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R

ERIE READER

February 2021//Vol. 11 No. 2//Erie

ANTONIO HOWARD
HOW THE LOCAL PAINTER IS
CREATING HIS OWN NARRATIVE

EMMA LAWRENCE
THE STORY OF ERIE'S FIRST
BLACK FEMALE BUSINESS OWNER

WENDELL W. KING
HOW THE RADIO PIONEER FOUND
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From the Editors

Will love find a way?

Some say love, it is a river. Others say love is a battlefield. But with all due respect to Bette Midler and Pat Benatar, perhaps 17th century French moralist François de La Rochefoucauld said it best when he said “True love is like ghosts, which everyone talks about and few have seen.” To paraphrase, we want to know what love is. Now if only someone, anyone, could show us — [sipping coffee] um yeah, that’d be great.

Come Valentine’s Day and the weeks that follow — the tail end of so-called “cuffing season” — it’s customary to reflect on this elusive, abstract, inscrutable force that permeates our quest for fulfillment and purpose. For the more jaded among us who refer to the Feast of St. Valentine as “Singles Awareness Day,” it’s an occasion to either dwell on slights and shortcomings or, more constructively, reconnect with who we are and what we have to offer.

For centuries now, both in Erie and throughout the country, the Black community has long been left to ponder “Where is the love?” Despite having given so much and having so much yet to give to humanity, people of color are *still* disrespected and marginalized on a systemic level. Millions of Black men, women, and children wake up everyday feeling unappreciated and alone, without an active partner in our “integrated” society, swept aside into a redlined corner to be neglected, expected to “keep to themselves.” This is its own form of solitary confinement.

If two are to actually become one — if a truly egalitarian, sustainable relationship is to be built — there must be not only the acknowledgment of injustice and inequality, but an openness and willingness to work to correct these imbalances. If, as American-German philosopher Paul Tillich said, “the first duty of love is to listen,” why do we so seldom *listen*?

Decisions concerning the former site of Erie Coke, the future site of the IRG plastics recycling plant, and proposed modifications to the Bayfront Parkway disproportionately affect lower-income, predominantly Black residents of Erie’s East Bayfront neighborhoods. If Erie is a home to all of us, shouldn’t *everyone* have a say about what we might be inviting in? Who looks out for it, walks with it, cleans up after it? Whose room does it sleep in? Would you bring home a stray direwolf without first consulting your spouse?

It is also often said of love that it is patient and it is kind. But how long can one reasonably wait to feel embraced and included? As much as we must treasure the stories of impactful African Americans of Erie’s past (like Wendell King and Emma Gertrude Lawrence), we must also champion those like Sonya Byes and Antonio Howard making a difference now. If love keeps no record of wrongs, will we expunge the criminal records of African Americans who’ve been arrested or incarcerated for nothing other than simple possession of cannabis? When marijuana is fully legalized, as most expect, will Black America be able to profit to the same degree that it’s been punished?

Like true love, social justice is often talked about but rarely seen. It’s time we give up the ghost for something tangible.

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New Community College Connects Erie, Philly

Education should be accessible for all



Allen Bonnell (left), who played a part in founding the Community College of Philadelphia (background), sent lengthy letters every week to his sister Jeanette (center) in their hometown of Erie. Bringing the Philly-Erie connection full circle will be native Philadelphian and would-be CCP retiree Dr. Judith Gay (right), who will serve as interim president of the new Erie County Community College while a search for a permanent candidate for the role is conducted.

wrote about him again, noting that the Community College of Philadelphia had created the Allen T. Bonnell Award for Community Service to honor people who open up educational opportunities for others.

Bonnell's desire to learn as much as possible started at a young age. He and his sister were born in the Panama Canal Zone, where their father, a construction worker, contracted an illness — likely malaria, Wellington said. "As a result of the time spent there, [the father] had difficulty holding a job later when he got back to Erie," she told me recently. "He had health issues and wasn't able to work full-time, so their mother went to work at Halle's [Department Store]. She made hats. Because she was working and their father was ill or not there, they were latchkey children."

In one letter, Bonnell recalled how he and his sister were busy "raising each other up" in childhood, after their mom went back to work. "This meant we came home to an empty house with no welcoming cups of cocoa and snacks and hugs. I can't remember ever bringing friends home with us. We had to create our own amusements," he wrote.

Their household had few books. "We had no shelf of the classics. The closest we came to any of the standard English poets and authors were two big volumes of verse and moral essays ... Horatio Alger was well-represented. ... Best of all were several volumes of the Bobbsey Twins. Their thrilling, often pastoral adventures you read to me in front of a roaring fire of the Isinglass gas stove."

Rummaging through old trunks in the attic, Bonnell found his great-grandfather's violin. "The instrument was strung with heavy gut strings and was accompanied by an old, balding, three-quarter size bow and a piece of rosin," he wrote. "A feeling of kinship with the violin provided the only motivation I needed. By

By: Liz Allen

Pepperoni balls vs. cheesesteaks. C. Wolf vs. Gritty. *The Brady Bunch's* Alice vs. Rocky. Philadelphia and Erie don't just have distinct cultural touchstones. We're also separated by geography — Perry Square is almost 400 miles from Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

But despite those differences, and in a happy outcome by decision-makers, the leader of the new Erie County Community College comes from the Community College of Philadelphia, founded by a one-time latchkey kid from Erie.

Judith Gay, Ph.D., will serve as interim president of the Erie County Community College while the search continues for a permanent president.

A native of Philadelphia, Gay, 70, had intended to retire from her position as vice president for strategic initiatives and chief of staff for the Community College of Philadelphia when she was approached about the Erie position. She told the Erie Times-News that she was attracted to the Erie job for a couple of reasons, including the fact that Allen Bonnell, who grew up in Erie, had founded the Community College of Philadelphia. "I feel like Philadelphia owes you a payback in Erie," Gay told the newspaper.

In 1962, Bonnell, then vice president at Drexel University, headed the research effort that led to a proposal to establish a community college in Philadelphia. He became the founding president of the college when it opened in 1965 and served in that role until he retired in 1983. He held the title of president emeritus until his death in 2013.

Gay, who joined the Community College of Philadelphia in 2000 after high-level positions at Montgomery County Community College and Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, remembers how Bonnell always made sure to attend the pinning ceremony for nurses graduating from CCP. "He came in a wheelchair," she recalled in a phone interview. "The nursing program meant a lot to him."

Bonnell's role in founding the Community College of Philadelphia and in advocating to break down barriers to higher education is celebrated in the City of Brotherly Love, but his story is not so well-known in Erie.

I learned about Bonnell's Erie roots and his commitment to making education accessible to all in 2008, when I met Patty Wellington. A former teacher, GE draftsman, toy company manager, and garden-center worker, the 77-year-old Wellington, of Millcreek, is also the keep-

er of her family's genealogy. Her husband Bob's father and Bonnell's father were first cousins.

Wellington explained that Bonnell, who was 96 at that time, wrote lengthy letters every week, either from Philadelphia or from the family's summer home in Cape Cod, to his sister Jeanette, 97, who resided in an assisted living facility in Erie.

Wellington regularly visited cousin Jeanette, a retired school librarian who had suffered a stroke, to help her with everyday tasks and to read aloud Bonnell's letters.

Wellington saved all the letters, written between 2006 and 2010, when Jeanette died, and indexed them because of the rich family and Erie history they contained. Because of her meticulous record-keeping, she can easily find Bonnell's reminiscences about the East 19th Street neighborhood known as Hogan's Alley where the Bonnell family lived, next to the railroad tracks. She can track down Bonnell's memories of his grammar school, Garfield Elementary; his high school, Academy; and his scholarship years at Oberlin College in Ohio.

When I interviewed Bonnell by phone in 2008 for my newspaper column, his sharp mind and quick recall impressed me. After he died in 2013, at age 101, I

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trial and error, I taught myself the rudiments of violin playing and could saw out simple tunes.”

Bonnell also used an original string from the violin to repair a tennis racquet that he also found in the attic.

With that grit and ingenuity, you might expect that Bonnell would credit himself for his achievements: a bachelor's degree in economics from Oberlin College; a master's degree from the University of Bonn; a doctorate from the University of Illinois; professorships at St. Louis University and the University of North Carolina; a job at the U.S. State Department rebuilding the European economies after World War II; and top positions at Drexel University before he founded the Community College of Philadelphia.

Yet he always chose to credit other people and places for the direction his life took.

“What a privilege it was, Hogan's Alley notwithstanding, to grow up in a city that was located on beautiful Lake Erie,” he wrote in one letter. At Academy High School, he understood that he and his sister would be mingling with students from “a wide variety of communities,” he wrote. “Did we, you and I, instinctively feel that we had to prove that we were just as good as they were despite our habitat on the wrong side of the tracks?”

Erie's public school system shaped him, he said. “I sensed from the moment I crossed the threshold of Academy that there was something there that I needed and wanted — a loaded smorgasbord of new challenges and opportunities far more interesting and exciting than those of Garfield Grammar and Hogan's Alley. I ate my way down the full length of that smorgasbord and never experienced a jaded appetite or intellectual indigestion,” he wrote.

Public service was part of his character. After he met his future wife, Dorothy, at the University of Illinois, he became a Quaker, like her. During World War II, they served with a Quaker organization in France to help Jewish refugees, Wellington said. Bonnell's wife, a children's book author, later wrote a young adult book, *Passport to Freedom*, based on a true story about an American student trapped in France when the Nazis marched on Paris.

Public service for students and leadership opportunities for community college staff are two of the goals Gay has pursued in her roles at community colleges.

In 2016, the Community College of

Philadelphia started its Institute for Community Engagement and Civic Leadership to promote “volunteerism, service-learning, scholarship and research, and community partnerships,” according to the college's website, ccp.edu. A free course on “know your government” proved so popular this semester that enrollment had to be capped at 200, she said. “Because of things that have happened, there's a whole conversation about democracy and how it works,” she said.

She also advocates for leadership development for community college employees. “Our underlying philosophy was leadership at every level. Sometimes you are asked to lead, sometimes you are asked to follow. You can teach basic leadership skills and the whole institution is going to benefit.”

There are many attributes of the community college experience that appeal to Gay. She earned her bachelor's degree at Findlay College and her master's and Ph.D. at Bowling Green State University, but she has been interested in the Community College of Philadelphia since she was 14.

“My best friend and I took the subway from our girls' high school to see what it would look like,” she said. “Somewhere along the line, I started keeping a file about the Community College of Philadelphia. The whole idea of open access, of starting people where they are and moving them to the next level, really impressed me — the idea that there would be a college open to everyone, and who would want you to start wherever you need to start and help you get to another level,” she said.

In the Erie Times-News story about Gay being named interim president, she said the diverse makeup of the Erie County Community College Board impressed her.

The chance to be immersed in a more diverse world also drew her to Montgomery County Community College from Chestnut Hill College.

“I made a very conscious decision to take the job at Montgomery County Community College,” she said. “When I told some of my friends that Montgomery had offered me the position and I turned down other opportunities, they said, ‘You are supposed to be moving up,’” she recalled. “I don't think of it that way. I loved the fact that it was different than what I did before,” she said. “For a person who believes in diverse experiences, I thought I would learn a lot in that kind of environment.”

A community college doesn't just improve the lives of its students, she said. Faculty learn from the “very interesting experiences” and stories that students share about themselves.

Families gain, too. CCP offered an English as a second language program and adult basic education, but the number of those students who went on to other college programs was “really low,” she said. “Why are they doing that program if they are not even going to come into the college?” she was asked.

But someone who took an ESL or basic education class had good reasons, she said. “They wanted to be able to talk to their kids' doctors, communicate with their teachers,” These adults might not further their college education “but their children probably would.”

