

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

THINKING ABOUT RACE RELATIONS, WITH 'TROUBLE IN MIND'

The play "Trouble in Mind" opened recently at The Old Globe theater, and it's got me wondering how far we've come as a nation — and where we are headed — when it comes to matters of race.

You see, "Trouble in Mind" was written nearly 70 years ago. It tells the story of Wiletta Mayer, a veteran Black actress, who's rehearsing an anti-lynching play set in the South. Mayer is tired of the stereotypical, demeaning roles for Black women, but mainstream jobs are few. She clashes with the White director; he tells Mayer that the American public isn't ready to see her the way she wants to be seen. "They don't believe it and they don't want to," he says.

"Trouble in Mind" was written by Alice Childress. While it was optioned for Broadway, it never opened there during her lifetime. The show's White producers wanted Childress to tone down the dialogue and give the play a happier ending. She refused.

Childress died in 1994, her play long forgotten. It finally had its Broadway debut last fall. And now, San Diego audiences get to see "Trouble in Mind" exactly as

Childress wrote it. Chalk one up for progress.

It's hard to assess how far we have (or haven't) come, race-wise, without talking about affirmative action. Someone once described it as "the eternal bone in the national throat." Broadly speaking, affirmative action policies seek, affirmatively, to achieve racial and gender balance in workplaces and educational institutions.

The Supreme Court is on the precipice of eliminating affirmative action, at least when it comes to higher education. I'm not sure we're ready.

Just last month, the court decided it will hear two affirmative action cases challenging the use of race as an admissions factor at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina.

The suits were filed on the same day in 2014 by Students for Fair Admissions, a conservative activist group; they claimed admissions practices at the two schools discriminated against Asian Americans.

The group's founder has said their aim is to eliminate affirma-

tive action altogether.

If you're thinking this tune sounds familiar, you're right.

Since colleges and universities first implemented affirmative action in the 1960s, there have been five challenges that found their way to our highest court.

In each case, the constitutionality of affirmative action has been narrowly upheld, allowing schools to consider race as part of a broader plan to achieve diversity.

What's changed, of course, is the composition of the court.

Today, six of the nine justices are conservatives; three of them voted against affirmative action in 2016, when the court last heard an affirmative action case.

Americans, overall, aren't fans of affirmative action either, when it comes to making decisions about student admissions to colleges and universities. In a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, 73 percent of Americans said race and ethnicity should not be considered.

While White adults were particularly likely to hold this view (78 percent), so did a majority of

the Hispanic, Black and Asian Americans polled.

Even still, most Americans agree with the goals of affirmative action. It's the means of achieving them that still tie us in knots.

And so, it was easy enough to predict the outcry when President Joe Biden announced that he would nominate a Black female to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer — the first such nomination. To some, it sounded like an affirmative action play that checked two boxes: race and gender.

Biden categorically stated his intent during the presidential campaign. No wonder he's following through: Biden was elected in part because of support from Black women, even when he wasn't the Democratic frontrunner. NYU law professor Melissa Murray (who is Black) noted that the court's docket will include matters like reproductive and gun rights that affect the Black community — and Black women — in profound ways.

Naysayers can take solace in knowing that Biden has a large and deep pool of talent from

which to choose his nominee.

They might also recall that President Ronald Reagan and President Donald Trump made affirmative action picks, each nominating a woman (Sandra Day O'Connor and Amy Coney Barrett, respectively) to serve on the high court. Both women were swiftly appointed.

Biden's forthcoming nomination of a Black woman should be a cause for celebration, not consternation. It's another sign of progress.

Alice Childress would be thrilled.

"Trouble in Mind" runs through March 13 at The Old Globe. On Feb. 26, the National Conflict Resolution Center will host a free, pre-show panel discussion — "Race Relations: How Our Past Informs the Future." For information and tickets, visit ncrconline.com.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com.



JOSE ISLAS

From film "We Are Here" - Domenica Castro, Dulce Valencia, Constanza Castro.

SCENE

Digital Gym Cinema

Venue hosts screenings from the Sundance Film Festival

BY U-T STAFF

SAN DIEGO

Media Arts Center San Diego hosted a preview weekend Jan. 28-30 for its Digital Gym Cinema in its new location at Market Street and Park Boulevard in East Village. The event coincided with screenings for the Sundance Film Festival. The Digital Gym was one of seven satellite venues Sundance selected

to host in-person screenings.

Guests enjoyed films selected for the official lineup of this year's Sundance Film Festival, question-and-answer sessions with actors, food and drinks and live music.

The Digital Gym is on the second floor of a new four-story 66,750-square-foot UCSD office building.

If your organization has held a social or philan-

thropic event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduiontribune.com. Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.

SAN DIEGO

FROM B1 serve other areas despite undergrounding being completed on properties.

