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A Chapter in the Story of Black History

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PHOTO OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Reenactors, portray the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment during filming of the documentary The Battle of Honey Springs.

Historic Battle

The Battle of Honey Springs, Oklahoma's overlooked 'Gettysburg of the West'

Trait Thompson
NonDoc

Long before it became a state, Oklahoma became a battleground where some of the earliest steps toward Black civil rights took shape and tribal nations' already tenuous relationship with the federal government further strained amid gun smoke and cannon fire.

Today, July 17, marks the 161st anniversary of the Battle of Honey Springs, a significant clash in Oklahoma and Civil War history not just because of its outcome, but because of the soldiers who fought there.

The largest of more than 100 engagements in Indian Territory, the Battle of Honey Springs was also among the most diverse, with approximately 80 percent of troops representing six tribal nations. Furthermore, it became a proving ground for the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment, the initial African American unit to fight for the United States in combat. Called the "Gettysburg of the Trans-Mississippi West," the Union victory at Honey Springs secured control of the territory for the remainder of the war.

The outbreak of the Civil War in the spring of 1861 presented a dilemma for

the Five Tribes — the relocated Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole nations. Many among the Five Tribes distrusted the federal government given their forced expulsion to Indian Territory just three decades earlier, and remaining native slaveholders within some of the tribes sought to protect the institution of slavery. However, some desired to maintain treaties signed with the federal government amidst concerns that President Abraham Lincoln's administration sought to open western lands to settlement.

Ultimately, geography also helped inform their decisions, as the Five Tribes maintained socioeconomic ties with neighboring southern states such as Texas and Arkansas. While the reasons the Five Tribes chose to ally with the Confederacy are nuanced and complex, they ultimately did so in the fall of 1861. There were individual tribal members who rejected the Confederate cause and supported the Union, notably native refugees who fled north to Kansas to form the Indian Home Guard.

'A struggle for their own freedom'

Despite Lincoln's hesitancy to use Black soldiers in combat, U.S. Sen. James Henry Lane of Kansas recruited a militia of formerly enslaved people to fight for the Union in August 1862. They won their first

battle at Island Mound, Missouri, on Oct. 29. Black soldiers could officially enlist in the Union Army after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863.

The Kansas militia unit became designated as the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment under the command of Col. James Monroe Williams. Williams characterized what was at stake for Black soldiers under his command.

"This will be no mere struggle for conquest, but a struggle for their own freedom, a determined and, as I believe, irresistible struggle for the disenfranchisement of a people who have long suffered oppression and wrong at the hands of our enemies," he said.

The Union had been all but banished from Indian Territory early in the war. Its forces managed to recapture Fort Gibson in the spring of 1863, but their hold was tenuous and dependent upon adequate supplies. In late June, the First Kansas, along with three regiments of the Indian Home Guard, were assigned to protect 200 wagons bound for Fort Gibson from Fort Scott, Kansas. On July 1 and July 2, they defeated an opposing Confederate force commanded by Col. Stand Watie at Cabin Creek near present-day Vinita.

This engagement, later known as the First Battle of Cabin Creek, was the first time Indigenous, Black and white troops fought

alongside each other. The supply train successfully made it to Fort Gibson.

Having caught wind of Confederate Brig. Gen. Douglas Cooper's plan to link up with reinforcements from Fort Smith, Arkansas, and attack Fort Gibson, Union Maj. Gen. James Blunt took the initiative. He marched against Cooper's forces with 600 men and two 12-pound howitzers, from Fort Scott to Fort Gibson. His men arrived July 11, making the 120-mile journey in three days.

'They will not give quarter'

Honey Springs was a Confederate supply depot near Elk Creek, southwest of Fort Gibson. There, Cooper's force of approximately 6,000 men waited for reinforcements while Blunt ferried his 3,000 troops, artillery and horses across the Arkansas River on July 16.

The Union force marched all night toward Honey Springs. A brief skirmish between opposing cavalry units broke out at Chimney Mountain, pushing the Confederates back toward Honey Springs. Early in the morning of July 17, Blunt stopped his soldiers one-half mile from Elk Creek to give them time to rest.

"I made use of the time by climbing on the roof of a farmhouse," Col. Thomas Moonlight recalled. "With the aid of a spyglass, I discovered the Rebel line of



(TOP) Drawn by James R. O'Neill, this sketch marks the only known depiction of the Battle of Honey Springs. It appeared for the first time to a nationwide readership in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper out of New York on Saturday, Aug. 29, 1863. PHOTO OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(BOTTOM) The visitor center at Honey Springs Battlefield, near Checotah, Oklahoma, contains exhibits and artifacts about the battle. PHOTO OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Historic Battle

A decisive win for the union, only losing 17 men, compared to the Confederate's loss of 150

From A2

battle. I also discovered from my elevated position that the enemy could not discover our advancing columns until within 100 yards."

Cooper stationed his troops — including Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw and Chickasaw regiments — and dismounted Texas cavalry in the brush on both sides of the creek. The Confederate line stretched for one-and-one-half miles, outnumbering Union soldiers by approximately two to one.

The stakes were high for both armies. Williams warned the soldiers of the First Kansas of their fate if they were captured.

"You know it is a common report that the Confederate troops and their officers boast that they will not give quarter to colored troops and their officers," Williams said. "Show the enemy this day that you are not asking for quarter, and that you know how and are eager to fight for your freedom."

Confederate Col. Chilly McIntosh of the Second Creek Mounted Volunteers described the stakes to his fighters.

"Man must die sometime, and since he must die, he can find no nobler death than that which overtakes him while fighting for his home, his fires and his country," he said.

The Union had a firepower advantage of 12 artillery pieces to Cooper's four, compensating for their deficit in soldiers. Blunt advanced his infantry about mid-morning to draw fire from the Confederate artillery. He began firing his artillery once the Confederates revealed their position. Soon enough, both armies were wholly engaged. Blunt ordered the First Kansas to fix bayonets and capture one of the Confederate guns. The fighting raged for two hours without much to show for either side.

A mistaken advance from the Union's Second Indian Home Guard Regiment ultimately became the Union's benefit. With rifle and cannon smoke filling the air, they advanced too far between the First Kansas and the Confederate line. When they fell back to safer ground, the 29th Texas Regiment assumed the entire Union force was retreating. Thinking they had the advantage, the 29th Texas joined soldiers from the 20th Texas Regiment by advancing into withering fire from Union forces.

No unit had more to gain or to lose than the soldiers of the First Kansas.

The fusillade of fire was too strong, forcing Confederate forces to retreat toward Elk Creek. Fighting at the lone toll bridge over Elk Creek was brutal, with hand-to-hand combat and bayonets supplanting musket fire. Col. Stephen Wattles of the First Indian Home Guard noted the advance of his regiment against an enemy "desperately contesting every foot of ground." Confederate forces managed to stave off the Union advancement long enough to get their remaining artillery across the bridge.

