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SERVING THE BLACK COMMUNITY WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR SINCE 1947

September 8 - 14, 2022

Florida judge faces criticism following order in Trump case

By MEG KINNARD, CURT ANDERSON and ERIC TUCKER



A page from the order granting a request by former President Donald Trump's legal team to appoint a special master to review documents seized by the FBI during a search of his Mar-a-Lago estate is photographed Monday, Sept. 5, 2022. The decision by U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon came despite the objections of the Justice Department, which said an outside legal expert was not necessary in part because officials had already completed their review of potentially privileged documents. (AP Photo/Jon Elswick)

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon is facing sharp criticism following her decision this week to grant a request by former President Donald Trump's legal team for an independent arbiter to

review documents obtained during an FBI search of his Florida property last month.

Cannon on Monday authorized an outside legal expert to review the records taken during the Aug. 8 search of Mar-a-Lago as part of a probe into Trump's inappropriate retention of sensitive material from the White House. The expert would have power to weed out any material that might be protected by claims of attorney-client privilege or executive privilege.

The order came over the strenuous objections of the Justice Department, which said a so-called special master was not necessary in part because officials had already completed their review of potentially privileged documents.

The move was cheered by Trump supporters seeking a check on the government's probe. But others say Cannon gave undue deference to the former president and unnecessarily put on hold certain investigative work by the Justice Department. They say she has slowed the momentum of the federal investigation into possible Espionage Act violations.

The Justice Department has not indicated whether it will appeal, though there are reasons why it might not be eager to do so, including out of concern that it could delay the investigation further or produce case law that it finds unfavorable for future probes, said Brandon

Continue **Judge** Page 2

EXPLAINER: Is COVID-19 winding down? Scientists say no.

By LAURA UNGAR



FILE - This August 2022 photo provided by Pfizer shows vials of the company's updated COVID-19 vaccine during production in Kalamazoo, Mich. (Pfizer via AP, File)

Is the coronavirus on its way out?

You might think so. New, updated booster shots are being rolled out to better protect against the variants circulating now. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has dropped COVID-19 quarantine and distancing recommendations. And more people have thrown off their masks and returned to pre-pandemic activities.

But scientists say no. They predict the scourge that's already lasted longer than the 1918 flu pandemic will linger far into the future.

One reason it's lasted this long? It's gotten better and better at getting around immunity from vaccination and past infection. Scientists point to emerging research that suggests the latest omicron variant gaining ground

in the U.S. — BA.4.6, which was responsible for around 8% of new U.S. infections last week — appears to be even better at evading the immune system than the dominant BA.5.

Scientists worry the virus may well keep evolving in worrisome ways.

HOW LONG WILL IT BE AROUND?

White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha said COVID-19 will likely be with us for the rest of our lives.

Experts expect COVID-19 will someday become endemic, meaning it occurs regularly in certain areas according to established patterns. But they don't think that will be very soon.

Still, living with COVID "should not necessarily be a

Continue **COVID** - Page 5

Here they are: Obamas unveil their White House portraits

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE



Former President Barack Obama kisses his wife former first lady Michelle Obama after they unveiled their official White House portraits during a ceremony for the unveiling in the East Room of the White House, Wednesday, Sept. 7, 2022, in Washington. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle returned to the White House on Wednesday for the unveiling of official portraits with a modern vibe: him standing expressionless against a white background and her seated on a sofa in the Red Room wearing a formal light blue dress.

"Barack and Michelle, welcome home," President

Joe Biden said before he invited the Obamas to the stage to unveil the portraits. Some in the audience gasped, others applauded.

"It's great to be back," Obama said when it was his turn to speak. He praised Biden — his vice president — as someone who became a "true partner and a true friend."

The artist whom Barack Obama selected to paint his portrait says the "stripped

down" style of his works helps create an "encounter" between the person in the painting and the person looking at it.

Robert McCurdy likes to present his subjects without any facial expression and standing against a white background, which is how Black president will be seen here for posterity, in a black suit and gray tie.

