

THE BLACK LENS

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Breaking barriers: Megan Matthews talks equity



APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS
Megan Matthews, left, the Washington state director of the Office of Equity, talks Spokane NAACP President Lisa Gardner.

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

In a world where access to opportunities often depends on who holds power, representation matters. As debates continue around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, Megan Matthews, Washington state's Director of the Office of Equity, remains committed to transforming government into a system that serves all people. For her, this means more than sitting behind a desk in Olympia; it means traveling the state, being present, and ensuring that equity is integrated into policies and programs.

Matthews understands the harm of tokenism, where symbolic representation lacks real influence. Instead, she believes in opening doors wide,

ensuring representation is meaningful and impactful. Recently, The Black Lens and the Spokane NAACP sat down with Matthews for "Challenging the Narrative," an interview series featuring notable leaders. In this conversation, she discussed the role of equity in government and how systemic change can create a more inclusive Washington. A Tacoma native, she has spent 17 years in state government, rising from a child support case manager to her current leadership position.

"Not only am I born and raised in Washington and care so much about this state, but I'm also really competitive," Matthews joked.

Her experience gives her a unique perspective,

See **MATTHEWS, 12**

Touring Broadway actor Jisel Soleil Ayon talks about representation In the arts and finding community



COURTESY PHOTOS
Jisel Soleil Ayon steps into the role of Angelica Schuyler in the national tour of "Hamilton" April 8-20 at the First Interstate Center for the Arts.

'HAMILTON' RETURNS TO SPOKANE

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Jisel Soleil Ayon steps into the role of Angelica Schuyler in the national tour of Hamilton in Spokane, running from April 8 through April 20 at the First Interstate Center for the Arts, she will bring with her far more than just a stellar voice and stage presence. She carries a curious mind, a love for her craft, and a strong sense of identity that fuels her belief in the power of cultural representation in the arts.

Ayon, who hails from Long Beach, Calif., has been performing since high school. She is no stranger to the theater world. With credits including the second national tour of Waitress, where she played Jenna, and a host of regional performances, her path has been shaped by a deep love for storytelling. But as she reflects on her career, one thing stands out: She embraces the power of versatility on her journey.

"I didn't always think I was going to pursue theater professionally," she said. "I didn't think that was an option for me."

See **HAMILTON, 10**



Jisel Soleil Ayon shows off her "Angelica" nails.

You don't have to carry it alone

Rayanna Tensley on representation, resilience and the future of Black mental health

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Rayanna Tensley, a Spokane-based social worker on the path to becoming a licensed therapist, is driven by a deep commitment to serve her community – not just with care, but with cultural understanding. With nearly a decade of experience in social services and a master's in social work under her belt, Tensley is working toward licensure to expand her impact, particularly as a therapist.

Her path wasn't always clear. "I didn't think helping people was something I'd do for a living," she admitted. "I enjoyed it in my free time, but I never saw it as a profession – until I realized how much it aligned with who I am."

Initially focused on macro-level social work – policy, systems and organizational change – Tensley shifted gears after a friend encouraged her to pursue clinical hours toward licensure. "I still want to change systems," she said, "but I knew I could do more



COURTESY
Rayanna Tensley

with a license. That one-on-one impact is powerful too."

One of the key reasons? Representation.

"I don't see a lot of Black social workers in the spaces I've worked in," she said. "Sometimes just two or three of us. And yet, it matters – so much. It makes building rapport easier. You don't have to explain micro-aggressions, racism or coded behavior. We understand each other's language without needing to translate our pain."

Tensley believes therapy becomes transformation.

See **TENSLEY, 10**

ALL ABOUT THE TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Gary Stevenson – inequality economist, former trader now Youtuber, wealthy although he grew up poor – recently released an important video on his channel Gary's Economics, entitled "How to Stop the Economy from Collapsing." I deeply resonated with his message, so I thought I'd amplify it by sharing a bit here, but I also want to lend a critical eye and provide some supplemental points for consideration.

In his video, Gary lays out a succinct, cogent (albeit simplified) semi-bleak analysis of our current predicament – massive wealth inequality that's moving us closer to the brink of a catastrophic economic collapse where "ordinary families will be driven into poverty and our kids and our grandkids won't be able to afford homes and financial security." While many of us would rather ignore the symptoms of the sickness that our global society is exhibiting, it's increasingly difficult to



By Inga Laurent
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR

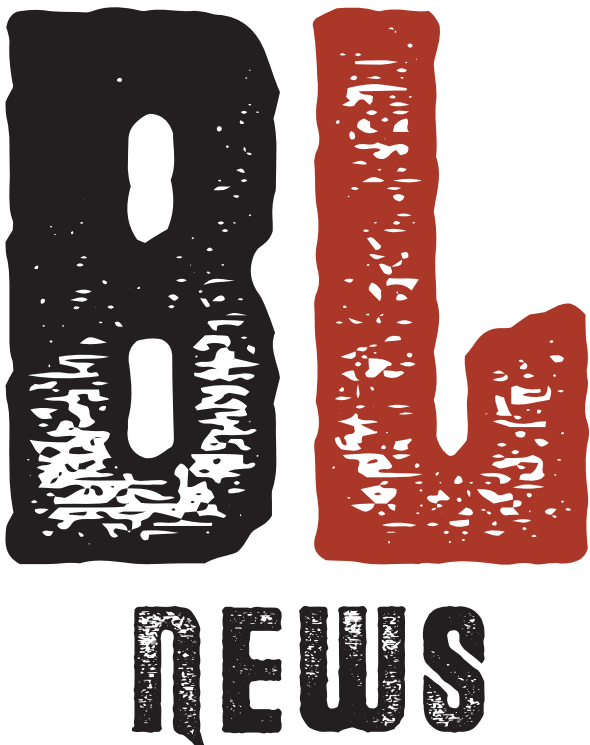


disregard the dwindling sense of security faced by the majority – people struggling to stay housed, pay all monthly expenses, and still eat.

Gary's proposed solution? A primarily bottom-up movement that firmly stays and stands on message: "The reason you are getting poorer is because your wealth is being squeezed out by the rich and the super-rich ... You are

See **JUSTICE, 10**

RESISTING SILENCE



BLACKLENS.NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

‘Segregated facilities’ are no longer explicitly banned in federal contracts

After a recent change by the Trump administration, the federal government no longer explicitly prohibits contractors from having segregated restaurants, waiting rooms and drinking fountains, NPR reported.

The segregation clause is one of several identified in a public memo issued by the General Services Administration last month, affecting all civil federal agencies. The memo explains it is making changes prompted by President Trump’s executive order on diversity, equity and inclusion, which repealed an executive order signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 regarding federal contractors and nondiscrimination, NPR reported.

While there are still state and federal laws that outlaw segregation and discrimination that companies need to comply with, legal experts say this change is significant.

“It’s symbolic, but it’s incredibly meaningful in its symbolism,” Melissa Murray, a constitutional law professor at New York University, told NPR. “These provisions that required federal contractors to adhere to and comply with federal civil rights laws and to maintain integrated rather than segregated workplaces were all part of the federal government’s efforts to facilitate the settlement that led to integration in the 1950s and 1960s.

“The fact that they are now excluding those provisions from the requirements for federal contractors, I think, speaks volumes,” Murray told NPR.

The clause in question is in the Federal Acquisition Regulation, known as the FAR. Clause 52.222-21 reads: “The Contractor agrees that it does not and will not maintain or provide for its employees any segregated facilities at any of its establishments, and that it does not and will not permit its employees to perform their services at any location under its control where segregated facilities are maintained.” That clause has been in government contracts for decades – at least as far back as President Reagan.

Toxic braiding hair study forces Atlanta’s Black community to seek safer options

ATLANTA – A recent report about cancerous synthetic hair extensions has sparked a heated conversation, prompting the Black beauty community to question if there are alternatives for protective styles.

According to a study published Feb. 27 at Consumer Reports, toxins were found in 10 brands of synthetic braiding, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

“The products were tested for heavy metals and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can pose health risks such as cancer and hormonal disruption. Users of synthetic braiding hair products have reported negative skin reactions,” the study reported.

Out of the 10 brands, two samples were taken from each. Within those samples, the report stated that cancer-causing ingredients were found in all of them. Each sample contained additional toxic chemicals when heated to a boiling point, including lead.

According to the study, the chemicals released when hair is dipped in boiling hot water could lead to nausea, dizziness, reproductive issues and hormonal imbalance.

Brands in the study were Sensationnel, including the hair product company’s Ruwa, X-Pression and Lulutress Crochet brands of braiding hair. Also included were Magic Fingers 3X Stretched Braiding Hair; Sassy Collection Kanekalon Jumbo Braid; Shake-N-Go FreeTress and Organique Mastermix; Hbegant Afro Twist; Debut Wavy Hair Weave and Darling Flexi Rod Curls Crochet.

From wire and staff reports

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NEWS

Environmental justice in Spokane
The need for a statewide reporting system

By Nahghmana Sherazi
NAACP SPOKANE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
COMMITTEE CHAIR

At the NAACP Spokane Environmental Justice Committee, we see firsthand how environmental hazards disproportionately impact Black, Brown, and frontline communities in Spokane. As the NAACP states, “Environmental injustice is the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color.” Our communities are exposed to higher levels of air and water pollution, industrial waste, and toxic chemicals, yet reporting these violations remains frustratingly difficult due to a fragmented system.

The Reporting Barrier

Washington lacks a centralized system for reporting environmental violations, making it challenging for us to seek accountability. Different agencies oversee different issues—air pollution falls under the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency, while water contamination is handled by the Washington State Department of Ecology. This bureaucratic maze discourages us from reporting violations and allows injustices to persist.

Our communities already face systemic barriers such as language access, economic instability, and historical disinvestment. The added complexity of reporting violations further silences those of us most impacted. As the NAACP emphasizes, “Communities of color must be equipped with the tools to fight for their right to a clean and healthy environment.” Without a clear, accessible reporting system, many environmental violations in Spokane remain unaddressed.

Environmental Injustice in Spokane (and also statewide)

We know from experience that Black and Brown communities in Spokane suffer the brunt of environmental degradation. Front & Centered (frontandcentered.org) published a recent report highlighting these key concerns:

Air Quality: Historically redlined neighborhoods experience worse air quality due to their proximity to industrial zones and highways, leading to higher asthma rates, particularly among our children.

Water Contamination: Low-income areas in Spokane are more likely to experience lead exposure, PFAS contamination, and unsafe drinking water, increasing health risks for our families.

Hazardous Waste Sites: Spokane has multiple brownfield sites—land contaminated by industrial waste—that pose



serious health risks and limit economic opportunities in our neighborhoods.

A Game-Changer: A Statewide Reporting Tool

To achieve environmental justice, Washington must implement a statewide environmental violation reporting tool. Such a system would:

Increase Accessibility: A multilingual, user-friendly platform would empower our communities to report violations easily.

Improve Accountability: A centralized system would ensure that complaints reach the correct agencies and are addressed efficiently.

Enhance Data Collection: A unified system would help identify environmental injustice patterns and guide policy changes.

Protect Public Health: Timely responses to violations would reduce our exposure to pollutants and improve health outcomes.

Community Action & the Path Forward

We, along with other grassroots organizations and community leaders in Spokane, are pushing for systemic change. The Front & Centered report (lnkd.in/gtfnYzgJ) underscores the urgency of implementing this tool to advance equity and public health statewide.



Our Environmental Justice Committee has also been fostering dialogue through our Eco-Anxiety Cafes, which have hosted six sessions to date, providing a space for community members to process their concerns and seek solutions. These gatherings continue to grow, with many organizations joining in to support these critical conversations.

Additionally, April is Earth Month, and there are numerous community-led events to commemorate Earth Day, including the Spokane River Clean-Up and Tree Plantings with The Lands Council – if you are looking for something to do with your family, consider volunteering at these events. These efforts not only restore our natural environment but also help build community resilience against climate change and pollution.

Now is the time for Washington policymakers to act. Our frontline communities deserve better, and a streamlined reporting system can help us ensure environmental justice for all.

More Information

The NAACP Spokane Environmental Justice Committee meets every fourth Thursday via Zoom at 6-7 p.m. If you would like to join, complete the membership sign-up form at naacpspokane.com/work/environmental-justice.



BUILDING RESTORATIVE COMMUNITIES PRESENTS: THE PRISON WITHIN

A film by Katherin Hervey exploring San Quentin Prison's Victim Offender Education Group (VOEG) program through the lens of its participants. A profound perspective of the inner-workings of restorative justice in United States prison systems.

JOIN US FOR MOVIE NIGHT!

APRIL 21ST | **SPOKANE PUBLIC LIBRARY - SHADLE PARK BRANCH**
4-6 PM | **2111 W WELLESLEY AVE**

Questions? Email us at brcspokane@gmail.com
This event is **free**.



By Alethea Dumas
THE BLACK LENS
BOARD CHAIR



FROM THE BOARD

Resting in the fight
Importance of Black feeling, rest

In a world that demands constant action from Black people, where every moment often feels like a fight for survival, it is easy to overlook one crucial part of resistance: rest. We live in a society that pushes us to act immediately, to respond to injustice, to speak out against oppression, and to always be “on” in our activism. But in the rush to constantly move forward, there is an overlooked necessity: the right to pause, to rest, and to feel our feelings.

As Black people, our existence has often been tied to struggle. From the depths of slavery, through the Civil Rights Movement, and continuing with modern-day calls for racial justice, we have inherited a legacy of resistance. It’s no surprise, then, that there is a pervasive sense of urgency that permeates our everyday lives. The weight of racism, systemic inequality, and historical trauma can often feel like an endless battle, one that requires us to be in a constant state of alertness, action, and vigilance.

But here’s the truth: We don’t have to keep fighting all the time. Our ancestors fought so that we could have opportunities, spaces, and moments to be free. Free not only from the chains of physical bondage but also from the invisible burdens that weigh on our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Yet, in our fight for freedom and justice, we have inherited a dangerous narrative: The idea that we must constantly perform, act, and push forward to prove our worth and make progress. This narrative is exhausting. And it’s time we challenge it.