Blunt was determined to give chase, and the fighting resumed south of Elk Creek. Cooper prioritized the protection of Confederate supplies near Honey Springs — nearly two miles away — but he ultimately settled on evacuating some provisions in wagons and torching what remained. Union soldiers got to the burning supply cache in time to salvage some food. They were in no condition to give chase to the retreating Confederates, however.

The battle resulted in a decisive win for the Union. Blunt's army lost 17 men, and 60 were wounded. Cooper lost 150 men, and 400 were injured.

The legacy of Honey Springs

The characterization of the Civil War as a conflict of "brother against brother" was epitomized by the Battle of Honey Springs, where tribal citizens faced off against kinsmen they had known their entire lives. Hispanic soldiers fought in the battle, too, along with their Texas brethren.

Perhaps no unit had more to gain or to lose than the soldiers of the First Kansas. While they had seen combat before, no opposing force had compared to the enemy they faced at Honey Springs, and their performance undermined criticism from those opposed to allowing African Americans into the U.S. military.

Blunt, the Union general, commented on the First Kansas soldiers after the battle.

"They fought like veterans and preserved their line unbroken throughout the engagement," he said. "Their coolness and bravery I have never seen surpassed (...)."

After the Battle of Honey Springs, Union troops found 500 pairs of shackles at a Confederate supply depot intended to take captured Black soldiers back to slavery.

CONTEXT

1st Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment

The 1st Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment was an infantry regiment that served in the Union Army during the American Civil War. It was the first black regiment to be organized in a northern state to see combat during the Civil War. At the Battle of Poison Spring, the regiment lost nearly half its number, and suffered the highest losses of any Kansas regiment during the war.

TRAIT THOMPSON has been the executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society since 2021. He is co-host of the Oklahoma history podcast, A Very OK Podcast, and author of a book titled The Oklahoma State Capitol.



Hinton Prison

State Seeks Dismissal of Lawsuit Alleging Inhumane Conditions at Hinton Prison

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

Seven state prisoners suing the Oklahoma Department of Corrections over their prolonged confinement in small shower stalls have not exhausted the agency's grievance process and should have their lawsuit dismissed, two state attorneys wrote in a federal court filing last week.

The 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act requires incarcerated people to pursue all available administrative remedies before filing a federal lawsuit. While some prisoners sought staff assistance with recovering stolen property or arranging a medical appointment, a state review of records returned no complaints of unconstitutional treatment or civil rights violations.

"None of the petitioners were found to have submitted any formal grievance to the Great Plains Correctional Center," attorneys Lauren

Ray and Lexie Norwood wrote in the filing.

U.S. District Judge Shon Erwin ordered the grievance history report on June 11 following back-and-forth filings between the plaintiffs and defendants. The prisoners will have 30 days to respond to the state's report.

In response to the state's initial motion to dismiss, which alluded to the lack of formal grievances over prison conditions, the prisoners claimed a hostile environment discouraged prisoners from seeking administrative relief and prison officials hindered their efforts at resolving the issue.

"Management at ODOC and the Great Plains Correctional Center attempted to intimidate honest correctional officers who refused to participate in sadistic measures and reported the events by completing incident reports," attorneys Richard LaBarthe and Alexey Tarasov wrote in a May filing. "This punitive response to staff highlights the hostile environment and discourages inmates from filing grievances, as it suggests that complaints would not only

be ignored but might also lead to further retaliation."

Oklahoma Watch reported in October that prisoners were held in the three-by-three-foot shower stalls for several hours or days without regular access to restrooms, water, bedding material or hygiene products. Two correctional officers working temporarily at the prison filed an incident report in August describing the conditions, triggering an internal Department of Corrections investigation.

The inspector general's investigation confirmed that prisoners were held in the shower stalls for up to three days. The 200-page report noted that staff were overwhelmed with prisoners refusing to be housed in eight-man cells, causing a backlog in the prison's restricted housing unit. Investigators ruled claims that staff were intentionally keeping some prisoners in the intended space as punishment as inconclusive.

LaBarthe, one of the Oklahoma City-area attorneys who agreed to represent the prisoners,

said poor planning and a small dose of sadism combined to create unconstitutional conditions for dozens of prisoners housed in the shower stalls. He said some prisoners housed in the shower stalls became suicidal as the hours and days passed.

"Imagine the horror of having to be in that small space with your excrement," LaBarthe said in an April 30 interview with Oklahoma Watch. "It's barbaric and not worthy of our society to pretend that it's not bad."

LaBarthe and Tarasov said they hope to obtain a permanent injunction barring the Department of Corrections from housing prisoners in shower stalls. The agency said it no longer allows prisoners to house inmates in such a confined space.

KEATON ROSS covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or Kross@Oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at @KeatonRoss.

Frederick Douglass Moon: African American Educator

By WILLIAM D. WELGE, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



African American educator Frederick Moon was born on May 4, 1896, at Fallis, Oklahoma Territory. Son of Henry Clay and Pollie Twigg Moon, Frederick Moon was educated in the segregated schools of Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Because there was no high school for African Americans near his home, he entered Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University) in the ninth grade, and he completed high school and two years of college there. In 1929 he earned a Bachelor of Science degree. He earned a Master of Arts degree at the University of Chicago in 1938. During his time at Langston he led an effort to develop a memorial to Inman Page, the college's first president.

Moon began his teaching career in 1921 at Crescent, Oklahoma, and he helped the school gain accreditation. In 1929 the Oklahoma Association

of Negro Teachers elected him as president. In 1931 he taught in and was principal of Wewoka Douglass High School, and he again assisted a school in gaining accreditation with the North Central Association. Moon married Leoshia Harris, of Oklahoma City, on August 28, 1935. In 1940 he moved to Oklahoma City and became principal of Douglass High School. He continued in that position until 1961. Considered the "dean" of African American education, he was elected to the Oklahoma City Board of Education in 1972 and served as its first African American president in 1974. He served at a time when federally mandated desegregation occurred within the Oklahoma City Public School System. During this period the school district carried out a program of busing students across town in order to bring racial equality to the schools.

Moon was also a civic leader in the community.

He served as a director for the YMCA. He was variously president of the Oklahoma City Urban League, the Langston Alumni Association, and the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, and he was a member of the National Education Association. He was vice president of the National Association of Secondary Principals and of the American Association of School Administrators and served on the mayor's Human Relations Commission and the Urban Renewal Authority. The Oklahoma School of Religion at Langston awarded him an honorary doctorate in humanities. His publications included Organization and Administration of High School for Negroes in Oklahoma, A Fifth Freedom for the Negro, and Teacher Integration in the Border States. He resigned his position with the board of education due to declining health in December 1974. Frederick Moon died on December 16, 1975, in Oklahoma City.

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F. D. MOON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL BAND, 1958 (20699.02.197.1620.7, State Museum Collection, Currie Ballard Collection, OHS).

