

Life!

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2025 SECTION B



Starting Dec. 1, North Carolina will no longer inspect tint on vehicle windows, although the law is still in force.

Roll with it: Tint inspections on the way out

By Courtney Singleton
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Testing window tint will no longer be a part of North Carolina vehicle inspections as of Dec. 1.

It means cars with illegal tints will be able to pass inspection and update registration with no issue, but the law has not changed. The legal limit is 32%, which measures the visibility to see in and out of the vehicle. Anything lower is considered too dark, which causes concern for not only driver safety, but law enforcement as well.

"If a police officer is approaching a car and they cannot see through those windows ten that police officer must treat that traffic stops in a completely different manner than they would if they could have seen in the car clearly and that is normally where all your social media videos come from," said Sunny Williamson, a vehicle inspector instructor at Alamance County Community College and chairman of the Burlington police civilian advisory team for two years.

"These cops are all acting bad and duh duh duh. Well, you put them in that situation, right?"

Williamson is relieved about the change's impact on inspectors.

"We are not here to enforce the window tint law.

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Transform home's interior space with an accent wall

FAMILY FEATURES

If you're looking to give your home a fresh look without a full-scale remodel, an accent wall might be an ideal solution.

Whether you're craving bold color or rich texture, an accent wall can instantly add personality and visual interest with minimal effort.

Consider these ideas to spark your imagination:

Bold paint colors

Sometimes the simplest option can be a fresh coat of paint. Whether you choose a deep, dramatic color like burgundy, navy or emerald green or opt for more playful vibes with teal or mustard shades, pair your accent wall with neutral decor for a balanced, stylish look.

Geometric designs

For a modern architectural look, use wood trim or molding to create a geometric pattern such as chevron or herringbone. Paint the trim the same color as the wall for subtle texture or use contrasting tones for a bolder statement.

Stone or brick accents

Exposed brick and stone can bring natural beauty and timeless appeal that pair beautifully with wood beams, modern furniture and industrial lighting. Use

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«HOLIDAY BAKING

Toss milk-based products for holiday desserts with a dairy-forward approach

FAMILY FEATURES

Holiday desserts set the stage for seasonal delight and add a touch of joy to gatherings.

From festive cookies to indulgent dips, these delicious desserts bring people together to create memories that will last a lifetime.

If you're looking to impress guests, Santa cookies are the ultimate treat. Made with Maple Hill Salted Butter, they're rich, soft and full of festive spirit. For a unique twist, try Gingerbread Dip, featuring vanilla Greek yogurt made with 100% grass-fed organic milk.

Whether you're hosting or deciding what to bring

to the potluck, Maple Hill's 100% grass-fed organic dairy makes it easy to whip up desserts that are as wholesome as they are delicious. Rich in nutrients and free from GMOs, hormones and antibiotics, each product comes from farms that prioritize regenerative practices as nature intended.

With a 40% healthier ratio of omega 3:6 and 40% higher levels of CLA fatty acids compared to traditional organic dairy, you can feel good about sweet treats at the holiday table.

To find more recipes, visit [MapleHill.com](#).

Santa cookies
Yield: 14 cookies
1 cup (2 sticks) Maple Hill

Saltd Butter, at room temperature

1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 large egg, at room temperature

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon red food coloring

mini chocolate chips

mini red chocolate-coated candies

Frosting:

1/2 cup (1 stick) Maple Hill Salted Butter, at room temperature

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 1/2 cups powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

In large mixing bowl, beat butter, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy. Add egg and beat until combined. Add flour and salt; mix until dough begins to form ball.

Remove 1 cup dough and set aside. Add red food coloring to remaining dough.

From red cookie dough, make one 1-inch ball and five 1/2-inch balls. From plain cookie dough, make one 3/4-inch ball and five 1/4-inch balls.

On prepared baking sheet, place red 1-inch ball and gently flatten until 1/2-inch thick. Attach four 1/2-inch balls for arms

and legs. Attach plain 1/2-inch ball for head and

gently flatten until 1/2-



Get an early jump on Christmas baking with Santa cookies. and legs. Attach plain 1/2-inch ball for head and Attach plain 1/2-inch ball for head and gently flatten until 1/2-

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CHARLOTTE DOUGLAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The holidays are prime time for travel across the United States – as well as injuries and illness.

There's no time for the holiday travel ouchies

Here are tips to maintain the best condition while making rounds

By Cameron Williams

[cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com](#)

Holiday travel is tricky enough without dealing with injury or sickness.

Nothing is worse than looking forward to spending time with family during the holiday season and wind up sick or nursing an injury due to travel. Nicole Vital with Novant Health offered a few tips and tricks for when travel tries to get you down during the holidays.

1. Make sure to stretch periodically on long road trips or flights

As odd as it sounds, the prolonged hours of sitting during long trips in the car or even flights cause stiffness in joints and muscles in the body. Studies have shown that it could even cause a serious condition such as deep vein thrombosis.

"Deep vein thrombosis, or a DVT is the shortened medical acronym that you'll see for a blood clot that is in the large vessels or large veins in the legs," Vital said. "If they migrate to the lungs, which is the most common place they migrate to, then they become pulmonary embolisms or PEs."

PES can be fatal if not treated immediately. Clots that form in the legs often develop from prolonged hours of sitting.

"If we sit or even lay down for extended periods of time, you run the risk of blood pooling in your lower legs," Vital said. ... "But some things you can do to make sure you don't get clots are to move around. ... If you're on a plane, going to the bathroom or just simply walking back and forth to the bathroom will help keep the

blood circulating. If you're in the car, make sure to take breaks occasionally, go to the bathroom, take laps in the park, go to the gas station or grocery store. Anything you can do to move around and not stay seated would be really helpful."

2. Keep clean by washing hands, breathing moist air and staying socially distanced from others sick

On top of muscle soreness from traveling, another common ailment is colds, the flu or even COVID-19. Making sure to steer clear of people that are sick and keeping a healthy home are critical during the dry, cold holiday months.

