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# Jamaican **Makes History:** First Black Woman To Earn **Biophysical Chemistry Degree** In Virginia

**By Stephanie Korney** Jamaica.com

Jay-Anne Jamaican Johnson is set to be the first black female student to graduate from James Madison University (JMU) in Virginia with a bachelor's degree in biophysical chemistry.

According to Linette Watkins, the head of the University's Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, JMU is the only school in the Virginia Commonwealth to offer this degree.

According to Isaiah Sumner, professor of chemistry at JMU, Johnson joined his lab as a first-year student in 2018, which he noted as "kind of remarkable in itself," as many first-year students do not feel ready to join a chemistry lab in general and one like his in particu-

lar. Johnson said it was also difficult for her to avoid realizing that she stood out for other reasons. She said that it took a few weeks in class before she noticed that she was the only black student there.

Sumner followed her growth as a biochemistry student with interest and watched her go on to present her research at national conferences. At one of the conferences, he received an email from someone who saw her present her work and wrote, "Wow, this is fantastic! She should come to my school for graduate work!" This was the first time anything like that had ever happened, Sumner added. A publication based on Johnson's work is currently in prepara-

Johnson's sorority sister, Lauryn Johnson described Jay-Anne as being "involved in so much stuff" that she has to check her planner to schedule time with friends. Johnson's impact on JMU is evident



in the list of clubs and organizations she is a member: cofounder of the JMU Chapter of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers; helped to establish an LGBTQ+ organization for minority students at

According

Lauryn, "Jay-Anne has made her mark on the campus. Many people know her, and many are likely to follow in her footsteps."

Johnson is hoping that other black and minority students like her will "flood the hospitals, flood the health care world, flood the STEM fields with black chemists, black engineers, black biologists, and just let them know

that we as black people are amazing."

Everyone who knows Johnson, including Professor Sumner, has no doubt that she will go on to inspire others in the future. "I told her once, 'You may be the first black woman to earn this degree, but guaranteed you're not going to be the last. You opened doors that weren't open before," Sumner said.

# United Order Of Mechanics Donates Bikes, Helmets To Help Decrease Chronic Abesenteeism

By John Perkins

Chronic absenteeism is of serious concern for Hartford Public Schools. dents to attend school regularly, On average approximately 25% of stu- the Independent United Order dents are chronically absent.

Evidence has shown dents who are chronically absent have higher rates of reading difficulties, less engagement in school-related activities, and overall lower achievement scores. According to research some of the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism are listed below

According to a January 29, 2021 article published in the Hartford Courant, Hartford Public Schools are considering extending the school day or moving to a longer school year to address attendance and academic achievement issues that have worsened during the pandemic.

The article continues, this school year, 48% of in-person learners are considered chronically absent in the Hartford Public Schools. Meanwhile, only 44% of high school students are on track for graduation, and only a quarter of elementary school students are reading on grade level, according to the district's January budget preview.

To help motivate stuof Mechanics located at 3363

**Barriers** 

• Illness, both chronic

mental health, vision,

Unsafe path to/from

Poor Transportation

Frequent moves or

school changes

Involvement with

child welfare or

juvenile justice

systems

and acute

Trauma

school

Lack of health,

or dental care

Main Street, Hartford, CT adopted three elementary schools (Wish, SAND, and Rawson). They donated six (6) bikes to each school to be awarded to students, male and

> **Negative School Experiences**

## Struggling

- academically or socially
- Bullying
- Suspensions and expulsions
- Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience
- Undiagnosed disability
- Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability

cant attendance improvement for a specified marketing period. The bikes may also help to boost health as the summer approaches and restrictions are lifted giving more

females, who demonstrate signifi-

#### Lack of **Engagement**

- Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction
- No meaningful relationships with adults in school
- Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school
- Unwelcoming school climate
- Failure to earn credits/ no future plans
- Many teacher absences or longterm substitutes

children more options for outdoor activities after having being indoors for almost a year.

The helmets were donated

Continued on Page 2

#### **Misconceptions**

- Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused
- Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning
- Sporadic absences aren't a problem
- Attendance only matters in the older grades

## **Donation Of Bikes, Helmets**

Continued from Page 1

by Safe Kids Connecticut, a program based out of the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, a statewide network of organizations and individuals who work together to prevent unintentional injury in children ages 0-19. Safe Kids Connecticut is a multifaceted organization that works to reduce death and injury rates of children through community education, public policy change, creating safe environments, and conducting research.

The Independent United

Order of Mechanics Lodge believes that such a project would help to foster the social, culture, and behavioral supports needed to motivate emotional and academic outcomes for all students.