Biden and first lady Jill

Biden invited Obama and the former first lady back to their former home to unveil their official portraits. It was Mrs. Obama's first visit since her husband's presidency ended in January 2017. Obama himself visited in April to help celebrate the anniversary of the major health care law he signed.

The former first lady chose artist Sharon Sprung

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EDITORIAL PAGE

Floyd Mayweather, Jr., Day

My Day

By Dr. J. Ester Davis



Dr. J. Ester Davis

“There he is. There he is, look!!... look” said a Mother to her eight(8)year old son. The eyes on the pint-size curly-top struggled to find the limo. Suddenly, a wide grin as big as Texas, came over his face on this summer day, his eyes only got wider as he spotted the Mayweather limousine rounding the curl through the barricades leading for the stage and the introduction of Floyd Mayweather, Jr., to his awaiting audience. “That’s the biggest limo I ever saw”, is the last remark I remember the young son saying to his Mom.

Floyd Mayweather, Jr., the legendary boxing champ was in Cedar Hill Texas officially opening his signature Mayweather Boxing+Fitness Gym at the popular Hillside Village (open-air shopping) Mall. The entire north side parking lot was occupied. There was the highly visible title sponsor, Credit Union of Texas, Kingdom Boxing Promotions (KBP), the William Holmes Step Team, cheerleaders and the mighty, mighty Drumline from Cedar Hill High School, families with children, worldwide media, athletes, boxing fans from across the state. On the Dias welcoming the Las Vegas Superstar was city, county and congressional officials. Cedric Brown, KBP’s CEO, remotely presented Bishop T. D. Jakes on the big screen with prayer for the concerted efforts of Cedric and Floyd blessing the ‘works of their hands’ for our community defining greatness. Stephen Mason, Mayor

of Cedar Hill, one of the fastest growing cities in the nation with a world high elevation, was all smiles. He also made history. Mayor Mason presented the globetrotting, 50-0, inside and outside-the-ring “champion” with a designer Proclamation, a Key-to-the-City topped off with “Floyd Mayweather Jr Day in Cedar Hill, Texas”. Mr. Mayweather for a few seconds was ‘speechless’. Rebounding, he was “thrilled to be here”. He was inspiring and challenging. He made an eloquent point of emphasizing his cause for creating Mayweather Boxing+Fitness Gym. Your health is your ‘real wealth’. “It’s not just money! Keeping your body fit and strong is your wealth” Cedar Hill, Texas, is the undisputed perfect city, with small town ambiance, as a location for the largest gym in Mayweather’s resume portfolio. All of North Texas, with its 28-city-proud Dallas County

View, love Cedar Hill for its Red Cedar Evergreens, untouched nature and unmatched shopping/dining. Cedar Hill has an Economic Development Department that was recently recognized as one of the 60+ developing organization acknowledged by the International Economic Development Council. Watch out Texas!! Its plain-er to see now why Kingdom Boxing Promotions said ‘the hill is about to make a mark’. My forever jubilant thanks to the Mayor and City Council for your sheer hospitality from beginning to the awesome end. We all enjoyed working with you. The Cedar Hill Police Department stayed with us through the heat-of-the-day to hours into the night greeting the people who kept coming to see Floyd Mayweather on his day. And Mayweather showed true signs of a teaching champion outside-the-ring.

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Continued **Judge** Page 1

Fox, a Los Angeles defense attorney and former federal prosecutor. Regardless, he said, Cannon’s opinion creates a perception of “two systems of justice.” “The criminal justice system is set up to try to make sure that everybody is accountable in the same way for alleged crimes they have committed,” Fox said. “Here, it appears that Mr. Trump is getting special benefit” by virtue of being a former president. Trump’s former attorney general, William Barr, told Fox News on Tuesday that the opinion was “deeply flawed in a number of ways.” A little-known federal judge appointed to the bench two years ago by Trump, Cannon delivered easily the most consequential move of her career on Monday. It thrust the Colombian-born former federal prosecutor to the center of a simmering legal debate about the confines of executive privilege and presidential power. Cannon is the least senior federal judge for the Southern District of Florida, where five of the 16 active judges were appointed by Trump. According to court rules, cases like the special master request are “assigned on a blind rotation basis ... to a judge assigned to hear cases in the division to which the case has been assigned.” During her roughly seven years as an assistant U.S. attorney, Cannon worked mainly out of the U.S.