"First off, social distancing is helpful," Vital said. "Making sure that you're staying away from

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«SPONSORED BY JPMORGANCHASE

Turn over a new financial leaf with these strategies to build credit score success



KEIRA BURTON | PEXELS

Your credit score is the result of factors including payment history and credit utilization.

your credit card and paying your bill on time demonstrates financial responsibility to lenders.

meeting the minimum amount due can negatively impact your score.

Factors behind your credit score

Credit scores typically range from 300 to 850. The

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There's no time for the holiday travel ouchies

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people you know are sick is obviously helpful. I'd also recommend humidified air. The reason why viruses spread so easily in this part of the year is because of dry, cold air. When our houses get cold, it drops the ambient humidity in our homes. So, tossing in a little humidity by running a clean humidifier and using saline to moisten our nasal passages is helpful.

Vital also suggests staying up to date on vaccinations.

"Getting yearly vaccines is important," she said. "The COVID-19 vaccine, influenza vaccine and even RSV can help prevent those viral illnesses. These help decrease the amount of time you are symptomatic and also decreases the risk of hospitalization, which could lead to missing work and school."

3. Prioritize healthy sleep habits

Most Americans have sleep schedules that don't align with proper amounts of time for the body to rest. Add in the holiday craziness of travel and keeping up with work or school can also hinder sleeping habits further.

Vital emphasized the importance of

making sure during the holidays making sure to get the appropriate amount of sleep.

"Sleep is the way for our body to recover, our brain to rest, and I think part of good sleep is just discussing how to get there," Vital said. "All of us are staring at computer screens or phones and even TVs. With that, a lot of folks can't unwind. You're staring at blue light all day. Our brain secretes something called melatonin that helps us sleep. If you're staring at blue light, your brain doesn't recognize it's dark."

The blue light our brains take in hinders the process of melatonin production.

"Shutting off some of these devices that emit blue light will be helpful," Vital said. "About two hours before you go to bed, have a nighttime routine. We think about it for our children, but with adults, we brush our teeth, might get into bed and scroll on Instagram, so, it's important to have a routine that doesn't involve these devices. Also, decreasing temperature is really helpful. ... Cultivating a routine without blue light and creating a good sleeping environment will go a long way."

Roll with it: North Carolina tint inspections are on the way out

Continued from page 1B

All we do is just go, is it within what the law says? And then we pass or fail it there," says Williamson.

"So now, it is going to be more of an 'OK, we are not going to hold you up from getting your stickers for your tags because of window tint,' because that is a law and the law should be enforced by law enforcement, right? Not the person who is inspecting the car."

Currently, cars with tint that is not made as part of the window's original manufacturing must be tested to make sure it is within legal standards. An inspector may suspect a shade is too dark, but still required to test before failing the vehicle.

Granville County Police confirmed law enforcement have a right to pull over a car they suspect has tint that is not in compliance to the law since there is no other way of confirming the percentage of shade until it is tested.

"Whenever it comes to window tint, that is where you get the irate customers," Williamson said. "I had a guy, he almost pulled gun on me, and he refused to pay me and I was like, 'fine dude, just

leave.' I had already failed the car in the system, so I am not going back in there to change it just because you want your windows black."

Although there are shops that may be more lenient or even pass a car that should fail, Williamson always made sure to follow the book. Overlooking a failed inspection can result in personal and/or shop fines, suspension of the inspection station or license.

There are exceptions to the law, though.

SUVs, limousines, minivans and pickup trucks get a pass when it comes to tint on back windows. They are tested only for the front window's hue.

Medical exceptions are made for the front windows when drivers with sensitive eyes obtain documentation issued via the Department of Motor Vehicles that specify how much darker the tint is allowed.

Doing away with tint inspection also means consumers will no longer be subjected to the additional \$10 charge. Any additional charges would be considered illegal. There should be no changes in price due to inspections being tax deferred.

A state vehicle inspection should only cost \$30 or \$13.60. The difference in these prices depend on if the vehicle is required to get both a safety and emissions inspection or just a safety inspection only.

The type of inspection your car requires is determined by the year of the vehicle and which county it is registered in, but anything that is a 2005 or older only gets tested for safety and not emissions.

Electronic vehicles and heavy-duty trucks with a gross vehicle weight rating of 8,500 pounds or higher are also subjected to a safety-only inspection. Vehicles that are 30 years old or more do not require inspection.

According to Williamson, emissions testing looks to be the next big change in state inspections laws. Conversations about the abolishment of emissions testing have been circulated for years but Williamson believes it could change as early as next year.

Originally, the change was set to happen for every county except Mecklenburg, but paperwork has recently been submitted requesting a change.



An accent wall goes a long way in transforming and personalizing a home's interior space.

Change interior with accent wall

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real stone for authenticity or opt for veneer panels for quick and easy installation.

Built-in shelving

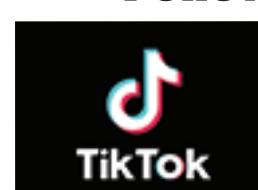
Combine function and style with a statement storage area. Built-in shelves filled with books, plants and curated decor can become the heart of a living room or home office.

Wall of art

Whether you opt for a hand-painted mural or a variety of prints in different shapes, sizes and frames, artwork can tell a story or set the mood for a room. Try a floral motif for softness, a skyline for urban flair or abstract pieces for modern drama.

Find more ideas to personalize your living space at eLivingtoday.com.

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Holiday desserts with a dairy-forward upgrade

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balls for hands and feet. Shape remaining red 1/2-inch ball into triangle for hat and attach. Repeat with remaining dough, arranging cookies 2 inches apart on baking sheet. Add chocolate candies for eyes and buttons.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until lightly golden.

To make frosting: In medium bowl, beat butter and cream cheese until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and powdered sugar; mix until combined.

To decorate: Place half of frosting in piping bag with small tip to line Santa's arms and legs. Place other half in second piping bag with small star tip to add Santa's beard, hat and hands. Put small dot of icing between eyes and beard and place red mini chocolate-coated candy on face for nose.

