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Word In Black. **A13**

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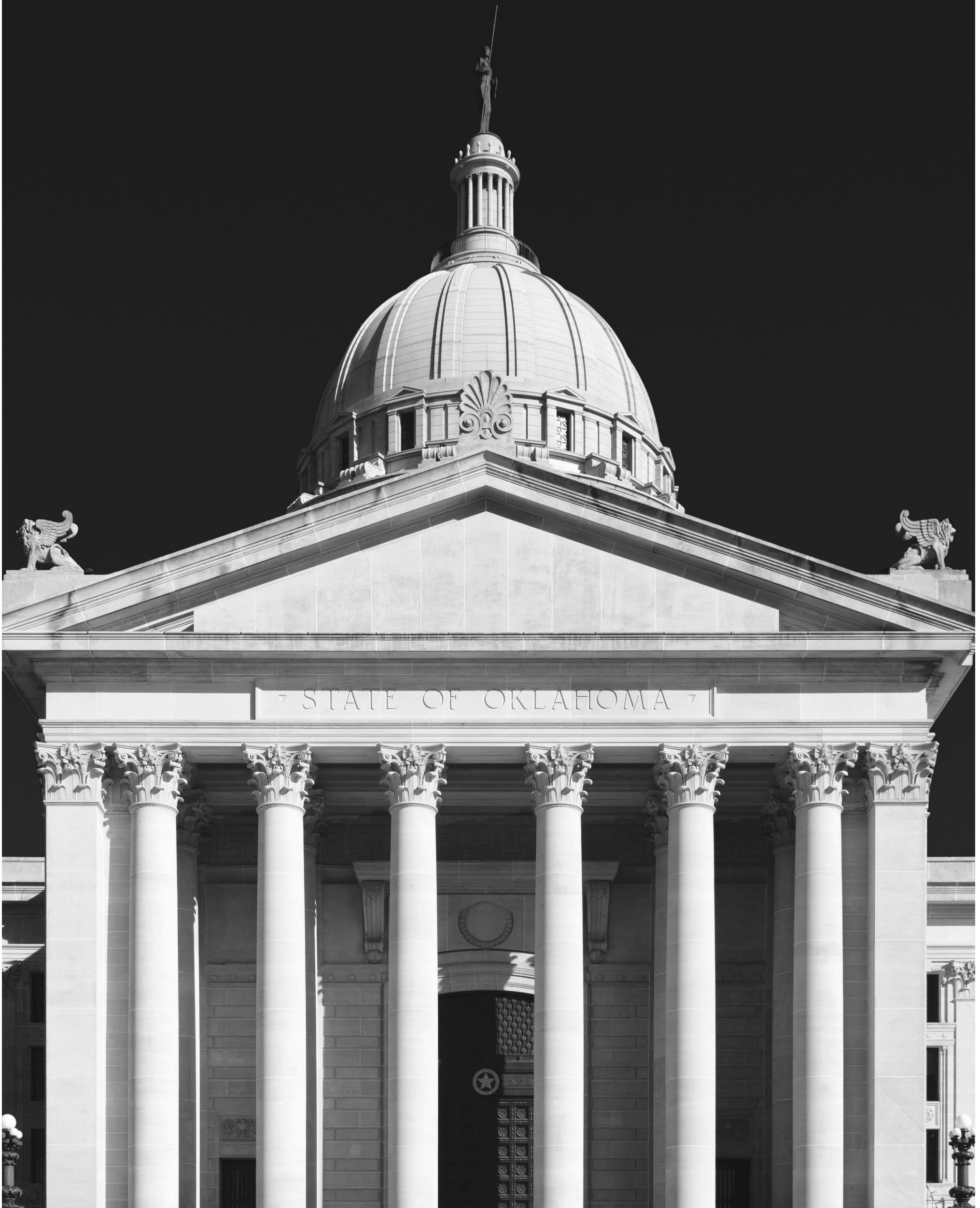
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December 13, 2024 - December 19, 2024

KFOR Lawsuit: Settlement avoids trial, prohibits Ryan Walters from blocking journalist access

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FEATURED

Oklahoma: Parole Rate on the Rise

Oklahoma's parole grant rate increased in 2024 after years of decline, an Oklahoma Watch analysis found.

Criminal Justice, A7



FEATURED

'Unreasonable use of force': OKCPD officer charged for slamming Lich Vu to ground

OKCPD, A7



PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Oklahoma State Capitol is the house of government of the U.S. state of Oklahoma. It is the building that houses the Oklahoma Legislature and executive branch offices. It is located along Lincoln Boulevard in Oklahoma City and contains 452,508 square feet of floor area. The present structure includes a dome completed in 2002.

Walters

KFOR Lawsuit: Settlement avoids trial, prohibits Ryan Walters from blocking journalist access

SASHA NDISABIYE AND TRES SAVAGE
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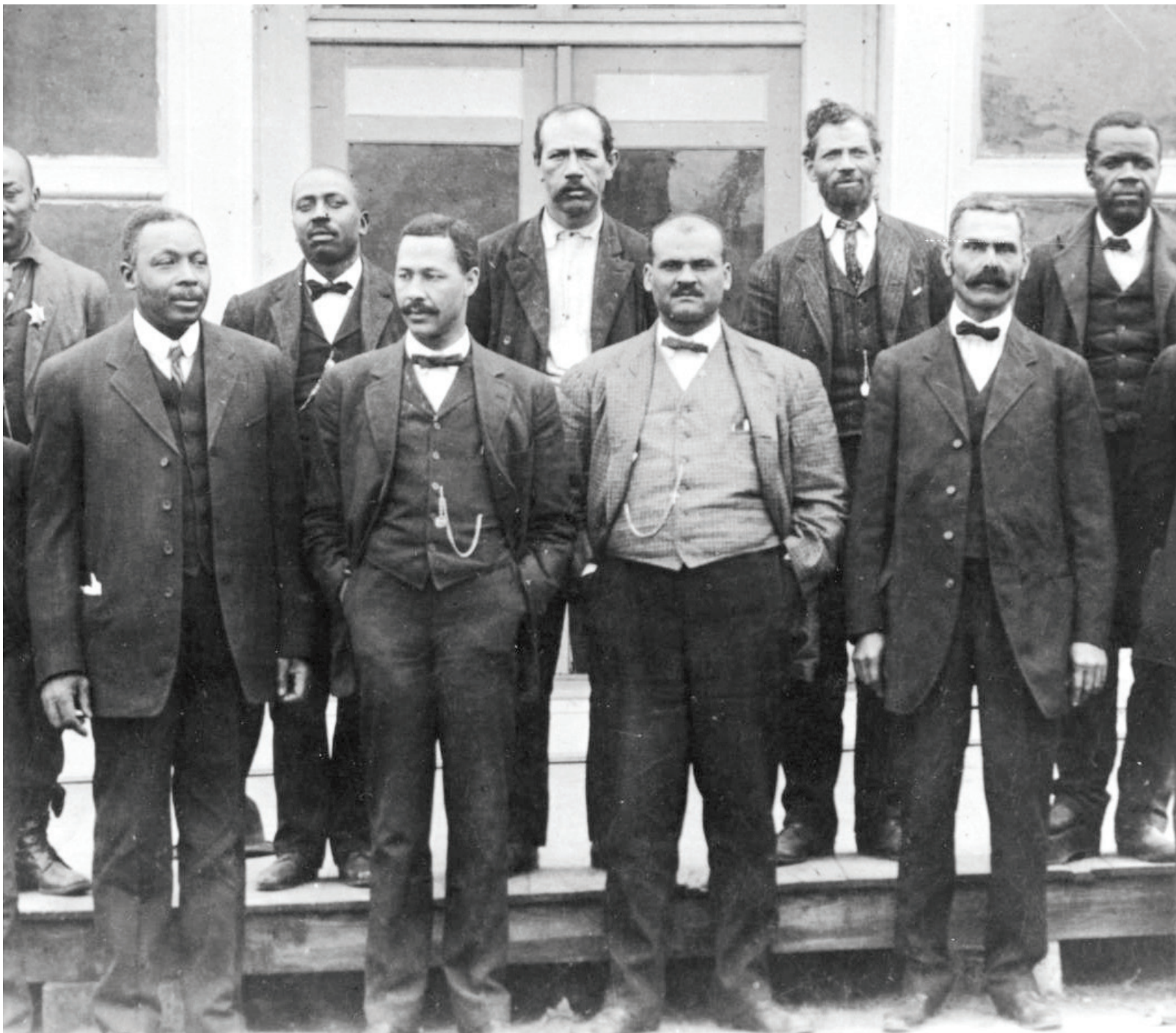
After more than an hour of private discussions behind U.S. District Judge Bernard Jones' courtroom, attorneys for State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters and KFOR struck an agreement this morning to settle a lawsuit alleging that Walters violated First Amendment protections by singling out and prohibiting Channel 4 journalists from accessing public meetings and press conferences.