A community college has other positive social impacts. Incomes go up. Graduates have more knowledge about health issues. Their communication skills improve.

The CCP also reaches out to younger students, offering a free Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math camp for middle school kids and an automotive program for middle school girls.

“You have to think about the impact on society not just for today, but what is the future you are building for the community?” she said. “It's a holistic community way of thinking about things,” said Gay. Observing Pennsylvania's rules about travel and social distancing due to the pandemic, she is working in Philadelphia. “I'm following the science. I am hoping that by March I will be able to come and spend some time (in Erie).”

During our phone interview in 2008, Bonnell credited his sister with fostering his lifelong connection to the Erie community. “(Jeanette) never let me leave Erie. She provided what I would call a flexible umbilical cord. No matter where I was, she would clip articles and comic strips out of the Erie papers and periodically would send me a great big bundle of those clippings,” he told me.

The scrappy kid from the 400 block of East 19th Street in Erie was still thinking about the community he loved late in life, said Wellington. “It was Allen's dying wish that Erie would have a community college, too, because he knew what a need there was when he was growing up here, growing up poor.”

Liz Allen has been writing about Erie's long push for a community college for years. You can reach her at lizallenerie@gmail.com.

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Chatting With Sonya & Friends

Streaming talk show aims to inspire, encourage, educate, and motivate



Sonya Byes (pictured) and friends Juanita Stokes, Lori Pickens, Vanessa Belen, Alicia Aldridge, and Jada Tamplin-Best — a diverse group of women of various talents and professional backgrounds — will engage in real, relevant, and unscripted conversation on *Sonya & Friends*, a streaming talk show that will air on YouTube and CAM Erie.

there are five other women that will be mainstays in the group, which includes: Juanita Stokes, Lori Pickens, Vanessa Belen, Alicia Aldridge and Jada Tamplin-Best. “It’s a diverse group of women from various backgrounds. We are authors, community leaders, women’s advocates, insurance professionals. We are influencers and we’re entrepreneurs.”

The show will be featured online with hopes of potentially moving to television. “We’re going to use Community Access Media (CAM Erie). In each program we will patronize local businesses and nonprofits but we will be filming there.” The show will be 30 minutes long, a YouTube channel will be created, and they will be able to share the content via CAM Erie. “We are hoping to produce eight to 10 shows per season.” The shows will also feature a variety of guests — both men and women.

“We have a segment called the Mantastic Monday. Essentially, it will be someone killing the game in his area of expertise. Be it his career, his family, or his community engagement. Someone that we feel is making a great contribution towards the betterment of our community.”

For the first run, though, it will just be the core group. “The very first show will just be us. We will be introducing ourselves, and who we are talking about. What’s to come, and what the audience can look forward to.”

I have had the pleasure of knowing Sonya for several years, having the opportunity to get to know her better when we both ran for local office. Sonya’s energy and spirit mirrors her mission and objectives of the production. She herself lives with purpose and passion and has often sought opportunities to help other women thrive. I also know that this has been a work in progress for her as well — something nearly 10 years in the making.

“You know, life happens. I lost my mom during the course of planning the show, and I’m a single mom, working a full-time job. I would stop and start and stop and start, but it just never went away. So now my 23-year-old son is in college. I finally healed from the loss of my mom and I’m ready.”

Chatting with Sonya & Friends will launch in mid-February. More information can be found on Facebook at: @chattingwithsonya.

Rebecca Styn is the proprietor of Room 33 Speakeasy. She is also VP of Ventures at Erie Innovation District and recently completed her Ph.D. in Leadership and Organizational Learning from Gannon University. Follow Room 33 on Facebook @room33speakeasy, and follow Rebecca on Twitter at @rstyn.

By: Rebecca Styn

These are the four pillars that Erie’s soon-to-be newest streaming talk show, *Chatting with Sonya & Friends*, will abide by — to inspire, encourage, educate, and motivate. The show will feature a diverse group of professional women of color having real — and relevant — conversations. I recently had the opportunity to talk with Sonya Byes, the founder and creator of the program and started by asking her what inspired this direction.

“I’ve always wanted to create a place and a space for individuals to get together to have meaningful conversations. A place we could engage, empower, and enlighten — all by the way of conversation.”

Her goal is to provide an opportunity for viewers to obtain and maintain strength, courage and confidence — to triumph over fear with purpose and passion to live their best life.

And she doesn’t want it scripted. “I wanted a talk show. A visible one. A place to have real dialogue — to help change a person’s way of being, way of thinking. And create a place in a space for us. And when I say us, I mean women of color.”

With the rise in popularity of podcasts I asked why she chose video vs. audio. “For me personally, I’m a visual person. I not only like to hear how people are feeling, I like to see facial expressions. And I like real emotion where you can actually see somebody being enlightened or recognize a glimpse of hope in their eyes. One can’t get that from a podcast.”

Sonya’s also not alone in this venture. Currently,

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**By: Lisa Austin, Judy Lynch,
Roland Slade, Adam Trott**

In 1854, railroads pushed through Erie along 16th Street. Tracks extended more than a dozen blocks along the waterfront. Trains brought coal and transported iron ore and lumber from lakeshore steamers. Laborers used wooden staircases from homes atop the bluff to jobs on the Bayfront.

Some neighborhoods divided by the rail were connected by overpasses, underpasses, and at-grade crossings. In 1918, after railroad accidents on East Ave, the public insisted on a bridge. In 1938, the McBride Viaduct was dedicated. In 1977 the Viaduct was rebuilt, then neglected until it was demolished in 2019.

1955 — Planning for I-179

By 2005, the Bayfront Connector was completed and featured a \$31 million, 1,100-foot-long bridge over Wintergreen Gorge. The Connector is the final segment of the Erie “Beltway” — a highway loop around, and through, the city. While supporting suburban and visitor traffic, the Connector fur-

Decision-makers ignored study's pedestrian data and failed to identify cost reduction due to non-vehicular use. Plans to demolish the Viaduct (and move pedestrians to Rt. 290 Bayfront Connector) announced. Rather than complete NEPA Environmental Assessment to examine how demolition would impact im-

In January 2018, Mayor Schember opposed a Public Hearing and pledged to demolish the bridge CIVITAS and ErieCPR hosted a Viaduct Town Hall at the Jefferson Educational Society.

The 2019 demolition cost \$1.5 million. Flawed study by L.R. Kimball and the engineering plan by Transystems also cost \$1.5 million. Thus, total demolition cost equaled the cost of completely rehabbing the bridge for continued non-vehicular use. Without the Viaduct, residents must walk along the Rt. 290 Bayfront Connector.



2 years ago / Waterfront highway plan

PennDOT shared a vision of an expanded Bayfront roadway that would increase traffic on the waterfront and on Rt. 290 Bayfront Connector. Challenges were published in the Erie Times-News.

1 year ago / PennDOT sidesteps NEPA (again)

In March 2020 PennDOT applied to the FHWA to skip environmental assessment. PennDOT claimed: environment would be unharmed and no significant opposition existed. PennDOT again granted a categorical exclusion. Community objected: wrote letters, testified at City Council, protested, marched in support of an en-

vironmental assessment for PennDOT's \$70-\$100 million project.

4 months ago / All five City Council men ignore public

After Erie City Council members Liz Allen and Kathleen Schaaf successfully pressed for a PennDOT study session and public hearing on the Bayfront plan; Erie

City Council members Dave Brennan, Ed Brzezinski, Michael Keys, Mel Witherspoon and Jim Winarski voted to allow PennDOT to proceed.

2 months ago / Federal Lawsuit filed

On behalf of Erie NAACP and PennFuture, Earth Justice filed a federal lawsuit against PennDOT and FHWA

for skipping environmental assessment.

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How Wendell King Found His Frequency in Erie

African American radio engineer met and obliterated the 'color line'



Wendell King, a talented electrical engineer and machinist, first took an interest in radio as a young boy in North Troy, N.Y. He eschewed a degree from Union College to work in General Electric's electrical engineering department in Schenectady, N.Y., where he faced workplace discrimination. After leaving G.E., he found his way into radio work in Northeast Ohio, which would eventually lead him to Erie, Pa. when an Ashtabula station moved.

UNION COLLEGE

By: Jonathan Burdick

It was June of 1917 and the United States was at war. The first American infantry troops had arrived in Europe that month and stateside manufacturers were working around the clock to keep up with wartime demand. In Schenectady, N.Y., the sprawling General Electric plant, which employed 20,000 workers, hired a few dozen students from nearby Union College for the summer. This included Wendell Wilford King, a brilliant 20-year-old North Troy local who had just finished his freshman year studying electrical engineering. Instead of having him work in the yard like most college hires, he was put on a drill press.

The machinists were enraged and demanded that he be fired. Their grievance? King was Black. Immediately and with the support of the International Association of Machinists — which like many labor unions of the time excluded Black workers — they authorized a

strike. Thousands walked off the job.

"Do not lose sight of the fact we are fighting, not on the grounds of race prejudice, but on the grounds of moral convictions," the organizer of the strike, a 24-year-old machinist named Joseph Lefkowitz proclaimed. He argued that even the United States military was segregated. "What the government sees fit in practicing, we feel justified in demanding."

Nearby Utica's newspaper was scathing in their response and chastised the white strikers for their "denial of economic opportunity" and their "flagrant violation of the democratic spirit of which America has been too fond of believing itself the especial champion and guardian."

General Electric leadership was initially defiant, even as metal polishers, forgers, and electrical workers discussed sympathy strikes. General manager George Emmons assured the white workers that they were not be-

ing replaced by Black workers, a common union-busting technique that could have been avoided if Black workers weren't excluded from their unions. Meanwhile, the federal government pressured the company to settle the dispute quickly, as it was slowing the installation of electrical work on three battlecruisers.

As the days passed, it didn't appear that either side was willing to budge. The local Knickerbocker Press reported after that the strike was "proving expensive to the strikers" and that the "impression left by the strike has not been a pleasant one."

After eight days, an agreement was finally reached. The striking workers would return and while King wouldn't be fired as was initially demanded, he would be moved off the drill press.

"Waiving their demand that Wendell King, the negro college student be discharged, 5,000 machinists ... who went on strike June 16, yesterday afternoon agreed to return to work this morning after they had been assured that no other negroes would be placed at work in the G.E. plant," the Albany Argus reported.

"Both sides profess to be satisfied with the settlement terms," reported the Erie Daily Times.

Whether King was actually satisfied remains unclear. The newspapers either never asked him his thoughts or he chose to keep them private. He did not appear to ever speak publicly about the strike, although *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the NAACP which was founded and edited by W.E.B. Du Bois noted in its coverage that the "affair at Schenectady ... has been amicably concluded."

One North Carolina newspaper used the situation to lampoon the idea of a tolerant North, observing that all of these workers went on strike "because one lone, unoffending Negro had been

given employment in the shops." They added that if it hadn't been wartime, perhaps there would have been "a riot instead of a simple strike." This wasn't hyperbole. Less than a week later in St. Louis, a similar situation led to white workers rioting throughout Black neighborhoods, resulting in a massacre of as many as 250 Black residents, including women and children.

The following year, King took leave from Union College and enlisted in the U.S. Army. Radio was a new technology and, since he had been tinkering with radios since he was a child, he desired to put his expertise to use. At age 12, he had started an amateur radio station out of his North Troy home, and by high school, he had co-founded a local amateur radio club. He once was in the newspaper for receiving a radio message from Iowa, delivering the transcription to the mayor's office himself: "Democracy requires that people who govern themselves should be educated so that they can protect themselves."

