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July 11 - July 17, 2015 50th Year Volume 11 www.ladatanews.com

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Coming Out of the Closet

Black and Gay in America



Michael Robinson, left, and Earl Benjamin, partners for almost 14 years, leave Orleans Parish Civil District Court after having exchanged vows to become legally married. (Photo Courtesy of NOLA.com / Times Picayune)

By Edwin Buggage

Marriage Equality Supreme Court Decision Brings LGBT Issues to the Forefront

Historic Decision Makes Same Sex Marriage Legal in All 50 States

Recently, the United States turned the pages of history when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to legalize marriage for all Americans, no matter their gender or sexual orientation.

The lead plaintiff in this monumental decision was the case of Obergefell v. Hodges. Jim Obergefell, an Ohio resident who wanted to be listed as the surviving spouse on his husband's death certificate. In 2013,

Obergefell married his partner of two decades, John Arthur, who suffered from ALS. Arthur passed away in October of that year; three months after the couple filed their lawsuit. This created a firestorm of cases as couples from other states filed similar cases, citing their 14th Amendment Rights of Equal Protection Under the Law were being violated.

This ruling is the culmination of work done by gay

On the Cover: Orleans Parish Civil District Court Judge Paula Brown signs marriage certificates during the same sex marriage ceremony for Michael Robinson and Earl Benjamin on Monday, June 29, 2015, in New Orleans. Photos courtesy of NOLA.com / Times Picayune

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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activists who have fought for years in the lower courts. While there has been a prohibition against gay marriage and even deeming it a mental illness during the history of this country, before this historic decision thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia already recognize marriage equality. In recent years the tide has turned in what once unthinkable that same sex marriages would be recognized in all fifty states.

In New Orleans days after the historic ruling by the Supreme Court that ruled same sex marriage legal in all 50 states Earl Benjamin, 41, and Michael Louis Robinson, 39, were married after years of being domestic partners. The two men exchanged vows before Civil District Judge Paula Brown shortly before 1 p.m., becoming perhaps the first same-sex couple to be wed in Louisiana.

While this has been a cause for some to celebrate, it is an issue that has found itself on the fringes of conversations among African-Americans. Where it continues to be a either a taboo subject or one that is polarizing and divisive, but the African-American community has had many who have come from its ranks that have been gay and lesbian who have moved the needle forward in the struggle for equality. But the community remains silent about issues surrounding those in our community who are LGBT and are not as vigilant in talking about their issues as others that affect African-Americans. But today with the decision to grant gays and lesbians the right to marry perhaps it is time for African-Americans to come out the closet and have a real discussion about what it means to be Black and gay in America.

Marriage and Morality in the Black Community

There are those who feel that while laws have been passed to allow same sex marriages and that they respect the law of the land. They feel that it is a step in the wrong direction. Dr. Aaron Harold is the Founding Pastor of New Millennium Breakthrough Ministries and a relationship counselor. He feels that the changes in the law will further erode the moral fabric of the country and the African-American community.

"I think the decision has created a decline in the moral side of people. God did not make man for man and woman for woman. I think when we go against the word of God we are going against the morals and standards that have been put down and is not a good thing for our society



Attorney Taetrece Harrison

where many other social institutions and standards of behavior are being lowered. I think instead of the standards being lowered they should be raised where people can think of having character, morals and vision. This is something that seems to be going by the wayside," says Harold, commenting on the Supreme Court Decision.

"We are now saying to the young people who are not yet of age that have not engaged in any sex or understand sexuality that these things are going on and we are sending out the wrong message that the moral value of people is diminishing."

While this is a highly charged issue with strong feelings on both sides, there must be a rational middle. A place where both sides can listen to one another without getting into caricaturing the other side and their views; because some would deem Dr. Harold's words as incendiary and anti-gay. He says that he does not have anything against gays, but he disagrees with the choices they make to live a homosexual lifestyle.

"I am not against anyone, but I am against the morals that we are supposed to stand on as believers of God and when we put those morals down for the right to do something that is not right in the eyesight of God its wrong. I am not against gay people but the choices and lifestyle they live. We should love everybody even our enemies, so we should love gay people but not the choices they make."

On Being Black, Gay and on the Frontlines of History

There are those who feel that who one loves and choose to marry is a private matter and that the state should not be in a place to regulate. One of those people is Taetrece Harrison, a Practicing Attorney from New Orleans who sat in the courtroom during the trial at the

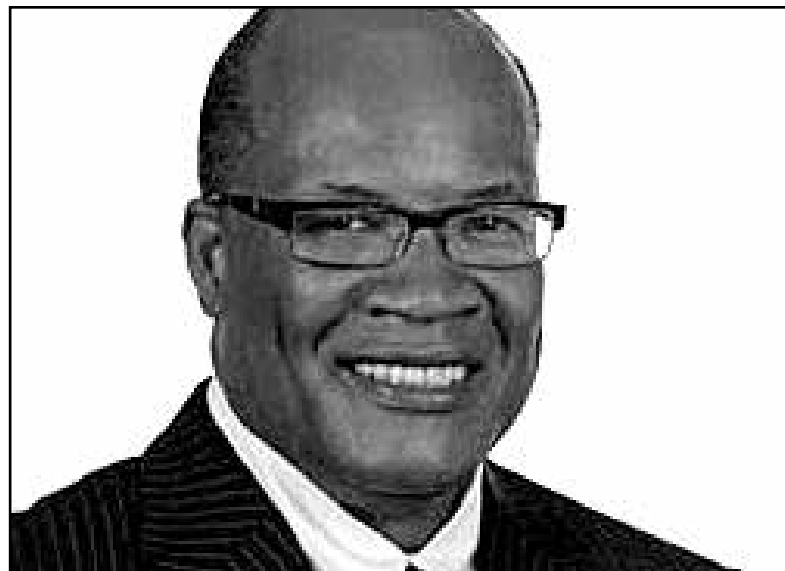
U.S. Supreme Court. She is a lesbian, who feels that her sexual identity is only a small part of who she is and that with African-Americans she's found less acceptance of her sexual orientation.

