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## West Point Graduatees Most Diverse Class

WEST POINT, N.Y. (AP) - Vice President Mike Pence told the most diverse graduating class in the history of the U.S. Military Academy on May 25 that they are "the best of the best."

Pence congratulated the West Point graduates on behalf of President Donald Trump, and told them, "As you accept the mantle of leadership I promise you, your commander in chief will always have your back. President Donald Trump is the best friend the men and women of our armed forces will ever have."

More than 980 cadets became U.S. Army second lieutenants in the ceremony at West Point's football stadium.

Pence noted that Trump has proposed a \$750 billion defense budget for 2020 and said the United States "is once again embracing our role as the leader of the free world."

He told the graduates that the world "is a dangerous place" and they should expect to see combat.

"It is a virtual certainty that you will fight on a battlefield for America at some point in your life," Pence said. "You will lead soldiers in combat. It will happen. Some of you will join the fight against radical Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq." He added, "Some of you may even be called upon to serve in this hemisphere."

The class was the most diverse in West Point's history, and Pence said he wanted to acknowledge "the historic milestones that we're marking today."

The 2019 cadets included 34 black women and 223 women, both all-time highs since the first female cadets graduated in 1980. The academy graduated its 5,000th woman May 25.

The 110 African Americans who graduated were double the number from 2013.

Pence said the graduates also included the academy's 1,000th Jewish cadet.

Pence did not serve in the military but noted that his late father served with the Army in the Korean War.

"And as I stand before you today here at West Point I can't help but think that First Lt. Edward J. Pence, looking down from glory, is finally impressed with his third son," Pence said. "So thank you for the honor."

The ceremony was Pence's second visit to West Point and his first as commencement speaker.



Some supporters of the recent teacher's rally in Raleigh. See photos on page 13. Photos By Artije Photography - Ronald Parker

## Longest-running housing discrimination case outlives judge

By Ed White

HAMTRAMCK, Mich. (AP) - A federal judge who worked until his recent death at age 96 left a historic trail of groundbreaking legal opinions. But one case outlived Damon Keith: the longest-running housing discrimination lawsuit in the United States.

Keith declared in 1971 that Hamtramck, a tiny Detroit-area city long known for Polish culture, had intentionally forced out blacks or cut them off from the community to make room for Interstate 75 and so-called urban renewal projects in the 1950s and '60s.

Hamtramck finally agreed to offer 200 family housing units, as well as housing for senior citizens, for violating the constitutional rights of black residents. Yet even today - decades later - there still are three houses left to build. Keith, who died on April 28, won't see the keys change hands, an unfortunate postscript for a judge whose steadfast enforcement of civil rights was the emblem of his career.

"The finish line will probably be this summer," said Michael Barnhart, an attorney who has represented generations of black families in the litigation. "I know his health was declining, but I wanted him to be there after all these years."

Hamtramck Mayor Karen Majewski said: "It's bittersweet. The end really is around the corner." Keith, the grandson of slaves, was a judge for 52 years, first at the U.S. District Court in Detroit, followed by 42 years on a federal appeals court. He made history on the bench, ruling against the Nixon administration's use of warrantless phone taps and ordering George W. Bush's administration to open deportation hearings.

In the Hamtramck lawsuit, filed in 1968, Keith noted that blacks made up less than 15% of the city's population but represented more than 70% of residents whose neighborhoods were broken up because of the path of I-75. He also cited other examples.

"The judge referred to it as the 'black removal case,'" Barnhart said. "It was an extreme example of racial discrimination."

After nearly a decade, Hamtramck agreed to offer housing at below-market rates to families that wanted to return. But that solution languished for many more years, due to political opposition and the city's poor finances. By 2010, half of the 200 units were complete, and Keith proudly attended a ribbon-cutting at a new home on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Then work stalled again.

"The problem always was the city was broke," Barnhart said. "Through the whole case we've tried to identify federal programs or county programs or state programs to help us put together the housing that was needed. That has been the fundamental problem."

Keith had the case for virtually his entire career, keeping it until 2018 despite his promotion to the appeals court. In his 2014 biography, "Crusader for Justice," the judge scoffed at critics who accused him of "social engineering."

"If I see inequities ... as it relates to discrimination and violation of the law, then I have broad authority to fashion a remedy," Keith said.

Lemuel Sawyer, 61, and his sisters are among those who have benefited from Keith's decision. His family was forced out when he was a boy, but he returned to Hamtramck in 2014 to live in a new two-story home. His parents are dead.

"To me, this is my mother's home. This is my family's home," Sawyer said, speaking in his doorway on Goodson Street. "Judge Damon Keith - he saved the day. He gave us optimism."

## NC African American Heritage Commission gets new director

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina's African American Heritage Commission has a new director with her own history with the agency.

The state Department of Natural and Cultural Resources said in a news release this week that Angela Thorpe is the commission's new director. Thorpe has been the acting director since September 2018 and previously was the commission's associate director.

Thorpe was the first African American historic interpreter at the James K. Polk State Historic Site in Pineville. The agency says that while there, she used inclusive programming to attract diverse audiences.

In 2016, she was awarded a diversity and inclusion fellowship by the American Alliance of Museums.

## Black official: Annexation could change Starkville politics

STARKVILLE, Miss. (AP) - An African American elected official in north Mississippi says he thinks a city's annexation plan could diminish black political power.

Starkville Alderman Henry Vaughn says taking in more territory could increase the strength of five wards that have been represented by white aldermen while decreasing the strength of two wards with black aldermen.

Starkville Mayor Lynn Spruill tells the Commercial Dispatch that redistricting is "nothing more than an opportunity for the city to grow."

The 2010 Census showed Starkville's population was 59.6% white, 34.6% black and 5.7% other. Combined with the annexation area, the city would become 60.2% white, 34.1% black and 5.8% other.

With or without annexation, Starkville officials will redraw aldermen ward lines after the 2020 Census to balance out other population changes.

## Register to Vote



REP. JOHN LEWIS - COURTESY LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

## Rep. John Lewis tells graduates to 'get in trouble'

WORCESTER, Mass. (AP) - U.S. Rep. John Lewis urged graduates of Framingham State University in Massachusetts on May 26 to "get in trouble" and to build "bridges, not walls."

The Georgia Democrat, a veteran of the 1960s civil rights movement, was the keynote speaker at the school's commencement at the DCU Center in Worcester.

He hearkened back to his days growing up in a segregated South, and remembered being told not to question the status quo.

"They said, 'Boy, that's the way it is. Don't get in the way, don't get in trouble,'" Lewis said. "But I was inspired to get in trouble: Good trouble, necessary trouble."

"I'd advise each and every one of you young people to go out and to get in trouble, come make our country a better place," he said.

Lewis was arrested dozens of times and was physically attacked during the civil rights movement, but told students to follow the non-violent examples of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Inspired by King, he joined and then rose to become a leader of the civil rights movement.

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