



East Village

Magazine

September 2020

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Commentary COVID-19 and mail-in voting challenge the Postal Service and election clerks

By Paul Rozycki

What would it take to make 2020 the most disruptive year in decades?

How about a global pandemic, where the U.S. has more cases than every other nation on earth?

How about an economic collapse, with unemployment worse than anything seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s?

How about racial divisions more intense than anything since the 1960s civil rights era?

How about an election that revolves around the most divisive and bombastic president that the nation has ever seen?

How about the U.S. Postal Service? What?? The Postal Service??

In a time of global pandemic, economic collapse, racial conflict and the most divisive election in a century, who ever thought a hot-button issue would be the U.S. Postal Service? We all feel that we know the government agency that delivers the birthday card from Aunt Millie, your Flint water bill, a fistful of catalogues, and the latest sweepstakes offer from Publisher's Clearing House. It's one of the most highly regarded government organizations. And since the days of Ben Franklin, it's done it with its motto: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

But today, it is at the center of this year's biggest election dispute. How do we vote in the time of COVID-19? As more of us choose to stay home and vote absentee, two problems have arisen. Can the Postal Service deliver ballots to the voters, and return them in time to local clerks? And can local election officials adapt to the dramatic increase in absentee voters?

The U.S. Postal Service

The U.S. Postal Service has been around since the days of Ben Franklin,

delivering mail to 157 million addresses in the nation. But, unlike most other federal agencies, it isn't supported by taxes. It's expected to run on the revenues from those who mail letters and packages.

Though the details are complex, currently, the Postal Service faces at least two big problems: it has 300,000 fewer employees than in the past, and more retirees. Currently, it has about 500,000 employees and nearly 600,000 retirees. The demand to fully fund their retirement program has placed increasing pressure on the Postal Service.

At the same time, the volume of mail has dropped significantly in recent years, as more people and businesses move to Facebook and email. The total volume of mail has fallen by more than 30 percent in the last decade. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the problem even worse as business mail has declined.

The financial problems of the Postal Service are serious and real — it faces a \$9 billion shortfall this year. But now it is facing cuts as it prepares to deliver 80 million absentee ballots for the 2020 election. Nearly three-quarters of all Americans will be eligible to vote by mail this fall, and estimates are that more than half may do so. Some experts predict a record turnout for November. Yet, for an organization that delivers 182 million pieces of first-class mail, and 472 million total pieces of mail every day, 80 million or more absentee ballots, over a few weeks, should be manageable.

Cuts in Postal Service

However, the current administration has initiated cost-cutting measures that hamper the ability of the Postal Service to deliver ballots during what is expected to be a contentious and divisive election. Most of the cuts seem to have been directed at limiting the ability of voters to cast

(Continued on Page 12.)



Photo of the Month: Eating out COVID summer, Steady Eddy's

(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Flint schools roll into school year with lawsuit settlements, sports canceled, board members departing

By Harold C. Ford

Events in August kickstarted the 2020-21 school year for Flint Community Schools in a most newsworthy fashion. The settlement of two long-standing lawsuits brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had important ramifications for Flint's schoolchildren. All fall sports have been canceled. Fewer than 50 percent of Flint's students showed up for class at the start of the new school year. And three incumbent board of education members have decided to exit the board.

ACLU lawsuit settlement provides millions for Flint's special needs children

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan (ACLU-M) announced a "groundbreaking settlement" on Aug. 20 in its federal class action lawsuit seeking "urgently needed special education services" for students

in Flint and Genesee County. At least \$9 million will be committed to special needs students.

In October, 2016, the ACLU-M and the Education Law Center, a national education rights law firm based in New Jersey, filed a class-action civil rights lawsuit alleging violations of federal education laws by the State of Michigan and local school authorities. Defendants in the suit included the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Flint Community Schools (FCS), and the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD).

The lawsuit charged that FCS, GISD, and the State of Michigan failed "to provide a safe learning environment, allocate sufficient resources, ensure the availability of necessary personnel, or adequately prepare for a likely increase in special education cases as a result of widespread exposure to lead."

The lawsuit alleged violations of

three federal laws: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Terms of the settlement, subject to court approval, include:

- \$9 million to fund a Flint Water Crisis Special Education Fund to support students with disabilities;
- \$2 million in supplemental assistance from the GISD to FCS and other districts for transportation, staff, and services for special needs students;
- Delivery of pre-school programming for all 3- and 4-year-olds in Flint;
- Modification and upgrading of special needs programming for all special needs students in Genesee County;
- And a "child find" process that provides neuropsychological assessments when necessary to all Flint children impacted by the Flint water crisis.

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... Schools

(Continued from Page 4.)

“This settlement establishes a model to identify children with disabilities, to create structural changes that will ensure that those disabilities are properly addressed, and to prevent school discipline from being used as a substitute for behavioral interventions,” said Lindsay M. Heck, lead attorney from the global law firm White & Case LLP, which worked on the case pro bono.

“It is a model that will not only transform the educational system for Flint children, but that establishes a framework for underfunded school districts in urban communities with deteriorating infrastructures that serve predominantly black and brown children,” said Heck.

Handcuff lawsuit settled

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and ACLU-M settled a lawsuit that resulted from the handcuffing of a 7-year-old student during an after-school program at Flint’s Brownell K-2 STEM Academy in Oct. 2015. The after-school program was administered by the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce.

Cameron McCadden had been handcuffed for about an hour by a Flint police officer who was employed as a school resource officer. The ACLU lawsuit was brought against the Flint Police Department and the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce in July 2018.

According to an Aug. 18, 2020 statement at the ACLU of Michigan website, “The settlement agreement includes the creation of a fund to help address Cameron’s needs and new policies adopted by the after-school program and the Flint Police Department.”