Cont. A6, Walters

The Oklahoma Eagle

Boley: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



Located halfway between Paden and Castle in Okfuskee County, Boley is the largest and most well known of the more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town, established on land allotted to Creek freedman James Barnett's daughter Abigail, was named after J. B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway. Founded in 1903 and incorporated in 1905, Boley and the African Americans living in the area prospered for many years. The Boley Progress, a weekly newspaper, began in 1905. The paper and various advertising campaigns circulated through the South and lured many former slaves to the new town. At 1907 statehood Boley sheltered 824 individuals.

By 1911 Boley boasted more than four thousand citizens and many businesses, including two banks and three cotton gins. Booker T. Washington, founder of the National Negro Business League and the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, visited the town in 1905 and proclaimed it "the most enterprising and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States." The town supported two colleges: Creek-Seminole College and Methodist Episcopal College. Boley also had its own electrical generating plant, water system, and ice plant. The Masonic Grand Lodge completed a majestic Masonic Temple around 1912. At the time, it was said to be the tallest building between Okmulgee and Oklahoma City. Like many rural towns, Boley suffered through

hard times in the 1920s and 1930s, its population dropping to 1,154 in 1920 and 874 in 1930. By World War II the population stood at 942, and it declined to 573 in 1960 and to 423 in 1980. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, with a population of 1,126, the town was experiencing economic rejuvenation. The number of residents was 1,184 in 2010. Boley still hosts the nation's oldest African American community-based rodeo every Memorial Day weekend. The downtown business district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 75001568) and has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. In April 2020 the census counted 1,087 residents.

The Oklahoma Historical Society is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma's history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

Boley Town Council, (3377.D.2, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

The Oklahoma Eagle

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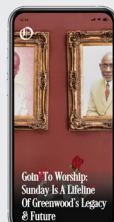
Owasso's Children



New Mental Health Center Faces Huge Construction Cost Overrun

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The Oklahoma State Capitol is the house of government of the U.S. state of Oklahoma. It is the building that houses the Oklahoma Legislature and executive branch offices. It is located along Lincoln Boulevard in Oklahoma City and contains 452,508 square feet of floor area. The present structure includes a dome completed in 2002.

Walters

From A3

SASHA NDISABIYE AND TRES SAVAGE
NonDoc

As part of the settlement, the Oklahoma State Department of Education must pay \$17.91 in damages to KFOR — a numerical reference to 1791, the year the Bill of Rights and its First Amendment were ratified in America.

“This is a huge victory for journalism,” Institute for Free Speech attorney Charles Miller told reporters outside the courthouse. “What happened today is the state school board superintendent decided that rather than go to trial and face that, they would grant KFOR everything that it was asking for in the case. It’s very clear that the defendants all along admitted it that they were doing this because they did not like what KFOR was reporting.”

Two months after Jones had granted KFOR a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction requiring Walters to grant the TV station’s reporters access to State Board of Education meetings and press conferences, the parties returned to U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma on Wednesday for what could have been a bench trial featuring testimony from Walters, KFOR employees and State Department of Education communications director Dan Isett. Like Walters, Isett was named as a defendant both in his personal and professional capacities after placing his

“

This is a huge victory for journalism. What happened today is the state school board superintendent decided that rather than go to trial and face that, they would grant KFOR everything that it was asking for in the case.

Charles Miller, Institute for Free Speech attorney

hands on Brown to block him from asking Walters questions on July 31.

“I appreciate the professionalism for all who have reached [this settlement],” Jones said Wednesday. “I am going to sign off on this agreement, and I am going to award you 60 days (to decide attorney fees) due to the holidays.”

The KFOR lawsuit settlement includes a continuance of the temporary restraining order and a permanent injunction that blocks Walters and Isett from the tactics they had previously employed to block the station’s reporters from observing the state superintendent at public meetings and asking questions afterward. According to the agreed final judgment and permanent injunction, Walters and Isett must:

- Grant access for KFOR to all OSDE board meetings, press conferences, gaggle or other meetings held in which other news media are given nonexclusive access;
- Grant KFOR’s access to the RSVP notices OSDE sends to journalists prior to each meeting;
- Grant KFOR inclusion on the email distribution list for all OSDE press releases and notifications related to OSDE activities, following a meeting between KFOR’s news director and Isett at KFOR’s;
- Grant KFOR’s access to all OSDE “statements” issued to members of the general press in response to daily press

inquiries; and

- Re-establish the media line outside State Board of Education meetings for journalists wishing to attend those meetings, “subject to security concerns that may arise.”

KFOR lawsuit background

KFOR and NexStar filed the federal lawsuit Sept. 23 after being the only members of the press routinely being relegated to a media overflow room during board meetings. KFOR journalists had also been prohibited from attending the press gatherings held after most meetings.

Two days later, Jones issued the temporary restraining order, stating that denying KFOR access to state board meetings and related press conferences would cause “irreparable harm,” especially when First Amendment rights “are at stake.”

Prior to and during litigation, Isett has repeatedly referred to KFOR as “fake news” and has openly discussed the organization’s alleged lack of commitment toward journalistic ethics — reasons Isett and Walters deemed the cause of their restrictions.

Attorneys for KFOR with the local law firm Hall Estill and the national Institute for Free Speech had sought the temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction to prohibit Walters and Isett “from denying plaintiffs access to the room in which Oklahoma

Cont. A9, Walters

OKCPD

'Unreasonable Use of Force' OKCPD officer charged for slamming Lich Vu to ground

ANDREA HANCOCK AND TRES SAVAGE, NonDoc

Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna has charged Oklahoma City Police Department Sgt. Joseph Gibson with one count of aggravated assault and battery for throwing 71-year-old Lich Vu to the ground during an Oct. 27 argument about a traffic violation.

Vu has remained hospitalized with face and neck fractures and a brain bleed, Behenna said in a press release announcing the charge Thursday afternoon.

"The Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office takes all use-of-force incidents very seriously," Behenna said. "We evaluate the law and the facts in each individual case, and in this particular case determined the officer's actions were an unreasonable use of force."

As documented in body camera and security camera footage (embedded above), the Oct. 27 altercation occurred as Gibson attempted to issue Vu a citation for his involvement in a minor traffic accident along Northwest 39th Street in Oklahoma City.

Gibson was issuing citations to Vu and the other driver involved. However, Vu objected to his citation and began arguing with the officer about whether he had performed a U-turn. During the argument, Vu told the officer to "shut up," tapping the officer's chest with the back of his hand once. Security video shows Gibson then grabbed both of Vu's wrists and slammed him to the ground before handcuffing him.

In an Instagram post the next day about her father's condition, Vu's daughter, Teresa, said he was already frail from bone cancer, and she implied a language barrier may have contributed to the conflict.

"This is not how you treat someone that is 5'3", 115 (pounds) with bone cancer after a car accident. Especially if English is their second language," she wrote.

In a statement accompanying incident footage posted to the OKCPD Facebook page Nov. 8, the department said the incident was under review.

"An investigation was immediately initiated, and the officer was placed on administrative leave pending the conclusion of the investigation. The incident remains under investigation and will be presented to the Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office soon," the statement read.