The funds to purchase the bikes were made possible from a grant of the West Indian Foundation. The funds were granted support the lodge customary Children's Christmas party and back-to-school supplies. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and in keeping with the State of CT and CDC recommendations the Christmas party was can-

The District Grand Master subsequently made a decision to redirect the funds to what the lodge saw as a more viable and beneficial program to assist students' outcome.

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## **Warning: Credit Card Skimmers Ahead Of Summer Travel**

The Department of the seal on each gas pump isn't brotious when paying at the pump, following a report of a skimming device at a gas station in

"People are driving more, and that means they're filling up more, but the last thing many consumers are thinking about is whether or not their gas pump card reader is secure," said DCP Commissioner Michelle H. **Seagull.** "The easiest way to avoid a credit card skimmer is to pay in cash or to pay inside the gas station, but we understand most consumers prefer the convenience of paying at the pump. Still, consumers should keep track of when and where they're stopping for gas, and regularly check their credit card statements for fraudulent c t i v i t y

"With more people hitting the road to go on summer vacations now that they're vaccinated, it's important to be vigilant of credit card skimming devices when you're stopping for gas," said Attorney General William Tong. "Before filling up your tank, check the seal of the gas pump to make sure it hasn't been tampered with. If you can, pay with cash inside. If you plan to use your credit card to pay for gas, identify and catch potential fraud r 1

As consumers gear up for summer travel, DCP is offering the following tips that can help prevent thieves from stealing financial and identifying informa-O

What You Can Do at the Pump: and • Check the seal. Many stations at dcp.foodandstandards@ct.gov. use security seals on the fuel dispenser access panels. Make sure

Consumer Protection (DCP) is ken or tampered with. If it is, that reminding consumers to be cau- indicates that someone not authorized to inspect a gas pump has tampered

- · Report it to an attendant. If you see a pump that you believe may have been tampered with, don't use it. You should report that pump's issue to the station attendant.
- · Use your credit card or pay by cash. If you pay by cash, you won't fall victim to a skimming attack. If you use your credit card, you will be able to recover your funds more easily and keep money in your bank account.
- Pay inside. Paying inside reduces your risk of falling victim to a skimming attack significantly because it's much harder for fraudsters to place a skimmer indoors near the cash register. If you must pay outside, pick the pump closest to the building or securi-

What You Can Do at Home:

- · Check your credit card statement regularly. If you have a charge that looks unfamiliar, it's important that you notice as soon as possible and report it immediately to your credit card company so that you can take the steps necessary to get a refund and possibly cancel your card.
- Plan your trips. If you're taking a long road trip, plan ahead so you know where you're getting gas and you can re-trace your steps if need be. According to reports, stations on check your statement regularly to or near the interstate are at the most for skimming.
  - · Notify the authorities. If you believe you've fallen victim to a skimming attack, make sure you alert your police and If consumers have questions for DCP, or need to file a complaint related to gasoline, they may contact our Food Standards Division

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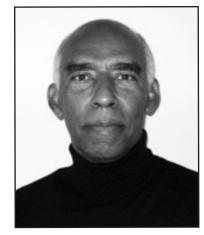
# Reparation: Precedent Setting And Denial

The vision is startling. God instructs the leaders of an enslaved, powerless people to plunder personal possessionsjewelry, fine clothing, gold and silver vessels, and anything of value from their slave masters, those for whom thy worked numerous lifetimes over without compensation.

After hauling an enormous load of their enslavers prized possessions, they are to get up and walk away from the armed nation they served. He will be leading them to a very enviable location. A place they will call their home. This is the historical record of the Jews.

The implication is plain. God brings justice to bear against those who bargain away another's labor, their personal human resources, their human capital. It's an interminable principle that is still not understood today as the United States of America continues to grapple with it.

The clamor is growing more deafening regarding the issue of repairing a horrendous wrong imposed on a specific



Jim Z. Daniels

group of people. African Slaves. It's about the taking by force from a people what was rightfully theirs; their possession without assigning compensable value.

The picture of that liberating scene transports the observer to the annual spring-time celebration of the Jewish Festival Passover. It's the most solemn of celebrations and linked inseparably to the slaying of a lamb, the enjoyment of a meal and a reinforcement of a historical benchmark that reminds all that someone intervened on the side of righting an intolerable wrong that persisted for 400

nation's valuables was clearly intended to repair a relationship where a certain group of people benefited from another's labor that was not freely given. For 400 years they were likened to a piece of furniture, or a slab of firewood, or a a d v a n t a g e brick made with straw but not to a person made in the image of God.

would be a sham if it did not remind all of the experience, horrors, and inhumanity of slavery. That what was taken away precisely because it had value benefited there is any joy in the celebration it is entirely connected to the reality that the day arrived and they were

It has become increasingly difficult in the United states to discuss human slavery without contending with the issue of economic repair when it is well known that slavery, free labor, gave the United States a jump start, a favorable handicap, to what eventually resulted in the greatest industrialized nation in human experience.