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Personal property of former tenants evicted from home, who must now find a new home and storage. Evicted residents suddenly find themselves at risk of being victims of theft and/or the destruction of their property while being homeless.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Rising Rents

Experts Disagree on Cause of Oklahoma's RISING RENTS

Heather Warlick
Oklahoma Watch

Housing shortages and rising rents go hand-in-hand with supply-demand economics. When supply is low and demand is high, one can reasonably assume costs will rise.

Rising rents in Oklahoma have led to a surge in evictions. Oklahoma City is on track to top last year's 17,868 eviction filings, and Tulsa is trending toward the same numbers as 2023.

Local and national experts discussed the reasons for Oklahoma's dramatic rent hikes in recent years and the growing number of evictions the state is experiencing.

Some experts said high rents are a natural result of Oklahoma's housing deficit. Inflation is a factor generally assumed. Oklahoma City Housing Authority's executive director said Oklahoma's rising rents are a side effect of a different deficit — landlords trying to recoup money lost during pandemic-era eviction moratoriums and rental assistance funds that have dried up.

Karey Landers, the executive director of the Apartment Association of Central Oklahoma, said in an email to Oklahoma Watch that skyrocketing multifamily unit insurance rates have played a big role in the rising cost of multifamily unit rents. She said that multi-unit insurance rates in Oklahoma have more than doubled and, in some cases, tripled.

An Unnatural Housing Disaster

A recent New York Times study showed that Oklahomans' home insurance, relative to home values, is more expensive than nearly anywhere else in America. The report states that rising insurance rates nationwide are blamed on climate change, though Oklahoma insurance rates top those of New Orleans, Paradise, Calif., and the Florida Keys, places where natural disasters are far more common and likely than Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's lax oversight of regulators' scrutiny for rate increases places the state at the heart of the country's highest premiums. Compared to some jurisdictions where regulators closely scrutinize justifications for rate hikes, Oklahoma's oversight of rate increases is minimal.

A monumental jump in Oklahoma City's population could also be a factor in rising rents in the state's capital city. Oklahoma City was one of only 14 cities nationwide to experience a hike of more than 100,000 residents between the 2010 and 2020 censuses. The state is short 77,000 housing units, most of which fall into the category of affordable housing rather than market-rate.

"There's a big gap between the supply of housing that's available and the amount of housing that's demanded," said Jacob Haas, a research specialist at Princeton University's Eviction Lab. "That's the case nationwide."

Haas said that as the nation's housing crisis worsens, a surge has occurred among people who prefer to rent rather than buy homes.

"There are more renter households now, and more renter households at different income levels in past years," he said.

Haas specified that households with incomes

Oklahoma City is on track to top last year's 17,868 eviction filings, and Tulsa is trending toward the same numbers as 2023.

between \$45,000 and \$75,000 per year are entering the rental sector more often than in past years.

Mark Gillette, executive director of Oklahoma City Housing Authority, speculated that supply and demand are less responsible for the state's rent hikes.

"When COVID moratoriums were in place, landlords never really got that money," Gillette said. "Yes, there was some money handed out through eviction moratorium relief, but it didn't address 100% of the issues."

Gillette said landlords deserve to be paid their rent. Raising rent prices after landlords experienced financial losses during the pandemic has allowed landlords to continue to provide housing while recouping some of the losses they've endured.

Landlord Weighs In

Nick Jones is an owner of Carlsbad Management in Norman. He said supply and demand, combined with rising inflation, are to blame for rental prices.

"We have seen vast rent increases in the country, as well as OKC," Jones said in an email to Oklahoma Watch. "This is primarily due to supply and demand and rising inflation on everyone's goods and services."

Jones said the problem has nothing to do with not being reimbursed for pandemic shortfalls.

"Most operators follow the market and that's how we decide where rents should be," Jones said.

He said the consumer price index dropped recently and is showing a slowdown in rent inflation nationwide.

He said the consumer price index tends to be a lagging indicator because tenants resign new leases every month.

"Rent growth is way down, but rent wasn't immune from all the inflation we have seen everywhere," he said. "The more supply that is built in Oklahoma City, the slower the rent hikes will come as the competition becomes stronger."

Years To Wait For Assistance

About 30% of Oklahoma households are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing. Oklahoma City Housing Authority's public housing and affordable housing units are at about 94% capacity and relief is far from sight, Gillette said.

Gillette said money for housing vouchers, known as Section 8, is drying up, adding to the burden of high housing costs resulting from Oklahoma City's exponential growth.

"Our projections show us going into shortfall soon," Gillette said. "We don't know how to define soon but it's very, very close."

Gillette said people who already hold housing vouchers will not be affected, but until the new year, OCHA is unlikely to approve vouchers for new applicants. Depending on the extent of the shortfall, Gillette said, OCHA may elect to close the waiting list

altogether.

James Johnson, 37, said he applied for a voucher 18 months ago and is desperate for help. He's had an eviction in the past and fears he is headed toward another soon. He has paid late fees nearly every month of the year he's lived in his apartment.

"Rents are just too much," Johnson said. "I can't keep up and it's, like, it's killing me."

Johnson pays \$875 for a two-bedroom apartment on the city's northeast side. A search of available two-bedroom Oklahoma City apartments online shows his rent is nearly as low as is available.

"I have kids, a car, a job," Johnson said. "I'm working 60 hours a week and still can't make it happen. It's really depressing me."

Section 8 Bracing for Evictions

Gillette said that OCHA has begun filing more evictions against voucher holders who are seriously delinquent in paying rent, making matters worse for some of Oklahoma's lowest-paid residents. Whereas traditional landlords can raise their rents, Oklahoma's 50-plus housing authority properties have no such luxury.

Oklahomans receiving housing vouchers are expected to pay 30% of their income toward rent, while OCHA pays the remainder. With stagnating wages, the financial strain of rising rents falls squarely on housing authorities, Gillette said.

"We are not doing a mass eviction," Gillette said. "We are working with tenants individually, giving them an option to enter a payback agreement, working with our resident services department so they have access to help through case managers who can connect them with help."

Gillette said inflation affects items such as appliances, wood, and other materials used to build homes. But he asserted that rising rents are not a result of inflation but of landlords working to recoup financial losses. And often, evictions are the unfortunate outcome of the rising tide of rental rates.

"We have a waitlist of over 10,000 people right now," Gillette said. "So while more people might be eligible to apply, it's a very long waitlist. You're talking multiple years."