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PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN ACTS 23:1-35

By Rev. Johnny Calvin Smith



Paul is now a prisoner, and we will follow Paul's life as a prisoner. Paul will give a vivid defense of himself and his ministry. In chapter 22, we have seen how the Roman captain arrested Paul and put him in prison and was about to beat him. He relented from doing so when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. He was astonished to find that Paul was a Jew who could speak Greek and was a Roman citizen. Paul was highly educated, a real cosmopolitan indi-

vidual. As chapter 23 opens, Paul is before the Sanhedrin; in essence, he is appearing before the chief priest and council. The High Priest orders that Paul be smitten on the mouth. Paul is treated in an unjust way, and Paul speaks out by calling the High Priest a "whited wall." Paul is standing up for what is right - "a man cannot be condemned or punished before judgment has been handed down." Paul did not recognize that he was speak-

ing to the High Priest (vv. 1-5). Paul understood that rulers should be respected under the law. As Christians, regardless of who is in office, we need to respect the position he or she occupies! Yes, Paul knew to render respect to rulers, for Romans 13:7 states: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." Paul wrote Roman when the infamous Nero was

on the throne! Paul shrewdly turns his defense into a theological argument between two rival groups - the "fundamentalists" (Pharisees) and the "liberals" (Sadducees). The fundamentalists and liberals are still at odds with one another even today. After a great dissension among the groups, the Pharisees came to Paul's defense, and the Roman captain orders that Paul be brought to the castle (vv. 6-10). The chief captain res-

cues Paul without understanding the real nature of the hatred against Paul! I find that to be very ironic! During a tumultuous period in Paul's life, he received some comforting words from the Lord: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (v. 11). Paul was warned by the Spirit of God that he should expect bonds and afflictions if he went to Jerusalem. Now the Lord assures Paul that he will also testify in Rome. Notice that there is a plot against Paul's life, but God's assuring words of comfort will overrule any plot (vv. 12-15). God's plan for Paul is Rome and no plot can suppress His plan. The plot is to kill Paul, but God's plan for Paul is to testify in Rome! The chief captain is informed

of the plot against Paul from Paul's relative and orders that Paul would be escorted safely to the port of city of Caesarea, where Paul will appear before the Roman governor, Felix (vv.16-35). Paul's accusers are to go down to Caesarea if they have case against Paul. In retrospect, it was interesting to me that Paul uses his Roman citizenship and instructs his nephew to tell the chief captain regarding the plot against Paul's life. It is interesting to me that this mob of above forty angry men did not even get to kill Paul! God will protect His own, for God promised Paul that Paul will testify in Rome! Paul will indeed witness before governors, rulers and kings as the Lord Jesus had said.

May God Bless!



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South Dallas pizzeria founder passes away at 81

Author: Jay Wallis (WFAA)

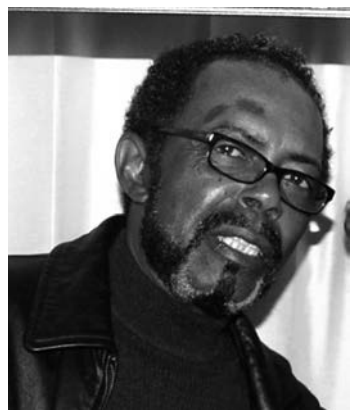


Photo Credit: Kevon Gee

DALLAS — The founder of a well-known

Dallas pizzeria recently passed away in Oak Cliff, according to his family. Texas native Frank E. Gee Jr. died at the age of 81. He founded Blackjack Pizza on 2536 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. with Terry Jones in 1990. Blackjack quickly became known as a restaurant with classic, quick pies and pizza slices at reasonable prices. The restaurant is also known

for its quality hamburgers as well. Before establishing Blackjack Pizza, now known as DJ Blackjack Pizza, it was once a soul food restaurant. After founding the pizzeria in South Dallas on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Gee Jr. also opened another location in Pleasant Grove on St. Augustine Rd. In a Texas Metro News article from May 2022, the

online publisher praised Blackjack Pizza and its importance to the community. In the piece, historian and educator Clarence E. Glover Jr. calls Blackjack as “one of the few remaining community sites” where African Americans comfortably gather. Originally from Corsicana, Texas, Gee Jr. passed away Sept. 1, 2022, at the age of 81 in his Oak Cliff home.

