



CELEBRATING OUR 2025 SPRING GRADUATES

THE GRAMBLING CONNECTION

TRUMP’S APPROVAL SLIPS AMID PROTESTS AND POLICY BACKLASH

Economic Confidence Hits a Low Point as Public Pushback Grows

By Staff Report

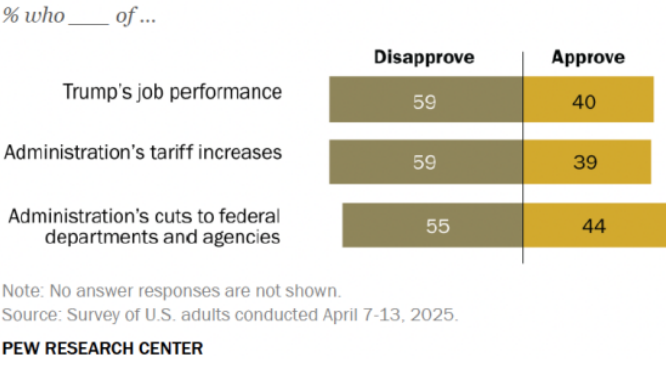
As President Donald Trump nears the 100-day milestone of his second term, public confidence in his leadership continues to erode. A recent Pew Research Center poll shows Trump’s job approval rating has dropped to 40%, down seven points since February. The same survey found only 45% express

confidence in his handling of the economy—marking a low not seen in Pew’s data since 2019. The decline in approval comes as protests are planned in over 340 cities on May 1, targeting what organizers call the administration’s “billionaire agenda.” Demonstrators from labor unions, immigrant rights groups, and student organizations are calling for increased in-

vestment in public services and protections for workers and vulnerable communities. Trump’s economic agenda is under increasing scrutiny. Fifty-nine percent of respondents disapprove of his recent tariff hikes. Nearly half expect the economy to worsen in the coming year, while only 36% fore-

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Trump’s approval rating is 40%, and majorities disapprove of his tariff hikes, cuts to government



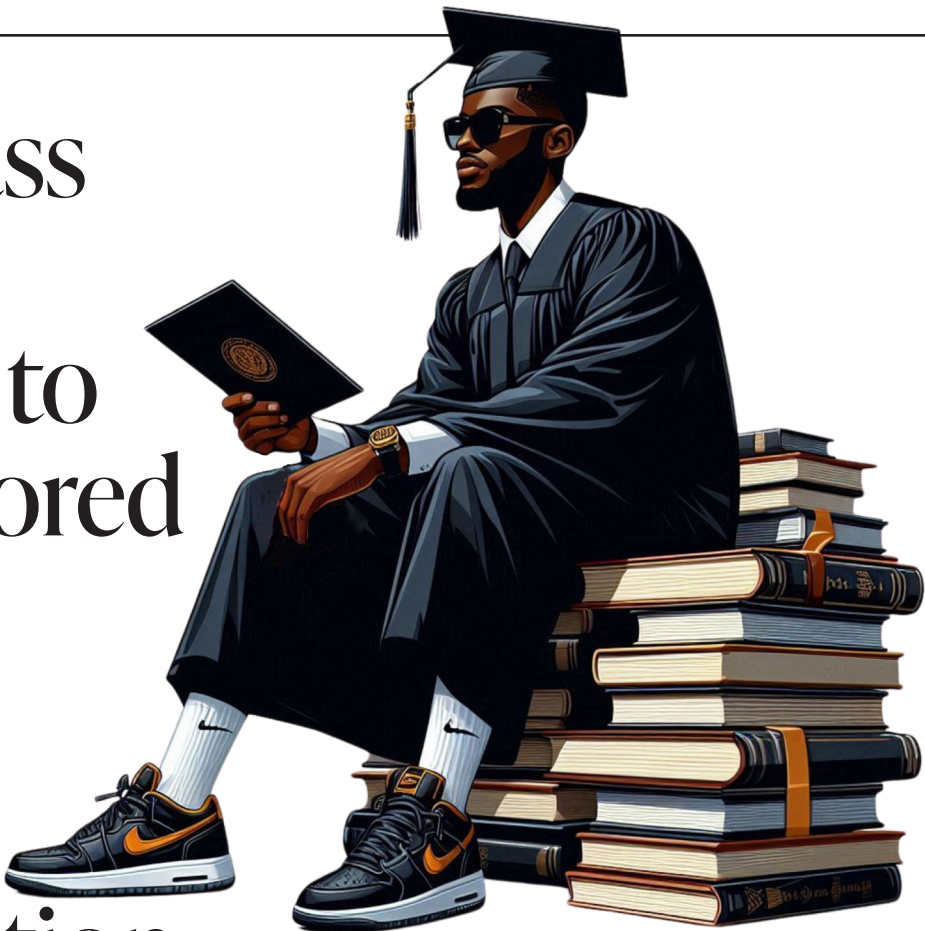
Louisiana to offer food assistance to eligible children this summer

By Greg LaRose
La Illuminator

Children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school are eligible for food assistance over the summer break, state officials announced Monday. The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services will participate in the SUN Bucks program again this summer, although Gov. Jeff Landry’s administration was at first reluctant to do so a year ago. The state agency is proactively telling families about the program, though it says nearly all participants are already signed up to receive the one-time benefit of \$120. “Most eligible children will be automatically enrolled and do not need to apply,” Sammy Guillory, DCFS assistant secretary for family support, said in a statement. The summer benefits will be added to SNAP recipients’ EBT cards or the SUN Bucks card they were issued last summer. The money is available to use for 122 days after it is issued. It will be doled out starting in the second half of May for children already enrolled in the program. To be eligible, children must be born between Aug. 8, 2006, and July 1, 2028 and have received income-based food, financial or Medicaid support since July 1, 2024. The threshold for families to receive the assistance is a household income below 185% of the federal poverty level, which comes to \$59,477 for a family of four. Families who no longer have EBT or SUN Bucks cards should call 1-888-997-1117 or visit www.LifeInCheckEBT.com to request a replacement. Families who need to apply for SUN Bucks can do so online.

See **SUN BUCKS**, page 2

First class of GSU Alumni to be Honored During Golden Grads Celebration



By GSU Office of Strategic Communications

Grambling, La. – April 29, 2024 – Grambling State University will honor a historic milestone this spring as members of the Class of 1975 — the first graduates to earn their degrees under the university’s new name — return to campus for their 50th anniversary celebration. Known as Golden Graduates, they will be recognized during the Spring 2025 Commencement Exercises on Friday, May 9, at the Fredrick C. Hobdy Assembly Center. The Golden Grads celebration not only marks a milestone for the Class of 1975 but also honors the legacy of leadership, resilience, and achievement that continues to define Grambling State University. As the first graduates to cross the stage under the Grambling State University name, the Class of 1975 helped usher in a bold new era — one defined by academic excellence, expanded opportunities, and a growing national influence. Throughout the weekend, the university will host a series of events honoring the Golden Grads and celebrating their contributions. Highlights include a guided campus tour, offering alumni a firsthand look at

the growth and transformation that has shaped Grambling State’s identity. The celebration is more than a reflection of the past; it is a bridge to the future. Today’s graduates will stand alongside the trailblazers who paved the way, drawing inspiration from their stories of perseverance, purpose, and pride. Together, they embody the spirit of Grambling State — a legacy built across generations. Among the distinguished members of the Golden Class are Senator Edward J. “Ed” Price, who currently represents District 2 in the Louisiana State Senate and has dedicated his career to public service, and Sheila Loeb, the first woman elected as SGA President at Grambling State. After graduation, Loeb continued her legacy of leadership in education as a teacher at Eunice High School. Both exemplify the values of service, leadership, and impact that define the Grambling experience. The Golden Grads celebration will culminate with a special recognition at Commencement, honoring the Class of 1975 or their historic achievement and the enduring example they set for generations to come. Their legacy continues to shape Grambling State’s future, inspiring every graduate to lead, serve, and build on the foundation they helped create.