The new policies agreed to by the Flint & Genesee County Chamber of Commerce included:

- No physical restraint except as a last resort;
- No involvement of a school resource officer unless there is imminent danger;
- Documentation of physical restraint and notice to parents;
- Disabilities training for staff.

The Flint Police Department will

encourage officers to do the following:

- Limit police involvement in school discipline issues to criminal offenses only;
- Use alternatives to arresting juveniles;
- Use lowest level of enforcement for elementary school children;
- Involve parents whenever possible;
- Release children when there has been no property damage or physical injury;
- De-escalate whenever possible;
- Participate in training related to implicit bias, de-escalation, special needs children, and positive behavior intervention.

All fall sports canceled

All fall sports in Flint schools have been canceled. The announcement was issued by the school district’s public relations firm, Lambert & Co., and posted at the district’s website by Jamie Foster, director of athletics, on Aug. 25. The cancellation includes football, soccer, tennis, cross country, volleyball, and Crim community sports.

“This was not a decision made lightly,” according to the statement from Foster. “We believe it is our responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of the students in our care and take all necessary precautions to help limit the spread of the pandemic.”

The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) had announced earlier on Aug. 14 that the fall football season would be postponed and played, perhaps, in the spring. The MHSAA judged football to be a “higher risk” sport along with boys lacrosse, competitive cheer, and wrestling.

“Low-risk” sports such as cross country, golf, swimming and diving, and tennis and “moderate risk” sports such as gymnastics, soccer, and volleyball had yet to be canceled or postponed by the MHSAA. However, the latest update at the organization’s website dated Aug. 20 presents a confusing array of regional guidelines that, at best, portends uncertainty.

Student no-shows send educators into neighborhoods

Less than 50 percent of expected student enrollment in the first week and a

half of school sent teams of Flint Community Schools (FCS) educators into Flint neighborhoods to find the no-shows. Those teams—including Superintendent Anita Steward and Assistant Superintendent Kevelin Jones—boarded buses to pound the pavement in search of potential enrollees.

“We are feet to the pavement, out in the streets, going door-to-door...to connect with our families,” Jones told *East Village Magazine (EVM)*.

“We were down 2,000 children and that had never happened to us before,” said Jones. He reported that FCS officials expected an enrollment of 3,800 students in the 2020-21 school year. When only 1,500 students had shown through the first eight days of school, FCS leadership undertook the beyond-the-call of-duty effort.

According to Jones, the recruitment effort was producing results. After one week, he reported the number of missing students had been reduced from 2,000 to 800.

Three board incumbents to step down

All three incumbent board members whose terms expire at the end of this calendar year have opted not to seek reelection on Nov. 3. Casey Lester, board president (with nearly two years on the board), Betty Ramsdell, secretary (11 years), and Blake Strozier, trustee (10 years), take more than two decades of Flint board experience with them as they step down.

Twelve candidates are vying to fill the three seats about to be vacated. *EVM* expects to profile the candidates prior to the November election.

Lester and Strozier cited career and family demands as reasons for their exits. After decades of service to Flint schools in various capacities, Ramsdell said it was “time for a change.”

EVM staff writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

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“Music in the Heart of the City” returns to St. Paul’s starting September 27

By Jan Worth-Nelson

After months of COVID-dominated musical silence in the sanctuary of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, live concerts in the “Music in the Heart of the City” series are returning.

Holly Richardson, the music series organizer, announced a five-concert schedule starting at 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 27, when vocalists Joseph Baunoch and Daniel Ewart will present “Opera Arias for Bass.”

Upcoming concerts, all at 4 p.m. on Sundays, include:

- Oct. 25: Soprano and Flute in Song, featuring Townes Osborn, Brittnee Siemon, and artist-in-residence Carl Angelo on organ.
- Jan. 24: **Beautiful Piano Music**, featuring Tyler Kivel.
- Feb. 21: **Woodwind Trio**, featuring Carl Angelo, Lindabeth Binkley, and MaryBeth Minnis.
- March 21: **Dalton Memorial Organ concert**, featuring Carl Angelo.

All audience members will be required to wear masks and are asked to enter through the “garden door” to the church off Saginaw Street. Seats will be marked for social distancing, Richardson said.

The concerts are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church is located at 711 S. Saginaw Street. Because of COVID limitations, there will be no reception following the concerts.

The Sept. 27 concert will feature arias from major operas.

Bass vocalist Joseph Baunoch trained as an apprentice artist with Toledo Opera and Dicapò Opera Theater. He has performed in over 50 different operas, including performances with the Toledo Opera, New Jersey Association of Verismo Opera and the Dicapò Opera Theater.

Baritone Daniel Ewart has sung a wide variety of roles, most recently as Horace Tabor in The Ballad of Baby Doe with the Toledo Opera. He also performed Danciaro in Carmen with Prelude to Performance in Manhattan.

More information on the series is available from Richardson at holly@stpaulsflint.com or at 810-234-8637. The church’s website is www.saintpaulschurchflint.com/.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.



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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

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• **Sunday, Sep. 27, 4:00 pm**
Opera Arias for Bass
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Artistic Director: Holly Richardson

\$600 million Flint water crisis settlement announced

By Tom Travis

A \$600 million settlement agreement has been reached in the Flint Water Crisis class action lawsuit, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel announced on a YouTube statement in August.

If the \$600 million settlement for the people of Flint is agreed to by the plaintiffs and by the courts, it will likely be the largest settlement in the history of the State of

Michigan, Nessel said.

Nessel explained some details and steps that need to happen must remain confidential for the time being

and is not yet allowed to provide in-depth details.

However, she said she will be able to provide details in weeks

to come and looks forward to meaningful conversations with the communities involved.