"I was at the Supreme Court and I heard the argument as they took place. The gay couples made great arguments stating this case was about family. When it comes to issues surrounding gays I believe people get too caught up in the bedroom and not looking at these people who should be entitled to love who they want," says Harrison about her feelings on the decision.

She feels that humanizing gays and lesbians is important in building bridges of understanding; and feels that in the Black community one that's been victimized there should be more sympathy and understanding of the plight of gays and lesbians.

"I feel the challenge is in humanizing that in LGBT community and for those heterosexual people who are against it to not focus on the bedroom. I think unfortunately that is what many get caught up in and more so in the Black community."

The issue of marriage equal-



Dr. Gary Clark

ity have been framed by many as the same as the struggle for racial equality; some liken the Obergefell v. Hodges decision to Loving v. Virginia, the Supreme Court case that made interracial marriages legal in all 50 states in 1967. A notion that some scoff at in the African-American community, but Harrison feels there are parallels between the struggle of African-Americans and the LGBT community.

"People want to get caught up in talking about we had it harder than

gay people because we were slaves. It is not about they were slaves or the same fight. It is a struggle, and at the end of the day it is a struggle although they may not have arrived at it in the same way."

Harrison says she felt great joy when the ruling was read and that the lanes of democracy were widened for more of our citizens.

"I felt vindication when the decision was made. It was a feeling of accomplishment. When people say Black Lives Matter. In this case it

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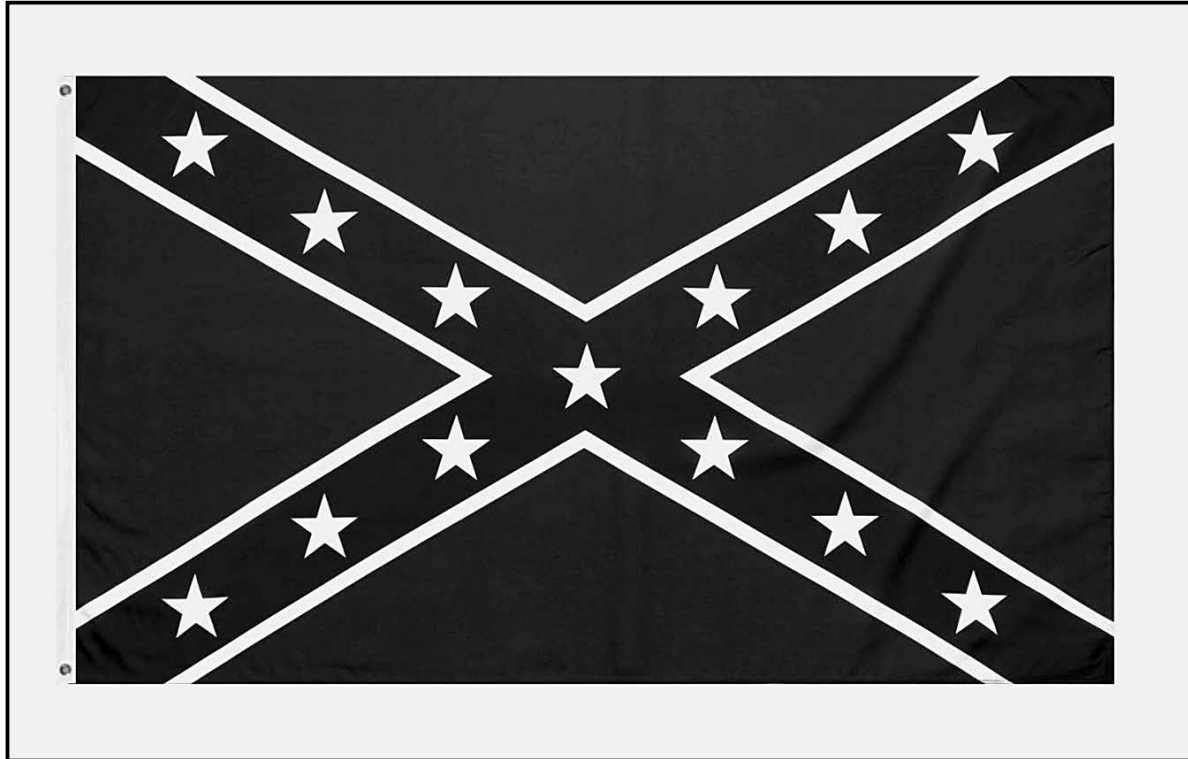
Confederate Flag Sales Soar After South Carolina Church Shooting

By Amen Oyiboke
NNPA Newswire

(NNPA) Rising conversations about the origin and history of the Confederate flag continues to be a topic on America's list of issues for discussion.