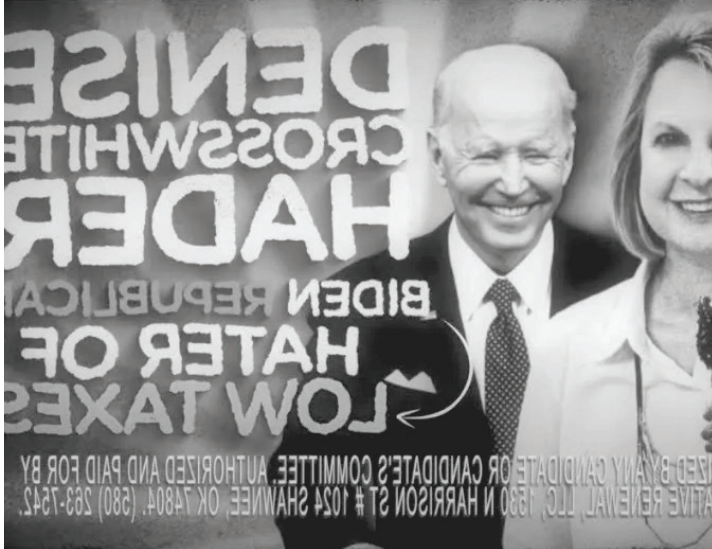
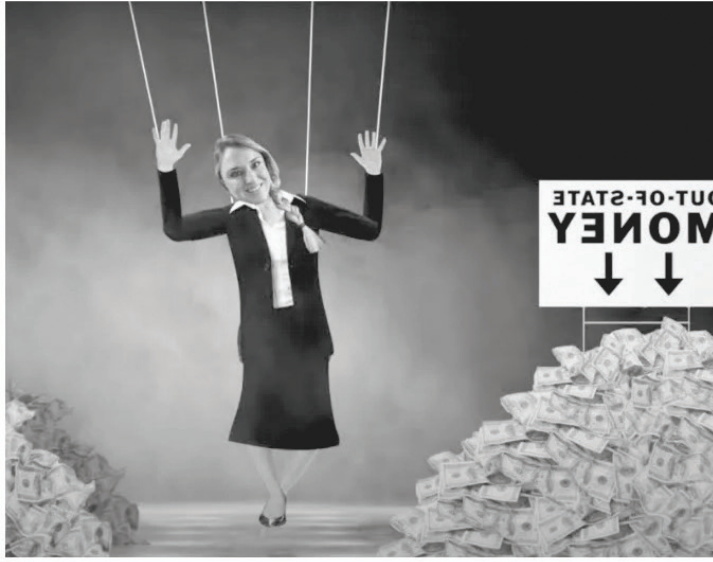
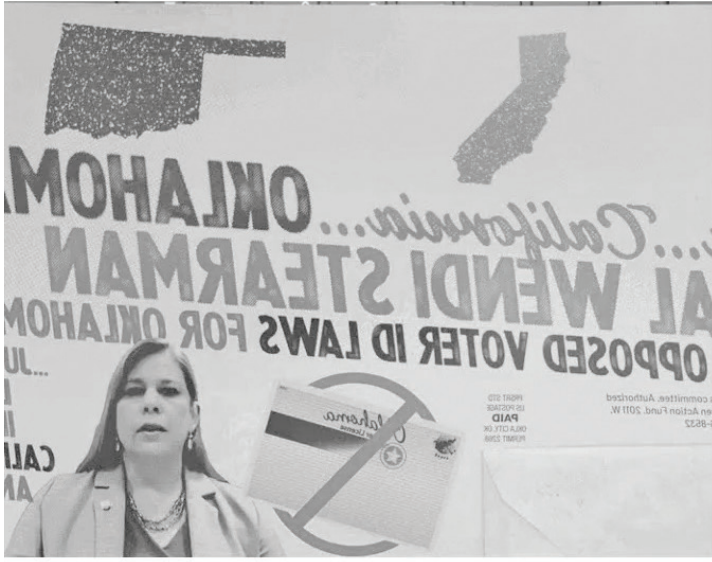
Oklahomans earning the state's lowest wages don't have years to wait for rents to subside or more affordable housing to be built, Johnson said.

"If we can't get help with our rent, I don't know what's going to happen to me and my kids," Johnson said. "I guess we'll end up on the streets. And that's the worst thing I can imagine."



PERSONAL PROPERTY OF FORMER TENANTS evicted from home, who must now find a new home and storage. Evicted residents suddenly find themselves at risk of being victims of theft and/or the destruction of their property while being homeless. PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Election Spending



Advertisements, such as these, paid for by outside groups who often do not have to disclose their donors, seek to influence Oklahoma voters ahead of the June 18, 2024 primary election. PHOTO OKLAHOMA WATCH

OUTSIDE SPENDING Soars Ahead of Primary Election

The ads take viewers to a dark place with ominous background music.

Keaton Ross and Jake Ramsey
Oklahoma Watch

The narrator wastes no time introducing the villain: A Republican candidate for Oklahoma House or Senate painted as a liberal in disguise.

They're alleged to be soft on crime, fiscally irresponsible or controlled by special interests. Photoshopped images of President Joe Biden often appear in the background.

"Sometimes they're just full out lies about the other person," said Jarod Mendenhall, the superintendent of Muskogee Public Schools who is challenging incumbent Rep. Neil Hays in the House District 13 Republican Primary.

The Oklahoma Federation for Children Action Fund, a social welfare organization that supports school voucher programs, has spent \$31,672 since May 28 on digital advertisements and mailers opposing Mendenhall, Oklahoma Ethics Commission records show. Mendenhall does not support expanding educational tax credits, stating in a Ballotpedia survey response that most who apply for the credits are already sending their children to private schools.

"You just sit back and think that's pretty incredible that we have a system that's designed to where you can spend an inordinate amount of money towards something that's a falsehood," Mendenhall said.

Spending by outside political groups, many

funded by dark money organizations, has soared ahead of the June 18 primary election. While the spending is not illegal, critics argue it can harm voters who are bombarded with messages from questionable sources.

From April 15 to June 15, politically involved nonprofits spent more than \$3 million to influence Oklahoma voters, more than three times what was spent over a similar period in 2020. About \$400,000 of the total has been spent on digital advertisements, commercials and mailers opposing candidates, while the rest has gone to support candidates, according to an Oklahoma Watch review of Oklahoma Ethics Commission filings.

The outside spending exceeds the \$2.6 million candidates used on campaign expenses from April 15 to June 3. A statewide Republican primary for a vacant Corporation Commission seat and dozens of legislative primaries in the Republican and Democratic parties are on the June 18 ballot.

Oklahoma campaign finance laws limit individual contributions to candidates at \$3,300 per election and political action committees at \$5,000 per election. But 501(c)4 nonprofits may spend unlimited amounts on political messaging so long as they do not coordinate with candidates.

On June 3, the Virginia-based conservative advocacy organization Make Liberty Win spent \$132,000 on "field distribution of literature" for

On June 3, the Virginia-based conservative advocacy organization Make Liberty Win spent \$132,000 on "field distribution of literature" for House District 23 Republican candidate Derrick Hildebrant.

House District 23 Republican candidate Derrick Hildebrant. Oklahoma Conservative Renewal LLC, a social welfare organization that posts no information about its mission on its website, spent \$263,000 on opposition mailers and advertisements from May 22 to June 3.

