

EDITORIAL OPINION

Want someone from the Naples Daily News to speak at your event or club? Please go to naplesnews.com/customerservice

Awareness to human trafficking is needed



Your Turn
Linda Oberhaus
Guest columnist

Sara was a smart, middleclass college student with a bright future when Paul, her boyfriend of two months, suggested she tryout for a swimsuit photoshoot, telling her she had plenty of potential and the money was good.

He dropped her off at a hotel to meet with the photographer, but instead of a swimsuit shoot, the photographer ordered Sara to remove her clothing. When she refused, he said she could not leave until she did everything she was told. After taking compromising photos of her, the photographer raped Sara. When Paul returned, Sara tearfully told him what had happened to her. Instead of consoling her, he slapped her, called her a whore, and said the photos would be posted online and sent to her family if

she didn't do whatever she was told. Even as he sold her for sex, it was difficult for Sara to comprehend that Paul had never been a boyfriend, but a sex trafficker who had meticulously groomed her for financial profit.

The story above happened here in Naples, and it happens every day throughout Florida, the United States, and the world. Like Sara, anyone can be targeted, but most victims are chosen by their trafficker based on vulnerabilities such as loneliness, homelessness, substance abuse, or mental health issues. Once caught in their trafficker's web, victims are exploited through a myriad of bodily threats, intimidation, and coercion.

Today, Florida ranks third in the nation for calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, preceded by Texas and California. Over 70 percent of Florida's calls to the hotline pertain to sex trafficking, mainly in the Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Naples/Fort Myers, Tampa, and Orlando areas. Although the venue

Guest commentaries

A guest commentary can be 600 words or less on a topical subject. Authors must have considerable experience, public involvement or expertise in the subject matter. Due to the large number of guest commentaries we receive, these may be returned to the author with a recommendation to resubmit it as a letter to the editor within the guidelines for letters. Submit to letters@naplesnews.com.

of most reports was not specified, the top three were illicit spas and massage parlors, motels/hotels, and private residences. In 2020, strip clubs and street-based solicitation fell to the bottom of the list, as the pandemic shifted trafficking from the streets to online venues, strengthening it by making it more difficult to detect.

During January's National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, The Shelter for Abused Women & Children

urges all residents to educate themselves and their children on the signs of this horrific crime and ways to protect themselves. We know that public awareness is working, as calls to the Trafficking Hotline have increased 35% since 2016.

The Shelter is proud to be Collier County's official service provider for human trafficking victims, offering specific, long-term therapeutic care at our Shelly Stayer Shelter in Immokalee as well as prevention education in Collier County schools. To educate yourself on human trafficking or schedule an awareness presentation, call 239-775-3862 or go to naplesshelter.org/trafficking

If you or someone you know has been impacted by domestic violence or human trafficking, call The Shelter's Crisis Hotline at 239-775-1101 or go online to naplesshelter.org.

Linda Oberhaus is the CEO for The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 12, the 12th day of 2022. There are 353 days left in the year. On this date in:

1915: The U.S. House of Representatives rejected, 204-174, a proposed constitutional amendment to give women nationwide the right to vote.

1932: Hattie W. Caraway became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate after initially being appointed to serve out the remainder of the term of her late husband, Thaddeus.

1948: The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, unanimously ruled that state law schools could not discriminate against applicants on the basis of race.

1959: Berry Gordy Jr. founded Motown Records in Detroit.

Legendary actor Poitier portrayed Black men with dignity they have off screen



Njeri Mathis Rutledge
Board of Contributors
USA TODAY

Quiet dignity. That's what I think of when I reflect on the life of groundbreaking actor Sidney Poitier. Representation in the media looks very different now than when I was growing up. Role models on television were hard to come by. The one Black person who had been awarded an Academy Award for acting before Sidney Poitier was Hattie McDaniel, who won the Academy Award for best actress for her comedic portrayal of Mammy in 1939's "Gone With the Wind."

McDaniel certainly opened doors, but the role she played reinforced painful stereotypes. For a long time, Blacks were cast in stereotypical roles involving criminals, slaves or mammy – an issue explored in the series "They've Gotta Have Us." Poitier, who died Thursday at the age of 94, presented to a world often consumed with stereotypes a different image of Black culture.

