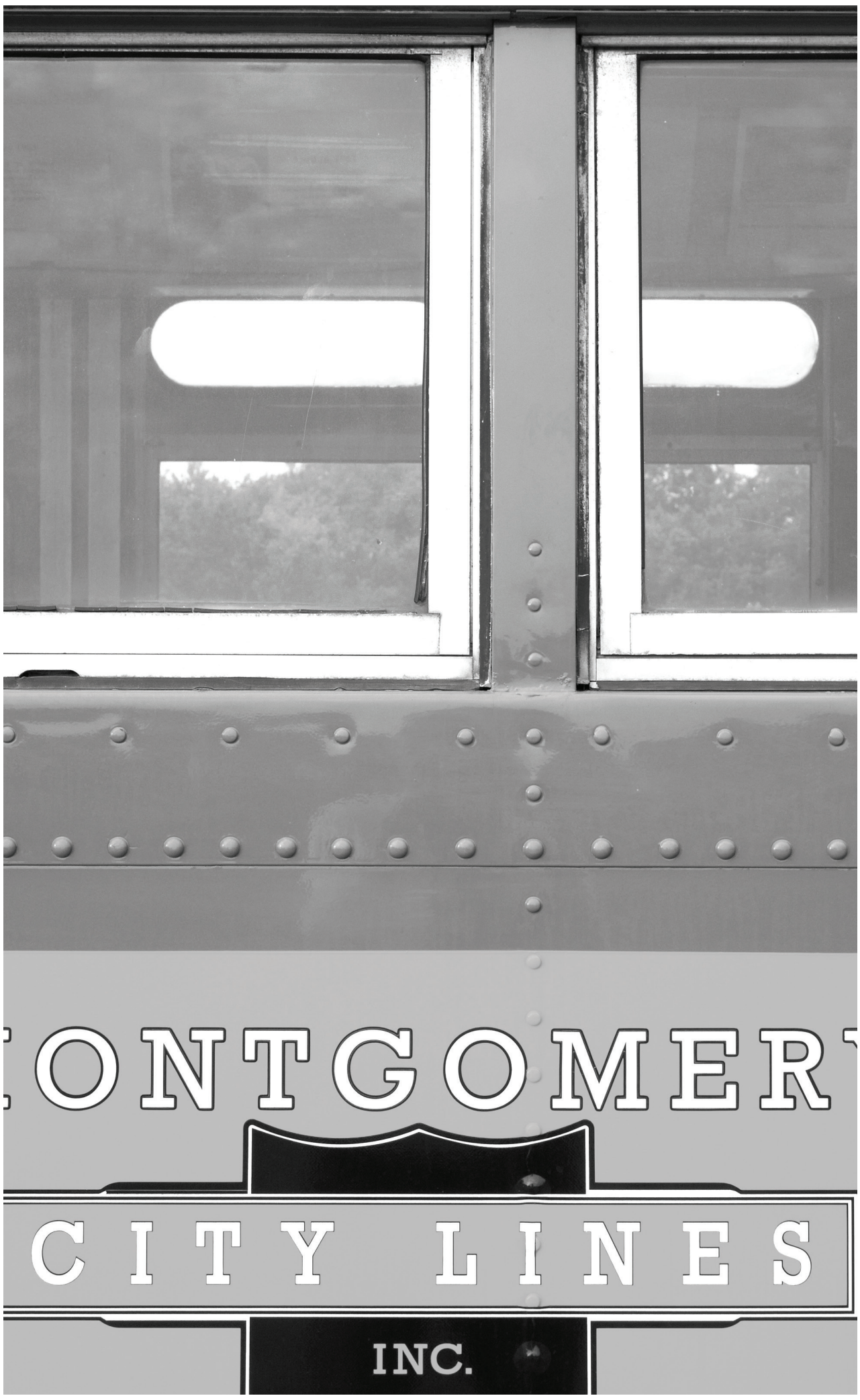

PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

Reparations from A15

there's space for both of these things. I think people just use whatever they feel is the new, cool term. The racial wealth gap recently became a cool term.

I like to focus more on quantitative economic metrics because the foundation of racial inequality is racial economic inequality. And the foundation of racial economic inequality is the racial wealth divide.

