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## 'Hidden stories and truths need to be told'

Freedom School teaches Black history on Saturdays



Chloe Truewell, 14, attended Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program. PHOTOS BY THOMAS BENDER/HERALD-TRIBUNE

**Samantha Gholar**  
Sarasota Herald-Tribune  
USA TODAY NETWORK

SARASOTA — On Saturdays over the past few months, a handful of educators and historians have been quietly teaching African American history to local students in Sarasota's historically Black neighborhood of Newtown through a community-based program known as Freedom School.

The pilot Freedom School program is run by the Manasota Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), a branch of the national organization that researches, disseminates, and preserves Black history and culture.

Leaders of ASALH are on a mission to directly combat Florida HB 7, known to critics as the 'Stop WOKE Act,' through engaging history lessons

See FREEDOM SCHOOL, Page 6A



**Jennifer Joseph**, educator/teacher program coordinator for Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program, holds a special edition remastered 2nd annual 2023 Black History Year Calendar by Jahkori Dopwell Hall.

## Doctors in India advise elderly to stay indoors

Northern state swelters under extreme heat

**Biswajeet Banerjee**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LUCKNOW, India — At least 34 people have died in the past two days as a large swath of the north Indian state Uttar Pradesh swelters under severe heat, officials said Saturday, prompting doctors to advise residents over 60 to stay indoors during the daytime.

The dead were all over 60 years old and had preexisting health conditions that may have been exacerbated by the intense heat. The fatalities occurred in Ballia district, some 200 miles southeast of Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh.

Twenty-three deaths were reported Thursday and another 11 died Friday, Ballia's Chief Medical Officer Jayant Kumar said.

"All the individuals were suffering

See HEAT, Page 11A

## Ex-Trump lawyer loses bid for release from probation

**Larry Neumeister**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump's onetime personal lawyer and the key witness against him in his New York state criminal prosecution lost his bid Friday for early release from probation following a three-year prison sentence after federal prosecutors said he's lying again.

U.S. District Judge Jesse M. Furman in Manhattan cited Michael Cohen's recent comments in a book and television appearance as reasons to conclude that early release from court supervision would not ensure rehabilitation and deterrence from future crimes.

See COHEN, Page 11A

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# Black history

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about Black Americans' contributions throughout the history of the United States.

HB 7 restricts how race is discussed in schools, colleges and workplaces, and sparked a nationwide debate over censorship, critical race theory and diversity training. Essentially, the Stop WOKE Act prohibits any teaching that could make students feel they bear personal responsibility for historic wrongs because of their race, color, sex or national origin.

With the restriction on how race is discussed in Florida classrooms in place, the next step for legislators was the removal of the advanced placement (AP) African American Studies curriculum for high school students. However, many high school students choose to take AP courses to earn college credits while enrolled in high school to give them a leg up as they approach their higher education journey. Gov. Ron DeSantis has criticized aspects of African American studies and stated the course "lacked educational value and historical accuracy" in its current form earlier this year.

It was around that time that Manasota ASALH president, attorney and historian David Wilkins, began to move forward with efforts to keep students educated about Black history.

"This attack on our history is so painful because it has happened before," Wilkins said.

## What is Freedom School?

The Freedom School program isn't new. The original Freedom Schools organized by ASALH came about during the Civil Rights Movement to address literacy and disparities in education.

The parallels between then and now, Wilkins said, are easy to see.

"The schools were birthed during Freedom Summer ...," Wilkins said, referring to the June 1964 campaign to register Black voters in Mississippi. "People during that time saw the need for learning the basics as they were working to get adults registered to vote and organizing."

"When we started strategizing about how to respond to the bill it was recom-



Left to right: Gretchen Johnson, an educator/teacher at Emma E. Booker Elementary School and the Pre-K reading educator/teacher at Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program; Edna Sherrell, educator/teacher coordinator for Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program; Jennifer Joseph, educator/teacher program coordinator for Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program; Chloe Truewell, 14, attended Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program; Simeon Glover, 18, attended Manasota ASALH's "Freedom School" program; and Mydahlia Glover, educator/teacher for the preschool 3- to 6-year-olds. THOMAS BENDER/HERALD-TRIBUNE

mended to take a look at reinstating the Saturday Freedom Schools."

Word about Freedom School grew quickly, Wilkins and the volunteer educators say. Ahead of its late February launch, the Freedom School had over 50 registered students who signed up to learn about African American history on Saturdays in Newtown.

