

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent community gazette

since 2016

January 26, 2024



Election integrity 2024: non-partisan viewpoint

Election integrity is an issue in America as we vote in November to choose the next President of the United States. No one (regardless of party affiliation) wants to repeat the problems encountered in the 2020 elections. Election integrity is a non-partisan issue.



Join your fellow Montebello residents to hear an expert on the subject. The speaker will be Lynn Taylor, president of the [Virginia Institute for Public Policy](#), a non-profit organization founded on non-partisan values.

Date: Thursday, February 15, 2024

Time: 7 - 8 p.m.

Place: Building 4 Party Room (doors open at 6:30 p.m.)

There will be time for questions and comments after the speaker's presentation. Light refreshments will be served.

– Peg Mastal 📧

ESL volunteers needed

Want to make a big difference in someone's life? Join us teaching English



to our immigrant neighbors. Volunteers must commit to teach one class per week, from February 13 to May 2, 2024. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11:30 a.m. or 7:30-9 p.m. Our adult students attend both days, but volunteers teach once a week.

We need morning teachers for Zoom classes and evening teachers for in-person classes at St. John's Lutheran Church, 5952 Franconia Road. No experience necessary – just a smile and desire to help people from other countries. Teacher training is February 3. For more information, go to www.sjlc.com/serve/esl-volunteers Or contact ESL Coordinator Dori McCormick at esl@sjlc.com – Karen Barnes 📧

voices on the 37

The Montebello Voice wants to hear from you: musings, travels, announcements, photos, book reviews, commentary, memoirs, essays, analysis, poems, suggestions, club news, recipes, and free ads
A publication for the residents, by the residents

Cover photo by Dian McDonald



Cellist Lourdes de la Peña and pianist Yechan “Enoch” Lim performed Goltermann, Haydn, Schubert, Chopin, Kapustin, Fauré, and Squire

Photo by Dian McDonald

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African art objects grace the display case



By Guinevere Jones

Kente: More than a Cloth

Narrow strip-weaving is rooted in 9th century West African civilizations. Kente, whose special stylization was adopted in 16th century Ghana, is a visual documentation of history, philosophy, literature, and social values. Notably associated with the Asante people, Kente has maintained its status as one of Africa's most prestigious handwoven cloths. It has achieved international recognition and has evolved into an art form whose social significance now transcends ethnic, cultural, and national boundaries. It is a tangible manifestation of an ever-growing sense of pan-African and global cross-cultural camaraderie.

Researched and published by Dr. Kwaku Ofori-Ansa, professor emeritus of African art history at Howard University.

Ethiopian processional cross

One of the most detailed of all crosses. Its intricate lattice work represents eternal life. The three parts that termi-

nate its points represent the holy trinity. Crosses may be of the processional type with a socket at the base so they may be mounted on a staff and carried in church ceremonies or hand-held blessing crosses used by priests in benedictions.

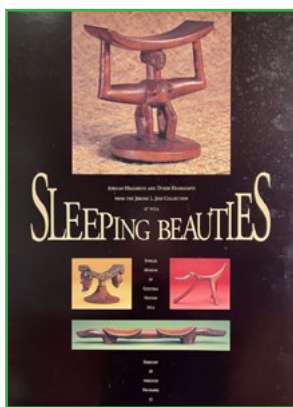
Makonde family tree

The Makonde people of Tanzania and Mozambique are renowned for their prowess in wood carvings. The Makonde artist will typically work seated on the ground, using only hand tools. A Makonde family tree is a visual representation of the genealogical relationships within a Makonde family. It depicts the ancestral lineage, tracing the connections between different generations, typically through the female line in the matrilineal social structure of the Makonde people. The family tree showcases the relationships between parents, children, siblings, and extended family members, reflecting the kinship ties and the importance of lineage in Makonde culture.



West African headrest, a sleeping beauty

The headrest is a status symbol and is associated with dreaming and divination or the practice of seeking knowledge of the future by supernatural means. It is designed for efficiency and comfort. While it aligns the spine, it also protects intricate hairstyles from the ground. 🏠



Photos by Dian McDonald

“Take it to the board!” Smoking ban is on the back burner

By *Mikhailina Karina*

A yes or no question, “Do you want smoking banned inside of units here at Montebello?” was recommended by the management to appear on the March Board of Directors election ballot.

