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BEST BUY IN THE WEST

Racially Motivated Violence Against Black Teen Prompts \$10 Million Claim Against LAUSD

Solomon O. Smith | California Black Media

A distraught mother and her legal team announced a \$10 million lawsuit against the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) on Dec. 16, alleging that her son was the target of bullying because of his race.

“CS DOE is a 14-year-old African American student at Verdugo High School. He is a Ninth Grader,” reads a statement the plaintiff’s attorneys shared with California Black Media (CBM).

“Almost from the first day of class (in August 2024), CS DOE was targeted by Latino students who called him racial slurs, physically attacked him and threatened to stab him.”

The family’s identity has not yet been released to the public due to safety concerns, according to their attorneys Bradley C. Gage and Caree Harper. The student’s mother is identified only as A.O. in the complaint. The first video,



Left to Right) Harper comforts the victim’s mother as she becomes emotional when describing the attacks on her son while her attorney Gage listens. Verdugo Hills High School on Thursday, Dec. 20, 2024 in Tujunga, CA.

filmed in August, showed several non-Black students punching and kicking a Black student in a bathroom on campus while yelling racial slurs. The mother claims that the students who attacked her son were not punished, and the administration asked her to move her son to another school for his safety.

“They wanted him to leave the school without giving any disciplinary action towards

those students,” said the student’s mother. “He’s not going anywhere. He’s going to finish. I wanted him to at least stay until the December winter break, and then I was going to transfer schools for him.”

Before she could enroll her son in a different school the attacks escalated.

In December, a second altercation, on a video shared

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2024 In Review: 7 Questions for the California Association of Black School Educators

Edward Henderson | California Black Media

The California Association of Black School Educators (CABSE) is an organization consisting of elected and appointed school officials, administrators and instructors from across California who are committed to advancing equity for Black students.

CABSE members represent governmental agencies, charter schools and charter school organizations, public school districts, traditional public schools, and community colleges.

The organization’s primary goal is to expand PK-14 educational opportunities for all students in California, with an emphasis on under-represented and under-served Black students.

California Black Media (CBM) spoke with CABSE



The CAACC proudly played a pivotal role in the State of California African American Economy Summit, one of our signature events for 2024. This summit is designed to strengthen Black economic influence through education and fellowship, bringing together the state’s most influential Black business leaders, policymakers, and economic thinkers. Our discussions covered critical economic topics relevant to California’s African American business community, including policy, government contracts, and equity.

President Satra Zurita and into the new year.

Conference Chair Micah Ali Looking back at 2024, about this year’s successes, what stands out to you disappointments, and plans Continued on page 7 for the organization coming

2024 in Review: 7 Questions for the Equal Justice Society

Edward Henderson | California Black Media

The Equal Justice Society (EJS) aims to transform the nation’s consciousness on race through law, social science, and the arts. Their legal strategy aims to broaden conceptions of present-day discrimination to include unconscious and structural bias by using social science, structural analysis, and real-life experience.

Currently, EJS focuses its advocacy efforts on school discipline, special education, the school-to-prison pipeline, race-conscious remedies, and inequities in the criminal justice system.

The Oakland-based nonprofit also engages the arts and artists to create work and performances that allow wider audiences to understand social justice issues and struggles.

California Black Media spoke with Keith Kamisugi, Director of Communications at EJS, on the organization’s successes, disappointments



The Equal Justice Society (EJS) aims to transform the nation’s consciousness on race through law, social science, and the arts.

and plans moving forward to the new year.

Looking back at 2024, what stands out to you as your most important achievement and why?

The Equal Justice Society’s most important achievement so far in 2024 is the substantive advancement of reparations in California as one of the leaders of ARRT (the Alliance for Reparations, Reconciliation and Truth) with eight reparations measures

passing the State Legislature and signed by the Governor and one ballot measure presented to the voters in the general election, (Prop. 6). The cumulative outcome of reparations legislation is a small step for reparations advocates but a giant leap for Black Californians.

On the international front, EJS President Lisa Holder delivered remarks in April

Continued on page 7

2024 in Review: 7 Questions for Reparations Advocate Chris Lodgson

Edward Henderson | California Black Media

The Coalition for a Just and Equitable California (CJEC) is a statewide organization comprised of various associations, community groups and individuals united by their commitment to fight for reparations and reparative justice for the descendants of enslaved Black American men and women.

CJEC was one of seven “anchor organizations” sanctioned by the California Reparations Task Force and the California Department of Justice (DOJ) to evaluate California’s role in slavery and Jim Crow discrimination. They also aided in developing resolutions to compensate African Americans in California for past and ongoing race-based injustices.

California Black Media (CBM) recently interviewed



Chris Lodgson and members of the Coalition For A Just and Equitable California (CJEC) held a reparations Listening Session in Sacramento, California, in August 2022. CJEC participated in many reparation activities across the state, specifically to raise awareness about how the effects of chattel slavery have reverberated for generations in California, leaving Black people at a distinct disadvantage in wealth, education, and health.

Chris Lodgson, the lead organizer and advocate for the CJEC to discuss the organization’s achievements, challenges, and plans heading into the new year.

Responses have been edited

for length and clarity.

Looking back at 2024, what stands out to you as your most important achievement and why?

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TRAFFIC STOPS, RACIAL DISPARITIES, AND THE CALL FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

By Stacy M. Brown
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Traffic stops remain the most common reason for police-initiated contact across all racial groups, according to a new report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The report, part of a series examining police interactions with U.S. residents since 1996, reveals that racial disparities in these encounters persist.

The Prison Policy Initiative responded to the report by noting a need to address inequities and rethink public safety strategies.

The BJS data show that Black drivers are more than twice as likely as drivers of other racial groups to be searched or arrested during a traffic stop. Black individuals are also over three times as likely as White individuals to experience the use of force in their most recent encounter with law enforcement. Although Black people accounted for only 12% of those whose most recent contact was initiated by police or related to a traffic accident,

they represented one-third of those who reported being threatened or experiencing nonfatal use of force.