The Power of Rest

Rest is not just the absence of action; it is a radical act of self-care and self-preservation. To rest is to honor our humanity. It is a direct rejection of a society that thrives on our exhaustion and overwork.

See **DUMAS, 3**

THE BLACK LENS

Serving Spokane’s Black community since 2015

IN MEMORY OF SANDRA WILLIAMS
FOUNDING EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

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Statement of Independence

The Black Lens is a not-for-profit, independent newspaper that focuses on all aspects of the Black community in Eastern Washington. The Black Lens editor reports to its own board of directors, which was set up under the guidance of the founders’ family.

As journalism calls for increased transparency, The Black Lens believes in being transparent about its work. The Black Lens is funded through foundations, donors, subscribers and the community. That funding pays for the work of the editors, reporters, photographers, designers, correspondents and columnists who produce The Black Lens newspaper, website and other platforms.

The Black Lens retains full authority over its editorial content. This organization maintains a strict firewall between news coverage decisions and funding sources and in-kind help. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services or opinions.

All story decisions made by The Black Lens newsroom and its leaders are made independently and not on the basis of donor support. This organization does not give supporters the rights to assign, review or edit content, and if a supporter is covered in a story or other editorial content, The Black Lens will disclose this at the bottom of the story.

The Black Lens is a partner of the “comma” community journalism lab. The Black Lens will be located within the community journalism lab newsroom that is set to be stationed on the main campus of Gonzaga University in Spokane. Though The Black Lens and lab may be housed at Gonzaga, the university has no control or authority over the journalism created by The Black Lens or other newsrooms located within the lab. The comma community journalism lab is a nonprofit news organization with its own board of directors, separate from the university and separate from The Black Lens. The Black Lens’ board of directors works closely with the comma community journalism lab and its leaders to

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*We're all in this together.
And the more we can see and hear each
other, the better off we'll be."*

Melinda Manning
Thrive International Director of Development

FROM SPOKANE TO THE WORLD

*Melinda Manning on service, global
citizenship and the power of representation*

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

When Melinda Manning reflects on her journey from Spokane's South Hill to countries like Egypt, Uganda and Madagascar, she describes a path shaped by curiosity, conviction, and a deep sense of moral responsibility. Manning, a Ferris High School alumna, began her professional career in government – traveling the world as a diplomat, public servant, and advocate for underserved communi-

ties. After graduating from Western Washington University with a degree in history and political science, Manning returned to Spokane unsure of her next steps. "I knew I wanted to work for the government," she said. That instinct landed her a job working for Tom Foley, then Speaker of the House. She later moved on to the House Press Gallery, serving as a liaison to print journalists covering Congress.

Though her academic background wasn't in journalism or communications, Manning's liberal arts education helped her carve a path.

"One of the things I tell kids all the time is: be interesting or be able to finagle your way into opportunities," she said with a laugh. "It's about being open to the unexpected."

Being nimble led her to international service. While still working on Capitol Hill, she pursued a master's in higher education administration, focusing on international programs. That pivot opened doors to working with international nonprofits and ultimately joining the U.S. Foreign Service under USAID—the U.S. Agency for International Development. Her work took her to developing nations where she advocated for early language acquisition and Fulbright programs and lobbied for international education initiatives.

Her government career spanned 24 years, rooted in what she calls "a true commitment to public service."

"I've worked with the poorest of the poor," Manning said, "and the people with the least are often the most generous." This paradox stuck with her and shaped her worldview: "Sometimes when you have so much, it can cloud your ability to see the power and value in those with less."

In countries experiencing war, famine, or systemic poverty, Manning says she learned just how deeply human struggle connects us all. "Marginalization is something no one wants to go through. And when we ignore those struggling the most, we miss the chance to be better—individually and as a society."

This moral imperative – of seeing and serving others—is what brought her full circle, back to Spokane, where she now works with the Thrive Center in a development role.

"Thrive aligned with my values," she said. "The focus on education, empowerment, and access – it resonated with everything I've done internationally."

Despite her global perspective, returning home hasn't always felt easy.

"Spokane is more diverse than when I left, but it can still feel isolating," she said. "Often I'm the only woman of color in the room at fundraising events or development spaces."

Still, she sees those moments as opportunity. "Nothing is all bad. If I'm the only one in the room, I use that space to expand people's understanding. Representation matters—because a lot of closed-minded-



APRIL EBERHARDT/THE BLACK LENS
Melinda Manning is Thrive International's director of development.

ness comes from lack of exposure."

Manning also speaks passionately about the importance of DEIA – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access – especially amid the recent political backlash against it. The push against DEIA feels like erasure, she reflects.

"When people say we don't need it anymore, they're speaking from a place of privilege," Manning said. "Not everyone has the same access or opportunity. That's just reality."

She emphasizes that DEIA isn't a threat – it's a framework for creating space where everyone can thrive. "We should celebrate our differences, not erase them. That's how we move forward as a human race."

As a mother of a biracial daughter, Manning understands the complexity of identity.

"There's power in feeling like you belong," she said, "but you also have to learn how to make friends, build community, and step into rooms where you might be the only one."

And sometimes, she added, making change is as simple as speaking up. "Silence is one of the top layers of prejudice. When you think, 'It's not my place to say something' – that's exactly when you need to say something."

Manning knows she prefers to work behind the scenes, but she's willing to step up when the moment calls.

"I don't like being out front, but if I can help others by being visible, by using my voice, then I will," she said. "It's not about spotlight – it's about service."

With Thrive Center and beyond, Manning continues to advocate for visibility, access, and collective empowerment.

"We're all in this together," she said. "And the more we can see and hear each other, the better off we'll be."

IN HIS WORDS

TOOLS OF RESISTANCE

In times like these, when the government may not be supportive of us, it is important that we use every communication vehicle available. Many of us are wondering, what is it that we can do to protect our families and community when our government does not care.

When democracy is being stolen by the elected president and a billionaire that bought him the election what are the tools of resistance that are nonviolent?

Here is a list of things that you can and need to do.

Nonviolent Tools of Resistance Against Democratic Erosion

When democracy is undermined by an elected leader and powerful financial backers, nonviolent resistance becomes a critical tool for citizens to reclaim their rights and protect democratic institutions. Research and historical evidence show that nonviolent methods are often more effective than violent ones in achieving lasting political and social change. Below are some key tools and strategies for nonviolent resistance:

1. Mass Mobilization and Protests

Organizing peaceful protests and demonstrations is one of the most visible and impactful ways to resist authoritarianism. Large-scale, sustained protests can draw attention to the erosion of democracy and pressure those in power to change course. For example, movements like the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the People Power Revolution in the Philippines successfully used mass mobilization to achieve democratic reforms.

2. Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience involves deliberately breaking unjust laws or refusing to comply with government policies that undermine democracy. This can include actions like boycotting government programs, refusing to pay fines, or staging sit-ins. Such acts disrupt the normal functioning of an illegitimate regime and highlight its lack of moral authority.

3. Building Broad Coalitions

Uniting diverse groups – across political, social, and economic lines—creates a stronger resistance movement. Broad coalitions can amplify the voices of marginalized communities and demonstrate widespread opposition to anti-democratic actions. This approach is emphasized in the "Democracy Playbook," which outlines strategies for strengthening democratic institutions and resisting illiberal forces ([brookings.edu/articles/democracy-playbook-2025/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democracy-playbook-2025/)).

4. Protecting Voting Rights

Efforts to protect and expand voting access are crucial in resisting democratic backsliding. This includes fighting voter suppression, ensuring fair elections, and educating citizens about their voting rights. Organizations like the ACLU have highlighted the importance of combating dis-



By Bob Lloyd
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



enfranchisement and ensuring that elections remain free and fair.

5. Strategic Use of Media and Technology

Using social media, independent journalism, and other communication tools can help spread awareness, counter disinformation, and mobilize support. Activists can use these platforms to expose corruption, document abuses, and share stories of resistance. However, it is essential to verify information

and avoid spreading misinformation, which can undermine the movement's credibility.

6. Non-Cooperation with Illegitimate Authorities

Refusing to cooperate with leaders or institutions that undermine democracy can weaken their power. This can include strikes, boycotts, or resignations from government positions. Non-cooperation disrupts the functioning of an authoritarian regime and demonstrates widespread dissent.

7. Training and Preparation

Participating in nonviolent resistance training can equip activists with the skills and strategies needed to resist effectively. Democracy training programs prepare individuals to respond to undemocratic power grabs and organize collective action.

8. Supporting Independent Institutions

Strengthening and supporting independent institutions, such as the judiciary, media, and civil society organizations, is vital for resisting authoritarianism. These institutions act as checks on power and provide avenues for accountability ([brookings.edu/articles/democracy-playbook-2025/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democracy-playbook-2025/)).

9. Funding and Supporting Opposition Movements

Opposition movements often lack the resources to effectively challenge entrenched power. Providing financial and logistical support to these groups can help level the playing field and ensure they are prepared to advocate for democratic governance.

10. International Solidarity

Building alliances with international organizations, governments, and activists can bring global attention to the erosion of democracy and apply external pressure on authoritarian leaders. This can include sanctions, diplomatic efforts, or public campaigns to hold leaders accountable.

Why Nonviolence Works

Research by Harvard Professor Erica Chenoweth shows that nonviolent resistance is more likely to succeed than violent campaigns. Nonviolent movements are more inclusive, attract broader participation, and are less likely to provoke violent crackdowns that alienate the public.

By employing these tools, citizens can resist the erosion of democracy and work toward restoring a government that reflects the will of the people.



Resources

Call the Washington state Legislative hotline: (800) 562-6000

Text "Action" to 48744 to reach your senators

Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard: (202) 244-3121

Apps: Relevote or 5 Calls (also found at 5calls.org)

Scan the accompanying QR code to send an email to your Washington state Legislature representatives

DUMAS

Continued from 2

When we rest, we reclaim our autonomy, not just from the systems that oppress us but also from the internalized pressures to always be performing or producing. Rest allows us to heal, reflect, and renew. It reminds us that our value is not tied to constant productivity.

This isn't to say that we should stop fighting for change. Activism is necessary, and the battle against racism, colonialism, and all forms of oppression continues. But the truth is, activism and care for oneself are not mutually exclusive. Resting and

healing are necessary components of the struggle for justice. We can be powerful agents of change not because we are always fighting, but because we are fully present, restored, and ready to act when the time comes.

Feeling Our Feelings

Another essential part of this process is allowing ourselves to feel. Black people, particularly in the face of systemic injustice, are often told to "stay strong" or "keep going," but this constant pressure to suppress emotions can take a heavy toll. We are told that our pain, anger, and grief are secondary to the needs of others. But in order to truly heal and lead, we must acknowl-

edge our feelings.

Anger, sadness, frustration—these emotions are valid, and they are part of the human experience. Suppressing them or pushing them aside to keep up with the demands of society only leads to emotional burnout. Acknowledging and processing our feelings is an act of resistance. It is a way of affirming our full humanity in a world that often reduces us to our pain or trauma. By feeling deeply, we reclaim the right to be fully human, rather than simply surviving or being defined by the weight of our struggle.

Breaking the Cycle of Urgency

The urgency that so

often accompanies the fight for justice is understandable—racism and inequality are pressing issues. However, we must be careful not to fall into a cycle of urgency that sacrifices our emotional and mental well-being. The movement for racial justice is ongoing, and there will always be work to do, but that work does not require us to be in a perpetual state of exhaustion. True change requires sustainable energy, which is only possible when we prioritize rest and emotional health.

When we give ourselves permission to rest and feel, we make space for creativity, new ideas, and long-term solutions. We

give ourselves permission to think strategically, to plan, and to take the most effective actions rather than acting out of fatigue or desperation. This kind of mindful engagement in the struggle makes the work more effective and lessens the chance of burnout.

Rest is Revolutionary

In a world that is always demanding more from us, resting is a radical act. By taking care of our minds, bodies, and souls, we not only nurture our own well-being but also empower ourselves to fight for a better future. Rest allows us to reconnect with ourselves and each other, deepening our communities and building

a foundation for sustainable activism. It reminds us that Black joy, peace, and love are forms of resistance too. We do not have to be in a constant state of motion to be powerful. Rest, reflection, and emotional honesty are powerful tools in the struggle for justice.

As we continue the work of dismantling the systems that oppress us, let us remember that we deserve rest, we deserve to feel, and we deserve to take care of ourselves along the way. The fight for justice does not require us to abandon our humanity; it is through embracing our humanity that we find the strength to keep going.

Rest is revolutionary.

HAPPENING AROUND TOWN

The Rose Garden, a space rooted in love, community and legacy

Black Lens staff reports

The Rose Garden, located at 811 W. Second Ave., Suite 101, isn't just a new venue – it's a vision born from love, memory, and the desire to create a space where people feel welcomed, celebrated and safe.

When asked about the inspiration behind the space, founder Jacquelynne Sandoval shared that the name and spirit of The Rose Garden stem from a deeply personal place.

"The inspiration actually came because I've always wanted to have a space where people just knew it was nice, clean, safe, and somewhere they could celebrate," she explained. "The name 'Rose Garden' comes from my grandmother, Rose Marie. She was always my biggest supporter, and this is one of the ways I can honor her. She was an incredible woman."

This sense of legacy, rooted in family and community,

is what makes The Rose Garden more than just a venue. It's a space where stories can unfold, where milestones are celebrated, and where joy is cultivated.

Looking ahead, the vision for the Rose Garden is full of promise.

"I want it to be an affordable, welcoming space in Spokane that people can rent out for events, bring in their own food, and just have a great time," she said.

While the focus is currently on creating a versatile and accessible event space, future dreams include hosting community-centered events that further anchor the Rose Garden as a gathering place for all.

Still in its early stages, the founder's passion is evident. With time and support, the Rose Garden is set to blossom into one of Spokane's cherished venues – one that honors the past, celebrates the present and invests in the community's future.



COURTESY

The Rose Garden founder Jacquelynne Sandoval during the Night of R.E.S.P.E.C.T., hosted by Strong Women Achieving Greatness (SWAG) was the first event at the Rose Garden, an intergenerational celebration of female empowerment on March 9.