The straight-forward question, proposed by the General Manager Eric Finke, was “to gauge overall sentiment from owners on the topic,” he stated in his memo on page 10 of the [board packet](#).

At the January 23 work session, Board President Jon Kandel said the election ballot was not the appropriate vehicle for the smoking ban survey, which will be addressed this summer or fall using data salvaged from last year’s [compromised second-hand smoke survey](#). The survey, which appeared to have record-setting 823 responses, was found to have 450 responses invalidated due to hacking [suspicion](#). Overall, the legitimate responses cited health concerns and quality of life as reasons for enacting a smoking ban inside individual units.

According to multiple sources with first-hand knowledge of the survey, the reason for the unprecedented manipulation of results was the management’s decision to move from the secure platform Survey Monkey to an inferior Google product for a negligible savings of a few hundred dollars. According to GM Finke’s memo, the association will return to Survey Monkey for the annual cost of \$1,000.

“The information gathered will help the Board shape future policies not yet determined surrounding a potential ban including implementation, grandfathering, and enforcement should a smoking ban be enacted at a future date as allowed by VA law,” Finke wrote in his memo. “Accurately knowing resident opinions and feelings on the controversial topic of a smoking ban is important for the Board to make an educated decision in the best inter-

ests of Montebello.”

Montebello would be joining a growing list of local condo communities who are passing smoking bans. Following the July 21, 2021 [law](#) that allows condo and property owners associations to easily ban smoking inside units or homes requires a simple board majority. Prior to the law, such bans required a two-thirds vote from owners to change bylaws. This means the Montebello board, if they so desired, could enact a smoking ban by Valentine’s Day.

However, since boards of directors are elected by the owners, changing bylaws was not as simple as a vote. In 2020, nearby Carlyle Towers in Alexandria passed a smoking ban that prohibits cigarette smoking and vaping in individual homes, common areas, and the outdoor grounds. Because it was done before the new law, Carlyle Towers bylaw was ratified by a super-majority of the owners in the 549-unit complex.

Carlyle General Manager Tamika Richardson was quoted in an article in the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors [publication](#): “A smoke-free environment means our co-owners and future residents will enjoy health and safety benefits, and this may make the property more attractive to buyers,” she said. In multi-unit housing, second-hand smoke can migrate through open windows or balconies, doorways, ventilation systems, or plumbing vents, fostering nuisance complaints from neighbors, she said.

One common concern among Montebello residents is changing the rules on people who purchased their homes with the understanding they were allowed to smoke in their units. At Carlyle, about 4 percent of the owners are “grandfathered,” GM Richardson explained, but new smokers cannot join that group. The smoking prohibition applies to residents, guests, and staff and contractors working in the building or grounds. In town hall meetings held to discuss the ban, residents expressed

concerns about the health issues associated with second-hand smoke, uncertainties about the safety of electronic cigarettes, and the stench of cannabis smoke. These were all likely factors in the approval of the ban, Richardson said.

In Old Town, [Potowmack Crossing condominiums](#) has also banned smoking and vaping in all units and common elements, including all outdoor areas.

A 2019 article on the Community Association Institute site, [“Breathing clear: Adopting smoke-free policies in your high-rise community”](#) outlined health and legal liability reasons for instituting smoking bans. It was written two years before the Virginia Assembly made such bans easier to implement with a board vote.

When *The Voice* contacted individuals responsible for the survey last October – general manager, board president, members of the QJ committee – for comment regarding the next steps for gauging community support, holding town halls, using available data gleaned from the survey – a cordial response stated, “Thank you very much for your interest and willingness to help get the word out. Please be patient and all your questions will be answered.”

At the last board work session, GM Finke mentioned his recent Meet the Manager event where residents passionately voiced their complaints about neighbors who smoke and support for the smoking ban. His repeated response at both meetings was “Take it to the board!”

GM Finke’s recommendation “to make a motion to add this question to the election ballot since such a divisive topic and the first time incorporating a survey onto the election ballot” was dismissed by director Rolf Dietrich as “adding confusion to the ballot” without allowing owners an opportunity to present both sides of the argument.