Gingerbread dip

Servings: 8-12

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

1/4 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup powdered sugar

3 tablespoons molasses

1 container (16 ounces) Maple Hill Vanilla Greek Yogurt

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 cups whipped cream

graham crackers

fruit

In medium bowl using electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese and sugars about one minute. Add molasses and mix until combined.

Add Greek yogurt, ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg; beat until combined. Fold in whipped cream and mix until fully incorporated. Refrigerate one hour before serving or overnight.

Serve with graham crackers and fruit.

Turn over a new financial leaf: Strategies to build credit score

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Payment history: Consistently paying bills on time has a positive impact, while late or missed payments can lower your score.

Credit utilization: Using a smaller portion of your total available credit is better for your score; high balances relative to your total credit limits can be a negative factor.

Total debt: Lower overall debt is viewed more favorably, while carrying high debt can reduce your score.

Types of credit accounts: Having a mix of credit accounts, such as credit cards, auto loans, and mortgages, can strengthen your score.

Length of credit history: A longer track record of responsible credit use contributes positively to your score.

Recent credit applications:

Applying for new credit can temporarily lower your score.

Credit inquiries: Soft inquiries, like checking your own credit or receiving pre-approved offers, don't affect your score. Hard inquiries, such as applying for a loan or credit card, may lower your score slightly, but the impact fades over time and drops off your report after two years.

If your credit score is on the lower end, don't worry—there are steps you can take to help improve it.

Credit smart habits

Pay your bills on time. Payment history is an important factor when it comes to calculating your credit score. If you struggle with meeting payment deadlines, consider setting reminders or enrolling in autopay.

Pay down your debt. Your credit utilization—

meaning the size of your card balance—is the second biggest factor in most credit scoring models. Create a plan to pay down high-interest debt first.

Monitor your credit with Chase Credit Journey. Regularly checking your credit report can help you spot areas of improvement and fix errors.

Chase Credit Journey is a free tool that lets you monitor your score without impacting it, and provides alerts if your personal information is exposed in a data breach. It's free for everyone, no Chase account required.

Turn credit concerns into wins

Building credit doesn't have to be spooky and mysterious. With patience and smart financial habits, you can improve your score and unlock financial opportunities. This fall, take steps to understand and strengthen your credit.



CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's new anti-vaccination guidance on autism is sparking pushback in the medical community.

What to know about the CDC's baseless guidance on autism

By Arthur Allen

KFF HEALTH NEWS

The rewriting of a page on the CDC's website to assert the false claim that vaccines may cause autism sparked a torrent of anger and anguish from doctors, scientists, and parents who say Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is wrecking the credibility of an agency they've long relied on for unbiased scientific evidence.

Many scientists and public health officials fear that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, which now baselessly claims that health authorities previously ignored evidence of a vaccine-autism link, foreshadows a larger, dangerous attack on childhood vaccination.

"This isn't over," said Helen Tager-Flusberg, a professor emerita of psychology and brain science at Boston University. She noted that Kennedy hired several longtime anti-vaccine activists and researchers to review vaccine safety at the CDC. Their study is due soon, she said. "They're massaging the

data, and the outcome is going to be, 'We will show you that vaccines do cause autism,'" said Tager-Flusberg, who leads an advocacy group of more than 320 autism scientists concerned about Kennedy's actions.

Kennedy's handpicked vaccine advisory committee is set to meet next month to discuss whether to abandon recommendations that babies receive a dose of the hepatitis B vaccine within hours of birth and make other changes to the CDC-approved vaccination schedule. Kennedy has claimed — falsely, scientists say — that vaccine ingredients cause conditions like asthma and peanut allergies, in addition to autism.

The revised CDC webpage will be used to support efforts to ditch most childhood vaccines, said Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan and co-editor-in-chief of the journal Vaccine. "It will be cited as evidence, even though it's completely invented," she said. Kennedy personally ordered the website's alter-

ation, he told The New York Times. The CDC's developmental disability group was not asked for input on the changes, said Abigail Tighe, executive director of the National Public Health Coalition, a group that includes current and former staffers at the CDC and HHS.

Scientists ridiculed the site's declaration that studies "have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism." While upward of 25 large studies have shown no link between vaccines and autism, it is scientifically impossible to prove a negative, said David Mandell, director of the Center for Autism Research at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The webpage's new statement that "studies supporting a link have been ignored by health authorities" apparently refers to work by vaccine opponent David Geier and his father, Mark, who died in March, Mandell said. Their research has been widely repudiated and even ridiculed. David Geier is one of the outside experts Ken-

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What to know about CDC misguidance on autism

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Kennedy hired to review safety data at the CDC.

Asked for evidence that scientists had suppressed studies showing a link, HHS spokesperson Andrew Nixon pointed to older reports, some of which called for more study of a possible link. Asked for a specific study showing a link, Nixon did not respond.

Expert reaction

Infectious disease experts, pediatricians, and public health officials condemned the alteration of the CDC website. Although Kennedy has made no secret of his disdain for established science, the change came as a gut punch because the CDC has always dealt in unbiased scientific information, they said.

Kennedy and his "nihilistic Dark Age compatriots have transformed the CDC into an organ of anti-vaccine propaganda," said Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

"On the one hand, it's not surprising," said Sean O'Leary, a professor of pediatrics and infectious disease at the University of Colorado. "On the other hand, it's an inflection point, where they are clearly using the CDC as an apparatus to spread lies."

"The CDC website has been lobotomized," Atul Gawande, an author and a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital, told KFF Health News.

CDC "is now a zombie organization," said Demetre Daskalakis, former director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC. The agency has lost about a third of its staff this year. Entire divisions have been gutted and its leadership fired or forced to resign.

Kennedy has been "going from evidence-based decision-making to decision-based evidence making," Daniel Jernigan, former director of the CDC's National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, said at a news briefing Nov. 19.

With Kennedy and his team, terminology including "radical transparency" and "gold-standard science" has been "turned on its head," he said.