Nessel cautioned in her statement that the payout of claims could take several months but said it



Residents listen to talks on water crisis litigation in June 2019
 (Photo by Tom Travis)

MCC President Shares A Message Of Hope And Commitment For The Upcoming School Year



Beverly Walker-Griffa, Ph.D.
President, MCC

I am pleased to share that Mott Community College has reopened for the Fall semester offering remote, hybrid and face-to-face classes. When the College's Winter semester began in January, my biggest worries were whether the winter weather patterns would cause extensive class cancellations and if the March 10 bond millage for .79 mills would pass. The winter weather was mild compared to last year, so my weather worries were allayed. In March, as the celebrations took place while the votes were counted, there was no inkling that we were on the cusp of entering the unfathomable. Our focus that night was on gratefulness for the tremendous support from community members during the election. Winning the election meant MCC was poised to create and shore up some outstanding spaces to support student success. The revelry was high as we looked to our future of continuing to provide this region with excellent academic instruction, workforce training and student support services.

Within hours the world changed, and I was meeting with MCC's Executive Cabinet, Medical Director and Interim Chief of Police, making decisions that we thought would last for at most a few weeks, but instead culminated into a five-month span. During these months of remote work and instruction, MCC remained true to its mission for this region. In a week, the College transitioned more than 750 courses (84%) from face-to-face instruction to an alternative remote format.

I had the opportunity to observe some of our faculty in action as they reimagined the instructional delivery of courses. Faculty members brought unique and creative strategies to work with students who never thought they were going to experience remote instruction. The observations gave me an opportunity to see the sometimes chaotic environments in which students were trying to learn. MCC faculty carried a heavy lift in supporting students, many who were unprepared to learn in a virtual space, to successful course completion.

We found very quickly that if faculty, staff and administrators did not step up to support our students, they would fall through the cracks and not complete. Thanks to our Lenore Croudy Family Life Center staff and a core set of volunteers, students were able to have MCC-loaned Chromebooks and Wifi hotspot pucks delivered to their homes. MCC students facing food and transportation insecurities were provided weekly Mott Eats Food Pantry food boxes delivered to their homes. As funds for purchasing food for food box deliveries dwindled, The Foundation for Mott Community College staff embarked upon a fundraising campaign to cover the average \$1500 per week food cost. The pandemic increased student emergency needs and Foundation personnel led a fundraising campaign to find dollars that met critical student needs.

Employees suggested that we live our mission by supporting the local hospitals and their respective staffs. Each local hospital was loaned at least one ventilator and received donated gowns, shoe covers, hair covers, gloves, drapes, masks and sanitary wipes. A Hometown Heroes fundraiser took place to raise funds to treat local hospital employees to a lunch/dinner while also donating to the hospitals' foundations.

Early during the pandemic, MCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the American Red Cross of East Central Bay-Michigan to offer our Ballenger Field House to serve as a temporary emergency disaster relief facility for the area. This partnership led to several Red Cross blood drives taking place on our campus during the last few months. Most recently, we heard there was a need to increase access to testing for Genesee County, so we formed a partnership with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and Kroger Health to offer free COVID-19 testing on our campus.

MCC is proud to have served this region for almost 100 years not only as an educational institution, but as a community partner, an economic driver and a safe haven for those who need us most. As we have navigated the pandemic, we have proven our commitment will never waiver. Mott Community College cares about this community deeply and will continue to provide high-quality instruction, student support both inside and outside the classroom, economic and workforce development collaborations and decisions that sustain the region's economy.

We are excited about the opportunities that this new journey will bring. Our road map to reopening can be found in our [MCC Reopening Plan](#). The five-phase plan serves as a guide to how the College will reopen face-to-face operations safely while mitigating risk. Please be patient as you enter our "new normal" with many different processes, procedures, workflows and directions. They have been implemented to keep each one of us healthy and productive.

Now Mott Community College needs your support. The College is now enrolling students for winter classes that begin January 9, 2021 and we have seats available in many of our courses. Please think about enrolling or sharing MCC enrollment information with a friend or relative <https://appsprod.mcc.edu/onlineapp/>. We hope you are Ready for More because MCC is Never Going To Stop!

Looking Forward!

Beverly Walker-Griffa, Ph.D.
President
Mott Community College

Democracy Beat

Flint voters experience troubled waters leading up to Nov. 3 election

By Tom Travis

What is the prospect for accurate and reliable voting for the people of Flint as the Nov. 3 election approaches? Several recent developments focusing on the Flint City Clerk's office are attempting to assure access and trustworthy handling of absentee ballots and election procedures for the high-stakes election.

City Hall shuts down due to the pandemic

The year 2020 has presented its share of obstacles to hurdle in carrying out one of the most basic tenets of democracy - the vote.



Around the world 2020 has been marked by a global pandemic which has halted economies and daily life as we know it. Fears of spreading the virus and unknowns of catching the virus by standing in voting lines to cast a ballot millions of Americans have taken to absentee voting.

According to the *Detroit News*, the passage of Proposal 3 “no-reason-absentee voting” in 2018 now allows for any voter in Michigan to vote by absentee ballot for any reason.

The perfect storm began to form after the pandemic hit the U.S. in March. Michigan Governor, Gretchen Whitmer shut-down the State of Michigan to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Municipalities around the state began to shut down their city hall buildings and municipal centers in response to the statewide shutdown.

Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley

closed Flint City Hall in April 2020. This in turn closed the City Clerk's office on the 2nd floor. Absentee ballot application deadlines came and went and the City Clerk's office remained closed.

ACLU files complaint against the City Clerk

With City Hall still closed, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a complaint, in which the ACLU calls for the City Clerk's office to open to the public.