Lincoln Prep Senior JaNancia Richard earns over \$1.5 million in academic scholarships

Courtesy of Lincoln Prep

Lincoln Preparatory School proudly announces that senior, JaNancia Richard, has been awarded more than \$1.5 million in academic scholarships and received an astounding 53 college acceptance offers from institutions across the United States. At just 16 years old, JaNancia has not only distinguished herself through academic excellence, but she also has emerged as a symbol of resilience, leadership, and compassion. Her journey to success is deeply rooted in her upbringing in Quitman, Louisiana, where she was reared as the youngest of three children by a single mother. Drawing strength from her close-knit family, JaNancia has used every challenge as motivation to excel. Since transferring to Lincoln Prep in August 2023, she has made extraordinary academic strides. With a near-perfect academic record and a 4.0 GPA as a freshman, JaNancia enrolled directly into the Lincoln Preparatory School’s Early College Academy and completed course-



JaNancia Receives Award

work requirements classifying her as a junior at the end of the year. This accelerated program allowed her to take dual enrollment courses at Southern University at Shreveport (SUSLA), where she is on track to receive an associate’s degree in general studies. She is also proud of her most recent score of 25 on the ACT. Beyond academics, JaNancia has been a driving force in her school and community. She has served as an officer in the Beta Club, participated in local service projects, and held titles as both Miss SUSLA (Lincoln Prep) and Miss Dual Enrollment (SUSLA), representing her peers with dignity and poise. As the treasurer of her church’s youth ministry, she continues to develop leadership and financial stewardship skills that will serve her well in the future. Janancia also serves as President of the National Honor Society. Her passion for medicine—specifically anesthesiology—stems from her personal experience caring for her grandfather, who suffers from dementia. This calling to serve others through healthcare perfectly embodies JaNan-

cia’s character: bright, determined, and deeply empathetic. “JaNancia is a once-in-a-generation student whose talents, integrity, and drive will leave a lasting impact wherever she goes,” said Dr. Crystal Washington, Acting CEO/Executive Director of Lincoln Preparatory School. “We are incredibly proud of her and cannot wait to see what her future holds.” JaNancia Richard’s story is a shining example of what is possible when intellect meets opportunity—and the entire Lincoln Prep family celebrates her as she steps into her next chapter. About Lincoln Preparatory School Lincoln Preparatory School is a public charter school serving grades K–12 in Grambling, Louisiana. Committed to academic excellence, character development, and community engagement, Lincoln Prep prepares students to lead and succeed in college, careers, and life. We are currently accepting students for the 2025-2026 school year. Please go to lincolnprep.school to apply!

Opinion

Punishing the Son for the Sins of the Father: The Shadeur Sanders Draft Day Freefall

By Prentiss Smith

The recently held NFL draft, which was held in Green Bay Wisconsin, turned out to be one of the weirdest drafts I have ever seen, and I have watched them for many years. It turned out to be a vigil for Shadeur Sanders, who was expected to be drafted in the first round but ultimately was drafted in the fifth round.

There's a bitter irony in watching Shadeur Sanders, who as I said, is a young man who was once projected as a potential No. 1 overall pick in the NFL Draft. He fell all the way to the 144th pick in the fifth round. For months, draft analysts marveled at his poise, arm talent, and football IQ. They compared his composure to the greats. They forecasted a franchise quarterback. And then — silence. Shrugs. Whispers. The drop. I was as surprised as anyone, and wondered what had happened.

The media world is still catching its breath, because it wasn't about talent. It wasn't about mechanics or production. No, what stained Shadeur's draft stock was something more insidious, I believe, and it was his last name. Or more specifically, his father — Deion Sanders. And therein lies the problem.

I have watched and admired Deion Sanders for many years for his athletic skills, but what impressed me more about Deion was his commitment to being a good father to his children. He raised his children. They are respectful, manner able, smart, and yes, they are confident like their Dad, but most children are like their parents, and they are no different.

But let's call it what it is: Shadeur Sanders was blackballed. Not because of a character flaw. Not because of criminal behavior. Not even because of questionable performance. But because of the noise surrounding his father — one of the most electrifying athletes this country has ever produced, and now one of the most unapologetically visible and vocal college football coaches in America.

Deion Sanders, a Hall of Fame cornerback, two-sport pro athlete, and now head coach of the University of Colorado Buffaloes, has been unrelenting in his passion, his style, and yes — his fatherhood. He's never shied away from defending his children, coaching them, promoting them. But somewhere along the line, that paternal commitment was twisted into arrogance, into overreach, into toxicity.

The NFL, for all its claims of being a meritocracy, has a long memory — and an even longer list of unspoken rules. Chief among them: stay in your place.

Be grateful. Be quiet. And if you're a Black man, especially a powerful, outspoken one? Be humble, or we'll humble you. Deion didn't play that game. And it appears his son paid the price.

The question isn't whether Shadeur is capable. The question is why the system turned against him at the eleventh hour. Why did teams suddenly question his readiness, his intangibles, his leadership? Why did draft boards, once glowing with promise, suddenly go cold?

One answer being whispered in locker rooms and press boxes is that NFL owners and coaches resented Deion's spotlight — his brashness, his branding, his refusal to kowtow. And perhaps, they feared bringing that same energy into their quarterback room, even if it came only through association.

If that's true, then this isn't just about Shadeur. It's about how America still struggles with the image of a strong Black father — one who dares to believe in his child so publicly, so vocally, and so fiercely that it unsettles the old guard.

Deion Sanders didn't commit a crime. His only "sin" was being involved. Present. Loud in his love. He didn't hide in the shadows or play by the unspoken rules. He stood on the sidelines in designer sunglasses, cheering on his sons, coaching with swagger, speaking his truth. And for that, it seems, the league punished his child.

This should haunt the NFL — and force an uncomfortable conversation. Because if a father's love becomes a liability in professional sports, then we've gone badly off course. And if being Deion's son is a scarlet letter, what message are we sending to the next generation of Black athletes — and their fathers?

