

NCCU Professor Receives Prestigious Award From The National Endowment For The Humanities

Sabrina L. Thomas, assistant professor of family and consumer sciences at North Carolina Central University, received a 2004 faculty research award in the amount of \$40,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The award will support her writing of a book entitled *The History of Dolls as a Sociology of Black Childhood*. Thomas states this grant is important because it shows that peers in the industry value her theories as credible and not just a person "playing with dolls."

"I examine how women born within the first half of the 20th century used the context of doll play to act out, negotiate, or challenge existing notions of race and race relations," said Thomas.

"When you look at the history of black dolls and their production and location in consumer areas throughout history, it is indicative of how we as a society had distinguished the notion of black childhood."

Thomas said she has often gone into toy stores to conduct research and found that the African American dolls are placed out of reach of consumers, are only available in skin hues that do not resemble the child or are not available at all. She believes these placements and product choices, although tacit and apparently coincidental according to the toy distributor, play a large role in child's psychological development. Thomas said she hopes her work will appeal to parents who may not be aware of the lasting effects of their doll choices.

"This is the opportunity I've been waiting for," said Thomas, who will submit articles to refereed journals and shop her book to publishers. "Getting the NEH grant is validating because it is a stiff competition."

Thomas received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Tuskegee University, a master's degree in early childhood education from the University of Rochester, and her doctorate in human development and family studies from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She also obtained a certificate in Spanish language and culture from Universidad de Salamanca in Salamanca, Spain and a certificate of africana studies from the University of Ghana-Legon in Accra, West Africa.



ASSISTANT PROFESSOR SABRINA L. THOMAS

Hidden Auto Financing Charges Cost Consumers

By Dee-Ann Durbin

WASHINGTON (AP) - Hidden auto financing charges cost consumers \$1 billion each year, and blacks and Hispanics are particular targets, a consumer advocacy group contended.

When a car buyer arranges financing through an auto dealer, lenders quote a finance rate based on the buyer's credit history. In some cases, dealers are increasing that rate by several percentage points and sharing the profit with lenders, the Consumer Federation of America contended.

The National Automobile Dealers Association responded that the charges are fair compensation for dealers who set up financing.

"The rate provided by finance companies to dealers is a wholesale rate," the association said in a statement. "It's the same as the difference between what McDonald's pays for a hamburger and what we pay for it. The McDonald's markup is undiscovered."

Stephen Brobeck, executive director of the Consumer Federation, said it's reasonable for dealers to charge a fee for setting up financing, but he said they should charge a flat rate of \$100 or \$200 instead of marking up financing rates.

Now, he said, consumers avoid the charges only if they're savvy enough to know the lender's rate.

"There's sort of an art here on the part of the dealer, to know which consumers will accept this loan

rate," Brobeck said. "They're taking advantage of vulnerable consumers."

Dealers typically increase the rate by around 3 percentage points, which can add \$1,000 to the cost of the loan, the Consumer Federation said. The group estimates the practice affects one out of every four buyers who finance their vehicles through dealerships and disproportionately hurts low- to middle-income blacks and Hispanics.

"The practice of the markup is unethical, immoral and should be deemed illegal," said Fenimore Fisher of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, a civil rights organization. The Hispanic advocacy group, National Council of La Raza, also joined the Consumer Federation on Jan. 26.

Brobeck said consumers can avoid markups if they call their bank and get a rate quote before they reach any terms with an auto dealer. The National Automobile Dealers Association also said consumers are free to shop around if a quote seems too high.

The Consumer Federation said the practice has gained attention in the last few years because of a handful of court cases and legislation.

In July, former California Gov. Gray Davis signed a law requiring dealers to retain documents so regulators can better track lending practices.

Nissan began offering "no

markup" car loans this year to qualified minorities as part of a settlement with 10 black and Hispanic car buyers, who sued the company's finance division over markups in 1998. General Motors

Acceptance Corp., the nation's second-largest auto lender, also is involved in a court case with a black customer from Tennessee who says she was overcharged.

James Peeler, dies, chronicled Charlotte's black community

CHARLOTTE (AP) - Photographer James Peeler, who captured the civil rights movement and the daily life of Charlotte's black community, has died, a month after part of his collection was destroyed in a fire.

Peeler died Jan. 9 at age 74 following a brief illness, according to a funeral home. His funeral was scheduled for Jan. 14 in Charlotte.

As owner for 40 years of Peeler's Portrait Studio, he captured special moments - weddings, proms and family portraits - in the lives of average people.

But as a freelancer for black newspapers and organizations such as the NAACP, Peeler also chronicled significant episodes in Charlotte's black community.

He photographed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on a visit to Charlotte and, in September 1957, Delois Huntley when she became the first black student to attend Alexander Graham Junior High School.

The Afro American newspaper in Baltimore hired Peeler in 1960 to photograph sit-ins at downtown lunch counters.

Charles Jones, who led Charlotte's sit-in movement, remembered how Peeler would tuck his camera under his jacket, search for a good angle, then fire off several frames.

"He was gutsy enough to understand the moment and document it at his own risk," Jones said.

In December, a fire in Peeler's home studio destroyed many of his negatives. Other photographs remain in a separate storage unit, but without Peeler to identify their subjects, friends and survivors fear it may be hard to put them to good use.

The surviving negatives "deserve to be preserved as a remarkable aspect of Charlotte history that isn't anywhere else," said historian Pamela Grundy, who worked with Peeler on a museum exhibit about Charlotte radio. "There have been situations where valuable collections have been lost or left in a form where they are not of great use to historians. I hope that does not happen in this case."

Peeler graduated from Johnson C. Smith University with a double degree in English and Spanish and a teaching certificate. He was drafted into the Army and served two years in the Korean War teaching photography.