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SUPPORTING
FAMILIES WITH
ADVOCACY







DATE
4.19.25



TIME
1 pm to 4 pm



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Central Library,
Conference Room B




REGISTER AHEAD OF TIME
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Light Refreshments Provided

Who should attend?

STUDENTS IN K-12
STUDENTS IN COLLEGE
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COMMUNITY MEMBERS
PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS
EDUCATORS



BUSINESS / EDUCATION

SIPS 'N' TIPS

Figuring out your finances with the spring dozen

April is the month for spring cleaning, a time to get rid of the old so you have room for the new. April is also Financial Literacy Month. So let's give your finances a spring cleaning! Following is a suggested "SPRING DOZEN": Tips you can implement to make sure the rest of your year proceeds with a "clean house" with room for growth, new ideas and the ability to set and implement action goals.

TIP 1: Go from a "scarcity" to an "abundance" mindset. Let's get rid of those "cobwebs" in your head that clutter up your mind and inhibit progress. Ask yourself:

- What is my relationship with money?
- Is my relationship with money positive or negative?
- Do I believe those with money are evil and look down on others?
- Do I believe to have less money is better as it is more humbling?
- Do I subconsciously believe I do not deserve to be wealthy and have financial freedom?

Did you frequently hear: Money doesn't grow on trees. Pinch your pennies. It's too expensive. We just can't afford it.

These ideas leave you with a residual of webs in your head that inhibit progress. If these are the thoughts you have, then you have a bad relationship with money and a scarcity mindset that include:

- Financial worries that keep you up at night.
 - Feeling like you will never get ahead.
 - Worries about outliving money.
- You're never going to take the action necessary to acquire the wealth you need or take the steps to get your finances in order until you change your mindset. How do you change your mindset? Come out of your comfort zone. The old you can't make changes. Take action!! Start by saying affirmations daily such as:
- I deserve financial peace of mind.
 - I deserve financial freedom.
 - Money, health, and wealth consistently flow to me from infinite and unexpected resources.
 - I prosper in mind, body, and spirit.
 - I give thanks for each new day, as each new day as a gift.
 - I have an attitude of gratitude.

If you say these or other affirmations daily, you will train your mind to be more positive, you will change your relationship with money and move from a scarcity mindset to a mindset of abundance. What you thought was impossible will start to become the possible for you.

TIP 2: Set financial goals for the short term, midterm, and long-term. Decide if you want to pass on a legacy to your family.

TIP 3: List action steps to implement those goals such as:

- (1) Establish your current financial situation by knowing your income, expenses, savings and plans to leave a legacy. Gather your paystub's, your bank statements, insurance paperwork, retirement and investment account statements, loan and credit card statements.
- (2) From these write down your monthly take home pay, list your expenses including groceries, eating out, auto, pet care, mani/pedi, hair, streaming channels, utilities, phone, clothes, auto, rent or mortgage payments and each credit card balance and payment. List the kind and amount of insurance you have and what amounts you have growing for retirement. Pay attention to the amount you spent in overdraft fees and late charges.



By Rhonda Leonard-Horwith
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



(3) From the above list, put a red check mark by the unnecessary expenses such as streaming services, excessive eating out, late and overdraft fees, and credit cards. Then decide which you can consolidate or eliminate.

TIP 4: Create a budget clarifying

income, expenses, savings and discretionary month-end amount that works for you.

TIP 5: Keep all your receipts or take screen shots of online receipts to track your spending. At the end of the day look at those receipts and list your expenditures. Look to see if they match your budget.

TIP 6: Start an emergency fund so you do not have to use credit cards in an emergency. Do this by adding up all expenses for the month and multiply that by 3. The answer is the total you should have in an emergency fund. Open an account that will pay you good interest and decide on an amount to start setting aside each month to build up that fund.

TIP 7: Reduce your debt. Use "the snowball method" to pay off debts such as your car, loans and credit cards. Start by getting a stack of index cards. List all of your debts except for your mortgage. Get a stack of index cards. Write the name of the company or credit card, the minimum monthly payment and balance of each debt ... one on each card. Arrange those cards from lowest to highest debt - regardless of interest rate. Increase the payment on the smallest debt and write it on the card. Pay minimum payments on everything else. Once that balance on the smallest card goes to zero, take that card out of the pile and add that payment to the second-smallest debt. You will continue making minimum payments on the rest. Soon you will have one card left in the pile. This debt "snowball method" eliminate your debts one by one.

TIP 8: Retirement savings. Decide when you can realistically retire. Determine how much you will need coming in per month in retirement and what that lump sum will be to carry you through retirement. Look at what you're saving now for retirement and see if you will have that lump sum in place. If not, start making plans to fill in the gaps.

TIP 9: Examine what insurance you have to cover your income and protect your family should the unfortunate happen.

TIP 10: Explore options to supply income if you have a health issue and cannot work for longer than 90 days.

TIP 11: Decide if you want to leave a legacy for your loved ones or your favorite charity and how you will achieve that.

TIP 12: Last but not least, make sure you have a will and a trust to protect your property and avoid probate, a health care directive, a power of attorney in place and a beneficiary listed on ALL your bank accounts.

HAPPY SPRING CLEANING!!!

THE HUMAN BEHIND THE CODE

The intersection of data, emotion, identity and healing: What is metacognitive narrative?

By April Eberhardt
THE BLACK LENS

Jordan E. Clark comes from humble beginnings in Wilson Creek, Washington, a journey that set him on his path to leading a pre-seed AI venture in Boston. Clark's journey weaves together data science, education, public service, and an often-overlooked tool for self-transformation: metacognitive narrative.

Raised in predominantly white rural towns in Washington state and later Spokane (a graduate of Lewis and Clark High School), Clark didn't initially envision a career in science or technology.

"I told my college counselor I didn't want to do anything with math or science," he said with a laugh. "I just said, 'I want to study Black people.'"

That declaration led him to major in African American Studies and Political Science at Northeastern University in Boston. What followed was a nontraditional path through the White House, Teach for America, and education administration in Washington, D.C.

"So I was pre-law - I was going to go to law school and be Obama, basically," Jordan said, laughing. "I worked at the White House. I worked for Obama. That was the path I was on. But then I realized - I just wanted to learn the skills of a lawyer. I didn't actually want to sit in a room reading all day. So I pivoted. I became a teacher through Teach for America."

But it was a personal crisis that ultimately brought Clark to the world of AI and computational data science.

"I went on medical leave. I had a breakdown," he said candidly. "That's when I was diagnosed with PTSD from chronic childhood trauma. Things started to make more sense."

As he sought healing, he immersed himself in graduate work in urban informatics - a field that uses big data to solve problems in city planning and public policy.

"It's like taking data from every corner of a city - trash collection, rat sightings, anything - and asking, how can we predict and improve life for people?" he said.

At the same time, he was engaging in metacognitive narrative psychotherapy - a clinical term for writing down what you're thinking and why. It became both a personal practice and professional superpower. "It's not just 'I felt sad today,'" he says. "It's: Why did I feel sad? What triggered it? Oh, that microaggression in the meeting - that's what made me shut down."

Clark specializes in metacognitive narrative: a methodical, structured form of journaling that combines self-reflection with analysis.

"I've been doing this for 11 years, but it took me six to realize that's what I was doing," he said. "Now I understand why people journal. Especially women. It gives you a sense of control in a world that often doesn't make sense."

This has become a catalyst for Clark to expand the value and impact of metacognitive journaling "Most people don't say the thing out loud. I do. That's the last step for me - self-advocacy." Drawing from his upbringing by white women and his experience navigating predominantly white institutions, Clark has learned to disarm, engage, and disrupt systems with clarity and courage.

Today, Clark is pioneering cognitive and emotional AI, merging machine learning with the nuances of human behavior. His technical title - computational data scientist - doesn't quite capture the breadth of his work, which lives at the intersection of data, emotion, identity, and healing. And at the core of it all is the idea that our thoughts, when examined with intention, can be tools for transformation.

"Metacognitive narrative gave me a way to survive," he said. "Now it's how I lead."

In the rapidly evolving world of artificial intelligence, conversations about ethics, bias and representation are finally making their way into the mainstream. But for Clark, the question isn't whether AI is biased. It's how deeply embedded racial identity is in the very architecture of the systems we're building.

"Most AI is built by white men," Clark said bluntly. "And so it reflects their worldview. What does a smile look like? To them, it's teeth, it's facial expression. But to a Black woman? It might be a shift in energy, a vibe. She's smiling with her being, not her mouth. AI doesn't recognize that - yet."

Clark is developing a VR-based, emotionally intelligent AI system rooted in something radically human: lived experience. His work blends cutting-edge machine learning, metacognitive narrative and deeply personal cultural history. The result? An adaptive AI that doesn't just mimic humanity - it learns humanity through the lens of identity, trauma, and resilience.

Born in rural Wilson Creek and raised by white women as a biracial



Jordan E. Clark

youth, Clark's early encounters with identity were complex.

"People used to ask me, 'What are you?'" he said. "I used to say, 'I'm a person.' But I didn't know then that was a microaggression. Now I do - and now I get to choose how I respond."

This awareness isn't just personal - it's foundational to how he believes AI must be trained.

"The question 'What are you?' is about categorization. People want to know where to file you in their brains. That's how humans process the world - it's efficient. But in doing so, we also perpetuate harmful stereotypes."

In AI, those categorizations become even more rigid.

"If a Black person isn't smiling, AI might flag them as neutral or even angry," Clark said. "But that's not how we experience joy. So when we train these systems without understanding culture, we're not just leaving people out - we're misrepresenting them."

He is currently building a metahuman avatar of himself - a digital twin that serves as a tool for cultural education and emotional feedback. Using brain-computer interfaces like the Muse headset, which reads brainwave activity, the avatar can respond in real time to a user's emotions, tone and intent.

"If you say something ignorant, the avatar might 'punch' you - in VR," he explained. "Not physically, of course. But enough to jolt you. To create presence. So you feel the impact of your words, even in a virtual space."

This isn't about fear - it's about education.

"We're teaching cultural competence, not through lectures or PowerPoints, but through experience," he said. "You don't forget how it felt when you made that mistake."

Clark believes that leaving identity out of AI development is not only unethical - it's dangerous.

"We're creating systems that are going to run our cities, make hiring decisions, police our streets, and educate our children," Clark said. "If those systems don't understand race, power, and trauma, they'll just replicate the same oppressive structures we're trying to dismantle."

His work asks a bold question: What if we trained AI the same way we train empathy?

By embedding his own metacognitive narratives into AI training data, Clark is creating a memoir - not just on paper, but in virtual reality.

"There aren't enough words to describe my life," he said. "You'd never fully understand it from reading alone." Using the virtual technology empowers Clark to show, not tell.

And he's not just showing his own story. He's encoding the voices of others - Black women, queer folks, people of color, whose emotions and experiences are often flattened in mainstream datasets.

"A photorealistic avatar isn't enough," he said. "Does that avatar know how to feel like me? Does it know the weight of my mother saying, 'I'll punch you in the throat' - not as violence, but as cultural code? That's what I'm trying to teach the machine."

Clark's vision of AI is fundamentally different: an ecosystem that doesn't just tolerate diversity - it requires it.

"In tech, bias is treated like a bug. But identity isn't a bug - it's the blueprint," he said. "We need to stop pretending we're building neutral systems. We're not. We're building human systems. And if we don't build them with the full humanity of Blackness, of queerness, of intersectionality in mind, we're failing."

As the future of AI unfolds, Jordan E. Clark stands at the intersection of code and consciousness, making one thing clear: racial identity isn't a side note in the story of artificial intelligence. It's the soul of it.

"You don't just train AI to understand faces - you train it to understand feeling," Clark said. "And feeling is cultural. If we get that wrong, we get everything wrong."

BUILDING RESTORATIVE COMMUNITIES BOOK CHAT

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EDUCATION

THE PROBLEM:
HOW FOOD
SYSTEMS
CONTRIBUTE TO
CLIMATE CHANGE

The way food is produced, distributed and wasted has a profound impact on both the environment and public health. Industrial agriculture – dominated by large-scale monoculture farms and corporate supply chains – contributes to deforestation, excessive water use, and greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, food waste exacerbates climate change, as decomposing food releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

For many African American communities, these issues are compounded by systemic inequalities, including the loss of Black farmland, the prevalence of food deserts, and the disproportionate environmental burden placed on marginalized neighborhoods. Addressing these challenges requires recognizing the deep intersections between food, climate and racial justice.

Case study: Food deserts and climate impact in Baltimore

Baltimore, Maryland, is home to a large African American population, yet many of its Black-majority neighborhoods lack access to fresh and affordable food. According to a Johns Hopkins University study, nearly 25% of the city's residents live in food deserts, with Black communities disproportionately affected. The absence of grocery stores forces residents to travel long distances for fresh food or rely on processed, packaged options from corner stores and fast-food chains.

This lack of access not only leads to health disparities, such as higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, but also contributes to climate change. Packaged and processed foods require more energy to produce, transport, and dispose of, generating a higher carbon footprint than locally sourced, fresh food. Additionally, the overreliance on car travel for grocery shopping in food deserts further increases greenhouse gas emissions.

The loss of Black farmland and sustainable agriculture

Historically, Black farmers played a significant role in sustainable agriculture, practicing land stewardship techniques that protected soil, conserved water, and minimized environmental impact. However, due to decades of discriminatory policies, Black farmers have lost an overwhelming amount of land.

Example: Pigford v. Glickman Lawsuit: The Pigford v. Glickman case, a landmark 1999 lawsuit, highlighted how the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) systematically denied Black farmers access to loans and support programs, leading to massive land loss. As a result, the number of Black-owned farms plummeted, with Black farmers currently owning less than 2% of U.S. farmland – down from 14% in 1920. This displacement not only deepened economic disparities but also reduced the presence of small-scale, environ-



By Dr. Sharah Zaab
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



mentally sustainable farms that historically practiced crop rotation, organic farming, and soil conservation.

Restoring Black land ownership and investing in Black-led agricultural initiatives can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of food production. Community farms and cooperatives provide fresh, locally grown produce, reduce reliance on industrial supply chains, and promote regenerative farming practices that help combat climate change.