The community is holding its breath waiting for the board to act. 🙏

Trump's grand charade

By Chester Taylor

Donald Trump isn't seeking the presidency because he cares about America. He is running for president in the hopes of avoiding some of the more serious indictments against him. He knows by being a candidate he can use money from campaign funds and political action committees to help pay for his legal fees. He is facing 11 civil and criminal cases, plus appeals headed to the Supreme Court. The appeals are to determine if he has any executive immunity from any of the criminal cases and whether the 14th Amendment disqualifies him from being president because he engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the United States. Sixteen states have cases or appeals pending on Trump's disqualification. His claims of election interference are malarky. He has cheated, lied, and broken the law. Now he must pay.

Of the 11 cases Trump is facing, seven are major civil cases. A civil case is a lawsuit, a dispute between two or more parties. For example, a person can sue another person for defamation after circulating a false story. A civil case involves getting a court order for the defendant to pay damages or perform a specific action for the plaintiff. It can also include punitive damages for particularly egregious behavior. As an example, Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani was ordered to pay \$148 million in damages for making false claims about two Georgia election workers in the 2020 election. This included \$75 million in punitive damages. Right after court, Giuliani repeated the same false statements and is going to trial again, already found liable for defamation. He has six additional civil cases pending.

Going to civil trial is dicey. In the E. Jean Carroll civil trial, Trump was ordered to pay \$5 million for defam-

ing her after she accused him of rape and defamation. Then Trump repeated the same false statements about her again after trial. She filed another civil suit against him with a trial date set for January 16, 2024. Since a judge has already found Trump liable for defamation, the jury will only have to set damages. In this trial, the [infamous Access Hollywood tape](#) of Trump bragging on how he abuses women will be allowed to be shown.

Trump faces four serious criminal indictments, two federal and two state, with another state indictment possible. While an indictment is not a conviction, chances of being convicted by federal prosecutors run about 99.5 percent according to data from the Pew Research Center. All could result in felonies that could result in large fines and prison time. Felony convictions remain on a person's criminal record for the rest of their life, even if they receive a pardon.

Trump's one case involving the intentional taking, unsecure storing, and showing off top-secret documents to unauthorized persons is particularly disturbing, given Trump's cozy relationship with Vladimir Putin involving Putin's election tampering and donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to pro-Trump super PAC America First Action. The evidence of this election tampering by Russia was in a top-secret binder that Trump directed be sent from a safe at CIA headquarters to the White House Oval Office and then it just disappeared. Trump calls the accusations of mishandling classified documents an "empty hoax" but does not explain the whereabouts of the binder.

Then there is the matter of attempting to overturn the 2020 election. Trump's legal strategy is to delay criminal legal proceedings as long as possible in the hopes he will be elected president and can pardon himself to make the most serious indictments go away. Since this has never been done before,

the Supreme Court would have to determine the constitutional validity of such an action. Any president could pardon Trump for his federal crimes, but not for future crimes, state crimes, or civil cases. In the Georgia case, their State Board of Pardons and Paroles, a five-member panel appointed by the governor, has the power to grant a pardon. If Michigan goes forward with a state criminal trial and Trump is found guilty, the power to pardon lies with the governor.

In a possible delaying tactic, Trump and his lawyers are arguing that a sitting president has absolute immunity from official acts done while in office and, therefore, cannot be brought before criminal proceedings. U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, replied "...that position [as President] does not confer a lifelong 'get-out-of-jail free' pass. Former Presidents enjoy no special conditions on their federal criminal liability. Defendant may be subject to federal investigation, indictment, prosecution, conviction, and punishment for any criminal acts undertaken while in office." DOJ's Special Counsel Jack Smith asked the Supreme Court to make a speedy decision on this argument, but the Court denied the request and said it must go to the D.C. Court of Appeals first. Trump wrote, "Deranged Jack Smith's 'SUPER SPEEDY' lawsuit against me...It is Election Interference like never before seen in our Country." Ironic since it is Trump who has been indicted for election interference.

According to *The New York Times*, Trump has used roughly \$27 million in funds from his political action committees (PACs) on legal fees in 2023. Trump claims that his legal expenses related to his 41 current felony charges are campaign-related, and are costs incurred due to his status as a candidate. In 2021 and 2022, Trump's PACs funded more than \$16 million in legal costs that included the Stormy Daniels

hush money case. If called out for using PAC money to pay for his legal fees in the hush money case, the hosts of Make It Smart podcast explained that

Trump could argue “it has to do with him potentially influencing an election or...that he’s being politically targeted because of his campaign.”