I prided myself in being a hands on, present, and vocal father to my children, and sometimes I may have rubbed some people the wrong way, but it was always about the children for me. I believe that Deion understands what happened with Shadeur, and he blames himself, but he should not blame himself for doing what so many young men wish someone had done for them, and that is to love them and stand up for them.

Shadeur Sanders will be fine. Talent like his doesn't stay hidden for long. But the stain left by this draft-day debacle will linger. Not just for the Sanders family — but for every family watching, wondering what happens when a young Black man dares to believe he's worthy of greatness, and his father dares to believe it with him. And that's my take. smithpren@aol.com



Prentiss Smith

POTTER MOTIVATION

Press the Accelerator

Life is not meant to be lived in neutral. Too many people sit at the starting line, revving their engines, but never press the accelerator. They have dreams, goals, and ambitions, but fear, doubt, or procrastination keeps them from moving forward. Today, I want to encourage you - whatever road you're on, whatever goal you've set - press the accelerator!

Think about a car. When you start the engine, you can feel the power rumbling under the hood. That car was built to move, not to sit idle under the carport. The same is true for you. You were designed for progress, for growth, for forward motion. But to get anywhere, you must engage, shift gears, and press forward.

Many people hesitate to take that first step because they're waiting for the perfect conditions. They think, I'll start my business when the economy improves, or I'll go back to school when the time is right. But the truth is, waiting for the perfect time is like waiting for all the traffic lights to turn green before you leave the driveway. That moment will never come. The time to move is now.

In 2018, I ran a marathon. I had just recovered from a pinched sciatic nerve, and I could have easily made excuses. The pain, the doubts, the fear of failure - they were all there. But I pressed the accelerator. I trained, pushed through discomfort, and crossed that finish line. The victory wasn't just in finishing the race; it was in starting it.

What race are you holding back from running? What dream have you put on pause? Maybe you've already started something, but you've eased off the gas. It happens. Life gets busy, obstacles appear, and progress slows. But remember, a car in motion is easier to steer than one that's parked. Even if you're moving slowly, keep moving. Press the accelerator.

Success doesn't come from standing still. It comes from action!

It comes from deciding that no matter what, you will move forward. Today, make a decision. Stop waiting. Stop overthinking. Stop hesitating. Press the accelerator and move boldly toward your goals. Your destinations are waiting, but you have to drive to get there.

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News

Alana Ward Robinson to Receive Honorary Doctorate at Spring 2025 Commencement

Office of Strategic Communications

GRAMBLING, La. - Grambling State University will award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to distinguished alumna and trailblazing executive Alana Ward Robinson during its Spring 2025 Commencement Ceremony, to be held at 10 a.m. on Friday, May 9, in the Fredrick C. Hobby Assembly Center.

Alana Ward Robinson is a transformative technology strategist and award-winning executive with a distinguished record of leading enterprise-wide innovation across the public and private sectors. With deep expertise in emerging technologies, she has reimaged operating models, built high-performing tech organizations, and driven measurable outcomes across Fortune 500 companies and mission-driven institutions.

"Alana Ward Robinson's journey is a testament to the power of preparation, resilience, and a clear sense of purpose," said Grambling State University President Dr. Martin Lemelle, Jr. "Her work at the intersection of technology, equity, and leadership has not only shaped industries—it has opened doors for generations to follow. As a Grambling State graduate, she exemplifies what it means to carry forward the mission of this institution with excellence and intentionality."

As Founder and CEO of Robin-



Alana Ward Robinson

son Group Consulting (RGC) since 2004, Robinson leads a national practice specializing in interim CIO leadership, enterprise technology strategy, and digital transformation. RGC's diverse client base includes global supply chains, healthcare payers, financial institutions, housing authorities, nonprofits, and universities. Her work consistently bridges strategic vision with operational excellence. Robinson launched her career at

IBM Corporation, ultimately managing the Public Sector P&L across multiple states. She then held senior leadership roles at the Public Service Company of Colorado, PACE Membership Warehouse Club, Coors Brewing Company, Sara Lee Hosiery, and RR Donnelley, where she drove ERP innovation and multimillion-dollar efficiency gains.


A civic leader and governance expert, Robinson has served on numerous boards, including the World Food Program (IT Advisory Council), Brighter Horizon Foundation (Chair), Girls Inc. of Chicago (Secretary), the National Hospice Foundation, and the African American Experience Fund of the National Parks Foundation. She is a founding member of the Information Technology Senior Management Forum (ITSMF) and an active supporter of inclusive leadership and next-gen tech talent.

Her honors include the Girls Inc. She Shines Lifetime Achievement Award, ITSMF President's Award, Grambling State University Alumni Beacon Award, CIO Review's Top 20 Technology Consulting Providers, and recognition from the Financial Times Agenda 100, among others.

Robinson holds a B.A. in Applied Mathematics and Computer Science from Grambling State University and is an alumna of Harvard University's Advanced Executive Management Program, where she was elected Class

President. A proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., she resides in Irving, TX with her husband, E. O'Neal Robinson, also a Grambling State alumnus.

Robinson's honor will be conferred during the Spring 2025 Commencement Ceremony, which also features a keynote address by actress, author, and entrepreneur Tabitha Brown. For more information, visit gram.edu/graduation.




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News

SUN BUCKS from page 1

Families who did not apply for free schools meals and do not receive other household income-based assistance will have to apply for SUN Bucks to determine if their children are eligible.

Last year, nearly 670,000 Louisiana children received SUN Bucks benefits, and almost 100% were automatically enrolled, according to Guillory. Families who have changed their home address are encouraged to update their records with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and other assistance programs to avoid delays with receiving food assistance this summer.

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see improvement. Support remains strongest among older, white, and less formally educated Americans, while younger, more educated, and nonwhite voters—particularly Black Americans—remain largely critical.

Surveys from multiple outlets paint a consistent picture. Approval ratings from Fox News, CNBC, Gallup, and others all hover between 39% and 47%. Among Republicans, Trump's approval remains high at 88%. Among independents and Democrats, disapproval is overwhelming at 68% and 93%, respectively.

Criticism is not limited to the economic front. Fifty-one percent of Americans say Trump is relying too heavily on executive orders. Large majorities agree that the administration must comply with court rulings—78% say the administration should halt actions deemed illegal by a federal court, rising to 88% if ruled by the Supreme Court.

Labor leaders and activists say the May Day protests are a response to a broader trend of eroding democratic norms and cuts to essential public programs. “This isn’t just about wages,” said Stacy Davis Gates of the Chicago Teachers Union. “It’s about what kind of country we’re going to be.”

Others echo the urgency. “We will not allow business as usual while basic rights are stripped away,” said Saqib Bhatti of Bargaining for the Common Good. Liz Perlman of AFSCME 3299 described the administration’s early actions as a “corrupt assault” on working families in favor of elite interests.

PEN America added to the mounting criticism with a new report outlining what it calls an “unprecedented assault on free expression,” citing a pattern of executive actions undermining press freedom, education, and diversity efforts.

While Trump’s core supporters remain loyal, the president faces a widening gap with the broader electorate—one that may define the rest of his second term.