Brendan Glavin is the Deputy Research Director at Open Secrets, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that tracks campaign finance and lobbying data. He said many social welfare groups, including Make Liberty Win, do disclose their donors to the FEC but are largely funded by dark money organizations.

As outside political spending has skyrocketed over the past decade, Glavin said state House races have become increasingly nationalized.

"They're accumulating vast sums of money and spending it with a common message across the whole country," he said.

Frustrated by skyrocketing in outside spending in the 2022 gubernatorial election, Gov. Kevin Stitt established a task force to study campaign finance and election threats in July.

The task force did not recommend limiting dark money spending, calling the matter a federal issue, but suggested increasing caps on candidate and political party donations as a solution to curb outside spending. Members also urged the state to ramp up enforcement of an existing rule requiring independent expenditure entities to have an Oklahoma-based treasurer and provide an active and legitimate phone number.

"Without significant change, the state is at risk that independent expenditure entities can assume the role of primary campaign communication entity as opposed to candidates," the report reads. "Meaningful change must be considered by the Oklahoma Ethics Commission to reverse this potential."

"Sometimes they're just full out lies about the other person."

Jarod Mendenhall, superintendent of Muskogee Public Schools

Ethics Commission members discussed the report at its May meeting and could take action on the recommendations in the coming months. Proposed Ethics Commission rules are subject to legislative and gubernatorial approval.

For now, candidates like Wendi Stearman say they are countering the outside spending by maintaining their voter outreach. The Oklahoma Federation for Children Action Fund has spent \$72,518 on digital ads and mailers opposing Stearman, who is challenging incumbent Sen. Julie Daniels in the Senate District 29 primary.

"I don't know if it will be effective or not, but it doesn't change how I do anything," said Stearman, a former state representative who has raised just over \$20,000 since April. "I've been going door to door like I've been doing last summer and I'll just keep doing it."

Mendenhall, the candidate for House District 13, said he's hopeful his campaign messaging will resonate more with voters than the outside advertisements.

"They're feeling like there's a lot of threat there and there's a good chance they're going to lose," Mendenhall said of the attack ads he has faced. "So that's been telling me a whole lot about them and their whole strategy to win the race."

JAKE RAMSEY is a Summer 2024 reporting intern with Oklahoma Watch. He is also Editor-in-Chief of The Vista, the University of Central Oklahoma's student newspaper. Contact Jake at jr Ramsey@oklahomawatch.org.

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**BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES
\$1.2 BILLION MORE IN STUDENT DEBT
FORGIVENESS | A10**

Project 2025

HOW WILL PROJECT 2025 Affect Black America?

THE DOCUMENT, DRAFTED BY FORMER TRUMP ADMINISTRATION STAFFERS BUT WHICH TRUMP DISAVOWS MEANS POORER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WORSE HEALTH OUTCOMES AND AGGRESSIVE POLICE.

BY JOSEPH WILLIAMS, WORD IN BLACK

Project 2025, the far-reaching Republican Party plan to demolish and radically remake the federal government under a Trump presidency, has gotten a lot of attention lately, and not necessarily in a good way.

President Joe Biden warns it's a threat to democracy. Former President Donald Trump says he had nothing to do with it, even though members of his administration helped write it. Actress Taraji P. Henson sounded the alarm while hosting the BET Awards last month, urging viewers to "look it up! Project 2025 is not a game!"

What's been missing in the conversation so far about Project 2025 — which calls for eliminating the Department of Education, replacing career civil servants with political appointees, ending affirmative action in government hiring, and virtually eliminating access to abortion, among other sweeping changes — is what it would mean for Black America.

To answer that question, Word In Black took a look at Project 2025's potential effect on five issues important to Black communities: education, healthcare, the environment, criminal justice and faith.

While some proposals are explicit, others are unclear and likely would face significant, insurmountable barriers. But it's likely that Trump would use much of it as a roadmap for his second term.

Education

While the document contains dozens of controversial proposals, arguably the biggest one is to shut down the Department of Education, an institution created in 1867, not long after the end of the Civil War. The theory, according to the blueprint, is to eliminate red tape so that families will be "free to choose from a diverse set of school options and learning environments."

But the plan also would wipe out the Ed Department's Office of Civil Rights, a sub-agency that enforces civil rights laws and investigates schools accused of engaging in discrimination. Although it's been 70 years since the Supreme Court outlawed separate-but-equal education in public schools, OCR is not lacking for work: in 2023, it handled more than 19,000 complaints last year, roughly 1,000 more cases than in 2022.

"The total number of complaints has almost tripled since FY 2009, and during this same period OCR's number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff has decreased from 629 to 556," according to the Ed Department's annual report.

Dismantling a cabinet-level agency that's been around for 157 years and has more than 4,000 employees would probably be a very heavy lift for any administration. But other proposals in Project 2025 would be far easier to initiate: replacing Title I funds to struggling schools

with block grants, allowing states to decide how to spend their share of federal tax dollars, expanding school-choice programs, using federal dollars to fund private schools; cutting "wasteful" school meal programs, swapping Pell grants for private loans while eliminating Biden's student loan forgiveness program; and curbing the teaching of race in schools.

Ultimately, the plan essentially cripples the struggling public education system, which educates the bulk of Black students. It would make it harder to file a discrimination lawsuit. And fewer college-bound Black students — most of whom depend on the federal government to help pay tuition — would be able to pay for higher education.

Health

One of the project's core objectives is to reduce the federal government's involvement in healthcare. This means the incoming president could take a battleax to the agencies that run Medicare and Medicaid as well as affiliated offices that research treatments for insidious diseases and approve prescriptions, medical devices, and personal products like cosmetics.

The main goal: fewer Black or low-income people will have healthcare. Black women, especially expectant mothers, will continue having the worst health outcomes,

Cont. A1. Project 2025





PHOTOS: ADOBE IMAGES

Project 2025

Crime:

It argues for the undoing of police reforms enacted in the wake of George Floyd's murder, absolves police departments under federal oversight because of racial discrimination, calls for more draconian sentencing guidelines, and puts federal district court prosecutors on very short leashes.

Undoing of police reforms

and the practice of medicine will become more politicized than ever.

Although the plan doesn't explicitly call for a federal ban on abortion, it does list "abortion, reproductive health, reproductive rights" as terms the incoming president must delete from every federal government document to make "institutions of American civil society hard targets for woke culture warriors." And it removes federal protections for members of the military and their families if they choose to terminate a pregnancy.

The guidebook argues that "HHS also pushes abortion as a form of 'health care,' ..." and that the "FDA should...reverse its approval of chemical abortion drugs because the politicized approval process was illegal from the start."

The plan also proposes restrictions that effectively criminalize abortion: besides increasing the prospect that abortion providers would face criminal penalties, it calls for the government to track miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortions. It would also restrict access to Plan B contraceptives — even if insurance covers the drugs.