Last week companies such as Walmart, Amazon, Sears/Kmart, eBay, Etsy and Google Shopping made statements by pulling merchandise displaying the confederate flag from their stores. The catalyst for the change came after a brutal shooting that left nine people dead at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

21-year-old Dylann Roof, the gunman of the shooting, proudly displayed the Confederate flag in his social media posts as a statement to support racial separation.



used by Confederate Army General Robert E. Lee. The army held their own views of rebellion against the union to keep slavery in place for economic prosperity. Soon white supremacy groups began to use the flags as symbols for racial segregation and cleansing.

Although companies have announced their decisions to discontinue items of Confederate memorabilia, flag sales continue to soar. Confederate flags made the top of Amazon's Patio, Lawn & Garden category last week and some item purchases peaked by more than 5,000 percent.

Customers who buy the products may have different reasons, for instance some customers have reportedly bought Confederate flags to burn them, while others believe they are preserving history, according to an article published by the New York Times. Consumers voiced their purchases as a way to celebrate history.

Although there are many groups who would like to brush off America's 500 year-long history with slavery, when the subject of Confederacy and its prevalence in memorabilia as a symbol of grace to Southerners is brought up its called "preserving history".

This rhetoric does nothing more than make it seem as though the conception of preservation is only beneficial when it comes to the lives of descents that were not directly impacted by this country's turbulent history. Symbols of slavery are rarely shown or addressed in mainstream history books. These symbols are also often absent from present discussions of America's roots. Supporters of the Confederate flag say it's preserving history and represents heritage of the South. Heritage should not produce a strong feeling of offense by people who fell under the oppression.

After the shooting, debates about the Confederate flag's meaning and stance began to resurface.

Gov. Nikki Haley of South Carolina and a group of locally elected officials announced on June 22 that they supported the removal of the Confederate flag from state capitol grounds. Other Southern states, like Alabama have followed through with removing the Confederate flag from state capitol grounds.

For decades Confederate merchandise has been sold quietly in stores with little opposition from businesses and consumers.

"We have decided to prohibit Confederate flags and many items containing this image because we believe it has become a contemporary symbol of divisiveness and racism," eBay said in a statement last week.

The flag was a symbol of the slave-holding South during the Civil War. The flag that is currently produced isn't the original Confederate flag, instead it is the battle flag

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was that all lives matter. And all people are being recognized and hold their head up high and be married and not be ostracized."

Time for the Black Community to Come Out of the Closet and Have a Conversation about the LGBT Community

This court decision is of historical significance. It is something that scholars will look at when thinking of the Obama years and how society changed in many ways on his watch. Dr. Gary Clark is the Director of Center for Law and Public Interest at Dillard University and a radio and television host. He feels that historically Blacks have been more socially conservative, so he is not surprised at the reaction or silence by some to the idea of marriage equality.

"Social issues, immigration issues and gay marriages have always polled more conservatively among Blacks than other groups. In my research I find the rank and file Blacks tend to be more conservative than the political leadership which tends to be more liberal and pragmatic."

As a student and teacher of political history, Clark feels it is impor-

tant to understand that a society like the U.S. with the Constitution being a living document and being a country that's amended itself into becoming a more perfect union that change is a constant and feels that is a good thing.

"When it comes to social policy these tend to be polarizing historically. In these cases you have to follow where society is going or evolving into. When you look at different generations people who are older are more conservative than those who are young who tend to be more open to other groups including young Blacks on the issue of gays and lesbians. Today we see generational change when it comes to social policy. In South Carolina we see the Confederate flag coming down and multicultural flag going up. This is a changing America, the country you are born into isn't the one you will die in, because of incremental changes that will take place."

He feels optimistic about the future where tolerance and diversity will triumph over intolerance and conservative narrow-mindedness. Also Dr. Clark sees the parallels between African-Americans and others in the struggle for equality. He feels that Blacks have been in the



Dr. Aaron Harold

vanguard of leadership in protest movements and have created the template for others to follow.

"My grandchild went to a kindergarten where one of her friends whose parents are a lesbian couple and it is not a problem. Younger people they are much more accept-

ing. We must begin to have conversations about the issue and broaden our views. If we cease to change with society we will fall apart. We need to have certain adaptability.

"Brown is the new Black, LGBT is the new Black. What happened is that Black Americans have taught

everybody that were sub-groups in America how to engage, how to fight the war for equality."

Dr. Clark feels the solution is to come out of the closet of secrecy and denial and talk about how LGBT people and their issues are a part of our community and they are part of our family and have much to contribute to our community moving forward in the spirit of brother and sisterhood.

"If you are a purist in how you interpret the constitution or the bible, you will feel the marriage equality decision is wrong; but when you live in a neo-Christian Society especially a democratic society these changes are inevitable. Black America has to get ahead of the curve ball. That means working with gays and lesbians, with brown and all types of people or they will find themselves isolated. Politics is about the allocation and distribution of resources and if we are isolated we will be left out of the power equation. We need to learn to work in this changing America. We may have certain values that exist but you must learn to work with lesbian and gay people. Even if it is something you don't accept, but must learn to understand that society is changing."

Data News Weekly is Hiring

Data News Weekly Newspaper, The People's Paper, is hiring for two positions in our New Orleans Office.

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About the Job

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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Congressman Cedric Richmond Hosts Essence Festival Party

Photos by Glenn Summers

The who's who of New Orleans turned out to celebrate the Essence Festival with Congressman Cedric Richmond. The music was cool, the outfits were hot, and of course, Data was there.



Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.