The event has spurred public outrage, especially among the OKC Vietnamese community.

"There is some very, very much uncalled for excessive force and, I think, as a community, we are hurt by that," Thuan Nguyen, president-elect of the Vietnamese American Community of Oklahoma, told KOCO. "It could have been taken in a different way and

“ This is not how you treat someone that is 5'3", 115 (pounds) with bone cancer after a car accident. Especially if English is their second language.

Teresa Vu, daughter of Lich Vu. The Oklahoma County District Attorney, Vicki Behenna, has charged Oklahoma City Police Department Sgt. Joseph Gibson with one count of aggravated assault and battery against Lich Vu, following a traffic violation stop on Oct. 27.

Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna announces her decision to drop charges against seven police officers charged in three fatal shootings of county residents Friday, July 28, 2023. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

The City of Oklahoma City Police Department. Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna has charged Oklahoma City Police Department Sgt. Joseph Gibson with one count of aggravated assault and battery against Lich Vu, following a traffic violation stop on Oct. 27. PHOTO THE CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT



in a different approach instead of having to body slam a 71-year-old Asian male who has language barriers."

OKC resident Lou Esjornson aired her concerns to the City Council during a public comment period Nov. 19. She said "a deescalating force is required" when "emotions are running hot."

"While I am disgusted and heartsick and full of rage over this latest publicized example of police brutality, I am not surprised. I don't know anyone who is surprised. This is the type of behavior we have come to expect from our police department," Esjornson said. "The trust in the police department is so eroded that only radical change will address that. But at a minimum, there needs to be accountability for the officer and the culture that repeatedly produces this type of behavior."

Aggravated assault and battery is defined by Title 21, Section 646 of state

statute as occurring "when great bodily injury is inflicted upon the person assaulted or when committed by a person of robust health or strength upon one who is aged, decrepit or incapacitated."

If Gibson is convicted by a jury, the range of punishment for aggravated assault and battery is up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$500, according to Behenna's press release.

A few hours after the charge was filed, Mark Nelson, the president of the Oklahoma City Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 123, issued a statement supporting Gibson.

"The OKC FOP stands behind Sgt. Gibson, who handled this call for service with professionalism," Nelson said. "It is very disappointing to see a police officer face felony charges for actions taken in good faith while

Cont. A8, OKCPD

Criminal Justice

Parole Rate on the Rise

KEATON ROSS
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma's parole grant rate increased in 2024 after years of decline, an Oklahoma Watch analysis found.

Nearly 29% of state prisoners seeking parole from January through November received a favorable recommendation, up from 24% in 2023. The parole board has the authority to grant parole for nonviolent offenders and recommend the conditional release of violent offenders to the governor.

The December docket meeting was moved to mid-January after former Vice Chairman Calvin Prince, who is under investigation for improper behavior with a woman he supervised in a Pontotoc County Drug Court class, abruptly resigned on Nov. 29. Gov. Kevin Stitt appointed Tulsa attorney Susan Stava to fill Prince's seat on Dec. 4, but one vacancy remains following chairman Ed Konieczky's resignation on Nov. 6.

Parole denials increased significantly in 2022 and 2023, correlating with an uptick in the state's prison population as the

COVID-19 pandemic waned. Several other states saw a similar decline in parole grant rates, according to analysis by the Prison Policy Initiative.

Justice reform advocates have argued that a full-time parole board would be better equipped to review cases and have confidence in recommending parole, particularly for violent offenders. Lawmakers heard testimony on this issue at an Oct. 30 interim study on sentencing reform and could consider changes during the 2025 legislative session.

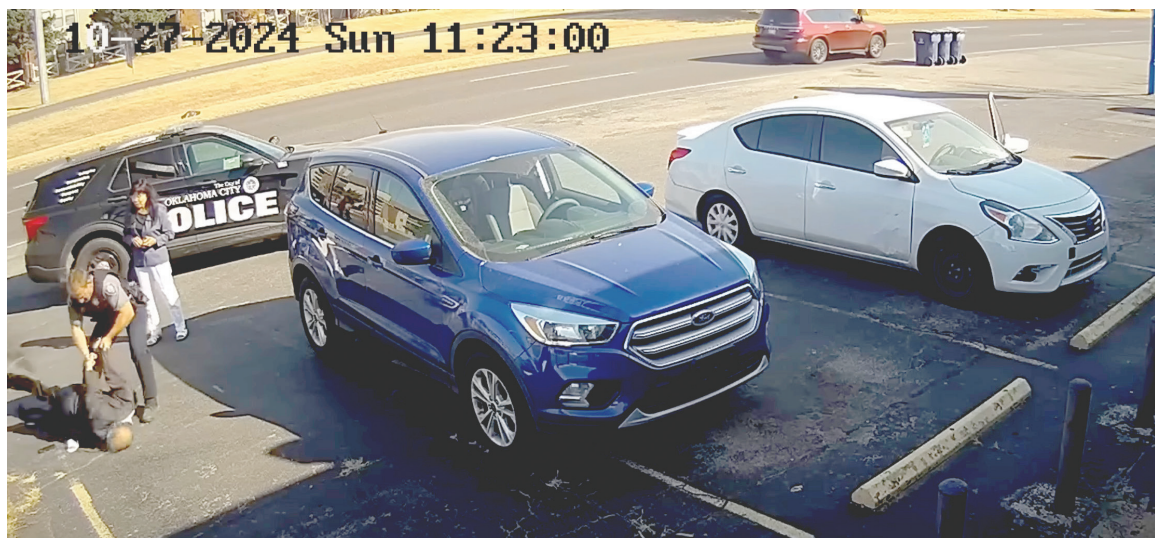
Violent offenders remained the least likely to receive a favorable recommendation, with about 20% making it past the first review stage. That was a significant uptick from 2023, when approximately one in 10 offenders were granted a more intensive stage two review. Most prisoners who receive a stage two hearing are recommended for parole.

The board is set to consider about 550 cases when it meets on Jan. 13. Executive director Tom Bates said he expects all vacancies to be filled by then.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

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.



Lich Vu. Body-camera footage of Lich Vu, a 71-year-old thrown to the ground during an Oct. 27 argument about a traffic violation. PHOTO THE CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Lich Vu. Body-camera footage of Lich Vu, a 71-year-old thrown to the ground during an Oct. 27 argument about a traffic violation. PHOTO THE CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY

OKCPD

Gibson, the first on-duty police officer charged by Oklahoma County District Attorney Behenna

From A7

serving in the line of duty. Sgt. Gibson followed his de-escalation training and protocol when assaulted. We recognize the injuries that Mr. Vu sustained, and we are sympathetic to him and his family. However, we believe strongly that every detail of this incident matters and needs to be considered.

"We are deeply concerned about the impact this charging decision will have on the ability of officers to rely on their training and professional judgment to preserve order and protect the public."

Oklahoma County use-of-force cases scrutinized

Gibson becomes the first on-duty police officer charged by Behenna in a use-of-force case since she took office in January 2023. In July of that year, she dismissed pending manslaughter charges against seven police officers in three separate fatal shootings that had been filed by her predecessor.

"From this point forward, anytime that there is an officer-involved shooting or a death results, those cases are going to be presented and investigated by the grand jury," Behenna said at the time. "I think that's what most metropolitan areas do, and I feel confident in the grand jury

process that we can do a thorough review of the case and make decisions, again, that are evidence-based and consistent with the law in Oklahoma."

About two months later, Behenna empaneled a grand jury to review a pair of law enforcement shootings, including a police officer who shot a man in the chest during a chaotic scene when someone else had fired a gun at a Del City football game. Over the next year, other police use-of-force incidents were also presented to that grand jury. Each time, Behenna's office has announced that the grand jury declined to recommend criminal charges.

In regard to Gibson throwing Vu to the ground Oct. 27, Behenna's press release Thursday appears to indicate that she did not involve a grand jury. Instead, as district attorneys in Oklahoma are empowered to do, she examined the facts of the situation and determined herself that they warranted a criminal charge being brought against the police officer.