The complaint from the ACLU points out that according to Michigan Law, voters have the right to apply for, receive and submit their absentee ballot “in person or by mail.” During that time, municipal clerks must “be available in at least one location to issue and receive absent voter ballots during the election officials' regularly scheduled business hours.” For the primary election on Aug. 4, 2020, the 40-day period began June 25, 2020.

Seventh Circuit Court Judge Celeste Bell heard arguments from ACLU attorneys and from City Attorney Angela Wheeler.

Bell stated in her order that the Court acknowledges there is “detrimental effect from the COVID-19 pandemic and the statewide shutdown” has had on the conduct of all governmental business.

Bell acknowledged these issues caused delay to the City Clerk's meeting a statutory deadline of providing ballots during the 40 days prior to the election.

“Nonetheless,” Bell then stated, “A substantial delay has occurred in providing absent voter applications and ballots that cannot be explained or excused by the unfortunate circumstances affecting the voters and the City Clerk.”

With this strong ruling from Judge Bell the City Clerk's office extended their schedule and opened the office on the

weekends for voters. Judge Bell also ordered added accountability requiring the City Clerk to provide a daily report until the primary election to the Court and the attorneys. The daily report was to provide the numbers of applications and ballots processed each day.

County Elections Supervisor writes letter to City Clerk

In the letter Fulcher listed at least 19 “deficiencies” and “failures” by the City Clerk's office in the primary election. (Fulcher's letter can be viewed on *EVM's* website)

City Clerk Brown never responded to that letter. However, she did speak at the next City Council meeting. City Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) by special order on the agenda asked Brown to come before the council.

Council members asked Brown what help she needed for the Nov. 3 election. Brown responded by speaking to City Council for more than 30 minutes explaining that in the next 45 days leading up to the Nov. 3 election what her staff would do.

Brown stated election workers will have training and retraining sessions, additional election workers will be hired, Public Service Announcements (PSA) will be produced and shared throughout the community on cable TV and YouTube, The Absentee Voter Counting Board (AVCB) will have additional training, Deputy Clerks are available if a phone request is made to the Clerk's office to have a ballot picked up at someone's house. Also, Brown said she has invited Secretary of State (SOS) Jocelyn Benson to visit Flint on a weekend yet to be decided.

City Clerk Inez Brown pens letter to Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson

On Aug. 21, Brown penned a letter
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... Voters

(Continued from Page 8.)

ter to Secretary of State (SOS) Benson informing her that the City Clerk's office received "immediately" after the primary election a box marked Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). When the city clerk's staff opened the box it contained over 100 absentee voter applications.

Also, in the same letter, Brown stated that on Aug. 17 the Bureau of Elections (BOE) emailed the city clerk's office two absentee application requests sent to the BOE that were dated June 16 and July 29. Brown wrote, "They were received by my office 13 days after the August primary election. The only explanation received from the BOE was that, 'Unfortunately, the State mail room gets sorted and backlogged pretty easily. So there has been some delay in receiving these. However, please do what you can with them now.'"

Brown did not make an explicit request in the letter to the SOS concerning hiring additional staff for the Flint Clerk's office. However, Brown did suggest the SOS hire additional staff to relieve the "backlog" of mail in their mail room. (Brown's letter can be viewed on *EVM's* website)

Pastors, members of City Council and community leaders stand in "solidarity" with Clerk Brown

Pastor Chris Martin spoke for the group, which included City Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward) and Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward). Martin stated, "There have been no misgivings or malfeasance in the City Clerk's office," Martin declared at

the press conference. "John Gleason needs to cease and desist his bullying tactics against Ms. Inez Brown."

Later, in a phone interview, Gleason was asked what level of accountability the County Clerk's office



Flint Pastor Chris Martin talks at "solidarity" press conference
(Photo by Tom Travis)

has over the Flint City Clerk's office. He replied, "None." The Genesee County website suggests there is some jurisdiction. But ultimately, the City Clerk answers to the Flint City Council.

According to the City of Flint website, the City Clerk is appointed by the Flint City Council and is responsible for the administration of the office of the City Clerk.

Additionally, in 2015, County Clerk John Gleason said, "The natural sequence for resolution is that a local municipality deals with the state of Michigan—they don't deal with the county clerk. and they should keep that process as pure as they can."

Voter deadlines and information for November election

On Election Day, voters can

cast their votes at a polling station in their precinct or in person at the City Clerk's office on the 2nd floor of City Hall, at 1101 S. Saginaw Street, Flint.

If you do not know what precinct you live in you can find it at www.vote.org. Voters with questions can call the City Clerk's office at 810-766-7414 or email the clerk at ibrown@cityofflint.com.

If you're voting by absentee ballot or voting online, your ballot must be postmarked by Oct. 19, 15 days before Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote is Oct. 19, 15 days before election day, or you can register to vote on Election Day, but you must register at the City Clerk's office at City Hall on that day.

EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomntravis@gmail.com.

Unclassified ads

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Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

9,695

Because of the governor's order, no pipeline replacements were conducted in April or May, but work has resumed. Totals as of August 13 were 9,695 lead or galvanized pipes replaced, 25,935 pipes excavated. A total of 16,240 pipes have been discovered to be copper service lines.



(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

... \$600 million

(Continued from Page 6.)

would begin after 45 - 60 days. Nessel clarified that certain preliminary conditions have to be met with the courts yet.

Early information about the settlement indicated that 80 percent of the \$600 million payout will be directed toward minors under age 18. Fifteen percent will go toward adults, 3 percent will go to those who suffered property damage, 5 percent will go to those who suffered economic loss, and 2 percent will go toward programmatic relief programs.

The claim process is still being developed, and will be announced to Flint residents in the next 45 to 60 days.