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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

2015 Essence Fest Highlights

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

Whether you are young or old, rich or not so rich, male or female, the 2015 Essence Festival had something for everyone. With top musical artists, headline making celebrities and national leaders, the venues were packed to capacity with people from near and far, making this year's festival, one of the best ever. Of course Data was there for all the action. In case you missed it, here are some highlights. Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.



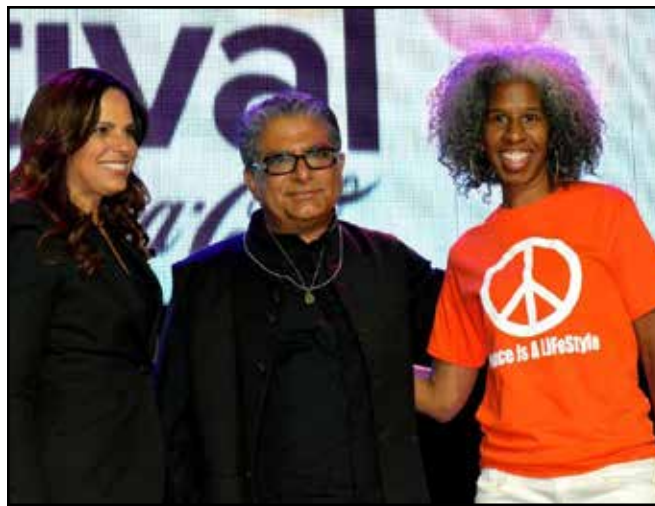
Music Artist Goapele



Music Artist Wale



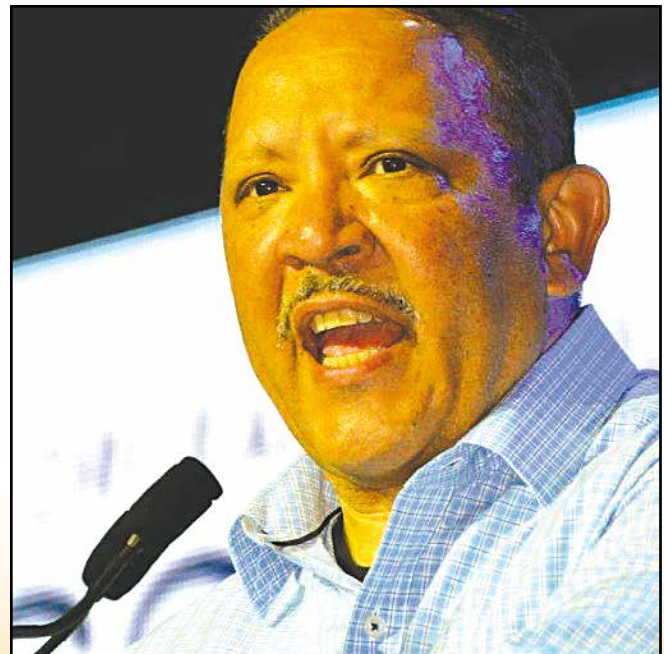
Music Artist Esperanza Spaulding



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Hailing a Cab While Black? It's Still a Problem



By Benjamin Todd Jealous
Guest Columnist

If you had to guess the single strongest factor in determining who escapes poverty, what do you think it would be? Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is transportation.

We may not think about it every day, but access to buses, trains and metros is a crucial link to opportunity and economic mobility. In fact, a recent Harvard study found the single strongest factor in determining economic mobility was commuting time. A lack of transportation options can keep a struggling

community treading water. It is bad enough when a neighborhood lacks access to fresh produce; it is even worse when the closest grocery is only accessible by a bus that only shows up occasionally, or not at all.

If there is a personal equivalent to this public policy problem, it would have to be the struggle of catching a cab as a person of color, especially as a Black man. Nearly every person of color I know has a first- or second-hand story about a time that a taxi refused to pick them up or even drive to their neighborhood. Even President Obama has recalled experiencing discrimination when he was a young man.

A new research study provides some statistical meat to those anecdotal stories, and hints that the solution to this age old problem may lie in new technology. A study, conducted by Brilliant Corners and sponsored by Uber, surveyed more than 800 Black and white residents of Chicago. It found the following:

The number of respondents who report personally experiencing being ignored by taxi drivers when hailing taxis on the street is significantly higher for black respondents than for whites (Blacks 48 percent to whites 23 percent).

55 percent of Blacks who have called for a cab at some point have experienced a refusal by the service to send a cab to their community.

A solid majority of Blacks and nearly half of whites agree that taxi drivers deliberately discriminate against Black passengers.

Fifty years after the Civil Rights Act, one of the most basic activities in daily life is still tarred by racism and discrimination. This new data proves the concerns that many people of color hold about finding a ride when it matters most: when the destination is a job interview, a doctor's visit, or just a lunch with an old friend. The vexing experience of trying to hail a taxi is a powerful incentive for many people of

color to seek alternative methods of transportation.

The most exciting alternative is ridesharing. Ridesharing companies, like Uber and Lyft, manage to be both more efficient than traditional taxi services and also more color-blind. When a driver selects a customer for pickup, he or she is completely blind to what that customer looks like, or where that customer is going. Using an app, anyone can get a reliable ride, whenever and wherever they are.

The added bonus of ridesharing services is that they serve as a form of economic empowerment themselves. As these services ramp up across the country, they are providing tens of thousands of flexible and easily accessible jobs. Three out of four Uber drivers use the service as a steady source of income, and eight percent of drivers were formerly unemployed. Uber has partnered with the NAACP in Boston and Maryland to recruit drivers

from heavily diverse neighborhoods where jobs are often sorely needed.