The war ended before King was deployed and in 1919, he was discharged at the rank of sergeant. He returned to college and continued working on his degree, studying under the renowned German-born scientist Charles Steinmetz, the "Electric Wizard of Schenectady" who counted Albert Einstein, Nikola Tesla, and Thomas Edison among his personal friends.

King was only the second Black student to have enrolled at Union College and the attention the strike received almost certainly brought more attention to that fact. He was active on campus. He joined Omega Psi Phi. For the Cosmopolitan Club, he organized an evening of words and music to celebrate the achievements of Black Americans. He helped reorganize the defunct College Radio Club and was selected as its chief operator. In October 1920, he and a friend from the club successfully transmitted a concert that was heard over 100 miles away, reported as being the "first wireless musical concert of an American college operation." This was days before Pittsburgh's KDKA signed on for the first time as the nation's first commercial broadcast. That same year, he also contributed a story to the *Electrical Experimenter* magazine, to which Tesla was a frequent contributor.



The *Journal of Negro Life*, the academic journal of the National Urban League, described in 1930 how King “met and obliterated the ‘color line.’” King’s likability, reliability, and diligence garnered him the respect of his predominantly white industry peers as a Black man (as shown in this undated group photo of the Radio Club at Union College). However, it should be noted that this was not the norm in the early- to mid-20th century, in Erie or elsewhere.

UNION COLLEGE

Being so busy, and perhaps so consumed by his interest in radio, wasn’t without consequences.

“He was often cited for skipping classes and received a number of incomplete grades, suggesting that it was not a question of not being smart enough, but of not trying,” Phillip Wajda wrote in his 2017 story on King for Union College’s alumni magazine. “The 1921 year-book entry on King states: ‘We hardly know what to say about King. Just as soon as classes are over, he makes for the E.E. Lab and hides himself away in the wireless room, and you couldn’t get

him out for love or money.’”

He didn’t finish his degree and instead began working in the research laboratory at the Schenectady plant. Not long after, he moved to Cleveland to work for an electric manufacturing company and then to nearby Ashtabula to work for a radio station. In December 1927, the station — now with the call letters WEDH — was moved to Erie under his direct supervision, located on the top floor of the 10-story Commerce Building on 12th and State streets.

A little more than a year after his arrival in Erie, the *Erie Daily Times* began

reporting on his involvement in local radio clubs. He would hold classes and give lectures on radio at the Downtown YMCA for anyone interested in learning and it was not long before he was known around the city for his expertise, as well as his likability, reliability, and work ethic. A story in the *Erie Dispatch-Herald* described his “quiet and cheerful smile” and that his colleagues admired his “tireless energy, skill, and loyalty.” In April 1933, a humorous “towne gossip” column in the *Erie Daily Times* quipped, “Wendell King, Erie radio engineer, works more hours than Edison did and apparently likes it.”

That September, he administered the move and installation of radio station WLBW from the soon-to-be-demolished Hotel Reed on North Park Row to its new headquarters located inside

the Hotel Lawrence on 10th and Peach streets. He began the transfer when the station went off the air at 1 a.m. and had the gear (including a massive board with *hundreds* of individual wires) moved and set up “without a flaw” by the time the station signed back on at 9 a.m.

“The transfer was effected by Wendell King, chief engineer of WLBW,” reported the *Erie Daily Times*. “[It] was completed without interruption of a single program of the local station.”

The following month, the newspaper addressed King as “a radio expert of no mean skill” and highlighted his latest innovation for WLBW: a portable, wireless short-wave set that broadcasters could use out on the street and that he’d “be able to carry it under his arm and carry on a conversation with someone a mile away [from the station].”

King completed his device in December and in early January WLBW began airing a “Man-in-the Street” show, where an announcer stood on a downtown street corner and interviewed passersby on topics of the day. The first broadcast took place outside the liquor store on the corner of South Park Row.

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FEATURE

G. E. STRIKE SETTLED

Negro Keeps His Job and Machinists Go Back to Work.

Schenectady, N. Y., June 27.—The 5,000 machinists and helpers of the General Electric company who struck on June 16th to have a negro college student removed from work among them, adjusted their differences with the company and resumed work. Both sides profess to be satisfied with the settlement terms.

The negro student, Wendell King, will remain in the employ of the company in his present position during the college vacation months. The settlement was made by the company and machinists acting directly after three state mediators from Albany had failed in all their efforts to bring the company and men together.

ERIE DAILY TIMES

"Customers will be asked to say what they think about prohibition [ending] and their words will be short-waved back to the transmitter by a set which Wendell King, WLBW, has invented," the paper reported.

Alongside being chief engineer for Erie radio stations, he was also employed by the Bliley Electric Company (now Bliley Technologies) as a research engineer for over three decades. The owner, Frank Dawson Bliley, had started the Erie Amateur Radio Club in an abandoned farmhouse the year before King moved to Erie. King was also a member of the Institute of Radio Engineers and the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and he continued with his speaking engagements around the city, covering topics such as radio's relation to astronomy for the Amateur Astronomers' Club and crystal radio circuits for a Radio Association of Erie forum at Erie City Hall.

During this time, he also met and married his wife Iva Gwendolyn Allen and they moved into a home on Bird Drive. It should be noted that these successes and the positive attention he received from the press were not the norm. Erie was a segregated city still plagued by unchecked racism — and while decreasing in size, the local Ku Klux Klan chapter was still active.

"It is difficult to know what Wendell really felt," Larry Rulison wrote in the Albany Times Union in 2017. "He and his wife experienced intense racism in their early years as a couple in Erie after eloping in 1930."

The *Journal of Negro Life*, the academic journal of the National Urban League, described in 1930 how King "met and obliterated the 'color line.'"

"[O]ne does not usually see feature

stories in the daily press about Negroes, unless a major crime has been committed ... or a 'scientist' is moved to announce that his findings have proven that the mental equipment of Negroes is inferior to that of other races," the article stated. They cited King's numerous positive appearances written by journalist Barbara Hawley in Erie's newspapers, which even included photos "so there could be no doubt about his racial origin."

Over the following decades, the reporting on his involvement in local amateur radio — by then referred to as "ham radio" — in the papers continued. He involved himself deeply in the Erie community, joining the boards of the Booker T. Washington Center and Erie Improvement Club. A few years after Harry T. Burleigh's death, he joined the board of a scholarship organized by the local NAACP branch to honor Burleigh. He spoke at radio nights and it became a point of pride that he had the oldest radio operating license in the city. With his radio club, they purchased an old 1941 Dodge truck and mounted it with two gas generators, attaching a "communications trailer" so that it could be used at a moment's notice during an emergency.

The Times reported in 1963 that King, who by then had retired, was appointed by the Erie County Civil Defense Council as the Chief of Amateur Radio Services. "King's professional background is expected to be of tremendous help in improving the communications capability of the newly expanded Wagner Road Civil Defense Center." Although sick at times during these years, he continued to teach and tinker with radio and share a love of gardening with his wife.

On April 2, 1967, after being hospitalized at the Veteran's Hospital, King died at the age of 67. Iva continued to be involved in the community until her death in 1976. They are buried in Erie Cemetery.

While much of Wendell Wilford King's story remains to be uncovered, his legacy lives on both in the form of street art, as one of the figures selected for Erie Arts & Culture's utility box project in 2020, as well as with the still-active Radio Association of Erie, who still meet and put out a newsletter every month.

Jonathan Burdick runs the historical blog Rust & Dirt. He can be reached at jburdick@eriereader.com

The Quiet Force of Emma Lawrence

The story of Erie's first Black female business owner



By: Erin Phillips

In the preface to Sarah Thompson's *Journey from Jerusalem* — one of the few books to be written about Black history in Erie — she begins: “The history of the City of Erie begins in 1795. The history of African Americans in Erie begins at the same time, but, in the unfortunate tradition of US history, standard accounts of the past two hundred years present a one-sided picture which does not adequately represent their presence or contributions.”

As I began researching the life of Emma Gertrude Lawrence — Erie's first Black female business owner, founder and operator of Lawrence Dyeing and Cleaning for 50 years, and matriarch of a legendary Erie family — I felt these words before I read them. Soon after beginning the pursuit of Emma's ancestry, I was struck by the white privilege that is genealogical information in America. In order to research the life of this woman, a woman of color, born pre-Civil War to a Black mother and a Native American father, I would have to consult other resources.

Local historian and long-time friend of the Lawrence family, Johnny Johnson, who became my main source in this research, commented on this lack of perspective as well. In a presentation he gave in 2019, he stated: “Erie was incorporated as a city in 1851, yet no comprehensive study was done on Erie African American History until 1994. Only four books have been written about African American history in Erie.

That's a 145 year void in documenting the presence of African Americans in Erie.” However, in 2020, Johnson himself, along with historians Melinda Meyer and Chris Magoc, completed another document to add to the small pile of literature on Erie's Black history by publishing the project *A Shared Heritage: A Timeline of the African American Experience in Erie County*. This project is one of the most comprehensive studies ever done on Black history in Erie and it was there that I was initially inspired by the story of Emma Gertrude Lawrence.

Emma was born in 1858 in Ohio. There is little recorded of Emma's early history, but it appears that her father was a Native American named Stephen Toles (also seen spelled Toiles, Tolles, or Tolls) and her mother was of African descent, but her name and information beyond that has disappeared from record. Emma was orphaned at an early age and wound up in a foster home in Buffalo, N.Y. She ended up fleeing what must have been a dire situation and found refuge with some relations in Erie, who eventually adopted her.

It was in Erie that she met her husband, John A. Lawrence. John was employed as a waiter at the Reed House Hotel, which was a prominent hotel in Erie, situated at the corner of North Park Row and French Street. According to census information from 1880, prior to his marriage to Emma, John was living at a boarding house on Seventh Street, owned and operated by Laura Sterrett. This is a very interesting Erie

This colorful mural at Erie's Martin Luther King Jr. Center pays tribute to Emma Gertrude Lawrence, Erie's first Black female business owner, who operated Lawrence Dyeing and Cleaning on the northwest corner of West Third and Chestnut — an area that became known as New Jerusalem.

connection: Laura Sterrett was married to Joseph R. Sterrett, whose parents were among the earliest non-indigenous settlers of Erie. Aside from Laura's daughters and parents, other residents totaled 16 and among them were various boarders, servants, and nurses. John was the only person of color living in the house.

In 1881, John and Emma were married. They had their first child, Earl Lawrence, in 1881 and by then the family had moved to the area of the city that would become their kingdom: the northwest corner of West Third and Chestnut. John continued to work as a waiter while they lived there. They had two more children, a daughter Effie and a son, Charles. Shortly after Charles' birth in 1884, John Lawrence died suddenly and young, at just 28 years old, leaving 25-year-old Emma, a young mother with three small children, alone. A few years after John died, Emma came to care for a fourth child, Earnest (he went by Ray, his middle name). Earnest Ray was born in 1889 in Buffalo, N.Y., and Johnson suspects, although it is unverified, that Emma may have adopted him from a family member, as she had relatives in Buffalo.

Emma called upon the strength that got her through her difficult youth and began taking in laundry to make money to support her family without her husband. Their home at Third and Chestnut was converted into a laundry business and Emma gained respect as her business expanded. She found investors to back her enterprise and eventually it grew into a dry cleaning and dyeing plant by the turn of the century. At this point, the family had a separate residence across the street from the plant. By the time her children were adults, the business had at least five other employees, making up a diverse workforce: Black and white, male and female. Emma ran the business and oversaw its operations up until a few years before her death from heart failure in 1934 at the age of 76. Her son,

Charles, continued the family business, keeping it running until the mid-1960s.