The standard GOP goal of reducing regulations is frequently mentioned and would decrease oversight of healthcare providers and insurers, pharmaceutical companies, and major wrongdoers like the tobacco industry.

Project 2025 also proposes significant changes to Medicaid, including a work requirement, and making Medicare Advantage, currently the paid supplement to Medicare, the default option.

Criminal Justice

Since it began garnering attention, the criminal justice-related headlines from Project 2025 have focused on its proposed politicization of the Justice Department, allowing Trump to salt the department with

political appointees and order investigations of his political enemies. But the blueprint also proposes a range of low-key reforms that would have a significant impact on Black communities.

It argues for the undoing of police reforms enacted in the wake of George Floyd's murder, absolves police departments under federal oversight because of racial discrimination, calls for more draconian sentencing guidelines, and puts federal district court prosecutors on very short leashes.

The justification, according to the report, is a left-wing approach to law enforcement — including progressive prosecutors, lenient judges, and hamstringed police — that has led to a "catastrophic" rise in violent crime.

"In recent years, federal and state officials have succumbed to calls from anti-law enforcement advocates for so-called criminal justice reform," according to Project 2025. "This campaign is not just ill-advised; it has had real-world consequences."

In reality, crime has decreased substantially, nationwide, over the last four years. Police departments under federal supervision usually end up that way because an investigation has revealed long-standing patterns of misconduct. Unleashing those departments increases the likelihood that more Black people will end up like Floyd — dead at the hands of aggressive law enforcement with no federal consequences.

And harsher prison sentences for federal offenders are likely to increase the over-incarceration of Black men, a trend that not only harms Black families but also disrupts Black communities.

Faith

Like the priests who blew their horns in the Biblical battle of Jericho, Project 2025 is a clarion call for demolishing the Constitutional wall separating church and state. And it's not good news for Black Americans.

The plan integrates "Judeo-Christian tradition, stretching back to Genesis," directly and indirectly, into official government policies, from using taxpayer money to fund parochial schools — which would further undermine public schools — to pushing businesses to close on Sunday, a move experts say would damage the economy.

The project calls for dismantling same-sex marriage, erasing specialized LGBTQ healthcare programs, sharply curbing the sale of abortion pills by mail or in person, and criminalizing pornography. While it doesn't explicitly ban abortion — the top goal of far-right conservatives — it outlines

Student Debt

Biden Administration Announces \$1.2 Billion More in Student Debt Forgiveness

This brings the total number of Americans who have benefitted from debt relief actions to 4.76 million, and the total debt relief under the Biden administration to \$168.5 billion

Stacy M. Brown

Word In Black

The Biden administration announced Thursday the forgiveness of \$1.2 billion in student debt for 35,000 public service workers, including teachers, nurses, and firefighters.

The announcement is part of a broader effort to provide loan relief following the Supreme Court's decision last year to block President Joe Biden's plan for widespread college loan forgiveness, and former President Donald Trump and his Republican ally's opposition to assisting students, the poor, and the middle class.

"Today, my administration is canceling student debt for 35,000 people through Public Service Loan Forgiveness, bringing the total number of Americans who have benefitted from our various debt relief actions to 4.76 million people," Biden stated.

According to the Department of Education, this latest round of forgiveness brings the total debt relief under the Biden administration to \$168.5 billion, benefiting approximately 4.8 million Americans. This represents about one in 10 student loan borrowers.

The beneficiaries of this round of debt cancellation are participants in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. Established in 2007, the PSLF program aims to help public servants, such as teachers, nurses, and law enforcement officers, have their debt canceled after 10 years of repayment. In the past, the program has struggled with confusing instructions and complicated regulations, which has reduced its effectiveness. However, the



Project 2025

CULTURE WARS 2.0

From A10

policies to make the procedure as difficult as possible.

It allows churches to retain tax-exempt status, even if they engage in racial discrimination or partisan political activity. And it reinstates the ban on Muslims immigrating to the U.S.

In short, Project 2025 reads like the fantasy wish list of Christian conservatives while dropping a nuclear bomb in the decades-long, left-vs-right culture wars. Critics say it eliminates individual rights and all but establishes Christianity as a state religion, but supporters say it simply restores traditional values to a nation founded on them.

Leslie Tune-Copeland, senior associate general secretary of the National Council of Churches, says the faith-based portion of Project 2025 does “the absolute opposite” of Christ’s teachings about tolerance and love.

“It’s the absolute opposite in the Bible. Jesus doesn’t force his will on anybody, right?” Tune-Copeland says. “If we’re disciples of Christ, we can encourage people, we can support people, we can minister to people, but we don’t force people to do what we do or to think what we think. But there are people out there who are telling you that that’s exactly what you should be doing.”

Those people, she says, “unfortunately, have manipulated our faith in such a way that people have bought into it. They have bought into some of the lies that white Christian nationalism has told us.”

Climate Justice

When it comes to the American government, there are few things conservatives fantasize about more than cutting programs related to climate change. So, it’s no real surprise that Project 2025 is full of ideas for slashing regulations, weakening government enforcement mechanisms, and cutting federal investment in programs related to the environment.

At this point in history, however, when the window for saving the climate is rapidly closing, those plans would be disastrous — and, like most extreme weather events, the consequences for Black and Brown Americans would surely be even worse.

Project 2025 proposes slicing up the Department of Energy, the Environment Protection Agency, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency, to name a few. All have a role in either addressing or monitoring climate change. The plan also calls for using the Department of the Interior to expand oil and gas exploration on all public lands. The federal government would eliminate funding and programs for renewable energy, like wind and solar, and would fast-track fossil fuel production.

At the same time, Project 2025 recommends moving climate-related

Project 2025 reads like the fantasy wish list of Christian conservatives while dropping a nuclear bomb in the decades-long, left-vs-right culture wars.

decisions from the hands of actual climate scientists to political officials.

Considering that Paul Dans, the architect of Project 2025, believes the science is still out” on human-caused climate change, you can only guess what kind of political decisions would be made if this plan is put into action.

Heritage’s Paul Dans, director of Project 2025, told The New York Times that one of its aims is to “investigate whether the dimensions of climate change exist.” In terms of the role of fossil fuels in driving climate breakdown, he told the Times: “I think the science is still out on that quite frankly.”

The plan also proposes eliminating multiple clean energy programs and offices within the Department of Energy — such as the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, the DOE Loan Program, the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, and DOE’s Clean Energy Corps.

The agenda further says that NOAA should be “broken up and downsized,” claiming it has become “one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry.”

MUSIC ARTIST.
rapper, poses during photo shoot in studio apartment.
PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



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Student Debt

Debt forgiveness available for public servants

From A10

Biden administration has reformed the PSLF program’s rules, making it easier for public servants to qualify for forgiveness.

