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The Villager

A Community Service Weekly Since 1973
4132 E. 12th Street Austin, Texas 78721



TPA TEXAS PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION



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Vol. 48 No. 22

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January 14, 2022



2022 MLK RALLY & FESTIVAL

MONDAY, JAN. 17 | 10:00 a - 3:00 p

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RAPPIN'
Thomas Wyatt

It's Good

It ain't 'ALL' good, but I'll take it. Despite our Annual MLK march being postponed due to covid; I'm looking forward to the activities at HT next week. Despite our city under Stage 5 Covid guidelines, my spirits are still high. And even with loved ones being lost to the pandemic, inflation prices skyrocketing, politics being at an all-time low, and kids missing out on what should be their prime schooling years, it's still good. For we have each other; that's all that matters.

And like I said last week, 2022 -so far- has been nothing short of a godsend.

Last week, the trial for the slaying of Ahmaud Arbery was put to rest. First, I must thank the jury for coming to the right and just verdict. I know that wasn't easy. Especially considering how tough it was just to get enough citizens to serve on that body during our nation's emotionally-hostile environment.

However, my heart, admiration, and pure gratitude goes out to Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley.

You see, after the verdict was reached, the sentencing phase began. And the now convicted felons were facing a max sentence of life in prison without parole. And it is here, where you find out what a black life is worth in the state of Georgia in 2021-2022.

This wasn't some football hero these men murdered. He was an average joe. An average Black joe; who suffered a modern-day lynching.

The defense lawyers stood in front of Judge Walmsley and gave some of the most pathetic arguments for leniency I have ever heard. And as I watched your honor while these arguments were being made, at some point you could almost see him disregarding a decent amount of it.

But, when it was all said and done, Judge Walmsley gave both, Greg McMichael and his adult son Travis, life - without parole- plus 20 years and another 10 years to run concurrently with the 20. The third convicted felon, William Bryan, got life with the possibility of parole after 30 years.

And to think, all convicted felons have federal trials to look forward to next month.

Impact of new Texas laws on Black and Latinx residents



State Rep. Nicole Collier, D- Fort Worth, the chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, speaks at a news conference at the Capitol on Sunday May 30, 2021, against Senate Bill 7, known as the Election Integrity Protection Act. (Jay Janner/Austin American-Statesman via AP)

by **Aswad Walker** | DEFENDER NETWORK

(DEFENDER NETWORK) - Though there are over 20 new state laws that went into effect on Jan. 1, 2022, the two new-ish laws that will probably have the biggest impact on Houston's Black and Brown communities are the "voter suppression law" (SB 1) and the "six-week abortion ban" (SB 8).

The state of Texas made national news for what pro-rights advocates label an "anti-abortion" law. Since Sept. 1, 2021, abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy have been banned in the state through a novel law that allows private citizens to sue anyone who "aids or abets" a person who gets an abortion. That means a parent our spouse who counsels someone who gets an abortion, as well as an Uber or Lift driver who delivers that person to the clinic for the prohibited procedure could be sued in Texas courts.

In a very recent hearing, a federal appeals court indicated it is likely to send Texas' restrictive abortion law to the state supreme court, a move that could add months or longer before the case is resolved. But until then, the law will continue to impact Texas citizens, in particular, Black and Latinx women.

"There is new research that shows state legalized abortion reduced deaths among Black women. Throughout the reproductive justice community, it is clear that this ban will increase a crisis that we already face in Black maternal health," said **Dr. Kim Baker**, co-founder of the Race Equity Leadership and Research Collective (RE-Collective for short), a Houston-area, Black women-led, local organization that seeks to develop young leaders able to take organizations from symbolic, anti-racist acts to substantive, liberating change for Blacks and other people of color.

The new research to which Baker refers, comes from a study produced by Georgia State University researchers that shows reviewed health records from the 1960s and 70s found that state-level legalization of abortion produced a 30 to 40% decline in non-white maternal mortality, with little impact on overall or white maternal mortality.

"Our findings suggest that legal abortion was crucial for non-white women but not as critical for white women, said the study's co-author **Lauren Hoehn-Velasco**, assistant professor in GSU's Department of Economics.

"The larger effects for racial and ethnic minorities could be due to economic disadvantages. These groups may have had less financial ability to travel to states or other countries allowing abortions," said study co-author Michael Pesko, associate professor in GSU's Department of Economics who specializes in evaluating health policies.

"Alternatively, a number of states allowed abortions in cases where the mother's health was at risk prior to Roe v. Wade, and non-white women may have had less regular access with the healthcare system to identify problematic pregnancies and receive consent for abortions from physicians," added Pesko.

The third member of the GSU research team that produced the report is Sherajum Monira Farin, a graduate student in the Department of Economics.

Still, the "voter suppression" law (SB 1) stands to have the biggest impact on state residents in 2022 and beyond.

Though Gov. Greg Abbott, who signed the bill into law last Sept. 7, touts it as a major deterrent to fraudulent votes, even though such votes are statistically almost non-existent in Texas and in the U.S., many, including the U.S. Justice Department, view it as blatant voter suppression, with some calling it "Jim Crow 2.0."

In Nov. 1, 2021, the U.S. Justice Department announced it is suing the state of Texas over SB 1, what they call a discriminatory law.

"The Civil Rights Division is committed to protecting the fundamental right to vote for all Americans," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Laws that impair eligible citizens' access to the ballot box have no place in our democracy. Texas Senate Bill 1's restrictions on voter assistance at the

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