It can be difficult to get a sense of the personality of someone who has been gone for nearly 100 years, but through a few recorded stories, I get the sense that Emma had a love for the arts. In the book *Erie History - The Women's Story*, the authors note: “She had a special talent for working with color, and to her fell the tasks of the dye process. After work when she was resting from the day, she would sometimes look at the sky and remark, ‘I dyed a dress that color today.’” Johnson recalls that she was also very proficient at needlework.

Two of her children went on to become artists, which suggests that they were supported and encouraged by Emma to pursue their talents. Her son, Earl, was an adept and multi-talented musician who owned his own studio on State Street and taught music in multiple Erie County schools. Her son, Ray, was a natural piano player and performer before his untimely death at age 36. Johnson describes Emma as being “a proponent of hard work and education.” Emma's granddaughter, Ada (who was an Erie legend herself, being the first Black teacher in the Erie School District), recalled “delightful visits to the plant at Third and Chestnut. The barrels of salt made an interesting play area, though Emma always set limits. She had a quiet force that demanded respect.” These few glimpses of the personality of Emma Lawrence gives the impression of a gentle but firm, creative, quietly confident woman who made her family's education a priority and did so by working hard and earning the respect of anyone who met her.

The places a person lived in and worked can tell you a lot about them. Their habits, their style, and their choices combine to give a glimpse of their daily life. Unfortunately, just about all of the built history of the Lawrence family is gone. Their storefront and plant at Third and Chestnut are gone. Their house across the street is gone. The Laura Sterrett boarding house is gone. The Reed House Hotel is gone. The long-time home of Earl Lawrence, which then became Ada Lawrence's home on Front Street, is gone. This architectural loss stands as a sad reminder: we wouldn't have to work so hard to



[left] An elderly Emma Gertrude Lawrence sits upon her wicker throne, likely on the porch of their home in the 400 block of West Third Street. [top right] Charles Lawrence (left), Emma's son, who helped run the business. This photo of the company car was likely taken in the 1920s and gives a glimpse of the diverse workforce. (Photo contributed from the Lawrence family archives by Johnny Johnson). [bottom right] The Lawrence Cleaning and Dyeing business situated on the north west corner of West Third and Chestnut, with horse and company buggy on brick paved streets. This photo was likely taken in the early 1900s. (Contributed from the Lawrence family archives by Johnny Johnson).

New Jerusalem days, one can't help but notice an increased effort to honor and represent that heritage in the neighborhood that is now known as the West Bayfront. Anna Frantz, director of Our West Bayfront, comments that while a lot of the built history of New Jerusalem is gone, its legacy still lives on in the neighborhood that evolved from it: "A community determines for itself what type of place it wants to be. The original settlers of New Jerusalem had the goal of creating an integrated neighborhood that would be welcoming to all, and

their success in that endeavor lives on to this day." Frantz mentions efforts to incorporate the community's heritage into the current neighborhood through the use of public art, historic signage, and historic walking tours, some led by Johnny Johnson himself.

While built and recorded history in Erie omits much from the perspective of African Americans, there are those now striving to research and record it, and help make these early Black experiences part of our public knowledge and celebrate Erie's own Black heroes. Emma Lawrence may have just been doing what she needed to in order to survive, but through her courage, intelligence, and hard work she was able to provide a better life for her children and grandchildren, and inspire all those who learn her story.

A Shared Heritage: A Timeline of the African American Experience in Erie County can be found at the website: sharedheritage.org

Erin Phillips runs the Instagram @olderieonfoot, an in-depth look at local architecture "by foot, stroller, papoose, bike, and occasionally minivan."

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED FROM THE LAWRENCE FAMILY ARCHIVES BY JOHNNY JOHNSON

remember and record the heritage of our town if we were able to walk past it every day and see the history with our own eyes.

Historically, the neighborhood where the Lawrence family lived for generations was referred to as New Jerusalem. It was established pre-Civil War by abolitionist William Himrod. He created the neighborhood by giving free Black people and destitute whites affordable

tracts of land with the agreement that they would build a home there. He also established a church and a school for the residents' use. This revolutionary idea created a foundation on which a future was built for so many people in Erie.

My family and I live in the Lawrence family's neighborhood now, and while the area has changed both geographically and demographically since the

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Antonio Howard: Creating His Own Narrative

The inspiring local painter shines prolifically after imprisonment



Antonio Howard, once labeled a “juvenile lifer” for his involvement in the shooting of cab driver Richard Stevens, discovered painting early on while serving a 26-year sentence at Huntingdon State Correctional Institution. Since his release in 2018, he has been actively involved in the Erie art community, as secretary of Erie Arts & Culture’s CHROMA Guild and a collaborator in several public art projects.

turn out to be a mask — it was supposed to be a shield but everyone referred to it as a mask. I presented it, the individual suggested I should bring it down to the auditorium because there was an art show coming up. The last Friday of every month or so, they had an art exhibit in the auditorium where staff members could actually come down to the auditorium and purchase a prisoner’s work. Prisoners would be compensated, DOC will take 10 percent, so that’s how I was invited down there. I went down there and set it up and the guy said he would put a price on it. I put some menial, extremely low price I thought it was worth. I didn’t know what art was, I didn’t know what would happen. But I came back after lunch, and somebody told me my painting got sold.

I don’t remember the number, so I’m making this number up right now, but I got 20 bucks, right? And it turned out that it sold for maybe a hundred or a couple hundred bucks. So I’m like “wait a minute, somebody changed the price that I had put on the painting and it sold. I was sold after that. That was the first time I actually made money, in my life on my own. I was a teenager. And I’m like, “wow.” And I’ve been doing painting ever since.

NW: You mentioned your books, let’s dive in there now. Are you specifically talking about the first book, *When A Child Is Worth More Than the Worst Mistake He Ever Made*? Can you tell me a little bit about your writing process, what inspired you to make this happen?

AH: I think my writing was impelled by not having a voice. I have a lot of unresolved issues about my story. I spent most of my life hearing people tell my story from their perspective. It was strange to me because usually, that perspective is skewed. “I’m the problem,” “disciplinary,” “bad seed.” It was always from a really biased perspective, somebody else’s perspective. So I started keeping my own journal. Why don’t I tell my own story? I started journaling, wak-

By: Nick Warren

Antonio Howard is a busy guy. A rapidly rising painter of note, he’s also a spoken word artist and has written and published three books. In 2020, the now 44-year-old Erieite completed two public art projects, one that beautified the exterior of the Whole Foods Co-op, and one mural that adorns the wall next to Luther Manus’ 12th Street Sunoco station. He was recently selected to provide the art for two City of Erie bandwagons, which are regularly deployed at more than 40 events each year. After being awarded Erie Arts & Culture’s Emerging Artist Fellowship in 2019, he is now an artist in residence with the organization, helping to re-envision bikeways and public spaces around the city. He’s a member of this year’s Jefferson Leadership Academy, and his artwork is currently being exhibited at Gannon’s Waldron Campus Center, including a piece that was part of the Erie Art Museum’s 2019 Spring Show.

He is doing all of this after being labeled a “juvenile lifer.”

At the age of 15, he became one of Erie County’s nine youths who faced a mandatory life sentence for murder, involved in a shooting that resulted in the death of cab driver Richard Stevens. His mandatory life sentence — as well as that

of many others like him — was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 2012 case *Miller v. Alabama*. He served 26 years at Huntingdon State Correctional Institution before being released in 2018.

Howard is a brilliant and radiant presence. He is quick to introduce himself as “Peggy’s son” when he’s in the positive spotlight, in honor of his mother. Meeting him, you get the sense of someone who truly understands himself, and the fact that his past need not entirely define his future.

I had the privilege of joining Howard on a Zoom presentation on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day for Erie Arts & Culture on public art. There, he shared the fulfilling experiences he had crafting the Manus mural, and I knew I had to talk to him more.

Nick Warren: Can you just tell me what kind of got you started creating and making art?

Antonio Howard: I don’t know what exactly got me started. I think circumstances that did not facilitate creativity got me started consciously painting while I was in prison. So I say consciously because if you ask my grandmother, I have been drawing my whole life, but I don’t recall any of that. So my official art career or trajectory began while I was in

prison and I’ve been painting for approximately 20-some years now. So, to give you a bit more information about that process — all this is already in my book and I really regret telling all of these stories again, because I wrote the book to purge all the emotion that came with it.

So I started painting — while I was in the RHU (the Restricted Housing Unit, commonly called “the hole”) — a bunch of sketches of shields. When I was growing up, faces were very interesting to me. They were also defensive mechanisms. So I started designing these African shields. I ended up sketching facial features onto those shields. Those designs took on their own meaning to me — they were just sketches at the time. I got out of the RHU, ran into some people who were kind of into the arts, saw my designs, and were like “I would like to pay you if you paint one of those for me.” I had never painted before. So long story short, somebody gave me some paints — actually oil paints at the time — and a canvas. Windsor Newton water-mixable oils. I stayed up for days. Completely immersed in the toxic smell of oil paints, because the scent was hermetically sealed almost. So I was upside-down, on my side, just trying to figure out how to maneuver the paint, because it’s oil, it never dried. So I painted what would



Antonio Howard's "Prison Is Where Relationships Go to Die" was featured in the Erie Art Museum's 2019 Spring Show. The painting demonstrates Howard's renewed focus in being more intentional and provocative with his art, in making a statement and starting conversations.

ing history created by one or two people. It literally took us one day to prime that wall with everybody that was helping us. Lourdes Jasso, Armando Reyes, many members from CHROMA. People from the [Jefferson] Leadership Academy. Art's Bakery stopped by to feed us. Other people stopped by to give us plates. We had so much community support. There were a couple of people who were homeless — who I knew from my previous job, working at the Mental Health Association — who came by and picked up a brush, and never painted in their lives. I met people who, for all intents and purposes, I don't think I would have ever crossed their path or they would ever cross mine. I watched Luther Manus cry, smile, and dance. It was an amazing experience. And I don't want to overplay it, like it was this dream come true. It was a fantasy, it was potential in the making. Sometimes to me, it was too good to be true. Right? We just painted on the wall. But everybody's coming around. Smiling, saying "Hey, I knew your father," "I know your grandmother." It was like a family reunion. People would show up. "Do you remember me?" No, I don't remember you. I apologize. But I remember *you*. Someone showed up to give a spotlight so we could paint at night. It was a communal experience. The art was about that part for me. What's left on the wall was just evidence of it.

NW: You're actively involved in the CHROMA Guild. Can you talk briefly about that?

AH: I'm currently the secretary for the CHROMA Guild, which was organized by Erie Arts & Culture to try and advocate for artists to color to provide more opportunities, capacity building, to educate those of us who may just be artists but not necessarily attuned to the financial aspects of art, logistics, and social platforms. We are a guild that is geared toward trying to facilitate the growth and development of artists of color, advancing those opportunities. I've been a member now for about a year. We're trying to recruit other artists of color in the community so that we can develop a guild that rivals other guilds and vehicles for opportunities for other people so we can have a seat at the table.

NW: Can you speak about some of the

themes that seem to run through several of your pieces?

AH: I don't tend to follow a theme. I just produce the work because it's the emotion that I gotta get rid of, right? There's obviously color, vibrancy as a theme. In many of my paintings, I see them memorialized in isolation. This is in retrospect as I'm looking at some of my older work and think that based upon the lack of intentional themes, I've kind of muted my 2021 New Year's resolution to refine or restructure the way I work. I want my work to be more intentional moving forward, to be more of an artist's political statement. I want it to move communities. I want it to evoke conversations. And right now I'm not so sure my work speaks anything beyond my personal past traumas. I want it to be codified inside the work in some shape or form to match it. And I knew in pieces like "Prison Is Where Relationships Go to Die" and the other piece "Juvenile Life Without Parole" [Ed: featured on this issue's cover] that I wanted to make more statements and produce a scene that when people look at it they say, "Well, that's an Antonio piece."