After the Army, he went to the Institute of Photography in New York on a GI bill. He returned to Charlotte to open a studio, tending bar and waiting tables at the Charlotte Country Club while he got the business off the ground.

Hundreds of Peeler's photographs have appeared in museum exhibits, history books and television documentaries. Several are currently on display at the Second Ward Alumni House Museum and the Levine Museum of the New South.

Jones said Peeler's photos helped black people see themselves as valuable in a world where whites often told them they were worthless.

"In most cases, black people were portrayed (in the white media) as murderers and rapists," he said. "In Peeler, we had a black photographer who could understand who we were and photograph us in our 'Sunday go-to-meeting' clothes.... He helped position that image in the psyche of the black community."

Peeler is survived by his wife of 49 years, Mrs. Ida Willis Peeler; his daughter, Latrelle McAllister, and his son-in-law, Michael McAllister.

ACLU of North Carolina Hosts Frank Porter Graham Awards Dinner

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina will host the 35th Annual Frank Porter Graham Awards Dinner at the Durham Marriott at the Civic Center on Saturday, February 7. A cocktail reception will begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner at 7 p.m.

Slater E. Newman, North Carolina State University professor and one of the founding members of the ACLU of North Carolina, will receive this year's Frank Porter Graham Award. Newman, whose work in the civil liberties arena has been tireless and widespread, is a co-chair of the Human Rights Coalition of North Carolina, among other vast and varied affiliations, and is a familiar face at human rights events around the state. He has been a Professor of Psychology at NCSU since 1957.

Gretchen M. Engel, an attorney for the Center for Death Penalty Litigation (CDPL), will receive the Paul Green Award. Engel has fought the death penalty with unceasing vigilance, through pre-trial research, clemency campaigns,

competent counsel, and post-conviction assistance. She currently serves as the director of Post-Conviction Assistance at CDPL.

Anthony Romero, executive director of the national ACLU, will be in attendance as Keynote Speaker. Romero became the sixth executive director of the ACLU a week prior to the September 11th attacks in 2001. In his first year as director the ACLU increased its membership by 75,000, and more people are joining every day. Under his leadership, the ACLU continues to spread the meaning of freedom and protect the rights of people throughout the United States.

The Frank Porter Graham Award began in 1968 when Dr. Frank Graham, former president of the University of North Carolina, was awarded for his lifetime of service in the civil liberties arena. The award was continued in Dr. Graham's name following his death in 1972. The Paul Green Award was established to recognize an individual's efforts to abolish the death penalty.

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Republicans

Bush plans to spend a lot of dollars on black media this year. He will be sending his black cabinet members to our community with the message that contrary to what civil rights leaders say, George W. Bush is a friend of the black community. Ignore their words and look at the Bush and GOP records. As Richard Nixon would say, they are perfectly clear.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.

Greatness

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been above ten percent and roughly twice the white unemployment rate since the recession began in the spring of 2001.

Further, the report also determined that African Americans are more likely than whites to endure long-term unemployment; that more college-educated and highly-skilled African-American workers are unemployed than their white counterparts; and that African-Americans have suffered disproportionate job losses in manufacturing, a job area where their gains since the 1960s was critical to the expansion of the black middle class.

These and other factors, such as stagnating wages, have combined to make the job reversals blacks have endured since 2001 the worst turn-around in the labor market they've faced in more than twenty-five years.

We at the Urban League are launching an aggressive effort to attack the jobs crisis. The effort includes convening a National Jobs Summit later this spring to develop proposals that spur job growth and wage and salary increases, and address the problems of long-term unemployment and the permanent loss of manufacturing jobs.

Our discussion will include exploring how to best spur African-American business development and entrepreneurship, persuade major corporations to invest more in urban communities and inner-city neighborhoods, and better use tax and fiscal policies to direct more public and private investment to repairing the crumbling infrastructures of our cities.

These are all things that can stimulate economic growth and get people working again in ways that help close the yawning equality gaps in American society.

Words that Whitney M. Young, Jr., who led the Urban League during the 1960s, wrote in 1964, provide a powerful testament to what American society must do now if the words "equality of opportunity" are to be more than a slogan.

"Our progress, technologically, is the marvel of the age and a tribute to our way of life," he wrote then. "But the test of our real and lasting greatness will be our willingness now to invest equal vigor, intelligence, and a substantial portion of our treasure in [assuring] opportunities for the most creative life for our youth and adults."

Gov. Easley Appoints Two to M.L. King, Jr. Commission

RALEIGH — Gov. Mike Easley has appointed Rev. Ricky L. Banks of Elizabeth City and Dr. George Bernard Jackson of Thomasville to the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission.

Banks is a pastor of St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church in Elizabeth City. He is a moderator of Roanoke Baptist Association, the fourth vice president of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and a member of the General Baptist State Convention general board. Banks received his bachelor's degree from Elizabeth City State University, his certification in religious studies from Roanoke Collegiate Institute and his master of divinity from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

Jackson is the founding pastor of the Citadel of Faith Christian Fellowship in Thomasville and an instructor at Livingstone College in Salisbury. Previously, he was the senior pastor at New Bethlehem Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Penn. Jackson received his bachelor's degree from N.C. Central University, completed graduate work at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, received his master's of divinity from Shaw University and his doctor of ministry from Friends International Christian University in Merced, Calif.

The commission encourages appropriate ceremonies and activities throughout the state relating to the observance of the legal holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. It promotes an awareness and appreciation of the life and

work of Martin Luther King Jr. among the people of North Carolina. There are 16 members on the commission, each serving a 4-year term. The governor appoints 12 members.

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