Asked whether a grand jury was involved and, if not, why she handled Gibson's alleged assault and battery of Vu in a different manner than she has handled other use-of-force scenarios, a spokeswoman for Behenna did not respond prior to the publication of this article.

In October 2023, Behenna charged off-

duty Edmond Police Department Officer Jennifer Haddock with manslaughter for shooting and killing her brother during an argument at their mother's house. Haddock's attorney is seeking dismissal of the charge by arguing she should be immune from prosecution under the state's "stand your ground" statute.

On Tuesday, a morning hearing on that motion was delayed until the afternoon. Haddock's father and mother testified in her defense, and Haddock was on the stand late Tuesday when District Judge Susan Stallings asked that the testimony be continued at 10 a.m. Friday.

Last month, the OKC City Council approved a reported \$1.5 million lawsuit settlement with the family of Bennie Edwards, a 60-year-old homeless man who was fatally shot in the back by an OKCPD sergeant while experiencing a mental health crisis.

On Nov. 30, OKCPD officer Shamar Kitchens was arrested on a rape complaint while off duty in Canadian County, which is in District Attorney Tommy Humphries' jurisdiction. No charging decision has been announced in that case, but the reporting party filed and received an emergency order of protection against Kitchens for his alleged behavior while they were driving in a car.

"[Kitchens grabbed] me by my hair and

dragged me to the floor board because he saw me texting men on my phone," the woman wrote. "After we dropped [his sister] off he continuously punched me in the head and face and dragged me by my hair when he saw something in my phone he didn't like or I said something he didn't like. He threatened to kill my daughter, him and I multiple times. He raped me in the backseat then held a gun to my head. When he dropped me off at home he said if I told anyone what happened he would kill me, our daughter and himself."

Kitchens could become the second OKCPD officer to be charged with rape this year. In June, OKCPD Sgt. Ryan Stark was arrested and charged in McClain County after an ex-girlfriend reported that he illegally detained and raped her after a date.

Andrea Hancock became NonDoc's news editor in September 2024. She graduated in 2023 from Northwestern University. Originally from Stillwater, she completed an internship with NonDoc in 2022.

Tres Savage (William W. Savage III) has served as editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and worked in health care for six years before returning to the media industry. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and serves on the board of the Oklahoma Media Center.



Carrie Compton, Alternative Education Director, poses for portrait in her classroom at Watonga High School on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, in Watonga, Okla. When students do not show up for school, Compton and Indian Education Director Hollie Youngbear take turns visiting their homes.

PHOTO AP PHOTO/NICK OXFORD

Tribes, School Attendance

As the Watonga school system's Indian education director, Hollie Youngbear works to help Native American students succeed — a job that begins with getting them to school.

FELIX CLARY, ICT
Associated Press

These Native tribes are working with schools to boost attendance

She makes sure students have clothes and school supplies. She connects them with federal and tribal resources. And when students don't show up to school, she and a colleague drive out and pick them up.

Nationwide, Native students miss school far more frequently than their peers, but not at Watonga High School. Youngbear and her colleagues work to connect with families in a way that acknowledges the history and needs of Native communities.

As she thumbed through binders in her office with records of every Native student in the school, Youngbear said a cycle of skipping school goes back to the abuse generations of Native students suffered at U.S. government boarding schools.

Cont. A1, Tribes, School Attendance

Walters

FIRST AMENDMENT Violation Challenges Successful for KFOR

From A6

State Board of Education meetings are held; denying plaintiffs access to and participation in Walters' press conferences; and physically obstructing, touching, or impeding plaintiffs' reporters when they do access the in-person Oklahoma State Board of Education meetings or Walters' press conferences."

In an affidavit, plaintiff and KFOR reporter Dylan Brown described the July 31 exchange where Isett placed his hands on Brown to prevent him from following Walters down a flight of stairs at the State Capitol. The interaction was caught on video and posted on Brown's Twitter account, garnering further online discourse and criticism of the controversial state superintendent.

Walters, a regular critic of media who recently called Tulsa World employees

"leftist loons," has been sued by numerous parties since taking office in January 2023. Concerns that he cares more about national media exposure than running the expansive state agency have led to legislative inquiries and tension at the State Capitol. Walters' tenure has spurred a lengthy federal report about how OSDE has managed U.S. Department of Education funding, and his handling of pandemic-era emergency relief funds has drawn criminal investigation by state and federal law enforcement. Those investigations have yielded only a highly critical state grand jury report, which Gov. Kevin Stitt's office panned as "an inappropriate and unlawful use of a grand jury."

Despite Miller's statement that Walters and Isett admitted to violating the First Amendment because they did not like "what KFOR was reporting," OSDE attorney Michael Beason specified in court that the defendants were not admitting guilt. Asked about Beason's comment, KFOR's attorneys hinted at the concept of res ipsa loquitur — the thing speaks for itself.

"The permanent injunction is the concession," IFS attorney Courtney Corbello said. "It's a great concession. They are now — in perpetuity — enjoined from behaving the way they've been behaving, which is wonderful."

Walters, whose formal request for a jury trial was denied by Jones, declined to discuss the KFOR lawsuit as he and Isett exited the



LEFT KFOR employees stand with attorneys representing the news organization outside the William J. Holloway Jr. federal courthouse in Oklahoma City on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024. PHOTO BENNETT BRINKMAN

BOTTOM Oklahoma State Department of Education communications director Dan Isett and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters walk into the William J. Holloway Jr. U.S. Courthouse in Oklahoma City on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024. PHOTO BENNETT BRINKMAN

courthouse Wednesday.

"Nope," Walters said. "No comment."

Later Wednesday, Brown tweeted, "We did it!!" Isett responded by claiming, "KFOR got nothing of what their lawsuit asked for," and he alleged that Brown "lied in his deposition." Further bickering ensued.

Shortly before 3 p.m., Walters tweeted a screenshot of a KFOR headline claiming the TV station "wins" the lawsuit.

"The Oklahoma news media and @kfor won the fake news award," Walters said. "They lie to the public, lie to themselves, and as the leading liberal media outlet in our state they will continually be held accountable."

Sasha Ndisabiye grew up splitting her time between southern California and southern Arizona before moving to Oklahoma to attend Langston University. After graduating from Langston with a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism and a minor in sociology, she completed a NonDoc editorial internship in the summer of 2024. She became NonDoc's education reporter in October 2024.

Tres Savage (William W. Savage III) has served as editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and worked in health care for six years before returning to the media industry. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and serves on the board of the Oklahoma Media Center.





Hollie Youngbear, Indian Education Director, poses for a portrait at Watonga High School on Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, in Watonga, Okla. Youngbear and her colleagues work to connect with families in a way that acknowledges the history and needs of Native communities.

Tribes, School Attendance

Building relations with students & parents key to achieving positive results

From *Ag*

"If grandma didn't go to school, and her grandma didn't, and her mother didn't, it can create a generational cycle," said Youngbear, a member of the Arapaho tribe who taught the Cheyenne and Arapaho languages at the school for 25 years.

This story is part of a collaboration on chronic absenteeism among Native American students between The Associated Press and ICT, a news outlet that covers Indigenous issues.

Watonga schools collaborate with several Cheyenne and Arapaho programs that aim to lower Native student absenteeism. One helps students with school expenses and promotes conferences for tribal youth. Another holds monthly meetings with Watonga's Native high school students during lunch hours to discourage underage drinking and drug use.

Oklahoma is home to 38 federally recognized tribes, many with their own education departments — and support from those tribes contributes to students' success. Of 34 states with data available for the 2022-2023 school year, Oklahoma was the only one where Native students missed school at lower rates than the state average, according to data

collected by The Associated Press.

At Watonga High, fewer than 4% of Native students were chronically absent in 2022-23, in line with the school average, according to state data. Chronically absent students miss 10% or more of the school year, for both excused and unexcused reasons, which sets them behind in learning and heightens their chances of dropping out.

About 14% of students at the Watonga school on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation are Native American. With black-lettered Bible verses on the walls of its hallways, the high school resembles many others in rural Oklahoma. But student-made Native art decorates the classroom reserved for Eagle Academy, the school's alternative education program.