Black WWII Battalion Finally Honored

By Stacy M. Brown
BlackPressUSA.com Senior National Correspondent

BLACKPRESSUSA NEWSWIRE — Seventy-nine years after their unprecedented service in World War II, the Black women of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion — the only all-Black Women’s Army Corps unit to serve overseas during the war — have finally received one of the nation’s highest honors two years after then-President Joe Biden signed a proclamation clearing the way for the award.

The heroes will receive the Congressional Gold Medal. “These heroes deserve their dues,” Rep. Gwen Moore of Wisconsin said. “And I am so glad their story is being told.” Formed in 1944 as pressure grew to include Black women in overseas military operations, the 6888th was tasked with solving a massive wartime mail crisis. More than 7 million U.S. troops, Red Cross workers, and government personnel stationed in Europe were relying on mail to stay connected with loved ones back home. By early 1945, the Army estimated a backlog of roughly 17 million pieces of undelivered mail—some dating back years.

The Army’s solution was a newly created battalion of about 850 Black women led by Maj. Charity Adams, who would later become the highest-ranking Black woman in the Army during the war. The unit deployed to England in February 1945 and immediately went to work in Birmingham, sorting an estimated



Second Lt. Freda le Beau serving Major Charity Adams a soda at the opening of the battalion’s snack bar in Rouen, France. (Wikimedia Commons / Photo by United States Army Signal Corps)

Second Lt. Freda le Beau serving Major Charity Adams a soda at the opening of the battalion’s snack bar in Rouen, France. (Wikimedia Commons / Photo by United States Army Signal Corps)

65,000 pieces of mail per shift around the clock, using a system of locator cards to track service members and their units. “They expected we were gonna be there about two or three months trying to get it straightened out,” recalled retired Maj. Fannie Griffin McClendon. She is one of only two surviving members. “Well, I think in about a month, month and a half, we had it all straightened out and going in the right direction.”

By the time they finished the job in half the projected time, they had cleared the backlog and restored morale to sol-

diers desperate for word from home. The women then deployed to Rouen, France, and later to Paris, where they continued their mission while also investigating widespread mail theft and dealing with racism, sexism, and the trauma of burying fellow soldiers killed in a tragic vehicle accident — funerals they paid for themselves when the War Department refused. Despite their success and high praise from fellow service members, the women of the 6888th returned to a country still unwilling to properly acknowledge their service. They received

standard medals issued to most who served, but no special commendation.

That began to change in the 1980s as their story slowly resurfaced through reunions, books, museum exhibits, and documentaries. A monument was erected in their honor in 2018 at Fort Leavenworth, and they received the Meritorious Unit Commendation in 2019. In 2022, Congress voted unanimously — 422-0 — to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the unit. Biden signed the bipartisan bill the following year. “That really shows how long this recognition took,” said Kim Guise, senior curator at the National WWII Museum. “It is really important to recognize the accomplishments of these women and what they went through to serve their country in wartime.”

The medal is a posthumous tribute for most of the battalion’s 855 members. Only two are still alive today, including McClendon, who later joined the Air Force after military integration and became the first woman to command an all-male Strategic Air Command squadron. In addition to the medal and previous honors, their story is now part of popular culture. Netflix has a feature film titled The Six Triple Eight, directed by Tyler Perry and starring Kerry Washington. “They kept hollering about wanting us to go overseas,” McClendon said. “So I guess they found something for us to do: take care of the mail. And there was an awful lot of mail.” “It’s overwhelming,” she added. “It’s something I never even thought about.”

Democrats Rally on Capitol Steps in Daylong Protest of Looming GOP Budget Cuts

Staff Report

From sunrise to sunset on Sunday, April 27, Democratic lawmakers staged a daylong protest on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, raising alarms over what they warn could be devastating cuts to social safety net programs under a proposed Republican budget.

The demonstration began quietly at 7:30 a.m., with Senators Cory Booker of New Jersey and Chris Coons of Delaware joining House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York. Dressed in black, Booker called the federal budget a “moral document,” setting the tone for the day’s gathering. As hours passed, the crowd grew. More Democratic lawmakers, activists, and onlookers came to show support, turning the Capitol steps into a platform for personal stories and policy warnings.

Participants took turns speaking, reading letters and recounting experiences from constituents whose lives depend on programs like Medicaid, food assistance, and Social Security. Since President Trump’s re-election



and the start of his second term in January, his administration has renewed its push to slash federal spending—moves Democrats argue will hit vulnerable Americans the hardest.

“The stakes are enormous,” Senator Amy Klobuchar said in a social media post. “Medicaid, food assistance, So-

cial Security—it’s all on the line. This is a moral moment.” Klobuchar, widely seen as a potential successor to Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer following recent leadership criticism and Senator Dick Durbin’s announced retirement, joined the protest alongside other prominent Democrats including

Representatives Andre Carson of Indiana and Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri.

The cuts, Democrats warned, would disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income families. For many African American households, the proposed budget represents not just a policy disagreement but an existential threat to financial stability and access to basic needs.

Meanwhile, in Illinois, Democratic Governor JB Pritzker issued his own call to action. Frustrated by what he described as overly cautious political strategy, Pritzker urged the party to abandon incrementalism. “Never before in my life have I called for mass protests, for mobilization, for disruption. But I am now,” said Pritzker, a billionaire heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune.

As the sun dipped behind the Capitol dome, the mood was solemn but resolute. Democrats, outnumbered in both chambers of Congress, acknowledged the uphill battle ahead—but pledged to keep pushing back from within Congress and from the communities they serve.



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Community

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Local Retiree still Learning and Sharing

By Joice M. Dunn

Carolyn Lavette Hicks Jones’ love of learning and teaching has taken her down many paths but through it all, she has continued her educational pursuits.

Having grown up on the Westside in rural Ruston, Louisiana, she knew at the young, delicate age of five that she would someday become a teacher. “I played school each afternoon and wrote on the make-shift sheet of plywood board my precious mother, Mrs. Cassie Dean, nailed up on her bedroom wall.” Her Mama handed her a box of white chalk she previously purchased from the Morgan and Lindsey store as she proudly modeled the exceptional teaching practices of Mrs. Bessie Robinson, Java Jackson, Muriel Butler, and Mrs. Barbara “Westly” Tobor.

Jones attended Ruston Jr. High and Ruston High school where she played on the girls’ softball team. Jones remembered the mid-term of her senior year, being called to the office. “I was terrified when I was called to the office, and they said I was out of school until May.” But what they told her and what she later explained to her mother was that she had completed her requirements before the 1979 graduation, and so she was able to stay home and care for her mom until graduation.

“My mother always taught me to trust Almighty God, pray and believe that with Almighty God I could become a teacher someday. It wasn’t easy for my mom living and depending on a \$130 monthly welfare check, but my father always helped my mom take care of me and by the grace of Almighty God, we made it through the hard times and over the rough patches in life,” Jones explained.