BO: Delving deeper into the report, it compares and contrasts the socioeconomic realities for Black Americans in the 1960s and the decades after. Then, it fast-forwards to the last five to 10 years. Why is that comparison important to show? What was the goal of comparing these two different eras of time?

DAM: It's important for people to recognize as we look back on the March on Washington, or the 60s, where the African American community was socioeconomically. Even though we highlight a lot of data that shows we haven't made as much progress as most of us would like, it's vital to know what progress has been made.

We noted in the report that in 1963, the Black poverty rate was 51%, and in the 1950s, it was even higher. The majority of Black people were in income poverty in 1963, and in just six years, by 1969, the war on poverty was implemented, and different programs were developed. The Black poverty rate had gone down to 32%. That's a remarkable change.

Today, we have more than 20% of African Americans in poverty. It's essential to recognize where we were in 1963, how rapidly that could be brought down, and how we've been somewhat stagnant over the last 20 years.

BO: The report also noted in bold that an analysis estimates it would take 780 years for Black wealth to reach that of non-Black wealth. That would be the closing of the racial wealth gap. What's the math behind this number of years?

DAM: In 1962, African Americans had 12 cents for every dollar of wealth. By 2019, they had 18 cents for every dollar. Bridging that six cents of wealth took almost 60 years. If you keep doing that, it would take 780 years for African Americans to be able to bridge that wealth divide.

People say, 'Oh, we're not where we want to be in terms of racial equality,

but we're getting there.' And the point of this analysis is we're just not getting there. We are on no path toward bridging the Black-white wealth divide. If we want to close it, we have to do something very different. We can't just do a little program here or there. We have to do something radically different if we really want to bridge the racial wealth divide in my lifetime.

It's not that radically different for income — 780 years for wealth, we say 513 years for household income. I don't think that's necessarily in people's minds that we're also nowhere near the path to bridging income inequality, which is easier to change more immediately than even wealth.

BO: One of the solutions proposed is around a national and local reparation plan. We've seen an enormous push around reparations this year. Going into 2024, how likely are we to see progress on this next year or in the next few years? How do you feel about seeing a reparation plan come to fruition?

DAM: It depends on what you mean by a reparations plan. Some local governments and some corporations might do a program they call reparations. California had one the boldest, broadest ones, but California was focused on addressing one aspect of inequality, and that was homeownership. It wasn't holistic.

For those of us who have been focused on reparations for a while, we're talking about a large national reparations plan because we know only a large, long-term commitment from the federal government could actually bridge this racial economic inequality. So, I don't see a likelihood.

I think we've gotten to the point where people can say the word, but we haven't even proposed a holistic, national policy that would require a good amount of money. The Black-white wealth divide is around $10 trillion. So you're going to need to invest a considerable amount to bridge this wealth divide if you want to bring African Americans up to where white people are.

Delta Sigma Theta Hosts City-Wide Retreat

DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY held a retreat and get-together last month. Attending the retreat were (l-r) Shelia Howell, Ebony Dean, Tametra Jamison, Alicia Hunt, Katawna Speight-Payne, and Alix Goff. PHOTO **PROVIDED**

Local members reconnected during the holiday season

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

The Tulsa Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority sponsored a retreat and round-up for its members last month. The occasion was to "reconnect, revitalize, and revisit the sorority's goal of serving the community," according to a press release. More than 100 sorority members attended the program.

"We started my presidency with the theme of unleashing the power of sisterhood and did our chapter come through," said Quanie Daniels, chapter president.

The programming was an opportunity for the chapter members to come together to "honor the organization's mission of sisterhood, scholarship, service, and social action."

"Combined with enthusiasm from the Tulsa Alumnae Chapter and diligently reaching out to sorority members we had not seen in a while, we were able to make the Sisterhood Round-Up a success," said Daniels.

Founded in 1913 at Howard University, the national sorority is noted for its community service to the Black community. The organization has 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters across the world. The international president is Elsie Cooke-Holmes.

For more information, contact qdanielsdst@yahoo.com or (918) 282-7251.

Annual Speak Eyes Vision Promotes Self-Care, Jan. 13

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

DA' SHADE ROOM EYEWEAR provides a variety of stylist and fashionable eyeglasses for men, women, and children. PHOTO **PROVIDED**

To host event to raise money for uninsured who need eyecare assistance

Da' Shade Room Eyewear is presenting Vision for All Cocktails for a Cause at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave. The program will feature Bobby Caddy, a health and wellness motivational speaker, and Lessie Simon, a financial insurance consultant. The event is scheduled for 3 p.m. – 7 p.m.