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attorney, Cannon worked mainly out of the U.S. attorney’s office in Fort Pierce, Florida, which is part of the same federal district as Miami but about 130 miles (209 kilometers) to the north. The cases there generally do not get the same kind of attention as those in the more densely populated, media-heavy areas around Miami.

Beginning in 2013, Cannon prosecuted 41 cases as part of the Major Crimes Division, later handling appeals of criminal convictions and sentences.

One of those involved a defendant in a major \$800 million Ponzi scheme who unsuccessfully appealed his numerous fraud convictions to the Atlanta-based 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Her opposing counsel in that case, long-time Miami defense attorney Richard Klugh, described Cannon as “very bright and talented” and fair to the defense.

“I didn’t see anything I could characterize as anything other than good lawyering, and no political bias whatsoever,” Klugh said, adding that he has worked on cases handled by

Cannon as a federal judge although he has not appeared in her courtroom. “She’s known for affording fair process and hearings. You like somebody who actually hears you out,” he said.

Born in Cali, Colombia, in 1981, as her father worked in advertising throughout South and Latin America, Cannon came to the United States as a child, ultimately graduating from Duke University in 2003.

During her college years, Cannon wrote a series of articles for El Nuevo Herald, a Spanish-language newspaper in southern Florida owned by the Miami Herald. According to a list of articles provided to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Cannon wrote primarily about health- and culture-related topics.

After earning a degree from the University of Michigan in 2007, Cannon clerked for U.S. District Judge Steven M. Colloton on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit. She next worked in private practice in Washington for three years with prominent international law firm Gibson Dunn & Crutcher.

The question of fealty to Trump surfaced during her

2020 Senate confirmation process, when Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California asked in written questions if Cannon had had “any discussions with anyone — including, but not limited to, individuals at the White House, at the Justice Department, or any outside groups — about loyalty to President Trump?”

“No,” was Cannon’s simple reply.

Of course, being a Trump-appointed judge in no way assures deciding cases in his favor.

In May, for instance, U.S. District Judge Timothy J. Kelly — nominated by Trump in 2017 — permitted the House panel probing the Jan. 6 Capitol riot to obtain the Republican National Committee’s marketing email data leading up to the violence, turning aside claims that the committee’s practices weren’t appropriate. Other Trump-appointed judges have sided in favor of the panel’s work.

But Cannon’s opinion in this case, and her musings about the possibility of “reputational harm” caused to Trump in the event of an indictment, have focused fresh attention on her judicial background.

Cannon’s initial response to the special master request, in which she asked the Trump team for more clarity about what exactly they wanted her to do and why they thought she might have jurisdiction, suggested some skepticism. But days later, she followed up with a new order in which she said it was her “preliminary intent” to appoint a special master but would give the Justice Department an opportunity first to argue against it.

Since 2005, Cannon has been a member of the Federalist Society, a conservative legal organization that has championed judges appointed by Trump, including Supreme Court Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett.

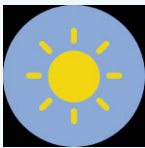
During her July 2020 confirmation hearing, the then-prosecutor noted that her mother “had to flee the repressive Castro regime in search of freedom and security,” leaving Cuba at the age of 7.

“Thank you for teaching me about the blessing that is this country and the importance of securing the rule of law for generations to come,” Cannon said, addressing her mother.