Cassidy goes quiet

The new webpage seemed to openly taunt Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), a physician who chairs the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Cassidy cast the tie-breaking vote in committee for Kennedy's confirmation after saying he had secured an agreement that the longtime anti-vaccine activist wouldn't make significant changes to the CDC's vaccine policy once in office.

The agreement included a promise, he said, that the CDC would not remove statements on its website stating that vaccines do not cause autism.

The new autism page is still headed with the statement "Vaccines do not cause Autism," but with an asterisk linked to a notice that the phrase was retained on the site only "due to an agreement" with Cassidy. The rest of the page contradicts the header.

"What Kennedy has done to the CDC's website and to the American people makes Sen. Cassidy into a total and absolute fool," said Mark Rosenberg, a former CDC official and assistant surgeon general.

On Nov. 19 at the Capitol, before the edits were made to the CDC website, Cassidy answered several unrelated questions from reporters but ended the conversation when he was asked about the possibility Kennedy's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices might recommend against a newborn dose of the hepatitis B vaccine.

"I got to go in," he said,

before walking into a hearing room without responding.

Cassidy has expressed dismay about the vaccine advisory committee's actions but has avoided criticizing Kennedy directly or acknowledging that the secretary has breached commitments he made before his confirmation vote. Cassidy has said Kennedy also promised to maintain the childhood immunization schedule before being confirmed.

The senator criticized the CDC website edits in a Nov. 20 post on X, although he did not mention Kennedy.

"What parents need to hear right now is vaccines for measles, polio, hepatitis B and other childhood diseases are safe and effective and will not cause autism," he said in the post. "Any statement to the contrary is wrong, irresponsible, and actively makes Americans sicker."

Leading autism research and support groups, including the Autism Science Foundation, the Autism Society of America, and the Autism Self Advocacy Network, issued statements condemning the website.

"The CDC's web page used to be about how vaccines do not cause autism. Yesterday, they changed it," ASAN said in a statement. "It says that there is some proof that vaccines might cause autism. It says that people in charge of public health have been ignoring this proof. These are lies."

What the research shows

Parents often notice symptoms of autism in a child's second year, which happens to follow multiple vaccinations.

"That is the natural history of autism symptoms," said Tager-Flusberg. "But in their minds, they had the perfect child who suddenly has been taken from them, and they are looking for an external reason."

When speculation about a link between autism and the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine or vaccines containing the mercury-based preservative thimerosal surfaced around 2000, "scientists didn't dismiss them out of hand," said Tager-Flusberg, who has researched autism since the 1970s.

"We were shocked, and we felt the important thing to do was to figure out how to quickly investigate."

Since then, studies have clearly established that autism occurs as a result of genetics or fetal development. Although knowledge gaps persist, studies have shown that prema-

ture birth, older parents, viral infections, and the use of certain drugs during pregnancy — though not Tylenol, evidence so far indicates — are linked to increased autism risk.

But other than the reams of data showing the health risks of smoking, there are few examples of science more definitive than the many worldwide studies that "have failed to demonstrate that vaccines cause autism," said Bruce Gellin, former director of the National Vaccine Program Office.

The edits to the CDC website and other actions by Kennedy's HHS will shake confidence in vaccines and lead to more disease, said Jesse Goodman, a former FDA chief scientist and now a professor at Georgetown University.

This opinion was echoed by Alison Singer, the mother of an autistic adult and a co-founder of the Autism Science Foundation.

"If you're a new mom and not aware of the last 30 years of research, you might say, 'The government says we need to study whether vaccines cause autism. Maybe I'll wait and not vaccinate until we know,'" she said.

The CDC website misleads parents, puts children at risk, and draws resources away from promising leads, said Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "Kennedy thinks he's helping children with autism, but he's doing the opposite."

Many critics say their only hope is that cracks in President Donald Trump's governing coalition could lead to a turn away from Kennedy, whose team has reportedly tangled with some White House officials as well as Republican senators. Polling has also shown that much of the American public distrusts Kennedy and does not consider him a health authority, and Trump's own approval rating has sunk dramatically since he returned to the White House.

But anti-vaccine activists applauded the revised CDC webpage.

"Finally, the CDC is beginning to acknowledge the truth about this condition that affects millions," Mary Holland, CEO of Children's Health Defense, the advocacy group Kennedy founded and led before entering politics, told Fox News Digital. "The truth is there is no evidence, no science behind the claim vaccines do not cause autism."

The Charlotte Post

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next generation of
black leaders in Charlotte.

GIVINGTUESDAY



ONA ZENDA | KFF HEALTH NEWS

Falling vaccination and immunity rates are driving a resurgence of whooping cough across the United States.

Waning vaccination and immunity fuel pertussis

By Céline Gounder

KFF HEALTH NEWS

Rates of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, are surging in Texas, Florida, California, Oregon, and other states and localities across the country.

The outbreaks are fueled by falling vaccination rates, fading immunity, and delays in public health tracking systems, according to interviews with state and federal health officials. Babies too young to be fully vaccinated are most at risk.

Pertussis cases increase in a cyclical fashion driven by waning immunity, but the size of the outbreak and the potential for severe outcomes in children who cannot be vaccinated can be mitigated by high coverage and good communication to folks at risk," said Demetre Daskalakis, a former head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's immunization program, who resigned in August.

Before the first pertussis vaccine became available in the early 1900s, whooping cough was one of the most common childhood diseases and a major cause of childhood death in the United States. Today, children get a series of DTaP shots (full-dose version) starting at 2 months old, and teens and adults receive a Tdap booster (lower-dose version) every 10 years. (Both vaccines target diphtheria and tetanus in addition to pertussis.)

Until recently, 8 in 10 toddlers had received four doses of the DTaP vaccine by age 2, and case rates were controlled. But vaccine coverage has declined since the covid pandemic and increases in state nonmedical exemptions have widened immunity gaps, which is when the proportion of individuals who are immune falls below the level needed to contain spread.

Texas logged 1,928 pertussis cases in 2024. By October 2025, the state had exceeded 3,500. National numbers are just as stark: In the first three months of 2025, the U.S. tallied 6,600 cases — four times last year's pace and 25 times 2023's. Several states are posting their highest case totals in a decade, and outbreaks from Louisiana to South Dakota to Idaho make clear this surge isn't regional. It's everywhere.