That's one of those pieces that's not really art to me. It's evidence of where I was between the years of 1991 and 2018. It's definitely one of those where it's not art, it's an experience. It's proof. The themes that I intend to create moving forward in my pieces are more aligned with giving a voice to other people who are voiceless. I was imprisoned for 26-and-a-half years, and prior to that, I was a child. But now I'm here and I have a voice. You're here, hearing me, this is my voice. At some point, they say you exhaust the 26 letters of the English alphabet, and whatever sequence that you could possibly structure, at some point in your life, you exhaust that formula. You have to make a choice to either shut the f--k up, stop talking, and let your demonstration speak for you, or make a conscious choice to repeat everything you said during the first part of your life. During this part of my life, I want my demonstration to speak for me, and I want my art to do the same thing. No more words; you see it.

View Howard's work at Gannon's Waldron Center, with a virtual celebration/performance in conjunction with Gannon University, Penn State Behrend, and LifeThruMusic. Register at gannonalumni.org/event/culturalcrossroads

Howard's three books can be purchased on Amazon.com.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

Nick Warren can be reached at nick@eriereader.com

ing up at three o'clock in the morning, thinking about my story and my narratives. Because I had no voice, which was the reason I wanted to publish it, and rid myself of all those unresolved emotions that were behind it. Verbally defending yourself against shields, adults when you were a child, police officers, whoever else is an exercise in futility, because you have no voice. That was my opportunity to use my voice.

Before I shared it, I sent it to my father, my mom, everybody, to get their perspective on it. And interestingly enough, everybody was pissed off, right? Because you don't air your dirty laundry in my family. But the interesting thing was that everyone up until that point was invested in airing my dirty laundry. But they all eventually came to terms with it and I moved forward with the publishing process. Me sharing it with them opened up some much-needed conversation that was impossible to have prior to that. They all came to terms with it. We talked it through, got some other information I hadn't known about myself, my upbringing, I learned some really valuable information about their stories as a result, but in the end, I told my story.

NW: What were some reactions from readers who maybe didn't know you personally?

AH: Oh, the first readers were people in prison. There were a bunch of people who bought my books. Appreciation came from a lot of unexpected sources, including staff members. There was empathy, it almost had the same effect that my paintings had. It seemed to humanize me in some of their eyes. A lot of people saw me as a stoic inmate who just kept to himself and my facial expressions ex-

hibited anger. After they read the book, they realized that my facial expressions weren't me feeling anger, it was pain.

For people who make a career out of making sure that they don't know your story, or they perceive your stories as insignificant, [the books] did a lot to increase my value as a human being to them. Not to mention the fact that they were always borderline surprised that I could actually write and articulate myself.

"I didn't know that you could articulate yourself that way." It was very well-written. It started a conversation amongst the men I was around in prison, staff members, and everyone who read the book. People thanked me for being as candid as I was about my story, and shared their own stories, and would ask for suggestions on how they should write their story, and how it feels to be that vulnerable. It was a good experience, all the way around. I didn't think it would be, because I shared some personal things there, but it really was.

NW: It seems like you've ramped up your public art portfolio recently. Can you speak about the Manus mural, the things you learned, and that whole experience for you?

AH: I learned that real art wasn't the mural. The real art was creating an excuse to bring the community together in ways that it hadn't been up to that point. Caesar [Westbrook] and I worked on the project, and I don't like to say I worked on the project with Caesar without mentioning the fact that there were many more people that we worked with. It seems to be tradition to amputate key players from history. It's significant to other people, but they perceive it as be-

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Artists To Look Out For In 2021

Musicians refuse to have creativity shut down



By: Charles Brown

The year 2021 has felt like a fresh slate for some, and a continuation of the turmoil of 2020 for others. Although opportunity may seem scant, musicians are still striving to maintain a presence. Artists all over are learning to maneuver with the current status of our country and planet by releasing more tunes and visuals for your quarantine consumption. Locally, songwriters and instrumentalists of all genres are putting energy into their art to bring forth sounds for the new year. Here is a list of a few Erie composers that are sure to rock out during another trip around the sun.

Spirit Marley (Rapper)

The melodic hip-hop soloist has been climbing his way to the top of the Erie music scene by giving his audience and newcomers singles and videos nonstop for a little over a year. According to his rap ballad "Blame Me," Marley has been dreaming of being a rap star since he was seven years of age. Armed with straightforward lyrics of struggle and ambition, the crooning emcee has plans on delivering more raw material this year. "I have quite a few projects coming soon," the songwriter says. "Collabs with LottoBeats a.k.a Kahlil Husband on an EP. I also got videos dropping at least every month this year. I plan on making an

Keep an eye on local musical artists (left to right) Spirit Marley, Six Year Stretch (singer Andy Brown pictured here), and Majestic Mar in 2021 — all of whom plan to release new projects this year.

album but just trying to build my fanbase more." The rap prodigy is looking forward to doing more live performances outside of the 814 but will continue to take everything in stride. Marley confesses "I plan on taking my music as far as it can go even if I don't make it as an artist, because I will make it doing something else musically."

Check out Spirit Marley on Spotify, Soundcloud, Pandora, YouTube, and Apple Music.

Six Year Stretch (Alternative/Soft Rock Band)

The five members of this group have been blessing the ears of Erie with their professional-grade musicianship and harmonious interwoven vocals for some time now. Consisting of brothers Andy, Adam, and Alex Brown along with drummer Mike Wolfe and guitar extraordinaire Eric Brewer, Six Year Stretch is working on the follow-up to their 2018 album *Afterglow*. According to frontman Andy Brown, their third release will be one for the hearts. "Every song has a meaning or a story behind it," claims the singer. "Love, relationships, loss, and mental issues seem to be a lot of things COVID has affected this past year or so. We really tried to focus on the lyrics

more with this one as well. We are shooting for an end of spring or beginning of summer release." Brown also states that the writing process has been great and that their upcoming installment will hit home. "We really believe in these songs and hope they connect with our fans like we think they will."

Six Year Stretch can be found on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music.

Majestic Mar (Rapper)

When it comes to self-love and sassiness without compromise, Majestic Mar is the epitome. Open about who he is while showing others that it's okay to be who you are, the gay male rapper refuses to set boundaries on his style while displaying his sexual orientation with pride and strength. His latest music video "Grim Reaper" featuring Finesse Fest (shot by Sanz Studios) showcases not only his individuality but his love for shock value through his personality. "For an artist like myself, I contribute diversity and confidence," Mar says. "Being able to share my truth in hopes that someone struggling out there gets it." The no-holds-barred emcee is currently in the studio cooking up more for the city and beyond its limits. "I'm planning a few surprises that are my most ambitious I've done so far. This is the beginning of a new era, change is taking place, and it cannot be stopped."

Majestic Mar can also be found on Youtube, Spotify, and Apple Music.

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Found and Lost: Search Party Season Four

Psychological horror arc subverts expectations and continues to bend format



Followers of *Search Party* know they're always in store for something different. Essentially from its very first episode, it has tossed enough twists and turns to keep the audience's head spinning. If you haven't been able to check out *Search Party* yet, do it. It's a fantastic show that's severely addicting, able to be

binge-watched in a manner of days. The show follows a quartet of New York City twenty-somethings as they begin to unravel the disappearance of one of their acquaintances from NYU. It stars Alia Shawkat (best-known as Maeby Fünke on *Arrested Development*) as Dory Sief, John Reynolds (*Save Yourselves!*) as Do-

The HBO series *Search Party* has always trended dark, but Season Four loses its signature humor as it plumbs the depths of psychological trauma. Despite the reinvention, it remains a worthwhile watch.

ry's boyfriend Drew, and John Early and Meredith Hagner as her friends Elliott and Portia. If you'd rather see how this roller-coaster story unfolds yourself, beware of spoilers ahead.

This season almost entirely revolves around Dory's abduction by Chip (known to the group as "the twink"). The spoiled and troubling big bad of this season (played by Cole Escola) proceeds to hold Dory prisoner and subjects her to untold amounts of psychological trauma and ultimately succeeds in brainwashing her. As we see Dory's transition from unwilling prisoner to terrified friend, Shawkat gives a brilliant and moving performance, her pain and self-reflection at the forefront of the viewer's mind.

If you disregarded the spoiler alert and wonder how Dory got from searching

for a missing person to being one, then watch the show.

Perhaps the biggest shift in this season is that it's simply not as funny. Of course, the content of the plot makes that nearly impossible, but threading that needle has long been one of the hallmarks of a successful dark comedy.

And oh, what a wonderful dark comedy it was! Season Three was an unmitigated masterpiece, reveling in such a high degree of absurdity while somehow keeping the show more character-based than ever. Still, the show's ability to reinvent itself is worthy of note. But even if Season Four was bad (which it isn't, for the most part), the cliffhangers that cap each 22-minute episode will have you keep going, eager for a fifth season. — Nick Warren

Season Four currently streaming on HBO Max // Created by: Sarah-Violet Bliss, Charles Rogers, Michael Showalter // Starring: Alia Shawkat, John Reynolds, John Early, Meredith Hagner, Brandon Micheal Hall, Cole Escola // 10 episodes (40 total)





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What in the Wanda?

WandaVision an uncanny watch



As of this writing, Disney+ has released five episodes (out of nine) of its new Marvel Comics Universe (MCU) series, *WandaVision* ... and so far, reaction has been mixed. (Proceed with caution if you are not all caught up: there be spoilers ahead!)

Picking up after the events of 2019's *Avengers: Endgame* — does anyone else feel like that was 20 years ago, rather than just two? — we meet up with Elizabeth Olsen's Wanda Maximoff, aka the Scarlet Witch, and — rather perplexingly — her android partner, Paul Bettany's Vision, who Thanos killed at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*.

Rather more perplexingly, they have taken up residence in Westview, N.J., in some kind of black-and-white *Leave it to Beaver*-esque sitcom, complete with laugh track, first based in the 1950s, then '60s, and right on up through the decades, picking up color, changing costumes, and mimicking the classic family-friendly fare of the day.

The first three episodes exist almost entirely within this bubble, a world-building slow burn that is obviously leading to something, but which left some fans and critics unimpressed. It's true, the plot meanders a bit, with just touches of intrigue — a toy helicopter in color? A voice on the radio calling to Wanda? A new neighbor who

mentions Ultron and then (cut to next scene) has disappeared? The show takes its time, and these moments provide just barely enough to keep things interesting.

The fourth episode is the turning point, however, introducing a slew of concerned characters, as they grapple with the situation inside The Hex (so called for the hexagonal shape of the "city limits"). Yes, it seems Wanda's loss — the word "grief" is mentioned numerous times — has compelled her to create this simu-world, bringing her lover back from the dead (somehow) and holding the residents of Westview hostage with her mind powers.

By the end of episode five, things are starting to come a little unhemmed, Wanda is starting to lose control of her perfect sitcom world, and this viewer — who walked away from episodes one and two kind of "meh" — cannot wait to see where it all goes next week.

WandaVision so far is fantastically weird, wonderfully uncanny, and I predict, worth sticking around for. — Cara Suppa

Streaming now on Disney+ // Created by Jac Schaeffer // Starring: Elizabeth Olsen, Paul Bettany, Teyonah Parris, Randall Park, Kat Dennings, Kathryn Hahn, Debra Jo Rupp and Josh Stamberg // New episodes on Fridays

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MOVIE REVIEWS

The Most Valuable Resource: Time is the Best Documentary of 2020

★★★★★

When discussing the systemic abuses in our legal system — whether it’s the rates of police brutality in poor neighborhoods, the difference in sentences between white and Black offenders, or simply the way that laws are enforced — there is an issue of those trespasses being reduced to statistics. When we talk about the numbers, they are often seen as just numbers without considering the way these problems affect the real people who are hurt by them. Garrett Bradley’s new documentary *Time* reminds us of the actual lives that these systems affect in a simple but intimately personal way.