SPORTS/NEWS PAGE

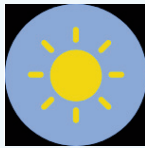
Day Weather Forecast for DFW

Thursday, Sept 8



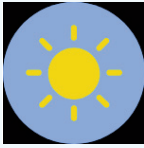
H - 88°
L - 72°

Friday, Sept. 9



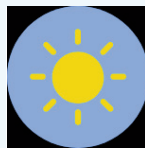
H - 88°
L - 71°

Saturday, Sept. 10



H - 89°
L - 72°

Sunday, Sept. 11



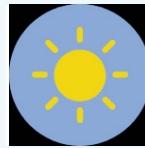
H - 89°
L - 70°

Monday, Sept. 12



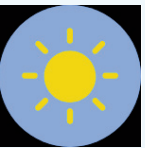
H - 85°
L - 69°

Tuesday, Sept. 13



H - 86°
L - 69°

Wednesday, Sept. 14



H - 88°
L - 70°

Dallas Cowboys - 2022 Schedule

SUN. SEPT. 11 7:20 PM	SUN. SEPT. 18 3:25 PM	MON. SEPT. 26 7:15 PM	SUN. OCT. 2 12:00 PM	SUN. OCT. 9 3:25 PM	SUN. OCT. 16 7:20 PM	SUN. OCT. 23 12:00 PM	SUN. OCT. 30 12:00 PM	SUN. NOV. 13 3:25 PM	SUN. NOV. 20 3:25 PM	THUR. NOV. 24 3:30 PM	SUN. DEC. 4 7:20 PM	SUN. DEC. 11 12:00 PM	SUN. DEC. 18 12:00 PM	SAT. DEC. 24 3:25 PM	THUR. DEC. 29 7:15 PM	TBD JAN. 7/8 TBD

Bold Fonts represent - Home Games
Photo Credit/NFL Dallas Cowboys

Continued COVID Page 1

scary or bad concept," since people are getting better at fighting it, Jha said during a recent question-and-answer session with U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont. "Obviously if we take our foot off the gas — if we stop updating our vaccines, we stop getting new treatments — then we could slip backwards."

Experts say COVID will keep causing serious illness in some people. The COVID-19 Scenario Modeling Hub made some pandemic projections spanning August 2022 to May 2023, assuming the new tweaked boosters adding protection for the newest omicron relatives would be available and a booster campaign would take place in fall and winter. In the most pessimistic scenario — a new variant and late boosters — they projected 1.3 million hospitalizations and 181,000 deaths during that period. In the most optimistic scenario — no new variant and early boosters — they projected a little more than half the number of hospitalizations and 111,000 deaths.

Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the world is likely to keep seeing repetitive surges until "we do the things we have to do," such as developing next generation vaccines and rolling them out equitably.

Topol said the virus "just has too many ways to work around our current strategies, and it'll just keep find-

ing people, finding them again, and self-perpetuating."

WILL THE NEXT VARIANT BE ANOTHER VERSION OF OMICRON?

Omicron has been around since late last year, with a series of super transmissible versions quickly displacing one another, and Binnicker believes "that will continue at least for the next few months."

But down the road, he said it's likely a new variant distinct from omicron will pop up.

The recent wave of infections and re-infections, he said, "gives the virus more chances to spread and mutate and new variants to emerge."

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CAN PEOPLE INFLUENCE THE FUTURE OF THE VIRUS?

Yes, experts said. One way is to get vaccinated and boosted.

"We have a virus out there that's still circulating,

still killing hundreds of Americans every day," Jha said in a press briefing Tuesday. But, he added: "We now have all of the capability to prevent, I believe, essentially all of those deaths. If people stay up to date on their vaccines, if people get treated if they have a breakthrough infection, we can make deaths from this virus vanishingly rare."

Not only does vaccination protect against severe disease and death, it raises the level of immunity globally.

CDC director Rochelle Walensky said Tuesday that up to 100,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations and 9,000 deaths could be prevented if Americans get the updated booster at the same rate they typically get an annual flu shot this fall. About half of Americans are typically vaccinated against the flu each year.

People can also keep protecting themselves by taking other precautions like, for example, wearing masks indoors when COVID rates are high.