Students are assigned to the program when they struggle to keep up their grades or attendance, and most are Native American, classroom teacher Carrie Compton said. Students are rewarded for attendance with incentives like field trips.

Compton said she gets results. A Native boy who was absent 38 days one semester spent a short time in Eagle Academy during his second year of high school and went on to graduate last year, she said.

"He had perfect attendance for the first time ever, and it's because he felt like he was getting something from school," Compton said.

When students do not show up for school, Compton and Youngbear take turns visiting their homes.

"I can remember one year, I probably picked five kids up every morning because they didn't have rides," Compton said. "So at 7 o'clock in the morning, I just start my little route, and make my circle, and once they get into the habit of it, they would come to school."

Around the country, Native students often have been enrolled in disproportionately large numbers in alternative education programs, which can worsen segregation. But the embrace of Native students by their Eagle Academy teacher sets a different tone from what some students experience elsewhere in the school.

Compton said a complaint she hears frequently from Native students in her room is, "The teachers just don't like me."

Bullying of Native students by non-Native students is also a problem, said Watonga senior Happy Belle Shortman, who is Kiowa, Cheyenne and Arapaho. She said Cheyenne students have been teased over aspects of their traditional ceremonies and powwow music.

"People here, they're not very open, and they do have their opinions," Shortman said. "People who are from a different culture, they don't understand our culture and everything that we have to do, or that we have a different living than they do."

Poverty might play a role in bullying as well, she said. "If you're not in the latest trends, then you're kind of just outcasted," she said.

Watonga staff credit the work building relationships with students for the low absenteeism rates, despite the challenges.

"Native students are never going to feel really welcomed unless the non-Native faculty go out of their way to make sure that those Native students feel welcomed," said Dallas Pettigrew, director of Oklahoma University's Center for Tribal Social Work and a member of the Cherokee Nation.

Associated Press writer Sharon Lurye in New Orleans contributed to this report.

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OKCPS Teacher

After prior battery plea, OKCPS teacher Kiera Smith arrested as 'horseplay' injures student

BENNETT BRINKMAN
NonDoc

An Oklahoma City Public Schools educator who previously pleaded to resolve a 2018 criminal charge for grabbing a co-worker's crotch was arrested again Tuesday after a 13-year-old student was injured during some sort of wrestling activity in a classroom.

John Marshall Enterprise Middle School teacher Kiera Smith, 41, was arrested on an allegation of aggravated assault and battery and booked into the Oklahoma County Jail. Her arrest came five days after she allegedly threw a student to the ground while "play fighting," according to an affidavit associated with the arrest warrant.

OKCPD Master Sgt. Gary Knight said the department's formal report about the incident was still being reviewed Tuesday, but he provided details from it.

"It appears that on Nov. 21 at 4:30 p.m., the [school resource officer] at John Marshall (Middle School) was notified by the principal that they needed to make an assault report. A student had gotten injured by one of the teachers," Knight said. "It sounds like there was some horseplay and wrestling going on in the classroom, and at some point during this the teacher was involved in it, and one of the students sustained a broken

collarbone."

Oklahoma City Police Department Detective Christian Hoehner investigated the incident and wrote in the affidavit that he reviewed other students' cell phone footage of the incident.

"Defendant Kiera Smith turned and grabbed victim lifting him off the ground and slammed him to the ground. This caused victim to break his collar bone. Victim was on the ground in pain asking for help," Hoehner wrote. "Defendant Kiera Smith comes over to victim and stands over the top of of him and raises both her arms up and looks down at him and says loudly, 'Anything else!' Defendant Kiera Smith walks away and goes to her desk."

Hoehner wrote that the student remained "on the ground in agony and crying" for 15 minutes before he was able to alert his mother — who works in the school's front office — of the situation. Smith allegedly remained at her desk and did not help the student during this time.

Hoehner wrote that Smith told him Monday that she often "play fights" with her students. The detective also wrote that Smith's comments about the incident contradicted students' video.

"During our conversation she did not ask about the victim's injuries or health. She seemed very put off about the situation and downplayed the altercation," Hoehner wrote. "Defendant

Kiera Smith said she was play fighting [another student] and saw victim coming up from behind so she ducked. Defendant Kiera Smith said this caused victim to 'roll over my shoulder or whatever, and he fell on his arm.'"

In an emailed statement, OKCPS director of communications Crystal Raymond said the district is cooperating with law enforcement and conducting its own "full internal administrative investigation."

"OKCPS was made aware of the arrest of Kiera Monique Smith, a teacher at John Marshall Enterprise Middle School. As is routine in these situations, Ms. Smith has been placed on administrative leave," Raymond said. "As always, the safety and security of our students and staff is our No. 1 priority. Because this is a personnel matter, we cannot provide further comment at this time. Inquiries related to this case and/or charges should be directed to the OKC police."

NonDoc also obtained a statement from the school's principal sent to John Marshall staff members, which indicated that "several" educators were involved in the incident and had also been placed on leave.

"Last week, [OKCPS] was made aware of an incident involving several JMEMS staff members, indicating they were in violation of board policy and/or regulations," Principal Jessica Robinson

wrote to staff. "The incident is now being investigated. As is routine in these situations, the employees involved were placed on administrative leave."

Robinson also added a request.

"As you might imagine, this is likely to be a topic of conversation over the next few days. However, out of respect for your colleague and for each other, I encourage each of you to allow law enforcement and the district to complete their investigations and to not jump to any conclusions or contribute to rumors," Robinson said. "As always, the safety and security of our students and staff is our No. 1 priority. Thank you in advance for your professionalism and for remaining focused on our mission to provide the best possible educational experience for our young men and women."

Smith, 41, is being held on \$50,000 bond.

Kiera Smith rehired by OKCPS after 2018 arrest

Smith's arrest Tuesday marked the second time she has been arrested for inappropriately touching someone at OKCPS.

In July 2018, Smith was charged with felony sexual battery after a fellow teacher said Smith groped her in a May at school. At the time, Smith was a Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School teacher.

Cont. A11, OKCPS Teacher

OKCPS Teacher

Smith pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor charge of assault & battery

From A10

OKCPD Detective Valari Homan wrote in her arrest warrant affidavit that the victim was standing in the school's front office on May 3, 2018, when she felt Smith's hand "go between her legs from behind then touching the area between her vagina and rectum. This was on top of her clothing."

"The victim asked Defendant Smith why she just did that. The defendant said, 'I was gonna see what your response was going to be and it should have been this.' The defendant put her hands up as if she was going to hit or slap someone," Homan wrote. "The victim was stunned, felt humiliated and was violated."

Smith eventually pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor charge of assault and battery on Jan. 22, 2019. She received a one-year suspended sentence, according to court documents.

According to State Board of Education records, Smith received an emergency teacher certification in July 2016. It was renewed in July 2017, but does not appear to have been renewed after that. Smith currently holds a standard paraprofessional certification, which took effect July 1, 2022, and expires June 30, 2027.

Smith was listed on the personnel report presented at a July 16, 2018, OKCPS board meeting under the "separations" tab. The only reason listed for her separation from the district was "non-continuing contract."

Asked about Smith's apparent rehiring by OKCPS after the 2018 battery incident, Raymond said she did not have any information about Smith's employment details because the HR employee with the information was out of the office.

Bennett Brinkman became NonDoc's production editor in September 2024 after spending the previous two years as NonDoc's education reporter. He completed a reporting internship for the organization in Summer 2022 and holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma. He is originally from Edmond.

MI-24-1495

FILED IN DISTRICT COURT
OKLAHOMA COUNTY

NOV 26 2024

RICK WARREN
COURT CLERK

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF
OKLAHOMA COUNTY
STATE OF OKLAHOMA

AFFIDAVIT FOR ARREST WARRANT
FOR THE PERSON(S) OF:

Kiera Monique Smith

FOR THE CHARGE(S) OF:

STATUTORY ASSAULT AND BATTERY -- 21 O.S. § 646

I, _____, #1972, your Affiant, being first duly sworn, upon oath, depose and

state that I am a Detective with the Oklahoma City Police Department. I have been employed by the Oklahoma City Police Department for 9+ years. During my tenure, I have been employed as a Patrol Officer. I am currently assigned as a Detective to the Investigations Bureau.