In fact, these new services create a virtuous cycle of employment and economic empowerment. Ridesharing companies serve new people and communities that traditional taxis have for years passed over. When these drivers come from the communities they serve, it essentially creates a new market for transportation services. Everybody wins, from the passengers to the drivers to the local economy.

We often think about how technology and smartphones make our lives more convenient and easier; it's important to remember that technology has the power to protect our dignity and make our society fairer as well.

Ben Jealous is former President and CEO of the NAACP and a partner at Kapor Capital, an early investor in Uber.

Confederate Traitors Don't Deserve to be Honored



George C. Curry
NNPA

Can you image waving a flag that honors Benedict Arnold, a name synonymous with treason?

How about traveling to work and back on Aldrich Ames Boulevard, a tribute to the CIA mole who secretly worked for the Russians?

Should we erect a statute of Robert Hanssen, the FBI computer and wiretapping expert who spent most of his career spying for the Soviet Union and Russia, in the hallway of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.?

Do you favor naming public schools attended mostly by Jews after Fritz Kuhn to honor the German who lived in the U.S. and was

in charge of the famous U.S. Nazi group, the German-American Bund?

If you are repulsed by the thought of honoring those traitors, you should be equally indignant at the thought of erecting statues and naming streets and schools after Confederate traitors.

Make no mistake about it: Those who declared war on the Union were traitors, defined as "a person who is not loyal to his or her own country, friends, etc."

Eleven Southern states broke from the Union for the same reason.

Writing in his book, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and identity in the Civil War South*, Drew Gilpin Faust observed, "leaders of the secession movement across the South cited slavery as the most compelling reason for southern independence."

Alexander Stephens, in what became known as the Cornerstone Speech, said on March 21, 1861 in Savannah, Ga., "The new constitu-

tion has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution – African slavery as it exists amongst us – the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution."

He explained, "[The Confederate] 'its corner-stone rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery – subordination to the superior race – is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.'"

Theses historical facts notwithstanding, a majority of Americans – 57 percent – view the Confederate flag as a symbol of Southern pride rather than racism, according to a recent CNN poll.

It gets more interesting when the numbers are broken down by race. Of Whites polled, only 25 percent view the Confederate flag as a symbol of racism. However, 72

percent of Blacks associate the flag with racism.

It is time to bring down the Confederate flag of hate, but we shouldn't stop there. We should remove the monuments and tributes to the Civil War traitors from public buildings and streets. If Robert J. Bentley, the Republican governor of Alabama, can voluntarily remove four Confederate flags from the Capitol grounds in Montgomery and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) can recommend that a statue of Kentucky-born Jefferson Davis be removed from the state Capitol, it is time to remove the tributes to Confederate leaders from the U.S. Capitol.

Visitors to the Capitol are greeted by towering statues of 11 former Confederate leaders, including Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Vice President Alexander H. Stephens and Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), a civil rights icon, said it's time for the statues to be removed.

He told the Associated Press,

"Young children, school children, walk by these statues, and those of us who serve in the Congress, we have to get our own house in order ... We have to have a cleansing in this place."

There is still cleansing to be done at the state level.

Despite the removal the Confederate flags from the Capitol grounds in Alabama, for example, the state annually celebrates Confederate Memorial Day, Jefferson Davis' birthday, and honors Robert E. Lee on the same day it observes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

A large statue of Jefferson Davis on the Capitol grounds overlooks Dexter Avenue, where Dr. King pastored his first church. The Confederate Monument is still on the grounds and a star still marks the spot where Jefferson Davis took the oath as president of the Confederate states.

Mississippi also combines the

**Commentary, Continued
on page 10.**

Don't Miss God's Wake Up Call



James Washington
Guest Columnist

I don't know about you, but there have been times when I have confused being blessed with being lucky. When it seems that life has stacked the deck against me, my worldly perspective on things can get kind of blurred. I mean life does that periodically. My point is that when this occurs and my back is truly up against the wall, I'm fortunate to be able to steady myself and come back to one very truthful thing. It's not luck. Forever strike that from your vocabulary. I am

blessed and there are not enough hours in the day to say thank you to the Almighty for this simple change in thought. What it means is that from wherever I sit, whatever my predicament or circumstances, I have not missed my wake up call from God. It may have been a long time coming, but this time I didn't hit the snooze button. Instead I got myself out of bed and started at some point to pay attention to God's agenda rather than my own. If you think about it, everybody could or should ask the same question. Have you missed your wake up call? Did you call the front desk and ask/pray for one?

The bible is full of saints and sinners who, when God rang them up, tried their very best to play past, ignore or sleep through God's call upon their lives. Most tried to deny it. Some begged God to ask somebody else. Many just

turned over and wouldn't believe God was actually trying to get in touch with them. Ask Jonah, Moses, Zechariah to name a few. But that's a funny thing about God. He continues to call, sometimes with consequences for the reluctant sleeper. I'm just thankful I answered the phone. Can you imagine missing your wake up call from God and never getting another one? Like I said, I'm feeling much more than just lucky today. I would have loved to have seen Mom's face to hear me say I'm saved. There are still people rolling over in their graves at this rather remarkable news. Yes, there is a celebration going on. And the only reason I know this is because in my life, I know I woke up exactly one ring before the last ring of my wake up call.