Food waste in Black communities: An overlooked environmental issue

Food waste is another major contributor to climate change. In the U.S., up to 40% of food produced is wasted, generating massive amounts of methane as it decomposes in landfills. African American communities face unique challenges in addressing food waste, largely due to infrastructure disparities.

Example: The Absence of Food Recovery Programs: Many predominantly Black neighborhoods lack food recovery programs that redistribute unsold grocery items to families in need. While organizations like Food Rescue US and Feeding America have national food recovery networks, they are often under-resourced in Black communities. Cities like New Orleans and Atlanta, which have large Black populations, are working to expand food rescue programs, but more investment is needed to ensure that food waste reduction benefits all communities equally.

Community-Based Solutions examples: The Role of Mutual Aid Networks Despite these challenges, Black-led mutual aid networks and grassroots organizations are stepping up to tackle food waste.

- The Black Church Food Security Network partners with Black farmers and congregations to redistribute surplus food to families in need.

- Soil Generation in Philadelphia works to reduce food waste through composting initiatives while promoting urban agriculture.

By supporting these initiatives, communities can address both food insecurity and environmental sustainability, reducing food waste and lowering methane emissions. Stay tuned for more about climate justice in May, when “Climate Gentrification” will be discussed.



GETTY IMAGES

Historically, Black farmers played a significant role in sustainable agriculture. However, due to decades of discriminatory policies, Black farmers have lost an overwhelming amount of land.

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2024-25 FAFSA DEADLINES

Federal deadlines

The FAFSA form had to be submitted by 9:59 p.m. Pacific time June 30. Any corrections must be submitted by Sept. 13.

Washington state deadlines

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ARTS AND INSPIRATION / EDUCATION

A look into Paul Tazewell

By Brianna Fields
THE BLACK LENS

When it comes to big-scale productions, we all became enamored with the music, the voices, and more importantly, the costumes. Some costumes stay with us years after the production holds its first performance.

Enter renowned costume designer Paul Tazewell.

Tazewell is a career costume designer with specialties in opera, dance, film, television, and theatre. His career began in 1996 with the Broadway musical, “Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk.”

Originally from Akron, Ohio, he started attending North Carolina School of the Arts and New York University Tisch School of the Arts. Tazewell has gone on to design costumes for quite a few famous productions. Some of the more famous ones are “In The Heights,” “A Streetcar Named Desire,” “The Color Purple,” “Wicked” and many, many more.

During his career, Tazewell has created costume designs for more than a dozen Broadway shows, with a majority of the plays having a predominantly Black and Latino cast.

Paul has also been known to mark many historic moments, including being the first Black male costume designer to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Costume Design (Steven Spielberg’s “West Side Story”) in 2021, and more recently, being the first openly gay Black man to win an Oscar in the Best Costume Design category. While



GETTY IMAGES

Paul Tazewell, winner of the Best Costume Design award for “Wicked,” poses in the press room during the 97th Annual Oscars at Ovation Hollywood on March 2 in Hollywood, Calif.

he’s worked on 29 theater productions, he’s also done work for more than stage plays, including the three television productions and five films he’s worked on.

He’s created costumes for ballet companies, operas and regional theaters. The ballet companies are the Bolshoi Ballet, the Boston Ballet and Washington’s very own Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle. For operas, he’s worked with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, English National Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera and the Washington National Opera. Finally, the regional theatres for which he designed costumes include Goodman Theatre, Arena Stage, La Jolla Playhouse, Alley Theatre and Guthrie Theatre.

Tazewell has quite the record when it comes to awards. He’s been nominated for 21 awards in costume design and won about 15 awards for costume design.

Recently, he won an Oscar for Best Costume Design for the movie

“Wicked,” starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande. Of the works that got him a Tony nomination, some of them include 2010’s “Memphis,” 2019’s “Ain’t Too Proud,” 2022’s “MJ,” 2008’s “In The Heights,” 2024’s “Suffs,” 2006’s “The Color Purple” and 2012’s “A Streetcar Named Desire.” He won a Tony for Best Costume Design of a Musical for Lin-Manuel Miranda’s “Hamilton” in 2016. A few other notable awards he’s won are an Academy Award, British Academy Film Award, and a Primetime Emmy Award was for his costume design in “The Wiz Live!” from 2016. With over three decades of costume design under his belt and the awards to show for it, we can’t wait to see what he does next! He will be coming back as the costume designer for “Wicked: For Good,” which is set to release later this year.

To learn more about Paul Tazewell, he has an Internet Broadway Database, IMDb page, and an official website at paultazewelldesign.com.

HEART HEALTH MATTERS

How nutrition can empower POC against in preventing, managing heart disease

By Shanel Harris-Rittermann
THE BLACK LENS

Heart disease remains the number one killer worldwide, disproportionately affecting communities of color. Why? A mix of genetics, systemic inequalities, and healthcare access gaps all contribute. But here’s the game-changer: nutrition. The right diet can be a powerful tool in preventing and managing heart disease in Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities.

Why Are POC at Higher Risk for Heart Disease?

Black, Hispanic and Indigenous populations have higher rates of heart disease than white Americans. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that Black Americans are nearly twice as likely to have high blood pressure, a major red flag for heart disease. Hispanic and Native American populations also experience elevated risks due to obesity and diabetes, both of which can lead to serious heart complications.

But it’s deeper than genetics. Food insecurities, economic challenges, and healthcare disparities make it harder to maintain heart-healthy lifestyles. Add chronic stress and cultural eating habits and the risks skyrocket.

Food as Medicine: Preventing Heart Disease

The right foods can cut heart disease risk dramatically. The Mediterranean and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diets have been proven to lower blood pressure and cholesterol while keeping the heart strong. According to the USDA and CDC here’s what they focus on:

Go Heavy on Whole Foods: Fresh fruits, veg-



PIXABAY

Found in nuts, seeds and fortified foods, plant sterols and stanols naturally lower bad cholesterol, which can lead to better heart health.

References to learn more

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Heart disease and stroke statistics” at cdc.gov
- American Heart Association’s “Nutrition and heart health” at heart.org
- U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “Healthy eating and nutrition” at usda.gov

gies, whole grains, and legumes provide fiber and nutrients that help regulate cholesterol.

Choose Healthy Fats: Omega-3s from fish, nuts, and seeds help reduce inflammation and protect heart function.

Ditch the Processed Stuff: Too much salt, sugar and trans fats in fast food spike blood pressure and contribute to obesity

Swap Red Meat for Lean Protein: Chicken, tofu and beans offer heart-friendly alternatives.

Stay Hydrated & Cut Down on Salt: Drinking plenty of water and reducing sodium intake helps maintain healthy blood pressure.

Can Nutrition Reverse Heart Disease?

Already dealing with heart disease? Don’t stress – science shows that the right dietary changes can slow and even reverse some damage. A plant-based diet rich in fiber, antioxidants, and healthy

fats is key. According to the American Heart Association and the USDA load up on:

Potassium-Packed Foods: Bananas, spinach and sweet potatoes help balance sodium levels and lower blood pressure.

Magnesium & Fiber: Nuts, seeds and whole grains boost circulation and prevent clogged arteries.

Plant Sterols & Stanols: Found in nuts, seeds and fortified foods, these naturally lower bad cholesterol.

Final Thoughts

Heart disease significantly affects communities of color, but it doesn’t have to be this way. Nutrition is an amazing and powerful tool that can help prevent and even reverse some heart damage. By using fresh, healthy ingredients and making them more accessible, along with providing culturally relevant education, we can take control of our heart health and build stronger communities.

ANYLA’S TAKE

STEADFAST RESISTANCE

The recent legal victory of the Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C., was granted ownership of the name “Proud Boys” from a group notorious for its white supremacist ideology holds profound significance in resisting the growing wave of blatant racism and extremist propaganda. In a ruling on February 3rd, Judge Tanya M. Jones Bosier of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia granted the Metropolitan AME Church ownership of the Proud Boys’ trademark. The decision also provides the church with a lien on the trademark and the authority to prevent the group from using it or selling branded merchandise, such as T-shirts and hats, without their consent.

This victory is not just a legal triumph – it is a symbolic act of defiance against white supremacy. It underscores the urgency for communities to actively disrupt hate at both micro and macro levels. Drawing inspiration from those who came before us in the fight for full recognition of our humanity, now more than ever, we must model unwavering resistance to both covert and overt racism.

This legal win represents a decisive counterattack against racial intimidation. According to CBS News, on December 12, 2020, the all-male, far-right group participated in a “Stop the Steal” rally in Washington, D.C., where they trespassed on the church’s property, tearing down and destroying a Black Lives Matter sign. Though the Proud Boys were ordered to pay the church \$2.8 million in damages, they failed to do so. As a result, the court awarded Metropolitan AME Church ownership of the Proud Boys’ trademark, granting them the authority to deny use of the group’s name and its recognizable yellow-and-black laurel wreath symbol.

This lawsuit’s success directly challenges the audacity of hate groups, delivering an unapologetic



By Anyla McDonald
THE BLACK LENS
CONTRIBUTOR



message: Black institutions and communities will not be erased, terrorized, or silenced. This victory resonates with countless historical moments where Black communities have fought for justice and recognition. It highlights the critical role of both legal and social recourse in confronting systemic racism. The precedent set by this case could empower other organizations and individuals targeted by hate groups, offering a blueprint for future legal challenges. Metropolitan AME Church’s stance is more than just a legal maneuver – it is an act of resistance.

Racist propaganda, disseminated through various mediums, thrives on misinformation, conspiracy theories, and historical revisionism. These tactics incite unrest, harassment, and violence while normalizing hate speech, fostering desensitization, and encouraging herd mentality. Beyond acts of physical aggression, such propaganda creates an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and marginalization for targeted communities. The rise of online echo chambers exacerbates this problem, allowing extremist ideologies to spread unchecked, radicalizing individuals at alarming rates. Figures like David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and Richard Spencer, a leading figure in the alt-right movement, epitomize the architects of these dangerous ideologies. Their influence has

contributed to real-world events such as the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and the torch-lit white supremacist rally at the University of Virginia in August 2017.

Interrupting hate is not merely a moral responsibility – it is a necessity for ensuring safety and affirming humanity. A multi-faceted approach is required, one that holds individuals and institutions accountable while amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. This includes promoting education, fostering meaningful dialogue, and actively challenging prejudice in all its manifestations. Organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center exemplify effective strategies in tracking hate groups and advocating for tolerance.

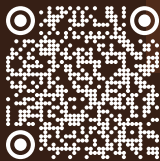
At the micro level, combatting racism and bigotry in everyday life requires active engagement, courage, and accountability. It starts with acknowledging and challenging our own biases, having difficult conversations, and refusing to remain silent in the face of discrimination. Micro-level interventions can include calling out racist jokes, confronting micro-aggressions, and supporting anti-racist initiatives in our local communities. This demands more than lukewarm multiculturalism that avoids direct engagement with racism – it requires bold and intentional participation in anti-racist movements.

Succumbing to the pressures of hate groups only emboldens them and allows their ideology to spread unchecked. Resistance is not just about winning legal battles – it is a daily commitment to challenging and opposing racism in all its forms. The Metropolitan AME Church’s pursuit of justice serves as a powerful reminder of the necessity of steadfast resistance. Their victory reinforces the reality that the fight against white supremacy is ongoing, requiring courage, resilience, and an unrelenting dedication to justice and equality for all.

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5PM-7PM @ HAMILTON STUDIO
ywcaspokane.org/equity4all

This year, we invite you to engage in an immersive experience focused on using restorative practices to build restorative communities. The event will feature powerful discussions, artistic performances, and an experiential component that allows participants to feel the impact of restorative circle work firsthand.

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YWCA’S ANNUAL FREE PUBLIC COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

YOUTH CONNECTION

BLACK JOY AND HEALING

What is Black Joy to You?

I asked a Black classmate what Black joy meant to her. She said, “To me, Black joy is when I see people of my color stand up for what’s right.” This is one thing that makes her happy, something she describes as Black joy. Seeing people of your color make a difference in a world where they are often unrecognized is a powerful example of Black joy.

When I think of Black joy, I think of the many things I love and enjoy doing. When I used to live in Africa, I lived on the far side of the city. One of the greatest things I loved was how neighbors would gather and share their stories, laugh, and celebrate together. In

the evenings, kids would gather around and listen to the oldest members of the community tell tales they had heard from their parents. Sometimes we would be scared, sometimes we would laugh, and sometimes we would even cry because of the stories being told. Moments like these were beautiful. Even from afar, witnessing such moments would fill you with pure joy. When Black people come together, it creates joy. I like to call it beautiful.

When I asked my father what his Black joy was, he said that simply being Black brought him joy. His Black culture, his story, and the knowledge that he is loved

by God no matter what others say are his sources of joy. This is very true. No matter what others say, it doesn’t matter when you know yourself and where you come from. That understanding brings joy, along with so many other things.

How to find joy

Finding joy starts within you. First, you learn who you are, and then you accept yourself. That’s where your joy begins. You can grow your joy by attending events that celebrate your identity and by surrounding yourself with people who understand and appreciate your story. Learning about your heritage and your people can build confidence in yourself. Standing up for yourself and being brave

brings joy. Being who you are and pursuing what you want to be will always give you joy, no matter how others view it. Joy is yours to find.

Black healing

Healing is everywhere – in the music, the dancing, and the speeches. For me, healing comes through dancing, painting, listening to music, and writing. These activities make me feel like myself again and help lift my mood. There are countless ways for people to heal. My personal favorite is listening to my parents’ stories – their own experiences and memories.

Find the joy within yourself; it’s there. Share it and let it grow. Be who you are and know that you are enough.



By Janet Tumasifu
SHADLE PARK
HIGH SCHOOL



MY RACE IS HUMAN

Shenla describes race as pol roti as the food she eats
That is her race, her food.
Dion describes race as experience as the looks he gets when he walks into a store
That is his race, his experience.
But what is my race?
My race is the way my hair curls.
The way my hair takes maintenance.
The way my hair not only represents my mother but represents me.
My hair is my race.
My race is not based on skin but culture.
About the way I grew up in a country that felt more like home than the one I'm from.
About the way that the second language I learned was from Africa.
About the way I jumped with a Kenyan tribe before I was 7.
My race is my culture.
My race is about the confused glance I get when I tell people where I'm from.
The way that people tell me who they think I am.
The way that I am put into a box of stereotypes the moment I walk into a room.
My race is breaking the opinions of people.
My race is both and neither.
My race is in the small things that make me.
My race is Washington, D.C. born, raised by the world, home to nowhere.
My race is human.