Through engaging classwork about Black Americans, coupled with the latest online e-books and lessons, Freedom School's 10-week pilot program made an immediate impact on local students and educators.

## Passion for teaching and learning reignited at Freedom School

Chloe Truewell, 14, attended each

session of Freedom School to satisfy her curiosity about her the African American side of her identity she said, but the incoming ninth-grader has been independently learning about Black history since she was a first-grader.

Truewell credits Emma E. Booker Elementary teacher, Major Hundley, for sparking her curiosity about Black history.

"She taught me everything I know already about Black history," Truewell said. "I've always loved my history. I used to give up my recess time to teach other kids about history and my teachers always helped me."

As a biracial child, Truewell felt led to continue learning more about her culture since she was 7.

"She did a PowerPoint presentation while she was at Bay Haven for her classmates," Marie Truewell said of her daughter. "I remember she wanted to just do more than her assignments."

Truewell completed all 10 weeks of the pilot program and says the school opened her up to even more knowledge.

"I got to know the truth. There were some things I did not know, a lot of it kind of shocked me and it kind of hurt too to know that I've been lied to, that my teachers lied to me about different things. Like how the rumors about how Africa is an unstable (continent), I didn't know it was one of the most economically stable places in the world until I came here," Truewell explained. "This program really shows you a different perspective of the world and history. It really has made me think about things differently."

Freedom School has also connected Truewell with new, diverse teachers who all share the love of learning.

Educators such as Gretchen Johnson, who was tasked with teaching students as young as pre-K basic lessons about Black history throughout the program. Johnson, led by Freedom School teacher coordinator Edna Sherrell and program director Jennifer Joseph, curated and sourced materials for the

youngest learners after a chance encounter with a grandmother who saw other students attending Freedom School on a regular library visit one Saturday.

"What you want to foster more than anything, in any kid, is intellectual curiosity," Joseph said. "Once I knew what the mission was, I was onboard."

Joseph is a retired higher education administrator who previously worked at Dartmouth University and Morehouse University. She serves as Freedom School's program educator and leads a volunteer team of 30 multiracial educators from 15 Sarasota County district schools. She believes the show of community support, educator interest and student engagement demonstrate the need for the Freedom School.

"This (Freedom School) is a statement. Having to implement this program speaks to people's awareness of how threatened our students are with not being able to access this crucial history. It's such a shame ... there are many adults who don't know things — Juneteenth is a good example of that, and how it's become such a big holiday over the past few years. People didn't know this history."

Wilkins echoed Joseph. He believes that ASALH's Freedom School, which has been reinstated in ASALH's five other branches across Florida, helps to ensure that students are able to learn lessons that could be otherwise forgotten.

"The support we have for this program is a reflection of the level of angst organizations and community members have," Wilkins said. "When we lie about our history, we miss stories like Juneteenth and many others. There are great stories all Americans need to know. These hidden stories and truths need to be told."

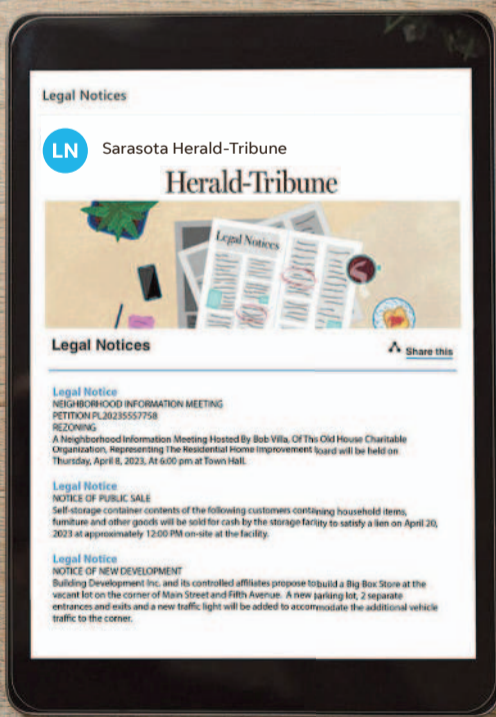
Samantha Gholar covers social justice news for the Herald-Tribune and USA TODAY Network. Connect with her at sgholar@gannett.com or on Twitter: @samanthagholar

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