“These 35,000 borrowers are public service workers who have dedicated their lives to strengthening their communities. Because of the fixes we made to Public Service Loan Forgiveness, they will now have more breathing room to support themselves and their families,” the president said.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona weighed in on the importance of the program.

“The additional Americans approved for PSLF today are hardworking public servants who will finally receive the financial breathing room they were promised — and all PSLF recipients can easily track and manage the process through StudentAid.gov,” Cardona stated in the announcement.

The administration also highlighted that this forgiveness includes individuals enrolled in the PSLF program through a limited waiver and regulatory changes. The Biden administration introduced the limited PSLF waiver, which allowed public-sector workers to receive credit for prior repayments that were not previously eligible for loan relief. The deadline for this waiver was October

2022.

Despite setbacks, including temporary injunctions against the administration’s flagship student loan repayment plan, the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan, and the Supreme Court’s rejection of a previous debt forgiveness plan, the Biden administration remains committed to student loan relief. Borrowers can still enroll in the program, the Education Department has confirmed.

Biden emphasized the administration’s achievements over the past three years, including increasing the maximum Pell Grant, fixing income-driven repayment plans, and holding colleges accountable for

exploiting students and families.

“From day one of my administration, I promised to fight to ensure higher education is a ticket to the middle class, not a barrier to opportunity. I will never stop working to make higher education affordable — no matter how many times Republican elected officials try to stop us,” Biden said.

The Biden administration said it continues to work on a plan for broad-based student loan relief through the Higher Education Act, aiming to provide more relief to millions of borrowers despite legal and political challenges.

Annual Langston University President's Scholarship Gala To Feature Entertainer Johnny Gill, Oct. 18

Two-Time Grammy Award Nominee And Member of Popular R&B Group New Edition

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Langston University has announced its 19th annual President's Scholarship Gala is scheduled for Oct. 18. This year's entertainer will be Johnny Gill, a member of the Grammy-nominated group New Edition.

The President's Scholarship Gala is Langston's premier event of the year. LU's largest student scholarship fundraiser, the Gala always features performances from talented artists. Past performers have included A'ngela Winbush,

Tamia, and Charlie Wilson. Gill entered the professional music world in 1983 at age 16 with his self-titled debut album on Cotillion/Atlantic Records. He went on to work with Stacy Lattisaw on their album "Perfect Combination" and released a second solo album, "Chemistry," in 1985 before joining New Edition in 1987, following Bobby Brown's exit from the group. On his first album with New Edition, "Heart Break," Gill helped the group find a more mature sound, which resulted in hits like "If It Isn't Love," which earned a Grammy nomination (1989), and



R&B NEW EDITION MEMBER JOHNNY GILL will perform at the 19th annual Langston University President's Annual Gala on Oct. 18. PHOTO PROVIDED

"Can You Stand the Rain."

He continued to release solo albums in 1990, 1993, and 1996 for Motown Records before joining forces with Gerald Levert and Keith Sweat to form LSG in 1997. With LSG, the group's debut album went multi-platinum. He also won two Soul Train Awards and a second Grammy nomination for his self-titled album in 1991.

Gill reunited with New Edition in 2004 for "One Love," and he has continued his work as a solo artist. His most recent album, "Game Changer II," won a SoulTracks Reader's Choice Award for Album of the Year in 2019.

For more information, visit <https://langston.edu/gala>.

Langston University

Langston University is Oklahoma's only HBCU (Historically Black College and University). The university has six academic schools offering a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The university provides students with a world-class education that includes hands-on learning through impactful research and beneficial internships. LU has campuses in Langston, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa as well as a site in Ardmore.

Oklahoma Birth Of Legends Announces Second Annual Event, Sept. 29

'The Marriage Between Hip-Hop And R&B' Will Feature Live Entertainment, Food Trucks, And Vendors

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Oklahoma Birth of Legends is returning for another year at Guthrie Green, 111 Reconciliation Way, on Sept. 29, 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. The event will celebrate Hip Hop's 51st anniversary.

"The Marriage Between Hip-Hop and R&B" themed event is following last year's festival that included artists from around Oklahoma.

The event will feature the following entertainers: Metr Netr, Ksmoov, Mz Apple, Nitro, Amber DeCassios, Chiney, Nasti Bayb, Onesat Official, Big Burma, Cortney Lachelle, Headliners Muf Gang, and many more. The co-hosts will be MidWest BJ and Tiqua from KJMM (KJAMZ) 105.3FM with D.J. Mike Mike.

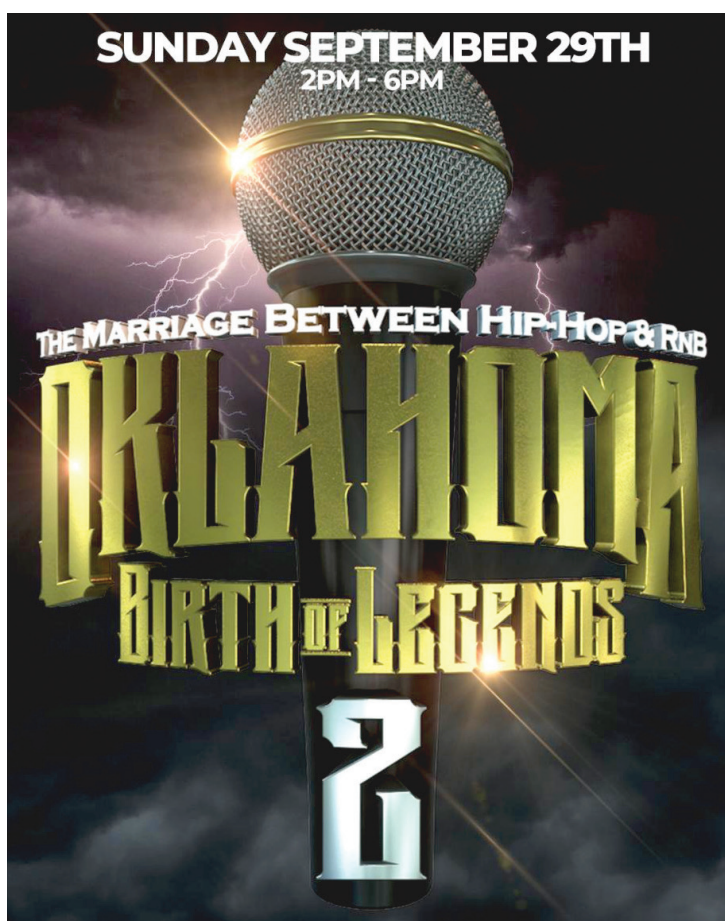
"I remember the years when the masses thought hip hop was just a fad, and it wouldn't last the past 10

years," said Mareo Johnson. He said, "(Global) hip hop has shown it's definitely here to stay by contributing over \$10 billion to the U.S. economy every year with music, concert sales, and merchandise."

The annual program features the state's hip hop legends, pioneers, and a new generation of artists coming together on one big stage to highlight some of Oklahoma's most gifted artists.