By Elizabeth Manning
LEWIS AND CLARK
HIGH SCHOOL



Well what if planets with rings asked the universe to loosen or free it of those rings?...”

Dante Crawford

Head space

Ever wondered when looking into the sky, “will I ever get there?” Daydreaming of an escape that pills, scissors, and ropes can’t provide? Maybe that’s just me.

I’ve tried to reach it but never by a spaceship given to me, but some were born with a spaceship. Never having to worry where the parts came from or the gas to fill it, never having to hear “do you have spaceship money?” Never having to make one on their own from rusted parts, looking hopeless because the universe gave them a bad hand, telling them to deal with it. Maybe that’s just me.

We can all be born stars that’ll shine in the night guiding wayward people at sea, leading them in the right direction all being connected in unity like constellations. Showing the beauty in every star but all still shining together. At least in an ideal world.

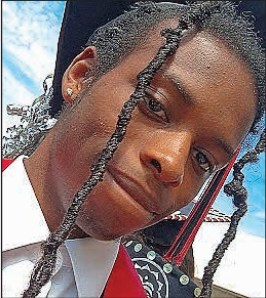
But let’s take a closer look. Those stars aren’t so close, and that light is always dying. Burning, struggling, and caving in on its own energy. Anxiously trying to shine as bright as the others until eventually dying out. No one ever notices that the star isn’t there anymore, due to its light giving an illusion that it’s still there until another takes its place. As if it never died, fitting perfectly to finish the constellation. Or maybe that’s just me.

An image of a soft, comforting place enters my vision without warning then suddenly fading.

Ok, ok let’s think bigger, how about planets! Personally, I connect with the ones with rings. They’re so beautiful, pretending to be the biggest thing out there. They are rings looking like something out of a fantasy, having moons that shine in their own way, all the while orbiting like a set path that never crashes into each other and their worlds.

This image of a soft, comforting place enters my vision without warning again, then fades. Sorry, let’s take a closer look.

That beauty they portray, once up close, looks less appealing.



By Dante Crawford
CENTRAL WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY



An unstable environment emanating a toxic atmosphere that’ll suffocate you due to misunderstanding, unsolid ground that you may get sucked into, drowning you in all its problems. Rings are like barriers that stop anyone from getting close enough to help, in fear of risking your destruction and all their problems caving in on you, leaving marks or scars you may never get rid of. Or is this just me?

Again, this image of a soft, comforting place enters my vision without warning, fading once more. Sorry; bad habit.

Well what if planets with rings asked the universe to loosen or free it of those rings? Although the universe is unresponsive and acts on impulse as well as planets, and doesn’t really have parents, I get that...”

If only I...
Sorry, planets with rings could ask for help from other stars and planets that don’t have rings, to help. But they’re so far away or may not understand, as well as being frightened or scared of my rings; but this is how I was born. Miles from relative moons that seemed close and rings I may never get rid of.

And again, this image of a soft, comforting place enters my vision without warning, fading for the last time today.

So, they ...

“I mean I daydream to escape my rings even for a short moment, smiling even if I’ll never be ok.”

Knowingly, I only show the best parts of myself, masking the dark side of my moons that I face constantly. And this is just me.

The art of not going with the flow

In a world where we are continuously pushed to comply, the concept of “going with the flow” has become the standard. Whether it’s following the current trends, joining the crowd, or doing what everyone else is doing, it can be easier to simply follow the path already prepared for us. However, there is an increasing emphasis on acquiring the art of going against the grain, standing up for what you believe in, and being true to yourself.

It is easy to become engrossed in what others are doing. There is frequently pressure to fit in and be like everyone else, from our clothing to the music we listen to.



By Kim Ndlovu
YOUTH CONNECTION
CONTRIBUTOR



However, this might lead to the loss of our individuality. Instead than following trends, why not

set your own? After all, some of the world’s most successful and inspiring people did not follow the crowd; instead, they forged their own way.

The art of not going with the flow does not imply rebellion. It is about making deliberate judgments that reflect your values, interests, and views, even if they may not coincide with what is trendy at the time. Whether it’s pursuing a unique job path, expressing yourself in unconventional fashion, or speaking out about something you care about, not going with the flow means making decisions based on who you genuinely are rather than who society expects

you to be.

Of course, deviating from the norm has its disadvantages. It’s easy to fit in without risking being condemned. However, in the end, individuals who dare to be different are frequently the ones who change the world. They motivate others to think for themselves, take risks, and cherish their originality.

So, the next time you feel pressured to go with the flow, remember that sometimes the ones who swim against the current create the biggest waves. Never be scared to be yourself, even if it means standing out. In the end, those who dare to be different will leave their impact on the world.

THE POWER OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

Don’t count us out

By Sian Armstrong
FERRIS HIGH SCHOOL

The Civil Rights Movement was a powerful force for justice that transformed the nation. It dismantled segregation and marked a pivotal moment in American history. Men and women from all social classes united to fight for the rights of all people. However, they were not the first to do so.

Young adults across the country began advocating for civil rights long before figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks appeared.

Their contributions are still crucial to our rights, both then and now.

Even before the 1900s, young people protested racial inequality. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

(SNCC) and the NAACP Youth Councils played significant roles during the Civil Rights Movement.

The SNCC was founded in 1960 by African American college students who opted for nonviolent methods of protest. This organization educated others about voting rights and helped people like them to access voting information.

Although these students made a considerable impact on the movement, they chose not to collaborate with Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Why would two groups fighting for the same cause be at odds? The answer is like disagreements over how to build a paper airplane or assign



By Sian Armstrong
FERRIS HIGH SCHOOL



roles in a group project – you don’t agree on how to do it.

The SNCC focused on nonviolent actions, using picket signs and marches, while the SCLC favored a more hands-on approach. Meanwhile, the NAACP youth councils were also

instrumental in organizing protests. Their efforts were not limited to local actions; they engaged actively at the state and national levels.

Unlike the SNCC, these young people collaborated with the SCLC and Martin Luther King Jr.

Despite their challenges and differing strategies, both groups worked towards achieving equality for everyone in the country, paving the way for more young people to join the fight.

The Black Lives Matters movement is one of many examples of youth activism. And none of this would have been possible without those first young trailblazers paving the way.

So, if you see or hear something that you don’t like, don’t just sit back; ask yourself this question: What are you going to do about it?

YOUTH CONNECTION

THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

By Daniella Musesambili
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL

Leadership is more than just a position – it is the courage to take action, the strength to inspire, and the vision to create lasting change. A true leader does not wait for permission to make a difference. Instead, they use their voice to challenge injustice, uplift those around them, and build opportunities where none exist.

One of the most pressing issues today is systemic inequality, particularly for women and people of color. Women continue to be underpaid compared to men, and individuals from mar-

ginalized communities face barriers that make success more difficult to achieve. Equal Pay Day serves as a reminder that our society still values the dollar more than the people who earn it. If we truly want progress, we cannot wait for the system to correct itself – we must actively build change.

Change does not start in boardrooms or government offices; it starts within our own communities. Leadership is about opening doors for others, mentoring, and ensuring that future generations have access to greater opportunities. It is about creating relationships, fostering trust, and using influence to uplift

others. A true leader does not stand alone – they bring people together to create something stronger than any individual effort.

At the heart of leadership is self-awareness. To lead effectively, we must first understand ourselves – our strengths, our weaknesses, and our purpose. Great leaders do not pretend to have all the answers. Instead, they surround themselves with people who challenge them, push them, and help them grow. A leader who is willing to learn, adapt, and accept feedback builds a foundation for long-term success.

But leadership is not just about personal develop-

ment; it is also about challenging the world around us. It means questioning systems that uphold injustice, speaking out when something is wrong, and standing firm in the face of resistance. Throughout history, the most powerful movements were led by those who refused to accept oppression as the status quo. Today, we must continue that legacy by ensuring that every voice is heard and valued.

Yet leadership is not just about fighting – it is also about bringing out the best in people. It means empowering others, spreading love and positivity, and recognizing that strength comes



By Daniella Musesambili
SHADLE PARK HIGH SCHOOL



The Power of a Voice

A leader stands, not just to rise,
But to uplift, to open eyes.
Not just a title, not just a name,
But a fire inside, a burning flame.
To break the chains, to build the way,
For brighter nights and fairer days.
To lead is not to walk alone,
But build a space, a lasting home.
So rise, and speak, and dare to be,
The change you wish the world to see.

Leadership is a journey of growth, impact, and purpose. It is about using your voice not just for yourself, but for those who need it most. Real change begins when we decide to act – not just for today, but for the generations to come.

Social Justice

UNMASKING DIVERSITY

How anti-Blackness persists under guise of inclusion

By Ian Aloyce
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

In the heart of Spokane, a city celebrated for its natural beauty but grappling with a stark lack of diversity, a troubling reality unfolds. Diversity initiatives, often hailed as progressive steps toward equity, sometimes harbor a hidden menace: anti-Blackness. This insidious force, cloaked in the language of inclusion, undermines the very communities these programs claim to uplift. Through personal experiences, evidence, and a call to action, this article seeks to expose and dismantle the wolf in sheep's clothing that is anti-Blackness in diversity initiatives.

The Illusion of Inclusion

Diversity initiatives are designed to foster representation and equity, yet they often fall short

when it comes to Black communities. Tokenism, performative allyship, and a lack of intersectionality are just a few ways anti-Blackness manifests within these programs. For instance, hiring Black individuals to meet diversity quotas without providing them with meaningful roles perpetuates a cycle of superficial inclusion. This practice not only devalues the contributions of Black professionals but also reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Evidence of Anti-Blackness in Diversity Programs

Recent studies and reports highlight the prevalence of anti-Blackness in diversity initiatives. A 2023 report by the Center for Workplace Equity revealed that while 85% of organizations have diversity programs, only 30% address anti-Blackness specifically. This gap

allows systemic biases to persist, often unnoticed. In Spokane, where Black residents make up less than 2% of the population, the impact of these shortcomings is magnified. Local anecdotes reveal instances of Black professionals being sidelined or their cultural contributions being appropriated without acknowledgment.

A Personal Perspective

As someone who has experienced the sting of tokenism and stereotyping, I can attest to the emotional toll of being reduced to a checkbox. In one organization, I was celebrated as the “diverse hire” but excluded from key decision-making processes. My culture and heritage were often misunderstood or misrepresented, even by those who shared my background. These experiences are not unique to

me; they are a reflection of a broader issue that demands urgent attention.

The Role of Media in Driving Change

Publishing an article like this in a reputable outlet like The Black Lens (shoutout) can serve as a catalyst for change. By shedding light on the hidden anti-Blackness in diversity initiatives, we can spark conversations and inspire action. Media has the power to amplify marginalized voices and hold organizations accountable. In Spokane, where diversity is scarce, such efforts are crucial for fostering a more inclusive community.

Solutions and a Path Forward

To combat anti-Blackness in diversity initiatives, organizations must take several steps: Genuine Representation; Move beyond tokenism by providing Black individuals

with meaningful roles and opportunities for growth. Accountability; Establish measurable goals and consequences for failing to meet them. Centering Black Voices; Ensure that Black perspectives shape policies and programs. Education and Awareness; Implement training that specifically addresses anti-Blackness and its impact.

Anti-Blackness in diversity initiatives is a wolf in sheep's clothing, undermining the progress these programs aim to achieve. By exposing this issue and advocating for genuine inclusion, we can pave the way for a more equitable future. Spokane, with its unique challenges and opportunities, has the potential to lead by example. Let this article be a call to action for individuals, organizations, and communities to confront anti-Blackness and commit to authentic diversity.

COMMON GROUND

A reflection on bravery in the face of bigotry and understanding the cost of dreams

By Shafiqah Wallizada
THE BLACK LENS

When I first moved to Spokane in 2016, I was a seven-year-old girl thrown into a world that didn't seem to want me. Though I had been a third grader in my home country, I was placed in second grade here, lost in an unfamiliar language and an even more unfamiliar sense of isolation. I still remember being dropped off in the middle of the school year, not knowing a single person, not understanding a single word. School, a place meant for learning and inclusion, became a battlefield where I was either ignored or ridiculed. My classmates saw my struggle not as something to empathize with, but as something to mock. I was a child, but I understood rejection. I understood that I was unwanted.

What hurt even more was the hypocrisy – the classrooms were decorated with posters about kindness, yet the teachers turned a blind eye. My only crime was existing in a space that wasn't built for me. And when I tried to stand up for myself, I was punished, while those who tore me down faced no consequences. This is the price of toxic positivity in schools – the illusion of inclusion while discrimination festers beneath the surface. It teaches children like me that no one will stand up for them, that their pain is invisible, that their

silence is expected.

Audre Lorde once said, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.” I carry those words with me because while my struggles as an Afghan immigrant are unique, I know they are not isolated. Black women, Indigenous women, Latina women, South Asian women – we have all faced the weight of being seen as “other.” In honor of Women's History Month, I want to recognize the strength of Black women, in particular, who have fought not just for themselves, but for every woman of color who dared to dream.

Women like Dr. Alexa Irene Canady, the first Black female Neurosurgeon in the United States, who stepped into a field dominated by white men and refused to back down. Rebecca Lee Crumpler, who earned her medical degree in 1864, despite relentless instances of racism and sexism. Mary Eliza Mahoney, the first Black nurse, who fought for recognition when the world refused to see her worth. Ida Gray Nelson Rollins, the first Black female dentist, and Dorothy Celeste Boulding Ferebee, a physician who dedicated her life to bringing medical care to underserved Black communities, understanding that access to healthcare and education could mean life or death.