Longtime nurse Catherine Mirabile said it's important not to dismiss the dangers of the coronavirus — which sickened her twice, nearly killed her husband and left them both with long COVID. Daily deaths still average around 450 in the U.S.

"People really need to look at this and still take this seriously," said the 62-year-old from Princeton, West Virginia, who is now on disability. "They could end up in the same shape we're in."

Tiafoe beats Rublev; 1st US man in US Open SF in 16 years

By HOWARD FENDRICH

NEW YORK (AP) — Frances Tiafoe became the first American man to reach the U.S. Open semifinals since 2006 by beating Andrey Rublev 7-6 (3), 7-6 (0), 6-4 behind the backing of a boisterous partisan crowd in Arthur Ashe Stadium on Wednesday.

The 24-year-old Tiafoe, who grew up in Maryland, put on a performance just as strong, if not stronger, than the one he used to eliminate 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal in the fourth round.

"Man, man, this is wild. This is crazy. Had the biggest win of my life 24 hours ago. ... That's huge growth. It's tough to turn the page," said Tiafoe, who is seeded 22nd at Flushing Meadows.

Then, looking ahead, and making sure everyone knows this big milestone is not enough to satisfy him, Tiafoe said: "Let's enjoy this one. We've got two more, guys. We've got two more."

Andy Roddick was the last U.S. man to get to the semifinals in New York, when he lost to Roger Federer in the title match 16 years ago. Roddick also was the last man from the country to win any Grand Slam singles championship, taking the 2003 U.S. Open.

Tiafoe's first career Grand Slam semifinal will come Friday against No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz or No. 11 Jannik Sinner.



Tiafoe played aggressive, offensive tennis and used 18 aces along with strong volleys to oust No. 9 Rublev, a Russian who dropped to 0-6 in major quarterfinals. Tiafoe won 31 of 41 points when he went to the net; Rublev only ventured forward 11 times.

Rain drops began falling just before the start of Tiafoe vs. Rublev, so they stood around waiting for the retractable roof to be shut. That resulted in both a cool, wind-free environment and a louder setting, with applause and yells from fans reverberating in what became an indoor arena — circumstances that favored Tiafoe.

The match featured dominant serving by both — the only break of serve came more than two hours in, when Tiafoe went ahead 4-3 in the third set, then stood mostly motionless on court, enjoying the reaction from the stadium — and the most vital moments were the two

tiebreakers.

Tiafoe is now 6-0 in tiebreakers at this U.S. Open. He excelled at that stage against Rublev, playing to the spectators and enjoying the crescendos of cheers that mirrored the way he lifted his performance.

Rublev actually had the first chance to nose ahead, with a set point at 6-5 in the first, but Tiafoe erased it with a risky forehand to a corner that drew a netted reply.

Several minutes later, it was Tiafoe who took the set, sealing it with a 130 mph ace, then strutting to the changeover, nodding and motioning with his racket for more noise. The audience obliged, including Tiafoe's pal, Washington Wizards All-Star guard Bradley Beal, from his front-row seat.

"I feel so at home on courts like this," Tiafoe told the crowd. "You guys get behind me, I want to play my best."



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Arts Legend Melba Moore Receives Joseph R. Biden Lifetime Achievement Award

By **Nsenga K. Burton, Ph.D.**, NNPA Newswire Culture and Entertainment Editor

Legendary Tony Award-winning and Grammy-nominated songstress, Melba Moore, has achieved many milestones in her dynamic career. From Broadway to television, hit records to high accolades from arts and civic leaders, Moore has overcome personal and professional obstacles on the road to her iconic status.

Friday, August 26, 2022, Moore received the Joseph R. Biden Lifetime Achievement Award, honoring her career. The event took place at Morehouse College in Atlanta GA. At the event, she also received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award for her commitment to improvement within urban communities.

Moore is no stranger to awards for her many talents and service. Moore won the Tony Award for best featured actress for her performance in Purlie (1970) and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Performance in that same year. Moore has received several Grammy nominations for her songs, "Read My Lips" and "Lean on Me," and Best New Artist



Photo Credit/NNPA Newswire

in 1971.