In the YouTube statement Nessel stated that for years the state has fought in more than 100 cases in state and federal courts brought by the people of Flint.

Nessel added the \$600 million settlement will be a part of more than \$1 billion the state has contributed to aid Flint in its recovery from the water crisis.

A little over a year ago, at a town hall, Flint residents pleaded, "Please tell us some heads are going to roll..."

Fifteen days earlier the state announced they had dropped all criminal charges against eight central figures in the Flint water crisis, now in its sixth year.

That incendiary move, which came without warning to the residents of a city beleaguered, and by what many call "poisoning by policy," prompted fiery responses from local politicians and a host of weary "water warriors," as they had come to be called.

Since then Flint residents have been waiting for, "the other shoe to drop." When would the courts resolve the criminal prosecutions and the civil class action lawsuit on behalf of the poisoned residents of Flint?

Local, state and federal Michigan politicians respond to Flint water crisis settlement announcement

Mayor Sheldon Neeley released a statement concerning the water crisis

settlement in which he stated:

"This settlement will be an important step forward for our community. For years, we were victims — our voices and concerns ignored as lead continued to leech into our water. However, our community is resilient and we have persevered."

State Senator Jim Ananich(D) said this about the settlement:

"This settlement represents a meaningful step toward justice for the people of Flint. More important than the money is the acknowledgment that our

people — our children — have been permanently harmed by the deliberate negligence of those who were supposed to serve us.

"The settlement is welcome news, but I have said from the very beginning that the demand for justice will not be satisfied until every person who had a hand in poisoning my city be held legally accountable, regardless of political position or power," he concluded

In an email statement, U.S. Representative Dan Kildee said, "While I

(Continued on Page 15.)



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Top eight ways to spend \$1 million Mott funds selected by residents' votes for neighborhoods

Demolishing vacant houses, setting up youth jobs for neighborhood cleanup, assistance for home repairs, and beautification efforts topped the tally of how to spend \$1 million the C.S. Mott Foundation has set aside to strengthen neighborhoods, according to a press release from the Foundation issued today.

Several months ago, the Foundation invited residents to suggest how to spend \$1 million and pledged to fund the projects most favored. Based on estimates of how much each project will cost, the Foundation will move to fund the top seven and partially fund an eighth.

"You told us what was important to you, and we're eager to get money into Flint neighborhoods to support your priorities," read the statement to residents in today's announcement.

The top eight projects, with the number of votes for each one and the estimated cost are listed below:

1. Demolish vacant houses that are beyond repair.

235 votes | \$150,553

2. Hire young people to assist with neighborhood cleanups and beautification.

215 votes | \$109,863.

3. Offer a home-improvement loan/grant fund for home repairs and upgrades.

197 votes | \$161,878

4. Take down properties that have been burned.

193 votes | \$139,378

5. Demolish homes listed on the city's Property Portal that are designated as needing demolition but currently no funds are available.

184 votes | \$158,098

6. Offer a home-repair program for seniors who want to stay in their homes but are unable to do minor repairs themselves.

160 votes | \$121,406

7. Place dumpsters throughout the city during designated times of

the year (e.g., spring cleaning and fall winterizing).

156 votes | \$82,147

8. Build upon the city's Blight Elimination Task Force.

146 votes | \$139,966

The Mott Foundation will fund the top seven projects, along with \$76,680 toward the eighth project, to equal \$1 million.

A complete list of how each of the 70 projects ranked is available at mott.org.

Next steps include "reaching out to local nonprofit organizations that could potentially tackle the eight projects," the press release said, adding, "We will report back to the community on which nonprofits received grants to complete the work."


More information on the Focus on Flint initiative is available at mott.org.


—EVM Staff from a C.S. Mott Foundation press release.

FLINT PUBLIC LIBRARY


NOW OPEN @ COURTLAND CENTER

The Flint Public Library at Courtland Center is welcoming patrons who want to browse and check out books and DVDs and access computers. **Masks are required and visits are limited to one hour.**






HOURS AT COURTLAND CENTER:
Tuesday through Thursday
 11:00am – 7:30pm
Friday and Saturday
 9:00am – 5:30pm
 The Library is closed on Sundays and Mondays.



TEMPORARY LOCATION
 Courtland Center Mall
 4190 E. Court Street
 Burton, MI 48509

Phone: 810-232-7111
 Email: askus@fpl.info
 Website: fpl.info
 Bus service: #10 Richfield Rd.



... Postal

(Continued from Page 3.)

ballots by mail — in response to a much-discredited idea that somehow mail-in voting encourages fraud. While some of those cost-cutting measures have been postponed until after the election, some have already taken place. The end result is that the Postal Service has fewer resources than in the recent past, which raises doubt about



its ability to deliver and return ballots on time. Whatever justification the cuts might or might not have, they undermine trust in both the postal service and our election at a time when trust is in very short supply. President Trump's comments about mail-in voting, and the postal service, have only increased the distrust.

Local election clerks

While the Postal Service struggles with the changes in how we vote, so do local election clerks. As absentee/mail-in voting becomes the norm, local clerks and state laws need to respond to those changes.

The change hasn't always been easy, as the recent ACLU suit against the City of Flint highlighted during the August primary. As reported in the *East Village Magazine*, a court order required greater transparency and speedier processing of ballots in the Flint City Clerk's office. A recent letter from Genesee County Election Supervisor Doreen Fulcher raised additional questions about the efficiency and transparency of the office.

A record number of mail-in voters

Of the 2.5 million votes cast in the Michigan August primary, 1.6 million were absentee/mail-in votes, a record number. Of that number, a little more than 10,000 were not counted. About

6,400 arrived late, and about 1,400 had no signatures. Nearly 800 had signatures that did not match. There is a bill in the legislature (HB 5991) that would require clerks to contact voters if there was a problem with the signature. While there were some other problems with polls opening late in Detroit, workers not showing up, and some late results, in the end, most results were reported within a day, in spite of the problems.