Their fight is the

reason I refuse to let other people's opinions define my success. I once believed that hiding my culture and identity was my only way to survive. Now, I realize that the very things I once feared are what make me powerful. I no longer want to be invisible. I want to be a beacon of hope for women everywhere, for those who have been silenced before they could even dream. I carry the weight of the women who came before me – my mother, my grandmother – who never had the chance to sit in a classroom, to hold a book, to write their own stories. Their dreams were dismissed before they could take shape, not because they lacked intelligence or ambition, but because the world told them they didn't matter. They did. And so do the millions of women in Chad, Sudan, Central Africa, Somalia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and beyond – women who are still being denied the right to learn, to grow, to exist freely.

I refuse to let their struggles be forgotten. I am here because of them. I will rise for them. I will use my voice for those who have been silenced,

because no woman should have to fight just to be seen.

I once dreamed of being an artist, then a lawyer, then an FBI agent, but now I know my calling is in neuroscience. I want to enter a field where women like me have been told they don't belong, just as Dr. Canady did. I believe it is my responsibility to work relentlessly to make my dreams a reality – just as it is society's responsibility to ensure that the dreams of all children, especially those of color, are protected.

Malala Yousafzai, a girl who was shot for daring to say that women deserved an education, said it best: “I raise up my voice – not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.” Today, I raise my voice for the little girl who sat alone at lunch, for the women who came before

me, and for the women who will come after me. Because of them, I will never be silent again.

And to the other girls with dreams that feel too distant, too impossible – to those who have just arrived and feel like they don't belong, and to those who have been here for years but still carry the weight of being unseen – you are not alone. I know the silence, the loneliness, the feeling of being out of place. But hear me now: you are not too foreign, too different. You are meant to be here. Your dreams are not too big – they are exactly the size they should be. And no matter who tries to break you, no matter how many times the world tells you ‘No,’ you keep going. One day, those same voices will have no choice but to listen, and you will be everything they never believed you could be.



WELLNESS

BLACK GENEALOGY

MAIDEN NAMES

Finding the birth names of African American women

Some of you are too young to remember when a married woman was known as Mrs. Husband's Last Name, as in Mrs. Smith, or Mrs. Husband's Name, as in Mrs. John Smith. This was common practice and continued well into the 1980s. These practices are dead. I have never written my name that way, but we receive labels addressed as Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Johnson throughout the year, and sometimes I use them on Christmas cards. Our names are on our checks, and companies have taken the liberty to combine our names as Mr. and Mrs. Husband's Name.

Many of our female ancestors did not leave records of themselves. They have been primarily silent companions. It is a man's world. Men purchased the land, served in the military, were taken to court, paid taxes, and left wills, and therefore, they left records. Our women ancestors have been overlooked in our history and genealogies. Here are some strategies to help you find the maiden names of your female ancestors.

Locating maiden names

- Children's Birth Records** – A child's birth record will provide the father's name and the mother's maiden name, depending on the time and place.
- Delayed Birth Records** – My father was born at home in New Orleans on July 29, 1920. His birth was registered at the Health Department on August 20, 1920. His mother's maiden name is on his delayed birth certificate.
- Marriage Records** – Marriage licenses and certificates include maiden names and information about the

couple. In Louisiana in the 1890s, marriage bonds were required before marriage. My paternal great-grandfather filed a \$500 marriage bond to affirm his intention to marry my great-grandmother and that there was no legal impediment to the marriage, like being underage or a previous marriage but not divorced.

Death Certificates – If the informant knows her mother's and father's names (thus her maiden name), her death certificate might include them. However, the details that are not about the death are notoriously incorrect. Consider who the informant is and how they would know the information provided.

Mothers' maiden names are included on the death certificates of her children. My brother, born in 1949, died in 2009. Our mother's maiden name is on his death certificate. On their death certificates, I found maiden names for my paternal grandmother (1889 – 1959) and my paternal grandfather's (1887 – 1957) mother.

Birth Family Obituaries – Published newspaper obituaries are an excellent source for finding maiden names. The obituary for her father, brother, or unmarried sister will provide the maiden name of your female ancestor. Funeral programs are another good source for finding maiden names. My mother's funeral program included her mother's maiden name and her father's name, (thus her maiden name), her brother's name, her unmarried sister's maiden name, and the names of two male cousins.

Church Records – A church record may be the only record you will find. Baptismal records have the mother's



By Patricia Bayonne-Johnson
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



maiden name, the female godparent's maiden name, and the birth record.

Newspapers – The local newspaper lists the names of couples who apply for a marriage license, including the female applicant's maiden name. Marriage or engagement notices are good sources for maiden names. Some newspapers have gossip columns, which may list who is visiting and the visitor's maiden name.

Social Security Applications – The Social Security application for your deceased female ancestor can be requested from the Social Security Administration. The application provides the individual's name at birth, the mother's maiden name, and the father's name ... and it is in her handwriting! The photocopy of the original application fee is \$27. A certified copy is provided for an additional fee of \$10.

While searching for the maiden names of African American female ancestors is fraught with challenges, the rewards of uncovering them are immense. Leave no stone unturned. Researching everyone associated with your female ancestors will lead you to that elusive maiden name.

FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

History of the Klan has deep roots here

One path to better health and wellness is knowing our personal and community histories. Mindful of the old adage, "There's nothing new under the sun,"

I want to share a little bit of local history with you.

I want to tell you the story of the 1915 release of D.W. Griffith's racist, silent film "Birth of a Nation." It purposefully glorifies the virtues of white people. It specifically promotes white supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The film portrays southern Blackfolks as dangerous and in other racially despicable ways. The film sparked white on Black violence whenever and wherever it was shown.

The NAACP petitioned the National Board of Censorship requesting the banning of the film. They weren't successful. In fact, in 1916 it was the first film shown in the East Room of the White House. It was viewed by President Woodrow Wilson, his family and members of his cabinet. President Wilson, who was a friend of Thomas Dixon, the author of the novel "The Clansman" which the movie is based on was reported to have been impressed with the film's historical depiction.

In Tacoma and Spokane and all over the country, people actively protested showings of the film. Despite protests, it opened at the Clemmer Theater (currently known as the Bing). The Clemmer came into being through the cooperation of two wealthy Spokane citizens: August Paulsen and Howard S. Clemmer, the son of a theater builder.

To add insult to local injury, the Clemmer Theater hired actors to dress as mounted Klansmen in front of the theater to promote the film. According to The Spokesman-Review, "a mob of men pulled the Klansmen from their horses and beat them. Rocks and sticks flew ... horses frightened, and a large crowd assembled." The article does not identify who the members of the resisters were. However, there was resistance. The popularity of the film and growing racial and religious hatred in the city sparked the founding of Spokane's NAACP Chapter in 1919. The Klan continued to rise throughout Spokane and throughout Washington.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Hyde Building on West Riverside Avenue was the headquarters and stronghold for the Klan. It is recorded that the KKK embedded itself within the fabric of the city's political and social institutions. Spokane's history recounts that at its height within Washington, the Klan boasted 40,000 dues-paying members. All told approximately 1 out of 10 eligible native-born men in the state, between the ages of 21 and 79, were members of the Klan.

The Spokane Klan distributed printed copies of their creed around town, promoting the values of white supremacy, fears about immigration, changing



By Robert "Bob" Bartlett
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



was accused of sending notes to Spokane's Black residents warning them to leave the city. The Klan publicly denied responsibility.

Our city's history recounts that one of the largest public Klan events was a rally in 1923 on Five Mile Prairie. It mentions the local figures who played leadership roles in the Klan's rise to prominence. The Rev. C.A. Rexroad of Corbin Park Methodist Church was the head of the Klan during the early

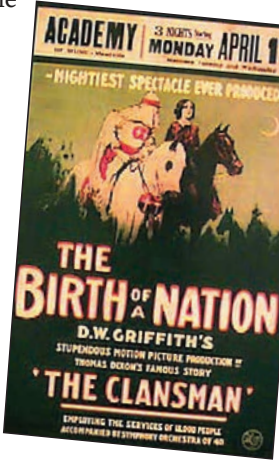
1920s. Spokane attorney E.B. Quackenbush rose to the position of "Grand Dragon" for the entire Klan in Washington state. Quackenbush was also honored with a ceremonial key to the city of Bellingham.

Black resistance was led by churches like Bethel African Methodist Episcopal and Calvary Baptist Church and later by the local NAACP and the Spokane County Colored Republican Club which took a stand against politicians endorsed by the KKK. The existence of the Klan was also challenged by many local white officials and the media. By the early 1930s, the Klan's power in Spokane reportedly began to decline due to local resistance.

The Klan and other white supremacist organizations are still here. Hate-fueled organizations and members of a certain political party have a long history of manipulating the "truth" and gaining social influence through spreading lies, intimidation, fear, hatred and division. The good news is efforts like these have always been met with resistance by good people of all kinds, shades and religious beliefs who come together and say, "No!"

We owe resisters of our past a great deal. The call for courage and resistance in the face of challenging times is, in fact, timeless because, "There's nothing new under the sun." It's our turn now to say, "No!"

Learn more at Spokane Historical (spokanehistorical.org/items/show/964) and The Spokesman-Review (spokesman.com). Dr. Bartlett is a retired educator. He retired from Gonzaga University in 2007 and Eastern Washington University in 2020.



Then came you: Honoring my 101-year-old mother-in-law

By James Smith
THE BLACK LENS

On Nov. 1, 1933, my beloved "motha-in-law," Lillian Jones, was born in Waco, Texas, to Frank and Atha Jones. In 1935, seeking better opportunities during the Great Depression, Frank and Atha migrated with Lillian and three of her siblings to Grand Coulee, Washington. They were part of President Roosevelt's New Deal public works program, designed to restore self-sufficiency and dignity to American workers – though, too often, this vision prioritized white skilled men.

Lillian's father, Frank, became a skilled machinist, and in 1945, when she was 12 years old, the family relocated



Lillian Jones

she dedicated herself to caring for others, beginning at a local nursing home before working at Sacred Heart Medical Center and Baxter Labs.

Lillian and her husband, Gardner – affectionately known as "June" – raised six children, five of whom still call Spokane home. For 20 years, the family lived in the East Central neighborhood before moving to Spokane Valley, where they shared a fence with the beloved Black Lens founder,

to Spokane. She attended local schools and, after graduating high school in 1951, pursued a career in nursing. For over 30 years,

Sandy Williams. Lillian remained best friends with Sandy's mother, Mother Williams, and their bond continues to this day.

Lillian's passions have been many, but some of her favorite pastimes included playing Bid Whist, Spades, and Crazy Eights. She found peace and joy in gardening, nurturing both plants and the people around her. Above all, she was a devoted caregiver, tending to her mother, Atha, until she passed away at the remarkable age of 101.

Her life is a testament to her unwavering love for family and faith – her guiding forces.

To my dear mother-in-law, I love you with all my heart and soul. Thank you for allowing me to be your son-in-law.

KAZUKO WELLNESS

TRUE WELLNESS

Breathe in. Breathe out. Begin. As a wellness practitioner, my sole mission is to guide people back to the knowing that they are their first and greatest healer. As an entrepreneur running a wellness business, this mission guides me as I make decisions, accept or deny collaborations, and work with clients that are aligned to receive what I can offer. This also means I am constantly checking myself and relying on my team of trusted advisors to check me as well. According to Global Wellness Institute, the global wellness economy reached a peak of \$6.3 trillion at the end of 2024 – and is forecast to hit \$9 trillion by 2028. That makes the wellness industry about four times larger than the global pharmaceutical industry (\$1.6 trillion). Anything can be capitalized. In moments of need – in moments of hardship, it can feel incredibly overwhelming to know where to turn.

The medical system that this country has been standing on has many passionate practitioners trying to work and fight within the systems to give people the care they need. It has also failed many – specifically those of the global majority and those who can't fight or advocate for themselves with their dollars. There is then this vastly expanding industry of wellness practitioners – again, a space with many intentional practitioners trying to offer solutions that often fall outside the scope of what insurance will cover making it simply inaccessible to a majority in need. In both spaces the drive for dollars over people creeps in. The desire to move faster – filtering people in and out as quickly as possible, to "fix" more, to have more and more reviews and testimonials, to sell more – it all overshadows the mission – to help people. In any space where you are seeking support there are ways to check for assurance that the true desire is



By Jasmine Linane-Booy
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



to help you:

- Overpromising with "Quick Fixes + Instant Results"
- There is no such thing. First, there is no need to "fix" – there is a need to connect. To listen to your body, to your breath, to your mind. That takes time, it takes rest, and it requires us to slow down and expand (write, talk, create, be with nature). True wellness invites us to explore new modalities like breathwork, meditation, yoga, somatic therapy and more. All great practices to support you in understanding yourself, connecting to yourself,

and working toward how you want to feel. The listed modalities are referred to as practices because that's exactly what the relationship requires: practice. Wellness asks us to be consistent.

- "One-Size-Fits-All" Solutions or Routines
- Your journey is unique to you. There are absolutely aspects of your wellness journey that will align with another's but whether it's mental health, physical needs, or beyond – you need a practitioner who will meet you where you are and walk forward with you towards your goals. It is the practitioners job to offer information and it is your responsibility to implement and take action.
- Ancient, Exotic, or Secret Methods
- Advertising that presents something as mystical or secret can be misleading and even harmful. Traditional indigenous healing ceremonies and practices hold deep power, but they must be approached with respect. These experiences are rooted in belief, practice, and a way of life that goes beyond a single event. If you expect to take a short break from work, engage in a profound healing experience, and return to your

WELLNESS INVITATION

Community Nature Walk

WHAT: A gentle walk along the Spokane River. We will meet in the Downriver Park Parking Lot just under the TJ Meenach Bridge at noon. From there we will walk as a group to the trail and enjoy a leisurely walk in community, in nature and return back to the parking lot when we feel ready.

WHEN: Noon Saturday, April 26

WHERE: Meet at Downriver Park, 4440 N. Riverside State Park Drive, Spokane

REGISTER: Online at bit.ly/4iIY8hb

routine unchanged, you may quickly revert to old habits and thought patterns – potentially even more deeply. If you acknowledge the transformative potential of these practices, you must also recognize that engaging with them without proper respect or under the guidance of those who lack authenticity and alignment can lead to unintended consequences.