Jones received a diploma from the Louisiana Business college in Monroe in data entry and computer operations. She served as a paraprofessional at the Lincoln Parish Alternative school in charge of the computer Lab by day and drove to Monroe for class in the evening. After receiving that diploma two years later, Jones majored in education at ULM, graduating in 2008 with a BA degree. She, also, received a BA in teaching/Special Ed., two masters, one in Educational Leadership at Louisiana Tech and a MAT in teaching from Tech as well as a General Studies degree from ULM 2010.

She received another Educational



Carolyn Lavette Hicks Jones reads her book to a group of Paul E. Slaton Head start students.

Leadership degree from Northwestern in 2020. She later attended William Carrey University in Hattiesburg, MS where she received her doctorate in Educational Leadership in 2022.

At long last, she achieved her dream of becoming a teacher and went on to teach at Lincoln parish schools as a Special education teacher and was also the C.E.O. of Shield of faith Outreach ministries, Carolyn’s creations, and Unique Pathways Christian Academy. She credits her former Title One supervisor, Mr., Willie Washington, for helping her become a certified teacher. “I would be remised not to thank Mr. Washington for helping paraprofessionals become certified teachers.”, she said.

As a Philanthropist, Humanitarian, Entrepreneur, two-time Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Angel award nominee, Dr. Carolyn Hicks Jones wears many other hats. She also has written sever-

al short stories, and is a former district, state, and national conference presenter.

Jones is also the author of the children’s book “I Shall Have A Chicken”.

Dr. Jones concluded by saying, “I would advise young people to trust almighty God and believe that they can achieve anything with God’s help. Always remember that nothing is too hard for Almighty God to do. For He knows the plans He has for you! Jermiah 29:11. “Don’t give up!” Keep on trying and you will achieve your goals.”

She is a member of the Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church in Ruston, where Brandon J. Crew is pastor/teacher. She is also a member of the Grambling Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Evening Star O.E.S. Chapter 93 in Grambling as well as the Lincoln Parish branch of the N.A.A.C.P. Dr. Jones is a Northern Louisiana recipient and homeowner of the first Habitat for Humanity



Larry Jones proudly holds degrees received by his mom, Carolyn H Jones.

home in her area over 40 years ago. Carolyn is the proud mother of three sons; Anthony, Marcus, Larry, and Meme to four precious grandchildren; Noah, Nicholas, Myelle, and I’leyanna.

Announcements

NAACP will hold monthly meeting on third Thursday

The Grambling Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) #6094B will host its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, May 15, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall, 127 King St., Grambling.

Members and interested persons are encouraged to attend and meet the new officers of the Branch. Membership is available to the public, either as an adult or as a youth (ages 7 to 17). Memberships for adults are \$30 a year and presently, the \$10.00 dues for children have been waived.

Refreshments will be served. For additional information, please call or text 318-680- 7679, Grace Tatem.

NAMI Family support group holds meeting

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will hold a support group meeting Thursday, May 15, at 2 p.m. in the Lincoln Parish Library, George Byrnside Conference Room, 910 North Trenton St., Ruston. The meetings will continue each third Thursday of each month until December.

Dr. Jeannetta Stephens-Jones, Ed. D and Dr. Shirley Burch, Ph.D., will be present as well as NAMI Certified Peer Facilitators. Other group meetings will be held June 19 and July 17. The meetings will continue to be held August 21 and September 18. The next set of meetings will be held October 16, November 20 and December 18.

Anyone at least 18 years old may RSVP to jjones79aka@yahoo.com or call (318) 614-1961 or SJBurch57@gmail.com or call (318) 350- 1612. The meetings are free to the public and all are invited to attend.

Line Dance class available for the Grambling area

A Line Dance Class with Yatta at Board & Bottle is now available for the Grambling area each Monday at 130 W. Park Ave. in Ruston. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. The free class is being

instructed by Kenyatta Collins.

For additional information please contact Collins at 832- 891-7488 or WWW.REALLYGREATSITE.COM

City of Grambling Water Department Issues Warning of ‘Wrong’ Sites for Paying Bills

The Water Department of Grambling wants Citizens to beware of paying their bills on the wrong sites online. Citizens should pay their water bills, property taxes and tickets at city-ofgrambling.org ONLY. Once at the site, you will be directed to payment page (ncount.com) where you can pay your bills. Several of these ‘wrong’ sites have cropped up lately according to the Water Department. One such site is doxo.com. DO NOT pay your bills on this site. Once your money is gone, the City has no way to retrieve it so BEWARE!

Councilwoman to start ‘Listening Post’ for Grambling citizens

Grambling City Councilwoman Delores Smith/Mayor Pro tem will be available on the first Monday of each month, noon at Grambling’s City Hall for what she calls a “Listening Post.” Smith will be posted to listen to, or answer city-related issues citizens may have. The “Listening Post” idea materialized from residents’ stopping Smith around town to ask questions. “A lot of times when I go to the post office or the grocery store, people see you and want to ask you a question about this or that,” Smith said. The listening post is a designated place and time to visit with Smith to get questions or concerns heard. Remember, the first Monday of each month.

‘No Limit’ accepting registration for 2025-2026

The No Limit Soldiers Program is accepting registration and sign-ups. All area youth are encouraged to come out and participate. For additional information please contact Howard Kirkpatrick, 318-497-2978, Montez Moss, 318-243-7451 or Kelli Granger at 318-664-5435.

Parish public transportation available to Grambling

The Lincoln Parish Public Transportation System (LPPTS) is available to the general public including the Grambling area. The system currently provides demand-response, curb to curb, non-emergency service and operates on a first call/ come first serve reservation schedule. The service is handicap accessible.

The service runs Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., with office hours from 7:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. There is a \$6 - \$10 fare charge per passenger per one-way trip, in the Lincoln Parish area only. The exact amount is required for each fare and must be paid immediately upon boarding.

Reservations are required 24 hours in

advance unless prepaid and cancellations must be made two hours prior to pick-up time. The service also serves Choudrant, Dubach, Simsboro and Ruston. For additional information please contact Samantha Dimmer, transportation coordinator 318-251-5138.

Subscribe to the Grambling Connection Newspaper

The Grambling Connection is offering print subscriptions for those who would like the paper mailed to them, as well as on-line subscriptions for those who would like to receive the paper in their email inbox.

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Community

NAACP Youth Council to sponsor raffle

Staff Report

The Youth Council of the NAACP Grambling Branch is raffling off a hand-made queen size quilt on Saturday, May 24. The winner does not have to be present to win.

The raffle tickets are five dollars (\$5.00) each for a valued item of three hundred and fifty dollars (\$350.00). Checks or money orders can be made

payable to the Grambling Branch NAACP -6094B. In the memo section, please note Youth Council.

The funds from this fundraiser will be used to finance the Youth's educational, cultural and historical activities. Their next major activity approaching is a historical trip to Washington, D.C. or Montgomery, Alabama.

For the purchase of tickets, please contact Grace Tatem, 318-680-7679.



Pictured above is the Queen size quilt designed and made by Hazel Hunter.



Pictured (left to right) Ray Stringfellow, Brina L. Hopkins, Leonard Lewis and Joice M. Dunn (Birthday Fellowship Club members) stand with Pam Allen, director of the Blind Center of Ruston, as they donate toiletries.