The facts which establish probable cause to believe that a criminal offense was committed by the above-named person, are the following:

On or about May 3, 2018, I, as a Patrol Officer (Oklahoma City Police Officer) at John Marshall Middle School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, was notified of an altercation involving a 13-year-old student causing injury to the student. There was an incident of "play fighting" in a 7th hour (Science/Advisory class) where teachers and students were present. My initial incident was documented under OKCPD Case Number 2018-0085622. A subsequent incident occurred involving the same teacher and other students in 7th hour on or about May 3, 2018. This incident was documented under OKCPD Case Number 2018-0085622.

I conducted a follow-up investigation into these incidents. I spoke to the principal of the school who advised me defendant Kiera Smith is a teacher at this school. I reviewed numerous written statements from students in the classrooms who were involved in the incidents with other teachers. These were provided to me for review of additional information. I reviewed video footage of the incidents taken by students in the classrooms and obtained a statement from her and what she learned from the incident.

I am the mother and guardian of _____, the victim in the above-captioned incident she gave to the school and provided me the story.

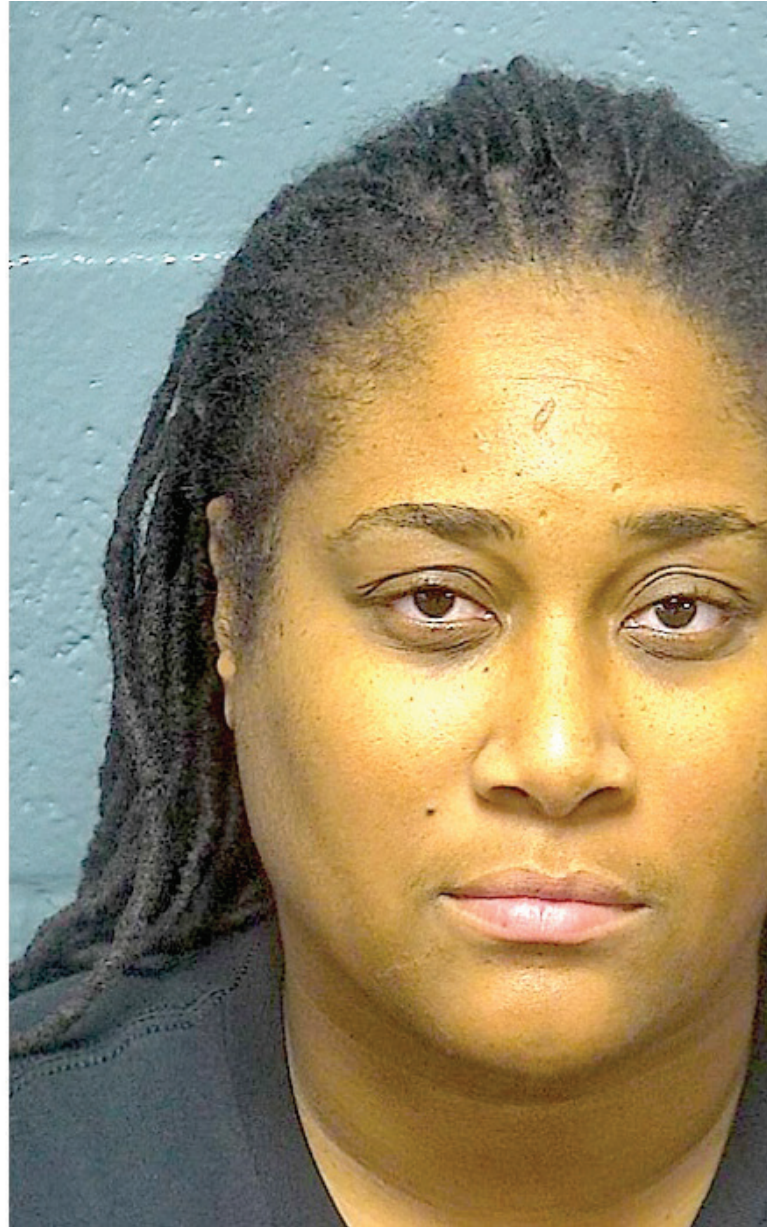


PHOTO PROVIDED

Oklahoma City Public Schools teacher Kiera Smith was arrested Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2024, after she allegedly picked a 13-year-old student up slammed him to the ground in class.

2001 TULSA RACE "RIOTS" MASSACRE: MISSION REPORT UPDATE: HETORIC BY

Breast Cancer in Black Women: Why Early Screening Matters | A14

Should Black Parents Worry About a 4-Day School Week? | A15

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

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Elder Julius W. Bland
Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882
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Northside Christ Gospel Church
3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd. Tulsa OK (918) 625-2374
Sunday School - 10 am
Sunday Morning Worship - 10:45
Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm
Rev. John W. Anderson

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Tulsa, Okla. 74106
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F: 918-587-0642
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Leroy M. Cole, Pastor
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Fax: 918-584-1958
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY
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Wednesday Bible Study Noon and 7:00
Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis

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FEATURED

Black Lives Mattered. Then America Moved On

A New York jury acquitted a white man who fatally choked a “threatening” Black homeless man on a subway car

BLM, A13



FEATURED

What Richmond Got Right About Taking Down Confederate Monuments

Monuments, A15



Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States of America, arriving in Guatemala.

PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Love Letter

GWEN MCKINNEY, Word In Black

Through the ages, Black women fight back, survive, and thrive. Now, post-election, we must redefine democracy beyond casting a ballot.

Sojourner Truth. Harriet Tubman. Ida B. Wells. Fannie Lou Hamer. Shirley Chisholm. Kamala Harris.

I celebrate you — Black women — by invoking these “she-roes” sisters who’ve made enduring freedom strides over the centuries. In that spirit, the November Presidential election starkly shined light on our lineage: loyal, relentless, overperformers who refuse to abandon the quest to shape our destiny.

The first Donald Trump presidential victory in 2016 left us in a state of shock. This time we’re raw and unvarnished. With an oozing wound, we face corrupt autoocracy and unabated white nationalism. Dangerous times — but we will resist. Though you’re weary, the challenges will deepen our resolve to fight back, survive, and thrive.

After November 5, “radical self-care”

has become the call to arms. We draw from writer/activist Audre Lorde who described it as “a radical act of political warfare and self-preservation.”

To sisters who are angry and dismayed — especially younger women — please don’t bail. Now is not the time to leave or give up. We must play the long game. Though horrific, this moment is another chapter in our unbroken march to freedom. Use history as a guiding light in these dark days.

From the Middle Passages forward, the onslaught endured by our ancestors has been formidable. Yet, they confronted each assault with courage because that’s all they knew. Audaciously unfettered, our clarity and sensibilities are gifts passed down over generations.

Through the ages, our contributions

Cont. A14, Love Letter

“

Radical self-care has become the call to arms. We draw from writer/activist Audre Lorde who described it as “a radical act of political warfare and self-preservation.”

Gwen McKinney, a Washington, DC based communications strategist

BLM

Black Lives Mattered. Then America Moved On

JOSEPH WILLIAMS, Word In Black

A New York jury acquitted a white man who fatally choked a “threatening” Black homeless man on a subway car — even though the victim, struggling with mental illness, had committed no crime.

The killing of George Floyd was a watershed moment, a rare instance in which the white killer of an unarmed Black man was held to account. But four years later, the pattern of white men absolved for the death of Black men seemingly has returned.

It’s official: Black lives don’t matter any more, if they ever truly did.

Cont. A14, BLM

Love Letter

Let us create brave spaces in alliance with Black institutions



PHOTO GAGE SKIDMORE, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States, and Governor Tim Walz speaking at a campaign rally at Desert Diamond Arena in Glendale, Arizona. Please attribute to if used elsewhere.