Key factors behind the numbers

Texas lawmakers recently passed a law that made it easier for parents to claim nonmedical exemptions from school vaccine requirements by allowing them to download exemption forms online. These forms now go straight to schools, not health departments, making the exemptions harder to track.

Dallas County Health and Human Services Director Phil Huang said the full impact of the new exemption rule is not yet known because it began this school year, but he expects it will make school-level vaccination rates fall even more.

He's already noted a dramatic drop in vaccinations. Normally, during back-to-school season, "our whole front downstairs area is packed," he said. "We did not see that this year."

Huang believes fear of immigration enforcement may be keeping at least some families, especially Hispanic families, from getting vaccinated. Dallas County is about 40% Hispanic. "We think that a lot of them are deterred by the ICE activity," he said, referring to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

More complications: These vaccines protect against severe disease, but protection against infection fades over time, as is the case with the covid and influenza vaccines.

The U.S. switched in the 1990s from whole-cell pertussis vaccines to "acellular" ones, which cause fewer side effects but do not last as long. Because more adults today than in the past received the acellular vaccine as children, many have lost immunity over time and may unknowingly pass the infection to babies.

Babies face the greatest risk. Whooping cough is especially dangerous for infants under a year old. Some stop breathing during coughing fits. Many need hospital care, about 1

in 5 of whom develop pneumonia, and about 1% of whom die.

Because of this high risk, the CDC urges pregnant women to get a Tdap vaccine during every pregnancy. This allows the mother's antibodies to pass to the baby before birth.

Health officials once promoted "cooing," vaccinating all family members and caregivers around the baby, but that strategy was hard to carry out in real life and is no longer widely recommended. Vaccination of pregnant women and babies at 2 months of age remains the strongest protection.

Better testing finds more cases

Modern PCR testing is also uncovering more pertussis cases than in the past. Many clinics now routinely use this lab-based technology to test for several respiratory infections at once, including pertussis. Ten years ago, these panels were uncommon.

CDC experts say this explains part of the rise in case counts. But the large number of infant hospitalizations and the size of state outbreaks show that true transmission has also increased.

A Growing Worry: Antibiotic Resistance

Doctors normally treat pertussis with macrolide antibiotics, such as erythromycin, azithromycin, and clarithromycin. These drugs work best early in the illness and help stop spread. Another drug, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, is an option for some older infants and adults.

But macrolide-resistant pertussis has become common abroad, especially in China, and recent reports show resistance rising in Peru. In the U.S., resistant cases have been rare.

CDC officials warn that resistant strains could spread more easily through international travel. Because treatment options are limited, especially for very young infants, health workers are watching this closely.

Huang said macrolide resistance has not been seen yet in Dallas County. But he is aware of the national concern.

What happens now

The resurgence of whooping cough has no single cause. Instead, several problems are occurring at once: falling vaccine coverage, only about 60% of pregnant women receiving Tdap, waning immunity, improved testing, and early signs of antibiotic resistance.

Health experts say solutions must match the problem's complexity.

Across the nation, clinicians are being told to have a higher suspicion for pertussis when they see patients, especially children or caregivers of newborns with a persistent cough or coughing fits followed by vomiting. Babies who stop breathing or turn blue need immediate care.

Obstetricians are encouraged to discuss Tdap during every pregnancy. Pediatricians and family doctors are urged to check booster status for teens and adults.

Several states have issued health advisories over the past two years, including Texas, which has issued alerts in both 2024 and 2025 urging clinicians to stay vigilant.

Huang said Dallas County is trying to rebuild public health outreach programs that were cut when covid funding ended. But staffing is still limited. "There's just a lot of different things that are making it more difficult," he said.

He also noted that Dallas County now receives immunization registry data only once a month, rather than daily, making it harder to track vaccine coverage. "We don't have that yet. ... It's not real time," he said.

Protecting the youngest

As the holiday season approaches, experts urge families with newborns to take extra care:

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Electronic plans and specifications can be obtained from Aaron Wagoner at LandDesign, at awagoner@landdesign.com. Mecklenburg County reserves the right to waive technicalities and to reject any or all proposals. This information will be made available in an alternative format for persons with disabilities by calling 704-575-4947.

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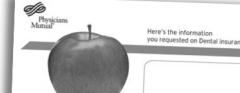
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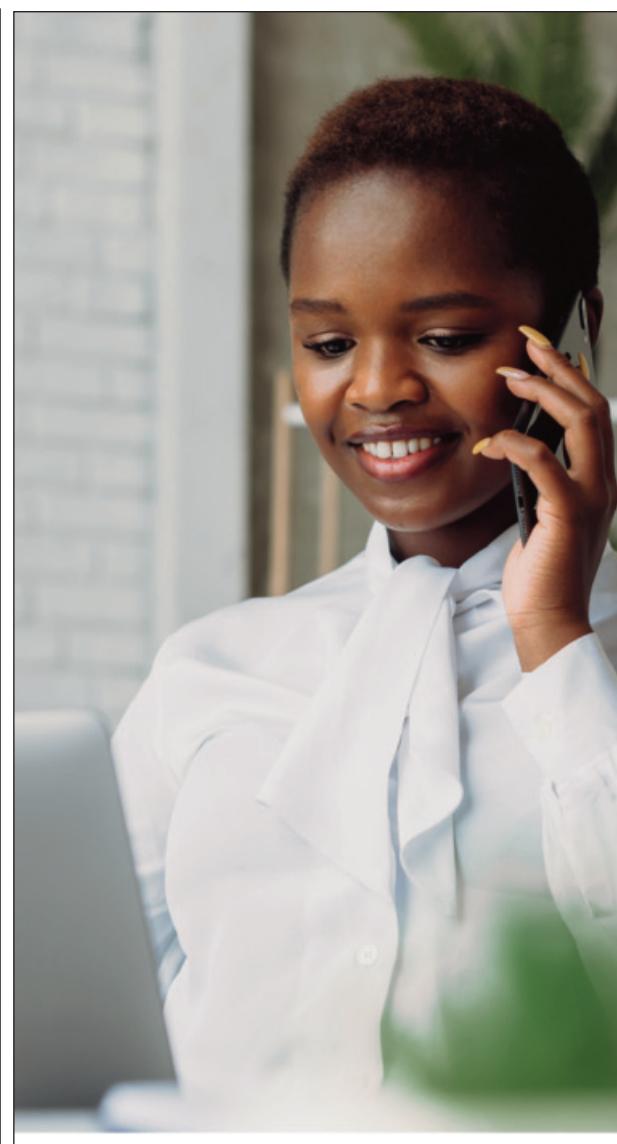
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PEACOCK