San Diego has accumulated more than \$170 million from the 3.5 percent surcharges customers began paying in 2003 to support undergrounding projects across the city.

Councilmembers said last month that they are frustrated by the glut of cash and eager for the city to begin spending the surcharge money more quickly under the new pact with SDG&E.

New estimates show the city will spend its undergrounding reserves down to less than \$40 million by 2028 under the new pact.

But even at that accelerated rate, it may take more than 100 years for the city to complete the remaining 1,200 miles of undergrounding required across the sprawling city. Since the project began in 1970, just under 500 miles has been completed.

Changes to the process made in 2016 accelerated the city's rate from four miles per year to 16 miles per year, but that slowed to 8.7 miles in 2021 because of the new franchise agreement with SDG&E.

"We are in a unique historical place where a 50-year franchise agreement has

ended and a new one is beginning," said Gene Matter, assistant director of the city's Transportation Department. "We now have several projects queued up at the starting gate."

The surcharges raised about \$30 million per year after they were put in place in 2003, but that has climbed to more than \$60 million per year as utility bills have risen and the population has grown.

Undergrounding typically costs \$6 million to \$8 million per mile, so a rate of 10 miles per year is the city's long-term projection.

San Diego has the largest utility undergrounding program in the state, city officials said.

Neighborhoods generally embrace undergrounding projects because they boost aesthetics, increase property values, reduce fire risk and ease the maintenance of utility wires. Some neighborhoods, however, have rebelled against undergrounding because of construction hassles, the city's inability to stick to schedules and unattractive utility boxes when projects are complete.

The 2018 master plan seems to have quelled resistance somewhat. A key change was using community or neighborhood names for each project, in contrast to a previous practice of using numbers and letters to

identify projects.

But many residents still complain about how long the process takes and how hard it is to get information from the city.

Councilmember Raul Campillo said complaints about undergrounding are among the most common feedback he gets from the residents he represents.

Councilmember Dr. Jennifer Campbell agreed. "Many of my constituents are beyond frustrated with this seemingly endless process," she said.

The new pact with SDG&E exempts several undergrounding projects that are already under way to avoid slowing them down with new restrictions. They are in Chollas View, Clairemont Mesa, La Jolla, Golden Hill, Lomita, Muirlands, Rolando and South Mission Beach.

The new deal requires creation of a five-member citizens oversight committee that will review undergrounding expenditures, policies and disputes. It also requires SDG&E to avoid removing mature trees and to make wildfire risk a key criteria in prioritizing neighborhoods for undergrounding.

Details about individual neighborhoods are available at sandiego.gov/undergrounding.

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WATCHDOG

FROM B1 the organization says.

In addition to pay, Transparent California also publishes benefit compensation, how much in medical and retirement benefits an organization pays for its employees.

In school districts such benefits usually amount to about 40 percent of salary, said Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

In California about 45 percent of K-12 superintendents made more than \$300,000 in pay and benefits combined, according to Transparent California; and 17 of San Diego County's 43 superintendents collected more than that in pay and benefits.

Domenech said superintendent pay is often influenced by how long a superintendent has been in the position and where the district is located; for example, he said district leaders in larger states like California and Texas tend to make more. School boards also frequently set superintendent pay by looking at how much district leaders in the surrounding area make.

Lucrative perks boosted some superintendents' take-home pay in 2020. One perk allowed them to cash in the value of unused vacation, illness or other personal days.

For example, Miyashiro gets 34 vacation days and 12 sick or personal days every year. He can accrue and roll over up to 68 days, and any unused days beyond those 68 accrued are paid to him in cash each year. Other Cajon Valley district cabinet members have a similar provision.

Miyashiro collected \$56,464 in extra pay in 2020, on top of his \$335,055 of salary, for a total take-home pay of \$392,519.

Miyashiro said he is paid "at the bottom of the totem pole" compared to CEO's of similar-size operations. Cajon Valley's budget is \$200

San Diego County's highest-paid superintendents

Here's how much the county's 10 top-paid superintendents made in total pay, and how much they were given in medical and retirement benefits, for 2020.

Superintendent	District	2020 enrollment	Benefits	Pay
David Miyashiro	Cajon Valley Union Elementary	15,776	\$68,167	\$392,519
Candace Singh	Fallbrook Union Elementary	4,756	\$68,988	\$386,538
Paul Gothold	San Diego County Office of Education	1,159	\$79,743	\$360,057
Katie McNamara	South Bay Union Elementary	4,576	\$68,881	\$334,284
Francisco Escobedo	Chula Vista Elementary	22,452	\$60,607	\$325,366
Marian Kim-Phelps	Poway Unified	35,663	\$73,872	\$312,084
Holly McClurg	Del Mar Union Elementary	3,853	\$59,756	\$302,235
Cindy Marten*	San Diego Unified	97,968	\$63,155	\$301,852
Julie Vitale	Oceanside Unified	16,373	\$61,675	\$279,568
Karen Janney	Sweetwater Union High	37,060	\$51,330	\$278,326

*Marten left the district in May 2021.

million and it employs 3,000 people.