Now I might be wrong but from my seat, better late than never. I'm

giddy today with the reality that God said, "ring him up one more time." It stops and starts with 'thank you.' It includes the truth that one day I will die knowing that God loves me and that knowledge gives a whole new meaning to my entire existence. You know when you miss your wake up call, it has a tendency to ruin your whole day. I believe when you miss your wake up call from God, it has a tendency to ruin the rest of your natural life and the next life after that. I know there is someone who is reading this right now who also knows the feeling of just getting in under the wire; catching a plane, making a meeting, getting to the store right before it closes. Maybe you made it in time to talk someone into letting you in after the door was locked when they weren't supposed to. The negative anticipation is replaced with great

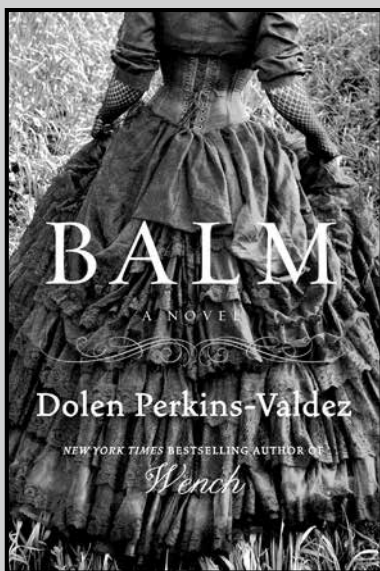
elation that, whew, you made it. Thank God I made it!

Now I may not get to heaven but I can honestly say, I do know the way. The rest is up to me. I don't know about you but that's worth shouting about. The bible says count it all joy. Life and death look a whole lot different to me now. Actually, they're pretty much the same to some extent. God is in both realms. And it's pretty nice to find or be found and then follow Him in this one. You guys have a nice day and may God bless and keep you forever. "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God." Romans 12:2.

**May God bless and
keep you always,**

James, jaws@dallasweekly.com

Balm



"Balm: A Novel"
by Dolen Perkins-Valdez
c.2015, Amistad
\$25.99 / \$31.99 Canada
273 pages

By Bookworm Sez

Music almost always does it for you.

After a long day, nothing makes you feel better – especially when you pair soft tunes with hot bath and solitude. You might even add a glass of something tasty and a novel you've been dying to read. But in the new book "Balm" by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, the only thing that soothes is forgiveness and restitution.

Moving to Chicago had never been part of Sadie's plan.

She'd supposed, instead, that she'd live in Pennsylvania after the War ended, and go on with her life as though there was never any war. Her parents had seen things differently, however: she was hastily married to a wealthy man she barely knew because it was safer that way. Sam purchased a house in Chicago, furnished it, and hired staff in anticipation of having a wife to display; Sadie might have even fallen in love with him, had he not been killed in a train accident.

She couldn't mourn; she barely knew Sam, which made the staff uncomfortable. As they deserted her, Sadie knew she needed a maid. The voice in her head – an in-



sistent voice that said he was a soldier once – sent her to Madge.

Born to a woman who was more interested in being a root doctor than in being a mother, Madge left her Tennessee home as a teenager – unloved by her Mama but knowing how to use plants and seeds to heal. She couldn't say she liked working for Sadie, but assisting with séances left Madge with plenty of time to build her apothecary and a little business. It also gave her guilty time to spend with Hemp Harrison, who said he was a married man.

Long before the day when raggedy Rebel soldiers came down the plantation

road looking for trouble, Hemp had fallen for Annie, and they married. Though he'd done something unthinkable, he loved her so much; after she was sold away in chains, he vowed to find her and make things right. With the War over, it was said that "millions" of former slaves had somehow landed in Chicago but was Annie among them? Was it right to move on without her?

Set during America's spiritualist movement of the post-Civil War years, "Balm" is a bit of surprise: it's not exactly a love story, not exactly a ghost story, not exactly a novel of amends. It's closer to all three, and that only works sometimes.

While it's true that author Dolen Perkins-Valdez writes with extraordinary beauty, those flowingly gorgeous words can slow the story down, which often mars the romantic aspect of it. I enjoyed the ghostly storyline – I found it interesting and accurate, but the spirit's brother annoyed me beyond all reason and left me feeling restless.

This isn't a terrible book, no. It's slow, but it has three great main characters going for it and the overall authenticity will make historical novel fans happy. But if you're looking for something snappier and with more finality, "Balm" just won't do it for you.

Slavery Linked to School Segregation in South

By Jazelle Hunt
NNPA Washington
Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – There is a direct correlation between the geographic concentration of slavery and today's K-12 school segregation, according to a new study.

The study, "How the Legacy of Slavery and Racial Composition Shape Public School Enrollment in the American South," appeared in the publication *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, the official journal of the American Sociological Association.

According to the study, counties in the Deep South that had large enslaved populations currently have the highest levels of racial segregation between public and private schools.

"This is fundamentally still a White flight process. We tested whether or not White students were leaving public schools to attend private schools because they were better schools. That's not the case," said Robert L. Reece, a doctoral candidate in the sociology department at Duke University and co-author of the study.

"They're leaving public schools because of integration, because there are Black students in these schools; [and] because slavery created conditions that normalize segregated schooling in these areas."

Reece and co-author Heather O'Connell at Rice University examined Census and National Center for Education Statistics data along



Robert L. Reece, doctoral candidate at Duke University and co-author of the study. (Courtesy photo)

county lines in states that were original members of the Confederacy: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and South Carolina.