Alarming Trends for Older Adults and Women

The report also laid bare troubling trends regarding the use of force against older adults and women. In 2022, people aged 65 or older made up 5% of those who experienced the threat or use of force. While the figure may seem small, it represents a more than tenfold increase since 2015. The rise suggests that even older populations are not spared from escalating police aggression.

Women also face an increasing risk of police force. In 1999, women comprised only 13% of those subjected to police force. By 2022, that figure had doubled to 28%. Among those who experienced force, women were more likely than men to perceive it as excessive, with 51% of women reporting excessive force compared to 44% of men.

Persistent Disparities Across Age Groups

Young adults aged 18-24 were the most likely age group to experience police

contact, with 25% reporting interactions in 2022. They were also the most likely to experience police-initiated contact (15%) and traffic accident-related contact (4%). Alarming, more than 1 in 5 individuals who reported the threat or use of force in their most recent police encounter were between 16 and 24 years old. The Prison Policy Initiative noted that these kinds of interactions can have life-threatening consequences, as over 70% of police killings in 2023 began with non-violent incidents or situations where no crime had been reported.

Systemic Issues and Data Gaps

Officials at the Prison Policy Initiative published a "wish list" of 22 critical gaps in criminal legal system data. The list includes data on arrests for technical violations, the quality of healthcare in correctional facilities, and the outcomes of pretrial supervision. Officials said the absence of such data hampers efforts to understand and address the criminal legal system's impact fully.

The Case for Alternatives to Policing



The Prison Policy Initiative responded to the report by noting a need to address inequities and rethink public safety strategies

Further, the available data suggest that many police encounters could be handled more effectively by alternative community resources. In 2022, nearly 30 million people initiated contact with police, but only half of those interactions involved reporting possible crimes. Many sought help for non-crime emergencies, such as medical issues, car accidents, or quality-of-life concerns. A 2022 analysis of 911 calls in major cities found that only 4% involved violent crimes. Officials said this indicates a need for investments in community-based services to reduce the risks associated with police intervention.

The Path Forward

Some officials noted that the decline in police contact does reduce opportunities for abuse. However, they said, the deep-seated racial disparities in policing remain unresolved.

"Just because the sheer number of police interactions was lower than it has been in decades does not mean the problems with our nation's fraught system of policing are solved," the Prison Policy Initiative stated in its release. **"Racial disparities in police interactions, misconduct, and use of force remain pervasive and demand immediate attention."**

Ethics Committee Finds 'Substantial Evidence' of Misconduct by Former Congressman Matt Gaetz

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent
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The House Ethics Committee released a 42-page bipartisan report on December 10, detailing evidence of criminal and unethical conduct by former Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz during his time in Congress.

The report, which outlined allegations of statutory rape, payment for sex, illegal drug use, and acceptance of impermissible gifts, follows Gaetz's resignation in November after his controversial nomination as U.S. Attorney General by President-elect Donald Trump. Gaetz withdrew his nomination amid widespread criticism and opposition from Senate Republicans and others.

The investigation revealed substantial evidence that Gaetz had sex with a 17-year-old girl in 2017, paid her \$400, and engaged in similar transactions with other women, often involving illegal drugs. The



The House Ethics Committee released a detailed report on Monday, revealing extensive evidence that former Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz engaged in criminal and unethical behavior during his time in Congress.

report also documented that Gaetz accepted impermissible gifts, such as a luxury trip to the Bahamas, and misused his position to expedite a passport application under false pretenses. The Ethics Committee concluded that Gaetz violated federal and state laws, as well as House rules prohibiting prostitution, drug use, and the improper acceptance of gifts.

While the Department of Justice previously investigated

Gaetz for sex trafficking and declined to press charges, the Ethics Committee resumed its review in May 2023. Gaetz obstructed the investigation by refusing to cooperate or provide requested documents.

The findings discredited his position in the House, prompting the release of the report in the interest of accountability. Despite the extensive evidence, Gaetz continues to deny wrongdoing.

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2024 in Review: 7 Questions for Social Justice Executive Kaci Patterson

Edward Henderson | California Black Media

The Black Equity Collective (BEC) is a community-focused, public-private partnership with Black equity as its central, driving force.

BEC's focus is to strengthen the long-term capacity and infrastructure of Black-led social justice organizations in Southern California.

Born out of two organizations – the Social Good Solutions Firm and the Black Equity Initiative -- BEC's mission is centered on the belief that progress on Black equity and racial justice must be part of any credible social justice movement in the United States. Additionally, the collective believes equity is only achieved when philanthropic investments, public policies, and institutional practices converge to boldly confront racial injustice.

Kaci Peterson, the founder and Chief Architect of Social Good Solutions and the Black Equity Collective, has over 18 years of experience in the

non-profit and philanthropy sectors, managing several multi-million-dollar grant-making portfolios.

California Black Media (CBM) spoke with Peterson recently. She discussed the organization's successes, disappointments, and lessons from 2024 as they continue their initiatives into the new year.

Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Looking back at 2024, what stands out to you as your most important achievement and why?

This year, we celebrated our 10-year anniversary as a firm. Since the firm's inception we are proud to announce that cumulatively we've been able to raise and leverage over \$55.5 million for Black-led organizations in California.

One of the things that we have accomplished -- and we are very proud of -- is our expanded membership. We had an initial goal of 30 to 40 organizations. We have a current membership of 54 organizations and a waiting list of over 120.

How did your leadership and investments contribute to improving the lives of Black Californians?

We launched a survey involving 200 Black-led organizations to study the economic impact of Black-led organizations on California's GDP. The results of that survey will be released in early 2025. One of the reasons that survey is important is that it develops a narrative around why there is severe underinvestment in Black-led organizations.

What frustrated you the most over the last year?