While the Flint clerk's office faces legal challenges, it is not alone in trying to deal with the dramatic increase in absentee voting this year. City and county clerks around the state are facing similar concerns. One of the problems is the uncertainty of the turnout this year. While absentee voting is expected to be at record levels, clerks need to decide how many polling places to open, and how many staffers to assign to absentee ballots. How many voters will want to vote in person? How many will vote absentee? How many poll workers will fail to show up for fear of the COVID-19 virus? The answers are not clear. Those problems may work themselves out in time, but right now there is a great deal of uncertainty and confusion.

Changes in the law?

In response, the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks has proposed a number of changes in the law.

The Association is concerned about the upcoming fall election, when they expect more than 3 million absentee ballots to be cast, double what they dealt with in August. It has recommended several changes to assure that the balloting goes smoothly in November.

It would like to be able to begin opening the envelopes for absentee ballots before the end of Election Day, freeing up workers for other tasks during the final count. Today, some 32 states, including Ohio and Illinois, allow some early processing of absentee ballots prior to Election Day. Some states allow the votes to be counted when they arrive, even if that is days before the election.

Many would like to have those

ballots that are postmarked before Election Day to be counted as well. Current Michigan law requires that ballots must arrive in the clerk's office by Election Day to be counted. That has been one problem for those who vote by mail in the last few days before the election. There is currently a bill in the legislature (HB 5987) that would allow votes to be counted up to two days after Election Day, as long as they were postmarked by Election Day.

Most clerks say they need more resources for staff and equipment to deal with the expected flood of ballots in the fall. With the threat of COVID-19, many of those who usually work the polls are not available, and the clerks would like to pay more to hire increased staff for the day.

What we should do

So what should the average voter do this year to make sure your vote is counted and the election is fair?

1. Vote early. If you plan to vote absentee, and mail your vote, do so early. In Michigan, the recommended date is no later than Oct. 27, but many suggest that Oct. 20 would be a wiser deadline.

2. If you don't mail your ballot, use the drop boxes that will be located throughout the city.

3. Check your ballot carefully. Especially if this is your first time voting absentee, make sure you have signed it, voted for the appropriate number of candidates, and inserted it into the envelope correctly.

4. Be a poll worker. There is likely to be a great need for additional poll workers as demand increases and veteran poll workers retire.

5. Support the Postal Service and election clerks with the resources they need to adjust to the new voting reality. There are a number of bills and proposals being considered that will give more resources to both.

However and whenever you do it: Vote! Vote! Vote!

EVM political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of Sept. 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city which, due to the pandemic, is currently very limited. To submit events for our October issue, email your event to pisenber@gmail.com by Sept. 24.

"Faces of Flint"

This video, created by a team entirely from Flint, stars 130 faces of people you may know. Flint musicians, a message written by *East Village Magazine's* Ted Nelson, photography by former Flint resident Dan White and editing by Justin Brown was all made possible by *East Village Magazine*, The League of Women Voters and other donors. Watch on your computer, TV or other device and share it with family and friends. Available on YouTube, or for easy viewing go to: eastvillagemagazine.org.

Flint Farmers' Market

Reopened June 15.
Open Tues. and Thurs. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.,
and Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Safety measures include only entering through one door and exiting through another. Masks required for all customers. Sanitizing stations have been set up.
Flint Farmers' Market
300 East First St., Flint
For more info visit flintfarmersmarket.com.

Flint Institute of Arts

Reopened July 6.
Open Mon. through Sat. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
and Sun. 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Safety measures have been put in place.
Flint Institute of Arts
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For info visit flintarts.org.

Jazz on Wheels at the "old" Flint Farmers' Market

Friday evenings, 5 to 7 p.m.
This social-distancing-friendly event is hosted by Pat Cronley. Listen to live jazz from your car. Various local musicians join the roster each week.

Flint Public Library

Reopened July 23.
Open Tues. through Thurs. 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.,
Fri. and Sat. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Masks and social distancing are required. Capacity is limited. Plan to visit one hour or less.
Flint Public Library
Courtland Center (corner of Center Rd. and Court St.) is the temporary location during renovation.
For more info visit fpl.info.

Say Farewell to Summer Lawn Party

Sept. 12
9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday
The Whaley House Museum is partnering with The What's Up Downtown Project to bring you a fun-filled day of socially distanced concerts in a variety of locations throughout downtown Flint! All events are walkable and parking is available near each location! For ticket info and a full schedule of events visit WhaleyHouse.com.

Music in the Heart of the City

Beginning Sept. 27
4 p.m. Sunday
The first in the series will feature Baritone/Basses Daniel Ewert and Joseph Baunoch. Patrons must be masked and enter through the garden door off of Saginaw Street. Seats are marked for social distancing.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
711 Saginaw St., Flint
For more info contact:
Holly Richardson
at hcrich88@gmail.com
or Tom Harpootlian
at sherlok494@aol.com.

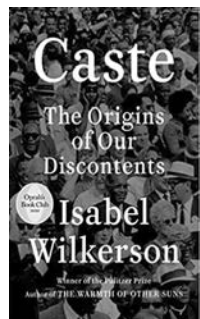


Ed Custer's *East Village Magazine* logo reimaged for each issue by Patsy Isenberg

Review: *Caste is “the bones,” race “the skin” in American body of discontents*

By Robert R. Thomas

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson offers a deep, scholarly dive into the foundations of human hierarchical organization.



“A caste system,” she defines “is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death favoring the dominant caste whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distinct from one another and their assigned places.”