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, a wave of private schools washed across these and other states in defiance of integration. Because this White flight was a response to Black students entering previously-White public schools, Reece and O'Connell expected there to be more private schools in

places that had been particularly attached to slavery.

Instead, they found that the correlation rested in the level of use of private schools, not the number of schools.

"We argue that the social structural legacy of slavery may separately affect the use of private schools by amplifying their legitimacy as a means to escape integrated public schools," the study stated. "The strongly demarcated social hierarchy associated with the lega-

cy of slavery may make the use of private schools more likely among Whites, regardless of the number of private schools."

In other words, there weren't necessarily more private schools in counties that had had high concentrations of enslavement, but the school segregation in these areas was stark.

Reece and O'Connell explain that high enrollment and racial segregation in private schools in the Deep South was, and still is, partly a result of "racial threat" – the rise of Black students and families in a given county or public school, which then leads to White flight and greater Black-White disparities. To test this hypothesis, they analyzed the same data for counties in the "Upper South:" Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, North Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Their results suggested no link between racial threat and racial school segregation in the Upper South, while showing a statistically significant link in the Deep South.

The study noted, "The Deep South was much more reliant on the plantation economy and is argued to have subsequently developed a more rigid set of racial politics that remain in place today."

Although the researchers focused on the former Confederacy, they make it clear in their writing that this type of segregation happens everywhere – but in different ways and for different historical reasons.

"Everyone [in America] had a

connection to slavery. Like New York, for example – a lot of plantation investment money came out of New York, from Wall Street," said Reece. "We're measuring how this one specific type of racial inequity was grown and protected in this area. School segregation exists in other areas, but the history is just different."

As the nation changes demographically, with young children of color already the majority in their generation, Reece asserts that race relations will not change much without examining and targeting these roots.

The study is part of a developing field of social science research on the legacy of slavery that examines the system's social and economic consequences. Reece and O'Connell hope to advance the field and encourage others to study history as a path toward correcting present-day racial inequality in communities all over the United States.

"What we're trying to demonstrate is that history mattered. The history of slavery matters," Reece says. "We can't really understand the social determinants of things like segregation, and poverty, and income disparity without taking a long pause and historical look at what has been happening. And considering that antebellum slavery, I'd argue, is the most prominent historical period in the country's history, we have to understand how it affects our current society if we want to be able to fix these social inequities."

Commentary, Continued from page 8.

birthdays of Dr. King and Robert E. Lee, observes Confederate Memorial Day on the last Monday of April and combines national observance of Memorial Day with Jefferson Davis' birthday as a state holiday.

In addition to Alabama and Mississippi, Confederate Memorial Day is also observed as a state holiday in Texas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

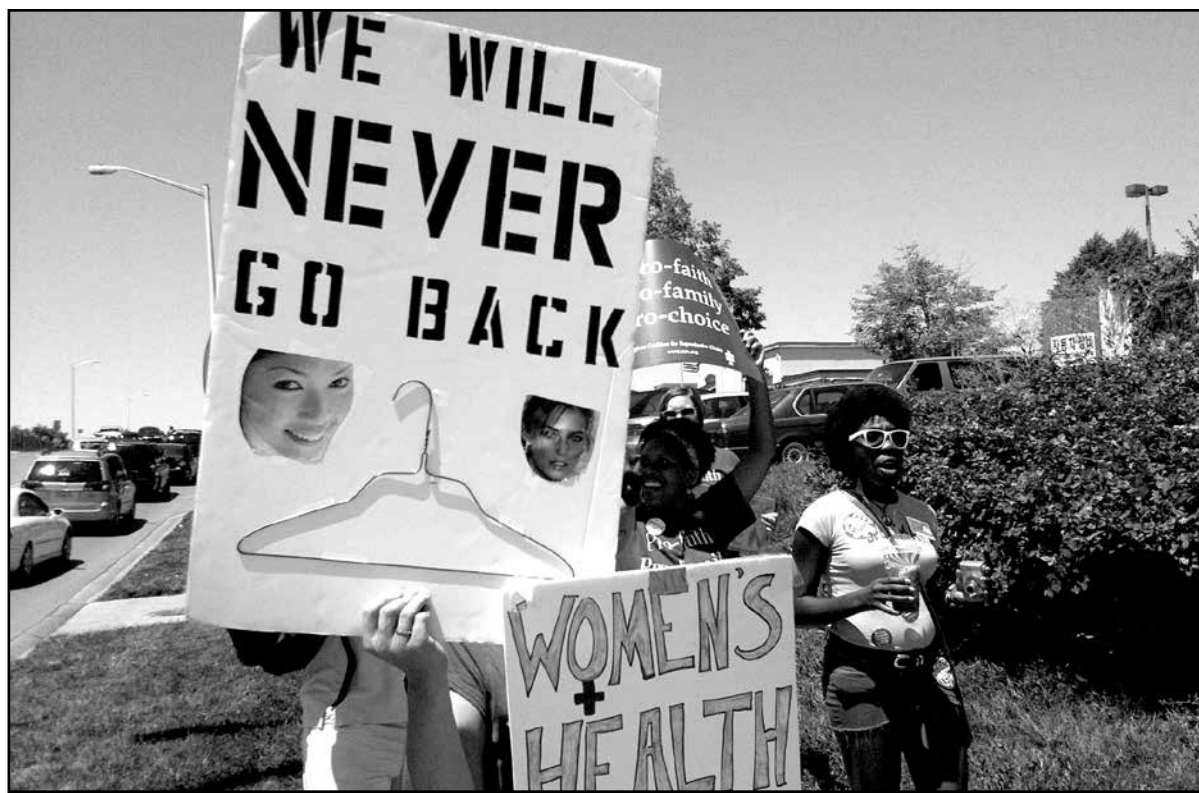
Let the cleansing begin. Like Maj. General William T. Sherman, let's march though Dixie and the rest of the nation until we rid the United States of tributes to traitors.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service (NNPA) and BlackPressUSA.com. He is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. Curry can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com. You can also follow him at www.twitter.com/currygeorge and George E. Curry Fan Page on Facebook. See previous columns at <http://www.georgecurry.com/columns>.