The decline in philanthropic investment after the height of commitments following the murder of George Floyd, following COVID. There was really this opportunity for philanthropy to permanently shift course and take a different approach when it comes to Black-led organizations.

While some have, for the most part, philanthropy has retreated to a place of familiarity, which is pulling back on their funding.

What inspired you the most

over the last year?

I am always inspired by the leaders on the ground who just continue to do monumental work. The fact that here in Los Angeles, we've been able to stand up a doula hub in response to the policy advocacy work that so many of our leaders, our Black women in particular, really pushed and

got state legislation passed a couple of years ago so that doulas can be an approved and reimbursable expense through Medi-Cal. There has been a real push to make the implementation of that law real.

I'm proud of the collaboration that we've been able to do with other Black-led networks across the state.

What is one lesson you learned in 2024 that will inform your decision-making next year?

I started an 11-week sabbatical on Nov. 1. I think oftentimes as Black leaders, we are burning the candle at both ends. And I don't think Black people are even aware of the social, emotional, and physical toll that taken on us



Kaci Peterson, the founder and Chief Architect of Social Good Solutions and the Black Equity Collective, has over 18 years of experience in the non-profit and philanthropy sectors, managing several multi-million-dollar grant-making portfolios

-- even subconsciously. We must really see, rest, retreat and take respite as part of our journey to justice.

In one word, what is the biggest challenge Black Californians face?

Erasure.

We've really leaned into a narrative of Black permanence and what it means to preserve our community, our culture, our contributions, our language, our history, our leaders, our institutions. There is so much effort to erase us through burnout and fatigue, through underfunding of our organizations. To erase our

history by banning books and not allowing certain things to be talked about.

We must have a counter battle.

What is the goal you want to achieve most in 2025?

I really want to start up an endowment for the collective. I think it's really important to be able to preserve all of the things that the collective has contributed to the ecosystem so far -- the philanthropic ecosystem in particular. To be able to create and establish an endowment for the

collective that allows that work to happen in perpetuity is really important.

Biden Commutes Sentences of 37 Federal Death Row Inmates

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent
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The American Civil Liberties Union celebrated President Joe Biden's historic action in commuting 37 federal death sentences. The group proclaimed that Biden has taken an "unequivocal stand against one of the most flawed and inhumane mechanisms of the U.S. criminal legal system."

"President Biden took a historic and courageous step in addressing the failed death penalty in the United States -- bringing us much closer to outlawing the barbaric practice once again," said Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the ACLU. "President Biden has reaffirmed the power of redemption over retribution and reminds us that state-sanctioned killing does not make us safer. The ACLU has long advocated against the death penalty and shed light on its fundamental flaws -- it is error prone, racially biased, and a drain on public resources. And although we

had hoped President Biden would commute all federal death sentences for those reasons, today's milestone brings us much closer to our goal of outlawing the death penalty once and for all."

By commuting the sentences of 37 individuals on death row, Biden has taken the most consequential step of any president in our history to address the immoral and unconstitutional harms of capital punishment, the ACLU said in a release. "With a stroke of his pen, the President locks in his legacy as a leader who stands for racial justice, humanity, and morality. This will undoubtedly be one of the seminal achievements of the Biden presidency," Romero asserted.

On Monday, December 23, Biden commuted the sentences of 37 individuals on federal death row, changing their punishment from execution to life without the possibility of parole. The White House said the latest decision aligns with the administration's ongoing efforts to curtail the federal death penalty, leaving only three individuals

still sentenced to death at the federal level.

The commutations exclude cases involving terrorism or hate-motivated mass murder. Among those who remain on death row are Robert Bowers, responsible for killing 11 people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018; Dylann Roof, who murdered nine Black worshippers at a Charleston church in 2015; and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the Boston Marathon bombers in 2013.

"Make no mistake: I condemn these murderers, grieve for the victims of their despicable acts, and ache for all the families who have suffered unimaginable and irreparable loss," Biden said. "But guided by my conscience and my experience... I am more convinced than ever that we must stop the use of the death penalty at the federal level."

Federal Executions Halted

Shortly after taking office, Biden's administration implemented a moratorium on federal executions through Attorney General Merrick Garland. Since then, no federal inmate has been executed.

The decision reflects Biden's long-standing opposition to capital punishment, dating back to his time as a senator and reiterated during his 2019 presidential campaign when he called for eliminating the death penalty.

Clemency Milestones

Biden's decision follows his announcement of clemency for approximately 1,500 individuals earlier this month, the most significant such action by any president in a single day. Those granted clemency included individuals in home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic who successfully reintegrated into their communities.

The president has also granted categorical pardons for non-violent marijuana possession and to former LGBTQI+ service members prosecuted for private conduct related to their sexual orientation.

Broader Implications

The use of capital punishment remains legal in about half of U.S. states, where more than two dozen executions have occurred this year, according to the



The White House said the latest decision aligns with the administration's ongoing efforts to curtail the federal death penalty, leaving only three individuals still sentenced to death at the federal level.

Death Penalty Information Center. Nationwide, over 2,200 individuals remain on death row.

Billie Allen, one of the 37 whose sentences were commuted, has long maintained his innocence. In a recent interview, Allen expressed hope that Biden would take action, saying, "As someone who's innocent, he should do the right thing sooner instead of later."

Allen described the grim atmosphere at Terre Haute federal prison, where most federal death row inmates are housed, during Donald Trump's presidency. Execution

rehearsals reportedly increased following Trump's election, and some staff members taunted inmates in anticipation of resumed executions.

A Step Toward Reform

Biden said his decision ensures that future administrations cannot easily reverse the moratorium or carry out executions based on outdated policies. "My administration remains committed to a fair and effective justice system, ensuring accountability while providing second chances where possible," Biden said. "This is a step toward that vision."

The Sun-Reporter

EDITORIAL

We wish to plead our own cause.
Too long have others spoken for us.

Freedom's Journal, March 16, 1827.