Birthday Fellowship Club ends after 21 years

Staff Report


The Birthday Fellowship Club has wrapped up its service to the Lincoln Parish community after 21 years. However, before shutting down for good, it donated several jumbo bags of toiletries to the Blind Center of Ruston, Louisiana on Friday, April 25 as well as a donation of \$100.

The club, in addition to making its donation to the Blind Center, also donated as follows: Four hundred dollars (\$400) to the Lincoln Parish Christian Community Center on Monday, April

21 as well as a \$400 (four hundred dollars) to the Domestic Abuse Team of Ruston.

The club is under the leadership of Dr. Joseph Capers, Sr., retired academic dean at Grambling State University. The club has served for the past 21 years, helping those in need.

Thursday, May 1, was the final day for the operation of the Birthday Fellowship Club. The president and members of the club extend thanks to God for allowing them to help those in need these past 21 years.




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Health & Wellness

Charming’s Corner

Returning to Our Roots: The Healing Ways

By Charming Davis

Long before pharmaceuticals were ever bottled and shelved—before prescriptions, synthetic pills, and commercials selling “quick fixes”—our Indigenous ancestors were healing themselves and others with the sacred knowledge of the earth. For thousands of years, healing was not merely about treating symptoms; it was about restoring balance—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and energetically.

Pharmaceuticals as we know them didn’t become mainstream until the early 20th century, with the rise of industrialized medicine around 1900. While modern drugs have provided emergency relief and advanced treatments, many of today’s medications are created to suppress symptoms, not heal the root cause. Even more concerning, these drugs often come with a long list of side effects—offering a temporary “bandaid” for one



Charming Davis

issue while creating new problems in the body. This reactive approach contrasts deeply with the proactive, intuitive, and natural wisdom of our ancestors. Our Indigenous foremothers and forefathers used herbal medicine, plant-based diets, fasting, spiritual practices, and energy work to treat dis-ease. They understood that every ailment begins first in the spirit or the energy body. They paid attention to emotional blockages, energetic imbalances, and trauma held in the body—long before we had terms like “psychosomatic” or “mind-body connection.” The medicine was in the rhythm of the drum, the song of the healer, the warmth of the sun, the touch of water, and the spirit of the plant. Healing was a ceremony, not a

transaction.

Plants like echinacea, sage, mugwort, and elderberry were not just remedies—they were relatives. Ceremonies using smoke (now known as “smudging”) were not trends but sacred rituals to cleanse the energy body and protect the spirit. The body was seen as part of nature—not separate from it. When something was off, they didn’t just treat the body; they treated the soul.

Our ancestors believed that healing came from within, and their methods aimed to unlock the body’s natural ability to restore itself. They used food as medicine, water as renewal, breath as alignment, and movement as release. There was no fear in facing pain; there was reverence in understanding its message.

Today, as more people grow disillusioned with side-effect-laden pills and rushed medical visits, many are returning to holistic healing. This isn’t new—it’s ancient. And it’s powerful.

At Naturally Charming Universe Holistic Wellness Center, I honor this ancestral wisdom by offering a sacred space for energy healing, sound therapy, chakra balancing, and more. I am here to guide you back to your natural state of alignment and wholeness—without masking your pain with temporary solutions. Whether you’re struggling with emotional imbalances, physical pain, spiritual disconnection, or just seeking more clarity and peace in your life, holistic healing offers you a path rooted in truth, not temporary relief.

Come visit me at 311 Main Street, Grambling, LA.

We are open:

Tuesday through Friday: 8:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Saturday: 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Closed Sunday and Monday

Let’s return to the ways of our ancestors. Let’s stop treating symptoms—and start healing the root.

Football Legend Marshawn Lynch on Mental Health Struggles and Going Beast Mode

(Black PR Wire) Seattle Seahawks legendary running back Marshawn Lynch, whose nickname is Beast Mode, lived up to that nickname—and then some—on the football field. Just take a look at some of his stats below:

- Super Bowl champion (XLVIII)
- First-team All-Pro (2012)
- Second-team All-Pro (2014)
- 5× Pro Bowl (2008, 2011–2014)
- 2× NFL rushing touchdowns leader (2013, 2014)
- NFL 2010s All-Decade Team

Now, after retiring from the game in 2019, Beast Mode has been on a quest to not only give back but also be transparent about his mental health journey and why it’s so important to all of us, not just athletes.

“Mentally, realistically, it’s something that is always, I mean, it’s always a battle,” admits Lynch in a 2023 interview. “And the thing is, some days is good and then some days it’s not so good. But the thing is, like, I think the way my mind is wired it’s like I don’t take Ls. I learned lessons. So, if anything is in the presence of me with I could feel like it’s never bad, it might not always be good but it’s never bad.”

“Take care y’all bodies, take care y’all chicken... take care y’all mentals...” As players enter another offseason and we are presented an opportunity to reflect on our personal growth and commitments off the field, I’d like to encourage us all to invest in our mental health by expanding your identities beyond football. There is a direct link between mental and emotional well-being and identifying with something bigger than a single profession.

NFL players are often seen as the pinnacle of masculinity, and because caring about our own mental well-being and seeking support has not historically been associated with masculinity, too many of us do not prioritize that aspect of our health. It’s an area that if we proactively address while we’re in the NFL, including utilizing the resources available to us, we’ll be much better positioned to handle life after football.

Psychologists have warned against overly identifying with one aspect of ourselves, because if – or, in NFL players’ case, when – that label no longer applies to us, it can feel like we’ve lost our identity completely. Football players are at a high risk for losing this sense of identity after they retire, because for most of our lives, the praise and admiration we’ve received has been because of football. Our careers give us recognition, pride and a sense of purpose. But it can be dangerous if being a “famous” football player is the only source of



Marshawn Lynch

those things.

On an episode of Finding Mastery, Marshawn opens up about what it takes to be stronger, mentally, on and off the field.

Be yourself

“Shit, it’s hard enough being myself, so trying to pretend to be somebody else, I know that shit got to be like, shit, even probably 10 times harder... growing up in Oakland, it was like, you feel me, you’re going to get called out. I mean, no matter what you was going to get called out about no matter what you did. And at the end of the day it was either you own up to take ownership in who you was, you know what I mean? Or get called out for being something that you’re not. And I think just over the times and over the years of just growing up in these type of environments, you feel me, it just helped me get even more comfortable in my skin than I already was.”

Fitting in

“I grew up in a real diverse area, so it’s a fine line of, I would say, being yourself and then just being somebody who wants to be accepted by somebody because I mean, you go around a couple different crowds and don’t fit in here, and then you go over there. And I mean, I feel it’s all a process of trying to understand who you are. But I mean, I know it can get real time-consuming and emotionally draining by going out and looking for these individuals that you fit in rather than just a natural connection and it just falling into place, which is what you’ve been saying to me, like more organic or authentic or however you want to look at it. But to

me it’s just shit just falls into place.”