From A13

have been invisible but indelible. Stalwarts of the abolitionist movement. Militants in the women’s suffrage movement. Foot soldiers in the civil rights and Black Power movements. Our toil and service exact a massive imprint in this nation’s demand for democratic rights. Despite marginalization, Black women have never wavered in our quest to be seen, heard, and unerased.

Unlike white women, privileged and pedestaled, ours was never a relationship of compliance or reverence with the patriarchy. They were not our fathers or husbands. They were our enslavers. And our resistance to patriarchy remains rooted in a visceral rejection of bondage.

While other women who are not Black have also fought for race and gender equity, we

speaks volumes about the reach of allies. At the very least they fall short in reaching their constituencies with an empowerment message. At worst, they give a pass to their MAGA counterparts who betray their own best interests on the altar of whiteness.

As we Black women approach the new year, we must redefine democracy through the prism of triumphs and tragedies that have made us stronger and battle-tested.

Trust Black women must be more than a cliché. Let this mantra be a mirror and badge of honor to confront cliques and divisions among us, fomented by classism and ageism.

Let us create brave spaces in alliance with Black institutions including our media, businesses and civic organizations.

Let us unfurl frank conversations about sexism, elitism, colorism, and adverse power dynamics within our families and community, in dialogues with our men and our youth.

“

As we Black women approach the new year, we must redefine democracy through the prism of triumphs and tragedies

Gwen McKinney, a Washington, DC based communications strategist

unapologetically command the stage. Witness the cohesive response from our ranks over the last three presidential elections: 94% for Hillary Clinton, 90% for Joe Biden, and 92% for Kamala Harris.

Our spillover influence illuminates why Black men — vilified early on as sexist and anti-Harris — constituted her second largest voting bloc, at 77%.

Equally instructive, the largest segment of the electorate — white women — are the most divided across class, education, marital status, and religion. It seems progressive women activists have some heavy lifting to do in their community.

Hence, many of us are wondering why a Women’s March on Washington, dubbed “Our Bodies. Our Futures,” is slated for January 18 — two days before the Trump inauguration. What’s the goal? To demonstrate resistance to Trump? Or solidarity with the democratic values he eschews? Though herculean, would resources be better placed educating and organizing convertible white women? The 53% of white women backing Trump

And finally, turn our ears to our beating heart of resistance, resilience, and activism. It’s a resonant sound for daughters of the enslaved, descendants of warriors, mentors, teachers, patriots and democrats. We all have a voice in our democracy.

Mary Ann Shadd. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Anna Julia Cooper. Callie House. Charlotta Bass. Ella Baker. Dorothy Cotton.

These women, not immediately recognized in the roll-call of change agents, have stories of noble pathfinders we should study and celebrate. Like legions of us, they affirm our greatness throughout this American journey.

Then and now, we claim ownership of our bodies, voices and choices. We build on our truths by redefining democracy beyond the limited act of casting a ballot. For Black women, our narrative is rooted in unerasable our achievements of yesterday, realities of today and possibilities for the future.

Gwen McKinney, a Washington, DC based communications strategist, is the creator and campaign director of Unerased|Black Women Speak.

BLM

George Floyd death “turbocharged” the BLM movement

From A13

Four years ago, a white man suffocated George Floyd, a Black man, to death on a gritty Minneapolis street corner as bystanders begged for mercy. That brutal killing of an unarmed Floyd — caught on camera — turbocharged the Black Lives Matter movement, put the phrase “white privilege” into the national lexicon and inspired philanthropists to throw bushels of money at social justice nonprofits.

A year later, Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer whose job included training rookies, was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 22 years and 6 months in prison — a rare instance of accountability and introspection in America’s long history of racist, systemic violence.

Monday brought us yet another reminder of how fleeting that reckoning truly was when a white man was found not guilty of suffocating Jordan Neely, a 30-year-old Black man, to death on the floor of a grimy New York subway train as bystanders called for mercy.

The acquittal of Daniel Penny — already a vigilante hero among the far right — comes just weeks after Donald Trump defeated Kamala Harris for the presidency in a racist campaign, Walmart became the biggest U.S. employer to shut down its DEI program, and social justice nonprofits realized philanthropists are closing their checkbooks to avoid Trump’s enemies list.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Black Lives Matter protesters at one of hundreds of rallies held throughout the United States in 2015, standing against police brutality.

Reasonable Doubt

The Manhattan jury trying the second-degree murder case unanimously agreed with Penny: Neely, a homeless man dealing with mental illness and substance abuse, was a threat to others on the subway car that day, and Penny, a former Marine with a lethal chokehold, should not be held criminally responsible for killing him.

Never mind that the killing happened in broad daylight, in front of many eyewitnesses, and was also recorded on a cellphone camera. Or that when Penny attacked him, Neely hadn’t committed an actual crime or put hands on anyone. Or that Neely was unarmed, that no lives were in danger, that passengers pleaded for Penny to let Neely go, that Penny kept McNeely in a chokehold for nearly five

full minutes, maintaining it long after McNeely stopped struggling.

The jury saw and heard and processed all that evidence and — following roughly 17 hours of deliberation, including deadlocking over a lesser charge — collectively shrugged.

They believed what Penny told detectives: “I wasn’t trying to injure him. I’m just trying to keep him from hurting anybody else. He was threatening people.”

With that, Penny essentially said the magic word, the 11-letter, three-syllable, get-out-of-jail-free card that justifies the taking of a Black person’s life: threatening.

“It hurts, it really, really hurts,” Andre Zachary, Neely’s father, told reporters outside the courthouse after the verdict. “What are we going to do, people? What’s going to happen to us now? I’ve had enough of this. The system is rigged.”

Tragic Life and Death

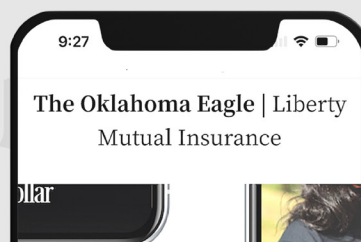
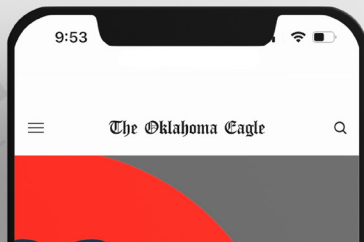
A homeless Michael Jackson impersonator, Neely had been hearing voices and raging in public for about 10 years; his symptoms surfaced not long after his mother was murdered by a jealous and controlling boyfriend when her son was just 14. That sent McNeely on a downward spiral: jail, substance use, stays at psychiatric hospitals.

It all ended after his encounter with Penny, an architecture student at New York City College of Technology. Penny

Cont. A15, BLM

Our Mission

To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial is the cornerstone of our continued success.



BLM

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

From A14

would have faced up to four years in prison for a criminally negligent homicide conviction and up to 15 years for a manslaughter conviction.

Now that he's been acquitted, Penny is likely to become the next hero of the far right, a soon-to-be Fox News icon who saved the day by selflessly killing a mentally ill, homeless, unarmed Black man because the man made people feel unsafe.

But the verdict slams the door on the George Floyd Era, all five metaphorical minutes of it.

Examples abound: the Supreme Court's dismantling of affirmative action in college admissions; state and local laws restricting the teaching of Black history; corporations turning their backs on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Last week, two white police officers were acquitted for killing Herman Whitfield III, an unarmed Black man who died after they restrained and tased him to death.

And let's not forget Trump, who ran an explicitly racist campaign to defeat Harris, the first Black vice president and the first Black woman to run for president atop a major party's ticket.

The More Things Change

Ultimately, Neely's death will become a footnote, more or less, in the oral history, and presumed demise, of the Black Lives Matter

“

It hurts, it really, really hurts. What are we going to do, people? What's going to happen to us?

Andre Zachary, father of Jordan Neely, a 30-year-old Black man who was suffocated to death on a New York subway train by Daniel Neely, who was later found not criminally responsible.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Black Lives Matter protesters at one of hundreds of rallies held throughout the United States in 2015, standing against police brutality.

movement. After all, his death didn't trigger a reaction; although the case made national headlines it came amid heightened fear of violence in New York, particularly among subway riders.