The Liberty in Laundry Act Sounds Like a Joke. Sadly It's Not

By Ben Jealous

The incoming Trump administration is supposedly interested in “efficiency.” It has a whole quasigovernmental department – the Elon Musk- and Vivek Ramaswamy-chaired Department of Government Efficiency – purportedly ready to take aim at government waste. So why are the very same people going to such extremes to make wasting energy one of their highest priorities?

Among the final acts of the MAGA-led House of Representatives to end this Congress was the passage of the absurdly named Liberty in Laundry Act. It prohibits the Secretary of Energy from setting or enforcing

energy efficiency standards for clothes washers and dryers. It is but one of several legislative attacks on energy efficient home appliances, like dishwashers and refrigerators, advanced by the House’s Republican majority. While the bill may have no chance of passing in the Senate, this is a clear signal about the GOP’s backwards priorities in the next Congress.

Energy efficiency simply means an appliance uses less energy to do its job. It not only can save households hundreds of dollars a year, it is one of the best – and most readily accessible – ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from homes and buildings, and mitigate our impact on the climate. Not only that, it is an area where the product manufacturers, sellers, and climate advocates agree.

The Department of Energy (DOE) is required by law to regularly evaluate and set energy efficiency standards for a wide range of appliances. Yet every time the DOE wants to ensure we have options that meet at least a minimum standard, it seems there is an extremist politician or talking head ready to scaremonger about Big Government coming into your home to take your beloved appliances. In reality, energy efficiency standards simply provide consumers with better choices – more high-tech products that work even better than outdated inefficient models and will save households money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (a fifth of which in the US come from people’s homes).

Donald Trump has railed against water efficient toilets and showerheads, and

against replacing inefficient lightbulbs that still use the same basic design from over a hundred years ago and waste up to 90% of the electricity powering them. After all, Thomas Edison’s invention was ground-breaking at the time, but technology has come a long way since then.

In 2023, far-right media and politicians tried to ignite a firestorm over gas stoves, peddling the falsehood that the Biden administration was trying to ban them. In reality, the DOE proposed improved efficiency standards for both gas and electric stoves that would not go into effect until 2027 and would help consumers save as much as an estimated \$1.7 billion. This is part-in-parcel of the myths being used to stoke outrage about regulations that would protect consumers – both their wallets and their health (don’t forget that producing excess energy from fossil fuels adds to the climate crisis and the air and water pollution that kills and sickens millions of Americans every year).

While it seems utilities and energy companies might not mind consumers buying more of their product than they use or need, many electric utilities actually support efficiency measures. They bring down overall demand on their grids, reducing costs for them as well as their consumers.

Most news coverage of the issue highlights interest group opposition from homebuilders. However, it seems the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) may actually be inflating the upfront costs, while ignoring the savings on utility bills over time that



Ben Jealous

more than make up for them. Those savings are especially important to low-income families, who carry a higher energy burden by spending a greater portion of their household income on energy bills. Low-income households are forced to spend as much as four times more on energy bills. And there is research that shows families that fall behind on their utility bills are at risk of the state taking their children away.

Of course, not all homebuilders subscribe to the NAHB’s rhetoric. They know that homes can be constructed to be more efficient, solar-ready, and in ways that cut costs and actually enhance quality of living. And for new construction of all-electric buildings, costs are even lower because there is no need to run a gas line, which saves tens of thousands of dollars.

But at the end of the day, opposition to energy efficiency standards is not just about doing the bidding of an industry group like NAHB. More than anything, based on the fallacious claims and outright distortions of what these regulations actually

do, it seems to be simply about manipulating voters by making them angry. People do not like being told what to do. They do not like being told the products they like – or at least have no problems with – will be banned or taken from them. When framed in a way that means less choice – or “freedom” – for consumers, too many people are ready to take the bait and believe the lies. The truth is, these standards are simply about providing consumers with better choices on the shelf for when their existing appliances ultimately do need to be replaced.

In Washington and state capitals alike, lawmakers need to put their constituents first, and not traffic in lies and misinformation. No one benefits from wasted energy other than the fossil fuel industry executives whose bank accounts get fatter with the selling and burning of an unnecessary excess of their product. Well, them and the politicians who benefit from misleading voters about what energy efficiency actually means.

Rollbacks, Rallies, and Resilience: Black America’s Battle for Equity in 2024

By Stacy M. Brown
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In 2024, Black Americans encountered a series of political events that tested their resilience and commitment to justice. From court rulings affecting civil rights to landmark political milestones, 2024 was a year of challenges and pivotal achievements.

Presidential Election and Kamala Harris’s Historic Nomination

Vice President Kamala Harris made history as the first Black woman to lead a major party’s presidential ticket. Most experts viewed her nomination as a breakthrough in representation and a continuation of the fight for equity. Harris’s campaign, which didn’t begin until President Joe Biden dropped out of the race in July, focused on protecting voting rights, promoting economic justice, and addressing racial inequities.

Despite those efforts, the 2024 election resulted in Donald Trump’s return to the White House. His campaign rallies were marred by controversy, including appearances in former

sundown towns and speeches at Madison Square Garden laced with racially charged rhetoric. The return of Trump to power stunned pundits and raised alarms within Black communities about civil rights protections.

“Trump’s rhetoric is dangerous, and his choice of venues speaks volumes,” said Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association.

Trump’s conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records in a New York hush money trial made him the first U.S. president ever convicted of a felony. The conviction meant little, as did the more than 50 other charges, as Trump still won the presidential election.

Project 2025 and Its Implications for Black Americans

Project 2025, a 900-page ultra-conservative roadmap drafted by Trump allies, details plans to restructure the U.S. government in ways that could severely impact Black Americans. The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) released an in-depth analysis showing how Project 2025 would weaken anti-discrimination laws, dismantle the Department of Education, threaten Black political power, and

exacerbate health disparities.