Loving yourself

“At a young age, when you’re trying to come of your own and you have so many different opportunities to see so much different shit, it can be kind of confusing. But I mean, one thing that I know that I tell my kids at our foundation, our youth center, and the ones that I come in contact with is all of that is cool, going on social media, liking this and liking that and being inspired by this and being inspired by that, but just make sure that your number one inspiration comes from when you’re able to wake up and look at that motherfucker in the mirror.”

It comes from within

“At the end of the day, I’ll be like, “Shawn, you feel me? How was your day today?” “I had a couple people say some shit that I probably didn’t like, but you know what? Overall, I had a great ass day.” You feel me? Body still works, still able to move around. And I go with that thought, I go with that self love, self-appreciation. And what that cost is that don’t cost nothing from no

other person, from no substance, from no outside form of nothing. But besides sitting down and have a conversation with myself.”

Getting rid of your labels

“The number one thing that I learned in my journey. Because I mean, I’ve been called... I’m not going to say called, I’ve been labeled. I’ve been labeled “special ed., ADD, ADHD,” all them Goddamn names that they got for kids who’ve got energy and don’t learn the Goddamn way that they taught you to learn back in the medieval times to sit down and raise your hand, all that shit. They’d label you as a menace, basically. And once you get labeled like that, it’s hard to shake those labels and they follow you. But I mean, I was labeled my whole... Shit, I left Cal with a 3.2 and was still labeled.”

Asking for help

“I was one of them kids. “No, I’m too proud to ask for help and I’m not going to go ask them for help. They’re already calling me stupid, they already don’t like me, this that and the third,” and then, I was just like, “You know what? Fuck it. I’ll keep failing. You know what? Help. I asked for help one time. It was the best thing for me. I asked for help for the rest of my life. I’m telling you, me, I left Cal with a 3.2 GPA. I’m like, shit you got me fucked up. If I could go and leave Cal with a 3.2 GPA, then I don’t give a fuck who you is. You could do it. Because man, I’m telling you, I’ve been labeled everything. So I mean, ask for help.”

Transitioning from sport

“It’s about keeping that community. Realistically, man, if you’ve got somebody to talk to, somebody that could just sit there and not even respond to you, but maybe just let you talk their ear off about some shit, man, that’ll probably be just a big help. And then, I know a lot of athletes after they leave from the game, it’s just like, woo, where is it coming from next?”



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Arts & Culture

Small Town 2 Big Dreams: Making the Leap – Walter Jones

By Lena W. Claybon

Welcome to “*Small Town 2 Big Dreams: Making the Leap*”, a new on-going series of articles we’re starting in The Grambling Connection where we interview people who grew up in small towns and went on to achieve huge success—turning their dreams into reality. We created this series to inspire others who may be living in small towns (or anywhere) that may have big dreams and may not believe they can make them happen. These individuals are here to show what’s possible.

Our first interview is with Mr. Walter Jones, who hails from Winnsboro, Louisiana.

Walter Jones is a former firefighter and fire marshal for the City of Monroe who became a Sports Agent, and signed some of the biggest names in the NFL—including Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott—and has since forged his way into the entertainment world as a movie and TV producer.

Today, you’ll find him producing content for one of the biggest names in Hollywood: Viola Davis. Ms. Davis is the first Black actress to win the triple crown of acting—an Academy Award, an Emmy, and a Tony—as well as a Grammy for the audiobook of her memoir *Finding Me*.

In 2023, Walter’s business partner of six years, Lavaille Lavette, who co-wrote *Finding Me* with Ms. Davis, joined Davis and her husband Julius Tennon to found JVL Media—a full-service production company dedicated to producing exceptional films, books-to-film adaptations, and television shows. JVL Media aims to inspire, enlighten, and entertain audiences worldwide. Walter now serves as a producer at JVL Media and as Senior Vice President of Development for Film, Television, and Streaming.

We caught up with Walter recently when he was in town and had a chance to ask him a few questions about his journey from firefighter to Film Producer.

GC: I'm really excited to talk to you—not just because of my background in film and television, but because you truly exemplify the kind of person we had in mind when we created this series. You came from a small town, and now you're out in the world doing big things. Your journey is filled with lessons for others still in small towns wondering if they have what it takes to make it. So, welcome.

Walter: Thank you.

GC: So, let's jump right in. How did you make that first leap—from firefighter to sports agent?

Walter: Ironically, it started with a knock on my door—or more accurately, a ring of the doorbell. Sometimes big things happen by chance, but you've got to be ready to turn that chance into opportunity.

A good friend of mine, Ricky Green—aka “Mean Green”—was a local DJ who went on to work in Shreveport and then Houston. He played a big part in Master



Pictured left to right: Walter Jones, Julius Tennon, Viola Davis, Lavaille Lavette



Walter and Dak Prescott

P’s early music career. Around 1998 or 1999, Master P decided to start a sports agency, and they were about to sign Ricky Williams, the Heisman Trophy winner out of Texas.

So, Ricky came back to Monroe, rang my doorbell, and told me about everything they were doing. He asked, “Do you want to help me sign some players?” I had no idea what a sports agent even did at the time, but I said sure.

GC: You had no background in it at all?

Walter: None whatsoever. But I did have the gift of gab. I knew how to talk to people, and Ricky knew that. He figured I'd be good at convincing players to sign with us. So I went to Houston, met the team, and started working with them—still working full-time as a firefighter, by the way.

The great thing about the fire department is we had plenty of vacation days. I'd take time off Thursday through Sunday to recruit players, then return to the station Monday or Tuesday. That's how I got started.

GC: So, you basically built your career on your off days?

Walter: Exactly. I'd research players—some from the University of Louisiana Monroe, which was called NLU back then—and talk to guys from places like Bastrop or other small towns



Walter and Steve Harvey



Walter on set

around. My first recruit is still one of my best friends today. That initial opportunity opened the door to meeting a lot of influential people, and I always made sure to build relationships. I had a shoebox full of business cards from people my players met. I told them: “Your playing days will end, but those connections could lead to your next opportunity.”

Entering the Entertainment World

GC: How did you meet your business partner, Lavaille Lavette?

Walter: After working with Master P, I joined Marshall Broder Sports in Los Angeles for 12 years. During that time, both my parents became ill and passed away. I stepped away for about a year to focus on my mental health and family. I missed the work, but I didn't want to do the L.A. grind anymore.

I was about to retire from the fire department and started working with a local agent. That's when I signed Dak Prescott while he was at Mississippi State. Lavaille wanted to write a book about Dak, so she googled the agency and reached out.

We met, and although Dak wasn't ready for a book at that time, she and I kept in touch.

Later, I told her I was leaving the agency. She asked, “What's next?” I told her I wanted to start a sports marketing company. She said, “Let's do it now.” We brainstormed for an hour, and before

the call ended, we had a company: One Haven Sports Marketing and Branding. And we've been working together ever since.

GC: That one meeting changed your entire trajectory.

Walter: Absolutely. One meeting can change your life. You just have to be prepared when the moment comes.

Partnering with Viola Davis

GC: So, I read where Lavaille helped co-write Viola Davis' book which is how you guys became partners with her. How did Lavaille end up writing with her?