In recent years, the Harlem-born, Newark raised dynamo's rendition of "Lift Every Voice & Sing" (recorded in 1990) was added to the US National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress in 2017 as an "American Aural Treasure." The rendition was also entered into the Congressional Record as the Official Black National Anthem. Moore's rendition of the national Black

anthem was also added to the US National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress as an "American Aural Treasure". Moore recently released her latest album, Imagine.

Moore will also be a part of the 2023 Hollywood Walk of Fame Class, which will include Lenny Kravitz, Sheila E., Charlie Wilson, Garrett Morris and Ludacris. Moore will receive her star for the Live Performance category.

Here they are: Obamas unveil their White House portraits

Continued Portraits Page 1

for her portrait.

The portraits do not look like any others in the collection to which they will be added, in terms of style and substance.

McCurdy told the White House Historical Association for the latest edition of its "1600 Sessions" podcast that his style is "stripped down for a reason." He's also done portraits of South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and the Dalai Lama, among others.

"They have plain white backgrounds, nobody gestures, nobody — there are no props because we're not here to tell the story of the person that's sitting for them," McCurdy said. "We're here to create an encounter between the viewer and the sitter."

He compared the technique to a session with a psychiatrist in which the patient and doctor tell each other as little as possible about themselves "so that you can project onto them."

"And we're doing the same thing with these paintings," McCurdy said. "We're telling as little about the sitter as possible so that the viewer can project onto them."

McCurdy works from a photograph of his subjects, selected from hundreds of images. He spends a year to 18 months on each portrait and said he knows he's done "when it stops irritating me."

Sprung, who also was interviewed for the podcast,

described feeling as though she was in a "comedy sketch" when she met with the Obamas in the Oval Office.

She kept sinking into the couch she sat on while they sat on sturdier chairs. Then the president "flicked" away the printed talking points she had handed out to everyone in the room. Then she just "went still" and had to "gasp for air a little bit" when someone else in the meeting asked her why she paints. Then she started to cry.

"So who knows what put the interview over the top, but that's how it went," Sprung said.

She had planned on having Mrs. Obama stand in the portrait, "to give it a certain dignity," but said the former first lady "has so much dignity that I decided to do it sitting just because ... it was too much looking up at her. I'm that much shorter than her."

Sprung worked on the portrait for eight months, day and night, the most time she's ever spent on a single painting. She worked entirely from photographs taken in various locations on the State Floor of the White House. Getting the dress just right was the hardest part, she said.

"The color was so beautiful and I really wanted to get the strength of the color and the light," said Sprung, who has done portraits of the late Rep. Patsy Mink, D-Hawaii, and Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman

elected to Congress.

Recent tradition, no matter political affiliation, has had the current president genially hosting his immediate predecessor for the unveiling — as Bill Clinton did for George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush did for Clinton and Obama did for the younger Bush.

Donald Trump, who criticized almost everything about Obama and deviated from many presidential traditions, held no ceremony for Obama. So Biden, who was Obama's vice president, scheduled one for his former boss.

Obama's portrait is destined for display in the Grand Foyer of the White House, the traditional showcase for paintings of the two most recent presidents. Clinton's and George W. Bush's portraits currently hang there.

Mrs. Obama's portrait likely will be placed with her predecessors along the hallway on the Ground Floor of the White House, joining Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush.

Both McCurdy and Sprung said it was hard to keep their work on the portraits secret. McCurdy said it wouldn't have been a problem "if it had not gone on for so long." Sprung said she had to turn the portrait to the wall whenever someone came into her studio in New York.

The White House Historical Association, a nonprofit organization that

is funded through private donations and sales of books and an annual Christmas ornament, helps manage the portrait process and, since the 1960s, has paid for most of those in the collection.

Congress bought the first painting in the collection, of George Washington. Other portraits of early presidents and first ladies often came to the White House as gifts.



Photo Credit/Andrew Harnik



Photo Credit NNPA Newswire