“The most important part of the report is how Project 2025 will have an impact on individual lives and how those individual lives will be upended through the policy proposals,” Karla McKanders, director of the LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute, explained.

The report warned that dismantling the Department of Education would harm programs like Head Start, where 28% of enrollees are Black children, and cutting Pell Grants would disproportionately affect Black college students. The plan also recommends replacing career civil servants with political appointees, which could undermine the integrity of agencies like the Census Bureau and result in undercounting Black communities, impacting political representation and federal funding.

The dismantling of agencies like the EPA and FEMA would leave Black communities vulnerable to environmental disasters. “The resources that the federal government provides when there’s a natural disaster are instrumental in getting communities back on their feet,” McKanders noted.

Rollbacks on Affirmative Action and DEI Programs

The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* dismantled affirmative action policies in higher education, igniting a wave of state and corporate rollbacks targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. In the months that followed, legislative efforts and legal challenges have accelerated the dismantling of these programs, further showing that opportunities for Black and brown communities are being systematically eroded.

In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis signed legislation banning the use of state funds for DEI programs in public universities, leading to the immediate closure of DEI offices and the cancellation of diversity-related initiatives. Texas quickly followed suit, eliminating diversity offices and mandatory diversity training, mandating that hiring practices in public institutions remain “color-blind and sex-neutral.” Alabama joined the effort by shutting down DEI offices at its public universities, enforcing laws that prohibit the teaching of so-called “divisive concepts” regarding race or sex.

Legal battles in the private sector have mirrored these state-level rollbacks. The Fearless Fund, which provides

grants to businesses owned by women of color, was forced to suspend its operations after a federal appeals court ruled the program may violate civil rights laws. The lawsuit, brought by Trump-backed conservative legal groups, claims the fund’s mission of supporting minority women discriminates against other races. The case has set a troubling precedent, signaling that diversity-focused business initiatives could be vulnerable to similar challenges.

Corporate DEI programs are also facing intense scrutiny. Southwest Airlines recently faced legal action over a program that offered free flights to Hispanic students, with a lawsuit alleging the program discriminated against non-Hispanic students. Boeing encountered resistance when a judge rejected its plea deal in a separate case, raising concerns about the company’s commitment to diversity in selecting a compliance monitor. Once an industry leader in DEI, Walmart announced a rollback of its diversity policies, opting to abandon practices prioritizing suppliers based on race or gender to avoid potential litigation.

Civil Rights leaders said the erosion of DEI policies reflects a broader movement aimed at

reversing gains made in racial and gender equity since the civil rights era. The rollbacks, framed by their proponents as efforts to ensure fairness, have drawn sharp criticism from advocates who view them as deliberate attempts to undermine progress.

“Without affirmative action, Black and brown students face higher barriers to entry. These rollbacks are designed to push us backward,” said NAACP President Derrick Johnson.

Crump also represented the family of Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who died in January 2023 after being beaten by Memphis police officers during a traffic stop. In October 2024, three former Memphis police officers were convicted of obstruction of justice in federal court, though they were acquitted on the most serious civil rights charges.

In November, Crump led the legal effort that resulted in a \$98.65 million jury verdict in a federal civil lawsuit against former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger for the 2018 killing of Botham Jean in his own apartment. Crump called the verdict a powerful testament to Botham’s life and the profound injustice of his death, pointing to critical issues of racial bias and police accountability.

THE SUN-REPORTER
RELIGIOUS SECTION
 THE BAY AREA'S CHURCH NEWS & ACTIVITIES



Sunday School Lesson
 By Shunda Criswell

Salvation Prepared For All People

Luke 2:25-38
Related Scriptures: Leviticus 12:1-8; Luke 1:57-80; 2:1-21 Place: temple in Jerusalem Time: 5 or 6
B.C. Golden Text: "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou has prepared before the face of all people" (Luke 2:30-31)

There was a man in who lived in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and had a deep level of commitment to his belief and way of spiritual life. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die till he had seen the Messiah. Simeon was righteous and devout "reverent")

before God. Unlike the religious leaders, he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, that is, the Messiah, the One who would bring comfort to the nation. The notation that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon reminds one of the Old Testament prophets on whom the Holy Spirit came. Since Anna was "a prophetess", Simeon was probably also in the godly prophetic tradition of Israel. The special revelation from the Holy Spirit about seeing the Messiah was apparently unique and perhaps came because of Simeon's intense desire for the Promised One. On seeing the Child and picking Him up, Simeon ... praised God, the response of godly people toward the Messiah throughout the Gospel of Luke. He then uttered a psalm

of praise extolling God for fulfilling His promise by bringing salvation. The Messiah is the Source of salvation, as His name Jesus indicates. In all three of the hymns of thanksgiving and praise recorded by Luke in his first two chapters (1:46-55, 68-79; 2:29-32) lie the deep significance of the births of John and Jesus for the salvation of Israel and the world. Simeon noted that the Messiah was to be for the Gentiles as well as for Israel. The idea of salvation for the Gentiles is set forth many times in the Gospel of Luke. (Luke 2:27-32). The words of Simeon caused Mary and Joseph to marvel. Hough, they had been told that their Son was the Messiah, perhaps they had not comprehended the scope of His ministry to

the entire world—to the Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel. (Luke 2:33). Simeon revealed to Mary that her Son would be opposed (a sign ... spoken against) and that she would be hurt greatly. Her grief would be like a sword piercing her soul. The Son would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. Throughout His ministry Jesus proclaimed that the only way to the kingdom, something the nation had long sought, was to follow Him. The ones who did so would receive salvation; they would "rise." But the ones who did not believe Him would not receive salvation; they would "fall." These consequences would reveal what they thought about Mary's Son. (Luke 2:34-35). Anna's thanks to God. 2:36-38. This godly woman from the

prophetic tradition continued the work Simeon had started. Anna was 84 years old and had devoted herself completely to the Lord's service in the temple since her husband had died years before. She announced to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem that the Messiah had come. The word about Jesus was likely known throughout the entire city as people either believed or disbelieved the words of the old prophet and the widowed prophetess. Anna (literally "grace") recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah when Joseph and Mary brought him to the temple for his dedication. (Luke 2:36-38). We are encouraged to live faithful lives until Jesus comes. Be Blessed!!