The film follows Sibil Fox Richardson, or Fox Rich, as she grapples with Louisiana’s legal system in an effort to release her husband Rob who is serving a 60-year prison sentence for robbery. In between bouts in this ongoing battle, the film also intercuts to home movie footage Fox took of her three sons over the course of 20 years while their father was imprisoned.

The film obviously addresses the aforementioned issues as well as America’s prison system and how it so often seems more focused on retribution rather than rehabilitation. However, the most striking images remain the quiet, simple moments of a family changing and growing over the passage of time while a noticeable absence remains ever-present. These moments were captured on video but can never again be recovered and that is where the true power of the film can be found. The statistics and numbers are important, but ultimately the people are who matter the most.

— Forest Taylor

Streaming on Amazon Prime // Directed by: Garrett Bradley // Edited by: Gabriel Rhodes // Featuring: Fox Rich, Rob Rich II, Freedom Rich, Justus Rich, Laurence M. Rich, Mahlik Rich, Remington Rich, and Rob G. Rich // 81 minutes // Rated PG-13



MLK/FBI: A Massively Important Story and a Decent Documentary

★★★★

Perhaps you already knew it, but Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was — in the eyes of the U.S. government — seen as a threat. The iconic Civil Rights leader is now one of the single-most heralded figures in modern U.S. history — Black or white. During the ‘50s and ‘60s, however, this was certainly not the case according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

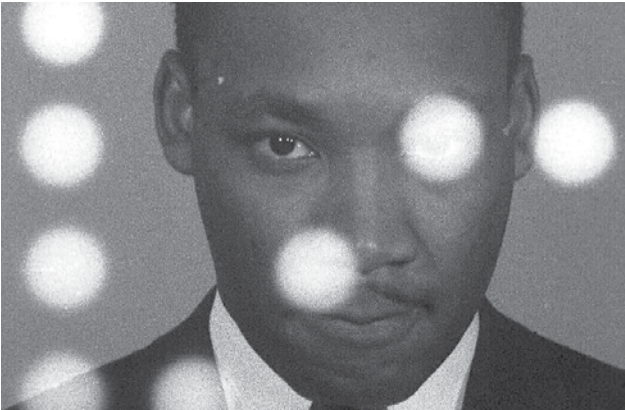
To many people fascinated by government programs like COINTELPRO, this is old news. Further, allegations of King’s extramarital affairs have been thrown around for years. What this documentary is able to do is utilize declassified government documents from the FBI on their investigation of King, which involved wiretapping and the use of covert bugging.

In documentary filmmaking, it’s worthwhile — albeit not required — to separate the content being presented with the presentation itself. Content-wise, this is a must-watch. It’s angering to hear the truth about the misuses of power by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Deputy William C. Sullivan, and President Lyndon B. Johnson. It’s empowering to simply hear Dr. King’s words and track his rise to prominence. Seeing Dr. King as a fallible person adds to the reality of his history, though some of the more problematic of the FBI’s insinuations and reaches may make certain parts difficult to hear, to say the least.

The presentation of the film itself is well-executed but wholly unremarkable. Using archival footage, document pan-and-scans, and altogether too much zoomed in b-roll footage of recording devices, the film foregoes talking head commentary until the final five minutes (this isn’t to say that it’s a big revelation, just oddly curious).

MLK/FBI is worth watching, especially if you don’t trust the government of the 1960s. — Nick Warren

Available on Amazon Prime // Directed by: Sam Pollard // Written by: Benjamin Hedin, Laura Tomaselli // Featuring: David Garrow, Clarence B. Jones, Charles Knox, Donna Murch, Marc Perrusquia, Andrew Young, James Comey, Beverly Gage, and archival footage of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. // 104 minutes // TV-PG



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Rastik Reloaded

Hosted by: Jay Rastik
YouTube // Music, Culture

Local rapper/inter-viewer/radio host Jay Rastik has been in the mix of Erie's urban culture for years on end. With a stream of his own Youtube phenomenon "Rastik Reloaded" and his classic mid- to late-2000s "Street Bang Em" DVD series (a collection that was started with Inda Streets Records founder Maurice Holman), the hip-hop pupil hasn't pumped his brakes on getting the scoop on talent or documenting the current state of Erie's rap scene. Now back with more content, the journalist is now taking a deep dive into the wave of podcasting with the *Rastik Reloaded* podcast. The first episode kicked off in January of 2021 where Jay Rastik had a sitdown with Erie's own Drippy Clouds and producer Chauncey Bill\$up that explored everything from mass appeal to maintaining positivity. In this episode, Rastik shows major interest in the world of being an artist and developing song structure while keeping the spotlight away from his own career. Let's not forget to add that receiving truth from his guests is a big part of the show's mission. "What people can expect from each episode is an honest open conversation, an extreme level of transparency," the vlogger says. "You will get the real side of every guest I have on the podcast." In the spirit of the late great Larry King, Rastik's podcast will take you where you need to go with his guests and further. — Charles Brown



Black Men Can't Jump (In Hollywood)

Hosted by: Jonathan Braylock, Jerah Milligan, and James III
Forever Dog Podcasts // Comedy, Pop Culture

In *Black Men Can't Jump (In Hollywood)*, Jonathan Braylock, James III and Jerah Milligan (Netflix's *As-tromy Club: The Sketch Show*) gather weekly to analyze "films with leading actors of color." While 2021 episodes have focused on new films — especially Oscar contenders like *One Night in Miami*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* — their usual selection is more varied. Think 2019's Michael B. Jordan-starring *Just Mercy*, being followed by *Finding Forrester* (a movie you probably caught on cable in the early 2000s), and then a Christmas episode. The core mission is obviously invaluable, but the bonus is the variety, made more eclectic given the smaller scope of their mission. Simply put, they talk about movies, like 2005's *Roll Bounce*, that other film podcasts don't bother with. The recent *Tenet* episode is a good entry point. They offer up their typically energetic review; they discuss John David Washington and why nepotism doesn't bother them here (it's been helping white actors for years, after all); and they note the fun connection between this film and Denzel Washington's *Déjà Vu*. Find their *Bad Boys* episodes for more good starting points. The concluding rating system has become the show's calling card, with the hosts determining if the movie helped the cause (more black/POC actors in leading roles) or hurt it. — Christopher Lantinen



Louder Than a Riot

Hosted by: Rodney Carmichael and Sidney Madden
NPR Music // Music, Social Issues

If you resist podcasts out of an aversion to meandering chatter, there's almost none of it in *Louder Than a Riot*. Instead, it's tightly woven around a clear thesis: the stories of mass incarceration and hip-hop (or "rhyme and punishment in America," as the series' tagline phrases it) are intimately connected — and worthy of real analysis. This thesis allows for a great tonal balance. When the realities of our prison system prove too grim, a little pop culture lightens its load. When the mixtape genealogies get too insular, its scope expands and their social relevance becomes clear. Best of all, the stories are unexpected. Instead of Lil Wayne's arrest, you get DJ Drama's. Instead of Snoop Dogg's acquittal, you get Mac Phipps' still-ongoing sentence. Its hosts provide a nice range of perspectives as well. Rodney Carmichael is old enough to remember the L.A. riots of 1992 (provoked by excessive force used in the videotaped arrest of Rodney King) and the West Coast gangsta rap that often soundtracked it. By contrast, Sidney Madden got her start at XXL in 2015, as the industry was intersecting with the movement for Black Lives — and arrived at NPR as it reckoned with the #MeToo movement in 2017. If you consider music an essential mirror to the culture that produced it, this is the podcast for you. — Dan Schank





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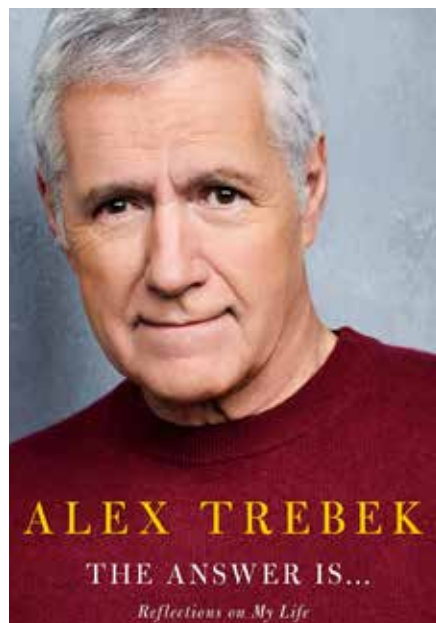
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The Answer Is...: Reflections on My Life

Late Alex Trebek in little jeopardy of losing lasting appeal



For more than 35 years, Alex Trebek made his way into America's living rooms as host of the popular quiz show

Jeopardy!, a game of skill and knowledge. Bringing both entertainment and education into the homes of millions, Trebek became like a family member to many, myself included.

In his 2020 memoir, *The Answer Is...: Reflections on My Life*, Trebek looks back, both on and off screen, following his 2019 diagnosis with stage four pancreatic cancer. Following the immense outpouring of support from fans across the globe, Trebek broke his more than three decade silence on writing about his life, stating, "I want people to know a little more about the person they have been cheering on for the past year."

Told in beautifully written prose in the form of short, succinct vignettes, readers learn more about Trebek's life before and during his iconic tenure on *Jeopardy!*

A glimpse into Trebek's childhood in rural Canada reveals his relation-

ship with his parents — his father a Ukrainian immigrant, his mother a French Canadian — as well as his first forays into a career in show business at the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC).

Although the book details Trebek's life, it follows more closely to a "Greatest Hits" selection rather than a full, nitty-gritty memoir. Trebek reflects back on what he has learned over the years, offering his own personal anecdotes for subjects ranging from marriage and parenthood to education and success. In light of the game show host's November 2020 death at the age of 80, this feels more appropriate than if Trebek were to delve into great detail regarding devastating points in his life. Instead, they are mentioned, but lessons are learned and wisdom is imparted on the reader.

In later chapters, Trebek reveals what happened behind the cameras on the

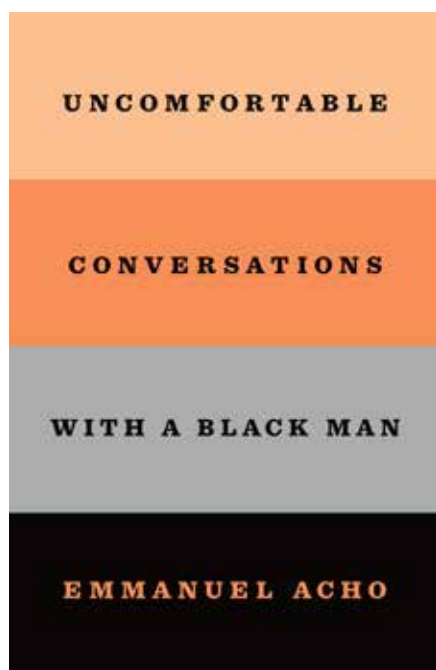
Jeopardy! set, exposing his kind and thoughtful nature. In such a high-energy, nerve-wracking game, Trebek took the time to make every contestant feel welcome and comfortable, knowing the potential each held. His relationships with former contestants throughout the years are a great testament to the host's genuine character, exemplifying his caring and supporting nature. From the start, he insisted on being the host, not star, of *Jeopardy!*, as he considered the contestants to be the real stars of the show.