Before Poitier, the few positive images focused on lighter-skinned Black musicians and entertainers. Poitier had beautiful dark skin and portrayed distinguished characters. Escaping stereotypical roles in Hollywood as an actor is nearly impossible, yet he managed to do it. The characters he portrayed were often elegant and educated, and they always had dignity. They were role models.

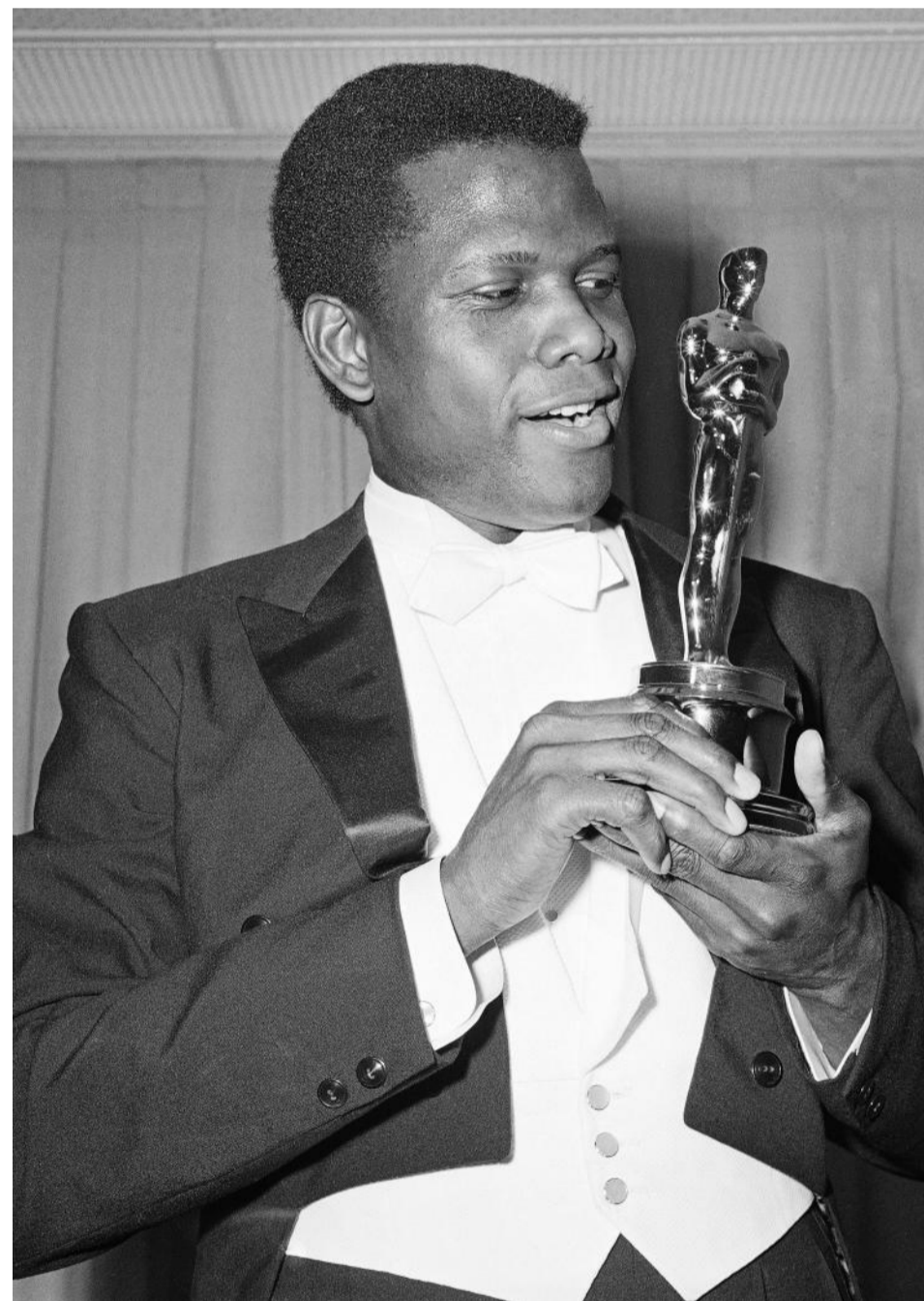
He made history as the first African American man to be nominated for an Academy Award (for "The Defiant Ones" in 1958) and the first to win in 1964 for best actor for his portrayal as a handyman, Homer Smith, in the movie "Lilies of the Field."