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Black Teen \$10 Mil Continued from page 1

with news media, showed 4 to 6 boys attacking a Black student and using racial slurs. The video also shows a person in a safety vest trying to stop the fight and telling them to "handle it after school." Then, the video ends.

CS DOE, a 14-year-old

freshman, left the school but was followed by a car, according to Gage. Several individuals exited the vehicle, one with a "large butcher knife." A fight ensued and two people were stabbed. The Black student was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon but was later released into his mother's custody.

Harper, who is handling the criminal charges, expressed

frustration with the school and the District Attorney's office. She criticized newly elected Los Angeles County District Attorney, Nathan J. Hoffman, for charging a 14-year-old for "defending his life" while reconsidering the resentencing of Eric and Lyle Menendez, brothers who were convicted of murdering their parents in the 1980s.

The high school freshmen

is scheduled to appear in juvenile court on Feb. 1, but Harper says she will reach out to the District Attorney and make the case against charging the young man.

"His mama had to go find him because he was hiding and fleeing for his very life," said Harper. "So, we want to have a conversation with the new district attorney, who will hopefully see it as Bradley

and I see it: this was a man who was defending his life against certain death."

According to the boy's mother, the young student is still traumatized and has not been able to return to the area because it remains unsafe. Racial slurs have also been spray painted on their home.

The victim's mother says that it has been difficult being

separated and that her son has been scarred by the incident.

"I'm sad. I'm devastated, you know," said the mother. "I still feel like they're after him. I still feel like they can kill him, possibly."

The LAUSD and principal of Verdugo High School did not respond to CBM's requests for comment.

Black School Educators Continued from page 1

as your most important achievement and why?

Ali: I would have to say that two highlights have been the ongoing support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Engie, and other sponsors that have enabled us to bring together like-minded education leaders twice a year to collectively advance innovative and meaningful strategies to achieve change on behalf of Black students across our state.

The other is the feedback we have received from presenters, attendees, and vendors alike about how our convenings and our collective work has inspired them to act within their local school districts and community colleges. It is a groundswell of solidarity and action that, yes, we hoped for, but have been overwhelmed with great pride and joy at seeing it manifest.

How did your leadership and investments contribute to improving the lives of Black Californians?

Zurita: CABSE's leadership and investment in improving the education system for Black students in our great state has resulted in a long-standing focus on transforming public education and its response to Black students. By pulling from the very wisdom of those educators and leaders who care deeply about Black students and who are showing great promise through their efforts. CABSE creates a venue where educators can be unapologetic about our mission, even in the face of long-standing implicit bias, low expectations, and unabating under-support of Black students. Something powerful happens when changemakers come together to make change.

What frustrated you the most over the last year?

Zurita: Continuing to see

the deep impact of COVID-19 Pandemic school site closures on students academically and emotionally --

especially Black students. This makes our work and our advocacy more vital than ever. We've made some gains but have a long way to go. I think folks really don't understand the sweeping impact of that time. Our schools are still in catch-up and recover mode from the learning loss.

CBM: What inspired you the most over the last year?

Zurita: Seeing our CABSE convenings grow in depth and breadth -- our strategies, powerful content and reach. In addition to attendees from virtually every area of the state, CABSE has benefitted from the faithful attendance of districts from the East, Midwest, South and Southwest US. This has brought a wonderful new dimension to CABSE, as it relates to best-practice sharing. We get to

learn from the strengths and successes. There is something to say about solidarity that reaches across state lines. It gives me great hope.

What is one lesson you learned in 2024 that will inform your decision-making next year?

Ali: Our Blueprint for Education Equity is a crowd-sourced framework of strategies that have shown great promise for improving the education experiences and opportunities for Black students. In 2024, we developed an equity self-assessment tool for districts to use in evaluating their own efforts on behalf of Black students. What we found is that virtually every district that participated in our survey indicated they have begun implementing most of our Blueprint strategies, whereas when we first launched the Blueprint, a number simply were not. One thing we learned, though, is that most

districts are not as intentional as they could be at measuring how well those implemented strategies are helping Black students. For example, a recent report indicated that dual enrollment programs increased greatly across the state, but Black

students remain underrepresented in them. This is both a challenge and an opportunity -- and we are here for it.

In one word, what is the biggest challenge Black Californians face?

Zurita: Many Black students across our state are dealing with a host of challenges: homelessness, food insecurity, exposure to violence, not to mention bias remains a pervasive problem. To add to the challenge, educators are worn out, tired, and frustrated. We now need to think about how we can simultaneously inspire and empower students and educators alike. The

system needs an overhaul.

What is the goal you want to achieve most in 2025?

Zurita: In 2025, we hope to stand CABSE up as a fully functioning non-profit organization engaged in research and policy design.

Ali: We also aim to deepen the content of our convenings, including adding a Math Track and what we are calling Social Determinants of Education Track to our annual conference and institute, which will address those social contexts that prevent Black students from realizing their potential as students. We will also launch a new Black Board Member Academy to assist relatively new school and community college board members in leveraging their role to effectively impact Black student outcomes through governance strategies and identifying high quality learning curricula.

Equal Justice Society Continued from page 1

2024 at the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in Geneva, Switzerland.

How did your leadership and investments contribute to improving the lives of Black Californians?

In addition to our work with the reparations movement, EJS has directly impacted Black school children and Black women through our lawsuits against several California school districts and against manufacturers of hair relaxers, which caused women to develop uterine and ovarian cancers. In September 2024, EJS's clients, the Black Parallel School Board (BPSB) and individual families, finalized a five-year plan that improves policies to ensure

that students with disabilities, and particularly Black students with disabilities, are no longer subjected to unnecessary exclusion from integrated environments, among other resource and discipline inequities, within Sacramento City Unified School District.