This image released by Peacock shows Damon Hopkins, left, in a scene from the documentary "High Horse: The Black Cowboy."

Series sheds light on legacy, history of the Black cowboy

By Gary Gerard Hamilton
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Texas-bred hip-hop duo UGK glared confidently into the camera atop stallions in the music video for their fan-favorite song "Wood Wheel."

The visuals reflected the expertise of the legendary Houston-area music act: blending tales of big city hustling with charming Texas cowboy culture.

"This is not Black people trying to assimilate with this country Western lifestyle. Black people across this country — East Coast to West Coast — have been prevalent in this space for years," said Bun B, who, with partner Pimp C, became pillars of southern hip-hop, creating hits to help it become today's current dominant rap genre.

Bun, an ambassador for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and the first and only Black male hip-hop headliner in its history, shares his experiences in "High Horse: The Black Cowboy," a new docuseries executive produced by Jordan Peele and his Monkeypaw Productions. The project highlights Black men, who it says were the first Americans referred to as cowboys, a term initially steeped in racism as it contrasted them with white "cowhands."

The series attempts to refute the pop culture images of the men whose tall boots and Stetson hats are seared into American mythology.

One in four cowboys were Black, even though in the late 19th century they made up a much smaller segment of the U.S. population, according to research by historian Bruce Glasrud.

"Being a Black performer at this 90-plus year concert series has been amazing for me, but it's also given me a deeper perspective of understanding the Black cowboys' place in American history," Bun told The Associated Press. "It's really energized me to try to fill this void of confusion where people who are somewhat aware typically will have a distorted view."

Who erased the Black cowboy?

Directed by Jason Perez and streaming on Peacock, the three-part docuseries is an extension of Peele's 2022 blockbuster film "Nope." Starring Daniel Kaluuya and Keke Palmer, the movie follows siblings who operate the only Black-owned horse ranch in California, training horses for Hollywood productions.

The sci-fi horror film mentions Eadweard Muybridge, a pioneer of motion photography and his groundbreaking "The Horse in Motion" moving image, noting that while the horse, Sallie Gardner, has always been recognized, the Black jockey riding her remains largely unknown.

"We just decided to go on this journey to really figure out, or to pose the question, what happened to the Black cowboy? Who erased the Black cowboy?" said Keisha Senter, the company's senior vice president of culture and impact and an executive producer on the project. "At Monkeypaw, we really think erasure is a horror story."

"High Horse" is filled with archival footage and photos to provide context of the lives of early Black cowboys. In addition to creating a more complete composite of the Old West, it documents how Black cowboy communities remain vibrant in various pockets across the country, while following their struggles and triumphs.

Series spotlights Black country western history
The docuseries focuses on the history and erasure of the Black cowboy, systemic racism and the current battles Black citizens face with land ownership dating back to the post-slavery Reconstruction era, and the entertainment impact African Americans have made throughout country western history. It arrives amid the nation's current political flashpoints.

Critics of the Trump administration note its policies disproportionately and negatively affect Black Americans, including eliminating DEI programs, mass layoffs at federal agencies, and cuts to SNAP benefits, Medicare and Medicaid. Peele, Glynn Turman, Pam Grier, Tina

Please see HISTORY | 6B

« ON THE MARQUEE »



RYAN DAVIS

Comic Ryan Davis headlines Queen City Omegas Black Friday Comedy Show Nov. 26 at the Oasis Shriner Temple, 604 Doug Mayes Place.

It's a holiday laugh-in with comic Ryan Davis

Headlines Queen City Omegas Black Friday Comedy Show on Nov. 28

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Nov. 26

• **Novant Health Thanksgiving Eve Parade** returns to Tryon Street for the 79th year. The procession step off at 5:30 p.m.

The holiday classic kicks off the season looking to build off 2024's parade, which organizer say drew more than 46,000 attendees, 1,000 volunteers, and 85 units. The parade is free and VIP tickets are available near the performance zone at www.novanthealththanksgivingparade.com/tickets.

Organizers are also looking for volunteers to walk as costumed cast members in the parade, handle the balloons or serve as parade marshals. To sign up, or for more information about the parade, visit www.novanthealththanksgivingparade.com.

Nov. 28

Comedian **Ryan Davis** will headline the Queen City Omegas Black Friday Comedy Show at the Oasis Shriner Temple, 604 Doug Mayes Place.

Fresh off the release of his independently produced YouTube comedy special "Under-Rated," Davis is one of the most authentic voices in comedy today. The show is part of a fraternity initiative to spotlight Black excellence in comedy through local engagement.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the Pi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc Scholarship Fund.

Doors open at 7 p.m., and the show starts at 8. Tickets are available through Eventbrite.

Dec. 5

Gaston County Museum of Art & History kicks off the holiday season with the annual open house and carriage rides from 6-9 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.



HISTORIC ROSEDALE

Historic Rosedale kicks off the holidays with guided tours starting Dec. 7.

Carriage rides, which start from the parking lot of the Museum's Daniel Stowe Carriage House on West Church Street, are free. The event coincides with Carols on the Square, presented by the Town of Dallas, which begins at 6:30 p.m. on the Historic Court Square in Dallas.