When most people recall Poitier, they speak of "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," a groundbreaking movie (both thematically and in content – he was the first Black actor to kiss a white actress on the screen) that addressed race and interracial relationships in 1967, the same year that the Supreme Court decided *Loving v. Virginia*, which found that laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional.

Poitier was involved in movies that mattered. Although other notable films include "In the Heat of the Night" (1967) and "They Call Me Mister Tibbs" (1970), my favorite was "To Sir, with Love" (1967). Poitier played a teacher to trouble-making kids in an all-white classroom. The iconic scene where he tells the students how he is to be addressed and how they should act was inspiring.

It is hard to watch Poitier and not hold your chin a bit higher and straighten your posture. In short, he made me proud. He made so many of us proud – of him individually and the Black community.

He was elegance personified. My admiration for Poitier is not limited to his impact on the screen but also his impact in the Black communi-



Actor Sidney Poitier wins the Oscar for best actor for "Lilies of the Field" in 1964. AP

ty. For a while, Poitier was in the uncomfortable position of being the only Black person in the room. A position that many of us still experience. Poitier made sure he would not be the last.

Poitier was committed to civil rights, along with his friends Harry Belafonte and James Baldwin, and participated in the March on Washington, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his iconic "I Have A Dream" speech.

For me, one of Poitier's greatest legacies is that he was committed to lifting others as he climbed.

Poitier made his community proud in every role he played, as a director, as a role model, as an activist. He possessed that quiet dignity that I have seen in many Black men, particularly my uncles. It is a strength and dignity rarely portrayed in Hollywood – even now, at a time where there is greater representation. It took four decades before another Black man, Denzel Washington, would win the 2001 Academy Award for best actor and acknowledged that he was following in Poitier's footsteps: "I'll always be following in your footsteps. There's nothing I'd rather do, sir."

An old African proverb says we stand

tall because we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. Poitier was a gift that birthed dreams in people who continue to break barriers and inspire others. I will never know all he had to go through to open those doors, but I can't imagine that we would have experienced the brilliance of Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Laurence Fishburne, Will Smith, Courtney B. Vance, Chadwick Boseman, Spike Lee, Cuba Gooding Jr., Robert Townsend, John Singleton or Jordan Peele – just to name a few – if there had not first been a Sidney Poitier.

Poitier stood for something other than his own self-interest. His legacy surpasses his list of film credits. At a time when we have said farewell to other principled actors from that time period like Cicely Tyson and Betty White, may we all strive to stand for something positive beyond ourselves.

Njeri Mathis Rutledge, a professor of law at South Texas College of Law Houston and a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors, is a former prosecuting attorney, a wife and a mother. She graduated from Spelman College and Harvard Law School. Follow her on Twitter: @NjeriRutledge

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS

Country singer **William Lee Golden** of the Oak Ridge Boys is 83. Actor **Anthony Andrews** is 74.

Actor **Kirstie Alley** is 71. Country singer **Ricky Van Shelton** is 70. Radio and TV personality **Howard Stern** is 68.

Director **John Lasseter** ("Toy Story," "Cars") is 65. News correspondent **Christiane Amanpour** is 64. Actor **Oliver Platt** is 62. Singer-director **Rob Zombie** is 57. Singer **Melanie Chisholm** (Sporty Spice) of the Spice Girls is 48. Contemporary Christian singer **Jeremy Camp** is 44. Actor **Issa Rae** ("Insecure") is 37.



Amanpour

BIBLE QUOTE

If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner (living among us), the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.

— Jeremiah 7:5-7

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be 250 words or less, the shorter and more to the point the better, and may be edited for clarity or taste, to eliminate personal attacks and to prevent libel. Letters may be edited for accuracy, rejected or returned to the writer to submit a new letter. The source of a statistic must be attributed within the letter. No poetry, letter-writing campaigns or airing of a personal grievance against a business. Submissions cannot be handwritten or typed in all caps. Name of the letter writer and city or community of residence are required and will be published with the letter. A phone number is required for verification but will not be published.