The United States is a nation of laws. We depend on the courts to serve justice.

Without adherence to the law, we are nothing more than an autocracy. Democracy would be dead.

On the left are the civil and criminal cases against Trump compiled from multiple media sources, including “The Cases Against Trump: A Guide,” *The Atlantic*, and “The long list of legal cases against Donald Trump,” *The Guardian*. 📖

| CASE | PLAINTIFF(S) | DESCRIPTION | TYPE | STATUS |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|----------|--|
| Against Trump & Hotel for improper spending of non-profit funds | DC District Attorney | For illegally using non-profit money to enrich his family. | Civil | Reached \$175 million settlement 5/23/22. On appeal. |
| NY State Fraud against Trump, <i>et al.</i> | NY Attorney General | For manipulating the valuations of estate properties & avoiding tax liabilities. | Civil | Found guilty of fraud 9/2023, pending ruling on damages & status of property—fined \$15,000 for violation of gag order. NY AG asks for \$350 million in penalties. Final amount and actions TBD. Will be appealed. |
| Defamation & Sexual Assault | E. Jean Carroll | For Trump's sexually assaulting her in department store dressing room. | Civil | Carroll awarded \$5 million on 5/2023, judge said that Trump raped her, a 2nd defamation trial set for Jan 16, 2024. The notorious Access Hollywood Tape of Trump will be shown. |
| Fraud of inheritance money | Mary Trump | Suing Trump & his siblings for defrauding her of inheritance money. | Civil | Pending |
| Trump Corp class action suit | 3 defendants | Alleging racketeering and of fraudulently encouraging unsophisticated investors to give large amounts of money to organizations connected to the Trumps. | Civil | The trial is scheduled for January 29, 2024. |
| Suing Trump over Capitol Riots | 2 DC Metro Police Officers | For directing and inciting the riot that led to them being assaulted by poles & pepper spray. | Civil | Pending—Trump's appeal for immunity denied by federal appeals court in DC, sent to Supreme Court 12/29/23. |
| Suing Trump over Jan 6 th riot | Capitol Police Officer Moore | Because Trump "inflamed, encouraged, incited, directed: the insurrectionist mob causing injury to himself and other officers. | Civil | Pending |
| Manhattan Hush Money | Manhattan District Attorney General | For felony charges against Trump alleged for falsifying business records as part of a scheme to pay hush money to women who said they had had sexual relations with Trump. | Criminal | The trial set to go March 25, 2024. |
| Mar-a-Lago Documents | Dept of Justice Special Counsel | Charging Trump with 37 felonies in for willful retention of national-security documents, obstruction of justice, withholding classified documents, and false statements. | Criminal | The trial is set to go on May 20, 2024. If trial delayed to January 20, 2025 Trump or any Republican would likely shut down the case. |
| Fulton County Election Subversion | District Attorney | Racketeering Case against Trump & 18 others, alleging conspiring to steal the 2020 election. | Criminal | In process for some of the defendants, Trump & others have a trial date of August 5, 2024. |
| Federal Interference Case | Federal Special Counsel | Two felony counts for obstructing an official proceeding, one felony count to defraud the U.S. and one count of conspiracy. | Criminal | On Aug. 1, 2023, the grand jury approved an indictment against Trump, charging him with an extraordinary conspiracy that threatened to disenfranchise millions of Americans. |
| A possible fifth criminal indictment for Michigan election tampering/bribery. | | Trump personally phoned two Republican members of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers, not to sign the certification of the election results in Michigan. Ronna McDaniel, chair of the Republican National Committee, was also involved in the call. | Criminal | Pending. So far, sixteen people who signed paperwork falsely claiming Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election in Michigan have been criminally charged by Michigan's attorney general. |

Disrespect versus decorum and dignity

By Bob Shea

The 9th Marquess of Queensberry, John Shotto Douglas, is remembered for developing 12 rules governing the sport of boxing. A nobleman of the Victorian era, Douglas persuaded his peers that even the brutal sport of boxing needed rules detailing what was permissible in the bloody matches in England.

Where is the Marquess when he is needed now? He is needed not now in boxing, but to mandate rules for the conduct of our elected officials in the US Capital.