The museum is free and open to the public Tuesday-Friday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Dec. 6

"Backstage With Louis Armstrong," an off-Broadway musical drama, is 7-9 p.m. at The Arts Factory, 1545 W. Trade St. Admission is \$20 and available at Eventbrite. Danny W. Mullen Sr. portrays the legendary jazz trumpeter.

Dec. 7

Historic Rosedale hosts its annual candlelight tour featuring a garden stroll and guided house tour from 5-7 p.m.

Check out Historic Rosedale by candlelight, where items like clothing, dinnerware, and furniture were designed to enhance the darkness that night brought without the benefit of electric lighting. The guided tour also features a holiday performance of strolling characters courtesy of Queen City Groove and light holiday treats including coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and sweets at the pavilion.

Gates open at 5 p.m. and the house tour begins at 6 p.m. Organizers request no cell phone lights be used inside the house; individual electric tapers for additional lighting will be provided.

New this year is Santa at work in the reconstructed blacksmith shop. Photos with Santa are available for \$10 each, and can be taken with your own phone, or you can choose a printed souvenir photo.

Dec. 12-21

Matthews Playhouse of the Performing Arts' production of "Scrooge! The Musical" is back for its fourth year. The musical adaptation of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is a story of redemption, compassion, and the holiday spirit. Shows take place at Matthews Playhouse, 100 McDowell St. Tickets are

Please see MIDDLE C | 6B

« MOVIE REVIEW »

'Wicked: For Good' a magical musical romp

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA
Wicked: For Good

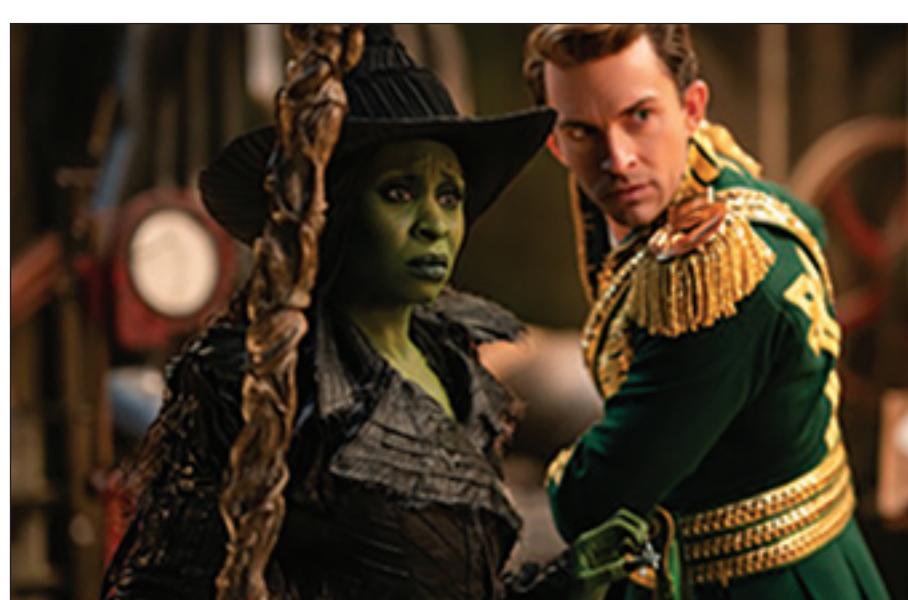
3.5 stars

"I've heard it said. That people come into our lives for a reason..."

That poet lyric is from the song "For Good," arguably the second most famous tune from the Broadway musical "Wicked." The words hint at the theme of this final half of the Wicked duology, which has been magically created by screenwriters Winnie Holzman and Dana Fox and manifested brilliantly by director extraordinaire Jon M. Chu.

Their 2024 film version of "Wicked," a stroke of genius, earned \$750 million-plus at the international box office, becoming the most successful Broadway musical adaptation of all time. It was also nominated for 10 Academy Awards and won two.

Nominations: 1. Best Achievement in Makeup and Hairstyling. 2. Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures. 3. Best Sound. 4. Best Achievement in Visual Effects. 5. Best Motion Picture of the Year. 6. Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role (Cynthia Erivo). 7. Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role (Ariana Grande). 8. Best Achievement in Film Editing (Myron Kerstein). Wins: Best Achievement in Production Design (Nathan Crowley, Lee Sandale) and Best Achievement in Costume Design (Paul Tazewell).



PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Cynthia Erivo and Jonathan Bailey in "Wicked For Good."

The difference in 2025 is that "Wicked: For Good" could sweep all those previous categories and give Chu a directing award for making arguably the best Broadway-to-screen film of our times. The visuals and sounds are exquisite and enchanting. The acting is superb, with Erivo and Grande finding and using all the nuances in their two lead characters to make them truly iconic. They blur the lines between frenemies, bosom buddies and jealous

sisters. Credit the script and direction for building the personas and the two women for developing the characters to the fullest extent.

Chu, ever the mastermind, corrals and manages all the moving parts superbly. The elaborate sets, sound effects and music. Exhilarating action scenes that break up the high drama and romance. Intimate moments of discovery and retrospect. It's like you're

Please see WICKED | 6B

'Wicked: For Good' a magical musical romp

Continued from page 5B

drawn into the lead and supporting characters lives as they figure out who they are, who they love, who'll love them back and who must pay for the misdeeds they've done.

It's hard in the film's first 20 minutes to remember all the details of the previous chapter and bring them forward. Pity anyone who didn't see the first adaptation and is trying to discern this one without previous knowledge. Regardless, getting reacquainted takes a minute, and songs in the beginning sequences aren't that stunning or memorable. So be patient.

Focus your attention initially on the tale that's unspooling. Then eventually, other important aspects kick into high gear too, as the compelling storyline evolves in ways that will intrigue children, teens and adults—right until the end.

As the famed Yellow Brick road is being built by animal labor, Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) is on the lam. She's hunted by the Wizard of Oz (Jeff Goldblum), his henchwoman Madame Morrible (Michelle Yeoh) and the army of fierce flying monkeys they control. Morrible: "The Wicked Witch can't allude us forever!"