The lawsuit against manufacturers of hair relaxer products led to a June 2024 expose in The New York Times Magazine questioning why hair relaxer products are still being aggressively marketed to Black women when the products have been linked to reproductive disorders and cancers.

What frustrated you the most over the last year?

We have been troubled by the misinformation resulting from some media outlets about reparations developments,

such as wrongly equating reparations solely with financial compensation and characterizing stalled reparations legislation as structural defeats for reparations. While financial compensation is part of any comprehensive reparations, it is not the totality of how we repair the harm. Of the 115 recommendations from the California Reparations Task Force Final Report, only one was focused on how to calculate financial compensation. The vast majority of reparations legislation invokes the UN principle of systemic and

institutional repair that ensures that the harm of anti-Black discrimination ceases and never happens again. Moreover, in terms of characterizing the progress of reparations in California,

when we look at 400 years of oppression through White supremacy, one legislative session is not enough time to judge success or failure.

What inspired you the most over the last year?

EJS was inspired by the 630-plus organizations and businesses -- majority non-Black -- that endorsed the California Reparations Task Force final report. These endorsements exemplify the broad-based support for the reparations movement from entities that recognize the social imperative to repair the harm caused by 400 years of White supremacy and who seek to support reparations in all its forms -- compensation, apology, satisfaction, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition.

What is one lesson you learned

in 2024 that will inform your decision-making next year?

Although not a new lesson, something we re-learned in 2024 was the incredible lengths to which the Right Wing will devote resources towards destroying race conscious remedies and truthful narratives that seek to simply level the playing field, afford equal opportunity, provide a factual historical accounting, and repair the harm four centuries of terror and oppression, specifically race-forward harm repair policies such as affirmative action, reparations, critical race theory and DEI. Since 2023, 86 anti-DEI bills have been introduced in 28 states and in Congress. Fourteen of those bills have become law and more than half the states have passed so-called "anti-woke" laws that prohibit

narratives that tell the truth about the history of racial oppression in America.

In one word, what is the biggest challenge Black Californians face?

Racism.

What is the goal you want to achieve most in 2025?

We would like to establish reparations and harm repair as the dominant American civil rights issue for the next 25 years. Also, we would like to draw national attention to healthcare inequality and the data points that establish the need for health equity for Black women. Black birthing mothers are 3 times more likely to die during childbirth and from post-partum complications, irrespective of income, due to implicit and explicit bias in healthcare.

Reparations Questions Continued from page 1

The fact that we helped to advance the first ever state level lineage-based reparations related legislation this year is probably the biggest success. At the start of the year, we introduced the first ever bill specifically for residents who were descendants of people who were enslaved in this country.

Also, state agencies across the state of California started collecting what we call lineage data. Now, specifically state employees or people who want to become state employees, have the option to self-identify as

Black Americans who are descendants of people who were enslaved in this country. That is based on some legislation that we wrote in 2022 that the Governor signed. It took effect this year.

How did your leadership and investments contribute to improving the lives of Black Californians?

California took steps to recognize and identify residents who are these descendants. I think that is a positive impact on Black Californians because for the first time ever we are being seen.

We have a saying: 'if you don't see a community you

can't serve a community'.

What frustrated you the most over the last year?

Several of the bills that we supported this year were blocked. And then also one of the other bills that we supported this year was vetoed.

Secondly, the actions of the California Legislative Black Caucus not just in blocking the bills, but how they didn't work with each other.

What inspired you the most over the last year?

How people across the state of California -- and across the country, really -- have been able to come together in support of the reparations

effort. Grassroots advocates and organizers and supporters of reparations generally have been able to work together, especially after the events over the last several weeks with the bills being blocked. Also, the national attention that we are getting has also been inspiring.

I'm also really impressed with and inspired by how much our folks are getting involved in the political work, and how much we've matured politically. We really have been caring more about elected leaders' policies rather than what their political parties are.

What is one lesson you learned in 2024 that will inform your

decision-making next year?

One lesson that we learned is that if Black legislators are working against each other, which is what we saw this year, that will hurt reparations. I know that this year we had Black legislators working against other Black legislators and that hurt the effort. As advocates for reparations, we must work to build more political power, specifically in areas where we would like influence over the members who represent those areas.

In one word, what is the biggest challenge Black Californians face?

Power. Political power specifically.

It became very, very clear when the Black Caucus introduced those bills that they call reparations bills. An apology is not reparations. Bringing back affirmative action is not reparations. Letting people wear their hair the way they want to at work is definitely not reparations.

To me, that was a clear sign of political weakness.

What is the goal you want to achieve most in 2025?

The passage and enactment of actual reparations legislation. That is the number one goal. That includes bills and policies that we didn't get this year and other things that we want.

Enhanced Michael Jackson ONE Immerses Fans in the King of Pop's Unmatched Brilliance

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

Cirque du Soleil's electrifying tribute to Michael Jackson, Michael Jackson ONE, has reached new heights with cutting-edge technology, refreshed performances, and an extended run through 2030.

Hosted at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, the 90-minute show continues to honor the King of Pop's unparalleled legacy through captivating visuals, revamped choreography, dazzling drone displays, and newly designed costumes.

The premiere of the updated production drew prominent attendees, including Jackson's son, Prince, and estate co-executor John Branca. Beginning at 7:30 a.m. EST

on Tuesday, Dec. 24, the Black Press of America's Let It Be Known News will air a special presentation exploring Jackson's genius and lasting influence, featuring Branca, hip-hop icon Chuck D, and others.

Branca reminisced about Jackson's affinity for Cirque du Soleil during an exclusive VIP meet-and-greet with Let It Be Known News. "Michael loved Cirque shows. Once, he asked me to drive him to one in San Francisco because his security wasn't available," Branca shared. "He was thrilled to meet the cast, and they were equally ecstatic to meet him."