"Transparency goes both ways. Don't tell one side without the other," Miyashiro said in an email to the Union-Tribune.

He pointed out he was the first superintendent in San Diego County to bring students back to in-person school after the initial COVID school closures, and he has generated millions in additional revenue for the district by pioneering the district's World of Work career education program. He said he also helped get 21 of the district's students out of Afghanistan when they were visiting it, when U.S. troops were pulled out of the country last August.

As for Singh, who has been Fallbrook's superintendent for 11 years, she said her compensation is commensurate with her experience, skills and longevity. She said the district has benefited from the stability and experience she brings.

"The job of a superintendent is incredibly complex and challenging, made even more so during the course of the global pandemic," Singh wrote in an email. "Many of the best superintendents in the country are leaving the job at rates we have never seen, due to the incredible pressure and toxic atmosphere

that has been created in communities and school districts. There has never been a more important time for school districts to retain talented and experienced leadership, and salary contributes to that."

How much to pay?

It's been a tough time to be a superintendent.

Superintendents have weathered harsh criticism from all sides during the pandemic, from teachers and parents who think they haven't done enough to protect kids from COVID and from parents who say schools are restricting their kids' freedoms and hurting them by enforcing state COVID protocols such as requiring masks and vaccinations.

Superintendents also are dealing with accusations from conservatives that they are propagating critical race theory, which is a university-level discipline that examines how the law perpetuates systemic racial discrimination. Superintendents have stressed that their districts are not teaching critical race theory.

At the same time superintendents have had to keep schools open despite crippling COVID staffing shortages, follow ever-changing state COVID rules, keep students and staff safe from

COVID, and figure out how to fight learning loss and mental health issues among students that were exacerbated by COVID.

"It has become incredibly difficult, to the point that we're seeing a significant exodus of superintendents from the field," Domenech said.

In San Diego County, where there are 43 superintendents, 11 have left their jobs in the past two years.

Some left for promotions, some left after facing controversies and a couple — the superintendents of Sweetwater and Dehesa — were kicked out amid allegations of wrongdoing.

Superintendents are the CEOs of what are often the largest employer and biggest businesses in their communities, Domenech noted, yet they are paid significantly less than what private company CEOs make because public schools are government agencies.

The average CEO in San Diego makes \$845,109 a year, according to Salary.com.

"Any CEO in the area is making \$1 million or millions, but it's the factor that it's perceived as a public entity and therefore the person running the district is not paid accordingly," Domenech said.

Other government leaders took home a range of an-

nual earnings. San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit oversaw a similar number of employees as Miyashiro, and he took home \$240,700 in pay in 2020. So did Santa Monica's city manager, who was paid \$453,800, and Fresno's city manager, who took home \$247,486.

Locally, UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep Khosla took home \$491,442 and San Diego State President Adela de la Torre took home \$463,530.

Gov. Gavin Newsom was paid \$196,164.

With many superintendents resigning due to the pressures of COVID, school districts may have to offer even more attractive pay and benefits as there is more competition for high-quality candidates, Domenech added.

"With the number of superintendents that are leaving there are a lot of superintendent openings," he said, "and as boards are searching for a new superintendent, they're going to be hard-pressed because there's a lot of competition."

Todd Maddison, research director for Transparent California, said he has no problem with how much many superintendents are getting paid, given all their responsibilities.

What does bother him is the fact that some superin-

tendents are given raises despite their districts doing worse on such metrics as the state's school rating system. Superintendent pay is typically not tied to performance metrics.

"I think you would have a very hard time finding a CEO making what our superintendents make who did not have some portion of their pay tied directly to performance," Maddison said, "not making the board happy, but specific measures that meant improving the performance of the organization."

Maddison also said he has a problem with the fact that superintendent pay is often not tied to the size of the school district or charter school organization.

Missing from the data are the vast majority of California's more than 1,300 charter schools, which are privately-run public schools.

Transparent California generally doesn't collect data from charters because of a lack of resources — the organization has two part-time employees — and because smaller institutions like charter schools are more likely to be unresponsive to their request for pay information or to not have pay data easily on hand, Maddison said.

"As we get to the smaller entities, the job gets much harder and takes much longer," he said.

The scant information that is publicly available about charter school pay has shown that some charter school leaders collect large salaries.

Nick Nichols, the founder and former CEO of the controversial Inspire home charter schools, collected \$514,197 in 2016. The CEO of Learn4Life charter schools made \$374,374 in 2016. The former CEO of High Tech High charter schools, Rasheed Meadows, who left the network amid criticism from teachers, was paid more than \$300,000 a year.

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