Wilkerson holds that caste is the infrastructure of our divisions, the architecture of human hierarchy. It is about power and who rules the earthly resources at whose expense.

She delineates caste from class: caste trumps class, which is based on socio-economic foundations.

Caste also trumps race, which does the heavy lifting for the American caste system. “In America,” Wilkerson asserts, “race is the primary tool and the visible decoy, the front man, for caste.”

She further notes that caste and race are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive. They can and do coexist in the same culture and serve to reinforce each other. Race, in the United States, is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. Caste is the bones, race the skin. Race has long been scientifically proven to be a man-made invention with no basis in science or biology.

Wilkerson’s astute analysis to connect caste dots focuses on three major caste systems: India, Nazi Germany, and the United States. This section of the book is aptly titled “The Arbitrary

Construction of Human Divisions.”

Her account of a June 5, 1934 meeting of Nazi bureaucrats who gathered to debate the legal framework for an Aryan nation, to turn ideology into law, which would become the Nuremberg Laws, is revelatory and chilling. The first topic on their agenda was the United States and what they could learn from it. They debated how to institutionalize racism in the Third Reich. According to Yale legal historian James Q. Whitman, “they began by asking how the Americans did it.” They “knew the United States was centuries ahead of them with its anti-miscegenation statutes and race-based immigration bans,” Wilkerson writes.

As for India, “This description of caste history from the 2017 Indian book *Ground Down By Growth* could be said of the American caste system with only a few word changes, as noted by parentheses: “The colonial powers officially abolished slavery in India (1843) and in the United States (1865), but this simply led to its transformation into bondage through relations of debt, what has been called ‘debt peonage’ by scholars.”

At this point in the book, the author deconstructs “The Eight Pillars of Caste,” “The Tentacles of Caste,” and “The Consequences of Caste.”

Pillar Number Seven, “Terror as Enforcement, Cruelty as a Means of Control,” offers timely insight:

“The only way to keep an entire group of sentient beings in an artificially fixed place, beneath all others and beneath their own talents, is with violence and terror, psychological and physical, to preempt resistance before it can be imagined. Evil asks little of the dominant caste other than to sit back and do nothing. All that it needs from bystanders is their silent complicity in the evil committed on their behalf, though a caste system will protect, and perhaps even reward, those who deign to join in the terror.”

The Tentacle titled “Dominant Group Status Threat and the Precarity”

offered this gem from the scholar W.E.B. Du Bois about the American caste system that “drove such a wedge between black and white workers that there probably are not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests, kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest.”

In “The Consequences of Caste,” the book offers another timely reminder regarding caste’s inevitable narcissism, which she defines as “a complex condition of self-aggrandizing entitlement and disregard of others, growing out of a hollow insecurity.” This applies to both individuals and nations. According to social theorist Takamichi, “Group narcissism leads people to fascism. An extreme form of group narcissism means malignant narcissism, which gives rise to a fanatical fascist politics, an extreme racialism.”

“The right kind of leader,” Wilkerson writes, “can inspire a symbiotic connection that supplants logic. The susceptible group sees itself in the narcissistic leader, becomes one with the leader, sees his fortunes and his fate as their own.” She quotes the psychologist and social theorist Erich Fromm: “The greater the leader, the greater the follower.... The narcissism of the leader who is convinced of his greatness, and who has no doubts, is precisely what attracts the narcissism of those who submit to him.”

In the “Backlash” section of *Caste*, Wilkerson examines the post-Obama presidency in the context of caste and its weaponized pry-bar, race. I found the detail in this analysis one of the most fascinating aspects of a very enlightening book. According to political scientist Ashley Jardina, who specializes in the behavior of the white electorate, “the symbolism of Obama’s election was a profound loss to whites’ status.” For many, according to political scientist Andra Gillespie, “the ability of a black person to supplant the racial caste system, (was) “the manifestation of a nightmare which would need to be resisted.”

(Continued on Page 15.)

... Caste

(Continued from Page 14.)

“The caste system sprang into action,” Wilkerson writes. She quotes Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on the eve of the 2010 election: “The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.”

The resurgence of the dominating caste system with the election of President Trump exposes what the author calls “the degree of reliable consistency of caste as an enduring variable in American life and politics.”

In the book’s epilogue, Wilkerson concludes with her most hopeful, but starkest reminder:

“To imagine an end to caste in America, we need only look at the history of Germany. It is living proof that if a caste system — the 12-year reign of the Nazis — can be created, it can be dismantled. We make a serious error when we fail to see the overlap between our country and others, the common vulnerability in human programming, what the political theorist Hannah Arendt called the ‘banality of evil.’”

EVM Board Member and frequent reviewer Robert R. Thomas can be reached at capnz13prod@gmail.com.

... Piano

(Continued from Page 16.)

“Fantasticks,” still “Oklahoma,” James Taylor, Carole King.

Two books of “Sacred Transcriptions,” and my unbelieving heart expands with the loveliness (made innocent without words) of arrangements of old hymns, like “Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us” and “For the Beauty of the Earth.”

Little by little I’ve played each day, soothed by the repetitions of a set of Beethoven variations, soothed by successions of chords, soothed by the practice over and over, approaching “perfection” of delivery, soothed that I can still make reasonably harmonious sounds. Soothed by the orderliness of keys and sharps and

... \$600 million

(Continued from Page 14.)

support today’s class-action settlement for the victims of the water crisis, there will never be a number that adequately recognizes the harm done to Flint families.

“Justice for Flint families ultimately will take many forms, including today’s announcement. Justice comes by holding those state officials accountable for what they did to Flint.

Justice also requires making sure that families have access to critical resources, like the Flint Registry and other health care, educational and nutritional services, that can continue to help mitigate the effects of lead exposure.