Always insightful, often comedic, and occasionally irreverent (Alex Trebek swears, who knew!), *The Answer Is...: Reflections on My Life* is the perfect read for those who have heard of Trebek in passing, longtime *Jeopardy!* fans, or anyone in between. — Ally Kutz

Simon & Schuster // 304 pages // Non-Fiction, Memoir

Book Review: Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man

Emmanuel Acho addresses apprehensions getting in way of true interracial alliance



In the summer of 2020, former Philadelphia Eagles linebacker and current Fox Sports analyst Emmanuel Acho began a YouTube series of videos titled "Uncomfortable Conversations with a

Black Man." Following the success of these videos, he penned the book of the same name, released in November 2020.

After the 2020 murder of George Floyd perpetrated by a Minneapolis police officer, a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement occurred, with protests taking place worldwide that called for the dismantling and restructuring of the racist system that allows for the oppression and mistreatment of persons of color in this country. In a time when it is imperative to not just be "not racist," but instead anti-racist, many white people may feel apprehensive and nervous, unsure of what the road to a true alliance looks like. What if you say the wrong thing? What if your privilege gets in the way? What if you are just virtue signaling instead of actually helping? These apprehensions can lead many to not want to get involved, leading to the unintentional support — but support nonetheless — of the systemic racism that allows little to no repercussions for those perpetrating

these crimes against persons of color.

Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man addresses these apprehensions many white people may have. The key lesson in Acho's book: you will mess up. Every single white person who genuinely wants to be an ally will make mistakes, say the wrong thing, do something unintentionally wrong. But the most important takeaway is to learn from these mistakes instead of continuing to make them; to actively understand why what you are doing is wrong and learn from it.

Acho addresses topics that range from the debate between using Black or African American and the myth of the "angry black man" to the more technical topics of systemic racism and racism in relation to our government. The book is split into three sections: "You and Me," "Us and Them," and "We." The first two sections address topics that separate whites from persons of color in America, with the final section addressing ways in which white allies can come together with persons of color to

bring about systemic change — chapters in this section include "The Interracial Family," "How to Be an Ally," and "How to End Racism."

Each chapter introduces its topic, gives its history (Let's Rewind), talks about the problematic aspects and how they apply to everyday life (Let's Get Uncomfortable), and practical solutions to take with you (Talk It, Walk It). Acho's writing is concise and to the point while also not being too technical to the point of alienation of readers. It reads more like a conversation (hence the title) while simultaneously acting as an introductory how-to guide, proving Acho's abilities as both a writer and educator. At just 30 years old, Acho has solidified himself as one of the exemplary voices of his generation.

Acho's companion book geared toward teaching children about systemic racism, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Boy*, is set to be released in May 2021. — Ally Kutz

Flatiron Books // 256 pages // Non-Fiction, Current Events

Restorative Justice and Cannabis

As industry grows, new opportunities must be colorblind



[top left] RISE Dispensary recently opened a second location on Rotunda Drive, the former site of Erie Sports Store and Planet Fitness. One half of the building serves as a dispensary, the other an education and outreach center. [bottom] A variety of cannabis-derived tinctures available for sale at RISE.

now all learning that none of that was true. The war on drugs was a farce. It did nothing but harm our country and harm so many people disproportionately, of color, and this tends to be a growing trend or a trend that is being spoken about more and more in this country.”

RISE opened another dispensary location in January located on Rotunda Drive, where Planet Fitness was once housed.

The new building is split in half; one part dispensary and the second part an education and outreach center. The education center intends to serve as a way to expand upon their efforts to inform the community of the benefits of marijuana and help people to receive their medical marijuana cards.

Going forward, the question of marijuana legalization is still up in the air. Both Kennedy and Hawkins agree that the commonwealth has been very clear about wanting marijuana legalized, reporting a 70 percent support rate.

However, considering possible legislation raises new issues. The cannabis industry continues to grow, and more than 4,000 residents of Pennsylvania have jobs directly related to dispensaries, cultivation, or testing labs in the cannabis industry. With the passing of adult-use, Hawkins says that number

will probably double or triple gradually, but aside from the economic benefits, the legislature would have to address the restorative justice aspect.

To date, less than 1 percent of licenses to sell cannabis have gone to Black Americans because any prior cannabis-related offenses prevent people from obtaining licensure. As a result of disproportionate charges in a community, white people are more likely to be granted a license and benefit from an economy that has incriminated Black people for using that same product.

“We strongly believe in the social equity side of legislation going forward,” Hawkins said.

“For those folks who have been arrested and have this on the record, once it does become legal for adult use in Pennsylvania, the first thing that should be taken care of is expunging every single one of those records that’s out there and removing them so that those folks, anyone who has a record, can go out and get a job in the cannabis industry.”

Along with his concerns, Hawkins seemed optimistic about the future with RISE’s presence in Erie. As the company’s mission states, “Our real power is in our people and our shared commitment to giving back to the communities we serve.”

This shared commitment could be the key to a new beginning, both in the community and within the broader sense of morality.

Chloe Forbes can be reached at cforbes@eriereader.com

By: Chloe Forbes

“Have you ever met the funny reefer man?
If he takes a sudden mania
He’ll want to give you Pennsylvania
Oh, you know you’re talking to the reefer man.”

Cab Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie, Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong were all jazz prodigies, bringing swing into the 1930s. Marijuana was illegal in 29 states when “Reefer Man” was written in 1931, but there was no federal ban on it at the time.

In fact, Armstrong’s prevailing romance with “Mary Warner” stretched past music. As Dizzy Gillespie once remarked, Armstrong “refused to let anything, even anger about racism, steal the joy from his life,” using a few puffs of “good shuzzit” to remind himself of a wonderful world during the Prohibition era.

Unfortunately, the forthcoming war on drugs became an enduring instrument of oppression used to further political agendas rather than address racial injustices.

A recent study conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found that although cannabis use is roughly equal among Blacks and whites, African Americans are over three times more likely to be arrested or cited for cannabis possession as compared to whites.

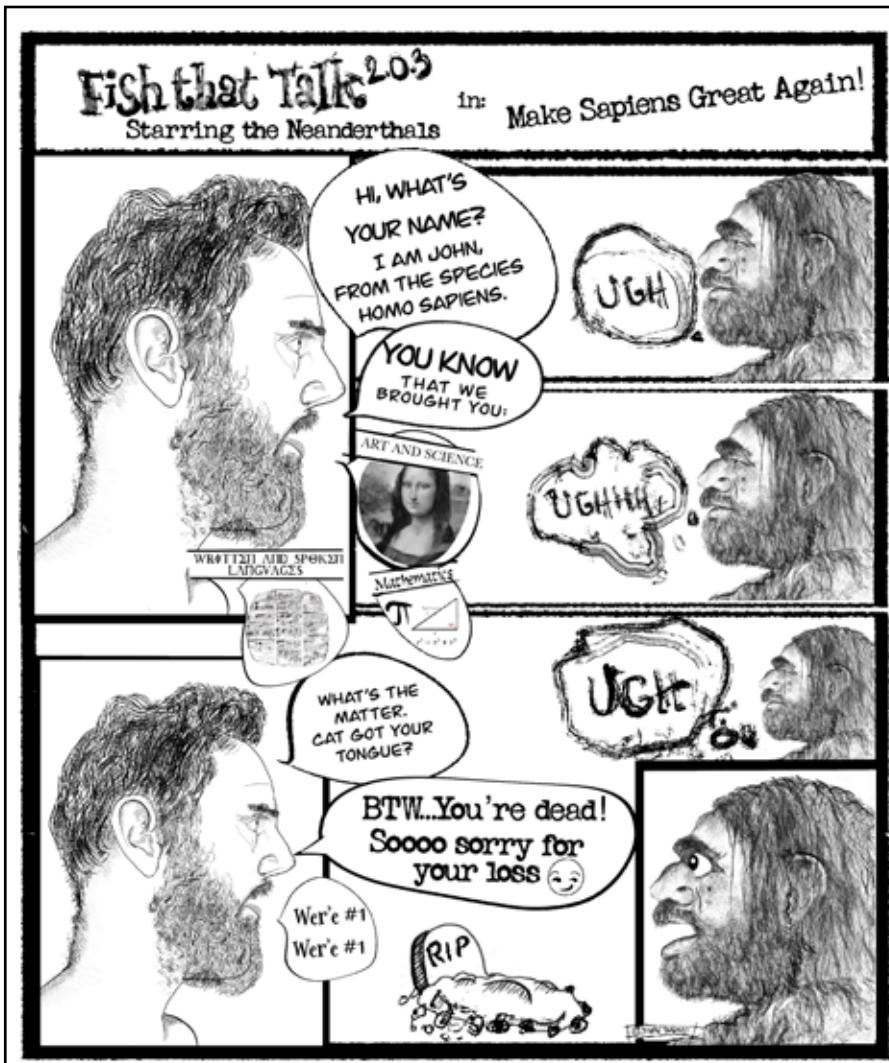
As for Erie County, there is no data that points to this specific problem,

but Pat Kennedy, public defender of Erie County, said there are a couple of reasons that people do or do not get charged for marijuana usage: inconsistencies with police agencies and charge variances. Agencies that believe there are more serious crimes than marijuana-related charges may not charge for possession as quickly as other agencies might. In places like the City of Erie specifically, there is an ordinance that possession of 30 grams or less of marijuana is a summary offense as opposed to a misdemeanor, so those charged may be given the opportunity to plead guilty to the ordinance violation first — and incur a \$25 fine for possession or \$100 for smoking in public.

Since the Uniform Narcotic Act of 1934 —state laws that included regulations of cannabis and the authorization of police power to seize drugs and punish lawbreakers who didn’t have specific licenses — criminal penalties and mandatory minimum sentences resulted in a rise of incarceration rates. This higher incarceration rate allowed Nixon to declare a war on drugs, and he continued to market drugs as evil to receive funding and support for his bills.

Tim Hawkins, the vice president of retail operations for Green Thumb Industries (parent company of RISE Dispensary), commented about these injustices, saying, “For so long, we’ve all been told that this is an addictive drug, a Schedule I drug, a gateway drug, and none of those things are true. For a very long time, we’ve been told that by our government, and we are just





ALBUM REVIEWS

Navy Blue

Songs of Sage: Post Panic!
Freedom Sounds

★★★★★

Navy Blue (born Sage Elsesser) has a lot to say. This is evidenced by the fact that he released not only one, but two albums in 2020; while his debut album, *Ádá Irin*, followed in the footsteps of collaborator Earl Sweatshirt and got the job done in just 29 minutes, *Songs of Sage: Post Panic!* nearly doubles that runtime, incorporating stronger production, more varied beats, and most interestingly, the human voice as an instrument. If it were released earlier in the year, it would have been a strong contender for the best hip-hop album of 2020.