Remember September 9, 2009 when, during a nationally televised speech by President Barack Obama to a joint session of Congress, Representative Joe Wilson from South Carolina shouted, “You lie!” at the president? Senator John McCain called the outburst “totally disrespectful.” On September 15, only six days later, the House passed a resolution of disapproval against Wilson.

Those were the good old days.

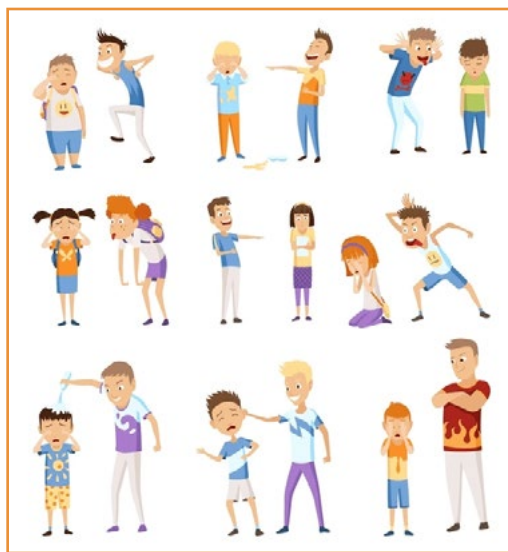
Earlier this year, Congresswomen Majorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert engaged in a loud and expletive-loaded verbal cat fight on the House floor over which one had first introduced a resolution to impeach President Joe Biden, and therefore which one deserved the credit.

Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was accused of elbowing Representative Tim Burchett in the kidneys in a scrum in a House corridor, allegedly due to the fact that Burchett voted to remove McCarthy as House Speaker. McCarthy denied the assault, but bragged “If I kidney-punched someone, he would be on the ground.”

Representative James Comer, on the House floor, accused Representative Jared Moskowitz who was wearing a blue suit of looking like a “Smurf.” Score one for childish insults.

In the upper chamber, Senator Mark-

wayne Mullin, during a formal senate hearing, called for Teamster President Sean O’Brien to “stand your butt up.” The senator was standing and taking off his wedding ring to throw a punch at O’Brien when Senator Bernie Sanders gavelled him to order, reminding him that he was “a United States Senator.” Mullin later refused to apologize for his conduct, suggesting that a return to the days of fistfights and canings in the Congress might help restore respect for the institution. Can you define respect?



What Mullin forgot was that the bulk of those confrontations, including the near-fatal caning of Senator Charles Sumner, occurred in the mid-1800s as a polarized nation was on the brink of a violent downward spiral to our deadly civil war.

What happened to the days when even political rivals in the Congress referred to each other as “the esteemed gentleman from the great state of (another state)?”

Tip O’Neil, the hard-nosed Democratic Speaker of the House, would occasionally share a glass of bourbon with Republican President Ronald Reagan. Despite widely differing views on policy, the two respected each other’s position and recognized that civility and calm discussion could move the governing process forward.

In the last Republican “debate” from Birmingham, those who elected to waste 120 minutes of their time watched four candidates for the highest office in the land engage in two hours of insults, name-calling, and ego-driven claims to be the chosen one. It was all personal with few if any discussions of policy. Unfortunately it was a slugfest for second place, for the one some elected but timid and anonymous party officials call the Orange Jesus was not on the stage. He was too busy identifying “vermin to be eliminated” and noting the “poisoning of the nation’s blood” by immigrants from other countries. Did he ever recall where his wife came from?

Our elected leaders all too often resemble 6th graders in a fight on the playground at recess, with supporters wearing T-shirts in the Capitol that say “F--- Biden” and referring to the Vice President as “the Ho.” How can we maintain a functional society when violence and disrespect become the new normal? Have we lost all dignity and decorum? Masculine theatrical swagger that we usually associate with adolescents is all too commonplace.

These are not bikers (with apologies to all bikers) disagreeing after too many Bud Lights in a shady blue-collar bar. They are the people we elected to make our laws, spend our tax dollars, and guide our nation. Our Congress is totally dysfunctional when taunts and skirmishes take the place of reasoned governing, compromise, and getting the job done. We see a daily soap opera of rage, nihilism, and backstabbing that negates competent leadership and governing. As an aside, the last Congress, prior to adjournment for the holidays, passed just 24 bills. Can you say unproductive?

Where is John Shotto Douglas when we need him? An even better question is: “How do we explain this to our kids?” 🙄



Photo by Don Savage