The mission of the organizers is to provide assistance and support for individuals without vision insurance and who are in need of vision health assistance. The company believes its customers deserve to have access to stylist frames with protection and prevention lens options.

The event is sponsored by Speak Eyes Foundation, Da' Shade Room Eyewear, and MzRene Thatme.

For more information, call (610) 467-7377 or contact info@dashaderoom.com.

Alzheimer's Diversity Outreach Services Recognizes 20 Years Of Service

To host annual gala on Feb. 16

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

20th Anniversary of the Alzheimer's Diversity Outreach Services "Out of Africa Healthy Brain Strategies Gala" is to be held at Hyatt Regency Tulsa Downtown, 100 E. 2nd St., VIP Experience: 6 p.m.-7p.m., Dinner: 7:30 p.m. The fundraising event supports educating and assisting caregivers and family members locally and across the nation.

The organization's website is www.alzoutreach.org. For tickets or more information, contact Pastor Beverly Baul, executive director, (918) 514-3154 or beverlybaul@alzoutreach.org or beverlybaul@gmail.com.

BEVERLY BAUL, executive director, Alzheimer's Diversity Outreach Services. PHOTO **PROVIDED**

Events

JAN 9
Vaccination clinics and Mini Health Fairs will be held on Jan. 9 from 4 p.m. – 6 p.m. at Casa de la Cultura, 1515 N. Harvard Ave., Unit E. Free services to be provided are the following: blood pressure, blood sugar and BMI; childhood and influenza vaccines among other services. For more information, call or text (918) 921-0898.

JAN 13
Annual Speak Eyes Vision for All Cocktails for a Cause at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. The event is sponsored by Da Shade Room Eyewear and MzRene Thatme. For more information, see social media or contact info@dashaderoom.com.

JAN 15
Martin Luther King Holiday

JAN 22
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is hosting its monthly support group for family members, significant others, and friends of people with mental health conditions at St. Augustine Catholic Church, Education Center, 1720 E. Apache St., 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month. For more information, call (918) 587-2965 or contact staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com.

FEB
Black History Month

FEB 10
Tulsa Alumni Chapter Kappa Alpha Psi presents its Annual Scholarship Sweetheart Ball 2024 on Feb. 10 at the Doubletree Hotel by Hilton Tulsa – Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. For ticket information, visit its Facebook page or call (918) 833-4300.

FEB 16
20th Anniversary of the Alzheimer's Diversity Outreach Services "Out of Africa Healthy Brain Strategies Gala at Hyatt Regency Tulsa Downtown, 100 E. 2nd St., VIP Experience: 6 p.m.-7p.m., Dinner: 7:30 p.m. For more information, contact beverlybaul@alzoutreach.org.

FEB 17
Education for Scholars, Inc. to sponsor United to Fulfil the Dream Annual Fundraiser on Feb. 17 from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. at Northeastern State University, 3100 E. New Orleans St. in Broken Arrow. This year's theme is "Sowing Seeds for Our Future." The program is to commemorate the non-violent work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For sponsorships or tickets or more information, visit www.educationforscholars.org/events.

MAR 13
2024 Women's Summit at the Doubletree Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. The program is sponsored by the Greenwood Women's Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201. For more information, contact info@greenwoodwbc.com or gbcwomensummit.com.

MAR 27
Women's History Month – "And So I Stayed" will be shown at Tulsa Community College at its VanTrease Performing Arts Center for Education (PACE), 103000 E. 81st St., on March 27 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. bars. For more information, contact ramona.curtis@tulsacc.edu.