A Story of Resilience and Artistry

The show's narrative follows Mephisto, a menacing media machine symbolizing tabloid exploitation, and his Smooth Criminals as they clash with

the MJ Warriors, representing Jackson's creative spirit and resilience. Four misfit characters—Clumsy, Shy, Smarty Pants, and Sneaky—lead the audience on a journey inspired by Jackson's timeless themes of hope, dreams, and belief, brought to life through video, narration, and symbolic storytelling.

Technological Brilliance and Enchanting Performances

With high-tech drones, immersive digital panels, and a state-of-the-art theater, the show offers an unmatched sensory experience. "These upgrades allow us to elevate our storytelling," said Mike Newquist, President of Resident and Affiliate Shows at Cirque du Soleil. "We're committed to making every performance unforgettable."

Highlights include:

"Beat It": Drones weave intricate patterns

as Smooth Criminals descend dramatically.

"Leave Me Alone" and "2 Bad": Dynamic choreography intertwines with imaginative staging.

"Smooth Criminal": Performers execute flawless flips and the iconic lean, thrilling audiences.

"They Don't Care About Us": Updated visuals address social issues like racism and climate change.

Other standouts include "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," where illuminated diabolos dazzle, and "I Just Can't Stop Loving You," a heartfelt duet blending archival footage and live vocals. The finale, set to "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," turns the theater into a joyous celebration with dancers and acrobats filling the aisles.

A holographic appearance



And, beginning at 7:30 a.m. EST on Tuesday, Dec. 24, the Black Press of America's Let It Be Known News will air a presentation about the King of Pop, his genius and lasting legacy. The broadcast will feature Branca, hip-hop legend Chuck D, and more.

of Jackson himself drew resounding applause, while the show's bold costumes and reimagined choreography further cement its legacy as a must-see experience.

A Global Phenomenon

Since its debut, Michael Jackson ONE has captivated over 5.5 million attendees

across more than 4,500 performances. With its renewed contract through 2030, the production ensures that Jackson's artistry will continue to inspire new generations.

For tickets and information, visit cirquedusoleil.com/michael-jackson-one.

Richard Parsons, Esteemed Corporate Leader and Jazz Enthusiast, Dies at 76

By Stacy M. Brown
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Richard Dean Parsons, a distinguished leader in corporate America renowned for his roles at Time Warner and Citigroup, died Thursday at his Manhattan home. He was 76.

Parsons, who was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 2015, had scaled back his professional commitments in recent years due to complications from the disease. Lazard, the financial services firm where Parsons was a longtime board member, confirmed his death.

Ronald Lauder, chairman emeritus of Estée Lauder,

called Parsons "a colossus in the worlds of business, media, culture, and philanthropy." Parsons resigned from the boards of Lazard and Estée Lauder earlier this month for health reasons, ending a 25-year tenure with the latter company.

David Zaslav, CEO of Warner Bros. Discovery, described Parsons as a "great mentor and friend" and credited him as "one of the greatest problem solvers this industry has ever seen."

Born on April 4, 1948, in Brooklyn, New York, Parsons exhibited academic excellence from a young age, beginning college at just 16. He earned his law degree from Albany Law School in 1971. His career began as a lawyer and counselor to then-New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller

and later included a role in the White House during the Ford administration.

Parsons transitioned to the private sector as managing partner at Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler and later served as chief operating officer of Dime Bancorp. In 1995, he became president of Time Warner, overseeing its entertainment and corporate operations. He ascended to CEO in 2002, where he worked to strengthen the company's financial position and reshape its portfolio. Most recognized Parsons as one of America's top executives.

Parsons played a critical role during challenging periods at both Time Warner and Citigroup. He became Citigroup chairman in 2009 amid significant losses and public scrutiny

of its practices. Under his leadership, the company returned to profitability and restored stability, retiring from the role in 2012.

In 2014, Parsons stepped in as interim CEO of the Los Angeles Clippers during a contentious moment for the team until its sale to Steve Ballmer. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver described him as a "brilliant and transformational leader."

Beyond his corporate contributions, Parsons' passion for jazz led him to co-own a Harlem jazz club and take on leadership roles at the Apollo Theater and the Jazz Foundation of America. He also served on the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture boards, the Museum of Modern Art,



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and the American Museum of Natural History.

Parsons' commitment to education and philanthropy was evident through his support of Howard University, where he was a trustee emeritus

and co-chairmanship of New York City's Commission on Economic Opportunity.

He is survived by his wife, Laura, and their family.

Nation Faces Insurance Crisis as Climate Impacts Drive Premiums Higher

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Homeowners across the nation are grappling with an insurance crisis as climate change drives rising premiums and non-renewal rates.

A Senate Budget Committee report reveals that insurers are increasingly abandoning high-risk areas, including

coastal regions, wildfire-prone communities, and even inland counties. This trend is destabilizing property values and threatening the broader economy, with insured losses from natural disasters now approaching \$100 billion annually—up from \$4.6 billion in 2000.

Counties most affected include 82 coastal or wildfire-prone regions, alongside inland areas like North Carolina, Montana, and Oklahoma,

which face severe weather threats. Florida leads with the highest average non-renewal rate, while traditionally stable markets such as New Jersey and Rhode Island report sharp increases. Between 2020 and 2023, homeowners in high-risk counties saw premiums surge by 22%, with nationwide premiums rising 21% since 2015, outpacing inflation by 40%.

The economic fallout mirrors the 2008 financial crisis, as

home insurance is critical for securing mortgages. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have sounded alarms over the inflationary pressures of rising insurance costs, while the Senate report warns that climate-driven losses are reshaping the insurance landscape. "Climate change is no longer just an environmental problem.

It is a looming economic threat," the report concluded.



Rising premiums and insurer withdrawals are creating a financial disaster that threatens national property values and economic stability.