Oklahoma Birth of Legends is a vision that Johnson has had for several years. His dream became a reality beginning in 2018 with "Stop The Killing, Start the Healing Old School Hip Hop Reunion," then "Community Love Event," setting the foundation for the last two years' events.

According to Worldmetrics.org, hip hop is 21.7% of total U. S. music consumption. In 2019, the music genre was the most popular genre in the U. S., comprising 28.1% of all music streamed. In



OKLAHOMA BIRTH OF LEGENDS is celebrating the 51st anniversary of Hip Hop at this year's second annual event at Guthrie Green, Sept. 29. PHOTO PROVIDED

2020, hip hop/R&B was the most popular category of total music consumption, surpassing rock 'n' roll.

"It's amazing that something that was birthed from the ghettos and neighborhoods of black expression is now a global multi-billion dollar business," said Johnson.

Food trucks and vendors will be available for families, including Fancy Made, The Shade Room, Black Wall Street Market, IVYL Soaps, Glows Ice Cream, Lyons

Bar B Que, Mrs. Bunkins, Brooks Poppin Popcorn, Aminah's Krafts & Treasures, Beads by Sis., Nessacadia dog boutique and rice warmers, and more.

Sponsors of the event are BELIGHT Entertainment, The Greenwood Beat, and Oklahoma Birth of Legends. Guthrie Green is a partner.

For more information, visit www.guthriegreen.com and contact (918) 209-1565.

'The Gold Standard' Is A Recipe For Success

The Mondays Share Real-Life Experiences And Insights

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Continuing to have success in business and in the sports arenas, a family has been inspired to share its formula for winning in the game of life.

Former Tulsans Sabrina and Kenny Monday have published their story of living the American dream. In "The Gold Standard: Winning Ways with the Mondays," the couple will motivate, inspire, and ignite your passion for greatness.

The book is a collection of real-life experiences and insights on what it means to be goal-getters who are bold, focused, and intentional, according to the Mondays.

"...Through faith, hard work, and determination, we've been able to thrive and build a golden family legacy. At this stage in our life, we've realized part of our purpose is to encourage and motivate others in their lives," said the couple.

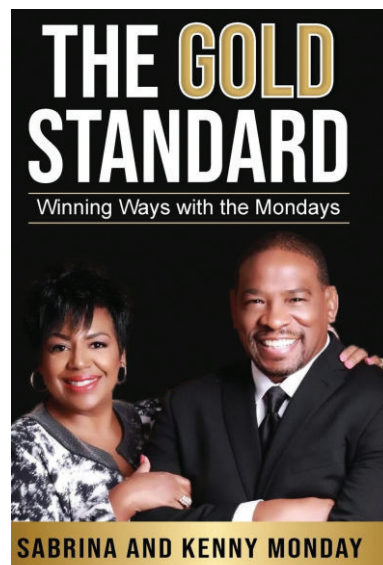
Sabrina is a top Independent

National Sales Director with Mary Kay Cosmetics, and Kenny, the first African American to win a gold medal in Olympic wrestling and a multi-awarded winning wrestler on the national and global stages, is head wrestling coach at Morgan State University. Morgan State is home of the nation's only HBCU D1 wrestling program.

"The Mondays way of winning and passion to educate others blesses the human spirit. You will be inspired to do better, be better, and give better to this world," said Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Baltimore Ravens' Ray Lewis.

The Mondays, married for more than 30 years, are the parents to Sydnee, Kennedy, and Quincy, who have each distinguished themselves in their professional careers.

For more information, contact mondaygoldstandard@gmail.com or visit <https://thegoldstandard.coach/>



SABRINA AND KENNY MONDAY have released a new book, "The Gold Standard: Winning Ways with the Mondays." PHOTO PROVIDED

Events

July

July 19 - 31

The Read to Succeed Summer Program will be sponsored by the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Students must have completed grades K-5. The program is limited to 70 students. Breakfast and lunch will be provided. For more information, contact (918) 596-1020 or info@greenwoodculturalcenter.com

July 19 – Aug. 14

Oasis Fresh Market, 1725 N. Peoria Ave., is sponsoring free breakfast and lunch for kids and teenagers under 18 years old from Mon.-Fri. during the summer. Breakfast will be served from 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. and lunch will be available from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. Extracurricular activities will be offered to the kids and teenagers. For more information, call (918) 935-2092 or send an email to storemanager@oasisfreshmarket.net.

July 19 – Oct. 26

The Original Black Wall Street Merchant Marketplace is open in the Greenwood Business District, 122 N. Greenwood Ave., on Saturdays from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. In addition to vendors, live music, line dancing classes, yoga classes, sound body and soul meditation and sound bath sessions, and free health care screenings will be offered. For more information, visit www.theoriginalbwsmarketplace.com or send an email to hello@tulsacountyliving.com

July 19

The "Let's Talk Credit" workshop will be offered by Chase Bank as a part of its Chase Money Skills program. The workshop will provide essential tips, tools, and resources to improve your credit score. Space is limited for the free program. The program will be held at Chase Bank, 6140 S. Lewis Ave., from 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. To attend, RSVP by July 18 at events.chase.com/300038367.

July 19

Tulsa City-County Library has announced its "One Book, One Tulsa" selection. It is "Calling for a Blanket Dance" written by Oscar Hokeah. The author will appear at the downtown library, 400 Civic Center, from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. His visit will include a presentation of his book and a question-and-answer session. For more information, visit <https://www.tulsalibrary.org/one-book-one-tulsa>.

July 20 - AUG 31

Anadarko Community Library, 215 W. Broadway St., will be hosting "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" exhibition. From the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street, the exhibition explores the complex history of the nation, including The Revolution, Civil Rights, Suffrage, Elections, Protests, and the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens. The project is touring the state. For more information, visit www.okhumanities.org or call (405) 247-7351.

July 25

MetroLink Tulsa is partnering with Youth Services of Tulsa for the "Stuff the Bus" Donation Drive at YST's offices, 311 S. Madison Ave., 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. The community is invited to help students prepare for the upcoming school year. A specially designated donation bus will be parked outside to collect donations items. For more information, contact (918) 582-0061 or visit <https://www.yst.org/>.

July 27

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Alpha Xi Sigma Chapter (SGR – Alpha Xi Sigma) is hosting The Rhoyal Bowl – The Anita Hairston Scholarship Fundraiser at Andy B's, 8711 S. Lewis Ave., 10 a.m. For more information, visit <https://sgrhotulsaalumnae.com/>

July 31

Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative is sponsoring a donation drive for clothes, diapers, wipes, and more at Langston University-Tulsa, 914 N. Greenwood Ave., 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Alexis Wells, Miss Langston, will be in attendance. For more information, contact megan@tulsabeie.org or Alexis Wells at misslangstonuniversity@gmail.com. ght Concert Series at Utica Square, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. For more information, visit <https://uticasquare.com/events/>