- Fear-Based Marketing
- If you are being led to believe that if you don't do something or participate in a program you will be worse off, scrap it! True wellness is about self empowerment, not fear or shame.
- Expensive = More Effective
- The more you pay does

not necessarily mean you're receiving a higher quality service or product. Many top level practitioners seek ways to offer services in an accessible way. This means partnering with local organizations to provide low cost or free programming. Look around your community for organizations that are doing just that! At the end of the day, true wellness is about sleeping well, eating well, hydrating, moving your body, connecting with yourself and your community, and being connected to nature. Slow down, simplify, connect.

Jasmine Linane-Booy of Kazuko Wellness is a Somatic Energy Guide.

SHADES OF MOTHERHOOD NETWORK / FROM THE FRONT PAGE

STRONG WOMEN, DEEP ROOTS

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

HONORING MONTH FOR BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH

A call for change and empowerment

Every April, **Black Maternal Health Month** serves as a powerful reminder of the urgent need to address maternal health disparities affecting Black women in the United States. This month is more than an awareness campaign—it's a movement to protect, uplift, and advocate for the well-being of Black mothers and birthing people.

Reality Check There Is A Crisis That Demands Attention! The statistics are alarming: Black women in the U.S. are **three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes** than white women, according to the CDC. These disparities exist regardless of income or education level, revealing that systemic racism, implicit bias, and lack of equitable health care access are major contributors.

Additionally, Black women face **higher rates of preterm birth (14.4%)** compared to white women (9.3%), as reported by the March of Dimes. Chronic stress, discriminatory medical practices, and economic barriers often leave Black mothers without the care they need before, during, and after childbirth.

A Movement of Strength and Change. Despite these challenges, Black Maternal Health Month is not just about raising awareness – **it's about empowerment, advocacy and action.** Black women have long been at the forefront of community-led maternal health solutions. Organizations like **Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA)** and SisterSong are fighting for policy changes, improved health-care access, and culturally competent care.

In our community there is **The Shades of Motherhood Network (SOMN)** where their vision is to create a world where Black mothers and families thrive, with equitable access to



By Stephy Nobles-Beans
THE BLACK LENS CONTRIBUTOR



compassionate care, comprehensive support, and resources that empower healthy pregnancies, births and postpartum experiences. Through their holistic programs – ranging from food assistance to doula services and peer support – they aim to uplift and transform Black maternal health outcomes for future generations.

There are many programs promoting **midwifery, doula support and holistic prenatal care** that have also been instrumental in improving outcomes. Studies show that having a doula present during birth can lead to lower rates of medical interventions and a **39% decrease in Cesarean births.**

Hope and Action: What Can We Do? There is so much that our community can do, here are some suggestions, now let's go to work!

• **Support Black-led maternal health organizations.** Donate, volunteer, or amplify their work.

• **Advocate for policy changes.** Push for laws that protect Black birthing people, such as expanded Medicaid coverage and implicit bias training for health care providers.

• **Encourage community-centered solutions.** Promoting midwives, doulas, and culturally affirming care can

create a safer experience for Black mothers.

• **Share stories and uplift voices.** Representation matters, hearing real experiences fosters understanding and drives change.

A Future Where Black Mothers Thrive. This April, let's honor **Black Maternal Health Month** by taking action, advocating for change, and celebrating the resilience of Black mothers. A future where every Black mother is seen, heard, and given the care she deserves is possible – but only if we continue the fight for maternal justice.

Because when Black mothers thrive, families, communities and the world thrive.

For more information about, visit our website: theshadesofmotherhood-network.org

Creating positive experiences for your child heals parts of you

Shades of Motherhood Network

Parenting is more than raising children – it's an opportunity for healing. Many of us carry wounds from our own childhood, whether from trauma, neglect, or moments when we felt unseen. However, through intentional and loving parenting, we can rewrite our stories – not just for our children, but for ourselves.

When we create positive experiences for our children, we also nurture the parts of ourselves that need love and affirmation. Every moment spent playing, listening, and validating their emotions builds trust and connection. In turn, this strengthens their sense of security while healing our inner child.

Healing through parenting isn't about being perfect – it's about being present. As we model kindness, emotional awareness, and resilience, we break cycles of pain and replace them with love. Simple actions, like speaking words of encouragement or providing a safe space for

Reflective Quiz: Nurturing Resilience in Yourself and Your Child

1. Think about your own childhood. What is one thing you wished you had received more of from the adults in your life? How can you offer that to your child today?
 2. When your child is struggling emotionally, how do you typically respond? Is there a way you can offer more validation and support while also being kind to yourself?
 3. What is one moment this week where you felt proud of your parenting? How can you celebrate and build on that success?
 4. Are there any patterns from your past that you find yourself repeating? What small step can you take to create a different, healthier outcome?
 5. How do you practice self-care while parenting? What is one thing you can do to fill your own cup so you can continue to show up fully for your child?
- Take a moment to reflect on your answers. Remember, every small effort you make toward healing and connection strengthens both you and your child. Resilience is built one moment at a time.

feelings, create lifelong impact.

Resilience is built in these small moments. When we guide our children with patience and care, we plant seeds of healing in them and in ourselves. Love, when deeply rooted, restores

and transforms us all.

If you need support on your parenting journey, reach out to the Shades of Motherhood Network Family Navigation Team. Together, we can take meaningful steps toward joy, healing, and resilience.

MATTHEWS

Continued from 1

and striving to break them down.

Transforming Government for All

Established in 2020 under RCW 43.06D, the Washington State Office of Equity was created to facilitate policy and systems change. Matthews explained the office's mission succinctly: "We are here to change the way government operates—moving from a government that does things to people to one that does things with people. We want a government of, by, and for all the people."

The Office of Equity focuses on:

- **De-siloing Government:** Breaking down barriers between agencies to reduce duplication, inefficiencies and service gaps.
- **Aligning Efforts Across Sectors:** Collaborating with local governments, nonprofits, and community organizations.
- **Ensuring Equitable Access:** Making sure all Washingtonians receive services in the ways they need them.

Equitable Hiring Practices

One of the office's tangible impacts is transforming the hiring process for state jobs. Matthews emphasized how traditional resume and cover letter screenings often fail to reflect candidates' true skills and potential. To address this, her office introduced alternative hiring methods,

More Info

Watch the full episode of Challenging the Narrative with Megan Matthews by scanning the accompany QR code.



such as:

• **Verbal Storytelling Opportunities:** Allowing candidates to express their abilities beyond a written resume

• **Multiple Interview Panels:** Ensuring diverse perspectives in hiring decisions.

• **Deeper Interview Questions:** Evaluating candidates' understanding of systemic barriers through meaningful questions.

These intentional hiring practices have fostered a team diverse in race, background, geography, and lived experience. "Our team is tapped into their communities," Matthews said. "So when we show up, our work has credibility because we truly represent the people we serve."

She challenged the reliance on degree requirements when they aren't necessary.

"We definitely want a surgeon to have a degree," she joked, "but for jobs where a degree isn't legally

FAMILY SKATE AT PATTERSON'S

Location: Patterson's Skating Rink
Address: 11309 N Mayfair Rd, Spokane, WA 99218
Date: Sunday, June 22, 2025
Time: 3:15 PM – 5:15 PM

SIGN UP NOW

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE

Early Childhood Community Support

The Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Rooted in Resilience Program** fosters emotional well-being, family connections, and resilience through trauma-informed workshops, storytelling, play-based learning, and caregiver support, addressing systemic barriers.

REGISTER NOW

required, why are we using it as a filter?"

Instead, the state evaluates candidates based on actual skills and experience, promoting opportunities based on capability rather than privilege.

Moving Beyond the Zero-Sum Mindset

Matthews addressed a common misconception about equity work: the belief that it takes something away from certain groups. "People ask, 'Who's get-

ting left behind now?' as if there always have to be winners and losers," she said. Washington's equity initiatives reject that zero-sum mindset.

Understanding the conditions that shape people's lives is crucial. Matthews emphasized that when government leaders don't listen to real stories, they fill in the gaps with assumptions, leading to misguided policy decisions.

Her message is clear: Equity is not about exclu-

sion or special treatment. It's about ensuring every person has access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive.

"I know a lot of people who work hard," she said. "They have two or three jobs, and they're still struggling. It's because of a lack of access."

She underscored that hard work should lead to opportunities, but without equitable access, many people remain left behind.

Washington for All

For Matthews, equity work is an ongoing process of systemic change. "We are building a Washington for all," she said. "We want to demonstrate, in real ways, that diversity is not a threat – it's an advantage."

She called on others to join in the effort. "There are folks across Washington working to push equity forward," Matthews said. "We need to share resources, learn from each other, and build collective power."

IN MEMORIAM

REST IN POWER
in Memoriam



MELODY BEATTIE
(FEB. 27, 2025)

Self-help author Melody Beattie struggled early in life as she faced abuse as a child and addiction as a teenager. Working through and overcoming her adversities led Beattie to a life dedicated teaching others how to care for their wellbeing. She is best known for her book “Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring For Yourself.”



D'WAYNE WIGGINS
(MARCH 7, 2025)

D'Wayne Wiggins was a music and film producer, singer, songwriter and co-founder of one of the most iconic R&B music groups of the '80s and '90s: Tony! Toni! Tone! Holding four No.1 hits on the Billboard R&B charts for the groups unique blend of jazz, soul and modern R&B, Wiggins is also responsible for the creation and signing of Destiny's Child.



DONALD 'SLICK' WATTS
(MARCH 15, 2025)

Seattle SuperSonics point guard Donald Earl Watts, better known as “Slick” Watts, spent his years beloved for his NBA talent, kind and welcoming personality and his imperfectly laid headbands. Watts spent nearly five seasons in the NBA returning to Seattle after retirement, where he taught elementary school PE and coached Franklin High School basketball.



ALYSHA BURNEY
(MARCH 2, 2025)

Alysha Burney began her comedic YouTube channel in 2013 making parody videos of the show “Bad Girls Club.” Acting as a multitude of characters, Burney created the in famous “Be Like” series expanding her network of followers across YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to over 5 million. Burney is adored for her comedic nature, creativity and relatable content.



SYLVESTER TURNER
(MARCH 4, 2025)

Houston native and Harvard Law school graduate Sylvester Turner served as a Democrat in the Texas House of Representatives for more than 25 years. Turner also led Houston as its mayor from 2016-24 helping prove his city's undeniable resilience against Hurricane Harvey, COVID-19 and social unrest.



COCOA TEA
(MARCH 11, 2025)

Founder of Roaring Lion Records and singer-songwriter Cocoa Tea captivated the reggae world with the smoothness of his voice and his memorizing mix of reggae, dancehall and lovers rock. Tea is most famously known for his hit record “Riker's Island” that went on to inspire a musical career that challenged the political scene.



ROY AYERS
(MARCH 6, 2025)

As a skillful, accomplished musician and composer, Roy Ayers' passion for the vibraphone and love for music helped break down walls once surrounding jazz, soul and funk. Ayers spent five decades creating unique sounds and working with a plethora of artists including Rick James, Erykah Badu, Fela Kuti and Tyler the Creator.



ANGIE STONE
(MARCH 1, 2025)

Angie Stone was a 2000s and 2010s R&B singer, rapper and songwriting sensation who stunned the music industry with her determination and creative works. Stone is known for her hit “no More Rain (In This Cloud)” that won an R&B Soul Train award and topped the R&B charts, and her album “Mahogany Soul” which included a Grammy nominated duet with artist Joe.

IN MEMORIAM: GABRIEL MICAH FENSLE

'A HEART THAT LOVED, A MIND THAT INSPIRED'

With deep sorrow and immeasurable love, we honor the life of Gabriel Micah Fensler, affectionately known as Gabe. He was a young man who carried both brilliance and compassion, with a mind that saw solutions and a heart that saw people.

From the moment he could talk, Gabe was ahead of his time. By 18 months old, he was speaking in full sentences, and by the time he started pre-kindergarten, he had all his teeth and the kind of wisdom that made people stop and listen. He never saw limits, only possibilities. At 16, he became certified for professional work, securing a job at Allstate, where he proved himself beyond his years. By 17, he had obtained his



Gabriel Micah Fensler

license as an agent and was excelling in ways that made it clear he was gifted.

Gabe was not just smart. He was a visionary. He secured a role as an executive

assistant at Microsoft for three executives and was already mapping out his future. With an entrepreneurial spirit and a heart for family, he created a 60 page business plan, making sure that everyone around him had a roadmap to success. Hi dream was to earn his next degree and build a business that would not only elevate his life but create opportunity for others.

Beyond his own ambitions, Gabe was a fighter for justice. He served on the Washington State Council on Juvenile Justice, standing up for young people, especially those impacted by the system. As co-chair of the Behavioral Health and Reentry Subcommittee, he worked to make sure youth had real chances to rebuild

their futures. He believed in second chances, in people's ability to grow, and in the power of community.

Gabe's greatest gift was love and resilience. He never ended a conversation without saying “I love you”, and he meant it. He believed in the power of words and made sure people felt seen, valued, and never forgotten.

On the day after his 24th birthday, Gabe's light was taken from us far too soon.

Though his time here was far too short, his legacy is unshakable. Gabe is survived by his devoted mother, Kitara Johnson-Jones and his Bonus Dad Tony Jones, his father Shane Michael Fensler, and his loving siblings Terrence McKinney, Manuel McKinney, Matthew Mc-

Clure, Leilani Knypstra, and Shane M. Fensler Jr. He was an adored uncle to his niece and nephew, and his light will continue to shine through his maternal grandmother Dianne Henry, his stepfather Tony Jones, and the many grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends whose lives he touched.

Gabe lived with purpose. He loved without conditions. He dreamed without limits and never quit.

Rest in power, Gabriel Michael Fensler. You are loved. You are missed. Your fight continues.

As seen on dignitymemorial.com. In the care of Advantage Funeral & Cremation Services - South Hill.

IN MEMORIAM: MARY LANGFORD (1938-2025)

A FORCE OF NATURE DEPARTED

The vibrant tapestry of Spokane dimmed on March 13, 2025, with the unexpected passing of Mary Langford, 87. A woman of extraordinary strength, boundless love, and unwavering spirit, Mary's departure leaves a void that echoes through the hearts of all who knew her.