"I'm tired of the shooting," starts "Tired," before Blue continues, explaining "They complains about their gun rights/They killing us for sport." It's a contemplative look at the protests for racial justice this past summer, and it's especially affecting sitting early at track two. Later, Blue drops an unforgettable hook on "1491": "I used to kiss my Saint Christopher, f*ck Christopher Columbus." Loosely coinciding with the loss of MF DOOM, Navy Blue is far from an exact replacement, but it's relieving to know that up-and-coming conscious rap is in more-than-capable — scratch that — good hands. — Aaron Mook



Steve Earle & The Dukers

J.T.
New West Records

★★★★★

The latest release from modern troubadour Steve Earle is a covers record of songs written by his late son Justin Townes Earle, who passed away last November in Nashville from an accidental overdose. Earle takes some of his son's most memorable works like "Harlem River Blues" and "Champagne Corolla" and adds the signature Steve Earle sound that he has been perfecting since the 1980s. One of the stand-out tracks is "The Saint of Lost Causes," where he adopts a much darker tone than the original version from his son's final album. Lyrically the song hints at the addiction that Justin Townes Earle was facing, hitting even harder after his untimely passing. The final song on the album, "Last Words," is the only song that the elder Earle penned for this release. It recounts the last telephone conversation he had with his son, reflecting on the relationship they had. It's a heart-breaking farewell, one that anyone who's lost someone they love to addiction can relate to. It feels as though this album was one that Steve needed to sort through his grief and to help heal fans who held his son in such high regard. — Larry Wheaton



Common

A Beautiful Revolution (Pt 1)
Loma Vista Recordings

★★★★★

Chicago-based rapper Common has always been public about the ill manner of society, including the harsh reality of poverty, systematic warfare, and the blatant oppression that refuses to cease. The conscious rapper stirs up more questions about today's world with his 13th studio effort *A Beautiful Revolution (Pt.1)*. The 9-track opus welcomes itself with a soothing intro laced with spoken word explaining the beauty of Black America, the perils it encounters — and without any reluctance — the answer to a better tomorrow. Common reveals on the second track "Fallin'" that it was the outcry about the racial barriers set upon African Americans that informed his writing for *A Beautiful Revolution* thematically. The album picks up with a few speaker-knockers and light-hearted cuts you can two-step to, but it never loses its fight for peace and justice. Guest appearances from Black Thought, Lenny Kravitz, Stevie Wonder, and more complement Common's conviction and curiosity. Jazzy and cohesive, *A Beautiful Revolution (Pt 1)* isn't made to shake up the world or obtain commercial success, but to be a ripple to inspire others to join the march for equality. — Charles Brown



Ethan Iverson/Umbria Jazz Orchestra

Bud Powell in the 21st Century
Sunnyside/Sunnyside Communications

★★★★★

During the 1940s and '50s, Bud Powell was to jazz piano as his contemporary Charlie Parker was to jazz saxophone—a revolutionary. Whereas other pianists of the day strode steadily with their left hands, Powell peppered in chords unpredictably, accenting the rapid-fire single-note lines of his right. Embracing rhythmic and harmonic complexity, improvisation, and all-around unpredictability, bebop represented jazz's next step forward. Powell's life was a whirlwind, too — marred by alcoholism and the psychological and physiological aftereffects of a brutal beating at the hands of police officers alongside a Philadelphia railroad in 1945. Despite his personal tragedy, his music remains a creative triumph, strongly evidenced here by former Bad Plus pianist Ethan Iverson with the backing of the Umbria Jazz Orchestra. Reinterpreting Powell's quintet recordings in a big band context (with a featured quintet of his own), Iverson achieves consistently compelling results, ranging from the breezy "Celia" to the spindly "Tempus Fugit" to the menacing "Un Poco Loco." Two years shy of what would've been his 100th birthday, Iverson proves Powell's music definitely belongs in the 21st century. — Matt Swanseger



TOMMY IN TOON — BY TOMMY LINK

Whenever I've been out of the habit of writing songs, getting back always feels like a struggle. Like it's something I used to move in and out of freely, but can't remember how to find.



And when I do finally find my way back, no matter how obvious the way in seems to be, it always comes when I least expect it.



And once I'm there...

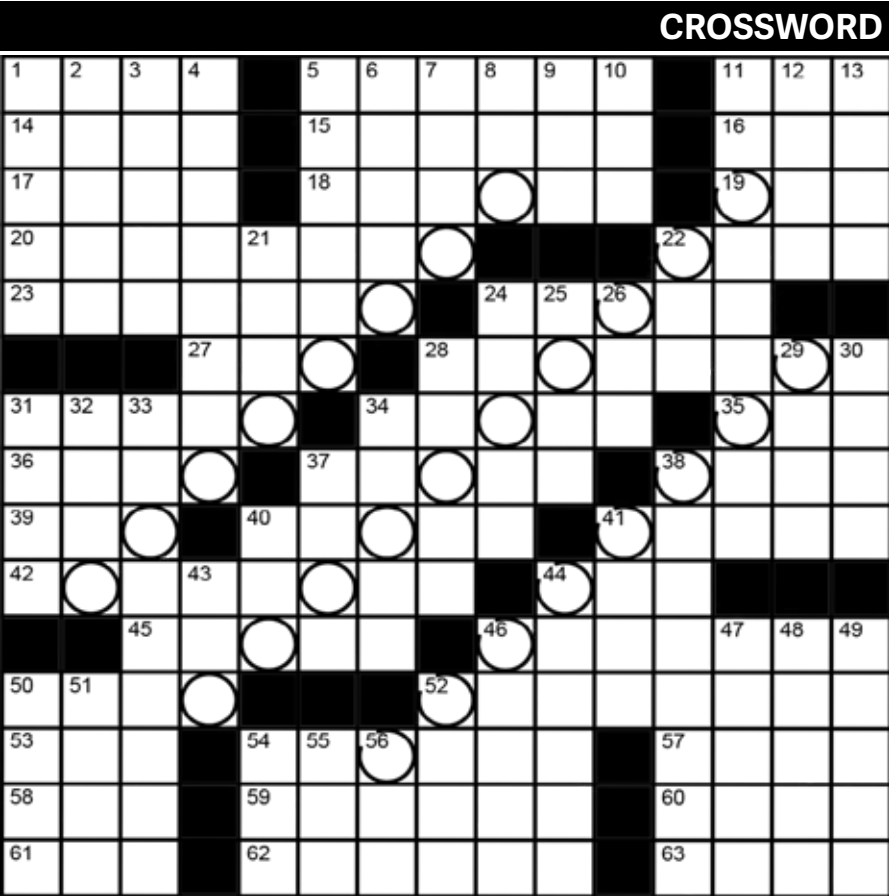


...I never know...

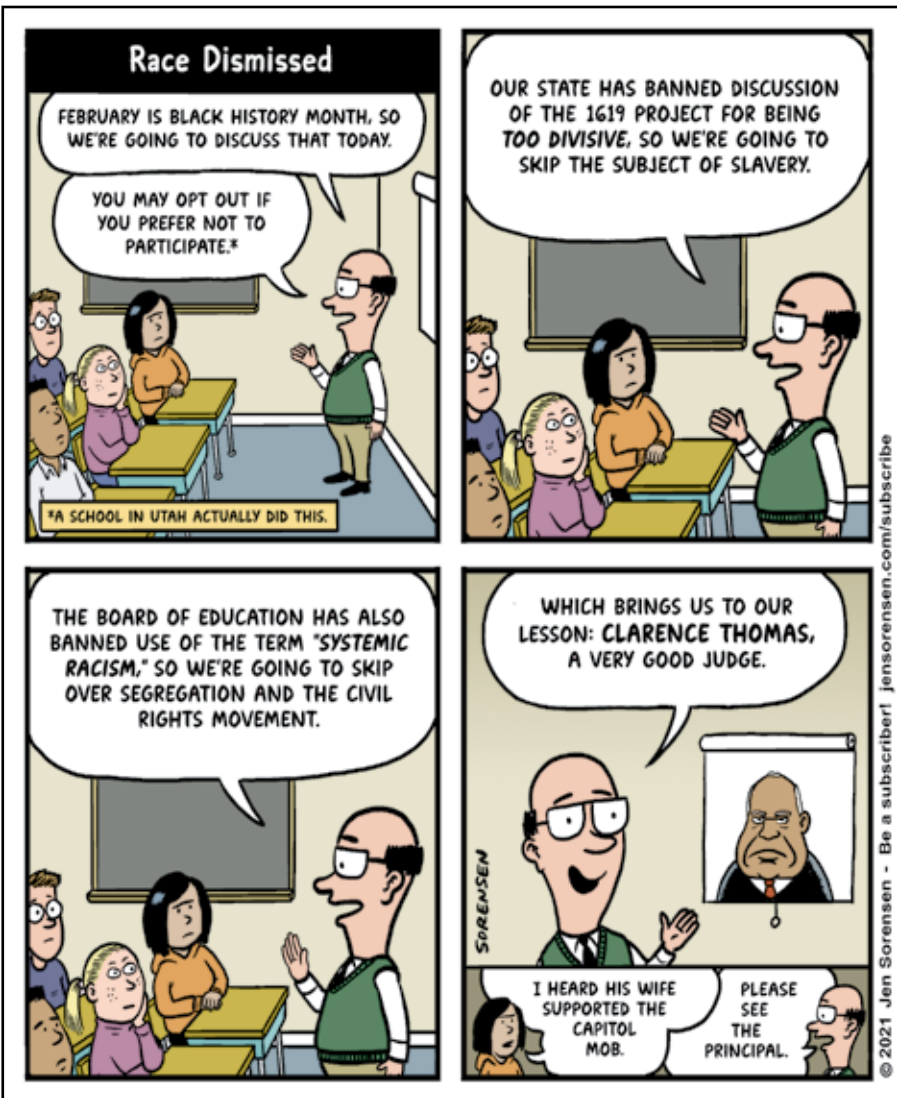


...how long I'll be there.





- Across**
1. Org. for students in uni-form
5. With 62-Across, a difficult engagement ... or a description of each set of circled letters
11. "u r 2 funny!"
14. Fitch of Abercrombie & Fitch
15. Tiny
16. Two-time Super Bowl MVP Manning
17. Hula ____
18. Beezus' sister, in children's literature
19. Actress Gadot
20. Walter White on "Breaking Bad," for one
22. Tennis star Nadal, to fans
23. Inhuman
24. Inhumane
27. Amtrak schedule abbr.
28. Renter's rental
31. It's just over a foot
34. Count who composed "One O'Clock Jump"
35. Josh ____, the voice of 12-Down
36. "Stop stalling!"
37. Evan and Birch of Indiana politics
38. Actress Campbell of "Scream"
39. "... good witch, ____ bad witch?"
40. Adorable one
41. "A Doll's House" play-
- wright Henrik
42. Like some bottles
44. Fed. electricity provider since 1933
45. Coffeehouse entertainers
46. Boardwalk scavenger
50. Business sch. major
52. Open (to)
53. "Green Book" Oscar winner
54. Haul (around)
57. Utah town near Arches and Canyonlands National Parks
58. Sleep state
59. "Lawrence of Arabia" star
60. Red resident of "Sesame Street"
61. English breakfast ____
62. See 5-Across
63. Pal of Kyle and Kenny on "South Park"
- Down**
1. Fix up, as a building
2. O3
3. Brisk paces
4. What T-Mobile has that Sprint lacks
5. Erect
6. June birthstone
7. Blood: Prefix
8. ____ Jima
9. "Dancing With the Stars" judge Goodman
10. Salonga who voiced two Disney princesses
11. They're set for drinking
- and smoking
12. "Frozen" snowman
13. ____ Wallace, co-founder of Reader's Digest
21. Add to the staff
22. Food writer Drummond
24. Like easy, well-paying jobs
25. Hank Aaron's 2,297
26. Suffix with glob- or gran-
28. Ending for sooth or nay
29. Rescue
30. Where Adam met Eve
31. "A line is ____ that went for a walk" (quote by 51-Down)
32. Scand. country
33. Korean-made sedan since 2001
34. Kathy of "Misery"
37. Rifle part
38. Magic moments?
40. French "Inc."
41. Tolstoy's "The Death of ____ Ilyich"
43. Captain's record
44. Home on the range
46. Whiff
47. Many a bike lock, essentially
48. Animal wearing red pajamas in a children's book
49. Simon of Duran Duran
50. 7-Eleven, e.g.
51. Surrealist Paul
52. Boatloads
54. [Poor me!]
55. Windy City rail org.
56. Like the summer sun



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