But when the first phase of Plundering an entire a strategy thousands of years after the liberation of the Israelites from slavery took shape to repair this abominable wrong in the form of Affirmative Action in the workplace, the hue and cry were that AA gave a certain group an unfavorable

Who were protesting? The solemn festival Those who had been and still were the most favored group. This spilled over into calls to examine at length and in depth the issue of equal opportunity, equity, and fairness.

Perhaps the greatest chalthe slave masters' community. If lenge to any effort to engage in rational discussions of the issue of reparation is to admit that ours, like many communities around the world, move very slowly towards any admission of a national wrong.

> As one example, President Bill Clinton in 1997 admitted to a national wrong growing out of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment where black men were infected with the disease as part of a governmentorchestrated project to determine the effect of untreated syphilis in black

This was not welcome in certain parts of our country because there are those who believe that any admission of national wrongs is a sign of weakness.

It is no secret that one of the longest and perhaps the loudest, highly placed calls for an examination, if not a redress of the issue of reparations is the late US Representative John Convers (D-Mich), who in 1989 introduced in Congress H.R. 3745 for a commission to study the issue of reparation for the descendants of slaves. It has very little support from congressional members.

One city in Illinois-Evanston, has moved out on this issue, providing what clearly is an introduction into our national discussion - reparation payments of up to \$25,000 to the descendants of slaves who qualify.

Other cities or towns will be watching how this initial effort propels a more elaborate examination of this issue. We will continue to mark the evolution of this topic in the weeks ahead.

## McCrory Votes To Approve Comprehensive Bill To Declare Racism A Public Health Crisis, Health Issues Exacerbated By Pandemic



HARTFORD, Recently, State Senator Doug McCrory (D-Hartford) joined the Senate in its approval of a bill to declare racism a public health crisis, ensure our state is prepared for future pandemics and address the current public health challenges caused or exacerbated by COVID-19.

The following is a brief excerpt from Senate Bill 1. "An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental Health Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic," will now move to the state House of Representatives for furdebate and action.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the long-existent health disparities in our communities. Disparities that are way past time for being addressed and this legislation takes substantive steps to do so," said Sen. McCrory. "An aspect of this bill that I welcome is the development of a gun violence intervention and prevention advisory committee that will identify community-based strategies and programs for reducing gun violence, along with opportunities to fund them.

The committee is a critical collaborative step in keeping our children safe and stopping future acts of violence that leave lasting trauma. I am thankful to my colleagues for their dedicated work on this bold legislation and to be able to join them in supit." of

SB 1 is a comprehensive bill, with health equity at its foundation, to address the state's current response to COVID-19, preparedness in the event of another major public health crisis and declares racism a public health crisis, creating a commission on Racial Equity in Public Health to document and make recommendations to decrease the effect of racism on public health.

Regarding the state's COVID-19 response, SB 1 requires the Department of Public Health to conduct a study on the state's response to the pandemic and, no later than February 1, 2022, the Commissioner of Public Health must submit a preliminary report to the legislature's Public Health Committee with the commissioner's recommendations.

The bill continues to address health equity by requiring the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to develop a mental health toolkit to help employers address employee mental health needs that arise due to COVID-19.

SB 1 takes on women's health through several improvements such as requiring the chairpersons of the Public Health Committee to convene a working group to advance breast health and breast cancer awareness, requiring DPH to conduct a study to determine whether the department should establish a state certification process for doulas and requiring the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee established in the general statutes to annually report disaggregated data regarding the information and findings obtained through the committee's investigation process to the Public Health Committee.

According the National League of Cities, over "90 cities publicly declaring racism a public health crisis in 2020." According to Pew Charitable Trusts article from June of 2020, "Black women are up to four times more likely to die of pregnancy related complications than white women. Black men are more than twice as likely to be killed by police as white men. And the average life expectancy of African Americans is four years lower than the rest of the U.S. population." Also, per Pew, "pervasive racism is the cause," for these inequities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has also commented on the issue, "racism—both interpersonal and structural, negatively affects the mental and physical health of millions of people, preventing them from attaining their highest level of health, and consequently, affecting the health of our t i o n

The bill advanced out of the Public Health Committee by a 22-11 tally on March 26 and received support from medical professionals, the state's association of boards of education and non-profits and advocacy groups for social justice during the public hearing phase of legislative session. Among the

speakers in support were Jennifer Barahona, the chief executive officer at Norwalk ACTS, who said "Racism clearly meets the criteria of a public health crisis in that it affects large numbers of people, threatens health over the long-term, and requires the adoption of larger-scale solutions."

The Connecticut State Medical Society expressed support for several sections of SB 1, stating "Connecticut must tackle the issues of inequality and disparities in health care and CSMS believes this Bill includes some important steps in





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