Both schemers, using lies and deceit, have turned the people of Emerald City against the witch, who's now been deemed wicked. Even the love of Elphaba's life, Prince Fiyero (Jonathan Bailey), heads the soldiers who track her. Elphaba's younger sister Nessa Rose (Marissa Bode) is bitter that she's been left behind and grappling with her romantic feelings for Boq (Ethan Slater), a munchkin.

Surprisingly, Glinda (Arianna Grande) only seems moderately interested in her friend's plight. Luxuriating in her majesty, flying in a new vehicular wagon sphere, a bubble that floats

her up, down and around. All while she's being catered to by her two sycophants, Pfannee (Bowen Yang) and Shenshen (Brownyn James).

This can't go on. Animals are fleeing the Land of Oz afraid of arrests or being imprisoned, like Dr. Dillamond (Peter Dinklage). Morrible and the Wizard are becoming more conniving and malicious every day. Lying to their public and blaming Elphaba for all that's wrong. The Wicked Witch of the West becomes crestfallen but never loses her zest for exposing the truth and fighting for the less fortunate.

That spirit drives her. Is it enough to counter the rumors, degradation and evils set upon her by those who wish she would melt away?

Unlike the first chapter, in this episode the Land of Oz has an interloper, Dorothy. Yes that Dorothy. Her quest adds an extra winsome tone as the little girl from Kansas, wearing ruby slippers, tries to find her way home with a dog, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion (Colman Domingo) and Scarecrow in tow.

It's a nice touch to what is already an increasingly engrossing storyline. A narrative that gets richer and more fanciful with every frame. The two-hour, 18 minute movie musical swirls to an ending with enough twists to surprise everyone. A finale that strays from the Broadway musical, so even hardcore fans will be amazed.

Chu's direction and the excellent production elements are extraordinary. But perhaps the film's strongest elements are the two leads. They sing well, separately and together. The script gives the lead characters arcs that take them to a revelatory understanding about themselves, each other and life. Erivo and Grande mine the small things and big moments in their characters' journeys.

Middle C Jazz is all in on holiday spirit

Continued from page 5B

available at matthewsplayhouse.com or by calling (704) 846-8343.

In addition to the eight regular performances, "Scrooge! The Musical" includes a "Pay What You Can" performance on Dec. 11 at 7:30 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the Women's Health and Resilience Foundation, which advocates for women's health from the inside through knowledge, inspiration, and support.

Middle C Jazz is all in for December.

The club is hosting a series of music celebrations from smooth jazz artists to R&B favorites throughout the month. Tickets for all December performances, including the exclusive New Year's Eve event, are available immediately.

A major highlight of the month is the two-night run with the smooth jazz artists Peter White, Mindi Abair, and Vincent Ingala Dec. 12-13. It also includes an optional VIP pre-show wine and jazz tasting with Mindi Abair.

Among the highlights:

(Dec. 4) "Happy Holidays - A Soulful Christmas" with Jay D Jones (R&B and holiday soul)

(Dec. 11) Ray Singleton Holiday Party Night (R&B favorites and holiday classics)

(Dec. 12-13) Peter White Christmas with Mindi Abair & Vincent Ingala

VIP Pre-show Wine & Jazz Tasting with Mindi Abair

(Dec. 14) Adrian Crutchfield: "For You at Christmas ... with Love & Jazz!"

(Dec. 17-18) "A Charlie Brown Christmas" featuring Lovell Bradford and Tyra Scott, family-friendly celebration of the Vince Guaraldi Trio

(Dec. 19) Joey Santo Sings Christmas Classics of Sinatra, Crosby, & Martin perform vintage holiday standards

(Dec. 21) Jingle Jazz Tour featuring B.K. Jackson, Erin Stephenson and Gino Rosaria

(Dec. 31) New Year's Eve celebration with the Voltage Brothers

For tickets, showtimes, and schedule, go to www.middlecjazz.com.

Not too early for planning.

Tickets are on sale for 2026 The Blues Is Alright Tour.

The eighth annual Queen City Blues Festival is at Ovens Auditorium on March 7 at 7 p.m. The Southern soul and modern blues scene blend old-school storytelling with contemporary R&B, with performances by King George, Pokey Bear, Lenny Williams, West Love, Tonio Armani, Mike Clark Jr., EJ Jones, Stephanie Luckett & the YP Band, and Henry Welch.

Tickets are on sale at Ticketmaster.com.

History of Black cowboys

Continued from page 5B

Knowles and Rick Ross, who all make appearances, speak to their own experiences with cowboy culture.

R&B legend Raphael Saadiq provides the project's original score.

"This is an important time in history, and I can see the writing on the wall," said Turman, a New York City-raised actor who's lived on a California ranch for decades. "This is a survival tool that we've been handed with this documentary."

Turman, the 78-year-old Emmy winner who received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in July, is no stranger to using entertainment to educate. He starred as retired Army colonel Bradford Taylor on the hit '90s sitcom "A Different World," a spinoff from "The Cosby Show" set on the campus of a historically Black college.

Elphaba and Glinda summarize what audiences will feel when they hear their song "For Good." "I know I'm who I am today. Because I knew you."

Visit [film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com](http://filmcritic.dwightbrownink.com).

the conversation surrounding the ownership of cowboy culture and the gate-keeping surrounding it.

That topic reached a pop cultural fever pitch in recent years, thanks to inflection points such as Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter" album and her subsequent album of the year win at the Grammys in February.

There's also Lil Nas X's record-breaking 2019 smash "Old Town Road," the viral line dance for "Boots on the Ground" by 803Fresh, western-themed Hollywood productions like "The Harder They Fall" and "Lawmen: Bass Reeves," and Ivan McClellan's book, "Eight Seconds: Black Rodeo Culture."

Bun says the heart of "High Horse" is examining this ignored—or erased—slice of history to gain greater insight about the country overall.

"It's not a Black story—this is an American story," said the past distinguished lecturer at Houston's Rice University. "This will turn everything that you know about the American cowboy on its head in the right way, and put these things into proper historical context. And that benefits all Americans."



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