Born in Savannah, Georgia, her early life, shaped by the nurturing hand of her grandmother, Louisa Day, forged a resilience that would define her remarkable journey. Mary's life was a testament to the power of determination. She transformed every challenge into an opportunity, every interaction into a moment of connection.

Her love for her family was a radiant beacon, a constant source of warmth

and strength. Though she faced the sorrow of losing her grandmother, parents, husband Richard, son-in-law Antonio Terry, and cherished granddaughter Allainna McClain, her spirit never faltered.

She leaves behind a legacy carried on by her devoted children: Cheryl Terry, Sharon Langford, Lorraine (Mario) Gary, Richard (Darcy) Langford, Jr., and Rhonda (Lonnice) Taylor. Her grandchildren, Venessa Harper (Wesley), Austin (Katie) Terry, Colton Terry, Kennan Gary, Iman Gary, Charles (Meagan) Langford, Mikaela Langford, and Tariq Muhammad, and her great grandchildren, Geno McClain and Genae Langford, will forever cherish the indelible mark she left on their lives.

Spokane became her home after her husband's Air Force career brought them west. Armed with a master's degree in education, Mary embarked on a 30-year mission with Spokane Public Schools, not merely as a teacher, but as a mentor, a guide, and an inspiration. She ignited the potential within countless students and adults, celebrating their triumphs as if they were her own.

Her faith was the bedrock of her life. A devoted member of Bethel AME Church, she poured her heart into her community, tirelessly working to create a more just and compassionate Spokane.

Mary possessed a rare gift: the ability to connect with anyone, transforming strangers into friends with

a single smile or a heartfelt conversation. Her laughter, her generosity, her unwavering “no-nonsense” approach to life - these are the memories that will linger, a constant reminder of her extraordinary presence.

A celebration of life was held on April 5 at 11 a.m. at Bethel AME Church, 645 S. Richard Allen Ct., Spokane, WA 99202.

In honor of her commitment to education and the future, contributions to the Mary Langford Scholarship Fund are welcomed at www.bethelamespokane.com. Let us carry forward her spirit, her love, and her unwavering belief in the power of community.

Obituary courtesy of the Lanford family



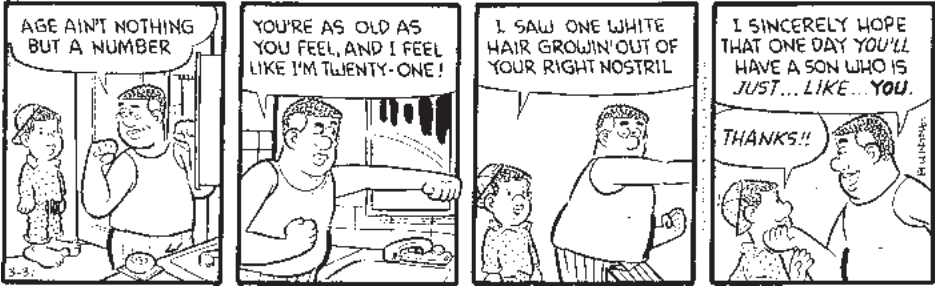
Mary Langford

LEISURE AND COMICS

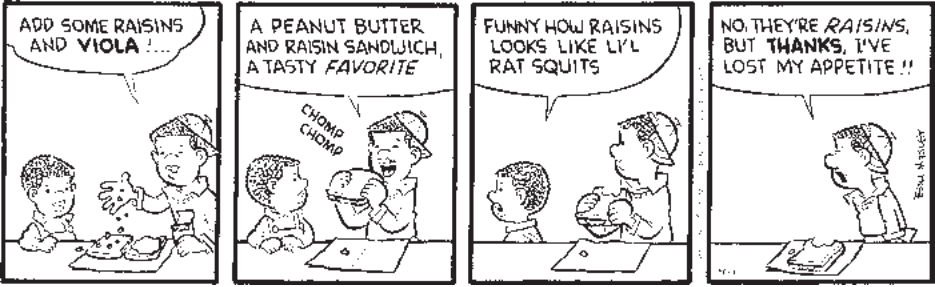
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CURTIS • BY RAY BILLINGSLEY

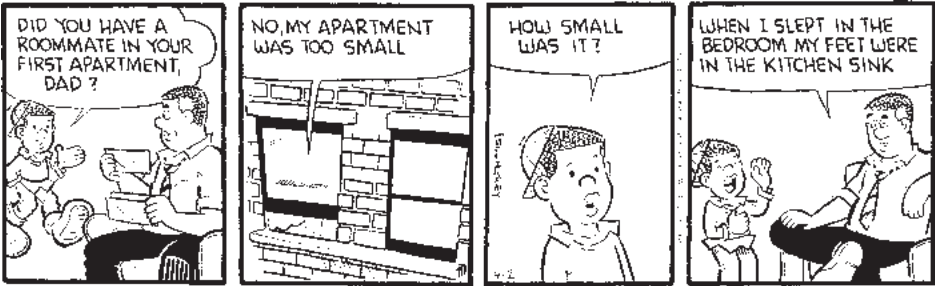
MARCH 31



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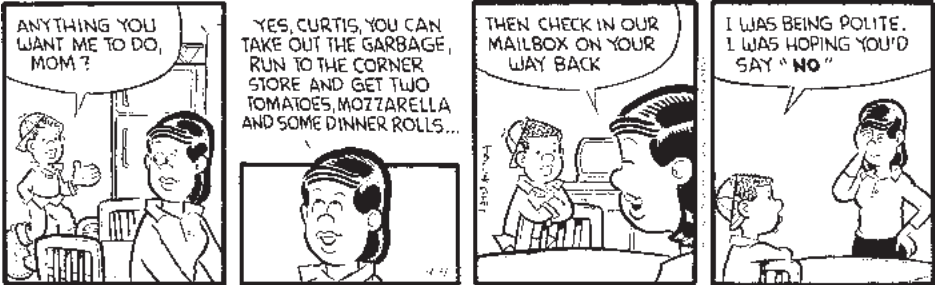
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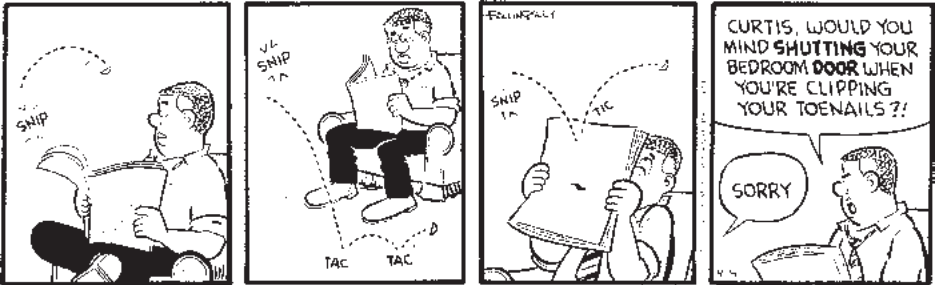
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APRIL 5

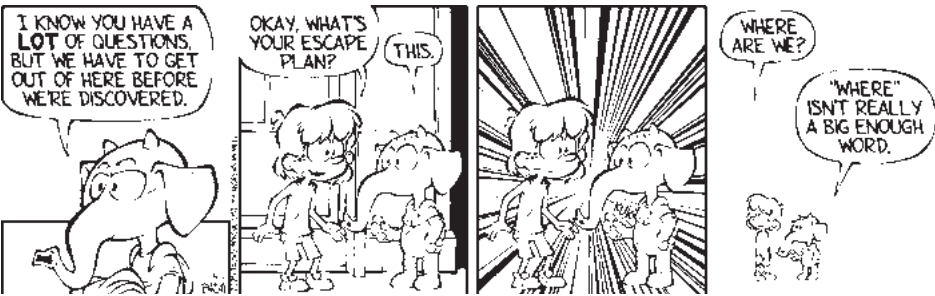


CRABGRASS • BY TAUHID BONDIA

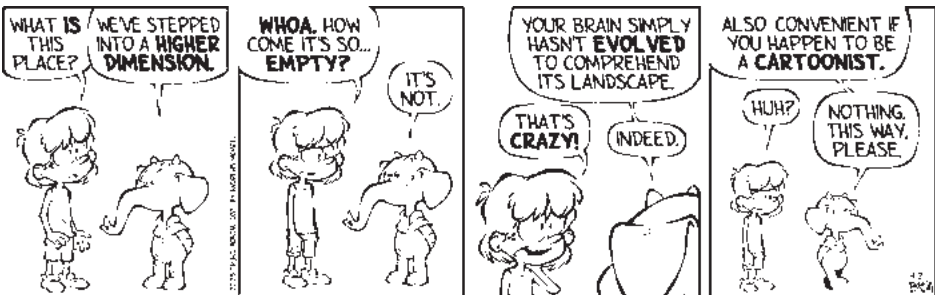
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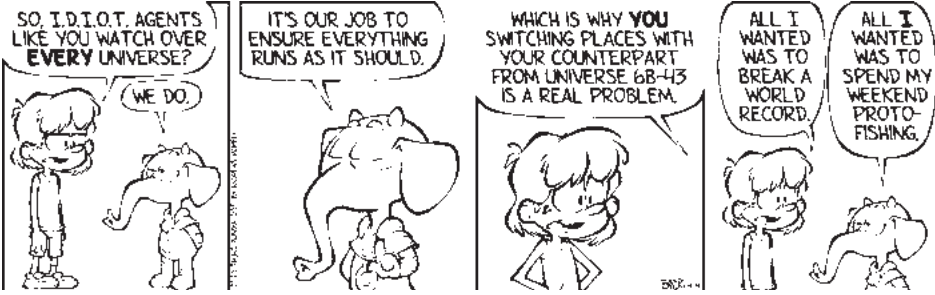
APRIL 2



APRIL 3



APRIL 4



APRIL 5



A KID'S COMIC • BY MJ BETHELY

PETS



ARTS AND CULTURE

POETRY CORNER

Anti-Black

By AJ the Wordsmith
The Black Lens

Within diversity initiatives exists a devil in disguise

Can you relate?

Let’s not be fake
Resolving internal conflicts to get out of this depressive state

Where we study others suffering to empathize with the other half
of our brain

Such a shame.

Entanglement of established criticism

Prevents participation of perception

Based off of egotistical desires

What prevents self-esteem from perspiring?

Isn’t it inspiring?!

We need to defuse stressful situations with feelings and needs

Too quick to give cultural critiques on imaginary issues

That deserve no tissues

This is a culture vulture society

With skepticism surroundings that people should see,

Instead we get rose-colored glasses

And the question “what’s YOUR reality?”

Where acronyms like AAVE (African American vernacular
English)

CRT (critical race theory)

NVC (non violent communication)

Get replaced with social media tags

That makes our intelligence lag

Like mustard music but if we say “turn the TV off”

It’s suddenly you vs me.

When we had justice it was Just Us

Making up fictional characters to live our lives

That way we truly wish we could fight in the light.

Where liberty is unconditional and unchained

When freedom actually is free

How do we explain the pain of melanin memories

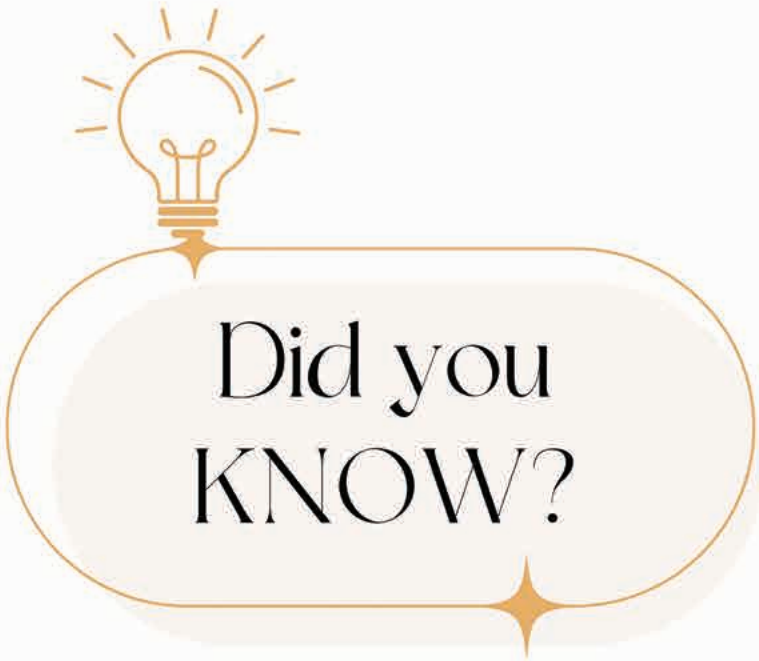
Ironic or iconic that both universe and community can’t exist
Without U & I

Yet THEY wonder why WE cry

When another Brown person is socially hanged

For opposing opinions that don’t fit in a society niche

Call it ignorant bullshit.



Facts from 1933

- 8.4 billion bales of cotton were produced.
- James Weldon Johnson published his autobiography, “Along This Way,” detailing his experiences as a writer, activist and former NAACP executive secretary, highlighting the discrimination he faced throughout his life and career.
Sound familiar today?
- Historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson published “The Mis-Education of the Negro,” critiquing how the American education system systematically failed Black students by disregarding their experiences and environments – issues that still resonate today.

Compiled by The Black Lens

KIDS CORNER
BLACK HISTORY PUZZLE

BLACK HISTORY

TRIVA

EMOJI Pictionary

GUESS WHO THE FAMOUS AFRICAN AMERICAN IS BASED ON THE EMOJIS!
MOST CORRECT WINS.

1. 🌹 🚐 _____

2. 🏀 🏃 🏃 _____

3. 🧑 🇺🇸 _____

4. 🧑 🚽 🏠 _____

5. 🚶 🕶 🎹 🎵 _____

6. 📺 🙌 🧑 _____

7. 🧑 ⚾ 💬 4 2 _____

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14. 🐾 🧑 🏌 🏃 _____

15. 📞 🧑 🏆 _____

BY VANILLA MINT PRINTS