Walter: Lavaille is one of the very few—if not the only—Black woman with an imprint at the two largest publishing companies in the world. She's a bestselling author and highly respected. When Viola was looking for someone to help with her memoir, Lavaille's name came up.

They met, connected immediately, and Lavaille co-wrote *Finding Me*. Then she suggested Viola do an audiobook version—and they ended up winning a Grammy for it. Their bond grew from there, and Lavaille suggested that Viola start her own media company so she could create her own content. Viola agreed.

Lavaille and I started looking for funding. She connected with a Nigerian bank president. We were in New York for a literacy event honoring Viola, and she said, “Let's call our guy in Africa.” He invited us to the Bahamas. He sent his plane from Cairo, and we closed the deal there. That's how JVL Media was born.

What's Next at JVL Media

GC: Can you share what kinds of projects you guys are working on now?

Walter: Right now, our first project under JVL Media is a documentary about the bank president who helped fund us. After that, we've got a slate of eight or nine films—some fully scripted, some still in development. Some will be produced internationally, some here in the U.S.

GC: Will they be movies for the theater or streaming?

Walter: Most of the projects will be theatrical releases, though some may stream, especially the documentaries.

Advice for Dreamers in Small Towns

GC: So finally, what would you say to someone still living in a small town with big dreams, but who's afraid to chase them?

Walter: I'd say: don't let your zip code limit your dreams. Where you're from is just your starting point—it's not your whole story. Opportunity doesn't always knock loudly. Sometimes it whispers. Be ready. Stay prepared. Plan properly. Sacrifice where you need to. And when your moment comes, take it—and turn it into ten more.

GC: Great advice. Thank you so much, Walter, for sitting down with us and for the kernels of wisdom you've given us today.

Walter: You're so welcome. Thank you for having me.



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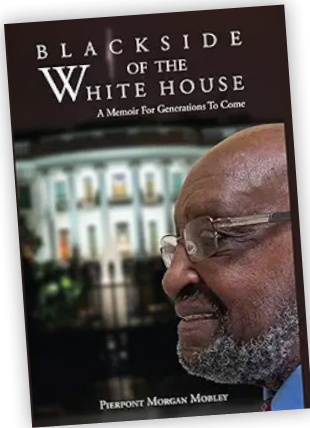
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Book Review: Black Side of the White House

By Pierpont Morgan Mobley

I made a commitment to myself that my education and life journey would be focused on helping others in the areas of employment and civil rights, both on the job and in my community. God would bless me by creating an opening for me to work in the White House under four Presidents. The stories that I share are about my experience as the first black person to work in the White House Personnel Office, under four Administrations, which increased my zeal and passion for dedicating my



life to improving civil and human rights for all. www.amazon.com



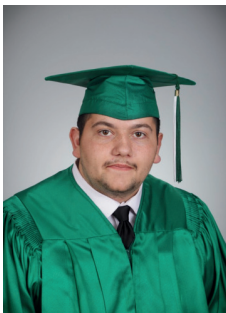
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The Faculty and Staff of Lincoln Preparatory School would like to recognize our 2025 seniors. We salute these students and their parents on a job well done!



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Nicholas Coleman



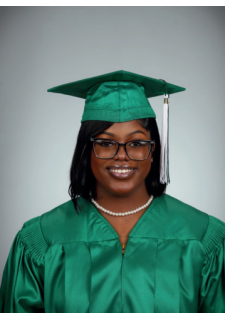
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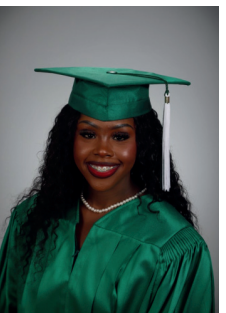
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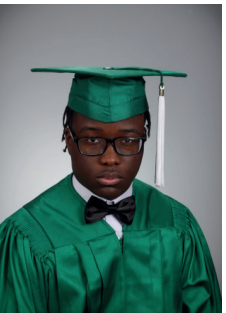
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Ny'Asia Graham



Alivia Hester



Terrance Jackson



Jaden Johnson



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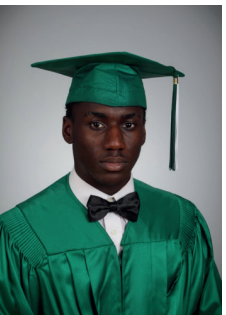
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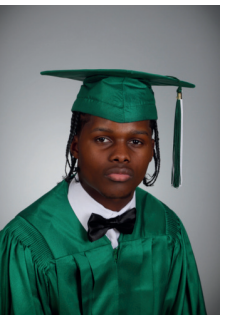
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Michael Lewis



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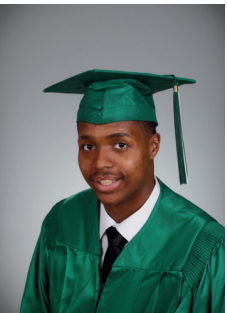
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Demarian Robinson



Ajah Salsberry



A'kira Samuel



Tyrin Slate



Tanner Steward



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Cenario Wilson



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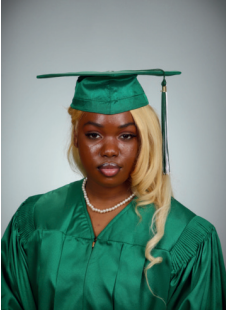
Tyler Wimberly



D'Tavion Wright



A'MarjaeYoung



Ke'nijah Pastor



Ma'leeh Freeman



Orlexi Evans

Not Pictured
Destiny Branch
Malayahia Kenny
Samuel Williams

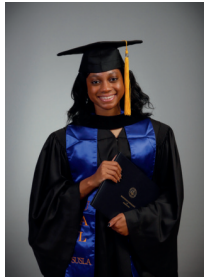
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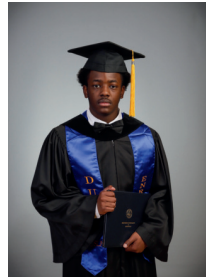
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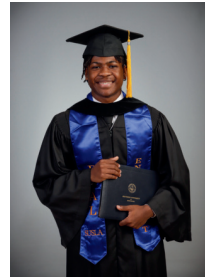
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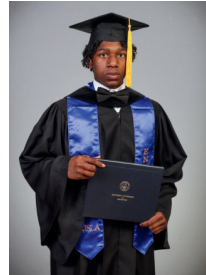
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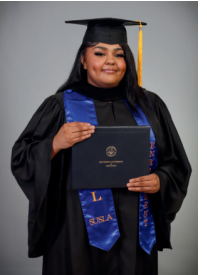
Fredrion Payne



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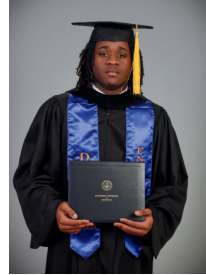
Ty'Rhon Roane



Synniah Spann



Jahanee Todd-Phillips



Peyton Walton



Brayden Williams



Jordan Williams



Timiya Willis

Pictured Above
Ma'leeh Freeman
Orlexi Evans