Flint families deserve our continued support and we owe it to other communities to learn the lessons of the man-made crisis, so it never happens elsewhere.”

During a period of state-appointed emergency managers, then Flint Mayor Dayne Walling and other city officials,

flats, by the rhythms, by the dance between my eyes and my fingers, by the messages of composers and arrangers long gone who created these harmonies, these melodies that require no words — except, of course, the beloved Italian language of *allegro andante, sostenuto, vivace*. I took those words for granted as a child. Now I repeat them like familiar mantras, delighted by how they feel on the tongue and how they matter to the song.

The piano does not need batteries. I do not need WiFi. There are no cords. It does not have threads that argue with me. It does not keep track of my birthday or what I did nine years ago. It does not know who I’m voting for. I do not have to worry about my privacy, unless my neighbors flip out at hearing just one too many repetitions of my faulty “Misty” — a

tapped the water in the Flint River to run through the pipes of the city’s homes, schools and businesses. That proved to be a tragic series of decisions.

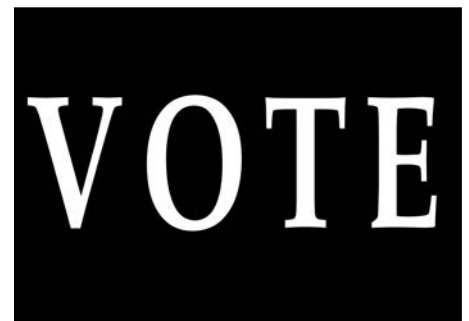
The corrosive make-up of the water in the Flint River stripped toxic lead amounts from old pipes throughout the city



Flint water pipe replacement crew
(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

and placed them into Flint’s water.

EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomntravis@gmail.com.



great song, by the way.

All I need is to sit down with my resurrected skill, the lifelong music in my spirit, my thanks for those devoted women of my childhood, my love of the gorgeous sounds other humans have created, and I let it all flow in and out of my body. All is not lost. There is still music. By luck, this beautiful instrument came my way. And somehow now, it gets me by.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

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Village Life

Reclaimed piano reclaims grace

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Some days, no matter how hard you try to stay sane, it's just too much.

Picture me roaming around my house — a sprawling old place with several routes for pacing and hiding — where we've been mostly cloistered, like any reasonable oldsters shrinking away from COVID-19, since March.

Picture me agitated, limbs sort of flapping, arms akimbo from time to time. Picture me muttering and cussing. Picture my pandemic hair, sticking out in cowlicks from a second or third conjugal chop.

You might think this is a woman who's a little bit mad.

You might think this is a picture of a person coming apart.

You might be right.

And if you were in my vicinity, which you wouldn't be since we've kept most of you out for five months, you might hear me mumble one particular plaint:

I'm so tired of words.

They have been my life, but today, as more Black men are killed, as a 17-year-old slaughters peaceful protesters in Kenosha, they seem tedious, inadequate, continually abused and misused, and, except perhaps for a primal scream, drastically ill-equipped for the realities off this life.

Nothing but trouble, words.

In this half-crazed condition, desperate to keep the TV off, desperate to avoid the mesmerizing madness of the laptop, annoyed by recent dips into bad novels and exasperating poetry, my sleep-deprived eyes landed on something.

The piano.

The piano! How could I have neglected that damn piano?

This requires a story. When we bought the house in 2014, the piano, a beat-up black spinet, had been left behind. Nobody much wants a piano these days — I've seen them tugged undecorously onto curbs more than

once, poor things.

Even though the previous owners didn't want the piano, nor the ones before that, before the bankruptcy and other indignities, I paid them a hundred bucks. Then it sat there, its lid modestly clamped down, mostly gathering dust, for six years.

History: as a kid I took piano lessons for ten years, tutored by a sequence of lovely women who endured my early stumbles and guided me as I gradually moved toward the life of a church musician I was supposedly destined for.

They threw in other music, too —



Jan at the keyboard
(Photo by Ted Nelson)

Beethoven, Chopin, Bach, Debussy, Brahms, Elgar.

And, appealing to my restless, foreboding eagerness for the "secular" world, they allowed for Gershwin, and show tunes — OMG, show tunes — from Oklahoma and the Fantasticks.

Remembering, I love those

women and how much they loved music and how good they were, sitting there trying to pass along their keyboard world, the possibility of the beautiful instrument, the possibilities of song.

I practiced an hour a day after school for many years. I perspired through a number of frilly dresses in a couple of recitals. I liked it, achieving a level supposedly suited to my destiny, but when my mom offered me a chance to stop taking lessons when we moved to yet another parish in high school, I was relieved.

In a way, I forgot about it all until the day I couldn't stand words.

And the piano, stolidly and uncomplainingly ignored and mute for all these years, whispered, "Open me up."

And so I did. I sat down, lifted the lid, and extended my two hands to the ivories, still remarkably familiar after all these years.

It felt amazing. I ventured a few chords, ran my fingers accelerando-ing and crescendo-ing up and down. Just fiddling and having fun. I gotta say, deep cleansing breaths almost immediately returned.

The poor instrument, however, was painfully, even comically, out of tune. Tom Travis told me about Dennis Ikeler (he is a story in himself), Flint's premiere piano tuner. He came to the house one Thursday morning and made a miracle happen, taking the boards off to expose the gleaming insides, tuning, tuning, tuning one note at a time. He repaired a broken pedal. He gave

me the love of a craftsman, and in the process told me about his life.

In a long-neglected bookshelf I found a pile of sheet music and music collections — as if my younger self knew someday I'd find them. They're funny to me — poignant. Still the

(Continued on Page 15.)

LVIII: 9 (689 issues, 7,104 pages)