**ONLY
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CAN PREVENT
WILDFIRES.**



Abortion Rights Issue Regains Momentum



By Jazelle Hunt

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – When she was five months pregnant, past the point where she could obtain a legal abortion, 23-year-old Kenlissia Jones of Albany, Ga. ordered prescription abortion pills from a Canadian website. When Jones started feeling pain, she was rushed to the hospital.

En route, she delivered the fetus in the backseat of her neighbor's car. The fetus died 30 minutes later. Instead of being comforted in her hour of loss, Jones was arrested at the hospital and charged with murder.

With agonizing stories such as Jones' in the news, reproductive rights issues are again coming to the forefront of public attention and are certain to be an issue in the upcoming presidential election.

That battle is already being played out at the state level. Since 2010, legislators in 31 states have passed almost 300 abortion-related laws, more than 50 of them in this year alone.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, White women accounted for 55 percent of all legal abortions in 2011. Black women accounted for 37 percent. Still, reproductive policies disproportionately affect African Americans. They report more unintended pregnancies, have a maternal death rate three-times that of White women, and often lack the health insurance that

fully covers women's care.

"These new restrictions are changing the circumstances under which abortion is provided and how abortion is accessed. We also seeing real access issues, depending on socio-economic status and racial status," said Elizabeth Nash, who analyzes state policy at the Guttmacher Institute, a Washington, D.C. nonprofit advocating for reproductive rights.

"Low-income women have fewer resources on which they can rely, and these restrictions are having more of an impact on them," she continues, adding that middle- and upper-income women can afford the procedure, which typically costs around \$500, have flexible jobs that allow for time off, and have the resources to travel if need be.

Data from the Pew Research Center supports the notion that Black people tend to be socially conservative on causes such as gay marriage and abortion, out of religious belief. But according to surveys conducted by In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, a national policy organization, there's another overlooked factor.

"Overwhelmingly Black Americans, by numbers of 80 to 95 percent, support a women's right to determine for herself when she will have children, and how she will have those children," says Dazon Dixon Diallo, founding partner of the In Our Own Voice agenda and

founder and president of SisterLove, an Atlanta-based reproductive justice organization.

"Regardless of religion, regardless of political ideology, regardless of education level or income level, and age...Black folks overwhelmingly support statements that, when it comes to abortion, 'We should trust Black women to make the important decisions about themselves and their families.'"

As part of a new effort to challenge women's care provisions built into the Affordable Care Act, 31 states have enacted Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers policies, or "TRAP laws," which set requirements for abortion clinics and/or medical professionals who perform the procedure.

The laws share a few commonalities across states. For example, physician offices and clinics must obtain a license from the health department, which makes the licensee subject to random searches of their offices and client medical records.

But in general, the requirements vary widely. In Missouri, for example, doctors cannot work in a clinic unless they are also on the staff list at the nearest hospital. In North Carolina, a clinic must meet specific standards for the air quality, flow, and vent placement in recovery rooms. Some laws require clinics to meet hospital standards. Some require medically unnecessary ultrasounds or mental health

services before an abortion, while other states shrink the window of time a woman can obtain one.

Jackson Women's Health Organization, the lone clinic in Mississippi that offers abortion services, has become the stage for a possible U.S. Supreme Court battle. One of the state's 2012 TRAP laws requires abortion physicians to have privileges at a local hospital. The Jackson center would not be able to meet that requirement and would be forced to close. The court case argues that this closure violates the 14th Amendment rights of women in Mississippi.

The case is on hold until at least the fall, when the court will reconvene and decide whether to consider it.

"When we've seen TRAP laws go into effect, we've seen clinics close for no good reason. That law does no good for any woman and is not justified in any sense of the word," said Nash, referring to the Mississippi law in question and others like it. "What would make a lot of sense is for this law to be repealed so the clinic can remain open."

Abortion is often only one of a range of services physicians and clinics provide, including providing contraceptives, prenatal care, sex education, affordable or free STD testing, and infertility services. Laws targeted at abortion also disrupt access to these services when they threaten clinics' existence.

Kenlissia Jones' murder charge was later dropped; although Georgia has TRAP laws, terminating a pregnancy is not a criminal act. As the Supreme Court and state legislatures recess for the summer, various advocacy and social justice groups are mobilizing and educating citizens on the issue in preparation for the election and legislative seasons this fall.

"We have to be a lot more engaged, and especially among Black women as leaders...that we're able to articulate these issues from within our own communities and on our own behalf," Diallo explained. "And that when we know these kinds of issues come up – like with Kenlissia – we are proactively ready for any legislative work that needs to be done, before we have to react to punitive legislation that may be working to close any kind of opportunities for women to be self-determining and have autonomy in their own bodies."

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