When Floyd was murdered, it set off protests worldwide, and Chauvin's trial drew international coverage. By contrast, the New York chapter of Black Lives Matter could barely scrape together more than a handful of protesters to demonstrate during Penny's trial.

Ginia Bellafonte, a columnist for the New York Times, noted that 38 years ago, in the same Manhattan courthouse, subway vigilante Bernhard Goetz, a white man, was acquitted for shooting four young black men on the subway whom he thought was going to rob him; a Times poll found a majority of New Yorkers agreed with the verdict.

In 2013, a juror who voted to acquit

George Zimmerman of murder charges for killing Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager, said she had no doubt Zimmerman, a self-styled neighborhood vigilante, feared for his life. And study after study shows Black males are typically seen as larger and more threatening than they actually are.

In other words, in 1977 and 2013, juries have told white men it's OK to use deadly force if you believe a young Black man is going to harm you. George Floyd's murder was supposed to change all that.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Joseph Williams is a veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist. He has been published in a wide range of publications, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Politico, The Boston Globe, The Atlantic, and US News & World Report. A California native, Williams is a graduate of the University of Richmond and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He lives and works in metro Washington, D.C.

Monuments

What Richmond Got Right About Taking Down Confederate Monuments

A scholar of white supremacy who's visiting all 113 places where Confederate statues were recently removed shares what he's noticed

DAVID CUNNINGHAM
Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis

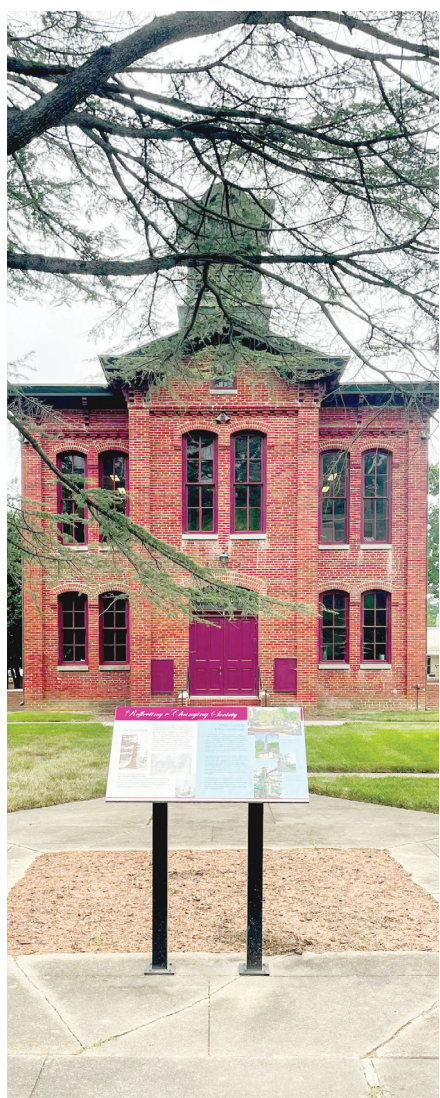


PHOTO DAVID CUNNINGHAM, CC BY-SA
Warwick County courthouse



PHOTO DAVID CUNNINGHAM, CC BY-SA

The Confederate leader Jefferson Davis has new digs in Richmond – a museum where he's displayed prone and paint-splattered.

In a symbolic rebuke of the American South's racist history, an old Confederate monument now has a meaningful new life, four years after it was toppled in Virginia.

In June 2020, protesters in Richmond used ropes to pull down the bronze statue of Confederate leader Jefferson Davis, splashed paint on its surface, and slung a toilet paper noose around its neck. Charged discussions over what should become of it followed.

In 2022, the statue – carefully and controversially preserved in its degraded state and displayed on its back instead of its original upright position – went on display in a Richmond museum.

This year, I visited the Davis statue in its new home. I am traveling to each of the 113 communities that removed or relocated Confederate symbols between 2015 and 2023 during the national reckoning sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement. As a sociologist who studies legacies of historical conflict, my goal is to understand how those sites – and the objects that for decades stood upon them – are reshaping where and how the Confederacy bears upon the nation's current identity.

From monument to artifact

Seven of the Confederate statues taken down over the past decade commemorated Jefferson Davis. A Mississippi congressman and U.S. secretary of war, Davis led the Confederacy between 1861 and the end of the Civil War four years later.

Before it was damaged and pulled down by activists in 2020, Richmond's 8-foot bronze rendering of Jefferson Davis occupied a premier plot on the city's famed Monument Avenue. Standing in front of a 60-foot Doric column, the statue proclaimed the president of the Confederacy a heroic "exponent of constitutional principles" and "defender of the rights of state."

Now the Davis statue is at The Valentine – a museum that occupies the site of the studio where the statue was sculpted in 1903. Curators there have gone to great lengths to conserve the monument in its "2020 state." The pink paint covering much of its surface, toilet-paper noose and gleaming bronze surfaces – uncovered upon impact with the ground – remain.

These details offer physical evidence of protesters' challenge to the city leaders who erected the statue. Richmond put it up 50 years after the Confederacy's fall, with a plaque calling the Civil War an "unflinching struggle against overwhelming odds," fought "to clothe their country with freedom."

Such ostensibly lofty principles reflect the "Lost Cause" myth advanced by groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which helped to fund and place the monument in 1907. This Lost Cause account obscures the fact that Confederates, in fact, seceded from the Union to defend and perpetuate slavery.

Moving the statue from its public perch on Monument Avenue and into a museum transformed it from a commemorative object glorifying its subject to a historical artifact. And presenting the statue in its prone and damaged state makes its removal the center of that historical story.

Indeed, this unscrubbed statue still allows viewers to consider why Davis was celebrated in the first place. But they can no longer avoid reckoning with those who refused to allow him to remain standing.

Monuments and memory

Monuments removed entirely from public view quickly fade from public memory, as my 2022 study with Christina Simko and Nicole Fox found. Moving them to alternative sites, meanwhile, enables public conversation about them to continue.

Our research casts doubt on claims that movements against Confederate symbols seek

to "erase history." But who guides this process is pivotal to a full and honest appraisal of the histories that these objects embody.

An hour's drive south of Richmond presents a sharply opposing case. That's where another Confederate statue has been claimed by a local resident and displayed in a fenced area on the edge of a cornfield.

Its interpretative marker, installed as part of the cornfield display in 2021 after the statue was removed from the grounds of the nearby Isle of Wight County courthouse, has a critical bent. Yet its critique is not of Confederate supporters of enslavement.

"By 2020," the marker reads, "historical monuments and memorials on public land were allowed to be vandalized and destroyed in many localities. It was decided by those who wanted to protect this monument that it should be taken out of government ownership and control."

The government courthouse itself fails to counter this challenge. The monument's original site includes no trace or mention of the statue that once resided there or why it was removed.

That lack of recognition remains the case with the majority of removed Confederate monuments. But a handful of other Virginia communities beyond Richmond do now provide a space for the public to grapple with these histories.

Warwick County's courthouse in Newport News includes a weatherproofed display panel telling the story of the Confederate monument that once stood there and explaining why and how county officials responded to activists' calls to remove and place it in storage.

A cemetery in Hampton has added a plaque to the obelisk of its Confederate soldier's statue that reframes the significance of the Civil War. It was, the plaque says, the beginning of "the path to freedom for millions of people who had been enslaved."

And in Roanoke, a statue of Henrietta Lacks, whose "immortal" cell sample taken shortly before her death in 1951 continues to transform medical research, now stands where a monument to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee once stood. The Lee statue remains on view, but in a cemetery 2 miles down the road.

These approaches represent different and sometimes conflicting narratives about removed monuments. But the fates of all these statues and their grounds illustrate an unfolding movement to recast the connections between the past and today.

Who defines American values? In their respective reckonings with the Confederacy – and with modern racial justice movements – relocated Confederate statues are bellwethers of ongoing struggles to resolve this question.

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