The Oklahoma Eagle

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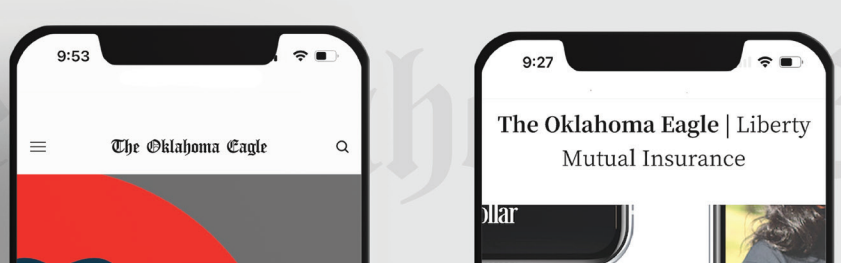

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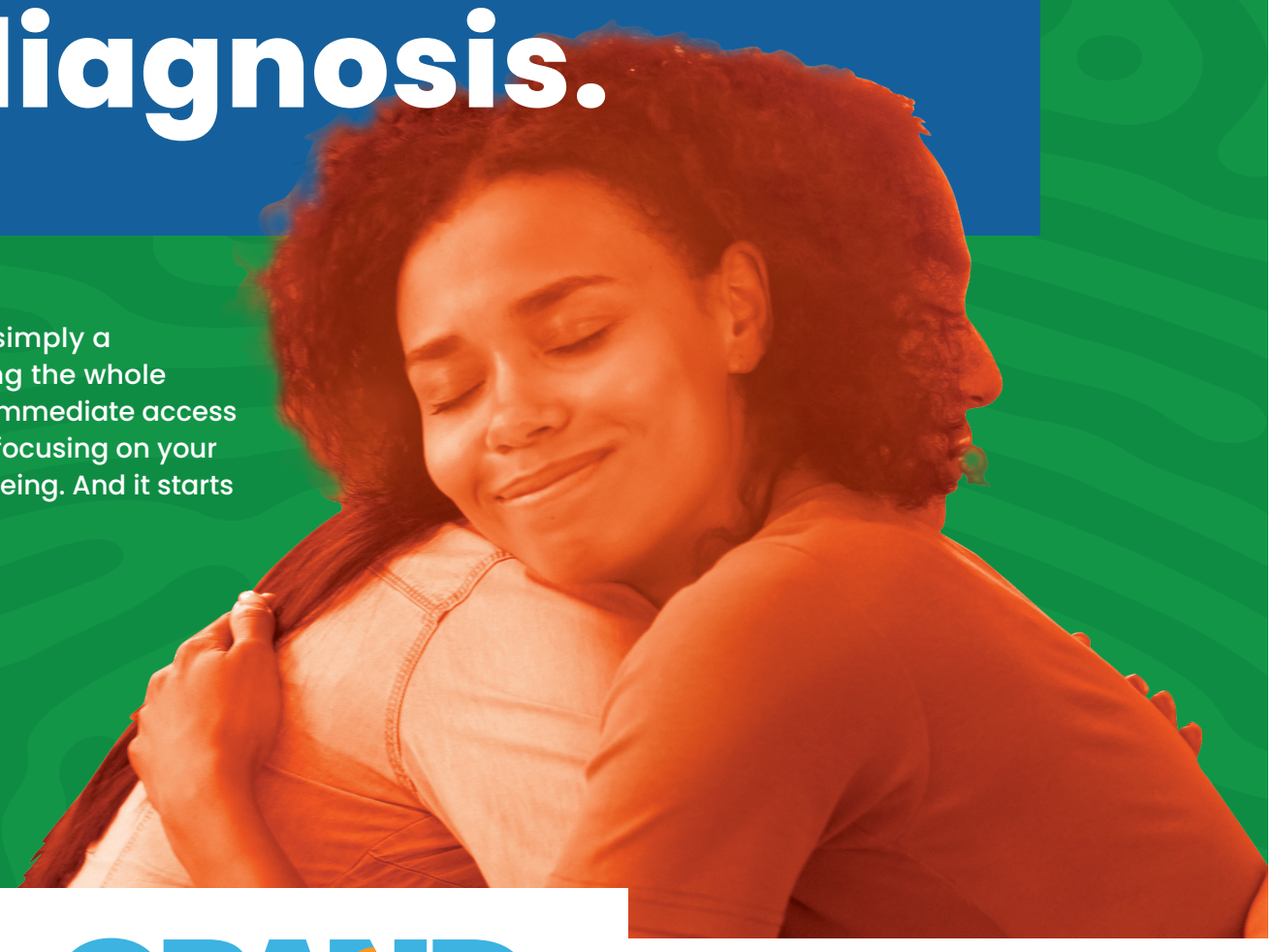

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